

## Following The Good Shepherd

**Pete Burak**

Hi, I'm Pete Burak. Let's begin with a prayer.

### Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus, we thank You for this day. We thank You for this chance to get to know You more, Lord, in looking at Your scriptures, and letting the truth about who You are, and what You've made us for, and where we're going, let it just wash over us, Lord Jesus. And the power of the Holy Spirit fills our hearts, Lord, with a greater understanding, experience, and depth of knowledge of Your love. Amen. Amen.

### Matthew 9:36

Alright, so our theme verse for this session is taken from Matthew chapter 9, verse 36. Let me just read it to you: *When He saw the crowds, this is Jesus, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* So the framing of this verse is: Jesus has been preaching, He's been going from the towns and the synagogues, and He's been healing the sick, and He's been really starting to interact with the people, and the people are starting to get to know Him. And it's in the context of kind of integrating in a deeper way as their teacher, as their rabbi and, hopefully for some of them, their master, He's starting to kind of get a sense of where they are with God, and where they are kind of with the truth. And so this is His assessment of them at this point, where He looks out over the crowds, the crowds whom He loves, the crowds that He's been teaching and ministering to, and His assessment is: His heart is moved with pity.

My translation has He had compassion for them. But a better understanding of that would not be kind of our American understanding of pity, where we're, like, kind of looking down on someone and condescendingly saying like "Oh, those poor people." It's not that. This is more of the deep, biblical, scriptural heartache. Like the core of who He was, something was breaking for these people.

Why? Why was His heart breaking for these people? Because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. And so what I want to focus on in this session is the phrase "Sheep without a shepherd." I want to look at what it means to be a shepherd, and what it means to be the sheep. Or a better way to put it is the good shepherd, what does the good shepherd want to do in our lives, so that we can avoid being harassed and helpless? And then how... I want to give you 3 tips for being a good sheep.

## Shepherds and Sheep

Now, in our, I'm guessing, where you're watching this, maybe you don't have a lot of experience with shepherds and sheep – I certainly don't. Living here in Ann Arbor, Michigan, it's not like I'm driving to work and I see a lot of sheep kind of roaming the streets or whatever. But there's definitely images that we've gotten, there's, you know, stories we've read where, you know, there's kind of a sense of what a shepherd does, and kind of what a sheep does, right. And so I want to break into that, because I think the reason the scripture gives us this image is because it pulls out some really significant truth about how Jesus wants to protect us, and provide for us, and guide us out of feeling harassed and helpless. And I don't know about you, but there have absolutely been times in my life where I have felt harassed and helpless.

And you may be feeling that right now. You may be sitting there saying “Yeah, Pete, like, actually I'm in the midst of a season of my life where I feel – or maybe a very long season of my life – where I feel basically alone. Basically harassed. Getting hit by all sorts of things: Suffering, and work issues, and family issues, and sin in my life, and just various things that have got me all screwed up, and helpless, and wondering where to turn.” Well, the image of the good shepherd provides such a great framework for how we should move forward, and how we can become under the guidance, under the protection, and under the kind of management, if you will, of the good shepherd.

So let's look at this. What are 3 things that a shepherd does? Now, there's a lot of things that a shepherd does, but I want to pull out 3 things that a shepherd does and tie them directly to what Jesus wants to do in our life, especially as He is the way, the truth, and the life. There's 3 things that Jesus wants to do as our good shepherd. The first one is this: A shepherd provides guidance. Now, I remember my dad went to New Zealand one time, and he came back and he was telling me about these shepherds that had these massive herds I guess, flocks of sheep. And he was saying that they did like a demonstration, that they had a sheep dog who was kind of guiding everything, and helping the sheep know where to go and kind of what to do. But, ultimately, it was the shepherd who had trained the sheep dog in order to move the entire group of sheep where they needed to go. And he said it was amazing, because without this, without this shepherd, without the sheep dog, he said, like, sheep just kind of wandered all over the place. That they just kind of were like “Oh look, there's grass over there.” Or “Oh look, there's something shiny over there.” And they just kind of moved around. They didn't kind of take it upon themselves to know where they should go.

## Jesus as Guidance

And I think we are often like that, right. Without guidance, without some actual good boundaries, some barriers, some framework for how we live our life, we get blown all over the place with the winds of the world, and with temptation, and with attractions and everything. I mean, I can think back on some of my high school and college days when I was kind of actively rejecting some of the direction of Jesus, the moral teachings of the church, those were also the times where I felt the most kind of beside myself, and harassed, and all over the place, because

there wasn't the framework, the beautiful teaching of Jesus and the church to help me understand really the guidelines for how to live a full, happy, peaceful, joyful life.

So we have to accept Jesus as the guidance, the guide posts, the one, as a shepherd, who leads us to water, who leads us to safety, who leads us to food, to nourishment. He's the one who provides the way to full life. Without the shepherd's guidance, the sheep would wander off and most likely die. Okay, so that's the first one, is guidance.

## **He Serves and Protects Sheep**

The second one is protection. You know, there's a lot of things that threaten a sheep's life. There's a lot of things that threaten our lives. And part of the role of the shepherd – you see this in David, in the Old Testament and, you know, the legends of David, how he killed the lion, and he killed the bear, and he was constantly looking out and saying “What could threaten the lives of my sheep? What's out there that their safety is in peril? What do I have to do about it?” And literally, the good shepherd, it talks about it in scripture, lays down his life for the sheep. The sheep are his prized possession. The sheep are worth giving everything for. The sheep are, you know, the essence of His existence in some ways. Like He exists to serve and to protect the sheep.

One of the reasons why Jesus, when He looks out over the crowds and says they are harassed and helpless, the harassed part is they were harassed by all of the different ideologies, all of the different cultures, all of the different temptations, all of the different things that would pull on them and attack them, and try to bring them away from the truth of who God is, and what He's designed them for. These people at this time had the Romans, and the Greeks, and all sorts of different cultures that were pulling on them, all sorts of normal human temptation. And without Jesus to protect them, without relying on God as the source of their protection, I mean, the Old Testament is just full of examples: When the people of Israel move away from God and from His protection, bad stuff happens.

And I'm not saying that there isn't the potential of suffering or even some pain when we are following the good shepherd – certainly the good shepherd also tells us to pick up our cross and follow Him, right – but at the same time, the deep kind of internal, existential, eternal perspective, the protection that comes for our souls can only be found in Him. And if we're feeling harassed, and helpless, and under attack, it may be because we're not in the shadow of the good shepherd. We may not be under His protection right now. We haven't asked for it. We haven't received it, another way to put it.

## **Correcting the Sheep**

Alright. And then the third piece is a shepherd, a good shepherd, He corrects. He tells the sheep what is the right and wrong thing to do. And certainly there's a guidance that plays into this, but there's also an understanding of shepherds – I've heard of stories where shepherds will, like a sheep that's wandered off, will pick up that sheep and actually put them on their shoulders and hold them for a while. I've also heard that maybe they even break their legs so they don't run off, and then they hold them for a while in order to keep them with them and say “No, you need to be

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with me. You need to be around me.” And obviously that analogy isn’t the same, it’s not like God is going to break our legs in order to get our attention. I mean, He can make use out of all sorts of suffering in different circumstances in our life.

But the point is that a good shepherd corrects His sheep when they go astray. A good shepherd helps them actually have their identity, and know who they are, and know what they’re made for and where they’re going, by telling them what they’re not and what they’re not made for. And if they start to head in that direction, to steer them away from that, and even if it means with the rod and the staff. Sometimes the correction takes the form of more of an encouragement or kind of a loving, affectionate correction, and then other times the Lord has to be a little bit more dramatic.

I mean, scripture talks about how the Lord disciplines the Son whom He loves, and it talks about how gold is tested in fire to burn out impurities, so that it can be refined into the purest gold of all. When scripture talks about that, that should be encouraging for us, because we are gold in the eyes of God. We are gold. You are gold in the eyes of the Father. And what the Father wants to do is create circumstances and environments, and help lead you through different things in our life that will purify us, so that we can be even more perfectly the son or daughter that He wants us to be, that He’s called us to be. But it can be easy for us, as dumb sheep, to reject that correction, to run from anything like that, to say “That’s not what I want,” when in reality that’s exactly what the Lord may be asking of you.

And so, if you find yourself harassed and helpless right now, I want you to take a step back first, before we get into the 3 tips of how to be a good sheep, take a step back and say “Where might the Lord, the good shepherd, be coming to me and asking to be able, you know, offering more guidance, more protection, and maybe even more correction?” And now these 3 tips are going to help us receive the guidance, help us receive the protection, and help us receive the correction that the Lord has for us.

### Three Tips

Okay. So, 3 tips for being a good sheep. The first one – Oh, and I should warn you, these tips are not necessarily earth-shattering in their originality. Sometimes I think the most important things we need to do as a disciple is get back to the basics. So I’m going to warn you that these 3 tips, a couple of them, you’re going to be like “Really? I watched all of this to hear that? I mean, I could have come up with that.” You probably could have. But I think we overcomplicate things. And if there’s one thing you can tell about a sheep, is they don’t overcomplicate anything. They are pretty simple creatures. They exist to... I don’t even know why they exist, but they’re pretty darn simple creatures. And sometimes I think we need to remind ourselves of that, even in our high intellect and being made in the image and likeness of God, we need to take a step back and say “What are the basics? What are the simple things we can do in order to be led by the good shepherd?” Okay?

## Pray Every Day

So the first one, this one is the one that I think is particularly earth-shattering: Pray every day. Spend time praying every single day. 2 minutes, 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes, 2 hours, you know. Grow to the ability to do that, ask for more grace to be able to pray every day, and to pray at the length that Lord wants you to. But to be able to spend time every single day communicating with the Lord, communicating with your good Father, asking for more love from the Son, and receiving more of the power of the Holy Spirit. And remember, prayer is communication, prayer is relationship. If we want to be in relationship with the good shepherd, we have to spend time with the good shepherd. And one nuance of this that I want to encourage you is to finish your prayer. So when we set out to pray every day, make a conscious effort to finish strong. And the reason I say that is because, often... I mean, I'm just going to speak for myself.

So, a lot of times I'll have a prayer time where I'll say "Okay, I'm going to pray for 15 minutes." Well, the first 3 minutes are just a complete waste of time because I'm distracted, I'm confused, I'm thinking about all of the various things that I have to do. It takes me about 3 minutes just to get my mind right, right. And then the next 3 minutes are maybe pretty good. I'm maybe saying some Our Father's, some Hail Mary's, some Glory Be's, kind of getting myself ready to do this. And then the next 3 minutes I'm starting to say "How long have I been praying?" You know. "Where am I at? Yeah, okay, okay, I've still got, let's see, I've still got about 9 minutes left. Okay, hang in there Pete."

And then the next 3 minutes just turn into a complete battle of trying to stay focused. I'm up and down, I'm all around. I'm noticing the air conditioning in the adoration chapel, I'm noticing that this guy fell asleep over here and he's snoring, I'm noticing that "Gosh, I forgot to send that email. I can't believe I forgot to send that email." Then the last 3 minutes are basically an exercise of checking my phone, saying, you know, and then right around minute 13 I'm like "I basically got here. I did my prayer time today. Alright Jesus, I'll see You later." And what the Lord has been convicting me of is: Finish the prayer time. I've noticed that when I finish strong, the last few minutes of the prayer time tend to be the strongest, and the time He most speaks with me, and the times I walk away feeling most kind of united to Him and protected by Him, guided by Him, and then even corrected by Him. Okay, so pray every day, and finish your prayer time strong.

## Scripture Everyday

The second one is: Scripture every day. Read the good book. So many people I know wonder what God has for them, what they want from Him, what He's asking of us. They say "I can't hear the voice of the Lord. I don't know if He's speaking to me." And I ask them "Have you prayed? Do you pray? Do you read the scripture every day? Do you spend time in the word of God, that is sharper than any two-edged sword, that cut through bone and marrow, that is living and active?" And they're like "Well, no, I haven't done that." Spend time in the word of God. It

will be amazing how often you'll find the guidance, and the protection, and the correction that you need from the good shepherd, because this is His book. This is one of the gifts that He's given us in order to be led by Him as the good shepherd.

## Humility

Okay, that's 2. And the third one, this will not make me very popular, but one of the things you'll see about sheep is that they're pretty humble creatures. They're not away of it of course, but they just seem like pretty humble creatures, and we often are not, you know. Pride runs deep through the heart of man. And one of the best ways we can align ourselves with the good shepherd is to humble ourselves. And one of the best ways I've found to humble myself is to fast. To intentionally give things up. To do a both scheduled fasting, and just kind of in the moment, feeling called. I'm not going to have that piece of cake, and I'm going to give it up intentionally to humble myself and ask for more grace, and I'm going to do it on the behalf of people that the Lord's put in my life, and I'm just going to deny myself.

So much of the humility comes from the denial of self. The denial of our desires, our own passions, our own... kind of what pride would lead us to. Humility comes from being able to push that down through grace, and say "No. My will is going to dominate my passions." And so I readily understand that fasting is hard, it's not fun. The last thing I want to do when I wake up on a fast day is... all I'm thinking about is "Shoot, 2 o' clock in the afternoon is going to come and I'm going to be hungry." Right. But it's amazing how often the Lord can use that grace, and that sacrifice, and that decision to pour out a deeper ability and power to be humble before Him. And to be humble before Him is to be a good sheep before the shepherd.

So, recap: The shepherd wants to guide us, protect us, and correct us. How do we receive those things? How do we receive the guidance, protection, and correction of Jesus? We pray every day, we spend time with Him, we spend time in the scriptures, and fasting. Now, there's certainly a lot of other things you could do – the sacraments and all sorts of other things – but those are 3 things that I've found can help me be a good sheep, so that I don't have to be in the same position as the people that, when Jesus looked out over the crowds, He had pity on them. He still has pity on me, but instead of looking at them as harassed and helpless, He sees a son who is in line with Him. A good sheep before the good shepherd. God bless you.