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FCF Family Camp

Shepherding Your Family John 10:1-18

Have you ever had a job where you did not have a clear job description? You knew that you would be answering to the boss, but you weren't sure exactly what you would be answering for? That can create a lot of anxiety!

I find that many men have a nagging anxiety about the matter of leading their families. They know that they are supposed to lead their families spiritually, but they're not sure what that means or how to go about it. They know that they will answer to the Lord for this important task, but they feel very uncertain and uncomfortable about doing it.

The task could be summed up under the phrase, "Shepherding your family."

Your job is to be the family shepherd,
under the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

If you wonder how to go about your job, look at how the Chief Shepherd does His job and imitate Him. He tells us about His role as the Good Shepherd in John 10:1-18.

The context of this discourse is Jesus' controversy with the Jewish religious leaders over the matter of His healing on the Sabbath the man born blind (John 9). These Jewish leaders should have been faithfully shepherding God's people, but instead they were simply exercising their authority with no concern for the sheep. They would put out of the synagogue people like this man born blind or anyone else who confessed Jesus to be the Christ (9:22). But they were thieves and robbers who were using the flock for their own advantage rather than sacrificing themselves for the advantage of the sheep. Jesus stands in stark contrast to them as the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep (10:11). By studying Jesus' words, we can learn seven principles for shepherding our families. I can only touch on each one and leave you to explore on your own in more depth.

1. To shepherd your family, make sure that you've entered through the door, and then lead your children through the door, who is Christ (10:9).

True heart conversion to Jesus Christ, not just church attendance or outward religion, is the prerequisite of leading your family spiritually. The Pharisees claimed to be spiritual leaders, but they had not been born again (John 3, Nicodemus). They had not entered through Jesus Christ into the personal experience of eternal life. Thus they were hypocrites. Nothing will turn your children away from the faith more effectively than hypocrisy on your part. You must *really* know Christ as your Savior through personal faith. You must be growing in personal reality with Him.

Then, you must seek to lead your children through the same door of salvation that you've entered. Salvation is not just a decision to "pray and ask Jesus into your heart." Salvation means that God has brought conviction of sin, a sense of need for the Savior, and turning from sin and embracing Christ by faith. When God saves a person, he has a new heart. If your children are truly born again, there will be evidence of spiritual life in them. They will desire to feed on God's Word and grow in their relationship with Jesus. They will be sensitive to their own sin, and willing to turn from it and grow in holiness. Pray together with your wife for the genuine conversion of your children, and teach them the necessity of it.

2. To shepherd your family, work at knowing them on an individual basis (10:3-5, 14)

You're probably thinking, "I know all my kids: Christa, Joy, and Daniel. What's next?" But knowing a person is a much more in depth process than just knowing their names. When the Hebrews talked about a person's name, they were referring to the whole person: their personalities, likes, and dislikes, etc. Each child is different. Each one can only be known individually, not on a group basis. By the way, 1 Peter 3:7 exhorts husbands to dwell with their wives "according to knowledge" (lit.). This means taking the time to listen and getting to know your wife well.

This implies spending *quantity* time, not just *quality* time, with your family. When the children are young, you must be there to

play with them and read to them. Include them in your tasks, like shopping or chores. Influence always comes through relationship. You cannot properly discipline your kids if your relationship is distant or strained because of anger or misunderstandings.

Note that the sheep know the sound of the Shepherd's voice, and they follow Him on this account (10:4). What does your voice sound like at home? Is it cheerful, pleasant, and inviting? Or is it harsh, angry, and repelling? The general tone of our voices should be that of love, tenderness, and warmth. It should say to your children, "Come to me, because I love you and care about you."

3. To shepherd your family, you must set the example (10:4).

The good shepherd goes before his flock, and they follow him. He doesn't get behind them and drive them with a whip. He goes before them, showing them the way. You cannot lead your family where you yourself are not walking. If you want your children to be overcoming their sins, you must be overcoming your sins, beginning on the thought level. If you want your children to speak kindly to one another, you must speak kindly to your wife and to them. If you want your children to be quick to forgive, you must be quick to forgive. If you want them to be cheerful helpers around the home, you must be a cheerful helper around the home. Simple, huh? Simple to understand, hard to practice!

4. To shepherd your family, you must lead them to the pastures of God's Word (10:9-10).

Note where the shepherd leads his flock: to abundant pastures where they will be well-fed (10:9, 10). This means that you must lead your family into God's Word. When they're young, limit the time and focus on the stories, not on Romans. As they get older, they can handle more solid food. Consistency is more important than anything else. Pick a time and try to do it as often as you can. For us, it is right after dinner. But it never has been automatic. You've got to keep at it. You want to communicate by example that God's Word and prayer are vital. Also, we have read "The Global Prayer Digest" to try to communicate that taking the gospel to those who have yet to hear is important.

5. To shepherd your family, you must guard them from danger (10:10-13).

The clear message is that it sometimes costs the shepherd dearly to carry out this task, but he does it because he cares about the sheep. The hireling only cares about himself and is not concerned about the sheep.

It's getting late at night and there is a knock at your door. You open it a crack and see a sinister guy who looks like he hangs out at the local porno shop. He says, "I'd like to come in and teach your kids about how much fun it is to have sex with different partners, including men with men and women with women. I'd like to show them how to make funny comments that put down others. I'd like to teach them how to disrespect their parents and view them as stupid and out-of-touch with reality. May I come in?" You'd rightfully slam the door in his face before he even finished speaking!

And yet many parents invite him in and give him free rein. His name is TV, and he also goes now by the nicknames, Video games and Internet. You've got to guard your children from these evil influences and teach them about spiritual truth and error. Again, you can only do it if you are guarding yourself from the same evil influences. If you are secretly indulging in pornography or even lusting after the women who parade around on the commercials or TV shows, you cannot lead your children into God's holy ways.

6. To shepherd your family, you must serve them (10:11, 15, 17-18).

Jesus was referring to His own sacrificial death on the cross, and we can never imitate Him in this. And yet His laying down His life for us is an example. He calls us daily to take up our cross and follow Him, promising that if we lose our lives for His sake, we will find them, but if we seek to preserve them for ourselves, we will lose them. By serving your family, I do not mean doing for your kids what they need to learn to do for themselves and for the sake of the family. Rather, I mean putting their best interests above your own selfish pursuits. It may take shape in little things, like putting down the newspaper to listen to your child or help him with his homework. It may mean sacrificing what you wanted to do on your Saturday in order to do something with the whole family.

The emphasis here is on Jesus' *willingly* laying down His life for us. Sometimes we sacrifice for our families, but we make sure that

they know what a great sacrifice it was! We should sacrifice ourselves *cheerfully* out of love. The well-being of the sheep was Jesus' concern, even above saving His own life. I've seen dads who use their authority to make the family serve them. That is a sure way of raising selfish children, because you are modeling selfishness. Your kids should see you willingly sacrificing yourself, not just for the family, but also for the Lord's purpose in the world. Model for your kids the joy of serving Jesus Christ.

7. To shepherd your family, tenderly care for each one, even if he or she is not being especially lovable (10:12-13).

The hireling sees the flock in trouble and takes off. He doesn't care about the flock, but only about himself. The Good Shepherd stays with them through the difficulties and helps bring them through to a place of safety and security again.

It's fairly easy to shepherd your family when your wife is being sweet and your kids say, "Sure, Dad, we'd be glad to clean up our rooms!" But the rest of the time (which may be *most* of the time), we still must care for them as the Good Shepherd cares for us. Of course His care often involves correction, but it is never harsh or demeaning correction. He always corrects us for our good. The goal is to see our wives and children without spiritual blemish, holy and blameless, growing in personal and spiritual maturity (Eph. 5:27; 6:4). The only way that I know of to love my family when they aren't being especially lovable is to focus on my responsibility, to love them as Christ loves His church. Ask yourself, "How can I best love my wife or children in this situation?"

I once heard the late Joe Bayly speak on the subject of "Enjoying Your Children." He was a Christian leader and writer from the Chicago area. He lost three of his children in death, and compassion and tenderness oozed out of him. He told about a time, back in the rebellious early 1970's, when one of his sons rebelled against his conservative evangelical upbringing. He grew his hair long and grew a beard. He was living in a run-down flop house, where kids would drop in and crash for a time before moving on.

Late one night, Bayly got a call where the caller identified himself as a police officer and said that they had his son in custody. Bayly got dressed and went down to the station, but they had not

heard of his son. He made the rounds to several other police precinct stations, but no one had any knowledge of his son being in custody. He finally concluded that it must have been a prank.

Before heading home, he stopped by the flop house where his son was living. He stepped over several who were strewn out in their sleeping bags on the floor, and quietly opened the door of his son's room. He was there, sleeping. Before he left, Bayly leaned over and gently kissed his son on the cheek.

Bayly said, "My son is a pastor now. He told me not long ago, 'Dad, do you know what turned me around?'" Bayly said, "No, son, what?" "It was that night when you came into my room and kissed me in the middle of the night. You didn't think that I was awake, but I was. I thought, 'If my dad loves me that much, I'd better get my life together with the Lord.'" That's the kind of love that we need to show to our kids, even when they aren't being especially lovable.

Our goal is that each of our family members live to the glory of God. That's a very different goal than using Christ to make us happy. God will be glorified as the nations hear and respond to the gospel. Thus we should view our children as arrows (Ps. 127:4) to be aimed at the enemy. Instill in your kids a heart for world missions, and then release them to that great task.

Conclusion

Where do you start? That depends on where you're at now. If you don't have a consistent quiet time with the Lord, begin there. Joining a Forum of Four might help you to be accountable. If you've never read the Bible and prayed together as a family, ask your wife and kids to hold you accountable to do that at least four nights each week. Also, begin the habit of praying with your family at other times of need.

Finally, don't neglect to have fun together as a family. But, you're already doing that, or you wouldn't be here! Keep it up!