

### **Week 5 Guide – The Good Shepherd**

- Read each daily Devotional Reading using the SOAP method and Daily Devotional to help you reflect.
- Read the article below prior to group
- Think through the small group and accountability questions after the article

#### **Devotional Readings**

Sunday	Isaiah 41:17-20
Monday	1 Peter 3:8-18
Tuesday	Psalm 23
Wednesday	John 10
Thursday	Acts 17:22-31
Friday	John 15:1-8
Saturday	Psalm 148

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#### **The Lambpack**

*What's the armor of God for, anyway?*

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*by Joseph C. Aldrich Issue #32 March/April 1986*

REMEMBER THE cowboys and Indians, the war whoops and circled wagons, the war paint and cowboy hats, the smell of gunpowder and the flash of flaming arrows? From a circled-wagon fortress, settlers fired hot lead through the dust and smoke at swarming Indian braves.

If instead of cowboys and Indians the enemies were the forces of hell versus the Church, who would be firing from the circled fortress and who would be riding the horses? Would the Church troops or the dervishes of hell have grease paint on their faces? Would Christ, the Head of the Church, wear a Stetson or eagle feathers? ". . . I will build my church . . .," He said (Mt. 16:18); you finish the sentence. In the cowboys and Indians imagery, did Christ go on to say, ". . . and the circled wagons will defeat the attacking Indians," or ". . . and the attacking Indians will defeat the circled wagons?"

Is the Church an attacking force, or a fortress to be defended?

The Bible declares that the weapons of the Christian are designed to pull down strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4). The gates of the stronghold of hell will not be able to hold out against them.

Why, then, have we developed a defensive, fortress, holy huddle mentality? How do we change this unbiblical mindset? Make no mistake about it: we must change it if the Church is going to extend the Lordship of Christ over the darkness of Satan's stronghold. Our actions are determined by our current dominant thoughts. If we visualize the Church as a fortress, our strategy, our vision, our measurements of success will reflect that perception.

Is the Church a haven until Heaven, a refuge until the rapture?

"Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war" is for today! "When the saints go marching in" is not for today. Is it right, then, that the average local church is like a department store where the employees show up at 7:30 a.m., march in, lock the doors, and sell merchandise to each other all day?

"But," you say, "the Lord said we're lambs in the wolfpack. When the wolves attack, fur and lamb chops fly in every direction. Baby sheep are helpless, defenseless, and flock together for protection. There's safety in numbers!"

Before you relegate the lamb chops to the wolfpack, run the lambs through Eph. 6. Over the doorposts of this chapter is a sign that reads, "God's Armament Depot." Ever see a God-armored, sword-swinging lambpack route a flock of wolves? Can't you just see that attack lamb, fairly frothing at the mouth, chasing a terrified "roaring lion" back into the darkness of night! Resist him, we're told, and he'll flee (Jas. 4:7). In the spiritual realm, lambs chase lions and scatter wolves.

We need some attack lambs—with steel wool!

Why do lions flee and wolves scatter? They're not scared of lambs in the physical or spiritual realm. It's shepherds they can't get along with. It's good for lambs to remember that.

Wolves aren't always frontal in their attacks. They learned long ago, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." And so they do. The chief Shepherd tells His lambs to watch out for them (Mt. 7:15-23). "They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (v. 15).

A sheep is a sheep is a sheep when it eats grass, grows wool, and bleats a lot. But a sheep is not always a sheep in the sanctuary or the seminary. Wolves sit in the pews and on the platform every Sunday. Some pass the plate and pocket the proceeds. Others preach pious platitudes, all fog in the area of the crucial.

Sheep-covered wolves are deceivers. They question, deny, and misinterpret the Shepherd's instructions. They encourage folks to view the Church as a fortress to be defended, a haven to hide in.

They've talked the armor right off lots of attack lambs. A little sin punches holes in the breastplate of righteousness; a seed of doubt corrodes the shield of faith; a limited vision distorts the image of the Church, blunting its impact.

Soon the attack lambs attack—each other! Why is it that we are the only army that shoots our wounded soldiers? Some lambs have to wear their armor to protect them from other lambs in the same fold! Selah!

## YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE VISION

So how do we get the attack lambs after the wolfpack? In large measure, we focus on vision. Where there is no vision, local lambpicks die (Prov. 29:18). That is, they lose life, vitality, beauty, power, and impact. Feet that are not shod with the preparation and the motivation that the gospel of peace provides belong to lambs without vision. They're barn squatters. They don't care to grow, have no desire to reach out, resent newcomers, oppose new ideas. "don't grow, maintain the status quo" is their unofficial motto.

Visions are tricky things. I suppose everyone has them. Many churches don't fail, they just succeed at doing the wrong thing. Most support five or six activities. Success is generally measured on the basis of the perpetuation of those programs.

Various lamb camps (churches) around the town compete for the handful of lambs (often an endangered species) by polishing up the Sunday school, purchasing a different color of choir robe, or painting the nursery. There's nothing wrong with that . . . except that you can't recruit real attack lambs to programs. Their minds are not inflamed by small ideas. You don't recruit to programs: you recruit to vision.

The most important factor in church growth is the undershepherd's (the pastor's) positive attitude toward the future of his ministry and his regular communication of that to his flock. Written another way, it spells vision.

The leaven of the Sadducees is a vision killer. The chief Shepherd warned local lamb camps to avoid allowing it to infest the lambship (fellowship) (Mt. 16:1-12). Sadducees sell vision killer in bottles labeled "Rationalism." They didn't believe in miracles. Consequently, the Resurrection was a historical joke; life was limited to the laws of nature, to the limitations of finite existence.

Bottled rationalism takes the fizz out of God-sized dreams: "Can't do it, can't afford it . . . simple as that.

"Won't work, never has, never will. We tried it once.

"It's beyond our reach. Not in the budget.

"The sailing's smooth, don't rock the boat.

"don't need faith, we got cash."

When spiritual bang is limited to bucks, when maintenance is the measure of success, when tapping the supernatural is taboo, the Sadducees have been resurrected inside the Church. Pulpits are full of them. "Vision? Haven't got time for it. What is our strategy? What are you, some kind of pinko? don't believe in methods . . . we just let the Spirit do it."

Another way to probe around for vision is to ask, "What's your burden?" Tell me what burdens a man and I'll predict his success in ministry. Little burden, little success. Laodicean lambs are lukewarm. Neither hot nor cold, the chief Shepherd says they are "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). God spits them out. And why not! They mock Him by their lack of concern for the concerns of God. They mock Him by their lack of faith, by their flight to the hedonism of safety. Abandoning the cause of justice and righteousness, they fire squirt guns at a blazing world.

No wonder the Marxist recruiters capture the minds of millions. They have vision! No wonder the ranks of the Moonies and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi swell! They have vision! They capture allegiance by dreaming impossible dreams, championing the difficult, the painful, the costly. And they sacrifice, they give and give and give . . . for a demonically inspired lie.

Vision is a journey into the future. It is a hard climb up a difficult mountain to gain perspective and wisdom to marshal resources, time, and energy toward a worthwhile purpose. But the future is not all mystery and intrigue. Some facts are patently clear. It is appointed to men once to die and then judgment (Heb. 9:27). Judgment is eternal separation from God. All without Christ will be cast into outer darkness. It's as simple and horrible as that. The Cross, the sprinkled mercy seat, is man's only hope.

Man's only hope! Can you be content, then, with the status quo? Can you be content to limit the size and growth of your church to that which is comfortable and convenient? Can you be content to give lip service to the Great Commission? Can you be content to live a life of self-centeredness? What is your purpose? What is your vision? If it is not to give your life away in the service of and for the glory of Almighty God, it is not a worthy purpose or a noble vision. It's as simple as that.

As long as one lost soul lives in the community of a visionary, an attack lamb committed to noble purposes, the Church isn't big enough, hasn't accomplished enough, doesn't reach enough. Anything less than a burning desire to reach the entire community for Christ is a limited burden, out of step with the One who is not willing that any should perish, and, in fact, desires that all should come to repentance.

Look out wolves! Here comes the lambpack . . . backed up by the Shepherd King!

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### **Small Group Questions**

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#### **Accountability**

Nurturing Relationships - How are you developing nurturing relationships? Are you showing up? How are you making community and teamwork important to your life? How's your commitment to small group and worship going? Are you reaching your group and individual goals in this area?

#### **Open / Scripture**

1. As a child, what was your favorite pet? How did this pet respond when it heard your voice?

#### **Observation**

1. As you read this passage (John 10:1-21) what verse, phrase, or picture jumps out at you, causes you to celebrate, raises questions, or clarifies something?
2. What do the sheep, shepherd, the sheep pen and stranger represent? How does the story in chapter 9 provide one example of what this parable is about?
3. How do the sheep respond to the shepherd? How does this relate to the Pharisees' difficulty in understanding Jesus?
4. What does Jesus mean by likening himself to a gate for the sheepfold? Who are these "thieves and robbers"? How is Jesus unlike them?
5. How does Jesus identify himself with the "good shepherd" (vv. 11-15)? How does Jesus death relate to his promise in v. 10?
6. Who are the "other sheep" he must bring also? What characterizes his flock?
7. What final claim does Jesus make (vv. 17-18)? Why do his listeners respond as they do? How would you have responded?

#### **Apply**

1. What was the turning point for you in terms of hearing "God's voice" and responding?
2. How do you discern his voice from all the voices that vie for your attention?
3. How does it make you feel to think of God caring for you as the Good Shepherd?