When Shepherds Shepherd Shepherds

Acts 20:28-38

Introduction:

1. It is easy to talk and not say anything; it is easy to listen and not learn anything; it is easy to work hard and think I am giving help and not do anything.
2. When I find that happening, where and to whom do I look for solutions?
   1. Will I require others to change?
   2. Will I realize that the only person I can change is me?
3. A man is flying in a hot air balloon and realized that he is lost. He reduces height and

spots a man down below. He lowers the balloon further and shouts, “Excuse me. Can you help me? I promised a friend I would meet him half an hour ago, but I don’t know where I am.”

The man below says, “Yes. You are in a hot air balloon, hovering approximately 30 feet above this field. You are between 40 and 42 degrees north latitude, and between 58 and 60 degrees west longitude.”

“You must be an engineer,” says the balloonist.

“I am,” replies the man. “How did you know?”

“Well,” says the balloonist. “Everything you told me was technically correct, but I have no idea of what to make of your information and the fact is I am still lost.”

The man below says, “You must be a manager.”

“I am,” replies the balloonist. “How did you know?”

“Well,” says the man. “You don’t know where you are, or where you are going. You made a promise which you have no idea how to keep, and you expect me to solve your problem. The fact is you are in the exact same position you were before we met but now it is somehow my fault.”

1. As we look at the work of elders, we focus on the first admonition of Paul in Acts 20:28:

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

1. The principle we are going to examine and emphasize is, “Take heed to yourselves.”
   1. **prosevcw**a; **ejpevcw**a: to be in a continuous state of readiness to learn of any future danger, need, or error, and to respond appropriately - ‘to pay attention to, to keep on the lookout for, to be alert for, to be on one’s guard against’ (Louw, Johannes P. and Nida, Eugene A., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains,* (New York: United Bible Societies) 1988, 1989).
   2. To yourselves.
2. Good leadership begins (and may end) with self-leadership.
3. Take heed to yourselves
   1. Individually
   2. As a leadership group.
4. I am going to be talking primarily about elders.
5. I hope others will listen in.
   1. To better understand elders.
   2. To some who will become elders.
   3. To some who are in leadership for whom the same principles will apply: parents, teachers, friends, supervisors.
6. TAKE HEED TO YOURSELVES AS SHEPHERDS: “WHEN SHEPHERDS SHEPHERD SHEPHERDS, SHEPHERDS WILL BETTER SHEPHERD SHEEP.”
   1. For general spiritual health.

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you (1 Timothy 4:16).

* 1. For obvious or hidden sin.

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

Try me, and know my anxieties;

And see if there is any wicked way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23,24).

* 1. In evaluating feelings of inadequacy.
     1. Many good leaders have that feeling.

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask! What shall I give you?” And Solomon said: “You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (1 Kings 3:5-9).

* + 1. God can work with that attitude.

The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: “Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you”

(1 Kings 3:10-12).

* + 1. If the king of Israel and the wisest man in the Old Testament could believe himself less that competent, could it be that elders in the church would deal with the same feelings?
  1. In dealing with emotional and spiritual pain.
     1. Grief.
        1. Anyone who loses anything will experience grief. Job 6:1-14
        2. Leadership does not mean feeling good when you feel bad.
        3. Leadership does not mean telling people you feel good when you are devastated.
        4. One eldership couldn’t understand why they “couldn’t get going.”
           1. They had no enthusiasm.
           2. What was wrong?
           3. How could they get happy?
           4. Two of their fellow elders had died within the past year.
           5. My suggestion was for them to “take heed to yourselves” and obey 1 Corinthians 12:26:

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

* + - 1. If a man in the Old Testament, who “was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1) experienced this level of grief, could it be that shepherds in the Lord’s church would have pain when they have great loss?
    1. Discouragement, depression. Jeremiah 20:7-18
       1. If one of God’s prophets thought about quitting and wished that he had never been born, is it possible that bishops today would be less than “on a high” at all times?
       2. How will they deal with that?
    2. Hopelessness, despair, frustration. Lamentations 3:1-33
       1. If this same prophet could feel hurt, boxed in, and Godforsaken, is it likely that spiritual men today may suffer similar pain?
       2. How do they bear that?
       3. An elder’s son was going through a divorce. The family was devastated. I asked him how much time they had spent in elders’ meetings since he learned of the problem (about seven months). His answer, “About three minutes.”
    3. Exhaustion.

Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray

(Mark 6:30,31,45,46).

* + - 1. If it were possible for Jesus and His apostles to get tired and need to rest, is it possible for God’s leaders today to need that?
      2. Could I rejoice and encourage them in that cessation of activity for that purpose?
  1. In dealing with criticism.
     1. Criticism will come.
        1. When the work was made harder in Egypt. Exodus 5:1-20

And they said to them, “Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us”(Exodus 5:21).

* + - 1. When Pharaoh pursued the children as they left Egypt.

Exodus 14:1-9

Then they said to Moses, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness” (Exodus 14:11,12).

* + - 1. After the report of the spies. Numbers 13:1-33

So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let us select a leader and return to Egypt” (Numbers 14:1-4).

* + 1. It is my observation that dealing with criticism is one of the greatest opportunities of God’s leaders.
    2. It is a quality I must have if I am to remain a leader very long and be effective.
       1. Criticism can devastate.
       2. Jerrie, I will be perfectly honest with you. I am not nor will I ever be interested in becoming a leader at this church. I am not interested in your class. I once was a deacon at this church but have no good memories . . . only bad ones . . . people never satisfied . . . always complaining . . . I’ve experienced much the same in my personal life . . . that’s why I’d rather dig the ditch and let someone else get the praise. Thanks for your understanding.
    3. Qualities of elders that prepare them for dealing with criticism.
       1. From Timothy.

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous

(1 Timothy 3:1-3).

* + - * 1. Blameless.
        2. Not violent.
        3. Gentle.
        4. Not quarrelsome.
      1. From Titus.

For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled (Titus 1:7,8).

* + - * 1. Not self-willed.

self–willed**:** authadeμs (aujqavdh" , (829)), self–pleasing (*autos,* self, *heμdomai,* to please), denotes one who, dominated by self–interest, and inconsiderate of others, arrogantly asserts his own will, “self–willed,” Tit. 1:7; 2 Pet. 2:10 (the opposite of *epieikeμs,* gentle, e.g., 1 Tim. 3:3), “one so far overvaluing any determination at which he has himself once arrived that he will not be removed from it” (Vine, W. E., *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell] 1981).

* + - * 1. Not quick-tempered.
        2. Self-controlled.
    1. When someone criticizes you personally or something you have done or something that is happening in the congregation, there is a great opportunity for blessing.
       1. You or I could need correction; you do not hurt me when you point out salmonella in my refrigerator.
       2. The person could have a valid complaint and we have an opportunity to learn from them.
          1. “Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning” (Bill Gates, *Business @ the Speed of Thought* (Warner) *Reader’s Digest*, October 1999, page 61).
          2. Maturity is moving from a thin skin and a hard heart to a thick skin and a soft heart.
          3. One of the things that often holds us back in our success is the deliberate attempt we make to hide from the facts when facts are unpleasant. Advice is seldom valued, though there is a great deal of advising and very little listening. Usually we do not want advice; we want flattery. And yet one cannot easily be our flatterer and our friend at the same time. Some people actually owe more to bitter enemies than to pleasant friends. The former sometimes speak the truth; the latter seldom do. An enemy is often a friend in disguise who stings us into action. He tells us the truth about ourselves. Cato asserted that wise men profit more from fools that fools do from wise men, for some wise men try to avoid the faults of fools, but fools seldom try to imitate the good examples of wise men (*How to Personally Profit from the Laws of Success*, Sterling W. Sill, page 202).
       3. They have no valid complaint about us or what is happening but are criticizing because of hurt within themselves and we have an opportunity to minister.
       4. Anonymous letter, April 27, 1996.
    2. Do I really believe what the Bible says?

Open rebuke is better

Than love carefully concealed.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend,

But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

As iron sharpens iron,

So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend (Proverbs 27:5,6,17).

* 1. For encouragement.
     1. Hopefully others will give this needed vitamin.
     2. If they don’t we are not helpless.

Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God (1 Samuel 30:6).

* + 1. A sign of growing up is the ability to feed oneself or getting someone else to help if we are injured.
  1. Who will provide all this?
  2. “If shepherds don’t shepherds, shepherds probably will not shepherd sheep.”

1. TAKE HEED TO YOURSELVES AS OVERSEERS. “WHEN OVERSEERS OVERSEE OVERSEERS, OVERSEERS WILL BETTER OVERSEE THE CONGREGATION.”
   1. In wolf-watching.

“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29).

* + 1. Elders are to guard against those who would harm the flock.

Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain

(Titus 1:9-11).

* + 1. The watching needs to start close to home.

“Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30).

* + - 1. An elder suspected and accused a fellow elder of leading a movement, an apostasy, without talking to the fellow elder. He (the accuser) asked me to “preach on the issues” to protect the congregation from this movement. My reply: “You believe an elder with whom you worship and meet every week is teaching error. You believe that he is harming this congregation. You correct him either privately or in the elders’ meetings. I will watch your example. If you cannot correct this one elder in a small group, how can I correct hundreds of people?” “If overseers don’t oversee overseers, overseers probably will not oversee the congregation.”
      2. In another eldership, one of the elders would leave elders’ meeting and discuss what was discussed. The other elders were frustrated. They felt helpless and hopeless. They were not taking heed to themselves. “If overseers don’t oversee overseers, overseers probably will not oversee the congregation.”
  1. In overseeing, not overworking.
     1. Elders are not deacons.
     2. The apostles would not go to the grocery store for the widows.

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:1-4).

* + - 1. They knew how to serve tables.
         1. The five thousand. Matthew 14:15-21
         2. The four thousand. Matthew 15:32-38
      2. They were not too good to serve.
      3. They had experience in serving.
    1. But at this point in their ministry, . . . for them to leave their primary responsibility to serve tables.
       1. “It is not reason” (KJV).
       2. “It is not desirable” (NKJV, NASV).
       3. “It is not fit” (ASV).
       4. “It is not right” (RSV).
       5. “It would not be right” (NIV).
       6. “It is wrong” (The Simple English Bible).
    2. The apostles asked the brethren to select seven men whom we may appoint
       1. “over this business” (KJV, NKJV, ASV).
       2. “put in charge of this task” (NASV).
       3. “to this duty” (RSV).
       4. “We will turn this responsibility over to them” (NIV).
    3. It is hard to do this: oversee and not overwork.
       1. When you see the importance of the task.
       2. When you believe you can do it better than others.
       3. When it is something in which you have a particular interest.
       4. Some eldership do this by appointing each elder over a particular work.
    4. But, at least for the apostles, “it is wrong.”
    5. One of the biggest mistakes that *good* leaders (elders, parents, supervisors) make is over functioning.
       1. When I do that as a leader, I keep the one who should be doing that from growing.
       2. I may increase my frustration.
       3. I neglect what I need to be doing.
          1. Mother dressing an eighteen-year-old.
          2. R. C. Thompson, working a crew in the oilfield, was digging a ditch. Half the crew started at one end, and half at the other end, with the water cooler in the middle. R. C. was in the ditch, digging. His boss asked him to come with him. Four men were sitting at the water cooler. His boss said, “You can’t do the work of four men. I didn’t pay you to do the work of four men. If you were doing your work, they would be doing theirs” (R. C Thompson, St. Louis, Missouri, 11/17/86).
    6. How do elders keep from sliding out of their tasks of shepherding and overseeing and into the role of deacons?
    7. “Take heed to yourselves.”
       1. Individually.
       2. As a group.
       3. During the first year our elders served at Berry’s Chapel, there was no VBS because no one would lead besides the elders.
  1. “If overseers don’t oversee overseers, overseers probably will not oversee the congregation.”

1. WHAT PRINCIPLES CAN BE HELPFUL?
   1. Stay with the word.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

* 1. Remember Jesus’ word.

“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ ” (Acts 20:35).

* 1. Stay connected with the leadership team.
     1. Prayer.

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all (Acts 20:36).

* + 1. Freely expressing emotions as well as facts.

Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him (Acts 20:37).

* + 1. Walk with brethren (team members) through life’s changes.

Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship (Acts 20:38).

Conclusion:

1. My relationship with God begins with me.

“Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! “And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:14,15).

1. The question is, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).
2. The answer is:

So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household (Acts 16:31-34).

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