

# A GOOD SHEPHERD IS...

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ April 17, 2016



To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Grace and peace to you from our Good Shepherd,

Have you ever received one of those gifts, where after you opened it you wondered, what in the world is this? For a kid it might be that gift of a saving's bond, when all they wanted was another Barbie or action figure. The kid just can't figure out why a piece of paper is so great and why someone would even give it to him in the first place. Or maybe you've received one of those gifts that was well intentioned, but fell somewhat flat – like a wife who receives a vacuum cleaner for her birthday, or the husband that receives deodorant for his. These gifts, while perhaps practical, might reveal something about ourselves that we had hoped to keep hidden.

Just like it is common for us to bestow and receive gifts with one another, over the last few weeks, we have been taking a look at the gifts that God himself gives us. Sometimes these gifts are like that savings bond – where we take a look at it and wonder why would God give us a gift like that, for example when God allows suffering to enter into our lives. Other times, those gifts are like a vacuum cleaner or deodorant – they reveal something that we've tried to keep hidden, for example when hear God's Word expose a specific sin that we have been enjoying.

This week is no different, we see another gift that God gives to his people. He gives his people a shepherd. The shepherd is one of the most comforting images the Bible gives for Jesus. Which is why, once a year we have a service where every song, reading and prayer directs us back to one of the pictures of Jesus, that throughout history, has been the most comforting, Jesus the Good Shepherd, who watches over his flock in every situation. But this morning we are also reminded about another kind of shepherding, a shepherding that doesn't get mentioned as often, but is just as important in our day-to-day lives. And that's the shepherding that each one of us does in looking out for one another, often at the expense of something we would rather be doing. To understand all that this entails, we must understand what A GOOD SHEPHERD IS. A GOOD SHEPHERD IS...

1. God's gift to you
2. God's gift through you

The portion of God's Word that we consider this morning comes to us from the book of 1 Peter. Like many of the books in the latter part of the New Testament, this book was written as a letter. Like we heard last week about John's letter, Peter's letter was written to the Christians living in modern day Turkey, Christians who had received pressures from the non-Christian influences around them and were in need of instruction. This is why the letter that Peter wrote has any number of instructions, both to Christians in general, but also to specific groups of people. Which is why this portion of his letter begins with the words, **"To the elders among you."**

God saw fit to entrust elders or leaders to help nurture, guide and direct his flock. This is whom Peter is talking about directly in this portion of his letter. And he gives them instructions on how they can be a good shepherd: **"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples of God's flock."** What a gift this is that God gives to his church – GOOD SHEPHERDS.

God has called upon these men to shepherd, care for and feed God's flock, just like an actual shepherd would. This is a full-time job. An actual shepherd would be on the clock 24/7 looking after his sheep, not just checking in every once in a while to see that they were doing OK. An actual shepherd would actually be inconvenienced, giving up some goals, to see that the sheep were fed and rested. It is this example that God wants for the shepherds of his flock – pastors.

Sometimes, people may get the impression that a pastor leads a cushy life. He doesn't have to get his hands dirty, he just has to worry about impressing people for an hour or two a week. And while I'm not denying that it might be possible for a pastor to act like that, more likely a pastor is actually pastoring, is actually shepherding his flock. Shepherds have to take care of their flock all the time, not just when they feel like it, not just when the times are good and the people are happy. Shepherding is taking care of people with no breaks, even when they feel like breaking. And why are the pastors doing this?

**"Not because you must but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve."** A good pastor, A GOOD SHEPHERD is one that is willing. It's no secret that a person doesn't become a pastor for the money. Even at Grace, where they offer a very generous salary package, your pastors are not in it for the money. But rather they are in it because they want to be in it, even if there isn't anything special in it for them. Sometimes that's a hard concept for many to get.

God gives his church shepherds, because we so often act like sheep. I don't know how much you know about sheep, but the Bible paints a pretty accurate picture when it describes us as sheep. Sheep are very simple animals, they can only see and think about what's in front of them at that very moment. In fact, one thing that sheep are very good at doing is straying. Sheep are very good at getting lost, and very vulnerable to predators. And that describes his people perfectly. We are very apt to stray, we are vulnerable to the temptations of the devil. This is what your good shepherds fight to help protect you against, even when that means some tough love.

But these good shepherds are never going to be able to completely protect you. Sometimes your shepherds will stumble too. Unfortunately, some use that as an excuse to not listen to the shepherds. But while your pastor is not perfect, his job is to point you to the one who was – THE GOOD SHEPHERD, Jesus, who did take it upon himself to protect his sheep, who gave up so much for us. The prophet Isaiah wrote, **“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”**

He kept going when nobody noticed how hard he was working and when it didn't seem like he was accomplishing anything. He didn't have anyone saying “thanks,” as the soldiers whipped him and spit on him. No one to stop the nails from being driven into his hands. He kept going when he was beaten and bloody and the weight of a world's sin weighed heavy upon his heart. He continued to love the world when the world showed it didn't love him as it crucified him. He called out for forgiveness to a wicked world like this, a world that you and I are part of. This is something that only THE GOOD SHEPHERD IS – God's gift to you.



He laid down his life for the sheep. He did it for each straying lamb. Jesus once told a parable of one hundred sheep. When one goes astray, the shepherd is not just content with his 99 sheep that are there, but rather he goes out and he looks for that lost sheep, the one that has no right to be found. Each one of us is that little lost sheep, and the sooner you come to grips with that, the more you realize how good THE GOOD SHEPHERD IS. We don't go to find our shepherd, it is our GOOD SHEPHERD who comes to find us.

(2)

It is only when we see our lost condition, and have been graciously swept up into our GOOD SHEPHERD'S arms, that we better understand while we were lost sheep, God now uses us to be a good shepherd to others. Because A GOOD SHEPHERD IS God's gift through you. Being a good shepherd is not just something that happens on church on a Sunday morning or canvassing on a Saturday morning. Good shepherding happens all the time, good shepherding takes work.

Good shepherding means putting other people's best interests before your own, it means showing up here on a Sunday morning not just for yourself, but for those around you – to set a good example and habit for your kids, to encourage a friend who had a tough week. Good shepherding means not just looking out for the people that are here on a Sunday morning, but looking out for the people that aren't, and then not just letting the pastor know, but going out to find them. Good shepherding means regularly and faithfully supporting the ministry of this congregation through your talents and even your money. Good shepherding makes sure your family knows the Word of God better than it knows their work schedules and soccer practices. Good shepherding means stepping outside of your comfort zone to tell others about what the good shepherd has done for them.

Good shepherding is more than just the job of a pastor. It's more than just the job of a church council member. It's more than just the job for the men or the adults of the congregation. It's a job for everyone.

Because what is our good shepherd all about? Our good shepherd is about getting people to eternal life. Our message isn't just a matter of opinion, it's a message that divides between life and death.

If you really believe what you believe is really true, you can do no other. If you really believe what you believe is really true, it does matter what you believe. If you really believe what you believe is really true you will be God's gift of a good shepherd to others. And as sheep who are following the good shepherd, we know exactly what to expect. Peter didn't hide the sufferings of Christ, and neither should we. Peter didn't avoid suffering for Christ, and neither should we. But Peter didn't avoid talking about the rewards of our service either. Just as Christ rose, we will rise too. Just as Christ received the crown of glory, we will receive one too.

And when we are feeling weak, when we are feeling like we just can't go on, when we are feeling like we just can't shepherd anyone anymore, we can remember the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm: **"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want, he makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul, he guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."** This is what our Good shepherd has done, is doing, and will continue to do all the days of our lives, until that time when **"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."** Praise be to God for his good shepherds, and praise be to God for his Good Shepherd. Amen!