

# Sunday Seconds

## Shepherding God's Flock

*Selected Texts*

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# Shepherding God's Flock

## Introduction

This past spring the elders and deacons of this church held a one-day Officers' Retreat. For several months prior to that retreat the elders and deacons had been reading and discussing a book by Timothy Z. Witmer titled, *The Shepherd Leader*. The subtitle of that book really describes the emphasis of the book: *Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*. So, at the Officers' Retreat the focus of our discussion was on how to implement an effective shepherding ministry at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church. We came away from that retreat with a plan that we are in the process of implementing and, I am sure, in the coming months, we will continue to refine in order to be as effective as possible in shepherding the flock at TBPC.

In his book, Dr. Witmer opens with a "real life" scenario, with appropriate details changed. He writes:

Cathy Williams, affectionately known to many as "Kate," was born on September 22, 1953. In 1986, Cathy became a member of Covenant Church on the basis of her profession of faith and remained a member until her death on July 14, 2005. The death of Cathy Williams became a watershed moment in the pastoral shepherding ministry of Covenant Church. Coming out of a rebellious and loose lifestyle, Cathy made a profession of faith and actively participated in the life of the church. But then she began to fall into her old sinful habits. She abandoned the church and no one knew where she was; or at least no one cared to find out. Her name, however, remained on the rolls of the church, but just as a name. Shortly before her death, God placed Cathy back on the doorstep of Covenant Church. Pastoral interaction with

the dying Cathy was too brief to confirm how she stood before God. In a cloud of uncertainty, Cathy was memorialized. She will have to stand before the judgment seat to give account for her life, but before that same throne the undershepherds of the flock at Covenant will have to give account for this one lost sheep.<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that the elders and deacons deeply sense the calling of shepherding God's flock effectively here at our church. We know that there are far too many "Cathy's" that we have not shepherded well, and we are also aware that we will have to stand before the throne of God to give account for how well we have shepherded God's flock at TBPC.

In his book, *The Shepherd Leader*, Dr. Witmer sets out a plan for achieving effective shepherding. The officers, as I have mentioned, are in the process of implementing the proposed plan. The place to begin, of course, is in the Word of God. An effective shepherding ministry must be biblical.

## Lesson

So, in this lesson, based on Dr. Witmer's book, I would like to give a brief summary of the biblical foundations for an effective shepherding ministry.

### **I. The Lord described himself as the shepherd of his people and his people as the flock under his care (Genesis 48:15; Psalm 80:1; 95:6–7)**

First, the Lord described himself as the shepherd of his

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 1-2.

people and his people as the flock under his care.

When the patriarch, Jacob, was dying he called Joseph to himself. Joseph brought his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to Jacob to be blessed by him. In Genesis 48:15 we read, “And he blessed Joseph and said, ‘The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, *the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day...*’”

In addressing God, the Psalmist writes in Psalm 80:1, “Give ear, O *Shepherd of Israel*, you who lead Joseph like a flock.” The Lord described himself, through the writing of the Psalmist, as the *Shepherd of Israel*.

And in another psalm, the Psalmist describes God’s people as sheep, with the clear implication that God is the shepherd. We read in Psalm 95:6–7, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! *For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*”

So, the Lord is the shepherd of his people, and his people are the flock under his care.

## **II. The Lord’s comprehensive care included knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting his sheep (Psalm 23)**

Second, the Lord’s comprehensive care included knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting his sheep.

This truth is most clearly seen in the well-known Psalm 23: “A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd [*knowing*]; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures [*feeding*]. He leads me beside still waters [*leading*]. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake [*leading*]. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me [*protecting*]; 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 overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Throughout this beautiful Psalm, and in many more places than I indicated, we see that the Lord’s comprehensive care included knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting his sheep. And this is the core of the shepherding ministry that God entrusts to his shepherd-elders in local churches. This will be the core of our shepherding ministry here at TBPC:

- i) To know the members. Spending time getting to know more and more about each member in our Shepherding Groups.
- ii) To feed the members. Teaching God’s Word, both personally and corporately, so that each member grows in the knowledge and grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
- iii) To lead the members. Mostly this will be done as the shepherd-elders serve on the Session. But it is also done in personal ways with individual members.
- iv) To protect the members. Primarily this will be done by application of God’s Word to every area of our church’s life. But, it is also done in personal ways by helping members see pitfalls and dangers.

### **III. Leaders of God’s people such as Moses and David were described as shepherds of God’s people (Psalm 77:20; 78:70-72)**

Third, leaders of God’s people such as Moses and David were described as shepherds of God’s people.

The Psalmist says in Psalm 77:20, “*You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses.*”

And Asaph writes in Psalm 78:70–72, “*He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance. With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.*”

#### **IV. Human shepherds were sometimes fallible and faithless (Ezekiel 34:1–10; Jeremiah 23)**

Fourth, human shepherds were sometimes fallible and faithless.

There is a terrible indictment by God against the shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel 34:1–10, where we read these words, “*Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.*”

“*Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the*

wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 'Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.'

And Jeremiah 23 has a similar dire word about the fallible and faithless shepherds. Let me just read Jeremiah 23:1, "*Woe to the shepherds* who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!' declares the Lord."

**V. Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the perfect messianic shepherd to come. In him his sheep find the ultimate provision, direction, and security (Ezekiel 34:23–31; John 10:1–30)**

Fifth, Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the perfect messianic shepherd to come. In him his sheep find the ultimate provision, direction, and security.

Ezekiel writes in chapter 34:23–24 the following words from God, "*And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David*, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken." Now, the David being referred to here is not King David, because this was written about four centuries after David had died. So, the David being referred to here is the Greater King David, the promised coming Messiah.

When Jesus eventually came, some six centuries after Ezekiel's prophecy, he said in John 10:11, "*I am the good shepherd.*

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” He reiterates this in verse 14, and also elaborates on it in the following verses, “*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*”

So, Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the perfect messianic shepherd to come. In him his sheep find the ultimate provision, direction, and security.

## **VI. Jesus provides for the ongoing care of his people through elders who are called to shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1–3)**

Sixth, Jesus provides for the ongoing care of his people through elders who are called to shepherd the flock.

In his farewell speech to the shepherd-elders of the church in Ephesus, Paul said in Acts 20:28, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, *in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

And at the end of his life, when the Apostle Peter wrote to the believers scattered throughout the diaspora, he concluded with these words in 1 Peter 5:1–3, “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: *shepherd the flock of God that is among you*, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

**VII. A plurality of elders is called to care for particular sheep in particular places (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; James 5:14)**

Seventh, a plurality of elders is called to care for particular sheep in particular places.

God never intended for his church simply to have one elder to care for his sheep. His intention was for a plurality of elders to take care of his flock. And so Paul and Barnabas set up elders in the churches they founded, which we read about in Acts 14:23, “And when *they had appointed elders for them in every church*, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

When he wrote to Titus, Paul said in Titus 1:5, “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, *and appoint elders in every town* as I directed you.”

When James helps sick believers, he says they are to call for the elders, as he writes in James 5:14, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him *call for the elders of the church*, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

**VIII. Though the biblical terms for elder are synonymous, there is evidence that there are among the elders those who are particularly called and gifted to focus on the ministry of the Word of God. These elders share the responsibility for shepherding the flock (1 Timothy 5:17; Ephesians 4:11)**

Eighth, though the biblical terms for elder are synonymous, there is evidence that there are among the elders those who are particularly called and gifted to focus on the ministry of the Word of God. These elders share the responsibility for

shepherding the flock.

Among the elders there are some who are called and gifted to preach, as Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:17, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, *especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*” In our polity, we call these men “Teaching Elders” in distinction from “Ruling Elders.”

Paul also wrote in Ephesians 4:11, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, *the shepherds and teachers....*” There seems to be a double function for shepherds and teachers. It is likely that some shepherd and others teach.

**IX. Elders continue the shepherding functions of knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting the sheep. These functions are to be carried out corporately on the congregational level and personally among the people (Acts 20:20)**

Ninth, elders continue the shepherding functions of knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting the sheep. These functions are to be carried out corporately on the congregational level and personally among the people.

Paul indicated that he did this in his farewell speech to the Ephesians in Acts 20:20, when he said, “... how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public [*that is the congregational level*] and from house to house [*and that is the personal level*].”

I have already indicated that this is the core of our shepherding ministry here at Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church. Over time, we pray to become increasingly effective in shepherding God’s flock here at TBPC.

**X. Shepherd-elders will be called to give an account for their care of the sheep one day and, therefore, the sheep are to respect their authority (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:4)**

And tenth, shepherd-elders will be called to give an account for their care of the sheep one day and, therefore, the sheep are to respect their authority.

The writer to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 13:17, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, *as those who will have to give an account*. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

However, there is a reward for faithful shepherds, as Peter writes to the shepherd-elders in 1 Peter 5:4, “And when the chief Shepherd appears, *you will receive the unfading crown of glory*.”

### **Conclusion**

That is a brief summary of the biblical foundations for a shepherding ministry.

The Officers of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church ask you to pray for us that we will be able to shepherd the members of our church well in accordance with the Word of God.

We know that we will be held accountable to God for the manner in which we shepherd God’s flock.

However, we also believe that it will be in the best interest of each member to be well-shepherded.

So, pray for us. May God be glorified, and may his flock be well-shepherded. Amen.

## **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FreddyFritz).

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