

Podunk Ponderings: Shepherds Should Smell Like Sheep

No. 2

Something that I heard in seminary, at some point along the way, was that shepherds should smell like sheep. That expression has always stuck with me, and in the age we live in, this idea is more important than ever. While there has always been a temptation for pastors to avoid the dirty work of rubbing shoulders with the sheep, the busy culture we live in leaves a mountain of excuses for the pastor avoiding this duty.

There is a sense in which a pastor never runs out of work to do. There is always another book that could be read, a phone call that could be made, or a program that could be improved on. Not to mention a hundred other things! For the solo pastor there is unending administrative work, maybe even facility work, and if they're "keeping up with the times", they should probably spend some time working on the church website/Facebook page. A pastor never runs out of work to do.

There are so many other things that we could be doing, besides stopping by an elderly church members home for coffee, or stopping by a member's farm during the busy harvest. There are so many other things that a pastor could be doing, besides regularly going out into his flock and spending one on one time with his sheep. Getting to know them, rubbing shoulders with them, building real and personal relationships with them. A good shepherd will smell like his sheep.

If you are looking for Scriptural warrant for this, then look no further than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Great Shepherd could have sent His angels to herd His sheep, but He didn't do that. Jesus Christ condescended down into a dirty, messy, broken world. Lived among us. Not as a king, but as a pauper. Our Lord lived a life that is common to man. He walked with His sheep. He ate with His sheep. He was persecuted with His sheep. And He died for His sheep.

Jesus Christ was a better preacher than you or me, and yet His preaching was not all of His ministry. Jesus went to the docks, and found fisherman. Jesus went to the market, and found tax collectors. Jesus' own family, whom He spent the majority of His earthly life with, was a working class family of carpenters. Jesus spent time with his disciples on the boat, and in the wilderness. Our Great Shepherd smelled like His sheep.

Why do I belabor this point? Pastor, I know that you have a lot on your plate. Too much. You are tempted to not do some of these simple, yet seemingly difficult things, like spending time with sheep. You probably didn't even finish this article once you saw that it was about something you should be doing differently as a pastor. But I would encourage you, as much as you feel like you don't have time for this, make it a priority.

Your sheep need to be able to look their pastor in the eyes for more than 30 seconds on Sunday going out the door. Your sheep need to see you wearing normal clothes, and not behind a pulpit. And you need to see your sheep for what they really are, people, God's people. Don't simply visit the sheep who are sick, or go to places to "put out fires". Just go and see how your sheep are doing. Pray for them. Listen to them. I think you'll be surprised how much this simple act will not only produce fruit in your ministry, but also bless your soul.

Sincerely,

A Podunk Pastor

-by Pastor Josh Emmel, Faith Baptist Church, Kenmare, ND

