



Course Name: The Shepherd's Qualifications (John 10:1-21 A)

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Course description:

This course is the first of two discussions about shepherds/elders that focuses on the qualifications of a *shepherd* based on the text John 10:1-21. The class will read the text and discuss key areas related to shepherding from the life of Jesus.

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

- A. Examined the text of John 10:1-21, having learned from the example of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.
- B. Considered how the lessons from Jesus can be applied to shepherds today.
- C. Discussed the importance of knowing, trusting, and leading by example.

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. Read the text at your table and list out key areas you see in the life of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.
 2. Which of these qualities and/or principles do you feel are also needed for an elder/shepherd in the church today? Why?
- B. Introduction
 1. When we discuss the appointment of elders/shepherds, the discussion usually centers around 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, where Paul lists a series of qualities that “must” be possessed by those who would lead God’s church.
 - a. Those texts are important, and it is important for you to spend time studying them in the weeks ahead.
 - b. But we need to start at a *much more fundamental level* than those texts – John 10, where Jesus announces Himself as “The Good Shepherd,” and explains what makes a shepherd good. He is the *Model Shepherd* others should follow.
 - c. Jesus speaks of Himself, but what He says is applicable to all who would serve as shepherds of the church. In 1 Peter 5:1-5, Peter addresses elders/shepherds, and refers to Jesus as “the chief Shepherd,” which tells us that shepherds of the church are the “under-shepherds” who serve on His behalf.

- d. That being so, John 10 takes on even greater importance.
2. An overview of John 10:1-21
- a. Notice how this text comes just after the episode of Jesus healing the *man born blind* in John 9.
 - b. Because Jesus healed him on a Sabbath, the Pharisees treat him like some kind of criminal, rather than as a wounded sheep who has been healed.
 - c. They try to get him to speak against Jesus, and when he will not, they kick him out of the synagogue, but he becomes a follower of Jesus.
 - d. He gets no compassion from the religious leaders, no encouragement, no spiritual support of any kind. Clearly, to them, he is nothing more than a *problem*, a *religious issue*, not someone to be cared for and ministered to.
 - e. So, it is to THEM that Jesus refers when (John 10) He speaks of “thieves and robbers, who climb into the sheepfold rather than coming in through the door.
 - f. THEY are the “strangers” whose voice the sheep ignore, because the sheep *don’t know* them and *don’t trust* them.
 - g. By contrast, a real “shepherd” enters by the door, calls the sheep, and they hear and follow him.
 - h. Jesus announces in vv. 7 and 9 that He is the “door” of the sheepfold. He is the Way in.
 - i. Also, v. 11 – “*I am the Good Shepherd*” who lays down His life for the sheep.
3. Note: He is not “a” good shepherd, but “THE” Good Shepherd. What is the background to this claim. Why does He use “the”?
- a. **Ezekiel 34** – God declares that though His sheep (Israel) have been scattered, He will gather them again and HE will be their Shepherd.
 - b. But for now, He has Ezekiel prophesy against the unfaithful shepherds of Israel, the civil and religious leaders who should have been looking out for His people but were not.
 - c. Rather than feeding *the sheep*, they had been feeding *themselves*! “The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them” (v. 4).
 - d. Sounds exactly like those “false shepherds” of John 9 and their treatment of the man born blind! They failed him in every way.
4. God promises them a “Good Shepherd” who WILL take care of the sheep, and Jesus says in John 10, “I AM the Good Shepherd”! *Fulfillment of prophecy and claim to Deity* since GOD is Israel’s Shepherd.
- C. John 10:1-6 – “The Shepherd’s Qualifications” (Note: No one or two texts give all the qualifications. Some very basic ones we often overlook are implied here.)

1. A good shepherd *Knows his Sheep*.
 - a. “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep *by name*.” Shepherds in ancient times did not just have a “bunch of sheep.” They had *names* for all of them, which shows a *relationship*.
 - b. This means he would know immediately if one were missing and be aware of the weaknesses and needs of each.
 - c. Note that the word “know” occurs 6 times in vv. 1-18. He *knows* them by name. They “*know* His voice.” They will not follow a stranger “for they do not *know* the voice of strangers.” In v. 14, “I *know* my own and my own *know* me, just as the Father *knows* me and I *know* the Father.”
 - d. Knowing the sheep is not listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but obviously necessary. Otherwise, how will you know who’s missing and needs to be gone after? Who is weak or ill and needs special attention?
 - e. You are a long way here from the “*board of directors mentality*” that marks many modern churches and their elders. Just “decision-makers” for a group is not shepherding the flock. This is not *individual oriented*, but *organization oriented*.
 - f. There is no way to carry out the responsibilities of a true shepherd if you don’t know the sheep!
 - g. You may “lead” the organization but cannot be a “shepherd.”
2. A good shepherd has the *Trust of the Sheep*.
 - a. The shepherds Jesus knew would go into a fold containing several flocks together. He would call out to his and they would come out from the larger group and follow.
 - b. The idea expressed in vv. 4b-5 claims, the sheep follow the shepherd because “*they know His voice*.” It is a distinctive voice, a trusted voice, the voice of one who cares for them, feeds them, defends them.
 - c. “A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”
 - d. When a church asks a man to serve as a shepherd, they place an enormous amount of trust in him. Trusting that he will not lead them astray, will protect them from the “*wolves*” and *false teachers* scripture warns us about, will be there for them when they need him, place their needs above his own, will act with integrity in every aspect of his life so as to represent the church in a positive way.
 - e. If they *cannot* have that kind of confidence, that man cannot truly be a shepherd. He may wear a title, but without the element of trust, can never be effective.

3. A good shepherd *Leads by Example*.
 - a. In v. 4a “When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him,” i.e., *they* go where *he* goes, where he leads them.
 - b. One thing regarding sheep: You cannot “*drive*” them. They have to be “*led*.” Try to drive them, and they will just *scatter* and *run*. (It is a cause of some *church messes*: shepherds who try to “drive” the sheep.)
 - c. A sure sign of misunderstanding: Constant appeal to “the authority of the elders,” the “because I say so” mentality. When you have to *claim* your authority, it is a sure sign you have none. You are not “leading,” but “driving.”
 - d. **Ps. 23** “He *leads* me beside still waters...He *leads* me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”
 - e. Shepherds Today: *Have to be and do whatever the church is supposed to be and do*. Set the example and lead the way.
 - f. This is where the “lists” of 1 Timothy 3 / Titus 1 come in. They do not describe anything *unique* to elders; they describe basically what *every Christian* should strive to be: above reproach, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money; not arrogant or quick-tempered, a lover of good, upright, holy, disciplined, hold firm to the sure word as taught.
 - g. A few *questions to ask* before you *recommend* someone or *approve* someone to be a shepherd of the church: 1) If the whole church were to be like this man, would we be a better church, or worse? and 2) Is this man someone I can point out to my kids and say, “Be like him, and you will be what God wants you to be?”
4. This is a *heavy responsibility* you are asking someone to bear.
 - a. Yes, but it is *not me* asking, it is all there in God’s word. What He is *requiring*. You cannot “soften” the requirements just so someone will do it.
 - b. Elders/Shepherds are not just “the best men in the church.” They must be *qualified* as God’s word teaches.
 - c. Shepherding the flock for which Jesus gave His life IS a heavy thing, an enormous responsibility.
 - d. Not talking with regards to *perfection*, otherwise *no one* would ever be qualified.
 - e. We can’t ignore *Paul’s word* in 1 Timothy 3 / Titus 1 either – *must*. These are not *suggestions*, they are *requirements*. We must take all of them *seriously*.

Conclusion:

- A. From John 10:1-21 we see the beginning of some key areas for shepherds: They know the sheep, they have the trust of the sheep, and they set an example for the sheep.
- B. The responsibility is great and not to be taken lightly. However, the need is urgent, and nothing is more rewarding for the one who fulfills this God-given role for His people.
- C. During the weeks ahead, as we begin the process of selection, we ask you to do *two things*:
 1. *Study* – Thoroughly acquaint yourself with what scripture says regarding elders/shepherds, why they are needed, and what is required.
 2. *Pray* – Ask God for guidance on the whole church, that this process will accomplish HIS will; for yourself, as you consider who should serve as shepherds; and for those who may be selected. Pray that this will result in the church having exactly what God knows we need.
- 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.

PROPOSED STUDY GUIDE (John 10:1-21)

1. Read 1 Peter 5:1-5: What indications do you see in this text that elders, shepherds, and overseers (bishops) are all the same function in the New Testament? (Elders in v. 1 – verb form of “shepherd” in v. 2 – and verb form of “overseer” in v. 2).
2. Read Acts 14:19-23: Why is it important to note that Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders for them in *every* church? Does this suggest that a church is not really a church or that it is somehow deficient until it has elders? Why or why not?
3. Read Ezekiel 34:1-15: What were the failings of the “shepherds of Israel”? What did God say He would do to correct this situation? How does this text impact the way we understand John 10:1-21?
4. Explain in your own words the differences between a group of “shepherds” and a “board of directors”? Given that elders are described as “shepherds” in scripture, why do you think so many opt for a “board of directors” form of leadership?
5. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-8 and Titus 1:5-9: Which of these qualifications should characterize all Christians, and which are specifically applicable to elders?
6. In spite of Paul’s use of the word “must” in 1 Timothy 3:1-8 and Titus 1:5-9, it is often suggested that these are only guidelines and not actual requirements for elders. What do you make of this suggestion?