

## BELONG (4)

### People who have shepherds

#### A. Introduction

##### 1. What is the church?

There are lots of ways of answering this question, but one thing it definitely is, is a place to belong.<sup>1</sup>

*"Being a Christian, by definition, involves belonging to the church – and that, in turn, means belonging to a particular church." (Sinclair Ferguson)*

By looking at the names given to or the image used to describe the church, we will see why the church is a great place to belong to.

Why is the church a place to belong?

It is a great place to belong because we belong to the people who God has called. We share the same testimony that we were sinners, but God has shown us grace by saving us.

It is a great place to belong because we belong to the people who are loved by God. We are to love those in our local church because that is how we show we belong to Christ and how we become like Christ.

It is a great place to belong because we belong to the people who gather to worship God. We are to commit to gathering with God's people to worship God, and as we do, Jesus is present, and heaven joins in.

"when you come together as a church" (1 Corinthians 11:18)

##### 2. Another image used to describe the church is one which is used throughout Scripture to describe God's people.

The church is the flock of God.

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)

"Shepherd God's flock among you." (1 Peter 5:2)

##### 3. God is THE Shepherd.

The Shepherd of individuals.

"Then 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 to this day." (Genesis 48:15)

"The LORD is my shepherd; I have what I need." (Psalm 23:1)

The Shepherd of groups of individuals.

"You led your people like a flock." (Psalm 77:20)

"He led his people out like sheep and guided them like a flock in the wilderness. He led them safely, and they were not afraid; but the sea covered their enemies. He brought them to his holy territory, to the mountain his right hand acquired." (Psalm 78:52-54)

"He protects his flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them in the fold of his garment. He gently leads those that are nursing." (Isaiah 40:11)

He gives to His people shepherds who are to be like Him in the way they shepherd.

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<sup>1</sup> A Place to Belong is the title of a book by Megan Hill on which this series is based

"You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." (Psalm 77:20)

"He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; he brought him from tending ewes to be shepherd over his people Jacob—over Israel, his inheritance. He shepherded them with a pure heart and guided them with his skilful hands." (Psalm 78:70-72)

Not every shepherd God gave was a good shepherd.

"For the shepherds are stupid: They don't seek the LORD. Therefore they have not prospered, and their whole flock is scattered." (Jeremiah 10:21)

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" This is the LORD's declaration. "Therefore, this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says about the shepherds who tend my people: You have scattered my flock, banished them, and have not attended to them. I am about to attend to you because of your evil acts"—this is the LORD's declaration. "I will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands where I have banished them, and I will return them to their grazing land. They will become fruitful and numerous." (Jeremiah 23:1-3)

God promised to gather His flock by giving them good shepherds and ultimately the Good Shepherd.

"I will give you shepherds who are loyal to me, and they will shepherd you with knowledge and skill." (Jeremiah 3:15)

"I will establish over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will shepherd them. He will tend them himself and will be their shepherd." (Ezekiel 34:23)

#### 4. Jesus is THE Good Shepherd.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11)

"But I have other sheep that are not from this sheep pen; I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd." (John 10:16)

"Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus—the great Shepherd of the sheep." (Hebrews 13:20)

"And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." (1 Peter 5:4)

He gives to His church, shepherds who are to care for His flock.

"For it says: When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people. But what does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth? The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things. And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness." (Ephesians 4:8-13)

Elders are to take care of God's church by being shepherds (a caring role), and to direct the affairs of the church by being overseers (a governing role).

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)

#### 5. A local church needs elders, like a flock of sheep needs a shepherd.

"When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36)

### **B. A local church needs shepherds**

1. Jesus warned that in the last days, the church would face particular dangers which would lead to some giving up following Him.

Two of these dangers were deception and persecution.

"Jesus replied to them, "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah,' and they will deceive many." (Matthew 24:4-5)

"Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many." (Matthew 24:11)

"Then they will hand you over to be persecuted, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of my name. Then many will fall away, betray one another, and hate one another." (Matthew 24:9-10)

It is because we are in the last days that the church needs elders.

2. It needs elders to encourage the members to remain faithful to Christ when hardships come and to protect them from false teaching.

"After they had preached the gospel in that town and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, strengthening the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith and by telling them, "It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:21-22)

"...holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it. For there are many rebellious people, full of empty talk and deception, especially those from the circumcision party. It is necessary to silence them; they are ruining entire households by teaching what they shouldn't in order to get money dishonestly." (Titus 1:9-11)

3. Elders do this by prayer, teaching sound doctrine, and by setting an example for them.

"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:4)

"An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach... able to teach." (1 Timothy 3:2)

"but being examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:3)

For this reason, they must be qualified in their character (do they have the godly character required to be a leader of God's people?), their conduct (do they live a godly life that is worth copying?), their convictions (do they hold firmly to the gospel?), and in their competence (do they have the abilities and skill required to do the work of caring for the church and directing its affairs?).

### **C. A local church with shepherds**

1. A local church with elders is a flock that is known.

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me." (John 10:14)

It has elders who know who is in the flock, and what the condition of the flock is.

It has elders who know who the individual sheep personally, spiritually, and currently.

It has elders who notice when a member starts to stray.

It has elders who are present with them, who listen to them, who pray for them, and who seek to encourage them.

2. A local church with elders is a flock that is fed.

"He lets me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters." (Psalm 23:2)

It has elders who preach and teach the Word publicly and who ensure the public gatherings are filled with Scripture.

It has elders who teach the Word privately making sure the individual sheep has what they need.

“You know that I did not avoid proclaiming to you anything that was profitable or from teaching you publicly and from house to house.” (Acts 20:20)

3. A local church with elders is a flock that is led.

“He shepherded them with a pure heart and guided them with his skilful hands.” (Psalm 78:72)

It has elders who lead the church in exaltation, edification, and evangelism.

It has elders who ensure the resources God has given to the church are used well.

It has elders who deal with problem issues and problem people in a sensitive manner.

It has elders who plan for the future by identifying, encouraging, and training up future leaders for the flock.

4. A local church with elders is a flock that is protected.

It has elders who protect the church from false teachers by silencing them.

“It is necessary to silence them; they are ruining entire households by teaching what they shouldn’t in order to get money dishonestly.” (Titus 1:11)

It has elders who protect the church from division by reconciling members.

“I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life.” (Philippians 4:2-3)

It has elders who protect the church from sin by disciplining unrepentant members.

“If he doesn’t pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn’t pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you.” (Matthew 18:17)

5. A local church with elders is a flock that is loved.

“Not to mention other things, there is the daily pressure on me: my concern for all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:28)

6. The church is a great place to belong because it is to belong to the people who have shepherds to care for them.

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” (Hebrews 13:17)

Join yourself to a flock – by publicly identifying with a local church through membership.

Receive the care of its shepherd – by accepting their ministry, learning from them, praying for them, looking to their example, supporting them, encouraging them, and by trusting that they are a good gift from THE Shepherd.

Pray for more shepherds.