



Course Name: Shepherds/Elders (Courage)

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Course description:

Serving as a shepherd/elder is not for the faint at heart. It takes courage. Courage is about a decision to act bravely when you are scared to death. Numerous areas of leading God's people require one to make decisions in times when they must be courageous, to act bravely. This lesson will focus on the biblical need for courage and the context describing when courage will be needed most.

Course Objectives: By the end of this class students will have...

- A. Defined courage from a personal and biblical perspective.
- B. Studied biblical text describing the context where courage is needed.
- C. Identified specific areas where shepherds/elders must be courageous.

Outline of the class:

- A. During the first few minutes of the class divide the class into groups of three or four. Then ask each table to take 15-20 minutes to discuss the following.
 1. Define courage in your own words.
 2. When will shepherds/elders need to act bravely, demonstrating courage.
 3. Reflect on and discuss the courage it took for Jesus to suffer as He did and go to the cross.
- B. Qualifications: If you compare the lists of qualifications for elders/shepherds in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, you will notice that they *are not exactly alike*. Much overlap exists, but they are *not identical* lists. Why?
 1. Most likely because Paul did not intend them to be exhaustive lists. Rather, they describe a certain *kind* of man who should serve as a shepherd, but do not cover everything.
 2. For example, neither says the elder "*must love God*" – but it is pretty safe to say that loving God is important.
 3. So, there are some "unwritten qualifications" that can be *assumed* without being *specified*. Courage would certainly be among them.
- C. Jesus describes one of those qualities in John 10. He never uses the word, but from what He says regarding good shepherds, it is clear they must be men of *Courage*.
 1. There is no passage in Scripture that uses the word "courage" in connection with elders, but obviously it is both *implied* and *necessary*.

2. In John 10, it says the Good Shepherd “lays down His life for the sheep.”
 - a. Specifically, when he sees *the wolf* coming, he *does not run*. Rather, he stands and protects his sheep, even at the cost to himself.
 - b. By contrast, a “hireling,” someone who “does not own the sheep,” sees the wolf and runs, leaving them to the ravages of the wolf.
 - c. Why? V. 13 he “cares nothing for the sheep.” Care more regarding himself.
 3. Jesus never says, “The Good Shepherd has courage.” It is implied. It is not easy to face down a hungry wolf.
 - a. 1 Samuel 17:33-37 This is when David was still a shepherd and saw the armies of Israel faced down by Goliath. He wanted to know why no one went out to fight him.
 - b. The truth was, they were all too frightened. They “fled from him and were much afraid.” David kept asking, “Why???”
 - c. Saul heard about David. David offered to fight Goliath, but Saul said, “You are but a youth. He has been a warrior from His youth.”
 - d. *You have to love David’s response:* “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God...The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”
 4. *That is* the courage of a good shepherd!
 5. “Okay, that is *literal* sheep-tending. What does it have to do with being an elder in the church???” What do shepherds need courage to DO???
- D. Shepherds need Courage to *Confront the Wolves Paul talks about in Acts 20.*
1. Acts 20:28-30 Paul told the elders at Ephesus to “pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock,” and to “care for the church of God.”
 - a. Why? Because after his departure, “fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.”
 - b. Also, “from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”
 2. From this text, we can begin to see *what a “Wolf” looks like:*
 - a. They do not care about the church – “not sparing the flock.” They only care about their own agenda.
 - b. They “speak twisted things” – distortions of truth.
 - c. Their Goal: “to draw away disciples after them.” They want to gain a following. They are looking for an audience and for power.

3. In 3 John, another *portrait of a Wolf – Diotrephes*.
 - a. He likes to put himself first – again, uses the church for their own agenda. He wants to be a leader but should not be one.
 - b. He does not acknowledge any authority other than his own – not even John’s!
 - c. He refuses to support the furthering of the gospel (traveling evangelists).
 - d. He stops others from doing such good works.
 - e. He wants to “de-church” anyone who disagrees with him.
 - f. He slanders those who get in his way (v. 10) – “talking wicked nonsense against us.”
 4. NOTE: A wolf *may* or may NOT be a *false teacher*.
 - a. Those in Acts 20 seem to be – “twisting things.”
 - b. But some just *make trouble over nothing* – Titus 3:10-11 “A person who stirs up division.”
 - c. It does not have to be doctrinal. It may just be some goofy pet peeve. They try to force others to accept, and they just will not leave it alone.
 - d. Example of preachers who hold to the AD 70 Doctrine, as well as others.
 5. When wolves show up, *somebody* has to stand up to them and protect the church from their destructive influence. Paul says that is the job of the *elders*.
 6. As we talked about before – Elders/Shepherds must be *men of the Word*. Add to that, “*Men of Courage*.” They are not afraid to confront. They refuse to leave the church to the whims of someone who has a selfish agenda.
- E. Shepherds need Courage to *lead the church in Discipline*.
1. Matthew 18:15-18, 1 Corinthians 5:1-8 Both involve the whole church (“Tell it to the church.” “When you are assembled...”).
 2. Neither text says discipline is solely the responsibility of elders – because it is not. But, if it involves the whole church, elders need to take the lead.
 3. Most churches seldom (if ever) practice the kind of discipline Scripture teaches. Why not? Because they are *not led to!*
 4. *Why are they not led to? 2 Reasons*
 - a. *Most elders have never even thought about it as part of their shepherding responsibility.* But the concept of shepherding requires going after those who stray, and protecting the rest of the church from the influence of those who refuse to repent and be restored to fellowship.
 - b. *It is not easy!* There are often those in the church who oppose such actions. There are many very sensitive situations, but it still has to be done. Galatians 6 “In a spirit of gentleness,” but still it has to happen.

5. Example: On one occasion at a workshop in Oklahoma – Someone was asked, “How do we get up the courage to do what the Scripture says?” The response: “First, we must *repent* of NOT doing what the Scripture says. We must be more fearful of failing to carry out God’s instructions than of criticism.”
 6. Hebrews 13:17 “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are *keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give account.*” Knowing that should give all the courage needed.
- F. Shepherds need Courage to *make tough calls for the church.*
1. It has been said repeatedly, elders/shepherds are NOT primarily “decision-makers.” They are not a board of directors who make decision regarding buildings, budgets, and banquets.
 2. But if they are going to *lead sheep*, they have to decide *which way the flock is going to go*. Where are the “green pastures” and “still waters” they need? What direction is in the best interest of the whole church and its mission as the body of Christ, and which ones ARE NOT?
 3. *Hint:* There are a lot more that ARE NOT than ARE.
 - a. People come up with all kinds of ideas for a “new direction” for the church. This may be fine, we may NEED a new direction.
 - b. But before the church sets off in that direction, shepherds need to carefully weigh the pros and cons, the consequences (intended and unintended).
 - c. What will we gain by this? What will we lose? Why is this change needed? Or is it? IS it good for all, or only for a few? Not good for anybody?
 - d. Is this change *allowable by Scripture*, or is it driven by social pressures from the world around us, and would lead us to violate the teachings of Scripture?
 4. Example: There was a woman at the Pepperdine Lectures. The whole church, which had a long and peaceful history, was about to split because of the whims of one woman, AND because of the weakness of elders who *didn’t have the courage to stand up to her and say “No”!*
 5. It takes courage to say “No” when someone proposes a direction that is not healthy. It takes courage to say “Yes” when a new direction is needed, a new challenge, but some do not like it.
 6. It is just what good shepherds do – what they HAVE to do, or the church is, as Paul said, “tossed to and fro by the waves.”

Conclusion:

- A. As you think about suggesting someone to serve the church as a shepherd, it might be a good idea to ask him, not just “Are you *willing* to assume this role?”, but you may also need to ask him, “Do you have...”
 - 1. The Courage to lead this church in the direction it needs to go?
 - 2. The Courage to lead us in discipline whenever it is necessary?
 - 3. The Courage to stand up to the wolves who will inevitably come in among us or arise from us?
- B. If so, then this man just might be a good shepherd. If not, he *can't possibly be*.
- C. The thought you put into the role of the good shepherd is worth every minute. Remember that courage will be needed. Understand what scripture teaches about the type of courage needed when facing wolves, leading the church in discipline, and leading the church in making tough calls for the church.
- D. Below is a proposed study guide to either give as homework for each person in the class, or it can be used as a separate class for discussion on the matter presented.

The Shepherd's Courage - Study Guide

- 1. In addition to loving God & being courageous, can you think of other “unwritten qualifications” for elders in the church? Why do you think these things are not specified in texts such as 1 Timothy 3:1-8 and Titus 1:5-9?
- 2. Given the descriptions of a “wolf” in Acts 20 and 3 John, why do you think there is often a reluctance to recognize that someone is, in fact, a wolf who needs to be dealt with?
- 3. Read Matthew 7:15-20 How does this text help us in knowing how to identify a wolf? What are some ways that wolves sometimes try to disguise themselves?
- 4. Read 3 John 9-10 How did John intend to deal with Diotrephes when he came? How does this offer guidance to elders (and others) in dealing with such people?
- 5. Read Matthew 18:15-18 At what point in this process do you think elders should become involved, if they are not the first ones to go to the sinning brother (or sister)? What should be their role once this situation is brought to their attention?
- 6. Read Hebrews 13:17 How does this text show the seriousness of shepherds being courageous in watching over God's flock?