

What to Do When Earthly Shepherds Disappoint You

One of the most significant roles described in the Bible is the role of shepherd.

But it's one that can also be abused.

Lately, our present-day news headlines have been filled with accounts of the worst possible abuse by 21st century pastor-shepherds.

For years, many Christians have watched the Roman Catholic church struggle with a tsunami of scandalous charges. Accounts of gross sexual immorality by clergy who have not only neglected to shepherd their congregations, their abuse of the flock has been egregious.

This past week, a Protestant denomination has also been in the headlines. The curtain has been torn away to reveal similar charges of sexual immorality that must grieve the heart of God in ways I can only imagine.

Back in the Old Testament, the prophets of God spoke judgment on religious leaders appointed to shepherd God's people. For example:

"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? ... I am against the shepherds. And I will require My flock from their hand" (Ezekiel 34:2b, 10b).

But God also identified *Himself* as a shepherd: "As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so I will seek out My sheep" (Ezek. 34:12a).

And, of course, Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ... I know My sheep

and am known by My own" (John 10:11, 14b).

If earthly pastor-shepherds are a picture of God's care for His people, surely the abuses seen today bring sorrow to His heart.

The Puritan preacher, Thomas Watson, once said, "The sins of the wicked anger God—but the sins of professing Christians grieve him."

There are shepherds—flawed and sinful.

Then there's the good Shepherd—perfect and holy.

The question is, will we allow the flaws of earthly shepherds to turn us away from the Good Shepherd? All too often, that's exactly what happens. Or we judge *all* earthly shepherds by the failings of a few.

Sometimes, it's not about the shepherd at all. Sometimes it's about the stubbornness of the sheep.

This week I was challenged to let the good Shepherd shepherd me. To submit to His leading. His prompting. His correction. To listen for His priorities rather than push ahead with my own. To examine my *good* intentions in the light of *God's* intentions.

Will I read Psalm 23 not just as poetic literature, but as an instruction for life?

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the

days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

I was challenged to surrender to the good Shepherd in thought, word and deed. Sometimes this means listening when He tells me to lie down and rest. Sometimes it means following as His Holy Spirit leads, even when I feel too tired to continue. But what will never change is that I—a stubborn sheep—am loved, cared for and belong to the good Shepherd, who is always at work for my ultimate good and His eternal glory.

Don't allow corrupt shepherds to tarnish your view of the good Shepherd. And don't place human, flawed shepherds—even the best of them—on a pedestal so high that they are set up for failure.

Instead, our pastor-shepherds need our prayers and our encouragement as we all love and serve the good Shepherd together.

So now I extend this same challenge to you. Regardless of the examples of earthly shepherds—good or bad—will you allow the good Shepherd to shepherd you? {eoa}

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