



Course Name: The Spiritual Life of the Shepherd

By Tommy South

Course description:

This course is designed to assist and guide shepherds and potential shepherds in understanding how they can keep their spiritual life strong. The best way to help others in their spiritual development is to lead from a place of spiritual strength. This class will help you accomplish both as a leader in God's family.

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

- A. Studied the causes and challenges of neglecting spiritual growth and development.
- B. Considered how they can remain in close personal contact with God to remain strong in their spiritual life.
- C. Assessed their spiritual growth through a spiritual self-checkup.

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. What are a few possible reasons shepherds neglect their spiritual growth?
 2. What suggestions would you give to help someone grow in their spiritual life?
- B. Introduction
 1. "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35).
 2. Shepherds are spiritual leader, and therefore it is essential for them to have and to maintain a strong personal spiritual life.
- C. Like all believers, shepherds are often tempted to neglect their own spiritual growth and development. Reasons:
 1. The demands of work, family, and church life consume enormous amounts of time.
 2. Shepherds may sometimes be so concerned about the spiritual needs of others that they neglect their own.
 3. There is a tendency to slip into the pattern of thinking that involvement in church activities is a substitute for personal devotional time with God.
 4. Regardless of our role in the church, we will suffer spiritually if we fail to maintain our spiritual lives:

- a. Spiritual weakness, inability to withstand trials and daily pressures of life.
- b. Inability to be a source of strength, encouragement, and example to other believers.
- c. The danger of succumbing to immorality or other types of sin. “As for those (elders) who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear” (1 Timothy 5:20).
- d. The possibility of apostasy. Elders are as much prone to this danger as are other Christians. “Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

D. Scripture shows that leaders of God’s people are subject to the same temptations as anyone else:

- 1. Saul – 1 Samuel 18:6-11 _____
- 2. David – 2 Samuel 11 _____
- 3. James & John – Mark 10:35-45 _____
- 4. Peter – Matthew 26:69-75 _____
- 5. Moses – Numbers 20:10-12 _____
- 6. Unless we are better men than these, we should readily admit our spiritual weakness and needs.

E. Shepherds will also face additional trials not shared by others to the same degree:

- 1. The burden of responsibility for people’s souls: Hebrew 13:17; 2 Corinthians 11:28-29.
- 2. Anxiety for the welfare of others and for the progress of the church: Galatians 4:19-20.
- 3. The sting of criticism: Galatians 4:16.
- 4. The temptation to pride: 1 Timothy 3:6.

F. Shepherds can remain strong only through close personal contact with God.

- 1. David, Peter, James, John, Moses, and others overcame their spiritual failures by staying close to God. King Saul perished (physically and spiritually) because he did not.
- 2. Keeping in touch means spending time with God. Although we may feel we do not *have* time, we must *take* time for worship, private prayer, and personal study of God’s Word.
 - a. Worship – Hebrews 10:24-25: Shepherds need fellowship and encouragement as much as anyone else and need to worship God to remain strong. (Another reason to *never* use worship time as meeting time).
 - b. Bible Study – Titus 1:9: Shepherds must know Scripture well enough to teach the church and to refute false teachings. This requires study. We must teach ourselves before we can teach others.

- c. Prayer – Mark 1:35-39: Even when the crowds were pursuing Him, Jesus took time to withdraw and spend time with His Father.

G. A spiritual self-checkup

1. I would describe my relationship with God as: closely personal _____, friendly _____, distant _____.
2. The last time I prayed in private was _____.
3. I do not pray more often because: I do not have the time _____, I do not take the time _____, I do not feel the need _____, I forget _____, I have too many distractions in my life _____.
4. When I go a full day without praying: I feel spiritually weak _____, It does not make any difference _____, I do not even realize it _____.
5. My Bible knowledge is adequate to teach someone how to become a Christian.
Yes _____ No _____
6. I never _____, seldom _____, occasionally _____, often _____ allow worldly interests to keep me from attending public worship and/or Bible study when I really could be present.
7. My attitude toward worship is one of: great interest (would not want to be anywhere else) _____, mild interest (enjoy it as much as some other things) _____, boredom (would prefer to be elsewhere) _____, irritation (regard it as unappealing but necessary) _____.
8. My relationship with God affects my conduct, relationships, work, family life, and decisions every day. Yes _____ No _____

Conclusion:

- A. Shepherds must not neglect their own spiritual growth and development. Instead, they need to be diligent in keeping strong in their own spiritual life to assist them in guiding the spiritual growth of others.
- B. Facing challenges and trials will be part of the shepherd's life, as much as anyone else, if not more so. How a shepherd handles these challenges and trials provides an example for others to follow.
- C. Make time this week to evaluate your own spiritual life and what you can do to help grow and strengthen your relationship with God and the congregation.