

# Shepherds

According to God's Heart

By Humberto Paz



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## Forward

There are so many ways I could introduce Humberto Paz, and all of them would include the word shepherd. Beto is an amazing shepherd to his family, friends, and countless leaders throughout the United States, Latin America, and Africa. I know of no one more qualified to write about a shepherd after the heart of God than Beto. That's who he is!

I had the privilege of working with him in Foursquare Missions for several years. In fact, for a time our offices were next to each other. I observed firsthand his heart for people in many different kinds of situations.

Much has been written about leadership skills, communicating effectively, techniques in capturing and keeping the audience interested. We hear a lot about the importance of church management and being relevant in a rapidly changing world. As important as those things are, knowing and communicating the heart of God is what transforms broken lives.

Beto writes to shepherd's who want to do more than fill a job description, become a skillful CEO, or master the art of communication. He writes to those who want to know the heart of God, shepherd like He shepherd's, and love like He loves!

I pray that this book will touch your heart like it has mine.  
That together, we become shepherds after Gods heart in a  
world confused and harassed like sheep without a shepherd.

-Dan Sneed

## ENDORSEMENTS

My first encounter with Pastor Paz Beto in 2008, was a divine appointment. At that time, I had just been appointed as an interim National Leader of Foursquare Gospel Church in Rwanda. As a trained lawyer, my assignment was totally new. I needed someone to mentor me. Pastor Paz came at the right time with a heavenly mission to raise me as the Church National leader, as well as the lead pastor of the only church we had planted two years before. His first message in our leadership retreat was on what makes a great pastor with a special focus on integrity. It was not only a vocal message. It was also the man I knew during his long service as the Area Missionary of Foursquare in East Africa. His integrity was above reproach. I saw a man with a shepherd's heart who changed and shaped my vocation. In this book, Paz speaks his heart and his rich experience of shepherding and mentoring pastors. This is a must-read book to all pastors and Christian leaders who want to remain God's vessels in their lifetime. **Bishop Dr. Fidele Masengo, President of Foursquare Gospel Church in Rwanda**

This book has dynamite, not to destroy, but to build, to challenge and to call us to a profound reflection and a sincere search of the heart of the leader who wants to serve the church well. This book reminds us what is important to God and what He wants to see take place in and through leaders. Humberto, who has been a very much appreciated leader in

Latin America and who with his wife Teri, have been sensitive leaders to God and an example to be followed. He reviews the stories of leaders in the Bible, their examples, lives, ministries and the results to help us see the importance of taking care of our personal life to then serve with authority. The examples in the Bible are not mere stories of the past. Humberto shows us what we need to consider in those stories and what we must apply to our lives and ministry for the healthy advance of the Mission of God in the world. The message of this book is to align ourselves to the heart of God. It is a message totally prophetic with a content relevant for today. Every leader should read it. It is easy to read and one does not want to put it down until reading it to the end.

**Rev. Paul Otremba, Foursquare Area Missionary for Central and South America**

How we, the pastors, needed a book like this one! I believe, through it, Humberto Paz helps us hear a prophetic voice at the best style of the Old Testament prophets. Obviously, inspired by God, calls the attention of the global pastoral body to align our priorities with the priorities of the Good Shepherd instead of continuing identifying ourselves with a leadership which seeks only their own benefit rather than the benefit of the people they pretend to serve. Humberto does not stop at the mere external practices of the pastoral ministry, but focus directly on the heart, in the expectations and motivations of the pastor, which many times are in contrast with the expectations of the One who called us to His service. All this, is done in a skillful use of the Scriptures,

citing prophets who were not very popular in their time, but whom today we admire, cite and applaud. Humberto sprinkles these accurate biblical reflections with personal examples which evidence a willingness to be vulnerable rarely seen in our days. I believe this book sees the light of a KAIROS moment when we are still in a time to mend our ways and participate in the work of the Builder of the Church. While it is true, the last great harvest is still to come, this could only be harvested by a people healthy and well fed...which ultimately represents the challenge of shepherding the flock....according to the heart of God. **Raúl A. Irigoyen, Operacional Assistant Pastor of the Foursquare Global Council.**

Perspective, wisdom, and spiritual insights abound in these pages! Humberto Paz is such a gift to us all and this book affords us a glimpse into his core life message and experience.

He is a role model, mentor, and personal friend to me for over two decades and I know first-hand that this man embodies the message of this book. He knows the heart of the Good Shepherd and he has conducted his life and ministry with total integrity in following Jesus Christ. I enjoyed reading this book packed with scripture, real life stories, and insightful metaphors; you will too! **Dr. Ted Vail, Senior Director of Foursquare Missions International.**

## Copyright Page

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## **Dedication page**

My greatest desire in writing this book is to honor Jesus, The Great Shepherd! My prayer is that His Heart may be conveyed in the best possible way through the words written in this work. May we all grow together in being shepherds according to His own heart.

To my wife, Teri, thank you for your encouragement and for insisting, for years, for me to write this book. Your love, support, patience, understanding, in our almost 50 years of marriage, has been a revelation of the heart of God through you. I also want to thank our daughters for their patience and grace.

## Acknowledgments

My gratitude to Robin Witt who took time to review the manuscript and edited it making it more presentable and easier to read. Robin, your help has been and is invaluable to me. THANK YOU!

Thank you to all the pastors I have worked alongside in Latin America, The Caribbean and Africa. Thank you for your graciousness, love, acceptance of us, as your brother and sister, as we lived and worked with you in the expansion of the Kingdom of God and in the building of the church. Thank you for teaching us how to live in your culture and your patience as we learned.

My gratitude to all my friends, Area Missionaries and Regional Coordinators of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, with whom we worked and from whom we learned different aspects of the Heart of God in their lives.

Our special gratitude to our mentors. It would be impossible to mention everyone by name. To those who had a great impact on our lives because we were able to spend a great deal of time with them and who treated us as friends. A special thanks to pastors Jack W. Hayford, Donald McGregor, Donald Pickerill, Jack Hamilton and Samuel Middlebrook (RIP)

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## INTRODUCTION

George Santayana, a Spanish poet and philosopher, said in 1905, "Those who do not remember the past, are doomed to repeat it."<sup>1</sup> Forty-three years later, in a speech to Parliament Churchill modified the phrase "Those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it."<sup>2</sup>

This statement is relevant today in individual lives, societies, and nations, including, spiritual and Christian leaders. The issue is not will history repeat itself; Jesus said in Matthew 24:37, "*As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*" The issue is, will I, or we as a church or nation, repeat the errors of history?

This book is primarily for pastors or anyone in ministry of any kind, for younger pastors and those who God is calling to His service.

The book of Judges is a good study of Israel repeating the errors of their history. However, for the purpose of this book, we will deal with a specific time and focus on the shepherds. (Shepherds in the Old Testament included the kings, his officers, priests and prophets). So, when we use the term 'shepherd', it refers to all listed above.

The history of Israel and Judah repeating the mistakes made by their ancestors is a lesson for us as pastors and the church, to learn from and avoid. God spoke to the generation referencing the time of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, and

Zephaniah. He warned them of the mistakes their ancestors made by abandoning God and following after other gods and how the present generation was repeating the errors of history.

Israel and Judah were in trouble because they ignored the Lord and His ways. God tried to rescue them, reminded them of His love for them and called them back to Him. Considering primarily the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who prophesied in the same period of history and to the same people, we see the condition of Israel and Judah and their stubbornness.

Of their stubbornness, Jeremiah said in chapter 25, ‘God had spoken to His people again and again for 23 years, and they have not listened’. At the same time, this also revealed the love and patience of God not wanting to bring disaster on His people. The question is, what lessons can we learn from their history today?

As a church, we would be naïve to say we have not made mistakes throughout history. We tend to grow complacent and be influenced by the culture. Even though God speaks to us again and again, we seem to think all will be well and there is no need for repentance. Zephaniah cautioned, *“At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad’.”* 1:12.

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As I write, I am not thinking only of the Church and the country I live in, the United States. I am thinking of the church around the world. To the reader, wherever you are, as you read these pages, you may pray and consider the history of the Church in your country. Allow God to give you direction as to His purpose for you in your nation.

I am attempting to present principles from Scripture and not specific solutions. Each pastor is responsible to seek and learn what God is saying and doing in your respective nations. It is His heart and His mind we are interested in knowing and communicating.

We will consider two revivals experienced in the United States in the 1900's and the reason they ended. The 'self', the 'ego', is our worse enemy. The interaction of Christians today arguing and fighting about politics, doctrinal issues, attitudes and expressing hate because of their differences, is the repetition of mistakes. It is a sign we have not learned from history and we are doomed to repeat it, if we are not careful.

The purpose in writing on this topic, "being shepherds according to the heart of God," is to simply review God's expectations of those who have been called to be spiritual leaders, to learn from Him and be encouraged to give ourselves to His transformational process.

Jeremiah faced opposition from the political and religious systems of his time. They accused him of not being a

prophet, put him in prison (Jeremiah 37), threatened him with death (26:16), placed him in a cistern (dungeon), the king burned the scrolls of his prophecies (36), and he was forbidden to prophesy to preserve his own life (11:21). J. Sidlow Baxter makes an analysis of the book of Jeremiah in his book, *“Explore the Book”*. He says, “I know of no man who reveals a truer heart-likeness to Jesus Himself than does Jeremiah.”<sup>3</sup> Could this be the reason God used Jeremiah to give the people the promise of “shepherds according to God’s heart” (Jeremiah 3:15)? As we read the book of Jeremiah, we see the heart of God and the prophet’s heart for His people.

After considering Jeremiah’s prophecies, who also spoke specifically to shepherds in chapter 23, we see the consistency of the message through Ezekiel’s prophesies. They both speak to the same audience. For the purpose of this book, however, when we come to Ezekiel, we will focus our attention on the words God has for the shepherds, specifically in Ezekiel 34. They are harsh but necessary words and come as a warning to us. In saying ‘warning’, it is not with a condemning spirit but simply, a warning. We also have that same human nature and are prone to make the same mistakes. We will repeat history if we are not careful.

There are dangers of comparing ourselves to others (even as a local church or denomination), trying to be someone we are not or thinking others are better than we. Or we compare ourselves as if we were competing with them; or we compare ourselves and become prideful, thinking we are better than they. Jesus is our example and with Whom we strive to be

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like, because He destined us to be transformed into His very image, not the image of others. (Romans 8:29)

Some have described the God of the Old Testament as bloodthirsty, hard, inflexible, a scary God. However, we will see the opposite as we see how He revealed Himself to His people. In the incarnation of Jesus, He came to reveal the Father, the God of the Old Testament to us, not only in word and deed, but the character of the Father throughout His life. His character is the reason He loves, does miracles, heals people and more.

The words of the Apostle Paul to the elders of Ephesus are important. He gave them counsel to take care of their hearts and what they should do in shepherding the flock of God. There are numerous passages in which God tells the people to pay attention (take heed). On one occasion, Jesus tells the disciples, “*take heed how you hear*” (Luke 8:18). May we daily take heed to hear what He says so we do not repeat the errors others made throughout history.

The following statement may sound as heresy, ‘doing what is right in the sight of God’ is not always enough. It is necessary our hearts be loyal to God in all we do. We will address this with examples in Scripture.

The first four chapters of this book are more about the shepherd and his heart towards God and the flock. In chapter five, I focus more on the church Jesus said He will build.



The New Testament gives us metaphors that describe our relationship with God and our relationship with one another. Finally, just as there are building codes for the safety of those who inhabit them, God has building codes for His Church. Without them, the building cannot be completed.

In no way is this an exhaustive presentation. No person alone could exhaustively write down what God has for His people. My prayer is God will continue to speak to our hearts and teach us how He wants to build His Church. I pray we will continue to avoid repeating mistakes made by other generations. He will encourage us to learn from the past mistakes of Israel so we do not fall into the same traps. Let us learn and not be doomed to repeat the errors of history. I Corinthians 10.

## Chapter One

### The Heart of God for His People

“Old Testament prophet was not to predict the future, but to tell forth the will of God which He had communicated by revelation.”<sup>4</sup> Dr. Gleason Archer.

The prophet (also called a shepherd) in Old Testament times was an important part in the life of Israel. They were consulted as to the Lord’s will regarding a situation Israel was facing; or simply, God spoke to them to communicate His will to the people which often had to do with guidance to a better future.

When my wife Teri and I served in Africa, we loved going on safari. Though we went to see the great Serengeti, we also discovered from our first safari there was much to learn from the animal kingdom God created. Our guides on safari were two men from the Masaai tribe, a major tribe on the Serengeti. One piece of information they shared that attracted our attention was the fact zebras and wildebeest like to ‘hang together’. There are important reasons for this

phenomenon. Each breed has one or two of their senses more developed than the other. Zebras have better eyesight and memory than the wildebeest. The wildebeest have a better sense of smell and hearing than the zebras. They hang together because they help each other at various times, especially during the Great Migration every year.

The wildebeests lead both herds to water, and their hearing helps them to alert the presence of predators. The zebras, on the other hand, are very helpful because of their keen eyesight and memory. When food begins to be scarce, both migrate from Tanzania to Kenya and several months later, return to Tanzania following the same food source. It is a round trip journey. During the migration, they must cross the Mara River. There are trails to enter the river and a trail on the other side to safely reach land and continue their journey. The zebra remembers the trails, and the entrances and exits from the river. The Wildebeest do not.

There are dangers waiting in the river too. Crocodiles await the time of migration to feed on the wildebeest and zebras. Another danger are the steep cliffs along the riverbanks. Tragically those wildebeest who attempt to navigate the river crossings without following the zebra, end piling up along the cliffs, trampling each other in their panic to get out of the river and away from the crocodiles. Because of the memory and good eyesight of the zebra, not only do they remember the crossing sites, but they also see where to exit the river on the other side. The loss of zebras is much lower.

The prophet was like the zebra when speaking the will of God to the people. They gave directions in times of spiritual danger and pointed out the way of escape to freedom. Unfortunately, the people like the wildebeests, did not follow their direction, and ended up captives of sin and to other nations. Jeremiah's prophesies communicated the will of God, called them to repentance, gave warnings of coming disasters for those who did not follow the directions of the Word of the Lord.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before Jeremiah was born, Israel and Judah (now a kingdom divided) had gone through turbulent times in their history because of the way some of their kings turned away from the ways of the Lord, leading the people into sin and idolatry.

Approximately 48 years before Jeremiah's birth, Manasseh was the king of Judah. He began his reign at the age of 12. Although he had a good example in his father King Hezekiah, Manasseh departed from doing what was right in the eyes of God and did what was evil. In 2 Kings 21, we find the story of his life and his actions, "*He established the idolatry that his father had removed, sacrificed his son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spirits, and shed innocent blood.*" In the midst of this, God called Israel to repent and return to Him. The people did not listen. Manasseh had induced them to do more evil than the nations God had destroyed before them. 2 Kings 21:9.

In 2 Chronicles 33, also tells the story of Manasseh but adds he was taken captive to Babylon. He repented and cried out to God and sought God's forgiveness for the evil he had done and tried to correct his evil doings. By that time, though, God had declared judgment on the nation. When Manasseh died, his son Amon became king and did evil in the eyes of God. He reigned only two years. During this time, Jeremiah had been born, but he was only a child. We don't know much about his life outside of what the scriptures tell us.

When Israel was one nation or kingdom, she had lived wonderful moments when the people followed the Lord, prospered and had peace. They also experienced tragic moments of instability and calamities. Israel's story is one of inconsistencies in her relationship with God - sometimes close to God and other times away from Him.

As it has been said, those who do not learn from history will repeat the same mistakes. This seems to be confirmed throughout the history of Israel. Even in our day, we see governments, people, leaders, churches making the same mistakes of the past and repeating history, even though God is constantly wanting to teach us not to make the same errors. In I Corinthians 10:11-13 after describing how Israel ignored God and forgot the wonderful love God showed them by freeing them from Egypt, caring for them through the journey in the wilderness, we find these words of warning, *"Now all these things happened to them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, on who the ends of the world have come. <sup>12</sup>So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful*

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*that you don't fall!*<sup>13</sup> *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*"

Making the same mistakes can be avoided with His help, His guidance, and our obedience to Him. He promises we will not be tempted beyond what we can bear. But He will lead us in the way of escape, if we follow Him.

Jeremiah lived during the time of seven kings of Judah and Israel, the last part of Manasseh's reign, who reigned for 55 years: Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. He served as a prophet during the last five kings. Some of Jeremiah's writings are difficult to place in a period of time or timeline. The original messages recorded by Baruch, Jeremiah' Scribe, were burned by the king of Judah, Jehoiakim, one of the sons of Josiah. *"After the king burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah.....* <sup>32</sup> *And Jeremiah took another scroll, and gave it to the scribe Baruch, the son of Nerias, and He wrote in him the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire, and many similar words were even added to them."* Jeremiah 36:27-32,

## The Young Jeremiah Around 627 B. C.

King Josiah began his reign around 640 BC when he was 8 years old. He was a different kind of king than his two predecessors. Josiah did good in the sight of God and followed the Lord. It was in the 13th year of the reign of Josiah that Jeremiah, being of a family of priests, had an encounter with God and received the call to be a prophet. Jeremiah not only learned about his priestly duties, but he must have maintained a personal relationship with God. Without this relationship, it would have been easy for him to turn away from God and lead the people on the wrong path as had happened with other priests and prophets. God had seen this young man's heart and knew He could entrust him with a commission he would carry out in obedience and with the right heart. God has also seen our hearts and has entrusted us with a mission, and He expects us to carry it out in obedience and according to His heart.

Jeremiah had been preparing for the priesthood, and what he was about to hear, would transform his life. These words from God would not only affect his personal life, bringing security, affirmation and encouragement in his mission, but would set him on a different path.

Jeremiah 1:5, says *“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.”* First of all, God is a personal God. He focuses His attention on Jeremiah's personal life, tells him of his origin. It is as if God was telling him, ‘you need to know you are who you are because I formed you’. This goes beyond his physical

origin; from eternity God had a specific design for him, *“before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”* Not only did God have a design for him, He set him apart for it. This purpose for Jeremiah’s life will have an effect on people's lives for eternity.

Perhaps the emotion Jeremiah felt as he heard these words must have been unspeakable. And at the same time, perhaps many questions crossed his mind. A natural question would be, ‘who am I for God to be interested in me in this way’?

It is no different today for any of us. God shows the same interest in each one of us. David testified of this fact when he wrote *“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book.”* Psalm 139 13-16.

What David expressed is applicable to each of us. There may be some who would think this kind of interest is only for those who serve in one of the five office gifts. His interest for all of us personally is the same. He died for all and loves us the same. His intent for each one may be different in profession but His interest in us is the same. His interest and purpose is for all to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.



We all have a spiritual destiny from God to fulfill His purpose in the edification of the body of Christ and the evangelization of the world. It is up to us to believe it or not. Failure to believe or accept this truth does not invalidate God's love and interest in us. John 3:16 says it clearly, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" I believe it is not only eternal life in salvation but the fulfillment of His eternal purpose for everyone who believes in Him.

Though His goal in profession is different for each one of us, it is uniquely wonderful. God invites us to live in what He has designed for us which is better than any plan we can make for ourselves. His design is motivated by His love. Ultimately, the decision is ours to accept His design for our lives, or not.

Jeremiah was aware of God's great love for him. The plan for his life continued to be revealed. God said, "*I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.*" Jeremiah was being called to something different to what he had been preparing for. The same has happened to most of us in the ministry. We were doing something different than what we were called to by God, and the new assignment requires total dependency on Him.

Jeremiah responded with insecurity and maybe asking himself if he was able to carry out the office of a prophet at his age? Was he ready? He maybe thought he did not have the

experience. He probably also thought he did not have what it took to be a prophet. So, he answered, “*Ah Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am too young.*” Jeremiah 1:6.

God said to Jeremiah, “*Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.*” Jeremiah 1:7. God was not looking at his age but at his heart and devotion to Him, as God had done in other young people He used to change the history of Israel. Among them were, Joseph, Joshua, Esther and David.

There are countries in the world where culture minimizes young people's ability to serve God. I have lived in countries and spoken to young people about their service to God and their response was like Jeremiah's. They are young and have the idea they cannot serve God until they reach a certain age. Some thought it would be disrespectful to those who have been in ministry for a long time, if they began to serve God at their age.

The reluctance Jeremiah felt is not limited to age. Moses was 40 years old when God called him to free Israel from the bondage of Egypt. He also responded with hesitation, reluctance and said, I don't know how to speak. This hesitation was a feeling of thinking he was incapable; the task was too great. Any task given to us by God is too great for us if we think we are going to do it by ourselves.

Jeremiah's inner struggle was not that he doubted God, nor was he rejecting what God was telling him. He was doubting

himself as it happens to most of us, if not to all of us. However, if God is asking us to be and fulfill the purpose for which we were created, it is necessary to enter another level of the process of learning to have faith in God. The Lord was dealing with Jeremiah's hesitation.

This is a process for all of us. We all have insecurities that need to be dealt with by God. We have our own insecurities, and there are insecurities others try to impose on us. Perhaps it is not done intentionally or with malice, but they can affect us if we allow a seed of doubt to be planted. Sometimes we hear discouraging words, but if God has revealed His plan to us, discouraging words have no impact on our lives.

When I was a young man, with my family's blessing I left my home in Mexico to attend Bible College in the United States. Being single, I left my profession and my job in pursuit of what God had told me. A few months after beginning my studies, my pastor of many years, came to visit me and invited me to lunch with him. During lunch, my pastor said to me, "I give you three months to give up and come home. You are not the one who should be preparing for the ministry. There are other young people more capable than you." Needless to say, I was hurt by his words. I thanked him for lunch and his visit. However, I was not discouraged by his words. My time of hesitation, insecurity or doubts had already happened prior to leaving home. God had dealt with me by giving me the assurance I needed. I continued with my studies and went on into ministry.

God was dealing with Jeremiah's hesitation. Times came in Jeremiah's life when he heard discouraging words, harsh criticism, opposition, persecution and more, but God was preparing him for those times. Jeremiah was being molded into a shepherd according to God's heart.

God continued the process of revealing more details of His plan for the young prophet. Jeremiah needed to act in faith. God continued to assure Jeremiah of His presence with him. He promised to be with him, rescue him, and then the Lord reached out his hand and touched Jeremiah's mouth and said, *"I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."* Jeremiah 1:9.

It would be easy to interpret these words as if God was giving him authority to do whatever he wanted. However, Jeremiah understood that this authority was only God's permission to speak what He instructed and to whom God told him to speak. The danger is real for us to think that God gives us authority to say and do whatever we want. We must be careful to say and do what He gives us to communicate and do it according to His heart.

### **The First Prophetic Experience**

In Jeremiah 1:11, God asked, Jeremiah, what do you see? *"I see the branch of an almond tree,"* he replied. *And God said, "you have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that My word is fulfilled"*. The name adopted here for the almond tree is

particularly suitable in this connection. It means wakeful; the almond tree blossoming in January, is the first to wake from the sleep of winter." <sup>5</sup> The word for 'watching' used in this verse is related to the word used for the almond tree. God is awake, alert, sleepless to fulfill His Word.

God reassured Jeremiah of His faithfulness to him and the mission for which he was chosen. God gave him confidence assuring him He would see the prophecies were fulfilled. God would make sure it was done. Jeremiah needed this assurance because God had told him He had given him authority to pluck and take down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant. Up to this point, Jeremiah did not yet know what the message was but had the assurance from God, whatever the message was, God would fulfill it. It was God who would do the work, Jeremiah was only God's spokesman.

The second question to Jeremiah: *"What do you see?"* *"I see a pot that is boiling". I answered. "It is tilting toward us from the north."* God described what was coming to Judah and why it would happen (Jer. 1:15-16). A northern nation would come and invade Judah and would take her into captivity. Not an easy nor a pleasant message to deliver.

Perhaps a question arises in our minds: Could this prophecy be applied to us today? It is not being suggested that the church today or the nation is in a condition which deserves judgment from God, and another nation will invade and take us captive. However, we can ask ourselves: Could the ideology of another country dominate ours? It has happened

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in recent times in other parts of the world. Depending upon where we live, each one of us must ask and answer this question. Though in some countries it has not happened by military takeover, it has happened by an anti-God ideology.

In my opinion, we cannot deny the struggle between ideologies that oppose God and the church where religious freedom has existed. There is a danger of the church getting involved in defending causes which seem good, but in doing so are not motivated by the Word or the Spirit of God, but by agendas or ideologies of political groups. There is danger for the church of being influenced by a culture which has its own definition of justice, a culture in which values become only ideas and are relative or changed to the convenience of any given group in society. Sadly, I have seen videos on the internet of pastors using a political agenda as the base for teaching and trying to make Scripture fit their political view. Our source for teaching is the Word of God.

The following is the report from Barna Group regarding a recent survey:

**Barna: We're Experiencing Another Reformation, and Not in a Good Way** By Jessica Lea October 8, 2020

“George Barna in a summary of the findings. “It certainly seems as if the culture is influencing the Church more than the church is influencing the culture.

“In January 2020, the CRC (Cultural Research Center) surveyed 2,000 adults in the U.S. from four major groups:

Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Charismatics, mainline Protestants, and Catholics. The study was part of the **American Worldview Inventory 2020**, and the estimated margin of error was plus or minus two percentage points.

Researchers asked respondents about their views on 51 topics, including marriage, absolute truth, the sanctity of human life, and the authority of the Bible. While there were notable differences among the four Christian traditions, researchers found that all of them showed a clear trend away from the teachings of the Bible and toward a secular worldview.”<sup>6</sup>

If the church were to experience bondage, it would be either in restrictive laws to worship God or in the spirit by being deceived by an ideology. I use the word ‘if’, as I am not saying this is the condition of the church or our country, but we need to ask ourselves: Are we heading in that direction? On the other hand, it would be naive of us to think because the nation was founded on Christian principles, they cannot be challenged or changed. It would also be naive to think as a church, God's discipline no longer exists or God would not bring discipline to those who continue to deny their sin and reject God’s call to repent. We must be careful not to fall into the mindset of the people of Jerusalem described by Zephaniah in chapter 1:12, *“At the time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left in its dregs, who think, ‘The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.’*”

## The Message and The Messenger

Jeremiah 1:17-19

*“Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you.”*

Jeremiah is told to act with courage and deliver the message God would give him. The recipients of the message included the political and religious systems as well as the society or the culture who will oppose him but will not overcome him. God described what He had done in Jeremiah’s inner being that would enable him to stand against the opposition to the message and the messenger. Jeremiah 1:18, *“I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall.”*

The following commentary is taken from “Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible.”

“I have made thee this day a defenced city.... Or ‘as’ one; so, read the Targum, Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions; which is inexpugnable, and cannot be taken: and an iron pillar; which cannot be removed out of its place and brazen walls; which cannot be broken down. All these metaphors show the safety and security of the prophet, being surrounded by the power of God; his constancy, immovableness, and



invincibleness in the work of the Lord, having such a spirit of power, fortitude, and of a sound mind, that nothing was able to move and shake him, or to deter him from the execution of his office; and that he should stand inflexible.”<sup>7</sup>

As we study Jeremiah's life, we realize that the metaphors God used to describe him, were fulfilled as he faced the oppositions, challenges, sufferings, death threats, persecutions and rejections during his life as a prophet. Yes, there were times of frustration, and confusion in Jeremiah, but God was always close to help him.

Some students of the Bible caution us to not put ourselves in the same place as the characters in the Bible, as if God was telling us the same thing or giving us the same assignment. This is true; we need to be careful and not think God is asking everybody to do the same thing as Jeremiah. On the other hand, some of these words may be applied for each one of us according to what He calls us to. The words, “*I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall*”, can be applied to our spiritual life in the spiritual warfare we face or through suffering and persecutions for the cause of the Gospel.

The disciples and the early church showed the characteristics of these metaphors in their lives as followers of Jesus. They suffered, were rejected, persecuted, most of the disciples suffered martyrdom for the Gospel. They were not persuaded to renounce their faith.

In today's world, there are brothers and sisters on other continents who suffer martyrdom because of the Gospel. The characteristics or metaphors used for Jeremiah have been evident in the lives of those who have suffered martyrdom and remained unmovable in their faith.

### **The Beginning of Jeremiah's Prophetic Journey**

Keep in mind we are discovering God's heart even in circumstances where it is difficult to see it. Sometimes it can seem as if His heart is one of aversion and abandonment of His people.

In seeing Jeremiah's prophecies in these early chapters, it may be difficult for us to see God's love for His people, even if He was saying it in the midst of the difficult things He ~~has~~ had to say. Children may not see or hear the words of their parent telling them they are loved while receiving discipline. Sooner or later, they will understand. Encouraged by the words he had heard from God, it was here he began to dictate to Baruch what God was speaking to proclaim it to the people including the rulers, their officers, the priests, the prophets.

### **God's Thoughts About His People**

The message from God started with His reflection on the relationship of love and devotion to His people giving a historical narrative to the generation to which Jeremiah was delivering the message. *"I remember the love of your youth, your bridal affection, when you followed me through the desert,*

*for unused lands. Israel was consecrated to the LORD, it was the first fruits of his harvest; all who ate from it suffered the consequences, the calamity came upon them," the LORD says.*  
Jeremiah 2:1-3

Yes, Israel loved God. However, on many occasions Israel was unfaithful, but God remained faithful with His unchanging love for them. In the first three chapters of Hosea, the love of God was expressed to His people almost 100 years before Jeremiah would deliver this message. *When that day comes," says the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband' Instead of 'my master'," Hosea 2:16. "I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion. I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as the LORD."* Moving words even today! Hosea 2:19.

This was God's heart and love for His people. He longed to have this relationship with them. This is also the heart of God for us, His church. Have we ever experienced a lesser devotion to Him, not in works, but in our personal devotion to Him? The loss of this devotion should be enough for us to wake up and return to Him with an increasing devotion.

### **A Sobering Question**

The historical narrative continued to the present generation of Jeremiah's time. God asked a question that should have made them reflect about their situation and become aware they were repeating the history of their ancestors, making the

same mistakes. God asked them, *“What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from Me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.*

The verses that follow are describing an intoxicated community. The term ‘intoxicated’ is mainly used to describe someone who is drunk. However, in the Spanish language, intoxicated includes the meaning of the voluntary or involuntary introduction of toxins into the body. For example, the bite of a venomous snake injecting venom into our system will affect the senses and function of the body members; or voluntarily ingesting or intoxicating ourselves with toxins or venom fully knowing the consequences.

Israel had a tradition of teaching its history to her children, the stories of God's love and how He had delivered them from Egypt, opened the waters of the Red Sea to cross, guided them through the wilderness, provided manna and how they built memorials God instructed them to build in various places.

In spite of knowing the history of the love of God for His people, Israel is described in this passage as spiritually bitten by a serpent and injecting venom of sin, selfishness, and causing the loss of common sense and spiritual sensitivity. The added sadness was, those who were the spiritual leaders, those who had the responsibility to lead the nation in the ways of the Lord, joined those who led the people into idolatry as King Manasseh did.

All those called shepherds in Old Testament times had neglected their responsibility and did not even ask, Where is the Lord? *“The priests did not ask, ‘Where is the LORD?’ Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.”* Jeremiah 2:8. They became indifferent to the Lord, ignoring Him even when He would speak to them with tenderness to return to Him and to reestablish the love relationship they had.

God continued to think of them. While people forgot the Lord, God did not forget them. So, *“What fault did your ancestors find in me that they forsook the Lord?”* This question should have caused them to react, at least to want to come out of the intoxication they were in and become sober. Obviously, they did not have an answer, nor could they find any fault in God, but their decision was, *‘we don’t want to serve you.’* Jeremiah 2:20.

When we think of idolatry, it is easy to think of other religions or unbelievers and condemn them for their idolatry. We must be careful not to judge others. None of us is exempt from falling into idolatry or sin. Idolatry takes many forms today. It is not only about religious idols, but everything that takes over God's place in our hearts. Jesus said, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Matthew 6:21.

We need to be constantly alert and protect our own hearts from the idolatry of anything on which we come to depend

on more than on God. It is always good to do what David said, “*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.*” Psalm 139: 23-24. Although Israel had not asked God to search their hearts as David expressed it, God still let them know the evil ways in which they were walking and invited them to repent and return to Him.

Two sins are mentioned by God: “*They have abandoned Me, the fountain of living water and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*” Jeremiah 2:13.

By abandoning God, rejecting His love, His care, His presence, no doubt their lives became dissatisfied. The need for safety, love, satisfaction of their thirst and spiritual hunger was evident in their lives. But instead of returning to the One they knew could provide them with everything they needed, with whom they had experienced love, care, with whom they could talk and receive answers, in the numbness of their senses, they went after false gods who could not hear or speak. What a contrast with the life David described when he and Israel found in God the fountain of living water. “*How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.*” Psalms 36:7-9.

When any man comes to rely more on his ideas, his will, his creativity in his spiritual life, his marriage, his family life, work, ministry, rather than in God, he is digging for himself broken cisterns which will not be their source of life wisdom and knowledge.

Verse 20 of chapter 2, *“Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, ‘I will not serve you!’ ”* It was not as if Israel was united to God by force, by obligation, nor that they were being mistreated that they had to break the bond. Hosea 11:4 says, *“I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.”*

These are the bonds Israel broke: God's love and goodness. Judah said to God, *“I will not serve you.”* On top of that, they refused to admit they had become contaminated and denied they had gone after other gods. Jeremiah 2:23, God made them see the infidelity in which they had lived, but Israel made the decision to love and go after the foreign gods.

Now God directed attention to the current generation of Judah. *“You of this generation, consider the word of the LORD: Have I been a desert to Israel or a land of great darkness? Why do my people say, ‘We are free to roam; we will come to you no more?’ ”* Jeremiah 2:31. Judah's behavior repeated the history of their ancestors.

As a church, we look at the present time in our nation and the Church, “What do we see?” We have known and know

of the love and care of God for His people. Where are we going as a church and as a nation? Has our nation become intoxicated with hate, lawlessness, selfishness? Has the church become insensitive to Him? Are we even asking these questions? Most of all, are we asking, “Where is the Lord?”

In Jeremiah 3, God speaks of the infidelity of Israel and Judah. The figurative language used to describe Israel and Judah is of a woman leaving her husband to prostitute herself with many other men without knowing shame and being impertinent. This speaks of Israel and Judah giving themselves to idols, idols that cannot speak nor hear. Judah saw the infidelity of his sister Israel and went out and prostituted as Israel did. Judah was not afraid of God, she denied her sin, and she denied God. Judah only pretended to return to the Lord.

Considering the kings and their officers, the priests and prophets had turned away from God. He said to the people, if you return to Me, I will give you shepherds, not like those who abandoned Me and led you astray: *“I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.”* Jeremiah 3:15.

The reason to review the history of Israel and Judah is for us to be aware that the same serpent who deceived so many kings, priests, and prophets is still active today. The deception may be in a different way, but its effects remain the same as those of the poison caused by venom, the loss of our spiritual senses and the loss of sense to shepherd God's flock.



What about our recent history? Events in the church in the recent past? It has already been said as human beings, and even as Christians, we are prone to repeat the same mistakes of the past, if we disregard God's Word.

The United States of America has a history of revivals. When God moved by His Spirit and many people were saved, there were many manifestations of God's power through miracles. Some of these revivals lasted years. The question is, 'Why does a move of God which comes from above by His power, and gives us the possibility of a wonderful future not only for us, but for generations to come, come to an end?'

People who have studied two of these great revivals, "The Azusa Street Revival" and the "Pensacola Outpouring", present their conclusions as to why they ended:

**Azusa Street Revival:** "Soon, conflict and disagreement became more pronounced *in the once tranquil congregation. Sadly, nothing would ever be the same again at the Apostolic Faith Mission.*

*For example, since neckties were little more than frivolous adornment, should they be worn by sanctified men? This debate invited even more arguments. Members also fought over whether constructing a storm shelter at the Mission demonstrated a lack of faith or not.*

*There was something else that may have contributed to the breakdown of the revival. Some of the leaders who attended the services were convinced that they could do a much better job of perpetuating the revival than William Seymour and his team. By the second and third year of the revival, several competing missions popped up around Los Angeles, attempting to take the attention away from the Apostolic Faith Mission.*

*There were the terrible problems of disharmony and schism. Of course, the intense theological battles contributed to opposing factions and a general loss of trust among leaders. These attitudes and expressions all contributed to this great revival's cessation.*

*Yet, as I finish this historic exploration, I think there is one important lesson that the revival at Azusa Street provides for us. I believe that it helps us to understand that revivals seldom end because of the trouble from without. No, revivals end because of the trouble within.”<sup>8</sup>*

**Why did Pensacola's Outpouring End?** *“For those who were personally involved in the revival, there are multiple reasons why the revival ended after 5 years.*

- *Divine leadership was appointed that later split the church;*
- *Evangelist Steve Hill left the meetings and the revival lost momentum;*
- *Financial mismanagement created unnecessary pressure. (The church was reportedly left with \$11M USD debt following the 5 years of revival.);*

- *Dark Ages Mentality poisoned minds of participants, making them open to financial disaster and other unnecessary struggles; and*
- *The revival was not spread around the world by those participating; instead, people stayed in Pensacola.”*

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This last revival took place almost 88 years after the Azusa Street Revival. We see similar conflicts, as the cause of the end of both revivals. The mistakes of the past were repeated. It seems the church did not learn from the past. This is not a criticism of the church of those times because we celebrate what God did and long for God to do it again, but we want to learn from the past and not repeat the same mistakes.

Today, we see there is much hatred and division in our nation, and even among some Christians. We are intoxicated with hate and injustices at all levels. Have we not learned from the past? Are we repeating history? As a church, it must be different between us. The world needs to know that we are His disciples because we love one another.

In these last days, when God moves again in His church, may God help us not to make the same mistakes. As I have mentioned before, we humans are prone to make the same mistakes and repeat history. It was true for Israel and continues to be true for nations, rulers, societies, churches and individuals today. However, can we live differently in these latter days and prevent internal problems from obstructing God's move? I believe we can. 1 Corinthians

## Shepherds According to the Heart of God

10:13, says, “*And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*”

### Where Are We Today as a Church?

The Barna Group has been a resource to the Church by letting us know the trends in people’s beliefs. This is the latest study that was released in October of 2020.

Examples of Christians' Beliefs That Differ from Biblical Teaching (Percent who reject the biblical teaching specified)				
Biblical teaching	% <i>reject</i> this biblical teaching			
	Evang	Pentec	Main	Catholic
People are not basically good; we are sinners	75%	76%	81%	84%
Which faith you embrace matters as much or more than simply having some faith	62	71	76	84
The Holy Spirit is not just a symbol of God's power, presence or purity, but is a real, influential being	58	66	73	74
Success is consistent obedience to God	53	48	77	84
There are absolute moral truth that apply to everyone, all the time	52	69	58	69
People cannot earn a place in Heaven by being good or by doing enough good works	58	49	61	85
History is story of God's plan for humanity moving toward fulfillment	44	59	79	76
Bible is unambiguous in its teaching about abortion	44	49	62	58
When Jesus Christ was on earth He was fully human but He did not sin	43	44	59	66
The Bible is the primary source of moral guidance	42	38	71	77
Human life is sacred	40	54	55	57
Personally certain to have eternal salvation only because have confessed sins and accepted Jesus Christ as savior	28	45	59	72
God is the basis of all truth	28	30	63	57
Bible is the word of God, is trustworthy and reliable	26	32	63	53
<b>Abbreviations:</b> Evang = Evangelical church attendee Pentec = Pentecostal or charismatic church attendee Main = Mainline Protestant church attendee Catholic = Catholic church attendee				
Source: American Worldview Inventory 2020; N=2,000 adults, 18 or older; conducted by the <a href="#">Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University</a> .				

“The American Worldview Inventory 2020, conducted by CRC Director of Research Dr. George Barna, surveyed 51

beliefs and behaviors among Christian groups and found that rather than transforming the culture around them with biblical truth, the opposite is happening. American Christianity is rapidly conforming to the values of the post-Christian secular culture. Key findings of the survey include:

- Evangelicals are embracing secularism:

A majority (52%) of evangelicals reject absolute moral truth;

61% do not read the Bible on a daily basis;

75% believe that people are basically good.

The study found that one-third to one-half of evangelicals in the survey embrace a variety of beliefs and behaviors counter to biblical teaching and longstanding Evangelical beliefs.

- Pentecostals and Charismatics take secularization a step further: Two-thirds (69%) reject absolute moral truth; 54% are unwilling to define human life as sacred, with half claiming the Bible is ambiguous in its teaching about abortion; and 69% say they prefer socialism to capitalism. A full 45% did not qualify as born-again Christians.

- Mainline Protestants are the most secular of the four faith families: Sixty percent (60%) of mainline Protestants' beliefs directly conflict with biblical teaching. Three key values define this group: truth and morality are relative; life has no inherent value or purpose, so individuals should pursue personal happiness or satisfaction; and traditional religious practices are no longer seen as central or essential to their Christian faith. Only 41% of mainline Protestants are born again.

- Catholics are increasingly secular and permissive: Catholics' beliefs are surprisingly similar to those of mainline Protestants but considerably different from that of evangelical and Charismatic Protestants. They are most likely to believe in salvation through works or living a good life and least likely (28%) to be born again." Today's Catholics are more permissive than other groups, being most likely to accept sexual relations outside of marriage, lying, speeding, and refusal to repay a loan as morally acceptable behaviors." <sup>10</sup>

Could this be a time when God calls us to repent as a church for injustices (all injustices not just one) in our nation, for any failures as a Church which have contributed to the state we are today? Should we repent for our contribution to injustices with our judgmental and condemning spirit? Should we repent for 'repeating history'? Are we praying for our nation as a corporate body in our churches?

Could it be when we develop a love for God, His Word, for each other, for the world, and when the Church abides in His love, God will move in a nation or nations and in the world? I do not suggest this is a formula, but perhaps a path in which we decide to walk in for the rest of the generations until Jesus comes.

How do we lead the flock on this path? God is the only one who can show us by seeking Him in prayer, in the Word, and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us and obey Him. Where is

the Lord? The rulers, those who knew the law, the priests and prophets of Israel did not ask this question during the deterioration of their society. Are we asking this question? Are we looking for the Lord? Are we inviting Him to move among us?

As shepherds, we are to seek the Lord and lead people through the teaching of the Word of God, to righteousness. Our responsibility is to be faithful to what God tells us regardless of the pressures of the culture or of those who oppose the Lord.

In the next chapter, we will focus specifically on what God has to say to the shepherds. We will talk of the danger of repeating history, making the same mistakes they made and the consequences not only for the shepherds but for the flock.

## Chapter Two

### Expectations: God's or Ours?

**“It is the duty of a good shepherd to shear his sheep, not to skin them.” Tiberius**

#### The Call of Ezekiel

Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, came from a family of priests. He was taken captive to Babylon in the year 598 B.C. Five years later, while in captivity, he received the call to be a prophet. It really does not matter in what state a person may be, free or prisoner, rich or poor, God calls who He wants when He wants.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied in the same period of the life of Israel and Judah. Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem, while Ezekiel prophesied primarily, though not limited to those in the Babylonian captivity.

Both prophets make reference to the shepherds. Jeremiah 2 described the negligence of the shepherds by not seeking the Lord. They did not guide the people to God, not even asking where God was in their own lives much less in the lives of the



people they were to lead. They were participating in and leading the people into sin. Ezekiel dedicates one entire chapter to specifically address the shepherds, and this is what we want to focus on.

It must have been extremely difficult for these two prophets to deliver the messages to their fellow shepherds. In the case of Jeremiah, God prepared him, assured him of His providence over his life, assured him God would see His word fulfilled. He told him He had made him a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land. As in the case of Jeremiah, God also prepared Ezekiel for the opposition he would face.

Ezekiel was by the Kebar River, when in a vision he saw a windstorm and an immense cloud, four living creatures and a wheel in the ground and on the side of each creature four faces. An amazing vision which at the end the prophecy, he saw the likeness of a throne and above it the likeness of a man. *"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord,"* Ezekiel 1:26-28.

J. Sidlow Baxter in his book "Explore the Book" describes a threefold purpose of the vision and considers it the heart of the book of Ezekiel.

- "First, the storm and cloud and fire the purpose is to show the approach of judgment.
- Second, in the centre-group of Cherubim and wheels, the purpose is to show that behind the events of earth are the operations of heaven.

- Third, in the super climax of the throne and rainbow, the purpose is to show that supreme over all is Jehovah Himself, that His sovereign will overrules all, that in wrath He remembers mercy, and that in the end judgment issues in the triumph of grace and righteousness.”<sup>11</sup>

His response to the presence of God is one of humility and surrender to the Majesty of God - a necessary quality for what God was about to reveal to him in the following moments of the vision. It is in this encounter with God that Ezekiel's life was changed and his vocation expanded from being a priest who offered sacrifices in favor of the people as a mediator between God and them, to God expanding his service as a prophet and a spokesman for God.

God did not hide from Ezekiel anything about his future. He spoke to him with frankness and told him what he was going to face in his prophetic service, a challenging mission. The prophet is told He was being sent to a rebellious, stubborn and obstinate people. Such was the rebellion of the people that they may or may not listen to him; there is no guarantee of good results but God assured him there will be no doubt, the people will know a prophet had been among them. He is told not be afraid of them nor allow them to scare him. A good lesson to learn especially in the days we are living in.

The description of how Ezekiel was going to live is very vivid. *“Briers and thorns around you, and you will live among scorpions.”* Ezekiel 2:6. It will be like walking in a field of briers and thorns, and it will be inevitable he will be touched

by them causing pain and wounds in his body. Besides this, he will live surrounded by scorpions whose sting is not only painful but poisonous. As if this was not enough, there is no guarantee they will listen. The opposition is going to be great. God required faithfulness from the prophet for this kind of life. God made one thing clear to him - he was to listen to what He said to him whether the people listened or not.

### God Asks for Faithfulness

Since I can remember, fruitfulness of numbers has too often been the main emphasis of our service to God. There is nothing wrong with fruitfulness of numbers, nothing wrong with working hard, having a large church, when we recognize it is God who produces the fruit. Jesus said, "*Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. <sup>38</sup>I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.*" John 4:37-38. Whether we sow or we reap, it is God who makes the seed grow. 1 Corinthians 3:7-9.

God is the one who makes His church to be fruitful and grow, not us. We have nothing to boast about. This is not to say we are not to pray for growth and work in what we can do, but understand God does what we cannot do. He tells Ezekiel, 'you be faithful regardless if they believe you or not. Do not rebel like them'. While we reach out to people to be saved, pray for the sick, work hard, let us be faithful to Him

## Shepherds According to the Heart of God

as our Good Shepherd in what He wants to do in our lives and in what He commissions us to do.

God will always assure us of His providence over our lives. He gives us the strength we will need to conduct His task, and yes, we will probably have opposition. We must remember though; our battle is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers of darkness. It is a spiritual battle. In some cases, there will be people involved doing the work of these powers of darkness, but still, our battle is not with flesh and blood.

My intention is not to write a commentary on the book of Ezekiel, but it is important to know something about his life and the background of God's call on his life. What we are interested in is the message to the shepherds of his time and see if something in the message applies to us today.

Shepherding the flock of God includes the process of doing it right and with the right heart. At the same time, we must consider the warnings of how things can go wrong on the part of the shepherd. If we lose sight of who the Great Shepherd is and He alone the owner of the flock, we will be as the shepherds referred to in Ezekiel 34.

This is a journey in which all of us as shepherds are trying to learn. We desire to do the best we can in shepherding the flock entrusted to us and avoiding the deceit in which these Old Testament shepherds fell into. **The task of doing it well or wrong is a matter of the heart.**

## **What Did God Expect from the Shepherds?**

The 'shepherds' being referred to are the kings, his officers, those who knew the law, priests and prophets. In I Samuel 2:35, God sets the expectations as He says He will raise, "a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in His heart and mind." Jeremiah 3:15 is consistent with His expectations. God is looking for shepherds who seek the Lord and lead the people to seek God and obey His commandments, to call for righteousness, faithfulness to God, justice without prejudice and to see to the welfare of the people.

### **A Closer Look of the Shepherds**

There is a risk when we hear Ezekiel 34 taught to think we are being accused of being like the shepherds described in this chapter. As you read this book, I in no way am accusing pastors or leaders of being like the shepherds in this chapter of Ezekiel. The intention here is simply to learn and create a conciseness of the traps and dangers in the pastorate which we need to avoid.

This is why it is important to address these issues so each one of us reflect about our lives. The Holy Spirit will show us, if we are knowingly or unknowingly abusive. We then have the opportunity to repent and allow God to change us. It is not my intention to condemn, but that we may seek God and let Him tell us our condition and repent where we need to repent.

### **What Our Heart is to Be Like**

Jeremiah described his heart as he saw the condition of the prophets, *“My heart within me is broken because of the prophets; All my bones shake. I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD, and because of His holy words..... The prophets follow an evil course and use their power unjustly.”* Jeremiah 23:9-10. His heart was broken because of the spiritual condition of the prophets and the priests, for the abuse committed and for the damage done to the people. Our tendency is to condemn those who err in any way, especially if they are in leadership. Most of the time it is in self-righteousness we look at their mistakes. May we learn from Jeremiah what our hearts ought to be when someone falls or errs. The truth needs to be spoken as God directs us but may our hearts experience brokenness for someone who goes astray. Jeremiah conveys the heart of God as he experiences this brokenness. I can only imagine how difficult it would be for a fellow pastor, prophet in any country to speak words like these today if God would ask him to do so.

### **The Message to the Shepherds**

The first thing we read in Ezekiel chapter 34, is that God was displeased with the shepherds. He was displeased not because they took care of themselves but because they **ONLY** took care of themselves. This speaks of a disregard for the flock and focusing only on satisfying their own selfish and greedy

desires. They had not thought of the flock or others, only what was beneficial to them.

God asks the shepherds in Ezekiel 34:2, "*Should not shepherds take care of the flock?*" Should they not be vigilant to know the condition of the flock? Should they not be attentive to the needs of the flock? Should they not be feeding and protecting the flock? God proceeds to describe their selfish actions in Ezekiel 34:3, "*You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals but you do not take care of the flock.*"

The figurative language used to describe the actions of the shepherds is clear in its meaning. They constantly milked the sheep and expected them to provide more milk, even when the shepherds did not feed them. Without food, the milk would run out and the sheep would starve to death. The expression used today is, 'they are milking the situation'. It is used when someone is manipulating emotionally, financially or spiritually, a situation for self-interest. It is someone taking advantage of a tragedy or situation to manipulate the compassion and generosity of others for their own benefit. Shepherds are to teach the Word of God, not play on the emotions of people.

Here is a harsh picture. Verse 3 continues saying, "*You clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.*" It is as if they shear them in winter when it was not the season to do it and leave them exposed to the harsh climate without the wool to protect

them. The shepherd sought to obtain a personal benefit with what should be for the protection of the sheep.

The phrase of Tiberius with which we started this chapter, “Suetonius tells us, in his work *Life of Tiberius*, that when the governors of provinces wrote to the emperor, entreating him to increase the tributes, he wrote back: *It is the duty of a good shepherd to shear his sheep, not to skin them.*”<sup>12</sup> In other words, if you tax them to the point they have no livelihood left, the time will come when there will be nothing left to collect.

The leaders of Israel and Judah were doing more than shear the sheep. They were skinning them. They were repeating the mistakes of their ancestors of 100 years before. Micah prophesied in the time of Hezekiah, “*Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel. Should you not embrace justice, you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; who eat my people’s flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?*” Micah 3:1-3.

As I mentioned, we repeat history. Growing up, I remember ministers on the radio guaranteeing a miracle to those who would give a specific amount of money to them. If a person did not send them money, they would not pray for them. I have seen these same tactics and others in different parts of the world. We can find cases of people in churches emptying their savings accounts, giving hundreds of thousands of dollars to a ministry who promised them an 100-200%



return. People were left without a livelihood, as if they had been skinned. I am not suggesting all ministries are frauds. There are many legitimate ministries that use what is given to them in an honest way and for the purpose the money was given. When someone promises a return of a certain percentage of what you give, be aware. There are many other ways to skin people other than financially. It could be emotionally, spiritually and affecting their self-esteem through abuses, physical, verbal, abandonment and our attitudes.

There have been political systems in governments who drive their citizen to misery and utter poverty while the leaders live in opulence. I have seen it in parts of Latin America and on other continents. It is a result of corruption or the implementation of an ideology in which they present themselves as the benefactors of the people. Sadly, it has happened in religious circles too.

Ezekiel 34:3, *“Even the strong ones you sacrifice to serve yourself.”* You benefit from all the flock can provide for you, but you do not care for the flock. We all are at risk of falling into these mistakes when we neglect our relationship with God and lose sight of the Great Shepherd. This is one of the reasons why we must keep in mind we are to be shepherds according to His own heart and not ours.

When we think God has given us a flock so they can serve us, we risk thinking we are the owners of the flock, and we can do anything we want. There are examples of those who have

fallen into arrogance and selfishness by abusing their congregations or followers through either misuse of funds, verbal abuse or sexual abuse to name a few. It is not the intention to point fingers but simply to admit that these problems have existed and we need to guard our hearts against these deceptions. Jeremiah says of the prophets and priests, “*The prophets follow an evil course and use their power unjustly. ‘Both prophet and priest are godless; even in my temple I find their wickedness’, declares the LORD.*” Jeremiah 23:10-11. All this is written as a warning to us to avoid making the same mistakes.

What the shepherds were doing was the opposite of what the Great Shepherd would do. Paul in Philippians 2 describes the heart of Jesus as a shepherd without giving the metaphor of a shepherd. “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*” This applies to us as shepherds and as sheep.

In Ezekiel 34:4, God continues to point out the failures of the shepherds, “*You have not strengthened the weak nor healed the sick or bound up the injured.*” Strength comes by drinking

clean water and eating healthy food; keeping the flock healthy with good fresh green grass which provides the nourishment they need.

God was speaking of a spiritual condition which was not just about intellectual knowledge of His Word but about the transformational power of the Word and the Spirit that takes place by an encounter with God and the experience of Him. Kingsley Opuwari Manuel said it this way, "Bible study without Bible experience is pointless. Knowing Psalm 23 is different from knowing the shepherd." <sup>13</sup> In Jeremiah 2:8, there were those who knew the law but did not know Him.

We have heard doctors and nutritionists say the best medicine is what you eat. The Hippocratic Oath includes the following statement, "I will use those dietary regimens which will benefit my patients according to my greatest ability and judgement, and I will do no harm or injustice to them." <sup>14</sup>

This is not about prescribing or making a statement about taking or not taking medications. The intention is to point out that for centuries doctors saw the importance of eating the right food to stay healthy. The application to the spiritual life is the importance of the Word of God which is spirit and life for the flock. As shepherds, what the Father gives us for the flock is essential for them to be healthy, strong and be able to reproduce. What is popular or what the majority is talking about is not always what every flock needs.

## Shepherds According to the Heart of God

At the time when Ezekiel and Jeremiah were prophesying judgment on Israel and Judah, what was popular from the other shepherds and the society of the time was to proclaim God's judgment would not take place. Chapters 27-29 of Jeremiah are an interesting exchange of letters between Jeremiah and those in exile in Babylon. Jeremiah told them to settle down because they would be there for a while. "Build houses while in captivity, have children and give your sons and daughters in marriage." Jeremiah and Ezekiel were confronted by the opposition of the religious system of their time.

Our way of shepherding must reflect the heart of God, and people must experience God, His life, His power, His guidance and know His voice and follow Him. We live in a broken world with people injured and wounded by the circumstances of life and by injuries inflicted by other people. There are broken individuals, broken families, broken societies and confusion as to what or who to believe because of biases surrounding us.

**This is the time people need shepherds according to the heart of God, and like Samuel, shepherds who will do what is in God's heart and mind (I Samuel 2:35).** But we must remember, there is no guarantee everyone will believe us. There will be those who will make up their minds not to believe the Word of the Lord. It happened to Jeremiah and Ezekiel. **What is important in times like these is to be faithful.**

Ezekiel 34:4, “*nor healed the sick or bound up the injured.*” The shepherds seemed to have been indifferent to the lives of the sheep, if they were sick, suffering or needed anything. The fact of not feeding them was in part the cause of their spiritual sickness. To those wounded by the circumstances of life, by others or by the shepherds themselves, they made no effort to help in their sufferings nor heal their wounds. A very different scenario is when Jesus saw the multitudes scattered abroad without a pastor to lead them and was moved with compassion.

Ezekiel 34:4, “*You have not brought back the strays nor searched for the lost.*” The word ‘strays’ implies someone being pushed away, misled, driven away, or forced to go. This is a terrible thing to do. Sometimes it is done on purpose and other times in ignorance or by making a hasty decision.

I had a personal experience in Mexico years ago. When I was general supervisor of the Foursquare National Church, I encountered a situation in one of the churches. Accusations had been brought against a pastor. I went to talk with the leaders of the church, listened to them and to the pastor. I made the error of making a hasty decision to support the pastor before I heard all what the leaders had to say. As a result, those leaders and some of the congregation left our fellowship. As time went by, I realized I had been wrong, and in my hasty decision, I had pushed people away, drove them away, and they felt an injustice had been done. They did not abandon the way of the Lord. They continued as strong brothers and sisters but away from our fellowship because I

had hurt them. I missed the opportunity to be a good shepherd. In regard to the pastor, I would not have condemned or despised the pastor for his mistake; and I did not condemn him after realizing my error. I would have tried to help him in any way I could but would have been truthful with him. This is not about the pastor; God in His mercy has restored his life. This is about what I did. What Ezekiel says here about the strays happens today.

It is also possible to push away those Jesus is trying to bring into the fold. Our condemning attitudes, bad testimony, or misrepresenting Jesus through our lives we push them away or discourage them from seeking after God.

*“You have ruled them harshly and brutally.”* The shepherds had exercised dominion over the flock to the point of fracturing their lives. While God wanted to make people whole and put them together, the shepherds were breaking them apart. The people were being fractured, hurt, and abused. It seems the shepherds believed their positions gave them power or an advantage over the people. ... *“and use their power unjustly,”* Jeremiah 23:10. Sometimes, titles and positions are wrongly interpreted either by us or by the flock.

Another experience from my time in Mexico was during the national convention. I had invited a minister from outside our fellowship to be the guest speaker. I had heard him before and thought it would be good to have him. He did well except for his interpretation of what a shepherd is. During one of the sessions, I was translating for him, as he

did not speak Spanish. He made a statement about shepherds being cowboys. I reluctantly translated but clarified to the congregation that in Mexico this is not what we think of shepherds. He went on to say when a wild horse does not submit, he needs to be tamed. The cowboy should put a rope around the horse's neck and beat him with a whip or a stick until the horse does what the cowboy wants him to do. This is what the shepherd needs to do with rebellious members of the church, he continued saying.

At this point, I told the congregation the speaker and I were going to take a 'time out'. I took him aside and told him this was not right and he either gets his teaching straight or this is the end of his speaking schedule. (I probably should have done the latter.) He abandoned the pursuit of what he wanted to teach about shepherds being cowboys, and the rest of his speaking was more scriptural. I was young and inexperienced, but I was the one responsible for the National Church. I knew I had to stop his false teaching.

Unfortunately, there are shepherds who still think this is the way to treat people. We are not to think shepherds are cowboys nor the congregation as wild horses. We are not to crush people who are already broken but lead them to the One who can put them together. The shepherds Ezekiel is addressing had been cruel with the flock.

Serving in Africa, I was teaching on this subject to a group of pastors. When I touched this point, I was interrupted by a pastor who wanted to make a confession. He said a lady from

his church had committed a sin. He did not elaborate on her sin. He wanted to expel her from the congregation, but she was sorry for what she had done and asked the pastor to discipline her as he saw fit. He said he told her to lie down on the floor of the church and with a stick beat her. With tears in his eyes, he asked God to forgive him, and he was going back to his church and ask the lady for forgiveness too. She needed his compassion, not the blows of a stick.

Another type of cruelty is the use of harsh words. Sometimes we raise our voices to people because we want to demonstrate we have authority. Sometimes we do it because of ignorance. We hear or see others doing these kinds of abuses and we think that is what we should do.

### **The Result of this Kind of Treatment of the Flock**

Ezekiel 34:5, “*The sheep were scattered because there was no shepherd.*” For all the previous reasons, lack of food, lack of protection, lack of care, abuse, cruelty by those who were supposed to care for them, lead and teach them in the ways of the Lord, the sheep were scattered and became prey to wild animals.

On several occasions the New Testament shows us Jesus was moved with compassion when He saw the condition of the multitudes. One of them is in Matthew 9:36, “*When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*” The people were harassed and helpless, as if they had been on a



long journey traveling a difficult road only to arrive at their destination and not find what they needed. They were helpless, abandoned and rejected. May God help us to have His heart so people have a shepherd to teach, guide and care for them.

**“The Sheep became food for wild animals.”**

Imagine a flock of sheep in a field abandoned by the shepherd. The shepherd who in the past led them to green pastures, now is not around. He has lost interest and love for the flock. The abandoned sheep, in their desperation to satisfy their hunger, begin to go astray. Each one to their own way with their heads close to the ground looking for grass. Step by step, each of them begins to drift further from the other. The sheep begin to utter an anxious, fearful, desperate bleat asking for help hoping other sheep or perhaps the shepherd will hear their cry and lead them back to the fold, to green pastures and a secure place. The sheep are too far away and the only one who hears is a wolf, who follows the sound, stalks the sheep, makes his move, attacks and devours them. The sheep become food for a wolf because the shepherd did not care nor pay attention to the flock.

Most of shepherding has to do with feeding and paying attention, watching out for the flock, and protecting them from the threats of wild animals. The early Church was threatened by false teachers trying to scatter them with deception and bring them back to bondage and away from their faith in Jesus. There is risk in teaching what people

want to hear, what we think they ought to hear, what can get them excited or just from our own wisdom. The flock could be dispersed and fall prey to false teachings, destroying their lives. Ezekiel is told, though they may or may not hear, he was to speak what God would tell him.

We all are aware there may be people, who no matter how much care we give them, how good the spiritual food we provide, they are going to go their own way. Jesus, physically and spiritually fed the people, healed them, and cared for the multitudes. Yet, the Scripture say many stopped following Him. Let us remember, we need to be faithful to do what is in His heart and mind. The rest is beyond our control.

Paul wrote a letter to the early church correcting many of the false teachings and giving sound doctrine. Writing to the Ephesians his goal was for the church to mature so they would not be deceived by the false teachings and would not be moved or shaken in their faith and their walk with Jesus. Ephesians 4:14

### **The Sheep Are Not Entirely Innocent**

In Ezekiel 34:17, God also spoke to the flock. There were those among them who tried to ruin the day for others, who when they fed, trampled the pasture and muddied the water. Verses 20-22 says, the fat abused the weak, they shoved the weak with their flank and shoulder, butting them, making them fall, with their horns drove them away. The implications for our day may vary. The strong abusing the

weak, the rich despising the poor, those who have greater knowledge of the Scriptures intimidating those who have less knowledge of the Scriptures, the self-righteous thinking they deserve a better place and privilege.

One of the hardest things in the life of the church has been getting along with each other, living in peace, respecting each other without looking at social class or level of education. Most times when churches have experienced divisions, it is due to jealousy, envy, selfishness, competing with each other, trying to prove they are right rather than allow the meekness of Christ prevail and strive more for saving a relationship than proving we are right. In Philippians 3, Paul speaks of having lost all for the knowledge of Jesus and whom he calls in Philippians 3:7, "my Lord". Jesus is Lord and this is how we all should think. *"All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained"*. Philippians 3:15-16.

The epistles are full of admonition to put to death the works of the flesh which are these things we mention, plus many more that have to do with character. In Romans 8:13, we are exhorted to put to death the works of the flesh. The flesh can't be controlled, it does not submit to God, it will not submit and this is why the flesh has to be put to death. Romans 8:7.

Teaching what God instructs us and providing times of spiritual edification and relationships between members of the

congregation is an important aspect of the life of the Church. We all have seen conflicts among the members of our churches or between congregation and pastors. We cannot force change in the hearts of people for only God can do that. What we can do is lead them through the teaching of the Word of God and pray for the Holy Spirit to transform their lives to the image of Jesus. Romans 8:29.

This posture may seem weak to some who prefer to be more aggressive in the pursuit of change or in a hurry to see results. The idea here is not to say there is only one way of dealing with difficulties but to seek God and His guidance to find the way He wants us to deal with a situation for the benefit of all. If we would surrender to the work of the Spirit to change us into the image of Jesus, we would be more patient with each other. In many places, the Church has become an event that takes place in a building at a certain time. It needs to be more than that. Hebrews says we are not to forsake the assembly of ourselves, not only to be fed, but to provoke one another to love.

### **Am I Being Too Negative?**

Perhaps there is too much negativism in these pages or harsh things said about shepherds. Maybe we need to see this as creating an awareness because we are susceptible to these attitudes and mistakes described in chapter 34 of Ezekiel. We need to guard our hearts. Paul told the elders of Ephesus, ‘take heed to yourselves’, “*Keep watch over yourselves.*” Acts 20:28.

'To take heed to ourselves', is not a request to be selfish and only look out for ourselves. It is a warning to be careful with our hearts, our lives, and our attitudes. It is to put a hedge between our hearts and sin and deceit; to ask God to examine our hearts, lead us in the way of righteousness and to be the shepherds He wants us to be.

Paul told the elders, *"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!"* Acts 20:29-30. Could this happen today? Will men we know come and distort truth to draw us away?

Paul was aware of the reality of the human nature. He had experiences with false teachers deceiving the followers of Jesus. Paul even said from among the elders of Ephesus some will arise and distort the truth. The reality is we will always face this threat and if we are not careful, we can also be deceived. The fact this is a reality does not mean we have to be one of those who distort the truth to deceive others. Peter warns us that we should not shepherd the flock of God motivated by power or position nor because we feel obligated, but because we are willing to shepherd and not for what we can get out of the flock. We are not to lord over those entrusted to us but be examples of the flock.

One thing is clear in Scripture, ultimately, God is watching out for His flock. The flock belongs to Him and not to the

earthly shepherds. Shepherds administer the affairs of the flock by doing what God desires in His heart and plans for the church. When a shepherd focuses on this truth, he wants to discover more and more what is in God's heart and mind for the flock. He focuses less on what he wants or what he thinks the flock needs. *"But it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose."* Philippians 2:13. What Paul is saying is God will put His desire in us, the shepherds, and will enable us to do what God has planned. As shepherds, we can apply it to our own lives and fulfill His good purpose in us, and ultimately His good purpose for His church will also be fulfilled.

His purpose is always to bring restoration back to what we were originally created for. Man fell from grace; God provided a sacrifice, Jesus, through which man can be restored to a relationship with the Father. When we drift away from Him, the door is always opened to come and be restored. Sometimes we suffer the consequences of our sin, as Israel and Judah, but His love for us never fails nor runs out. God is watching out for His flock, even when the flock runs away from the shepherd and suffers the consequences of abandoning God. God never stops loving the flock. His judgment is never intended to destroy the flock.

### **Other Contemporary Prophets of Jeremiah and Ezekiel: Habakkuk**

There is a consistency with other prophets contemporary to Jeremiah and Ezekiel in describing the condition of Israel and

Judah. All of them spoke of the love and grace of God for His people.

Habakkuk probably wrote the book that bears his name during the reign of Josiah or beginning of Jehoiakim reign, as he wrote about God raising the Babylonians who will sweep across the whole earth. Habakkuk seemed to be more focused on intercession than declaring disaster. Habakkuk saw the spiritual, moral and social deterioration of the people, and he was disturbed by their actions. Apparently, he had a series of conversations with God interceding for the people and received no answers. The prophet cried out to God in agony. *“How long Lord, must I call for help but you do not listen?” Why do you let me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and conflict abound, the law is paralyzed, justice does not prevail.”* Habakkuk 1:2-4.

God tells Habakkuk about the Babylonians and the kind of people they were. ‘Ruthless, impetuous, taking what is not theirs, being a law to themselves, promoting their own honor...they laugh at the fortified cities; by building ramps they capture them. Guilty people, whose own god is their strength.’ It describes a city on a hill, difficult to get to, but by building earthen ramps, Babylon gains access and conquers the city. 1:6-11.

The spirit of Babylon is alive today and has been for centuries. My belief is there are corrupted political, financial, educational, social, media and sadly, religious systems that

have been operating with the spirit of Babylon. **‘Ruthless, impetuous, taking what is not theirs, being a law to themselves, promoting their own honor...they laugh at the fortified cities; by building ramps they capture them. Guilty people, whose own god is their strength.’** Today, there are different ‘ramps’ being put in places in this country through the media, education, politics special interest groups to take captive the hearts and minds of people, and eventually, will try to conquer the church. An ideology, the ‘Critical Race Theory’ is being implemented in grade schools and government institutions, it basically teaches, if you are of white skin color, you are bad and must apologize for being white. In other words, God made a mistake in creating you with white skin so you must apologize on His behalf. I am not a person of white skin, so, I am not defending myself. I am saying this is an ideology against God and His creation.

Here is an example: “Rufo conducted research into human resource departments and governmental agencies that have become increasingly reliant on critical race theory.

“The National Nuclear Laboratory in New Mexico was holding a critical race theory-based training in which they took their white male executives to a resort and forced them to go through a series of trainings to deconstruct their white male identity, which was consonant with the [Ku Klux Klan], MAGA hats, mass killings,” Rufo said.

They then had to publicly condemn themselves and write letters of apology for their “whiteness.”



(Stepman, 2021)

<https://www.dailysignal.com/2021/01/12/critical-race-theory-infiltrates-government-classrooms/>

Another source of information in the following link.

<https://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/2020/09/critical-race-theory-indoctrination-our-schools-joseph-klein/>

Racism exists but the problem is not the color of skin, **the problem is in the heart of people who are inherently sinful and selfish.** We must focus on learning what God says about the heart for from it flows all the issues of life. **The heart can be changed, the color of skin cannot.** We must be careful this spirit of Babylon does not build a ramp into the church. This spirit of Babylon is at work, not only in this country, but around the world.

Some of us may identify this condition described by Habakkuk with the conditions in our own countries. We see corruption at all levels around the world. This is not a political statement but a spiritual, moral and social reality. We cry out for justice for a certain group in society which has suffered injustices. However, when this same group, victim of an injustice, commits injustices against their own people or others, no one cries out for justice. As a church, we must be careful to speak out for justice for all and not just for a single group. Most importantly, we must pray and intercede before we speak.

## Shepherds According to the Heart of God

Habakkuk suffered when he saw these injustices and interceded for God to intervene. Do we intercede to God before we take any kind of stand in social injustices?

Habakkuk decided to wait on the Lord. *“I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.”* Habakkuk 2:1.

God revealed to the prophet in chapter 2, a vision and told him to write it down. The vision was the fall of Babylon. It had an appointed time to happen and it was fulfilled about 100 years after the vision was given. Amid this revelation, while there were nations like Babylon who caused destruction of other nations, God said to Habakkuk, *“the insolent does not have an upright soul, but ‘the just shall live by faith.’”* The day will come, God said, *“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”* In chapter 2:14, the prophet, after hearing what God said, proceeded to declare God as just and recognized God had chosen the Babylonians to discipline his people. At the same time, he continued to intercede for his people, though he was also complaining.

Habakkuk understood what was going on and his prayer in chapter three was very different to his cries in chapter one. The prophet described God in His Majesty and accepted the purposes of God for His people. As he heard the words from God, his heart was pounding, his lips were quivering, his bones felt as if they were drying up, his legs weakened and he

said he would wait patiently. He would wait for the calamity to come from the nation invading them. The following prayer has been used by many in times of calamity; *“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes in the vine, though the olive crop fails and the field produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my savior.”* Habakkuk 3:16-18.

As the Church, we must intercede for our country asking for God's intervention in the correction of injustices. We must teach our congregations that the Scriptures are the basis for living. A political agenda or an agenda of any group, is not our base. As Habakkuk interceded for Israel, let us pray today, *“O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.”* Habakkuk 3:2.

## Zephaniah

Another prophet contemporary with Jeremiah and Ezekiel is Zephaniah. Zephaniah declared, as did Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the judgment of God over Israel and Jerusalem, and also over the Philistines, Assyrians, Moabites among others. People in Jerusalem were thinking God would not send calamity on them. They were indifferent in spite of the many messages God had sent through His prophets. They thought God was not really interested in their lives and therefore, He would not intervene. *“At that time, I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its*

*dregs, who think, the Lord will not do nothing, either good or bad.”* Zephaniah 1:12.

Chapter 3:1-4 described Jerusalem as ‘a city rebellious and defiled. They did not listen to advice. They did not accept correction. They did not trust in God nor sought God. Her officials were roaring lions, her rulers were wolves, and her prophets had no principles. He accused them of being disloyal, and the priests disrespected the sanctuary. They were violators of the law’.

I mention this primarily as a reflection of what could happen to us, if we are not careful. While these are harsh words, they are the words of God and we need to allow them to be the two-edged sword He speaks of, “*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*” Hebrews 4:12. Let us allow God to speak to us as He searches our hearts. If he finds any offensive way in us, let us ask Him to lead us in the everlasting way. Or allow Him to comfort us, saying it is well with our souls.

### **Message to the Remnant**

*“On that day they will say to Jerusalem, ‘Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands fall limp. The LORD your God is among you; He is mighty to save. He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you with His love; He will rejoice over you with singing.’ “I will gather those*

*among you who grieve over the appointed feasts, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.” Zephaniah 3:16-18.*

The message is the day is coming when the Good Shepherd will gather His sheep and lead them, protect them, feed them, and care for them. As God in the creation of man delegated authority to him to care for God's creation, God delegated us to be shepherds of His flock on this earth. The day will come when He will be the only shepherd. While we are in this assignment of shepherding, let us strive to do it according to His heart, and in the manner He instructs us to and not imitating others

## Chapter Three

### Created to Be

#### Bullfighters, Pugilists or Shepherds?

Compare yourself to who you were yesterday,  
not to who someone else is today. <sup>15</sup>

(Jordan B. Peterson).

Fernando de la Peña was a bullfighter when I was growing up in Mexico. He was a young man when he began to appear in bull fights, gaining a good reputation as a bullfighter. He was my idol, and I wanted to be like him. I was proud because he was from my city, and he lived near my neighborhood. I had friends across the street from my house and they had access to a ranch with some calves and bulls used for training bullfighters. I would go with them to train and practice. It was my dream to be a bullfighter. One day, after several weeks of practice, a calf I was training with did not follow the cape as he was supposed to do. It charged straight at me and hit me right in the stomach. It sent me flying several meters before I hit the ground. Thank goodness the calf was young

and had not yet developed horns. The calf persuaded me I was not to be a bull fighter.

A few weeks later, I visited a boxing gym. I saw some of my friends sparring and I thought, I could become a boxer. I like boxing and there were Mexican boxers I admired. I wanted to be like them. After weeks of training, I went into the ring to spar with a friend much more experienced and about five years older than me. I began well, defended myself and was able to land a few punches, one of them to his face. That was the last thing I remembered. I woke up on the mat. I had been knocked out. I was persuaded not to pursue boxing. I still like boxing but just not with me in the ring.

I wanted to be a bullfighter or a boxer because I admired them. They were my heroes. I was comparing myself to others, wanting to be like them. That was not what I was created for.

Many of us, I imagine, have a story about admiring someone and wanting to be like them. Movie stars, athletes, musicians and even ministers become our heroes. We admire someone either in the past or the present and want to be like them, admire their character or abilities. We begin to focus on who they are **and not on who we are becoming**. We compare ourselves with them and like better what we see in them than in ourselves.

Another scenario I have seen is imitating others. Some young leaders try to imitate successful leaders. We begin to talk the

way they talk, mimic their mannerisms, repeat phrases they use mimicking their personality, trying to be something we are not. **We see what others are today and forget who we were yesterday, and who we are today according to God's purpose.**

Yes, we should learn from others and apply our learning in the context of our situation, personality, and assignment we have from God. As individuals we are called to be like Jesus. **As shepherds, we are called to be shepherds according to His own heart. He is our measuring model, not someone else.** We overlook the fact the leaders we admire at one time had to give themselves, surrender their lives, and committ to a relationship with God. They too had to follow the process of becoming like Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

### **Dangers of Comparisons**

The dangers of comparing ourselves to someone else is we take our eyes off the One who is to be our model. As we compare ourselves to others, jealousy or envy creeps in because we think they are better than us. Or our own pride and arrogance creeps in because we think we are better than they.

There have been times in my life when I have thought a pastor should be doing things differently in his church. According to me, I thought I knew better what should be done in the church. Thankfully, God did not allow me to continue in these arrogant thoughts and attitudes for long,



and quickly He corrected me. He told me, “Nobody has asked for your opinion. I did not put you as pastor of that church. You don’t know what I am saying to the pastor.” I have been humbled. My pride has been hurt but I believe I am a little healthier because of His corrections. I am in no way perfect but a little more objective of who I am and what God has asked me to do.

Unfortunately, when comparing ourselves with others, we do it mostly in the performance area of the job and lose sight of the internal work God is doing in us.

### **What About the Community of Faith? Do We Try to Be What We Are Not?**

On the corporate side of the Church, or the community of the faithful, we also run the risk of trying to be what we are not. As leaders, we have a great responsibility to lead according to the heart of God, or the church will repeat history’s mistakes. When Samuel was old and appointed his sons as leaders of Israel, they did not follow the Lord. The elders gathered and decided they wanted a king to rule over them as other nations had. *“So, all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, ‘You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have’.”*

I Samuel 8:6. They wanted to be like others and not what God had designed for them; *“A holy nation and a kingdom of priests.”* Exodus 19:6.

Are we repeating history by giving in to what culture dictates? Are we compromising the values we have in Scripture? Jesus told His disciples we were not to be like the nations of the world.

### A Timeless Lesson

We all want to do well in what we do, but at times we do it for the wrong reasons. We want the fame, power, recognition, wealth and so on. The disciples and some of their family members struggled with the same thing. In Mark 10:34-35, we have the story of the two disciples, James and John, sons of Zebedee. They came to Jesus saying, “Teacher, *“we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”* They sounded demanding and arrogant. They requested for one of them to sit at Jesus’ right hand and the other at His left. This caused indignation in the other ten disciples. Was their indignation because they felt threatened? Did the ten have the same aspirations or campaigned or desired to be the greatest? Yes, all of them wanted to be the greatest. After Jesus told them about His death, they made their way to Capernaum. On the way, they argued with each other about who would be the greater (Mark 9:33-34).

After Jesus responded to James and John, He gathered the disciples together and began to teach them about life in the kingdom, not just for disciples and pastors, but everyone. In Mark 10:42-44, His teaching is about aligning our life to the nature of the Kingdom of God. Jesus knew of the

indignation of the disciples. He knew the human desires of the two and discloses it to the twelve.

Jesus described the human nature without God. Jesus talked about man's compulsions to rule others, to feel he has accomplished his personal goal in life to be better, to be recognized as being above others, and having control over others, making him feel he is successful and accomplished.

Jesus then said, "*it is not to be like that among you.*" Mark 10:43. He was talking to them as future shepherds. He was teaching them to have a heart to serve others in humility, not lording over them, or thinking because they may have a title (apostles, shepherds, evangelists...) they have a right to see others as inferiors. Rather, He desired them to be willing to serve others and take the form of someone, who in the natural, is hardly recognized and has no power over others. Jesus continued, "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" Mark 10:45. Jesus revealed the heart of the Father by not lording over nor abusing His followers.

We battle our human nature constantly. Our human nature wants to take control of our lives and displace the nature of the Kingdom of God in us. After the resurrection, the disciples had gone fishing. The story narrates notable events that took place, and they will be addressed later. What we want to see here is how the human nature in us tries to regress to our old ways.

When Jesus told Peter the kind of death he would endure, Peter looked at John and asked, ‘what about him?’ Jesus just finished telling Peter the plan for the rest of his life, what Jesus had been preparing him for. But Peter took his eyes away from what Jesus just told him and wanted to know about John. Peter was not who he was yesterday when he denied His Lord. He was commissioned to be a shepherd with much to look forward to. Could it be Peter, for a moment, was wanting to compare himself with John? Jesus, as He answered him, brought him back to who he should be giving his attention to. Jesus said to him, focus on Me, “*you follow me.*”

Jesus is our model for all aspects of life. He came to teach us how to live in the kingdom of God. To see how Jesus reveals the Father, we need to see how God was known in the Old Testament.

### **How Was God Known in the Old Testament?**

Moses had his first encounter with God in Exodus chapter three while in the wilderness shepherding *his* father-in-law’s flock. In this encounter, God revealed Himself to Moses through a burning bush. Here he received the commission to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. Not an easy task. In his first encounter with Pharaoh, the Egyptian king refused to recognize who God was and made life more difficult for Israel. Moses complained to God that things were not going the way he expected. Moses needed to learn who God was at

the same time Israel did. We know the story; God delivered Israel and led her through the wilderness in route to the promised land.

By the time we get to chapters 33 and 34 of Exodus, Moses asked for God's direction to lead His people to the promised land. Moses had seen God's miracles and power in the wilderness. Moses asked God, *"If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you."* Exodus 33:13. Moses recognized there was more to know of God and desired to learn more of who God was. We all have seen and experienced God's miracles, power, supernatural workings, but there is more of God to know. May we always have the hunger to know Him more.

As the story continues, in verse 18, Moses said, *"show me your glory."* God responded in 33:19, *"I will cause my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my Name..."* Then, in 34:5-7, *"Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him."* This is what God did. He proclaimed His Name, *"The Lord."* He passed in front of Moses proclaiming, *"The Lord, The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished....."*

There is a consistency in how God was known throughout the Old Testament. David testified of the knowledge he had of God. The same as revealed to Moses. David wrote of His great works and how God will be praised from one generation

## Shepherds According to the Heart of God

to another. They will sing with joy saying, *“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.”* Psalm 145:8-9.

Nehemiah declared who God was, *“But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.... Therefore, you did not desert them, Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the wilderness. By day, the pillar of cloud did not fail to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take.”* Nehemiah, 9:17 and 19.

Jonah was sent by God to the city of Nineveh to proclaim destruction if they did not repent. God in His compassion and slowness to anger gave the city a chance to repent. When the city responded favorably to the message and the people repented, God relented from bringing destruction to the city.

Unfortunately, Jonah became angry and complained to God. ‘I did not want to come to Nineveh. This is why I tried to run away from You and the assignment You had for me. These people deserve to die and the city to be destroyed’.

It is difficult to understand how a person like Jonah, who obviously did not want to serve God and had no love for the people of Nineveh, is chosen for this mission. Then we read, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the*

*earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts". Isaiah 55:8-9*

Jonah was a prophet. He knew the heart of God but did not want to convey it to the people. He said, "*I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.*" Jonah 4:3.

Perhaps Jonah's thinking is like ours. At times we may think that if God is gracious and compassionate to us, it is because we deserve it. We expect His compassion is only for us, especially if we think we are better than others, and our sins are not like the sins of others. Sin is sin, no matter how we dress it. Jonah did not understand God wanting to convey His heart to Nineveh so they would also know Him as Moses, David, Nehemiah and Israel had known and experienced Him. We know the love God has shown for His church and we are to convey this love to the world.

It is interesting how God taught Jonah His love for the people. Chapter 4:5-9 narrates God's dealing with Jonah. The prophet looked for a place to wait and see what God was going to do. It was a very hot day and a burning wind was blowing. God caused a plant to grow to give shade and alleviate Jonah's discomfort. Surely God's love and patience goes beyond what anyone of us would have had for Jonah. The plant dried up and the shade was gone. Jonah got very upset because of what happened to the plant and he complained. He was uncomfortable and wanted to die.

When God questioned him about his anger for what happened to the plant, the prophet said he had a reason to be mad. God said to him, *“you are concerned about the plant which you did not plant, care for or made it grow.”* Then God asked, *“And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left...?”* Jonah 4:10-11

The story does not tell us how Jonah responded to God. Hopefully, the prophet learned to have the heart of God. What we do know is what we do when God tries to teach us His love for mankind. Knowing God, the way He wants us to know Him, is what is important. *This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.* Jeremiah 9:23-24. We know God’s heart by being with Him and knowing Him.

The question comes up with this revelation of who God was. Why did Israel insist on drifting away from Him? Why do some of us choose not to reveal the heart of the Father to others? The heart is deceitful, God tells us, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure, who can understand it?”* Jeremiah 17:9.



We cannot change our hearts on our own. It is beyond our capabilities. Our heart is without a natural cure. We cannot change or fix our own hearts. Our hearts need a supernatural power to change. Paul expressed his struggle with the deceitfulness of his heart, *“For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”* He cried out, *“who shall rescue me from this body that is subject to death?”* In Romans 7:18-19, he thanked God, that through Jesus Christ, he is delivered. Jeremiah asked the question, *“who can understand it?”* God responded, *“I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind,”* Jeremiah 17:10, He understands our heart. He can cure it.

What are we to do? Proverbs 23:26, *“My son, give me your heart and let your eyes delight in my ways.”* The context of these words in Proverbs has to do with infidelity. The infidelity of Israel towards God is a subject which is repeated many times in Scripture. Infidelity begins in the heart. Israel needed to surrender her heart to God for Him to change it and shape it. We also need to surrender our heart to God for Him to mold and shape it according to His own heart.

### **What is the First Thing God Wants Us to Know About Him?**

Of the many things we know about God, what is the most important lesson Jesus came to reveal to us? He reveals the heart of love of the Father to us. John 3:16, *“For God so loved*

*the world*". I John 4:16, "*God is love.*" What about His power and miracles? Should we not know this too? Yes, absolutely. We must give ourselves to Him so He may manifest His power and miracles so others may know of His love for us. **God's Love is behind everything He does for us.**

### Jesus Came to Show Us The Father's Heart

What we see in the Gospels is the emphasis Jesus makes in revealing the Father to His disciples and the world. "*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.*" John 17:3 and 6.

Jesus directed attention to the Father in all He said and did. He only said what He heard the Father say. He only did what He saw the Father do. Jesus said, "*In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven,*" Matthew 5:16. A professor of mine once said, "Jesus came to put a face on God". In John 14:9, Jesus said, "*He who has seen me, has seen the Father.*" As Jesus glorified the Father, so are we to glorify the Father through Jesus.

Who better than Jesus to show us the heart of the Father, and the Holy Spirit to transform us into the image of Jesus? Jesus throughout His life showed us the heart of God for mankind. So, the question arises; how do we become a shepherd according to His own heart? We need to ask ourselves what

motivates us to become a shepherd. What is it we think we want to accomplish? What is the result of our shepherding? We all want to please God and obey Him. We must put aside any human perspective of being a shepherd and must surrender to the life changing and formative work of the Holy Spirit in us. At the same time, we must be aware of the difficult and challenging process we must accept.

We do not lack the desire to live the way Jesus lived, but our human nature resists it and rebels against it. Jesus' desire and passion was to make the Father known to mankind. Everything He did was so people would know the Father. Could it be we have known this but, in the culture we live in, we lose sight of the main reason why we are shepherds? We focus only on the task, the 'what' and the 'doing'. When we focus more on the 'doing stuff', could it be we feel the reasons why we do what we do, do not matter but rather we think we have done something good and should get recognition for our 'doings?'

The revelation of the Father in the Old Testament, *"the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished;"* Exodus 34:6-7. We now see it in the incarnation of Jesus, His Son. In all Jesus did, i.e., healing the sick, delivering the demon possessed, feeding the multitudes, forgiving the sinner, in all He said and lived, He revealed the compassionate, kind, merciful, loving, and

patient heart of the Father. Jesus came to reveal who the Father is, not only what He can do.

Jesus constantly spoke of the Father. He directed the attention to the Father whenever He spoke and in whatever He did. At the same time, the Father declared Jesus was His Son, sent by Him and He glorified the Son in the world. *“I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them,”* John 17:26.

Jesus declared His Name to the disciples. He declared who the Father was, not only with words, but showed them His character and power by the way He lived and by what the Father told Him to do. This is the model and example to follow. Earlier, we asked the question, why do we do what we do? What motivates us? The answer comes from Jesus; to make the Father and the Son known to mankind. We understand we should be shepherds according to His own heart, and the best way we can be this kind of shepherd is by learning from the way He shepherds us.

When I experience His heart towards me as my Father, I learn how to be a good father to my children. When I experience His heart as a husband to His bride, I learn how to love my wife, as He loves His church. When I experience His shepherding, I learn how to shepherd others.

As I come to know His heart and I surrender to Him and allow Him to shape me, the more I have the potential to

become a shepherd according to His own heart. I use the word potential, because I still have to make the decision to treat others as He treats me. It means adjusting what my concept of a shepherd is and accepting what He knows a shepherd to be.

As the days go by, it is not what I think should be done but knowing His mind and heart and do what I see in Him. *"I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind,"* I Samuel 2:35. I want to become a faithful priest/shepherd. We are not saying we will be perfect in everything we do. We are saying we give ourselves to the process of growing into what He wants us to be.

Jesus revealed the heart of love of the Father for His flock, His compassion, patience, meekness, humility of heart, justice, benevolence, forgiving, unselfish, pure, gentle, kind, merciful, and the ways go on. We discover His heart as we are shepherded by Him. We learn from Scriptures the ways Jesus revealed the Father. However, each one of us needs to personally learn and experience Him in our own lives through our relationship with Him so we can convey His love in the context and circumstances to the people He leads us to.

### **A Heart of Compassion**

The definition of compassion, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is the *"sympathetic consciousness of others,' distress together with a desire to alleviate it."*<sup>16</sup>

In all circumstances, Jesus revealed the heart of compassion of the Father through everything He did. He saw the multitudes mistreated by people or circumstances of life (Matthew 9:36); He demonstrated compassion for the sick (Matthew 14:14); compassion for the hungry (Mark 8:2); compassion for the blind men coming to Him for healing (Matthew 20:34); and compassion like the father waiting for his prodigal son to return home (Luke 15:20). We have also experienced His compassion when we have been in any of these circumstances.

Years ago, my friend Juan Reyna, a pastor in Tampico, Tamaulipas, Mexico taught me a lesson about compassion and the heart of God. His ministry has been characterized by the supernatural manifestation of God through healings and miracles. A lady, not a member of his congregation, had heard about these manifestations in pastor Juan's church. She came to him and asked if he could go and pray for her husband who was very sick. Juan accepted the invitation and went with her to her home.

When they arrived, she led him to a room built in the backyard and separated from the rest of the household. As they entered the darkened room, Juan became aware of a foul smell. As Juan's eyes adjusted to the darkness, he was able to see a man standing in front of him. Juan realized the man was a leper. At that very moment, the Holy Spirit spoke to Juan urging him to go and embrace the man and tell him God loves him. Naturally there was some reluctance at first

on Juan's part but quickly Juan felt compassion. In obedience, Juan went and embraced the leprous man and told him, "I am here to tell you God loves you, and I love you too." As Juan had his arms around him, he prayed calmly and with a soft voice. It was a short and to-the-point prayer for healing.

Several weeks went by and Juan did not hear from the family. One Sunday Morning, as Juan was preparing to preach, a family entered the building. He recognized the woman and the children. It was the woman who had asked him to pray for her husband. They were accompanied by a man Juan eventually recognized as the husband. The man was completely healed. No longer a leper!

The transformed husband and father stood in front of the congregation and testified of what God had done. He said, "When I was stricken with leprosy, my friends would come to visit and speak to me from outside the room. They soon stopped coming and I was all alone. I was not able to spend time with my family at the table or able to hug my children and my wife. I was completely isolated because of my sickness. I thought leprosy was going to be my future until I died. Then pastor Juan came to pray for me. This man, who had never seen me before, hugged me and told me God loved me. I thought, God's love must be true, otherwise how could a stranger in his right mind put his arms around a leper. At that moment, I believed in God. Even if God had not healed me that day, I would still believe because of the compassion and love pastor Juan showed me."

This is not just a story but a true testament of the Father's love. What I saw is Juan's obedience to the Holy Spirit to make the Father and Jesus' heart known. It started with who God is. He is LOVE. That is the first message from God and demonstrated by Juan's actions. The compassionate, forgiving, abounding in mercy and faithfulness of God was revealed in the life of a man condemned to leprosy. We are to make the Father known in all circumstance through a shepherd willing to be a shepherd according to the heart of God.

God does what He does the way He wants to do it. God does not reveal Himself the same way with everyone. We don't have to hug a leper to show the compassion of God. It could be a homeless person God directs us to help; it could be a person who considers us his enemy; it could be a person with a lifestyle that we think is dangerous to get close to and perhaps, in our self-righteousness, we have been judgmental. Each one of us needs to learn to show compassion with the heart of God to whoever He directs us.

We are encouraged to have compassion for one another and anyone who is in need. Matthew 9:36 has been a passage I have taught many times. It focuses on the condition of the people as Jesus saw them, harassed and helpless, "like sheep without a shepherd." I believe Jesus was moved by this fact, and not only by the condition of people. He saw the helplessness in them and no one to direct them to where they could find rest and freedom from guilt and condemnation.



Jesus wanted not only to provide help for the condition of the people at that moment, but He wanted to provide shepherds who would love, care, feed, strengthen and lead them to grow in their relationship with God. In Matthew 9:37-38, Jesus appeals to the disciples, His potential shepherds. Jesus said, the harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few.

Permit me to replace laborers with shepherds. The sheep without a shepherd are many and the shepherds are few. Continuing with this trend of thought, pray to the Lord of the flock, to send shepherds to the fields.

As shepherds, we ought to pray for God to send shepherds, and not only be one of the shepherds, but reproduce ourselves in other shepherds. As Jesus called the twelve disciples and prepared them and sent them out, He calls us not only to reach the lost, but disciple and equip others for the work of the ministry.

We alone, or the church we pastor, will never reach all the sheep who need a shepherd. We need for those God has entrusted us with, to learn to hear the voice of the Great Shepherd and follow Him wherever He leads them. We all need to learn from Jesus how to reveal the Father and Him to the world. He will choose from among the sheep those to become shepherds. Compassion should be in all the followers of Jesus, and we need to teach and lead by example. *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe*

*yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*” Colossians 3:12.

### **A Heart of Meekness and Humility**

One of the definitions Merriam Webster Dictionary gives for meek is: “deficient in spirit and courage.”<sup>17</sup> This is not what Jesus implies about Himself when He utters these statements in Matthew 11:29. Jesus is not deficient!

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says the following: “In its use in Scripture, in which it has a fuller, deeper significance than in non-scriptural Greek writings, it consists not in a person’s outward behavior only; nor yet in his relations to his fellow-men; as little in his mere natural disposition. Rather it is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercises of it are first and chiefly towards God. It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting; it is closely linked with the word tapeinophrosune [humility]”<sup>18</sup>

Jesus is our example. He accepted the will of the Father going to the cross to bring redemption to all of us. Jesus did not dispute nor resist the will of the Father. When Jesus was mistreated, insulted, mocked and whipped, He did not respond with threats, nor did He seek vengeance or complain. This is why He could say, *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find*

*rest for your soul For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*  
Matthew 11:29-30.

It is interesting the context in which Jesus invites us to take His yoke upon us. It describes His heart towards those who accept His invitation. In verse 27, *“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

Jesus is speaking of revealing the Father to those He chooses or invites. Here is another opportunity for Jesus, who came and took the form of a man, to reveal the heart of the Father through His own life. All along, Jesus has been saying He only does what He sees the Father do and says only what He hears the Father say. We are all invited to do the same. He invites us to take up His yoke and become a part of His life in our journey.

The yoke is what was placed on the necks of the oxen to join or partner in whatever work they were to perform - plowing, carrying, or training a younger ox. Jesus said in Matthew 11:30, *“my yoke is easy.”* The word ‘easy’ according to Vine’s, signified “fit for use, able to be used, mild, pleasant.”<sup>19</sup> This suggests one size does not fit all. The yoke was tailored to each ox according to size and built to fit the shape of the neck of the ox. All the fitting and measuring was to make it easy on the oxen to work together, and the yoke would not be rough, hurtful, uncomfortable but properly fitted to make his work easy.

Meekness and humility of the heart is to accept the yoke God has tailored for each one of us. God has given us rights, the right to say 'no' to Him. Meekness is when we renounce our rights and obey Him. If we are insulted, offended, or mistreated, we have the right to defend ourselves, to be upset, or demand retribution. Meekness is renouncing those rights and seeking to repair or restore a relationship and reveal the Heart of the Father and Jesus to others. Meekness means to voluntarily submit to God. Meekness and humility of heart should be a part of every believer's life.

Philippians 2:1-8 is too long to write out, but in verse one there are many 'if's'. They are about our union with Christ. Verse two encourages us *'to be like Jesus in mind and heart.'* Verse three, *'follow the example of Jesus, no selfish ambition or vain conceit,'* (These are opposite to what Lucifer did. Lucifer had a selfish ambition to be like God and even more, he was conceited). We struggle with those things because of the flesh with which we battle daily and resists the spirit of Christ. Verses 6-8 describes the humility and meekness of Christ in making Himself of no reputation; *"He humbled Himself and God exalted Him."*

Other Scriptures which speak of the life of the church or community of believers are found in Galatians 5:23, the fruit of the spirit; Galatians 6:1 says when a brother is overtaken in a fault, restore him in meekness; Ephesians 4:2 says forbearing one another in the spirit of meekness; and Colossians 3:12 says we are to be clothed with meekness.

Paul writes to the shepherds in his epistles to Timothy and Titus. They are pastoral instructions which include not only instructions with respect to the work to be done, but to the heart of the pastor and his relationship or dealings with the congregation. Having a servant spirit, not a brawler, apt to teach, without resentments, with meekness teaching those who oppose the truth with the hope they will repent and come to the knowledge of the truth. As shepherds, it would be beneficial to read these epistles periodically to be reminded of these and other pastoral issues.

### **A Heart of Forgiveness**

Perhaps, one of the most difficult things for us to practice or live out has to do with forgiveness. We tend to resist or give all kinds of reasons or excuses not to forgive. Forgiveness is in the heart of God. *“But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate slow to anger and abounding in love.”*

Nehemiah, 9:17, 19

Jesus is without a doubt the perfect model of the forgiving heart of God. When on the cross, after He had been mocked, mistreated, beaten, insulted, falsely accused and slandered before He died, He asks the Father to forgive them. Not only did He ask the Father to forgive, He himself also forgave all those who acted against Him. He forgave all of mankind at that time and continues to forgive today and the future generations.

## Shepherds According to the Heart of God

When the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He included in the prayer the issue of forgiveness, to ask for forgiveness, as well as to forgive. *“Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”* Matthew 6:12. Both are difficult for us. Most of us struggle to admit our trespasses against others because of pride, fear, insecurity or any other reason. We also want to hold on to our right to get justice on our own terms. We attempt to justify our acts of retaliation. Our world today is living in tension due to injustices. Injustices committed against us and injustices we commit against others. As shepherds, and as the church, we must speak for justice for all. Never justify any injustice because it is what society dictates. Sometimes, speaking for justice for all may seem unacceptable to societies who want selective justice for those who fit into their ideology. No ideology is above the values God has given.

Sometimes a changing culture tries to influence us to focus on a recent injustice that becomes one sided, and we forget the other injustices that have been taking place for years. We must avoid the snare of basing our teachings on any political or any other group’s ideology. **We teach the Word of God; we speak and act in love.**

The prophet Habakkuk was disgusted by what he saw in the society of his time. His complaint was primarily towards God. He received the answer, he understood the purposes of God and the promise of restoration for His people. In any injustice, we go to God first and ask Him to intervene. He guides us and shapes our attitudes. We speak the Word of

God in love. The prophets of Judah contradicted Jeremiah's message, it was not easy for him to speak what God dictated instead of what the society in Judah wanted.

I have been in Rwanda many times and visited the Genocide Museum detailing the 1994 conflict between the Tutsi and the Hutu. There you can read the history which contributed to the genocide. However, during my visits, I began to see a healing in the Rwandan people. Those who committed the crimes asked for forgiveness from the victims whose parents, siblings, children, spouses, and friends had been murdered. And those who were victimized rose above being victims and extended forgiveness to their persecutors. Justice was happening. Most of them have expressed a freedom in their inner being in asking and giving forgiveness. We can learn from the Rwandan people.

Matthew 18 tells us the story of two servants. One owed the king 10,000 bags of gold. It was probably an amount the servant could not pay. When he was brought before the king, he informed the king he could not pay. The king ordered the servant, his wife and children be sold to pay the debt. The servant pleaded and asked for mercy. The king forgave the whole debt and the man, and his family went free. As the servant left, he came across a fellow servant who owed him 100 silver coins. He violently tried to collect the debt, a debt with time and patience the other man could pay off could be paid.

The servant who owed the 100 silver coins asked for mercy and patience and said he would pay. The servant trying to collect refused the request and throws him in jail. When the king heard what this servant, to whom much had been forgiven did to his fellow servant, he called for the man and told him, "I forgave all your debt because you begged for mercy, should you not have mercy on your fellow servant?" The man was then thrown in jail to be tortured until all the debt is paid.

Asking and extending forgiveness is a way of life. When struggling to forgive, let us remember "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*". Romans 5:8.

In the New Testament, we are told at least 12 times to forgive one another. Peter asked Jesus, "How many times do I need to forgive my brother?" Jesus said, "Seventy times seven." In other words, always. We need the strength and help of the Holy Spirit to live this way.

### **A Contemporary Story About forgiveness**

The story of Nelson Mandela is a perfect example of putting aside offences when we give up our right to retribution. Mr. Mandela was a prisoner for 27 years in South Africa during Apartheid and the discrimination of black and colored citizens of South Africa. Mr. Mandela fought against such discrimination and was accused of subversion and was



imprisoned. A story is told in South Africa of Mr. Mandela's power of forgiveness:

*“Once after he was elected as the President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela was having lunch along with his security guards at a restaurant. Everyone placed their orders and were chatting while waiting for their food.*

*At that moment, he spotted a man sitting right across his table, also waiting for his food. He told his guards to ask that man to join them for lunch. The person agreed and joined them but sat quietly the whole time. After some waiting, their food arrived, and everyone relished on the delicious meal. The man too starting eating, but his hands were trembling.*

*Without uttering a word, he quietly ate his food and left. Everyone could sense something fishy, so after he left, his guards guessed that he might have been ill because he was trembling so bad.*

*To this, Nelson Mandela shook his head and said that he knew that man. He was the jailor of the prison where Mandela was imprisoned. And that he gave him a very tough time while he was in the prison, subjugating him to all kinds of torture.*

*But then, things were different, as Nelson Mandela had become the President. So, when he invited him over to join them for lunch, the man thought that Mandela might seek revenge and behave the same way he did. But Mandela did no such thing. Because he believed that no matter what that person did to him, it is not in his character to harm others. He believes that the*

*burning feeling of revenge and angst will only cause destruction, whereas, patience and tolerance, are the tools that can help develop compassion and humanity amongst us.*

*He says, “No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”* <sup>20</sup> (Mr. Mandela totally destroys the ‘Critical Race’ theory.)

Mr. Mandela did not use reverse discrimination against the white person who had mistreated him. Mr. Mandela was a follower of Jesus who was able to reveal the heart of the Father and Jesus to his neighbor.

### **The Heart of the Great Shepherd**

The story of Jesus looking for the disciples who had gone fishing after the resurrection is one of the beautiful pictures of a shepherd caring for His sheep, and a lesson for the one who was going to be commissioned to take care of God’s flock.

In John 21, we find this story. After the resurrection, Peter and the other disciples go fishing. Jesus comes to them, and John writes it is the third time He appears to them. The disciples did not realize it was Jesus. We see several times in Scripture His followers did not recognize Him at times: Mary at the tomb when Jesus spoke to her did not recognize Him or His voice, and the two disciples on their way to Emmaus

did not recognize Him. Now appearing to His disciples, the third time, they still did not recognize Him. None of these times seem to have bothered Jesus. In fact, He called them 'friends'.

They had not caught any fish. They may have been discouraged, wondering if they would eat that day. They had used their knowledge, wisdom, experience as fishermen to try and catch fish but this time they had failed. Jesus directed them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat. When they did, they hauled in a great catch. Jesus was not trying to make them feel as failures by directing them to throw the net on the other side. He was revealing to them who He was. The disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord". Those words, "It is the Lord" always moves us.

After the disciples and Peter came to shore, they saw a fire burning. There was bread and fish being prepared, and Jesus told them, "Come and have breakfast." Still the master was demonstrating He did not come to be served but to serve, even after the resurrection, after He defeated the powers of darkness, He still was serving them. Jesus came to them with kindness, calling them friends and serving them.

When Jesus called Peter to follow Him, He said He would make him a fisher of men. Peter had followed and now was about to experience the greatest fisher-of-men experience on the day of Pentecost. However, was Jesus also telling Peter about a transition in His life after the day of Pentecost?

Jesus addresses Peter with a question, “Peter, do you love me more than these?” Peter responded, “*Yes Lord. You know that I love you.*” Then Jesus told him, “*Feed my lambs.*” Three times Jesus asked Peter the same question, except, the last two times, Jesus asked only, “Peter son of Jonah, do you love me?” All the attention was directed to Peter’s love for Jesus. The third time, Peter felt hurt and said in John 21:7, “*Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.*” Again, Jesus tells him to tend His flock. In everything that has to do with relationships with God, love is the center of it all. *If you love me, keep my commandments*” John 14:15.

The word ‘tend’ has several implications, from feeding, protecting and caring all for the growth of the sheep to be healthy and reproductive. I believe the three years of Peter walking with Jesus was his opportunity to learn. They were building up to this day in which Peter was going to understand the commission from Jesus to tend, feed, and care for His flock. The flock belonged to Jesus. The flock was not Peter’s. Jesus in this sequence of events, from telling Peter to follow Him up to this moment when Jesus extends His call to tend His flock, were lessons which would help Peter understand his commission to be a good shepherd.

When Peter had denied Jesus three times, he probably felt like a failure and unworthy of continuing his walk with Jesus or be involved in the Great Commission given in Mark and Matthew. Now Jesus showed Peter the heart of the shepherd by loving him regardless of what Peter had done and restoring

his life to have confidence, and to participate in the purposes of God.

John 10 is dedicated to describing the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Most of us have lived and relived the kindnesses' of Jesus. We have all failed at one time or another. We have felt unworthy to continue our walk with Him or participate in the purposes of God. BUT He has come to us, as He came to Peter, and restores our lives. Psalm 23, "*He restoreth my soul.*" As the heart of God is shaped in us, we will go on to shepherd according to His heart, becoming what God describes in Jeremiah 3:15 and I Samuel 2:35.

The intention here is not to list or try to cover every virtue of the heart of the Father and Jesus for the flock. Each one of us must discover, learn, and experience these virtues themselves to be able to shepherd as He shepherds. May we pursue to learn and experience Him to be shaped according to His heart.

In Jeremiah 30 :21 after God promises the restoration of His people, He promises a ruler will arise from among them. God said, "*I will bring him near and he will come close to me - for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?*" Jesus came to show us the way. **May we possess in our hearts the devotion to come close to Him regardless of the cost.** Being close to Him is the way to take care of our hearts, to be shaped and molded according to His.

## Chapter Four

### The Heart is Deceitful

“Spiritual leadership is a work of the heart. This truth escapes many spiritual leaders. Caught up in helping other people maintain their hearts, they frequently ignore or neglect their own.”<sup>21</sup>

Reggie McNeal, “A Work of Art”

I can relate with the above statement in periods of my life. There is no condemnation here, and I certainly do not write with the attitude of pointing fingers or condemning anyone who might identify with me in admitting mistakes made.

There have been times I have neglected my heart and thought I could lead my family or congregation to keep their hearts right. I thought by over working and focusing on the outward aspect of ministry, without cultivating my own heart before God that all would be well. As a result, I felt an emptiness and unpreparedness to deal with life and my relationships with my family and congregation.

There have been times I failed as a husband, not cheating on my wife, but a failure to care for her, as Jesus gives me the example. I felt a failure as a brother, son, father, pastor, friend, and missionary, but God and others have been gracious to forgive me. As I realized my errors and confessed them, the Lord forgave me, restored me and my family, my relationship with friends and the church. I don't share this to say I am perfect or an expert in confessing or restoration, but I share because I think we all experience some of these issues in our life's journey.

**Why Do We Make a 'Big Deal' About the Heart?  
Because God does!**

In the last chapter, I mentioned the heart is deceitful, and God asks us to give Him our hearts and He will change them. It is from the heart that all the issues of life flow, good and bad. When Paul addresses the elders of Ephesus about shepherding the flock of God, the first thing he tells them is, "*Keep watch over yourselves.*" Another translation says, "*Take heed to yourselves.*" Acts 20:28,

This is not a request to be selfish, but to allow the Holy Spirit to check our hearts and reveal whatever is in it that can harm our lives and service to God and the Church. It is not enough to help others only from our training or education, professional vocation or with just intellectual knowledge. It is necessary to provide help from our hearts. At the same time, to 'take heed' is to put a hedge between

our heart and what can harm us, a barrier between us and sin, temptation, hypocrisy or any of the works of the flesh.

Why is this important as shepherds? We have the answer from Jesus who always pursued pleasing the Father. He did not just heal people. He was also moved with compassion, as the Father is moved with compassion. He did not just preach and offer salvation, peace, and rest. He wept over the city of Jerusalem who did not want to know God. For Jesus it was not just a task to be done. It was His heart for the people. His heart was the heart of the Father.

Paul is asking the elders to pay attention to their lives. Not to think because they are elders and leaders, they are free from temptation, selfishness, deceit or the lies that would make them think of being more special than the flock. To take heed is to adhere to the teachings from God, to the leading of the Holy Spirit, to apply and give yourself to what God has made you and is shaping you to be. Give yourself to His process. When Paul says, “take heed to yourselves,” he is talking about our hearts, our attitudes, speech and the intentions of our hearts. God makes a big deal about the heart: *“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”* Psalm, 139:23-24. *“He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do”.* Psalm 33:15.

*But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at*



*the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7.*

It is not only asking God to search our hearts as His children, but as shepherds too. We all strive to do right in the eyes of God and the Scriptures above remind us God is also looking at the heart and not just the deeds.

### **When Just Doing What is Right is Not Enough**

This may seem like a strange statement to some. Is this not what we all seek in our service to God? To do what is right in His eyes? We want to consider the lives of two kings of Judah. They both did what was right in the eyes of God, but the final words of God were different for each one. II Chronicles 25 is the passage where we find part of the story of one of these kings.

Amaziah became king of Judah when he was 25 years of age. Amaziah strived to do what was right in the eyes of God. When a war broke out between Judah and Edom, he formed an army of 300,000 able fighting men. As he contemplated his army, he felt 300,000 were not enough for the battle. He hired an extra 100,000 from Israel, at the cost almost 4 tons of silver. After raising a large army, they were ready to go to battle, as the price had been paid up front. A prophet came and told Amaziah there was a problem. The prophet gave Amaziah the message from God. He said, God will not be with you because of Israel's sin. The Lord would oppose Amaziah's army, if Israel marched with them.

Amaziah found himself in a dilemma. He asked Israel for help, paid up front the four tons of silver, now needed to make a difficult decision. Would he risk Israel's anger and loosing what he had already paid? Or would he risk God not being in the battle with him. He made the right decision and sent Israel home. The Israelites were furious with Amaziah. Judah lost 4 tons of silver, but it was the right decision. Sometimes we too must make the right decision no matter the cost. To disobey God is the higher cost.

Though Amaziah did right, there were things he did which were not right before God. Like many of us, Amaziah had made some mistakes. Mistakes can be forgiven. The sad part of Amaziah's life is what God said about him, "*He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly.*" 2 Chronicles 25:2. Other translations say, 'his heart was not loyal to God' or 'his heart was not perfect towards God'. It was not just the mistakes he made, but his heart was not loyal to God in what he did. So, we can say, doing what is right in the sight of God is not enough. There must be a perfect heart towards God in all we do. This must be our attitude and goal.

The other king who did right before God was King Asa. Two revivals were experienced during his reign. I King 15 9-14 gives a summary of what Asa did; "*Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done.... Although he did not remove the high places, Asa's heart was fully*

*committed to the LORD all his life.* Another translation says, *'his heart was loyal to God all his life'*.

Asa was not perfect. In the later years of his life, he made mistakes. His faith wavered and he sought help from other sources outside of God. Nevertheless, the final words from God are in verse 14, *"Although he did not remove the high places, Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life."* Another translation I Kings 15:14 says, *"his heart was loyal to God all of his life."*

We all worry about not finishing our tasks. At times we feel if we do not finish the task, we are failures. However, many times we worry about the tasks we impose upon ourselves and not the task we were given by God. Focusing on having the heart of God is a lifetime learning process that involves a relationship with God Himself.

What does a loyal heart towards God mean? How do we know if our hearts are loyal to God? I believe it is a lifetime process and we need to ask ourselves every day if our hearts are loyal to Him in all we do and let Him teach us. I cannot be the judge of anyone. I cannot say if someone's heart has been perfect or not towards God throughout his life. Only God is able to say it. Our responsibility is to our own hearts. What we can do is pray and ask God to teach us and shape our hearts to be loyal to Him throughout our lives.

It is our responsibility to inquire of God how our heart is towards Him. Scriptures mention God focusing on the heart.

## Shepherds According to the Heart of God

He searches the heart. He wants me to be a shepherd according to His own heart. He will raise up priests/shepherds who will do what is in God's heart and mind.

God says of David, *"I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, who shall fulfill all My will."* Acts 13:22, *"And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them."* Psalm 78:72. Let us be careful with our hearts, not in fear or feel threaten, but as a desire to know Him and His heart, and to be transformed into shepherds according to His own heart.

### **When We Don't Balance Family and Ministry Life**

When my wife and I started in the ministry, there was not, or at least we had never heard of 'soul care'. Marital problems among couples in ministry are not new. They have existed for a long time. My wife and I went through some tough times in our marriage. I was too busy 'doing the work of the ministry'. I neglected her and caused her to experience loneliness, frustration, and feelings of abandonment. There was no unfaithfulness from either one of us. We have always been faithful to each other and our marriage, but when troubles began, we both knew we needed help. We wanted to get counseling, but felt we had no one to turn to. There was one thing that kept us together and working out our difficulties, though. It was our commitment to our marriage. We both had seen our parents separate and dissolve their

marriages. We did not want our daughters to go through the same experience.

The time came when finally, I started asking God to search my heart. I discovered the areas of negligence in my relationship with God and my wife. I soon discovered my wife had come to the same decision of allowing God to search her heart. The healing of our marriage was a process and not an overnight solution. When we accepted our personal responsibility instead of blaming each other for the difficulties, the compassionate, gracious, forgiving, slow to anger, abounding in love and the faithfulness of God began to heal our lives and our marriage. We needed help in our marriage but most of all, we needed to care for our personal relationships with God.

This is not to say we could not have used the help of others; nor that a couple should just tough it out, man up and resolve it. We just did not know what to do as far as getting help. We were afraid we would need to leave the ministry. In our pride and fear, we did not understand there was a community of believers there for us, if only we had asked for help. Taking care of ourselves will help us not only in our family relationships but in all relationships. It will help us to know how to respond or react to every circumstance we face, good or bad.

## There Are Realities We Must Face

We hear of stories about pastors having difficulties and some, sadly, have committed suicide or they have ended their marriages after falling into infidelity. According to **The Soul Shepherding Institute**, an organization which exists to care for the mental well-being of pastoral leadership, “90% of pastors work 55-75 hours a week and 75% report feeling ‘highly stressed’ on any given week. Most are managing family life with the demands of pastoral care, which usually comes with an unending stream of requests and responsibilities.”<sup>22</sup>

Others give in to immorality, misuse of finances, abuse the flock and even some commit murder. Some may think the number may be small and yet, if there were more emphasis or periodic checks on the conditions of pastors, perhaps some of these things could be prevented. There needs to be genuine concern for pastor’s lives and the lives of their families from either the denominations or local church councils. Help should be made available without a pastor’s fear of losing his job or being embarrassed

This is not a pleasant subject to talk about. On the other hand, we can consider the subject as a reality of the need to pay attention to ourselves, our hearts and seek help when needed. This is not an indictment or criticism. It is to acknowledge we still have these challenges, and they need to be addressed. I’m thankful some churches and organizations

are establishing 'care' ministries and facilities to address pastoral needs.

Pastoral care or self-care begins with us, especially those of us who put up a 'front' of being strong on Sundays, only to become discouraged, or depressed when alone in private on Monday. God is extremely interested in us and in changing our lives. He only wants the best for us. He can be trusted. He is compassionate, gracious, forgiving, abounding in love and faithfulness.

### **Taking Heed to Ourselves, Benefits the Flock**

Paul's intent for speaking these words to the elders of Ephesus, and to us, in Acts 20:28, is for us to discover if we are taking heed, watching out and allowing God to search our hearts and heal us. Then we will be able to take good care of the flock. Paul does not put a comma after take heed to yourselves. He adds 'and' the flock of God. They go together. Taking care of ourselves increases the possibilities of shepherding the flock as He wants us to.

When Scriptures encourage us to allow God to search our hearts and see if there are any wicked or offensive ways, it is not that He does not already know what is in our hearts. It is primarily for us to know or realize what is in our hearts. God said to Israel, "*Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.*" Deuteronomy 8:2.

Israel's experience was to realize what was in their hearts every time they faced a test, to realize their weakness and have the opportunity to trust in God. God never abandoned them, even when Israel was disloyal. Israel, who had lived as slaves for 400 years, needed to learn to live in freedom and to become the royal priesthood God wanted them to be. They needed to see what was in their hearts and at the same time, see God's faithfulness and grow in trust and love for Him.

As we go through life and experience testing, unpleasant situations or circumstances, it reveals what is in our hearts. Will we complain, be victims, feel sorry for ourselves, be bitter, or discouraged? Sometimes we may feel this way. However, I also have learned from David, as he went through those same feelings, after he complained, was a victim, felt sorry for himself and so on, he did not stay in that emotional state. Though he was expressive (venting) about his feelings and emotions, he always ended his conversations or his prayers with the declaration of who God was. David declared God's lovingkindness which has no end, His faithfulness, His righteousness, and His unending love. David was uplifted by the love of God and what he learned about his relationship with the Father. Psalms 13 and 42 are good examples.

As an individual, and as a shepherd, we need to learn not to stay with a self-pitting emotional response in our heart, but to declare who God is and declare His attributes, and put our trust in and to Him. It may take time, but we get there with the help of His Holy Spirit. His patience, love, faithfulness



leads us to put our trust in Him, as we allow Him to transform our lives. As shepherds we realize what is in our hearts during the trying times of circumstances, attitudes, challenges and sufferings we may face in life.

We all know we are not perfect, and we will never be perfect as long as we are in this world. But we can give ourselves to the process of transformation God has started in each one of us. *“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”* Luke 6:45.

As we look at this Scripture from the perspective of a shepherd, we could say that a good shepherd brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil shepherd will bring evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. I want to be the good shepherd, shaped after the heart of God so I can store up good things in my heart to express them to the flock of God. *“As water reflects the face, so one’s life reflects the heart.”* Proverbs 27:19.

As we consider what we go through in life and how He shepherds us, it will give us understanding of what those under our care go through. We understand how we can shepherd them and lead them to see God as the Great Shepherd through our teaching, and the way we treat them with the same treatment God has treated us. *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all*

*our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”* 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

The charge ‘take heed to yourselves’ is not only for us but for the flock of God. We are to teach and lead the flock to take heed, watch out, pay attention, to adhere to the teachings from God, to the leading of the Holy Spirit, apply and give themselves to what God is transforming and shaping them into, and giving themselves to His designed process.

### **Whose Idea is it For Us to Be Pastors?**

Acts 20:28, “*The Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*” It is not man’s idea, but God’s. Man does take part in commissioning or appointing us. Our appointment is from God through the Holy Spirit. I am not saying we are not to be in submission to our leaders who watch over us. Ultimately, we all will respond to God for what He has commissioned us to be and do. After Paul exhorts the elders to care for their hearts, Paul exhorts the elders to be shepherds with all the implications and the responsibilities of a shepherd.

### **“Be Shepherds of the Church of God.”**

**Acts 20:28**

Proverbs 27:23, “*Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds;*” I wonder if Paul was thinking of this verse when he spoke to the elders in Ephesus.

In the Old Testament, we find different types of leaders called shepherds. They are the kings, rulers, priests, prophets and law givers. In fact, in most older cultures, the term shepherd was used to refer to political leaders executing their function as taking care of their people. “Plato reminds us of the religious use of the word when he compares the rulers of the city-state to shepherds who care for their flock.”<sup>23</sup> (Dictionary of the New Testament Theology, Volume 3 page 564 Colin Brown General Editor Seventh print 1982). It seems that the majority of the political leadership around the world today, has lost the concept of being shepherds to the people they serve.

In the New Testament, the coming of the Great Shepherd established a narrower definition of the shepherd when it comes to the church, focusing more on the heart and the spiritual service of the shepherd for the sheep, than the ruling over them. Jesus said it to His disciples when He told them they were not to lord over the people but instructed them about the difference between the rulers of the nation and His servants. 1 Peter 5:3, specifically says, “*no lording over them but being examples.*”

What are the implications of the charge Paul is making to the elders? Scripture gives us instruction or direction. What we notice is the flock belongs to God. He purchased it with His blood and sacrifice. The flock is not ours; it does not belong to us; we did not pay for them; we do not have the right to mistreat them nor to reject them. We are merely

commissioned to take care of them, and The Shepherd of the flock provides us with what we need to tend the flock.

I Peter 5 tells us we are not shepherds because we have to be, but because we are willing to be, not for dishonest gain but with a willingness to serve. When Scripture speaks of tending the flock, it implies to feed, care for, protect, and lead. These actions from the shepherd will cause the sheep to trust him. The sheep will recognize his voice and follow him. In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, we find the perfect description of not only what the shepherd is to do, but of his heart for the flock.

### **Feeding the Flock**

The Bible speaks of David being in the field with the sheep. This indicates the sheep were taken to places where they could graze and find fresh clean water. They were led out of the fold where they were secure and safe to a place where there could be danger. They were in constant motion grazing in a rocky terrain where it would seem impossible to find food, and yet, the sprouts of fresh grass was there. At the same time, they would feel secure because of the presence of the shepherd with them. At other times of the year, the shepherd would cut branches with green leaves for the sheep to eat. The following is an excerpt of a teaching on the subject by Ray Vander Laan.

Ray Vander Laan, a historian and theologian explains, “The green pastures mentioned in Psalm 23, are not as we see today on a farm where all we see green plants or herbs on a piece of

land.” He describes the terrain in which these green pastures are found in Israel as rocky terrain. “The green pasture are sprouts of green grass between the rocks produced by a little rain or the humidity in the air. The sheep needed to be in motion and find the grass. The task of the shepherd is to find those places where sprouts of green herbs would be found.”<sup>24</sup>

Fred H Wright writes, “Scripture often refers to shepherds looking for pasture for their flocks. ‘And they went to the entrance of Gedor, even unto the east side of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks’ (1Chron. 4:39). The Psalmist thanks God for the pasturage which the Lord, as Shepherd, provides for His people: ‘So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever’ (Psa. 79:13).”<sup>25</sup>

When it came to feeding the sheep, I used to think Sunday messages were enough to keep the congregation satisfied for the week. I was wrong. I learned to change my way of thinking due to the conversations with a very ‘pesky’ and ‘irritating’ member of the congregation where we pastored. During the week, he would come to my office and tell me all the things I left out of the message and all the other things I could have said. That bothered me at first. It made me feel incompetent, inept, and made me feel I was failing the congregation because I did not say all the thing this friend was telling me.

As I prayed and asked God to help me cover all the possible areas in the message, He gently informed me it was ok. What I learned is this: I was opening the gate for the congregation

to see in the Word of God the green pastures, and they went out and God fed them. This is what was happening with this brother who came to my office every week. The things I missed or could have said were what the Holy Spirit was speaking directly to him and dealing with in his life. The congregation was motivated by the Spirit to think and pursue on their own, more of His Word. The Holy Spirit was leading them to where He wanted them to go and find the food which would help them in their daily living. My sermons were only an encouragement or stimulus for the congregation to seek more.

One day, one of my daughters came to me and said, “I know what you are going to preach on Sunday. I read ahead the next chapter of the book you are teaching.” She was motivated. I learned many in the congregation were doing the same thing. They were meditating on what was taught on Sunday, and the Holy Spirit was continuing to teach them by reading ahead and growing strong in the faith.

Every week, before Sunday, a group of us would meet at the church and pray for God’s presence to be manifested in our midst. We prayed for people to be saved, healed, filled with the Holy Spirit and meet every person’s need. Then, every Sunday morning, the entire congregation took time to pray for one another in small groups. The small groups were able to pray with visitors and often lead them to Christ. Also, in these groups, Christians prayed for the sick, prayed for miracles, encouraged one another, and saw the power of God manifested. The majority of those saved and or healed in our

community was the work of God through the congregation, not the pastor. What was taking place in these small prayer groups was not planned but simply happened because people were in tune to the Holy Spirit. It was all by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit leading the congregation to green pastures. We had relational challenges, but the Love of God was stronger than the challenges. This was all the work of God. We prayed for His presence be with us in our meetings

### **He Makes Me to Lie Down in Green Pastures**

Philip Keller was an actual shepherd of sheep who lived in East Africa. He wrote the book, "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23." In chapter three of his book, he states, "sheep will only lie down when four requirements are met. 1) They refuse to lie down unless they are free from fear. We must teach and provide opportunity for God's presence to bring the security needed; 2) They will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind. Divisions in a church, most of the time, if not all, does not come from outside forces. The cause of division comes from within the congregation due to frictions among believers; 3). They will not lie down if they are being tormented by flies or parasites; and 4) They will not lie down unless they are free from hunger."<sup>26</sup>

What a beautiful picture of what we are to do as shepherds. Lead people through the Word to where they can move and find the green grass and feed themselves. We all have comfort zones and feel secure in them. Sometimes, we need to leave

## Shepherds According to the Heart of God

our comfort zones and live life where there is danger and away from where we may feel secure. The presence of the shepherd is what gives us security, not our personal comfort zones.

Feeding the flock is more about leading them in the Word where they stroll and find the green, fresh pasture and are able to rest. Their hearts are satisfied with God's Word, they will recognize the Great Shepherd, and feel even more secure in the midst of threats. Proverbs 27:25 speaks of when the hay is gone and there is new fresh green grass, and describes the health of the sheep and goats, and what they will provide for those who care for them.

I am not farmer and I do not know much about farm life or taking care of herds of any kind. I can only try to learn from others. As to dry grass and green pastures, I saw something while living in Kenya. We had several years of drought in Kenya when not only cattle died, but also the people. They were terrible times of famine. I saw during the drought, as those in charge of the herds would take the cattle into the fields searching for food. There were places with a little vegetation, but most everything was dried and the cattle were skinny. Their bones were very visible showing the state of their malnutrition. They were sad looking and walking slow, as if they were trying to conserve energy. I observed the devastation for months as the drought continued. Finally, the rains came, and the fields were again green, and there was plenty of food to where the herders were able to lead their herds to lush green grass. After a few weeks of the cattle



feeding on fresh new green grass, they began to fill out where before they had only been skin and bones. Months went by and we began to see the herds with calves and cows producing milk. They were healthy and reproducing.

We, as shepherds must give attention to taking care of our hearts and build hedges against sin and the pressures trying to squeeze the life out of us and our families. We need to search for the fresh and nutritive pasture. Let's us be sheep before Jesus and learn from the Good Shepherd so we may be healthy and able to shepherd the flock of God to a healthy life in the community of believers. He has a wonderful plan for His flock who comes under His shepherding to impact the world, becoming the Church He has purposed to build.

## Chapter Five

### Jesus the Builder of His Church

**“I will build my Church and the gates of Hell  
shall not Prevail Against Her”**

**Jesus. Matthew 16:18**

As I stated in the introduction, in this chapter we focus more on the church, the flock of God. This focus leads us to expand on other aspects of the life of the church. These aspects are of the Church Jesus is building to be an impact to the community and the world. Shepherds are called to equip and lead the people of God to become all God designed for them.

The passage of Matthew 16:18 where Jesus said, *I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her,*” has been quoted over again and again and every time it is quoted, there is an excitement in the people who hear these words, and with a good reason it is celebrated. However, too often after the meeting, it seems the hype goes away. The words are TRUE, no question about it. It is not debatable.

He will do what He has said. The question is, will we be a part of that building? Will we be built as He says? He definitely has invited us to be a part of this building and His intention to build us up is definitely YES. Peter says, “*you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*” 1 Peter 2:5

Jesus is not talking just about the action of what He will do. He is talking about a process for the Church to be built. His intention is to build the kind of Church He described which will be strong, healthy, vibrant, powerful and the gates of hell will not stand against it.

This is the building process Jesus began with His disciples. He always starts with people, not with buildings. The Church is formed by ‘those called out’. We were called out of the darkness into the Kingdom of Light.

### **What is Needed for a Construction of a Building?**

When we speak about the construction of a house or building, several things come to mind of what is going to be needed to be done. The builder needs to make a survey of the land, have designs drawn up, order building materials, get building codes, hire human resources, arrange financing, time investment and so on. Jesus has surveyed the land where His Church is to be built. He has the design, He has the resources needed, He gives the building codes, and calls us to be a part of the building and construction.

When Jesus says, 'I will build my church', He not only had in mind what was needed, but the details of how He was or is going to build His Church. It starts with people building their lives as a spiritual house. He has the design for each of us as a living stone shaped to fit in the building. His building codes which will be inspected, are to make sure the Church will be able to resist life's storms, earthquakes, floods and other disasters which may come her way. He is the one who provides for us spiritually, as well as materially. We build one another, investing time in relationship with God and one another.

Let us take a closer look at the word 'build' (Greek, *oikodomeō*) used in this passage. Strong's concordance includes 'embolden' <sup>27</sup> as a meaning of the word. It is both interesting and encouraging, the concept of embolden included in this word. The Merrill-Webster Dictionary lists several synonyms of this i.e., "*to instill life, to encourage, to give incentive, to give power, to give courage, to inspire, to boost, to energize, to invigorate.*"<sup>28</sup>

Paraphrasing, we could read this verse in the following manner: I will give my people life, power, courage, strength, vigor, incentives, inspiration, energy, which will eliminate all fear and reluctance to advance the Kingdom of God in this world, and the gates, forces or authorities of hell will not be able to stand against my people. Does this sound like something we would want to be a part of?

It is important to remember the building of the church is a continuous process. It does not end until Jesus comes for His Church. One thing we can be sure of, He has no intention of giving up on us no matter how many times we fail, as long as we take His hand extended to us to lift us up. *Philippians 1:6, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"*.

### ***Is it a Matter of Multiple Choice?***

The church is described in Scripture through different metaphors. Each one has a purpose to teach us the relationship of the Church to God, to one another, and to the world. These are not a multiple choice where we can choose one and we are done. We must grow in all areas.

These metaphors are used to represent different aspects of the life of the Church which are to reflect the life of Jesus. Some of the metaphors are the flock of God, the Bride of Jesus, the House of God, the family of God, the Body of Christ, and the light of the world. Ephesians 6 speaks of the Church in a warfare.

We are not at war with people but the evil powers that work in the world. Our battle is not against flesh and blood but powers and principalities, and rulers of darkness in heavenly places. There are many more but for the sake of space and our purpose, we will not try to cover everything. Hopefully, this will cause us to seek to discover what all God wants to do in and through our churches.

The foundation of the Church is Jesus Christ. No other foundation will work. When we say, Jesus is the foundation, Jesus Christ coming in the flesh, dying on the cross for our sins and being raised from the dead having triumphed over Satan and ascending to the right hand of the Father, on this foundation we are being built into the Church. We are being built in whatever the area of church life He is dealing with us at any given time.

For many years I have heard the debate among some leaders about what is the purpose of the Church. Some say to build a strong church while others say we are to evangelize the world. They discuss it as if it were an either/or choice. It is both. The tendency for some of us is to emphasize one area as the most important in the life of the Church. Usually, they mean the outward work of what the Church is to be 'doing'. We often put more emphasis on the doing and neglect the rest of the areas of relationship with God and one another.

We may have made them a multiple choice in regard to areas of growth in the church or the growth in the relationship with God in what each metaphor represents. When we do this, the success in the growth in only one of these areas, will eventually come to an incomplete state, as the weakness of the others will reflect only in the one we had success in. For example, if we emphasize evangelism and succeed in this area but neglect to grow in the relationship as the body of Christ as the house or family of God, we limit the purposes of God for His church. It has been my observation of some churches

strong in evangelism but don't develop the church in other areas. In one or two years, they close the church, as people stop attending and their evangelism efforts are lost.

We are not suggesting for one moment that we need to be only inward focused. However, as an army needs to be prepared to be strong and healthy to face the enemy, as a building needs a strong foundation to be a firm, solid building and structure. As a body also needs to be strong and healthy to properly function and reproduce, so the church needs to be strong and healthy to reach out and overcome the enemy and touch lives with the love and power of God. In the process of becoming strong, we begin to do the outward work needed to be done.

In the previous chapters, we have talked about being the flock of God and the responsibilities of the shepherds to shepherd the flock under the authority of the Great Shepherd. In every aspect of the life of the church, we need to be emboldened. We need to be given life, encouragement, incentive, power, courage, inspiration, boost, energized, all invigorated by God.

*I Corinthians 6:17 says, "whoever is united with the Lord is one with Him in Spirit."* This opens the door for a multifaceted personal and corporate relationship with God in each and all of the aspects of the life of the church, as represented by metaphors used in Scripture. It is denying ourselves and following Him, allowing Him to live through us. Paul said it this way, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by*

*faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*"  
Galatians 2:20.

This multifaceted relationship illustrated by the metaphors in Scripture, are areas we need to continue growing in and living out. It is a relationship with God lived out in relationships with one another. As we consider some of the metaphors, let us keep in mind they are for us to grow and learn to reflect the life of Jesus. We will consider the metaphors, The Church the Bride of Christ, The Church the Body of Christ, the Church the light of the World.

### ***Metaphor #1: The Church as The Bride of Christ.***

In our weddings in Mexico, we have a tradition we call 'giving the arras'. The arras are gold plated coins in a little box which has the shape of a treasure chest. During the ceremony, the groom deposits the 'arras' in the hands of his bride, symbolizing his promise or guarantee to take care of her, provide whatever she needs and make sure she will lack nothing.

Ephesians speaks of a guarantee Jesus deposits in the life of His bride with a commitment to take care of her, provide what she may need, and she will lack nothing. *"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised **Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance** until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."* Ephesians 1:13-



14. The Holy Spirit is the seal of a commitment to the bride, also a seal of authentication of the groom who gives the guarantee.

The concept of the people of God seen and treated by the Lord as His bride is not a new one. Since the Old Testament, God addresses His people as His bride. *“For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—”* Isaiah 54:5. In Hosea 2:19, God says to His people, *“I will betroth you in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness.”*

With these words, God is describing His character as a husband to His people: (1) He is righteous in the way he deals with Israel; (2) He is just; no injustice is found in Him; therefore, He is not unjust to His bride; (3) He is steadfast in love and mercy. His love does not change under any circumstance; and (4) In His faithfulness. He is faithful even when Israel was not. Nothing will change His love for His people.

This is the relationship we all experience with Jesus as our bridegroom. He is all that is described here and invites us to be clothed with Him so the same qualities or characteristics can be developed in us to be lived out in our relationship to our spouses. We are to become husbands, fathers, shepherds of our own families, brothers, friends according to His own heart. As husbands, we learn from Him to love our wives with the same heart Christ has loved us, His church. When we read from I Corinthians 6:17, *“whoever is united with the*

*Lord is one with Him in Spirit.*” He wants us to be the same husbands to our wives He is to the church. It starts in our relationship with Him. It is all about reflecting His life and His image.

Paul speaks in Ephesians 5 of husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself in sacrifice for her. After the process of cleansing her by the washing of the Word, He may present to Himself a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless.

The two becoming one flesh is a great mystery. In Ephesians 5:32, Paul uses an analogy we can relate to, so we keep Jesus as the focus in our relationships. If we are one with Him in spirit, we will become more like Him in all areas of our personal and church life. As a Church, we must strive to grow in our groom and bride relationship with Jesus. The wedding of the lamb will take place. *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.”* Revelation 19:7. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to continue making us ready for that day.

### ***Metaphor #2: The Church as The Body of Christ***

There are several aspects in our lives and the life of the Church where we learn and grow to represent Jesus to one another and the world: 1) Our relationship with Jesus as Head of the Church; 2) with one another, loving one another, forgiving one another and 57 more references of

relationship to one another in the New Testament; and 3) Using the spiritual gifts given to us to do our part in the edifying of the body of Christ and to advance His kingdom.

I Corinthians 12 explains the function of the body through the gifts of the Spirit given to each one and how we are to function in them. We are all different, and yet, we are to be united. We don't have to agree with one another in everything, but we are united in our attitudes because He is the Head of the Church. He is the One giving direction with the Scriptures and His Spirit. We need each other and we are part of one another. If a part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. We cannot say to each other "I don't need you."

We do not all do the same thing. Our physical body illustrates how we are to function as the body of Christ. My body has many members (my nose, arms, legs etc), but it is all my body. If something is coming at me to hurt me, either on my face, on a leg or any other member of my body, the other members respond with an action to protect the member threatened or targeted. This is how we are to respond when a member of the body of Christ is targeted by spiritual forces to do them harm. We are not to hurt, damage, wound or destroy one another. We must always keep in mind who is the Head of the Church and what He directs us to do in every situation.

The operation of the gifts God has given to us are not for our own benefit nor to make us renown or popular. They are to

help one another to grow, and thus the whole body is built. This is what shepherds are to teach in the Church. Ephesians says God gave gifts to the church, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These gifts are to, "*equip the saints for the work of the ministry.*" The purpose is, for the "*body of Christ to be built, until we reach the unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*" Ephesians 4:11-16. The word 'equip' in other translations say, 'perfect' or 'capacitate'.

Marvin R. Vincent writes the following about the use of the word 'Katartizmos' in classical Greek. It means "refitting a ship or setting a bone." <sup>29</sup> The idea is the repairing of a ship to put it back in service. The same word is used in Matthew 4:21, and it is translated as 'mending'. That is, repairing or preparing the nets to be used again for the purpose they were made for.

The analogy of setting a bone has the same purpose: to put back into use. If a shoulder is dislocated, the shoulder and the arm cannot function properly, thus affecting the function of the body. The shoulder has to be put back in place to function again for the purpose it was created and benefit the body. This is the function of the five office ministries through teaching and providing avenues for the body to function.

The preposition 'for' (the work of the ministry) denotes the goal to which the five ministries seek to lead the members of

the body. To equip is the process through which the body is being perfected. The member is placed in the proper position to function to give a service to the body of Christ and the world.

The purpose is to edify the body of Christ. What will result from this edification? *“Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* Ephesians 4:13. The term ‘reach’ obviously refers to a destination set before us. Most of the study resources, such as studies of the words of the New Testament, concur to equip, perfect, and capacitate “denotes an inner strength of the community or in its organic relationship, or in the character of its members.”<sup>30</sup>

The following verses confirm this. *“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.<sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”* Ephesians 4:14-16.

Every member of the body participates according to its function in the edification of and to be the Church Jesus wants to build.

We will not continue with the gifts of the Spirit further, not because I'm minimizing them but because I want to focus more on God's heart. His heart must be reflected in His body, the Church - functioning in the Gifts of the Spirit. After all, the body of Christ is the body of the anointed one. Christ is the anointed one. The purpose of this book is to deal primarily with the heart of the shepherd and his relationship with the Great Shepherd and the flock of God.

### ***Metaphor #3: Church as Light of the World***

*“Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” John 8:12.*

As in the creation when the world was in darkness, the first thing God created was the light. Jesus came into a world of spiritual darkness; His presence came to dissipate the darkness by being the light. This is why He says, “whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.” John 8:12.

There are other Scriptures which refer to Him as the light. Jesus said to those who believe in Him, *“You are the light of the world. . . ., let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”* Matthew 5:14-16.

The word ‘light’ used in these Scriptures means, “to shine or make manifest.” (Strong's Concordance). What Jesus is saying to us in Matthew 5, is we are to be witnesses of the

light. We are to be open to the light and let the light be seen in us. We are to let Jesus shine in our lives so others may see Him through our good deeds and people will glorify our Father in heaven.

### **Witness of the Light**

John the Baptist said he was not the source of the light; he only gave witness of the light by allowing God to shine His light in John's life. This is how we are to be seen as light in the world. People not only hear our testimony but see the truth - Jesus in us as we proclaim the Good News in any form God directs us to be His witnesses. In being a witness, we need to be convincing, not through manipulation or acting, but because the truth we live is what we are testifying. It is the decision of the listener and those who see us to believe, or not, our testimony.

Years ago, I was called as a witness at a trial in a court of law. I was sworn in to tell the truth. The opposite side of the case tried to discredit my life and testimony. At the end of the trial, the truth prevailed. Our lives will be attacked and there will be an attempt to discredit us, but the truth will prevail. All we can do is manifest the light in us to others. It is the Holy Spirit's work to convict people of their sin. Our lives need to be 'open' to be seen by others, not for them to say how good we are, not to impress, but for Jesus to be manifested in their midst and in their lives.

## Good Deeds

Jesus did much good when He was in the world. He provided for the hungry, He healed the sick, He resurrected the dead, and delivered people from the bondage of sin and demons. When He did these deeds, people glorified the Father. Therefore, the Church, as the light, needs to be involved in all these areas so Jesus can be seen in the church and glorify the Father. There are many who are gifted in the areas of healing and miracles who have experienced a greater number of these manifestations from whom we can learn.

Jesus tells us to go into all the world preaching the Gospel to everyone. There is much to say about cross-cultural ministry of the church. All I've written here is applicable to cross cultural ministry, once it is contextualized to the culture we are in.

Don Richardson in his book, "Eternity in their Hearts", narrates his research of different cultures in several parts of the world. In every place he researched, there had been a witness of God in the culture. God had revealed Himself to the culture. God has already been working wherever we go. We need to find out what God is doing and join Him.

I love the story Carl Medearis tells in his book "Speaking of Jesus" in chapter 10. Medearis tells the story of his trip to Basra, Iraq. He was asked by a worker at the hotel, why he had come to Basra, and if he was with the American Army. His response was, no, "we followed Jesus to Basra and we are



trying to find out what He is doing here.” The hotel worker, using the Muslim name for Jesus said, “Isa is in Basra?” A friend, Samir who was with Carl said, “we think so and He wants us to help in any way we can.”<sup>31</sup> To make the story short, other men joined the conversation and one of them said to Carl and Samir that when he was young, a man had come and told them about Isa and when he left, he left a cassette recorder and tapes with the stories of Isa. At the end of Carl’s story, the men asked for a Bible where the stories of Jesus were recorded. Perhaps, as we visit other places or cultures either on a short visit or long-term missionary work, we need to ask Jesus what He is already doing where we are going and how can we help.

### **What Was Jesus Doing in the Churches of the New Testament?**

It is interesting the things Paul sees in common with the churches of the New Testament. They were not perfect churches by any means but they were in a process of development. The Apostle Paul wrote to the churches and among the many instructions, doctrinal teachings, corrections, and encouragements, he recognized common aspects of the life of the church and encouraged and prayed for them to grow in those areas.

The letters to the churches in the New Testament, which emphasize areas of their life as a community of believers, needed to be strengthened, corrected, edified and affirmed.

Several of them had something in common in their process of edification, as in Ephesians, Colossians, Thessalonians, and Corinthians.

- The Ephesians are praised for their faith in Jesus, their love for one another and encouraged to grow in hope.
- The Corinthians church, a carnal church, receives correction and is encouraged to live in these three, faith, hope and love.
- The Colossians are praised for living in faith hope and love.
- In 2 Thessalonians, Paul is thanking God for them growing in faith, love for one another and encouraged with hope from God.

Ephesians 1:15-18, "*Having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, your love for one another...I pray you may know the hope to which He has called you.*" Faith, love and hope are what I call non-negotiable building codes.

### **Building Codes: *Faith Love and Hope***

As I mentioned before regarding Christ's building plans, building codes are requirements to be met for a building to be a safe for those dwelling in it and to stand against natural disasters. There are times when inspectors will come to check the construction, inspect the foundation, the structure or framing, the functionality of the services to make sure they are up to code. A building must be up to code or the

construction cannot continue or the building can't be used. In the same way, Jesus will inspect His church for complying with the building codes of faith, love and hope.

**Building Code of Faith Hebrews 11:6,  
“*And without faith it is impossible to please God*”**

Paul's words of praise to the Ephesians 1:15, “*having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus*”, do not describe an event. They describe a way of life in which believers renounced their own desires and followed the path designed by the Word of God.

Faith in Jesus is renouncing our own efforts of attaining salvation by our own merits. Faith to be saved is when we empty ourselves knowing we cannot be redeemed by our efforts, our doings. We cannot buy it. We can only depend totally on His love, grace and sacrifice on the cross. “*Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.... Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*” Hebrews 12:2.

He is the author, founder and perfecter of our faith, a lifetime process as we face different circumstances. Our faith is perfected in circumstances, life experiences we go through, good and bad, positive and negative, in joyful and painful experiences. We grow in faith, depending how we respond to those experiences.

When we think or talk about faith, we usually think of faith to receive something from God. It is true we are always in

need from Him. It is part of growing in faith. But there is more. We will limit God if we think faith is only about receiving. We also need faith to know He is with us no matter what kind of situations we are facing, and we are secure in Him.

The Ephesians saw the miracles and power of God. Acts 19, tells us of the healings and miracles God did through Paul in Ephesus. Paul's words encouraged the Ephesians who continued living in the power of God, as Paul mentions in this his letter after his visit.

Let us remember we are in a process, just as His disciples were. Several times Jesus spoke to them with correction but never with condemnation. (Remember, He was preparing them to be shepherds.) He corrected them and at the same time instructed them in what God could do, and they learned to trust in Him. Peter was corrected several times but never rejected for his lack of faith. The other disciples were treated in the same manner. Matthew 17 talks about a man who had brought his son to Jesus, explaining he had taken his son to the disciples but they could not cure him. The disciples willing to learn, asked Jesus why they could not cast the spirit out. Jesus corrected them and instructed them, "*if you have faith as a mustard seed.... nothing will be impossible for you.*" Matthew 17:20.

Many of us have experienced the power of God as recipients. We must be careful we do not think of faith only as consumers; this is when we only see faith as a way to receive

something from God. We err when we focus only on what is received and no longer focus on the Giver. God wants to develop faith that declares He can do what we ask for, but if He does not, we still have faith in God and know and declare He is Just and knows what He is doing. In chapter three of Daniel, the three Hebrew children were faced with being thrown into the furnace of fire for not worshipping the Image. They declared, “God can deliver us but if not, we still will not bow to the Image.” Daniel 3.

Another aspect of the faith Jesus wants to develop in us, besides those opportunities in which we benefit from a miracle, is to maintain faith in God when we do not receive the answer we expect, desire or ask for. **Sometimes in the midst of our suffering, pain, difficulties, or bitter experiences, we do not receive the answer we desire. God is still God. He is still Just, and we can learn to have faith in God in the midst of all difficulties.**

We learn about His character from those experiences, especially if God is building us up into the Church He has purposed to build. Suffering was not uncommon to the early church. *“Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering”.* 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5. Faith that becomes faithfulness to God.

Hebrews 11 is called the chapter of faith. Chapter 11:33-34, refers to the stories of those who, *“through faith conquered kingdoms, shut the mouth of lions, quenched the fury of flames, escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength, became powerful in battle.”* What a legacy we have from our brothers. We obviously rejoice in the example they left for us of what faith in God can do. We must seek to grow to have this faith.

The chapter also tells us of those who experienced the opposite of what the previous group experienced. Hebrews 11:35-37, *“There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated.”*

All of them, the ones who did experience great deliverances by faith, as well as the ones who did not, have the same experience and were commended for their faith. The fact some of them suffered persecution, mistreatment, did not have a place to live and so on, does not mean their faith was weaker than the others who did not suffer as they did. Hebrews 11:39, *“These were all commended for their faith.”* Their faith in both cases described God's faithfulness and the faithfulness of our brothers toward God. The gates of hell did not prevail against them.

## The Need of Faith in the New Testament is No Different Than in the Old Testament

Paul asks, “*who shall separate us from the love of God?*” Romans 8:35-39. He goes through the list of possible threats, i.e., sufferings, persecution, famine, destitution, sword, hardships? Paul concludes, none of these things will separate us, but we will overcome all these threats through Jesus who loves us. Paul adds, “*life nor death, present or future, powers, angels or demons.*” Nothing else can separate us from the love of God who is in Christ Jesus. It can be said that Paul was given life, courage, inspiration, vigor, and power to advance the kingdom of God and the gates of hell would not overcome him.

The church Jesus builds has both times of great deliverances and times of great sufferings and oppositions. There are areas of the world where God is doing wonderful works and miracles. Other parts of the world, there is persecution and we are seeing martyrs for the cause of the Gospel.

April 2, 2015, while serving in Kenya, one morning we woke up to the terrible news of a massacre at a school in Garissa, Kenya. Early in the morning terrorists entered the University of Garissa and took captive 147 young students. They were gathered into a room and given the option to renounce their faith in Jesus or die. All 147 *students* remained faithful and chose death rather than renounce their faith and deny Christ. They were all brutally massacred.

People may think the gates of hell were victorious over them. The truth is, the gates of hell did not prevail against those to whom God gave courage, vigor, inspiration, energy, and strength to remain faithful to a Righteous and Just God. Yes, they died but the gates of hell could not snatch them from the Hands of God. *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in various trials, so that the authenticity of your faith— more precious than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire— may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with an inexpressible and glorious joy,...*” I Peter 1:7-8. Faith is authenticated, not only through miracles, but through faithfulness in suffering.

### **The Building Code of Love.**

*“If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:3.*

We continue looking into the Ephesian church. Paul says, *“I heard of your love for all God's people.”* Ephesians 1:15.

Notice he does not say your love for God or Jesus but for all the saints. The church is praised for their growth in this area. Paul tells us in Corinthians anything we do without love has no positive impact on our lives. God's instructions since the beginning is to love God and to love our neighbor. On one occasion Jesus tells his disciples in these two commandments



all the law is fulfilled. Then in John 13:34, “*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*”

Is Jesus eliminating the rest of the commandments? No. If we follow this new commandment, we will not wish any ill on anyone. We will not want to harm, or desire what others have, cheat, be dishonest with one another, nor will not lie to one another. We will forgive one another, be patient with one another, and love our enemies. It is a difficult path because our human nature or pride resists the Spirit of God’s leading. Paul reminds us of the heart of Jesus toward us so we can choose to follow His example. “*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” Romans 5:8.

This kind of love is not automatic, just because we are Christians, it does not mean we are going to love one another automatically. We grow in this kind of love. It is a learning process of deciding every day we are going to love one another. When I promised my wife to love her ‘until death do us part’, it was not automatic that I would love her forever. I needed to grow in loving her, especially when we had tough times in our marriage. I decided to love her with her imperfections and she decided to love me with my imperfections. We must guard our hearts from resentments, hurts, unforgiveness and allow God to fill our lives with His love. If I love my wife the way Jesus tells and shows me, I will do what is best for her.

Paul praises the church in the first chapter of Ephesians for their love for one another. Years later in Revelation 2:1, *“These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.”* Jesus walks among the churches inspecting His building. He praised the Ephesian church for their hard work, for the way they operated in the gifts of the Spirit, discerned false teachers, their sufferings, perseverance, endurance in hardships, patience and labor for His Name's sake. All was going very well concerning the ministry of the church. We would say it was a very successful church. However, Jesus tells the church what He praised them for was not enough. There is something which may cause the church to fail the inspection. They have left their first love, the non-negotiable building code.

With the loss of this first love, they don't meet the requirement for the building to go on. This was so important to Jesus that He said to them, if they did not repent and return to their first love, He would remove them from being a light to their surrounding areas and to the world. He says, *“I will remove your lampstand from its place.”* Revelation 2:5.

Jesus came to inspect His building and found the building code of the first love missing. He tells them the building will not pass inspection, if they did not make the correction. It seems the church did repent and returned to their first love. About 10 years after Jesus calls them to repent, St Ignatius writes them a letter and praises them for their love for one another.

<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/ignatius-to-the-ephesians-12514>)

When this kind of love is abandoned, the church will cease to be an impact in the world. It will cease to be the light and salt of the earth. When this happens, the gates of hell will be able to resist the church's advancement of the Kingdom of God.

Today, there is so much hatred in society, and even among Christians who hold a different political view. I have seen posts on social media where Christians condemn one another and accuse one another of not being a Christian because they have a different political view. Being a Christian is not about belonging to a political party. We need to repent from falling away from our first love. A church without love cannot advance with just hard work. Work is not what unites us. The love of Jesus unites us.

### **The Building Code of Hope**

**Hebrews 10:23** *“Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”*

Ephesians 1:18, *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.”* Paul prays for the church to grow in the hope of her calling. This hope is given to all of us as individuals and corporately as the body of Christ. This hope is not a guessing act. He is not praying for a hope that is uncertain, as if saying let us hope God does something.

We see hope given to Israel and Judah in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. God tells His people they will be in captivity for 70 years, but at the end of that time, there is hope. *“This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, **plans to give you hope and a future.**”* Jeremiah, 29:10-11.

In Ezekiel 37, the prophet was taken to a valley where there were dry bones. There was a dialogue between God and Ezekiel. God asked in 37:3, *“can these bones live?”* Ezekiel was honest in his response. “I don’t know and I don’t know anyone else who knows except you, Lord; *“You alone know”*. God commanded Ezekiel to prophecy to the dry bones for God’s breath to enter them and they would come alive. God would attach tendons to them and put flesh on them and cover them with skin. Ezekiel 37:10, being faithful prophesied as God directed him, *“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.”* In verse 11, God revealed to Ezekiel the meaning of the prophecy. The dry bones were the people of Israel who said, *“**Our bones are dry and our hope is gone.**”* They had lost their hope even when they had been told about hope all along.

With the prophecies of judgment, there was always the message of hope. Here again in the following verses Ezekiel

prophecies, “*Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’*” 37:12-14.

We don’t know what the future will be like in the next few years. As I see the world’s condition, it seems it will be a difficult time for the Church. In parts of the world, the church is already being persecuted. Regardless of what happens, we know we have a hope of a day when everything in this world will come to an end and we will be with our Savior for eternity. This is not an escapist hope, it is just the TRUTH. In the meantime, as a church what are we to be doing? Paul tells of the hope for the believer and the church.

This hope Paul prays for in Ephesians 1 :18, is sure and certain as the promise and hope given to Israel. It is a promise from God, and though it may take time to come to pass, it is certain. The hope of His calling is to each one of us as individuals in the body of Christ, doing our part for the edification of the body of Christ.

Hebrews 6, speaks of hope and gives the example of the promise given to Abraham when God promised He would give him many descendants. “*I will surely bless you and give you many descendants*”. Hebrews 6:14. Abraham and Sara

waited patiently until he received the promise, and twenty-five years went by before the birth of the son of the promise. *“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him”.* Romans 4:18. They waited in the hope given by God when nature did not give them any hope.

Sara herself laughed when she heard the promise of a son. *“So, Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, ‘After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?’”* Genesis 18:12. Nature was saying to Sara, what she was hearing was impossible but God is the God of the impossible. It does not matter if, we think in the natural, our present circumstances are an impossibility. If God makes a promise, He will do it!

What is this hope? The opening of Hebrews chapter six starts by leading the readers to look beyond salvation and the first rudiments, and to look forward to the maturity God wants to bring to His followers. *“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”* Hebrews 6:11-12.

The word diligent has to do with not being passive in the personal and corporate growth of the church. As individuals, the realization of the hope to which we have been called to, contributes to the corporate hope so we all grow, mature together into the fullness of Christ. It takes time but in being diligent, we will see our hope fulfilled.

**God Gives Us a Hope That is an Anchor for the Soul.  
It is Secure and Stable.**

**Hebrews 6:18-20**, “..we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. <sup>19</sup> **We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.** It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup> where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

*“Back in the world of large sailing ships, it was not possible to safely sail through the mouth of a harbour. Instead, the ship would sail close to the harbour and drop one anchor. A small vessel, a forerunner would come out and row her other anchor into the harbor and set it firmly into an anchorage that was suitable for the ship. From the moment the forerunner set the anchor, the ship was safe from any storms. Once that anchor was set and the fullness of the tide had arrived, the ship could then winch herself into the harbour.”*

*“The captain of the sailing vessel had to have implicit faith in the skill and integrity of the forerunner. They would make sure that the anchor was not set weakly or in soft sand that may shift and loosen, but that it is set so that it grips the solid rock.”<sup>32</sup> (Source: The Forerunner by John Rae. Saint Benedict Parish)*

Jesus, as our forerunner, has entered the Holy of Holies and has secured the hope set before His followers and our lives in

God. No life storm, earthquake, spiritual force will sink us. Tossed around but not abandoned, beaten by the waves of attacks, winds of deception, persecutions, threats, sufferings but we will not be destroyed. We join in the declaration of Hebrews 10:39, "*But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.*"



## Conclusion

Why is it so difficult to learn from the past? For how many centuries have we repeated the errors from history? Could it be we have tried to be shepherds according to our own hearts rather than the heart of God? My intention for writing this book is to direct our attention to the heart of God and not to our own. Our hearts are deceitful above all things and we need to learn to surrender it to God.

Scriptures reveal the stories of shepherds who followed their own hearts and the culture of their time falling into the traps of selfishness *and sin*. But we also have the stories of those shepherds who made right choices and who did not succumb to the pressures of political and religious systems nor to the pressure of society or culture which induced the people to sin. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah are some worthy examples to follow.

Some of the dangers for pastors and leaders is falling into selfishness, egocentrism and greediness which is what happened to the shepherds described in Ezekiel 34. Another danger is wanting to be something we are not: The danger of comparing ourselves to others causes us to think less of ourselves or hold ourselves in greater esteem than others resulting in envy, jealousy and discords; Arrogance makes us think we are self-sufficient and we do not need God; We would never say it out loud, but our attitudes and actions

## Conclusion

declare it; Or seeking to fulfill our own expectations rather than God's is another way of saying, we know better than God what is needed.

The flock belongs to God not to us. Christ designs and provides what is needed to build His church. We are instruments in His hands. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, enables us and gives us power to be used in His service. This is the hope of His calling to each one of us.

The most important conclusion of these teachings is not the conclusion I can present at the end of this work. The most important ending is how you the reader arrive at your own conclusion, as you read these pages. I suggest you write your own summary or conclusion of what the Holy Spirit has and is speaking to you and discover the path God opens before you to walk in, as He directs you. Psalm 32:8, "*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.*"

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.whiteboardbusiness.com/those-who-fail-to-learn-from-history-are-doomed-to-repeat-it-sir-winston-churchill/>

by DALLON CHRISTENSEN

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## *A Note from the Author's Wife*

Over the years I have watched my husband grow in faith, understanding and wisdom. Like most of us, our growth and maturity in 'the Faith' often comes through trial and error, and Beto is no different. What I have always seen in him, which made him unique in my eyes, was he seldom ever committed the same mistake twice. Living in Christ, Beto has always been a quick study. He has learned what it means to have the heart of a Shepherd and to know God's heart.

As you read his book, I feel you can trust Beto's wisdom and experience. He truly has the heart of a Shepherd. I have watched him shepherd the various flocks the Lord has sent him too. He has always shepherded with a heart of love, compassion, interest, caring, sympathy and empathy. I have watched him weep with pastors and dance with joy with them. He never slighted or mis-treated a pastor or leader but always held them in the highest esteem.

Beto's quiet spirit and soft-speaking voice has allowed him to walk into the most tense and combative of situations and bring peace and quiet. I've watched pastors and leaders come into a meeting angry and hurting only to find a quiet peace-maker ready to listen. Beto would sit and listen to all sorts of angry arguments without ever condemning a single person. Pastors and leaders always came away knowing they had been heard. Beto could not always give them what they argued for, but they always knew they had been heard with grace and love.

My prayer for you, as you read Beto's book, is your spirit will be refreshed, and you will know and hear God revealing His heart to you. Be blessed!!

*Teri Quigley de Paz*

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