

Man of God: Take Heed unto Yourself

By Bryan Salminen and David Maier



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FOREWORD

I am a physician, what's more, a Lutheran physician. In the 32 years of my medical practice, I have been given the privilege of caring for many Lutheran pastors, teachers, seminarians, synodical leaders and their families. I saw with my own eyes many scars of body, mind and spirit. I probably inflicted a few scars myself by what I did appropriately both medically and surgically, and yet, perhaps some others by what I didn't do best. Scars are memory-marks, reminders — tattoos on the structure of personal DNA that make us uniquely who we are — and can define how we function.

Scars exist as a reminder that something that was formed in one way is now reformed in another. Scars mark moments of brokenness, but brokenness does not necessarily lead to dysfunction or uselessness. In fact, more often than not, a scar is the starting sprout of the new growth nurtured from pruning. It is, indeed, necessary if the new branch is to be the type of branch that produces not just good, but great, fruit (JOHN 15). We are reminded that only as we remain inextricably bound to His vine, our sin-weakened spiritual genetics transcribed by His perfect DNA and the scars in His hands, feet, and side as testimony, can we live to the fullest.

What are your scars? Come on, if you are a professional church worker and leader, you have them. It goes with the vocation. As you reflect on your scars, what do they speak to you? Sorrow? Grief? Anger? Shame? Betrayal? Or do they shout thanksgiving? Deliverance? Renewal? Second chances?

Jesus knows every one of the scars on your frame and remembers each as if it were His own ... because He was really there when each scar was formed in you. So often we forget to see Him present in the circumstances our scars commemorate.

He was and is there. Furthermore, that means He has a fully vested interest in how those scars, and the life-alterations brought about in creating those scars, turn out. He bet His life on the outcome.

Two brothers in the Lamb (Doctor Bryan Salminen and Rev. David Maier), professional church worker/leaders, pastor/counselor/professors, husband/father/confessors, healing/healers, undershepherd/sheep, patient/practitioners, saint/sinners, have jointly penned this extraordinarily insightful few pages on the important, nay quintessential task of taking stock of your own health and wholeness as one called to the office of the keys. They speak not as men perfect in faith and practice, but as ones who have experienced tentatio, experienced Anfechtung, up close and personal. Rather than being devoured by the devil, the world, and sinful flesh, by God's grace through faith they have been able to live abundantly, not always, but frequently. Christ's scars announce the love, hope and new life that activate their being, that fan them into missional flame, that allow them to glorify God in their baptismal living and serving. This book is sobering, but even more, this book is a song of celebration, of jubilation of what the Great Physician is doing here and now.

This book is much more than mere transparent soul-searching. There are scripturally rooted lessons to grow by that are outlined from experience wearing the collar — lessons about humility, restraint, service and leadership.

I am brought to a particularly meaningful verse of the great Lenten hymn by Johann Heerman, “Jesus Grant That Balm and Healing”:

*Every wound that pains or grieves me
By Your wounds,
Lord, is made whole;
When I'm faint, Your cross revives me,
Granting new
life to my soul.*

*Yes, Your comfort renders sweet Ev'ry bitter cup I meet;
For Your all atoning passion Has procured my soul's salvation.*

Please afford yourself the time to read this missal in one sitting and then go back to reflect on particular sections that ring especially true to you.

Your brother in faith,
John D. Eckrich, M.D., Executive Director
Grace Place Lutheran Retreats

INTRODUCTION

Where the pronoun “I” is used, it is to be understood that both authors have contributed unless otherwise specifically indicated.

I have always found it immeasurably comforting that Jesus gave Simon the name “Cephas,” or Peter, before Cephas had done much of anything. Before Peter had even determined to follow Jesus, let alone serve Him and love Him as the Christ, before Peter had muttered his denials of knowing Jesus or had one of his moments of blurted insight, before Jesus had reason to call Peter “Satan,” Jesus called him the “rock” (**JOHN 1:42**).

What does this text from John say to us? First, I believe it shouts of God’s sovereignty and love. God knows who we are before we know ourselves. God can use us in spite of ourselves. God is sovereign over our failures and our successes. But He also loves us in spite of those failures. Second, it reminds us that we are more than the sum of our blunders and failings and our victories and our bright spots. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, “But God shows His love for us that in while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (**ROMANS 5:8**). Before we had a chance to prove ourselves, before we had a chance to fall on our faces or say something smart, God knew that He would need to die for us, and He did.

Peter is the disciple that makes many of us feel okay. He is a loud statement to the hopeless, the skeptic, and the guilt-ridden that the Father can take our doubt, our regret, and the hopelessness of our past or our present and create in us something solid by giving us Himself. In Peter we also find that pains of regret and faithlessness may leave scars, but that scars can be powerful reminders of the living hope we profess: the Word that will not wither (**SEE 1 PETER 1:24–25**). Through Peter, God encourages the

weariness. Through our scars, Christ heartens us to see a God very much in control and a God who can make all things new.

Even so, when we look at our own moments of faithlessness or foolishness, our scars of humiliation, or the bitter sting of missed and lost opportunities, it is hard to see much beyond regret and remorse — even if we know Christ has forgiven us. Can there be more to see in the weight of our past, the pains of childhood and the wounds of life, and the glimpses of guilty motives and poor behavior? For the authors, these questions have loomed large.

As I (Salminen) discussed in my first book, *No Ordinary Men*, a lot has happened in my own life recently that has redirected me back to Christ's enormous love, mercy and forgiveness. Christ not only forgives. Christ heals. Christ still creates. What is bigger than sin in our lives is always God's amazing grace in Christ. Sin is boring compared to grace. I have learned that despite our own suffering, there is always a bigger picture. While we are called to look suffering full in the face and confront it with courage and compassion, suffering is not to be our master, and sin shall not have dominion. Even suffering that comes as a direct consequence of sin is not greater than our Lord's mercy and grace. Whether we are the one in the bed of a nursing home, never to rise again, or the one tending to a loved one wracked with sobs over the loss of a child, or the one suffering due to personal sins and failures, as God's children, our purpose is to still give thanks and glory to God in all things. Yes, we are to fight against suffering, disease and death, and especially sin, but sometimes they will appear to win. That's simply life. However, the spirit of the Lord is upon us and in us to bind and heal. But the goal is not simply the healing, for even those who experience healing will go on to suffer in yet other ways. We are to heal, bind up, and comfort so that God will be glorified. Whatever the backdrop to a life, our lives or yours, honor to the name of Jesus is the goal.

God uses brokenness. Brokenness does not lead inevitably to uselessness. God is the God of life, the One who redeems. Our faith teaches us that out of suffering, loss and death, God brings life. No matter the extent of the brokenness, no matter the depth of the pit, the God of the impossible can beautify and use what appears useless to us.

We write this book, not as “super saints,” but as broken men — men who have met the Redeemer. He is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was alone, regarded with contempt. He was afflicted, struck, crushed, stripped, and oppressed. He is scarred for all eternity. His suffering has left its tracks across His face. His hands and feet carry marks of the violence done to Him. Suffering does that to you; it leaves its marks all over you. Both David and I carry our marks.

The testimony of Scripture is that there is, very definitely, more to see in our lives than simply the weight of our past, the pains of childhood and wounds of life, and the glimpses of motives and poor behavior.

Arguably, Peter’s passion for Christ was largely shaped by that which the pain and humiliation of denying Jesus rightly reminded him: “If we are faithless, he remains faithful — for He cannot deny himself” (2 TIM. 2:13).

Our scars are similar. Some of my own scars simply remind me that I am alive, living within a fallen world, participating in this fragile thing called life. Some remind me that I am not an island, that I need people, that I desperately need a Savior, and that I need God in all that I face. Still others remind me that I am healed and being healed. But all of my scars can remind me, as they did Peter, of the sovereignty of God and the privilege and responsibility of the hope I profess. “Do you love me?” asks Jesus. “Yes, Lord,” responds Peter. “Then feed my sheep.”

When Jesus appeared to the gathered, frightened disciples after His resurrection, He said to them, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see . . .” (LUKE 24:39). The frightened disciples had gathered together to discuss the rumors that Christ was alive and out of the grave, risen from the cruel death they witnessed days ago. They were disoriented and afraid, and Jesus said to them, “Look at my hands and my feet.” And to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (JOHN 20:27). To His closest friends, Jesus said, “Look at my scars, see that it is me. Recognize me by my scars; they will point you to God.”

Christ was recognized by the scars that marked His body and shouted of His love. As the powerful lyrics of musician Michael Card exclaim in his song, *Known by the Scars*:

*The marks of death that God chose never to erase
The wounds of loves eternal war
When the kingdom comes with its perfected sons
He will be known by the scars.¹*

Like our own, but far beyond this, the scars of Christ point us to a gracious and forgiving God who goes to great lengths to touch our disfigured world and scarred souls with His holy hands. As the prophet Isaiah proclaimed long ago, in **Is. 53:5**: “. . . he was crushed for our iniquities . . . and with his wounds we are healed.” No doubt, it was this piercing reality of Christ bearing the scars of our sin, carrying our pain, and taking our shame, that Peter bore in mind as he dynamically instructed all believers, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (**1 PETER 5:6-7**). For Peter, of all people, knew.

¹ KNOWN BY THE SCARS - Words and Music by Michael Card. © 1984 Mole End Music (Admin. by Word Music, LLC), All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

“Prosperity, pleasure, and success may be rough of grain and common in fiber, but sorrow is the most sensitive of all created things” (Wilde, 1905, p. 6). Those are the words of the famed pleasure seeker Oscar Wilde. In his *De Profundis*, written in prison, he wrote with profound earnestness about how much suffering had taught him. He went on to add, “Where there is sorrow there is holy ground. Some day people will realize what that means. They will know nothing of life till they do.” This book is our attempt to help you address some of your scars and name your sorrows. It is written in the hope that regardless of your past — your sins, mistakes and failures, or even victories and triumphs — you will recognize that Christ is bigger, better and more marvelous than any of them.

Sorrow comes into our lives and compels us to see our own finitude and frailty. It demands seriousness and tenderness of us if we are to live life the way it is meant to be lived. One of the most important things sorrow does is show us what it needs and responds to. Wilde said it himself: “Sorrow is a wound that bleeds when any hand but that of love touches it, and even then must bleed again, though not in pain” (Wilde, 1905, p. 16).

Of all the descriptions given about Jesus, there is one that unabashedly stands out to confront us. It is a description uttered by the prophet Isaiah, prodding mind and heart at once:

*He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows,
and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men
hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet
we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted
(Is. 53:3–4).*

Maybe you are at a time in your life when hurt is written large upon your thoughts. The Lord Jesus is not unacquainted with your pain. In fact, He draws near particularly with a hand

of love. Your wound may still bleed for a while to remind you of your weakness. But He can help carry the pain and carry you in strength. This could be holy ground for you.

Our goal for this book and for those that follow in this series, is to help you in your walk with the Lord. Each word is written to help the “man of God” take care of himself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Each chapter identifies struggles and potential pitfalls that pastors need to identify. Each chapter is written with great hope, conviction, and excitement. Both David and I are convinced that God can use us — even though we are “jars of clay” — to do incredible things for the Kingdom and for His beloved Son Jesus Christ. May this book help you in that endeavor.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MINISTRY OR THE MASTER

The story of former heavyweight champion of the word, Muhammad Ali, is familiar to many. While he was heavyweight champion of the world, Ali was on a flight to his next bout. The plane encountered severe turbulence, and the pilot came over intercom and said, “Please fasten your seat belts, we are experiencing severe turbulence.” The flight attendant went to every passenger making sure all complied, and at last came to the heavyweight champ of the world. She said, “Sir, the captain has ordered that everyone fasten their seat belt.” To which the champ responded, “Superman don’t need no seat belt.” Without missing a beat, she said, “True, but then superman don’t need no airplane either.” This story is important because we are not supermen either. We fail. We sin. We err. We make mistakes. We are mortal, finite and limited. Each day in the pastoral office brings back constant reminders of how sinful and in need of grace, mercy and the forgiveness of our sins we are.

As Lutheran clergymen, one a former seminary professor and licensed therapist, the other, a pastor now serving as district president, it has been about privilege to serve future and current pastors who are called into the public ministry. All of the pastors in the LCMS and most other denominations have been grounded in theological training, rooted in doctrine, and have sat at the feet of great professors and teachers. We have a wealth of knowledge and of doctrine. All of that is good and right. However, all the knowledge that we have gained and accumulated is not enough. What I primarily mean to say here is what the Apostle Paul says in **1 COR. 13:2**: “If I have ... all knowledge ... but have not love, I gain nothing.” We have had the great privilege of sitting with great teachers and pastors in our studies. They have come for many reasons. Sometimes depressed, angry, burned out, hurt, slandered or weary. They have come as couples because of the tremendous

tension between marriage and ministry. And, many have come, sadly, because they have blown up their lives with affairs, Internet pornography and embezzlement. These men have all had seminary degrees. What happened to them?

In **1 TIM. 4:16**, Paul says something significant in his instructions to Timothy. He has already told him to devote himself to preaching and teaching. He told him not to neglect the gift that is in him and he urges diligence. And then he says this: “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine.”² Now the word heed means to concentrate on something, to rivet your mind on it — to give it all your energy. It’s a strong and powerful word. It’s a word that grips. It’s a word that has guts. Take heed to yourself. Watch yourself closely. And, it is this phrase that is crucial for us to understand as pastors and as pieces of iron that sharpen but also need to be sharpened (**PROV. 27:17**). It is important for all of us to consider ways that the devil, the world, our flesh, and the lures and seduction of the ministry can take us away from our first love. As Christians, but certainly as pastors, we want to guard our lives and homes so well that we witness to the world around us and our congregations of godly health, wholeness and wellness.

Seminary education is largely about paying attention to your doctrine. The Word of God calls us to do this, and it is crucial that we do so. But the Word of God calls you to give the same kind of attention to your person. You are called by God to be the incarnation of what you preach and teach — the pattern and print of what you preach. So who you are matters as much as what you know and what you do. They are inseparable.

There is, we believe, a great seduction inherent in the work of ministry. It is a very subtle seduction, and many do not see it. Many, therefore, are seduced away from their first love. The seduction is this: The work of ministry itself often lures us away

² This quotation is from the American King James Version. All other Bible quotations are from the ESV.

from love and obedience to Jesus Christ. We end up in service to the ministry rather than to the Master. We end up seeing to the success of ministry or to the enterprise or organization rather than standing true to Jesus Christ. Many times someone enters ministry called by God, gifted by God, and with a God-given vision for that particular ministry. But somewhere down the road, when the vision has grown, the demands are great, and the pressure is on, the pastor becomes obedient to the ministry rather than to Christ.

In such situations, decisions are based on what will succeed or bring success or future growth to the ministry. The pastor will not allow the ministry to die no matter what. It is then that the life of Christ in the minister begins to die. The worker is, then, no longer a servant of the Master but a servant of the ministry. It is a good ministry. It is a work to which God has called him. It is a ministry that has borne fruit. But, beware of anything that competes with love and obedience to Jesus Christ. Oftentimes, the greatest competitor for Jesus is service for Him. When the ministry seems to call you to neglect marriage and home or to neglect solitude and personal study of the Word or to neglect prayer, you have traded masters — and we would say you are placing yourself in grave danger.

When the demands of ministry shape your character into something other than the reflection of the character of Jesus Christ, you have traded masters. The ministry master will push you unrelentingly till you drop. The ministry master is not concerned about your character and does not care if you are an incarnation of what you teach or whether you delight the Father. The ministry master only cares that the ministry succeeds. Take heed to yourself lest you be seduced.

There is another form that this seduction takes. As you get involved with caring for others and caught up in their dramas, keenly aware of their pressing and often crucial needs, you can

easily be seduced into thinking that you are only a shepherd and forget that you are also a sheep. If you forget that you are a sheep, you will get tangled in ministry, on getting others to move and grow, and failing to seek out the Great Shepherd, the green pastures, and the still waters that He has given for you.

Care for God's sheep long enough and you will have plenty of experiences to help you understand why God has called His people sheep. You will watch people do stupid things. You will watch them follow other sheep into ravines and wander off from the flock and get devoured. And, you will hear yourself mutter under your breath, "... just a bunch of stupid sheep." One obvious example most pastors have to address surfaces when a couple comes for premarital counseling and informs the pastor that they are living together. You will begin to really think, "How stupid can you be?" Not only do the scriptures make very clear this is sin, but all the latest research indicates the same thing. Living together before marriage only hurts your relationship; it can never help.

When shepherds see their sheep do foolish things it is very easy to get frustrated and angry and proud, as if somehow you are the shepherd over all these stupid sheep. Has God called you to shepherd His people? Of course He has. But do not forget that long before He called you to be His shepherd, He called you first and foremost to be His lamb. We are silly stupid lambs who do stupid things and who follow other sheep into ravines. If we wander from the flock we will get devoured. We are lambs that must stay very close to the great Shepherd. That is the best and wisest way to lead other lambs, for they will follow you there.

Your value as a shepherd depends on your life as a lamb — a weak, dependent and foolish lamb — utterly dependent on the Shepherd. How will such a lamb know anything about shepherding if he does not stay close to the great Shepherd? When the work of shepherding leads you to pride, or superiority, you have forgotten that you are a lamb. A shepherd that is not first a lamb, humble

and gracious to other sheep, is a dangerous shepherd, for he has ceased to follow the great Shepherd. Your primary identity in life, if you are to be of eternal value to our Father in heaven, is not only that of a shepherd, but also that of a lamb. Take heed to yourself lest you be seduced.

Allow us to give you one final seduction. Think of these as ways that the good becomes the enemy of the best. The third seduction is that the work of ministry easily crowds out the worship of God. The measure of the worth of our public work for God is not success but our private relationship with Him. It is that relationship of worshipping God that is essential for fitness for ministry. Have you learned to worship Him? Is worship a thread woven deeply into the tapestry of your life? Or, have you become so taken up with Christian knowledge and Christian work that you have no time for the Christ, whose work it is? No time for Him in morning. No time for Him at night because you are so keen for doing those things that are called by His name. The work will compete for your worship of God. What irony. But, we must expect it to do so. The very work of God to which He has called us can become the very thing that seduces and distracts us and draws us away from Him. The workshop where you acquire what you need is your personal worshipping life, which is sometimes hidden as well as public. Do you want to be equipped for ministry, prepared and protected? Worship God.

Allow us to tell you something that we have seen time and time again with those who are engaged in ministry and have come to see us. It is something that grieves us greatly. In working with many clergy couples, we have come to see that many couples do not pray together. In working with pastors, we have found that pastors and elders do not pray together. Often those in leadership pray very little. Through the years, those folks have said, “I’m not much of a prayer. I have not learned how to pray very well.” In other words, I can lead a church, make it grow, and teach and

preach, but I cannot pray. Prayer seems to be something done in public service or, perhaps at times, devotional in nature. But prayer appears to be impractical and even unnecessary. It takes time away from more important things like running a meeting. The work needs to be done, programs need to be run and people need to be tended. Who has time for prayer? Yet, this Lord we profess to serve, seemed to consider prayer itself to be work — rather than simply preparation for work.

How foolish we are to consider that we can carry out the work of God without continually talking to Him and listening to Him. What arrogance; yet, how easily all of us fall prey to that belief. The work escalates, it demands our focus. The discipline of daily life and ongoing worship in the life of the worker gets swallowed up by the work itself. Do not presume to do the work of God from any other foundation than that of ongoing worship of God Himself. How can we possibly think we will have wisdom, untiring love for the sheep, or strength to persevere in conflict unless we sit daily at the foot of the Savior who said to us, “But one thing is necessary” (LUKE 10:42). Only one. Not two, not several. Only one. Not sometimes, not as a nice addition, only one. Getting the work done is not that one thing. Worshiping, listening and learning at the feet of Jesus is the one thing necessary. Take heed to yourself, lest you be seduced.

We must take heed to ourselves and not just our doctrine. There are seductions in ministry that can lead us away from Jesus. Ministry itself can woo us away from the Master. We can get so caught up in shepherding that we forget we are sheep. The work can swallow up the worship of God.

The God who called you to Himself to serve came in the flesh to minister. He knows what ministry is like. He understands its seductions, its pulls and its lures. This God who came in the flesh has ministered before us, and He lived utterly devoted to His Father, His Master. He lived as a lamb who followed His Shepherd,

and He has shown us how to walk this earth. He has done what He has called us to do. He has gone before each of us in the work of ministry.

Remember the story of the large crowd of people in great need following Jesus? There were 5,000 of them. Jesus fed them all and had 12 baskets left over. I think we would call that successful ministry. The people did. They deemed Him the prophet and wanted to make Him king. Now Jesus is King! Ultimately He would be established as King forever. So, what the people wanted was what God ultimately wanted. How easy, at that juncture, to be fooled and let the ministry dictate. The people seemed ready. They seemed to want what God wanted. But Jesus' response was to withdraw by Himself to a mountain and pray. It would appear that He lost His opportunity. He walked away. Why? Because He served His Master more than His ministry. His choices were not dictated by opportunity or need or even the goodness of the goal. Just because something is good does not mean it ought to be done. When the day comes and the people you serve push you to a goal that appears to be God-honoring, remember Jesus. He is your Master, not the ministry. The goal must be His. The way the goal is achieved must be His. The timing must be His. And you? You must be wholly His. Do not be owned by the goals of ministry, no matter how lofty they are, but answer to the Master alone.

Jesus describes Himself to us as the Good Shepherd. "I am the Good Shepherd," He says (JOHN 10:11) and "If anyone serves me, he must follow me" (JOHN 12:26). God's Word says, "If anyone aspires to the offices of overseer, he desires a noble task" (1 TIM. 3:1). But look carefully at the One you follow. When you look at His entrance into ministry, you find His entrance heralded not with, "Behold the Shepherd" but with "Behold the Lamb of God" (JOHN 1:29, 36).

This is a Shepherd who is first like His sheep. He leads by demonstrating for them how to be a lamb — obedient to the

Father. His leadership as a lamb led Him to suffering, darkness and death. This was a lamb forsaken by His Shepherd. These are hardly glamorous results for a ministry. In fact, He looks something like a stupid sheep. Sheep that follow their shepherd are supposed to be protected. This sheep was submissive and led to death. If the Great Shepherd became a lamb in order to care for the sheep of God, then you and I must never forget that is who we are. We are, first and foremost, lambs. Any shepherd who forgets that he is a lamb in need of constant care of the Good Shepherd is a very dangerous undershepherd.

Secondly, good shepherds sometimes look like stupid sheep when they follow the Great Shepherd. There have been numerous occasions when at our church in Lansing, Mich., we have asked people to stop living together before we would marry them. Oftentimes we were belittled as “old fashioned” or “out of touch,” and asked “why couldn’t we be more with it,” and that is to put it politely. But I can also recall the numerous times that these people complied and later expressed their gratitude, or who came back years later and similarly expressed their gratitude for our stand on God’s Word. And when these types of things occur in the parish and members are angry because we follow the Good Shepherd and His divine Word, we are reminded that following Him may sometimes lead you to places of suffering and darkness and death. Do not let people lead you to think that following God always looks glamorous or successful. Look at what God’s hand did to the Lamb of God. But at the same time, when you find yourself in ministry and those places of darkness and death, because the Lamb of God was forsaken, you will never ever be forsaken or abandoned in your ministry. No matter how dark it is, you will always have a Shepherd and never be alone.

In **MATTHEW 4**, we see the battle between work and worship. The Spirit has led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The devil takes Jesus to a high mountain and shows Him

all the kingdoms of this world. “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me,” says Satan. Now think about that statement. He offered Jesus what his heart wanted — the world. The scriptures tell us that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He offered Jesus what He loved. Jesus wanted the world for His own. It was a good and holy God-given desire. And the enemy offered it to Him. But Jesus did not allow the work to swallow up His worship of God. In that moment, He let go of what He longed for, and He stood grounded in the worship of God and God alone.

That fact is demonstrated for us in His life again and again. His worship of God is always protected, alive and active in His life and ministry. The tremendous needs of the suffering people; the press of the crowd; the criticism of His leadership; the death of His beloved cousin John. Again and again we see that He went apart to pray, listen and obey. What He practiced throughout His three years of ministry was tested on the cross, the place where, when He was even forsaken by God, He cried out, “My God” (Ps. 22). Even the work of His death for you and me did not swallow up His worship of God.

Pastors, it is a good and noble task that we have been called to do. We are here because God, by His Spirit has called us to shepherd His people in various ministries. It is good work. But it is also dangerous work. It is work that tried and tested the One we are called to serve. It will test and try you. Do not be surprised when that is so. Love your Master more than your ministry. Love your Shepherd more than your sheep. And, worship your God more than your work. Remember Paul’s message: “Take heed to your ministry that you have received in the Lord and see that you fulfill it. Take heed to yourself.”

CHAPTER TWO: LESSONS LEARNED TO BE “FIT FOR LIFE”

One of the things I do as a faculty member at some area universities is supervise other counselors who work with students and families. The one thing I continually remind those counselors about is the power they hold to help or to hurt their clients. Whenever you enter the broken life of another human being, you become extremely important to that person. To have such potential to help also means you have great potential to harm. There are a number of things that we have to be on guard against as we enter the lives of people. I will mention a few.

There are many things we can say about being an unfit shepherd. A most important word is given to us in **EZEKIEL 34**, where we hear about the shepherds of Israel feeding themselves on their flocks. These were people called by God to take care of His sheep. Instead, they used these sheep for themselves. We are told they drank the milk of the sheep, wore their wool and ate their flesh. In other words, they took whatever it was that the sheep had to offer, and they used it for themselves.

The most obvious corollary in pastoring is when the pastor uses the sheep for whom he is caring for his own sexual satisfaction. This happens far too often. But, it is also easy to use your sheep in far more subtle ways. It is easy for us to feed off of others emotionally in order to feel loved, or important or wise. We can ask questions of someone in order to titillate ourselves or gain information about a third party. Any time a pastor orchestrates a relationship in order to feed an appetite or need in himself, he has behaved as an unfit shepherd.

Another way we can become unfit shepherds is when we encourage others to feed on us **alone**. Now certainly those who come to us for help will need to feed on us. They will, in essence,

need for us to be broken bread and poured out wine. The weak need us to be strong; the foolish need us to be wise. Those who doubt need us to have faith. These are good and right things. Such work, however, can be very seductive because it can lead you to think that we, alone, can give such things adequately. Somehow the gifts of others in the body of Christ begin to pale by comparison. There is a very fine line between understanding how important we can be in a broken life and thinking that we are necessary to that life.

When we begin to think that we are necessary, we begin to take the place of the one we are called to follow, point to and share. We are never to steal the hearts of others for ourselves, but rather, we are to hand them over to God. People come to us hungry for things like love, hope, truth and faith. But it is not us that awaken such desires in them, and we cannot ultimately fulfill those desires. We can, by our lives, give them a glimpse of the One who is using us to draw them to Himself — but God help us if hungry sheep find us only at the end of their journey. We are servants of the Good Shepherd, and whenever we fail to point to the satisfaction that resides in Jesus Christ alone, we are unfit servants.

A final way we can be unfit shepherds is when we misrepresent the Good Shepherd in any way. In the Gospel of John, chapter 10, Jesus speaks about Himself as the Good Shepherd. Such a statement follows many examples of unfit shepherding by the Pharisees. They were unfit because they were opponents of Jesus and His message, and they attempted to destroy Jesus' influence in the lives of others.

Whenever we misrepresent the Good Shepherd, we, too, have become opponents of His message. Wherever you and I feed on things like status, reputation, pride, praise, money or power, we hide the influence of Jesus. However important it is to speak the truth, when we neglect mercy and compassion, we become dangerous shepherds. When we do not attend to our own obedience, we destroy the influence of Jesus in the lives of others.

The word of Jesus to the unfit shepherds of His day was, “Woe,” which is essentially an expression of grief. So, wherever you and I function as unfit shepherds in the lives of others, we bring great grief to the heart of the Father.

God’s final word, however, to all of us pastors is not “Woe.” Rather, His word is one of love, mercy and grace. The cross has our names on it. God’s love did not go out to an anonymous mass of humanity within which we are simply included as a member of the species. His love letter does not come addressed, “Dear Occupant.” He gathers His sheep one by one, calling each by name (JOHN 10:3). A name is a proper noun, not a common noun. Your name is uniquely yours. He knows you by name because that is what love is: intimate, personal, knowledge of the beloved.

It is utterly important for us pastors to remind ourselves again and again of the central teaching of Scripture and of the Reformation: the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. It is a solid certainty. God is love. God is a lover, not a manager, businessman, accountant, owner or puppet-master. What He wants from us is not a technically correct performance. He wants our hearts. We need to relearn this simple but liberating truth. We may think God wants actions of a certain kind, but God wants people of a certain sort. In Christ our Lord, by faith, we are now those certain kinds of people.

God continues to teach many things to that certain kind of person who also serves as a pastor. Recognizing that God has many more lessons for us, let’s focus on four specific teachings: humility, restraint, service and leadership.

LESSON ONE: HUMILITY

The first lesson that we have learned from our great and good Shepherd is the lesson of humility. The Scripture says this in PHIL. 2:6-8: “Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by

taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” The Lamb of God identified with and served those who were cursed.

Most of us would say that to identify with an accursed thing is abnormal. We suspect that, like us, you prefer people to whom you have a natural affinity. When you are in group of people, you prefer, if given a choice, people who take baths, are relatively bright and relationally adept. Jesus Christ identified Himself with those whose personalities or abnormalities cut them off from others. He identified with the demon possessed, the blind, the diseased and the dead. In order to reach those who feel cut off from the living, He was cut out of the land of the living.

It is not our nature to identify with an accursed thing or person. You and I see the afflicted, and we back up. We are repulsed by crime, disease, sickness and death. We have an aversion for the tormented, the odd and the unacceptable. I remember years ago when I saw clients who were abused sexually as children. I have never been abused, and I know that I have the privilege of having a mind completely free of any memories of abuse. I can walk through life and never have to worry about such a memory floating to the surface of my mind or being triggered by something in my environment. Because it doesn't exist. One person I saw in the early years was a woman who had been horribly abused sexually as a child. I found myself experiencing just a bit of the trauma she had experienced as I connected with her. I didn't like those feelings and thoughts. I wrestled with myself, voicing my preferences: I don't want to do this kind of work. I don't even want these pictures in my brain, affecting me in this manner.

But Jesus did. Jesus who in His relationship with, and saving ministry to all of mankind, lays aside the constant use of His divine power and glory, now becomes like a servant and lets Himself be made like those He served. Jesus, who is God untouched by

the muck and the mire of sin, did not think about what He had as a thing to be grasped, namely the glories of heaven, but in the incarnation became like a servant and let Himself be made like those He served.

One person asked me, “After all these years, does your head ever get mixed up about where your memories stop and others begin?” That is a great question, and I have to say that sometimes I do get mixed up. Sometimes my mind and my feelings get mixed up and feelings and thoughts arise out of my identification with survivors and those I have been called to serve rather than from my own experience. It is only through the power of Christ that we can humble ourselves and identify with those whose nature, experience or history is different from our own. If we are to follow the Good Shepherd, we must go there. For this is the kind of shepherding He did. He so identified with the objects of His redemptive work that He became a lamb.

There is a second arena in which we have learned this lesson in humility. The Shepherd we desire did not seek to build His reputation. He emptied Himself of those things that elevated Him. He demanded no recognition, and He did not complain that Nazareth was too limited a sphere for His great abilities. He never dominated those under Him. It is very grievous, but nonetheless true, that in recent decades we have been infiltrated with the idea that bigger is better, more means more important, and worship belongs to things like status, money, and power. Now, I am not foolish enough to suggest that bigger is always worse, or that more is always bad, or that status, money, or power are inherently evil. What I will say is that such things are of this earth, and they are transient and certainly not worthy of our worship.

I believe my wife, Casey, has modeled this second kind of humility for me. When we were first married, she was immediately published in *Leadership* magazine, among others, and she had the potential to become a great writer. I think she still can and

hope that she will. However, we were, at that time, in the process of having babies — or, at least she was. She set aside the opportunity to make a name for herself in the academic community and world, and instead, she made a name for herself with her children: mommy.

Now understand this. She adores her children, but she also loved her work. It was not an easy thing for her to do. She also struggled with the fact that God had gifted her and called her to do some things in the literary field. It seemed rather puzzling that God would ask her to lay down that which He had clearly given. But, it was in that place that she learned something of setting aside a good thing that was rightfully hers for the sake of others. In that place, she learned that God had indeed called her to do some exceptional things in her life, but He had also called her to be exceptional in the ordinary — to be holy in small places. He called her to be loving with little people and go unrecognized and unapplauded. It is a lesson that she and I have had to learn again and again — not just with little people, but with slow people, mean people, difficult people and resistant people. David and Pat would say the exact same things, especially David of Pat and of her “sidelining” her career (teaching, writing Christian musicals and programs, ecclesial art design) to raise their children and take care of her family, particularly when enduring tremendous obstacles.

If we would follow this Shepherd, we must learn that greatness resides not in what we have and not in what we do. True greatness resides in freedom to set aside what we have and what we do at His bidding in order to love whatever sheep He has placed in front of us with a taste of the love of God.

LESSON TWO: RESTRAINT

A second lesson we have learned from this Shepherd over the years is the lesson of restraint. Now, restraint means a voluntary limitation of oneself. Let me give you an example. Every year my wife and I visit my brother and sister-in-law to attend a

football game at Michigan State University, and every year we visit a convenience store to purchase ice for the coolers. At that convenient store is a young man who is mentally disabled. He is a very nice man, but one who is slow and who seems to be more of a nuisance than a help to most people. One day as we went to the store, I heard him asking people, “Can I help you?” Each time the response was, “No,” and the people hurried by him. He was in the way. Then he came to me. “Do you need help?” I, too, said “No.” Then he asked, “Are you sure, sir?” Everyone rushing by said no. But I stood there and said, “Yes, I do need help.” With that, he carefully placed the bags of ice in my car. He did it very slowly and deliberately. When he was done, he cocked his head and said, “Sir, did I do a good job?” I simply replied, “Yes, you did a good job.” And then he told me, “Lots of men get mad at me ‘cuz I don’t do so good.” He looked at me and said, “Thanks so much. Have a good day.”

I went home from that encounter so upset, asking God to teach me a lesson in that little scene, for I thought that young man was the voice of God speaking to me. This man suffers in ways that I have never experienced in my life. He is treated daily with anger, frustration and annoyance. God called me, that day, to restrain myself — my adequacy, my skills, my independence, my intellectual ability — in order to bestow dignity, value and esteem on one who suffers. I thought to myself, is that not a picture of God’s incarnation? Is that not a tiny taste of what He did for me? God of Very God — a baby! Infinite wisdom in a little boy. Creator of the worlds, a carpenter. Master of the seas, riding in a boat. Eternal life, yet dead and buried. I didn’t want to stop myself for a man with a disability. Jesus says to us, “Why do you call me Lord and do not do what I say?” I say I love Jesus and that I’m a Lutheran pastor, yet then I turn around and treat someone who is struggling with a confused and/or darkened mind with impatience and intolerance?

I will not wait for a trauma survivor to speak the unspeakable unless I have learned the lesson of restraint. I will be intolerant with the repeated failings of an addict unless I have learned the lesson of restraint. I will refuse to walk through the valley of the shadow of death with one who is sick and dying unless I have learned the lesson of restraint. The work of shepherding often requires that we limit our words because people who suffer cannot manage a barrage of words. We have to restrain the loudness of our voices, the suddenness of our movement and the intensity of our emotions if we are to make room for the scared, the suffering, the traumatized, the ill and the dying. Often when faced with the need to restrain ourselves in some way, we say, “Let’s not meet. I can’t do that.” I’m not sure where we get the idea that we should only do those things that come naturally or easily to us. My Shepherd has been teaching me that I cannot shepherd His sheep by simply doing what comes naturally. That which is immeasurable came to us in a very tiny package. If we would follow Him, we too must learn the lesson of restraint to bring life and light to His sheep.

LESSON THREE: SERVICE

The third lesson I have learned from the Good Shepherd is the lesson of service. We are trained to serve others. We counsel, we tend, we pastor, we teach. In doing those things, we are serving others. I believe that the service the Great Shepherd has called us to goes beyond those things we have been trained to do.

MATTHEW 25 is an important text. Jesus speaks about returning to His glory and the great judgment. He says to His sheep who are to enter His glory that the fruit of faith was seen in their lives, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was in prison and you came to me” (**MATT. 25:35–36**). These acts were simply evidence of their faith. He’s talking about acts of service to particular kinds of people. I would like to look at those acts for a moment.

What do you think it's really like to serve somebody who is truly hungry or thirsty? I don't mean they skipped dinner. They are starving. Hungry, thirsty, starving people are people in great need, and they are very demanding. They do not care about you. They do not think clearly. They want their needs met now. They are desperate. They clamor, and they grab.

What's it like to serve a stranger? A stranger is basically someone who is alien to you. They seem odd. You don't know why they do what they do. You can't serve strangers effectively until you take the time to understand them. If you don't bother to understand them, you will serve them in such a way that could be frightening or offensive to them.

What's it like to serve a naked person? Naked people usually want to hide from us. They feel exposed. It requires great care to tend them without humiliating them. They don't want you close. They want you to go away. But, you cannot cover their nakedness unless you move in close. Their ambivalence is overwhelming.

What's it like to serve a sick person? Sick people focus on their pain, and that is all they can think about. Their interest in you is only how you can help them. They can be exhausting! Sick people live in small worlds. Sick people talk about what hurts. Sick people want to show you their scars and stitches from surgery. They are needy and often times messy. They require constant oversight.

What's it like to serve a prisoner? You can't serve a prisoner unless you go to prison. It means you enter a place of locked doors and little light. You must enter a place where you are watched and there is little trust.

Jesus' redemptive work demanded identification at the deepest level, in all of the most shocking varieties of human suffering. As the Master, so must the servant be. The amazing thing is that Jesus said the sheep who did this, did it for Him. He doesn't say when others were hungry and you give them food that you did it

for them. Instead, He says, “For I was hungry,” and He defines the “I”: “as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (MATT. 25:40).

The lesson I have learned is that it is not simply that I’m called to serve people, but rather that in serving those who suffer, I am, in some way that is still rather mysterious to me, serving the One I follow. Every time I encounter grief, I am encountering a grief that He bore. Every time I encounter a stranger or a prisoner, I am encountering something my Lord endured while He was here. The lesson of service is this: You and I live in solemn trust to the afflicted, to mediate to them all that is there for them in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In doing so, we are serving the Lord Christ.

LESSON FOUR: LEADERSHIP

The final lesson is the lesson of leadership. When Jesus speaks of Himself as shepherd He says that “he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (JOHN 10:3). He goes on ahead of His sheep. The lesson of leadership is this: I must go where I would take the sheep I tend. As the shepherd goes, so go the sheep. After all, we are to be imitators of Christ (EPH. 5:1). A colleague once commented that if you ever seek therapy, you need to be very careful to whom you go. If you are in therapy long enough, you become much like your therapist. It is true. You identify with your shepherd. As the shepherd goes, so go the sheep. Do I really think I can lead another person out of a life of deceit if I live with ongoing sin in my life? Do I think I can lead someone from bitterness and revenge against their spouse if I harbor such things in my heart against my own? Do I think I can lead someone out of their captivity to an addiction if I, in my own life, am slave to something else? Do I think I can lead someone in my professional ministry with grace and love when I do not live graciously with those in my own private life?

One client I saw, who had made the decision to stay with a very difficult husband and learn how to love him, asked me one day, “Tell me, do you work this hard to love your own wife?” It was a great question, coming, not just from her, but from God Himself. It gave me great pause. Now, our wives are very easy to love, and Casey and I have been married 24 years, and Pat and I have been married 29 years, and they have been filled with incredible blessings. However, if I’m going to teach this woman Christ-like ways to love the man she lives with, then I must be the kind of shepherd who goes before my sheep, and I need to love my wife in the same way that I am teaching my client to love her husband.

The lesson of leadership is not that shepherding is about imparting knowledge or skills alone, but rather, it is about going before, in order to impart life (JOHN 10:3-4). Isn’t that exactly what the Good Shepherd did for us? There is absolutely nothing that Jesus asks of us that He has not first accomplished in His own body. He calls us to walk in the truth. He is truth. He calls us to love one another, and He has loved us perfectly unto death. He calls us to carry the burden of others. He was broken by ours. He calls us to enter the muck and mire of others’ lives. He entered the muck and mire of ours.

It is said that the eastern shepherd uses his pet lambs to gather his lost sheep. The pet lambs are those so fond of being near the shepherd that he takes them and scatters them around the various hills. In the evening, when he returns home, he calls out to the pet lambs, and they immediately run to follow the shepherd — and the lost lambs follow the pet lambs. Our Shepherd goes before us. Those of us who would serve in leadership positions as His undershepherds must be so attached to Him that, no matter where He places us out on the hills, others will be induced to follow Him because we have gone before and shown the way. The redemptive work of Christ demanded identification at the deepest level with all the most shocking varieties of human suffering. As

the Master was, so must the servant be. He who dealt with the enemy occupation of the human heart has called us to do the same.

As we follow lessons such as these, we'll be taught many more. As we are taught the lesson of humility, we will see eternal glory setting aside rank and honor. As we are taught the lesson of restraint, we will remember the Lamb, who is God, who went uncomplainingly forth in the flesh. As we are taught the lesson of service, we will remember the Sovereign over all, washing feet and touching the untouchable. As we are taught the lesson of leadership, we will see Him going before, being and doing what He calls us to be and do. For you and I to follow the Shepherd is to enter into the fellowship of His sufferings. It means, like Him, you and I must get down into the muck and mire of the world. To enter into the fellowship of His sufferings is to, little bit by little bit, know Him more fully and love Him more deeply. And, the more we are willing to follow Him into the dual mysteries of iniquity and suffering, the more of His beauty we will see.

CONCLUSION

Ask you again. What are your scars, now that Dr. Salminen and Rev. Maier have so carefully modulated the prescription of your oft myopic eyes so that you can see your cuts and scrapes with more direct focus? Because it is your calling as undershepherd to tend the flock, do you have a new understanding of the importance of your personal “lambness?”

Living as a favored lamb under the Good Shepherd prepares you best to lead other sheep to Him. Your own dependency on Christ is essential to your calling.

What are your scars? Is the task of ministry, itself, an indolent cancer that slowly eats at the very relationship you possess by grace through faith with Christ, threatening to divert the nurturing relationship with Jesus that is based on love and obedience to Him? When ministry robs the joy and vibrancy from marriage, parenthood and personal devotion to God’s Word, then the ministry becomes the master, not Christ, and you are deeply in need of scar revision. Take heed.

What are your scars? The substitution of busyness for the business of ministry, when it crowds out time for public and personal worship of the King, leaves scars deep beneath the skin’s surface on the very essential organs for life. Prayer, and especially meditative praying of the Word — that is, Word-saturated prayer coupled with faithfulness to the Sacraments — is the balm of life in which God works in us His healing presence. We are reminded again of Jesus’ ensemble cast of family friends from Bethany, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Mary has chosen what is better (sitting at the feet of the Word), and it will not be taken from her, says the Lord.

I am taken by the authors' statement (*see page 21*) that "We may think that God wants actions of a certain kind, but God wants people of a certain sort." The aspects of ministry that define stuff that we have to do invariably leave dense scar tissue; dead tissue. However, ministry that flows from stuff that we get to do because we are, by grace, people set apart, anointed as His chosen (favored) lambs, create life, abundance, vibrancy and longevity. God calls us to be baptismal people and gives us His Holy Spirit to grow and mature us in faith and make us fragrant. The unnatural intention of being humble in service, being transparent rather than aloof, being a non-anxious presence in the chaos and squalor of 21st century life, is to live baptismally.

To serve, understanding the primary importance of our relationship with God, self and others rather than the evolutionary survival of the fittest, is a keystone for life. Serving and glorifying God, seeing ourselves as the least and last rather than the first, is living baptismally.

Understanding that the best way to grasp what it means to serve others, as Luther reminds us in his sermon on GAL. 5:14-15, "... is to look into your own heart, and it will tell you how you ought to love your neighbor as yourself."³

Understand what it is like to walk in another person's shoes, live in their broken relationships, suffer the type of imprisonment to poverty and injustice that they do, in order identify with them at the basest of levels. That is, then, to do it to the Lamb Himself — to serve baptismally.

Finally, to lead by example, as broken and often uninspiring as we might be within our humanness, is to lead baptismally.

³ Martin Luther, trans. Theodore Graebner, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* [1535] (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1949), 216-236.

It is a great conundrum. How could suffering, bearing scars, getting into the disruptive circumstances of being human to serve Him possibly produce abundance? Yet, that is where God promises to heal us, bless us, and prosper us all the days of our life so that we may dwell in His house with joy and abundance forever. He does that for one simple reason. His Son paid the price on the cross and made us His own. Thanks be to God.

QUESTIONS

The authors have written some initial questions for the foreword and continued the practice for each chapter in this book to enhance what they pray will be a growth and maturation experience for readers in their relationship with the Lord. These questions can be used privately, with a spouse or an accountability partner, or corporately in a larger context, for example, a gathering of fellow pastors or other men. Some wrap-up questions cover the Conclusion.

The “Warming Up” questions are meant to bring the readers to a place where they are comfortable with being open to honest discussion, as well as to establish a focus for the remainder of the questions and study.

The “Digging Deeper” questions begin to explore topics on a deeper level in two ways: First, opportunity is given to dig into the Holy Scriptures or other cogent citations; and second, whenever the Scriptures are explored, the Holy Spirit is also at work to move our spirits — to plant or water some seeds that have been or are being planted for growth and maturity.

The “Anchoring” questions are to help funnel the insights gained from the discussion in the first two sections (Warming Up and Digging Deeper) into a few specific truths to be remembered and/or translated into action items. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (JAMES 1:22).

FOREWORD

1. Dr. Echrich mentioned scars in his opening comments. Most of us have our physical scars, marks we carry in our body. How about emotional, spiritual, or relational ones? Why are they harder to carry? What makes it so difficult to talk about them?
 2. How does knowing that Jesus carries His scars for all eternity help you address your own scars?
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INTRODUCTION

Warming Up:

1. Maier and Salminen stated that Peter is the apostle that basically makes us feel good. Do you agree? Disagree? Why?

Digging Deeper:

2. This may be an obvious question with an obvious answer, but in **JOHN 1:42**, why does Jesus refer to Peter as a rock?
3. Would you agree that it is very hard to see past our own sin and regret? Why? Please read **PSALM 32** and share your insights as you read. How do the examples of Peter and the word of God (**1 JOHN 1:8; ROM. 6:14**) help us look sin straight in the face and not run from it?
4. The authors stated, “Sin is boring compared to grace.” Do you agree? In our world it seems the exact opposite. Why?
5. How does God use brokenness in your life?

How can this be a tremendous gift for our clergy? There is more to see in our lives than our sin, but personal sin seems to be so difficult for brother clergy to address personally with one another and deal with. Why? What can we do so that we can

be both vulnerable and safe with one another? How would that contribute to needed healing? To honoring our Lord, the Great Shepherd of the sheep?

Anchoring:

6. In **JOHN 20:27**, Jesus shows His scars. Why is this significant? Does this have any specific meaning for you and me as we talk about our scars?
7. Oscar Wilde wrote from prison regarding sorrow, “Where there is sorrow there is holy ground. Some day people will realize what that means. They will know nothing of life till they do.” What do you think he meant? Do you agree?
8. Read **Is. 53:3**. What most saddens you as you read this verse? What most “wins” and “cheers” your spirit as you read this verse? Why?
9. Does it feel as if your pain and sorrow are “written large” and that people may know the sin or shortcomings that grieve you? Or worse yet, that they might find out? Is there something that enslaves you to the point that you would never share it with anyone, even those closest to you? What is it about us that makes us terrified to share our pain and sorrow?

Read **JOHN 8:31–36**. What is the good news here that is meant to set us free from our fears ... and our “slaveries?”

CHAPTER ONE:

Warming Up:

1. Have you ever felt as if you had to be Superman? When? What happened? Superman could never let his secret out. Is that somewhat true for us as men and as clergy?

2. Seminary education and training alone do not equip a man for the office of the public ministry. Why not? What else needs to happen for the man of God to be equipped?
3. When you entered the seminary, what were you taught were some of the most important things to make you ready for the ministry? Why is education alone insufficient?

Digging Deeper:

4. Read **1 TIM. 4:16**. How does this verse strike you initially? Of the two emphases in this verse, which one is easier for you? Why? Which one is harder? Why?
5. How do you “take heed unto yourself?” In what areas does this pose a problem? What can you do about it?
6. What are some of the seductions in ministry you face? The writers stated that the work of ministry can compete with our love for the Master. Is this true? If so, how? What do we need to be aware of? How can that change?
7. The authors wrote, “When the demands of ministry shape your character into something other than the reflection of the character of Jesus Christ, you have traded masters.” Do you agree? What literally happens when you trade masters? What can be done about it?
8. Many men graduate and are filled with a wonderful sense for mission and ministry. This passion, however, can somehow get beaten out of them quickly. Why?
9. Have you been tempted to be successful rather than faithful? If so, how does this temptation show itself?
10. Have the demands of ministry affected your character in a negative way? Has anyone close to you ever noticed and commented on this — that maybe you are changing, but not always for the better?

11. We all know the experience of watching our flock do silly things. Share with each other some of those experiences and how you handled them.
12. How easy is it to forget that we are little lambs in need of the Good Shepherd?
13. Is it true that the work of ministry can easily crowd out the worship of God? How does this happen?

Anchoring:

14. Are you a “pray-er” not just in public, but in private? With your spouse? Kids? Elders? What can you do to make this a reality in your life? Why is it so hard?
15. Read the story of the feeding of the 5,000 in **JOHN 6:1-15**. What thoughts come to mind as you read this text? Why did Jesus walk away? Does this have any meaning for you in terms of the demands of ministry? How? What are they?
16. What significance does it have for you that our Lord’s entrance into ministry is heralded, not with behold the Shepherd, but with “behold the Lamb?”
17. When we follow the Good Shepherd, do we sometimes look like stupid sheep? How? What does this mean for our ministries?
18. Read **MATTHEW 4**, the temptation narrative. How are these temptations the ones you face? How did Jesus handle them? How do you, and can you, handle them? Who can help you with them?

CHAPTER 2

Warming Up:

1. Read **EZEKIEL 34** and discuss the marks of unfaithful shepherds.
2. How can we use the sheep of the congregation for our own satisfaction? How easily does this happen?
3. How tempting is it to get our sheep to feed on us alone? Don't move past this question too quickly. Sit with it. Think about it. Ponder this one.
4. The authors stated that there is a very fine line between understanding how important we are and thinking that we are necessary. What's the very distinct difference? What does this mean to you and for your ministry?
5. How were the Pharisees unfit shepherds? How are we? How can we remain faithful undershepherds?
6. One person has said that lack of obedience among clergy is the number one problem in our church. Is this true? Even if it's not the number one problem, how is lack of obedience a problem for us and our church?
7. The authors stated that our Lord's last word to us is not one of woe. Rather, it is of grace and love. It is also personal. What does this mean to you personally? How can we communicate that to one another?

Digging Deeper:

8. The Lamb of God identified and served those who were cursed. What does this mean for you and your ministry?
9. The authors stated that it is not our nature to identify with those who are so different from us. Would you agree? Disagree? Why? How can we learn to overcome the differences?

10. We must go where He leads us, and sometimes that is into dark, secretive, sin-filled areas. How do you prepare yourself to do this?
11. Let's face it, reputation is a big deal for all of us. In the ministerium, there certainly seems to be a pecking order. Do you agree? What is it? How do we get sucked into this reputation issue?
12. Both authors offered illustrations of how their wives modeled humility for them. Give examples of people in your life who model humility for you. How does this affect you? How can you be holy in small places?
13. How do we restrain ourselves? Be specific. Do we need to? If so, when and where?
14. How do we use our words and tone in a way that can be seen as domineering? One of the authors is a very big man — 6-foot-6-inches and 250 pounds. He is mindful that his size intimidates people (although not the co-author, of course). What do we need to be mindful of?
15. Discuss service to those who are so different from us: the naked, the hungry and those in prison. Please read **MATT. 25:40**. How can we learn to see Jesus in others?
16. In what ways do we identify with our Lord who served?

Anchoring:

17. I must go where I want my sheep to go. We need to ask ourselves, “Are there things in my life that are getting in the way of my leading God’s people? What are they? Do I have sins that I need to confess? Are there brother clergy or others who can help?”

18. What do we need to do to become supportive and helpful to a brother pastor who is in need?
 19. Do you work as hard to love your spouse as you work to help members in your own parish? If not, what do you need to do? How long will it take for you to do this? How about starting today?
 20. The authors stated, “We may think that God wants actions of a certain kind, but God wants people of a certain sort.” Do you agree? What will it look like for us to be those people of a certain sort?
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CONCLUSION:

1. What is the greatest blessing that you can derive from your “lambness?” What can you and will you do, consistently, to maintain your “lambness” perspective in ministry?
2. Please read **LUKE 10:38-42**. In the chaotic busyness of ministry, what is still the one thing needed?
3. How will spending time at Jesus’ feet help us to remember who we are — and inevitably, help us be a blessing to those we serve?
4. Dr. Echrich stated, “Serving and glorifying God, seeing ourselves as the least and last rather than the first (and I would add) and foremost ... is living baptismally.” Do you agree? How would this thought help you in your life, in your ministry, and in your service of others?
5. Please end the questions by reading and meditating upon **PHIL. 3:8-14**.

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