

## Aaron Kuehmichel - Shepherding in Practice

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Well, as you can tell, our service this morning is entitled Shepherding in Practice, and we're going to have a series of slides and the Scriptures on the slides. Not all of them, but most of them, and we'll have bullet points correspond to what we're talking about. But according to the New Testament, there are three offices within the church.

I have to relocate something here.

There are two perpetual offices within the church, the elder, or the overseer, and the deacon. Now in Philippians 1:1, Paul writes to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and the deacons, thus indicating a distinction exists between both of them overseers and deacons on the one hand, and the rest of the saints the congregation on the other hand. Whereas elders and deacons are required to meet a high standard of Christian character and maturity, saints or believers are not required to do so in Scripture. The only qualification that the Bible gives for Christians in general is that they make a profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and all are encouraged, whether you're an elder deacon or a believer, fellow believer, to grow in grace, faith, knowledge, etc.

In Christ. So let's consider the role of the elder.

Now, overseer and bishop refer to the function of the office, while elder refers to the position of that office, and no matter what the term used to denote this responsibility, the individual in this role is charged with shepherding the flock of God. They are responsible for the spiritual oversight and the care of the church of God.

Now in Acts 20:28, Paul tells the elders to shepherd or to care for the flock, or figuratively, a group of the fellow believers. Now, just as a shepherd seeks to provide for the needs of the sheep under their care and to protect them from danger, so an elder seeks to provide for the spiritual needs of the congregation and to protect them from anything that would harm them spiritually.

Now, what we find in the Scriptures is that the Lord Jesus is the prototype for all the under shepherds, and in John 10, 11, 16, Jesus presents Himself as the good shepherd, and as this prototype for all under shepherds, so John 10, 11, 16, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

That's verse 12. Now verse 13, he flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep, and continuing verse 14, I am the good shepherd and I know my own, and my own know me, even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father, And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep which are not of this fold.

I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice, and they will become one flock with one shepherd. Now there's another passage in which Jesus talks about the work of shepherding, and as found in the discussion James, Jesus, sorry, Peter and Peter had, where Jesus equates shepherding with love for him, and we find that next set of verses in John 21, verses 15 through 18. So verse 15.

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So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to him, Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? And he or Peter said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you, and Jesus said to him, tend my lambs. Now you remember, this is the account after the resurrection. The Lord Jesus is on the shore.

Disciples are out in the boat fishing, and they come and they come to the shore. Verse 16. Jesus says to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And Peter said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you, and Jesus says to him, shepherd, my sheep.

Continuing in verse 17, he Jesus said to Peter the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? And Peter said to him, lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. So Jesus said to him, take, tend to my sheep.

And then he continues says, truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone will gird you and bring you where you do not wish to go, and that's the conclusion of verse 18. So what can we learn from these Scriptures regarding what it means to be a shepherd? So we're going to consider five different things.

So our five takeaways are from a combination of both sets of scriptures. John chapter 10 and John 21. The first point is that the shepherd takes ownership of and responsibility for the flock over which he has been appointed, and that's taken from John 10:12 specifically. So an elder takes responsibility for the flock because he has something invested.

The Father has appointed him to run the family business, so to speak. But more than this, the text makes it plain that ownership leads primarily to protection. When danger comes, the shepherd stands fast in his determination to protect the sheep from all threat. This is the main reason why an elder must be able to teach.

Now, the elder must know sound doctrine and be able to distinguish it from what is false, and then to communicate it, either for instruction or for rebuke. Because the Apostle Paul reminds us in Acts 20:29, 30, I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own cells men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Now, this was to a group of elders that he was very close to and intimate with, and he was telling them, after I'm gone, this is going to happen from internally. Even so, elders provide this protection.

And as much as they're able, they are to guard against corruption and doctrine and behavior, so that not even the smallest lamb falls prey to the wolf or to the prowling lion, and we remember first Peter 5:8 and says, Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

So our second takeaway is, the shepherd cares for the sheep over which he has been appointed, and that's John 10, verse 13. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. In verse 14, I am the good shepherd, and I know my own, and my own know me. So here we read that the shepherd cares for the sheep, which the hired hand, or while the hired hand cares more for himself and his own comfort, the shepherd feeds them and tends them.

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He looks after them and attends to their needs because they are precious in the sight of God, and that's what John 21:15, 17 told us. But in order to care for the flock, the shepherd first must know his sheep, and the shepherd also must be known by them as well, and that's what we read in verse 13 and 14. Unless the shepherd knows his sheep, the shepherd will not be able to provide what they need, nor will he be able to protect the sheep unless he first knows when they are in danger.

So as the shepherd of the church of God, elders must know the church they regularly meet with so that he can provide for them and protect them. But not only must he know his sheep, the elder shepherd must also be known by them before he will be able to lead them, because sheep will not follow someone that they do not know. Now, if our fellow believers in Christ do not know you or your elder, and they do not know that the elders care for them, then the elder's leadership will be significantly limited because the church simply will not follow them.

So lesson number three. The shepherd sacrifices on behalf of the sheep and we read John 10:11, verse 11 and 15. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. So here we are told the shepherd lays down his life on their behalf.

This passage is explicitly referring to the Lord Jesus own death on the cross. But note that Jesus speaks in the same way about Peter in John chapter 21. After calling Peter to serve as a shepherd of his people, Jesus says to Peter, you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go, and then verse 19, John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, explains that Jesus spoke this to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. So, just like Jesus, Peter's career as a shepherd was to be marked by sacrificial service on behalf of the flock.

Now this does not suggest that all shepherds are to die the martyr's death on behalf of the people they serve. But the job of the shepherd will be one of sacrificial service. An elder should not look for nor expect an easy and trouble free tenure in the office of service. When an elder really shepherds and cares for the brethren over whom he has charge, his life will be a visible expression of the love of Christ for the flock, and that expression of love will endear the elder to his flock because he is showing them the greatest possible care that he is able to give.

So let's look at number four. The shepherd searches intently and relentlessly to find lost and missing sheep. Now for all the above reasons, the shepherd will seek to find those of the flock who have gone astray and to return them to the sheepfold, and on every occasion he will be only as drastic, as necessary and as gentle as possible in restoring them to the fold. Because the shepherd loves and cares for his sheep.

Now the shepherd also seeks those other sheep that are not of this fold. John 10:16. These are not sheep that have wandered from the fold. These are sheep that have not even yet entered. They are not lost, they are just missing.

This means that the elder shepherd must be committed to spreading the good news of salvation encompassed in God's plan for all mankind. Now this continues on our next slide in Romans 10:13, 15 tells us how these missing sheep will enter into this fold. So let's read Romans 10:13 15. For whosoever or whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?

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And how will they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? And how will they preach unless they are sent just as written? How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things. So here Paul is telling us that in order to have believers, you must have a preacher.

And in order for the preacher to preach, you must have a knowledge, and you must have the desire and the commission to do so.

So let's look at our fifth takeaway. The shepherd serves as such because he loves Christ. In John 21:15, 17, we'll just read verse 15. This is the account with Peter and the Lord Jesus, and Peter replies to him, saying to Lord Jesus, yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

So here we see the motivation for the shepherd's sacrificial service to the flock of God. It is because he loves Christ that he pours himself out on behalf of the sheep of the congregation. But why does the shepherd love Christ? Simply because Christ has changed his life. The elder has had his heart of stone exchanged for a heart of flesh, and he's entered into a personal covenant relationship with Christ and has come to know him personally, intimately, and even passionately.

Thus, Christ becomes not merely the example the elder is to follow, but Christ becomes the motivator for his sacrificial service.

So we've considered five things. The elder shepherd works at for the spiritual oversight and care of the church of God. He takes ownership and responsibility. He cares for the sheep over which he has been appointed. Number three, he sacrifices on behalf of them.

Number four, he searches intently to find lost and missing sheep, and number five, he serves because he loves Christ.

So that's the shepherd as an elder or an elder as a shepherd.

But let's take a look now at the role of the deacon in the church.

So the Lord Jesus is also the prototype for the role of the deacon, who is also an under shepherd as well. So let's look at the office of deacon. Now, the office of deacon is distinct from the office of an elder. While the elder is chiefly concerned with the spiritual oversight of the congregation, the office of deacon is principally concerned with the physical needs. We can see this clearly in Acts 6, the only scriptural passage dealing with the specific nature of the office of deacon, in contrast to that of the office of Elder.

Acts 6:1:6. Now, at this time, while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food so the 12 summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, it is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task, but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Verse 5, a statement found approval with the whole congregation, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicnor, Timon Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch, and these they brought before the apostles.

And after praying, they laid their hands on them. So what can we learn from these scriptures? In Acts 6:1 6, primarily verses 1 through 4, what can we learn about what it means to be a deacon?

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And we're going to look and consider four different items.

Number one, the principal function of the deacon is to serve tables.

In Acts 6:2. So the twelve summoned the congregation of disciples and said, it's not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

So the word that is here rendered serve tables is Diakonian in the original Greek, which literally means to wait on. Now I'm having problems with my mouse. It keeps disappearing on me. I'm sorry about that. I cannot advance because I can't find it.

Yeah, I want to advance my notes, not my slide.

So I'm sorry. If you see the mouse moving around the screen, that's because my mouse icon disappears and I have no idea where it is because it's not where I left it, and right now it's. It just disappeared again. So we're going to.

There it is. Sorry. So if you see it crossing the screen, that's my apologies. So the office of deacon is instituted as one of the functions alongside the office of elder for the express purpose of alleviating the burden of those who work as the spiritual overseers of the congregation. While the deacons do concentrate primarily on the physical needs of the flock, this service is still spiritual nature because it helps to facilitate the elder's ministry of the word and of prayer.

Now, the apostle John links the physical care and the spiritual care together in 1 John 3, 16, 18. That's our next slide. So first John 3, 16-18 reads, we know love by this, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to also lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against them, how does the love of God abide in him, little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth.

So let's read. Or let's look at number three, our third takeaway. Both deacons and elders are indispensable to the healthy functioning of the church.

If there are no deacons within the church, or if the deacons that are in the office do not deacon, they do not fulfill the responsibilities of deacon, then the church cannot function as it is intended to function, because the elders will have to sacrifice time from their work in the word, in prayer to take care of the physical.

I'm sorry, my mouse is playing peekaboo with me here.

This, as Luke reminds us in Acts 6:2, is not right, and so verse 6:2 says, it is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

Now, if the deacons do not fulfill the responsibilities as deacons, the credibility of the church's witness can be significantly hampered. 1 John 3:16 reminds us that the church must put its money where its mouth is, so to speak. Otherwise its actions contradict the very thing that it preaches.

So let's look at the fourth takeaway from the Deacons from Acts 6:1:6. Deacons must know the flock in order to fulfill their official duties, and we read Acts 6, verses 2 to 4, and we're going to just highlight verse 3 and 4. These must be selected from among you, which means the brethren know who the deacons are. They must be men of good reputation, full of spirit and full of wisdom.

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And the only way the congregation would know that is if they were interacting with them. So that's why these men were chosen, because the congregation knew their characteristics and knew who they were. So if the congregation knows the deacons, it's also very safe to assume that the deacons know the congregation, and the deacon must be proactive in discerning the needs of the church and how best to meet them.

So we've considered four things from Acts 6:1:6 regarding deacons. The principal function of the deacon is to serve. The office of deacon is a spiritual office. Both deacons and elders are indispensable to the healthy functioning of the church, and deacons must know the flock.

Just like the shepherds, the elders must order to fulfill their official duties.

So far we have talked about the scripturally sanctioned roles of elder and deacon. Now let's consider our individual responsibilities as a member of our local ecclesia, our local class, or our local church. All of those words are interchangeable mean the same thing. We tend to use the word ecclesiastical, because we don't like the connotation of church. We don't typically say we go to church.

We typically say we go to Bible study, we go to class, we go to our. Attend our ecclesia, and by doing that, we're trying to make a mental distinction in the eyes and the minds of those whom we're talking to. But it's the same word. It's the same thing.

Church means a congregation of local people, and it's a scriptural term.

So as we follow after, behave like and start to think like Christ, we begin to see that the heart of the church is the commitment of its members to Christ. This commitment is revealed by how well we can rest or abide in Christ. Abiding in Christ is the giving up of ourselves to be ruled, taught and led by our Lord Jesus. Our ability to trust him is indicative of our commitment to Him, and I cannot find my mouse.

I've been moving around every time. All this time, I've been trying to find it. Yeah, I don't know what's going on. Okay, so the one time I don't bring my written notes, I have. I'm having difficulties, but please bear with.

I can't. I can advance the slide, but I can't advance my notes, Sebastian.

Okay, thank you.

So it's in this condition of submission that we find rest in our Lord Jesus. Now, this rest is also called the peace of God. It is an internal calmness based on a confidence in our Heavenly Father's leadership or our Lord Jesus leadership in our life, and because we're confident in his leadership, we find a great sense of peace. Now, the irony is that the less we think we have to bring to him, the greater our need for him is to supply what we're lacking.

And on the other hand, the more that we believe we have to bring to him, the less we trust him, and therefore the less we have need of Him. So abiding in Christ is meant for the weak, and it's well suited to all of our weaknesses. Abiding is simply our weakness, trusting itself to our Father in heaven and to our Lord Christ Jesus to keep us, and it is a condition of submission, a consenting to let him do all things for us, to do all things in us, and to do all things through us, and this is why the heart of the church is the commitment of its members to Christ.

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But if that's true, if the heart of the church is this commitment, then the commitment to love one another as Christ loves us reveals just how effective we become as that church.

I apologize, I could not advance. There we go.

So let's talk about our commitment to each other in our local ecclesia. The church we meet with are the brethren. God has provided for us. They are a gift from God to each of us. You are God's provision for me, and hopefully I am God's provision for you.

So there are three ways that we can show our love for one another. We can serve one another, we can encourage one another, and we can forgive one another. So let's start with the aspect of serving.

Now Jesus said in John 13:34, I give you a new commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. You should also love one another, and the question really is, what does the Lord Jesus love look like and how does it act that I might be able to emulate it or do it?

So the following two slides are a combination of four verses and they're a chronological order of the discussion in the upper room combined from the Gospel of Luke and John. So we're going to read those four verses. So let's start with Luke 22:24, and there was a dispute among them as to which of them seems to be greater. Now again, this is the upper room.

They're having this conversation, arguing amongst themselves, who's the greater? And the Lord Jesus standing there, sitting there, he's listening and observing this conversation. This is not the first time they've had this discussion, but they're having it this last night, and the Lord Jesus listens and then he interacts. So John 13:3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things unto his hand, and that he had come from God and went to God, he rose up from supper, took off his garments, and he took a towel and girded himself.

And after that he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them with a towel, which he was girded. Verse 27 of Luke 22 for which is greater, he who reclines or he who serves? Is it not he who reclines, But I am among you as one who serves, and then back to John 13:14. If then I, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, neither is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. Now you can just imagine how chagrined the disciples were when they were arguing amongst themselves and the Lord Jesus gets up and serves them all by washing each of their feet. The world believes and teaches that we will be happy when we are successful in getting other people to serve us.

The Lord Jesus teaches just the opposite. We will be fulfilled when we learn to practice serving love to others. Now serving or servanthood is a mindset. It's an attitude, it's a choice. It's a perspective that is in my power or your power to choose or to ignore.

I can choose to serve or I can choose not to serve. Paul reminds us our goal as followers of Christ is Philippians 2, verse 5. For let this mind or this mindset be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

So remember John 13:3 it said Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and went to God. That verse tells us that Jesus knew his life was

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secure in his Father's hands because he knew and believed this. He could focus on others and not be self centered. When he was established with his own identity in his own position in relationship, then he could use that as a leverage and springboard to help others, and so he was not self centered because of his relationship.

But when we live self protected, self centered lives effectively, we are denying that we have a loving and powerful Father in heaven. Now just think about what that means. When I live just myself, I claim to follow the Lord Jesus and I'm thinking only about myself. Then I am denying that I have a Father in heaven who loves and protects me and watches over me. So when Jesus reproves us for being consumed with anxiety over material things, that's from Matthew 6.

Consider the ladies of the field. Then he says, look at the birds of the air. They don't sow, they don't reap, they don't gather into barns. But your Father in heaven feeds them. Are you not much more valued than they are?

So when Jesus reproves us and reprovved them in that account, Matthew 6:3 times he reprovved them for not having the faith that would remove their anxiety. So when Jesus reproves us for being consumed with anxiety, it is because we have a Father who loves us and has pledged to take care of us, and if that is true, then we shouldn't be anxious. Now I'm not saying we don't have day to day issues and concerns. That's not.

I'm talking about. I'm talking about the anxiety that freezes or locks us or causes us to do and make decisions, or prevents us from doing making decisions because we're not sure about our relationship with our Father in heaven. Or we forget that our Father in heaven knows today and tomorrow. We don't even know. All we know is the present.

But our Father in heaven knows today and tomorrow, and when we forget that, then we think we have to control everything, and our Father in heaven reminds us that he's watching over us, caring for us. So when we believe that God will take care of me, much like the Lord Jesus, when we have that conviction that God will take care of me, then I don't need to support myself all the time. I can start to think about serving and encouraging and forgiving others.

I can begin to think about how God may want me to help others, and Paul reminds of this Also in Philippians 2:4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but but also to the interests of others. So responding to the opportunities of service we are presented brings blessings to our lives. But we also must think about and try to encourage one another to brotherly love and right conduct, and that's Hebrews 10:24.

So serving one another means to consider how God can use me to bless others, then to prayerfully meditate on how we might influence others and cooperate with him in this process. Now, when we serve, we need to be careful that we don't fall out of the attitude of servanthood and into the attitude of servility. Servility means to be cravenly submissive, and we fall into servility because we feel we have to serve. We have to serve not because we want to serve.

So what can we watch out for in our service? Sometimes our selfishness distorts many of the things that we do, and because of our selfishness we can do the bare minimum within the sphere of our responsibilities. We will do as little as possible to get by, and outside of that little as possible responsibilities, we don't want to be inconvenienced.

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We can give to get God test our motives for service, and unfortunately, I think we can all admit to the giving to get attitude surfacing in our lives occasionally.

But we are called.

We are called on. Sorry, we are called on to give without strings, no strings attached, trusting God to provide for us greater blessings than we could ever receive by mere repayment. God promises to bless us as we give away ourselves to others for the sake of the Lord Jesus, and in our service. Sometimes God dictates the timing and the terms.

Our part is just to Trust him by being able to and willing to give freely. Three Highly gifted or talented Christians may serve with a prima donna attitude. They seem to have it all together, and they don't need help from others. Most of us, however, disqualify ourselves from service because we can't do, or we think we can't do what the gifted ones do. We may not have that ability.

And so we say, well, they're recovering that service. I just won't do it. Now our Father rebukes both the prima donnas as well as those who believe that they have nothing to contribute. Proper humility has two components. We allow God to help us through others, and we assume responsibility to make the contribution God wants us to make.

Number four. Sometimes we serve to be accepted by others and not because we are already accepted by God. We are in it to gain acceptance or recognition, and this affects how we relate to and how we deal with each other. We may not reprove when needed because we fear that they will reject us. We may be angry when our efforts aren't appreciated.

We may be jealous of others because they receive the respect that we desire or crave. We may avoid personal vulnerability, and we do this by refusing to admit that we struggle. We make mistakes, that we have failures or weaknesses, because if we admit it, then we fear others will think less of us because of our admission, and it can be very painful to see this selfishness in our lives and in our own hearts.

And we may tend to withdraw from service until we can purify our motives, and I would submit that this medicine is worse than the disease, because the opposite of service is selfishness, and the antidote to selfishness is service. If you're not serving, then you're thinking about yourself. If you don't want to be thinking about yourself, start thinking about others.

And the way you think about others is you start doing things for others. God wants us to continue serving others while we work with him, even when our hearts and our motives need to be cleansed, and that's a sign of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is not learning to avoid this conflict in our lives. It's about learning to trust the leadership and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and still serve despite our fear, our aversion or inadequacies.

Maturity is paying more attention to the spiritual and paying less attention to the natural.

So the second way we can show our love for each other is by encouraging one another first. Thessalonians 5:11 says, Therefore comfort one another and edify one another, even as you also do so. Following Christ is a life of battle against the world, the flesh, and the adversary. We're very familiar with that expression. Biblical encouragement communicates God's truth and love in ways that strengthen us to go on following God's will for our lives.

And encouragement is a powerful influence in our lives. Encouragement.

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Encouragement is what it strengthens us spiritually to continue in our walk with Him, and we are able to do that when we receive God's encouragement and when we respond properly to it. Now we recognize that God is the ultimate source of our encouragement, even though this encouragement comes to us through others.

While it is true God can and does encourage us directly, he often uses our brethren and as the most practical means of our encouragement. As we express our love to each other through encouraging him, we become the instruments through which God exercises His will, and there are four main ways that we can produce or produce encouragement for others, and there are many other ways. These are just four of many.

Number one, we can affirm another's potential. Now, we all struggle to some degree with thoughts and feelings of worthlessness. Even the most confident person you know struggles when they experience failure, and our Father knows that we need of this type of encouragement. That's why we need to express this affirmation to others.

Number two, we can encourage by recognizing spiritual accomplishments. The desire to hear someone say well done is instilled by God, and the primary motivator for employees above salary, above working conditions, and meaningful work is recognition by their supervisors of a job well done. Encouragement through recognition is an important expression of love that we should be able to effectively communicate to each other. Now, our younger Christians thrive on this recognition.

And maybe it's because they are so aware of their biblical ignorance. Maybe that's because they feel awkward in prayer, or maybe they feel that they are not growing and they don't see the significant progress that they've already made. But mature Christians are often energized by watching the younger Christians. They are energized by their enthusiasm and zeal. They're energized by their willingness to share because they don't have that fear of rejection or the fear of being accepted.

They're brand new, so they're more interested in growing, and mature Christians get energized about the excitement about learning that the young in Christ bring and have. But we can also encourage our mature followers when we communicate to them our appreciation for their faithfulness, for their wisdom and their experience.

Now, sometimes God will contest our commitment to him by asking us to serve without such recognition or without encouragement. But he will also communicate his commitment to us through others by their gratitude for our fellowship, our service, our ministry, or our example of our walk. 3 By communicating God's faithfulness now, God does not spare us the pain of this world. Horrible things happen to all of us. God reveals new depths to our sins and our sinfulness.

Our loved ones die, relationships and marriages may end, and when those things happen, we can turn to and direct others to our Father in heaven, who understands completely and has compassion far beyond our own expectations. So when we remind others of God's promises in God's Word that relate to their experiences, God uses our words and our efforts to revive them, and Number four, by challenging one another to continue despite their pain and fears, Philippians 1:29 says, for you have been given the privilege for Christ's sake not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for Him. So endurance and perseverance are necessary for those of us who want to be successful.

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And this kind of encouragement helps us and motivates us to stick it out. Now sometimes we need our brethren to be brutally honest with us. We need to be told, quit whining, stand up, suck it up and get back in the race. We need to be reminded that it is our privilege and responsibility to suffer for our Lord Jesus. However, other times we may have had the spiritual wind knocked out of us because of our experiences.

And at those times we need a gentler kind of encouragement to help us. We want to catch our breath, collect our bearings, and be sent on our way. Continuing and encouraged to press on. Don't stop and stay where you are. Keep moving forward.

So that's how we can encourage one another. But let's consider some ways that we can be effective in when we do encourage. So here are just several ways. Number one Receive it yourself. To be effective in giving, we need to first know how to receive.

Do you know individuals who will not accept a gift, but they're always willing to give you something? Well, many times if there's going to be a giver, there has to be a receiver. So by us not receiving, we are preventing someone from giving. So we must learn to receive encouragement ourselves. Number two, Trust God to encourage you in his way and in his timing.

God knows best how and when to encourage us, and no amount of pressure on our part is going to force his hand. Instead, we need to keep ourselves in the scripturally defined environment in which he works, and when we do, then we will be encouraged, and when we choose to patiently endure on our watch, we God will prove his faithfulness to encourage us. Number three.

No one Use God's word. It's God's word that encourages us by giving them the insight they need and by challenging them to trust God in very practical and real ways. Number four. Study and meditate on how to encourage each other. This usually requires careful and prayerful forethought.

If we want to effectively encourage when we are present with his people, we must be reflecting on such things when we are absent from them. Number five. Pay attention to others Other centered listening. Now, the better we are at listening, the more we will be able to discern what kind of encouragement someone needs, and because we demonstrate our love and respect by listening, our encouragement, when offered, might be better accepted.

Number six. Practice. Be a leader, take the initiative and encourage. It may not be easy, but God will magnify our efforts when we are insincere in our encouragement, and the more we encourage others, the easier it becomes to do so.

Now, the third way we can show our love for each other is by forgiving one another. So let's first consider forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:32 says, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake, has forgiven you, and the Lord Jesus picks up on that. He says, if you have a problem with your brother, leave your altar, leave your item there, go and reconcile, and then come back and make your offering. God's not interested in your offering if you don't have a good relationship first.

And we are told elsewhere to forgive. How many times must I forgive? I tell you, 70 times 7.

So the thing about forgiveness is that if we don't forgive, bitterness starts to grow. Now, bitterness is the alternative to forgiveness. It's retributive anger prolonged over a period of time towards

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another because of an offense committed. Now, notice that the offense is the occasion of bitterness. It is not the cause for bitterness, it's the occasion for it.

Bitterness is a chosen response to an offense, and that is why two individuals can have a very similar experience. Yet one becomes embittered and the other does not. One chooses to respond properly, the other chooses to respond improperly. One grows bitterness, the other one throws it away or releases it.

When we're bitter, we believe that we have the right to pay people back for their offense, and somebody must pay for hurting me, is the attitude. While this conviction may be correct, it's wrong for us to assume to ourselves the right to exact retribution because God reserves this right for himself. When we choose to get even, we are taking upon ourselves something that belongs only to God.

Romans 12, 18 and 19 tells us that vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord, and that's a quote from the Old Testament. But Paul says, if it's possible, as far as in you be in peace with all men, not avenging yourselves, but giving place to wrath. For it's written, vengeance is mine.

Number four. Besides the emotional and relational consequences of bitterness, there's also a spiritual consequence. We don't think about that, but there's a spiritual consequence. When we harbor bitterness, it's simply because bitterness reduces our spiritual clarity, because it's hypercritical but also hypocritical, and that is what John says in 1 John 2, 9, 11.

He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no offense in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness and does not know where he is going because darkness has blinded his eyes. So when we retain our right to hate or our right to bitterness or our right to vengeance, we forfeit the privilege of God's mercy and God's forgiveness.

Now there are two main barriers to forgiveness, our own unwillingness to forgive, and perhaps a misunderstanding of what biblical forgiveness is. So biblical forgiveness insists on personal moral responsibility, number one, and transfers retribution to whom it rightfully belongs, which is God's domain, and forgiveness is based on truth, not on feelings. I may not want to forgive because my heart's not there yet, but in my head I know that I'm expected to give. So by getting my head in the right place, my heart will follow.

Number two, forgiveness is a process. It's much more than just a specific point in time. Action. We can say, I forgive you and still harbor the resentment of it, and so we said I forgave, but that was a point in time.

But the reality is it's taken me longer to get to the point of true forgiveness. Forgiveness, and a simple test for if you've ever been able to forgive someone or a situation is can you share that experience or talk about that experience, or think about that experience and not have a visceral, a visceral gut reaction to the occasion. If you can get, when you get to that point, then you have gotten to the point of forgiveness. Doesn't matter if you say it or not, if you have a visceral reaction to the situation, you have not forgiven.

So forgiveness is a process. When God forgives us of our sin, he will not use them as the basis for rejecting or condemning us, and many times we gunnysack, we keep a list of all the things that someone has done to us, and when we're angry, we bring it back up. Skeletons in the closet.

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God does not do that. God removes our sins. As far as the east is from the west, and can you tell me where east is or where west is? You can find north, you can find South.

Can't find east, can't find west.

Forgiveness waives the right to focus on past offenses and chooses not to use those offenses against the one being forgiven in any way in the future. Number four. Forgiveness relates to past offenses. It's in the past. Trust relates to the present.

My forgiveness allows the offender to rebuild responsible trust with me because trust is in the present.

Forgiveness number five is not the same as reconciliation.

Sometimes we expect the other person to come up to us and apologize before we extend forgiveness. They may or may not even know they offended us. So in those situations, it's impossible. So we will have to forgive them or not, and if we wait for them, we'll never extend forgiveness because they don't know.

So forgiveness is one sided unilateral. Reconciliation, on the other hand, is bilateral. You can't reconcile unless you both talk through it. Forgiveness does not mean that you are weak, does not mean that you're a wimp, and forgiveness does not tolerate future injury.

And extending forgiveness does not mean that we are to let someone take advantage of that forgiveness. That's not what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is an aspect of love, and this very love that extends forgiveness is also the very love that extends discipline and boundaries.

So when we forgive scripturally, we are modeling how to do it and what it looks like. In essence, our forgiveness opens the door for others to forgive also. You ever think about that? When I model forgiveness, others are watching us. Me, you.

If they see that you can forgive, then maybe I can forgive as well. It's one thing to hear the Lord Jesus say it, read it. It's another thing to see it actually put into practice. Lord Jesus lived 2000 years ago. His time frame is different situations, different circumstances that might be our emotional thinking.

The reality is that the ones around us can help us the most because they model God's behaviors and Christ's behaviors.

So we've titled our service Shepherding Practice, and it's easy to discern that encouraging and serving one another is something that shepherds do. But is forgiveness a shepherding trait?

Do you think being forgiving is a trait of shepherds? And I'd submit that it is simply because the shepherds lead by example and the Lord Jesus teaches us to and requires us to forgive, and as under shepherds, if he's telling us that we need to forgive, then we need to be modeling that to others.

So let's conclude the offices of elder and deacon are scripturally assigned and established with qualifications for that service given to us by the Apostle Paul. All the biblical qualifications are really description of the Lord Jesus character, and he is the prototype for all of us as under shepherds. Now all the things that our elders and deacons do to shepherd and serve are models for us, the

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rest of us to incorporate as we shepherd and serve one another. Because we are all following and serving the same master.

Sometimes we think it's the role of the elder and the role of the deacon. They're the shepherds, and I'm explaining to you, if you haven't figured it out already, that you and I, every one of us has that same responsibility of under shepherds to encourage, to serve and to forgive.

Abiding in Christ is simply trusting the Lord Jesus to keep us, and the amount of which we believe that he will keep us is indicative of our commitment to Him, and it is because of the fact that we trust and can trust in the Lord Jesus that reveals the heart of the church, and we can love one another deeply by showing our love through sincere service. We can encourage each other by recognizing each other's spiritual accomplishments, communicating God's faithfulness and challenging us to continue.

Sometimes you have good days and bad days. Sometimes we just need someone to come alongside of us and say, hey, put an arm around us, put a hand on our back, give us a little push, and unfortunately, sometimes once in a while, swat on the butt to help us motivate. So forgiveness models Christ. Forgiveness prevents emotional, relational and spiritual consequences. But forgiveness lets God control retribution.

When we serve one another, encourage one another and forgive, we demonstrate that the effectiveness as the church is because of our commitment to love one another as Christ loves us. So where do we start when we try to shepherd? I would submit that we start with prayer and we want to lift up each of us individually and all of us collectively as a body. We might want to ask that we each grow in righteousness, service and in sacrifice, and then we must take the initiative and do those things.

We must serve, we must encourage, we must forgive, and as we do this, we are acting as Christ would and we are shepherding the flock that we are blessed to associate with.

Now, we should always keep in mind this expression to in our service to and relationships with one another, it is better to be righteous than right. It is always better to be righteous than right.