

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 315
Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21
Verses: John 18:7-9
Topic: I Have Lost Not One...
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John 18:7-9 MKJV Then He asked them again, Whom do you seek? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. (8) Jesus answered, I have told you that I AM. Therefore if you seek Me, let these go away; (9) (that the word might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me, I have lost not one of them").

The Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The flock is cared for, protected and known by name. The boast of Jesus is "I have lost not one of them." The disciples are far more than statistics on a church roll, or donors in a database. They are a trust from the Father and Jesus would rather die than lose even one of them.

How impersonal our pastoral care has become in the majority of churches! Visiting the sick, pastoral calls at home, even phone calls to see how people are going are now very rare indeed. Church has tended to become either a stage production or a business enterprise – or both. Church members come and go, get saved and fall away, and hardly anyone notices for long. There is little anguish over backsliders and not much joy over salvations. Rejoicing is kept for large donations.

Church is about lives being lived for God, so a church full of old people is actually a good thing – because it means people have stayed the course and kept the faith. On the other hand an established church full of young people is mostly an evil thing – because it means they are all falling away in their thirties and forties – often due to materialism or an immature faith that cannot cope with mid-life problems. A shepherd who does not keep his flock from going astray is a wicked shepherd.

Evangelism is important – but so is diligent pastoral care. What use is it bringing many lambs to birth if the wolves of our culture devour them all?

Keeping the flock requires at least three things, attention to the flock so the Shepherd knows their condition exactly, knowledge of how to feed and tend them, and the courage to protect them from evil and to confront those that would harm them.

Most bible colleges give reasonable training in how to feed and tend the flock of God. But attention to the people who sit in the pews is a personal task and it is a systematic discipline of praying for them by name, phoning them regularly, and visiting them, in their homes, at least twice a year. This can be done if the pastor's time is used wisely. Developing an active team of elders trained in visiting and pastoral care can be a big help especially in larger churches, but the pastor must still set the standard.

The courage to protect the flock from evil is doubly needed in these days of sexual predators and con-men entering the churches. Not only do we have to guard against

false doctrine – but against false people with wicked designs. Many good policies have been developed to safeguard churches – such as background checks on children’s workers, team teaching (so children are not alone with an adult) and windows in the doors of rooms used for child-care.

Beyond this there is the vigilant care of souls. The ability to sense when someone is going astray and then striving in the Spirit to bring them back to the faith. Programs have largely replaced this ancient sense of the “care of souls” and the “cure of souls”. Programs can be effective and have their place – such as in training counsellors before a crusade. But mass production is not found in nature or in the Spirit. Soul care is an individualized thing – and will always be that way.

There is no substitute for deeply knowing one another – how else can we carry out the “one another” command such as love one another, encourage one another, exhort one another, etc? These all require community and an accurate knowledge of the other. The techniques of mass production do not impart such personal and particular knowledge. There are solutions - small groups, house churches, prayer partners, eating together, and pastoral visiting are all ways of building up our personal knowledge of one another.

Jesus took the initiative to protect His flock by confronting the mob and demanding that He alone face the wrath of the High Priests. Jesus faced evil, and endured the consequences, in order that the flock might be saved and so He could say to the Father “Of those whom You have given Me, I have lost not one of them.”

We need to take the initiative to protect the flock from the things that would ravage it – false teaching, injustice, immoral intruders, con-men and “investors”, some types of multi-level marketing, extremists, and various common sins and weaknesses. Sometimes we will have to be very bold and stand between the flock and the danger.

One day we will have to give an account of our ministry. That should embolden us to protect the flock – for we will have to give an account of how we have cared for those given into our charge. It does not matter if “no-one visits parishioners any more” – what matters is what God expects, not what other pastors do.

Finally, Jesus saw the disciples as gifts from God “of those whom you have given Me.” – not as pains in the neck! Some pastors live in opposition to the congregation. Instead the pastor should view the congregation as gifts from God, then in time they will form the same opinion of the pastor. When we realize that it is God who sends the folk into our church we will start seeing them with new eyes. And with this realization we will make our church the sort of place where God would want to send His precious saints – that is a place full of love, grace, truth and pastoral care.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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