

LIVING PORTRAITS OF THE CHURCH

Making Room for the Family
Selected Scriptures



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Among the many portraits of the church painted in Scripture, none is more calming and comforting than a flock of sheep under the watchful eye of a caring shepherd. And when we add the presence of a pasture full of lush, green grass, the picture is even more appealing.

But this is almost too idealistic. The truth is, not all sheep stay in the flock . . . not all shepherds are caring and faithful . . . not all that's lush and green is edible grass . . . and not all peaceful places are free of danger. Let's trace this analogy through several scriptural scenes. Hopefully, the time we spend in God's Word will leave us with a realistic awareness of what it means to be among our Shepherd's flock and how it feels to be fed from His hand.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. When It Comes to Sheep, Remember . . .

We might have the impression that sheep are smart animals, that the Bible's comparison of God's people to sheep is a high compliment. However, we should keep in mind several key facts about sheep.

First, *sheep lack any sense of direction*. They get turned around and cannot find food easily. Second, *sheep are virtually defenseless*. Furthermore, they are easily frightened. Third, *sheep are, by nature, extremely unclean*. The oils that sheep secrete ensure that sheep draw all kinds of dirt and filth into their wool. All that said, *sheep know the voice of their shepherd*. When a sheep hears the voice of its shepherd, the sheep follows.



Quotable

*God often turns
tragedies into
yet another
opportunity for
spiritual growth.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. When It Comes to Shepherds, Don't Forget . . .

Thinking well about sheep means we also need to think about those who keep sheep: the shepherds. Three factors are significant.

First, *shepherds are essential for a sheep's survival*. Since sheep cannot protect themselves or find food for themselves, they need shepherds to survive. Second, *shepherds know which sheep belong to them*. In this way, shepherds can keep track of their own sheep. And finally, *not all shepherds are faithful and trustworthy*. When trouble comes and the shepherd disappears, the sheep can know that the shepherd is not someone to rely upon.



GETTING TO THE ROOT

In It for the Money

When Jesus speaks about shepherds in John 10, the Lord offered a contrast to His own image of the Good Shepherd. He called this lesser shepherd *misthotos*, or a “hired hand.” The noun comes from the verb which means “to hire” or “to pay a wage.” The focus of Jesus’s words are unmistakable — some shepherds are in it for the money. Some are looking to get paid, first and foremost. These shepherds have no heart for the sheep. These shepherds have no commitment to the sheep. And these shepherds have no love for the sheep.



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3. Wise Counsel to All Who Are Sheep

In Jesus's discourse from John 10, the Lord offered three pieces of wise counsel to His flock—those who follow Him: First, *be sure to listen to the voice of the right shepherd*. We need our ears attuned to the Lord, not to one who will lead us astray. Second, *never hesitate to follow where the Good Shepherd leads*. When our ears are attuned to the right shepherd, we know we can trust Him to lead us well. And finally, *use discernment when choosing your door*. We all have the option of whom to follow. Discernment will help guide us toward that shepherd who has our best interests at heart.

And in Acts 20, the missionary apostle Paul offered one further piece of keen advice to God's flock: *Watch out for wolves that look like sheep*. We need to be aware that there are those among us, even in the church, who seek to lead us away from the Lord.



LET'S LIVE IT

The Bible offers four warnings to all who serve in some capacity as shepherds to other people.

- First, *be sure you're not serving yourself instead of the sheep*.
- Second, *pay close attention to sheep who need special care*.
- Third, *take a gutsy examination of yourself*.
- Fourth, *be a good example to the flock*.

Have you ever followed a bad example in the church? What kinds of damage have you seen or could you see resulting from this bad example?



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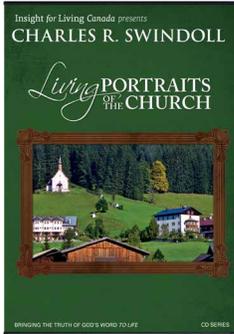
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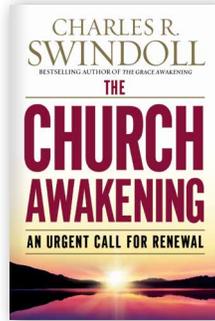
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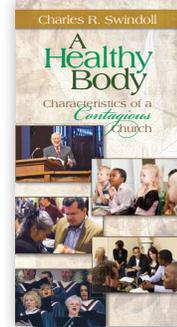
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