



Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2011-2012

Participant's Guide

Participant Guides

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LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012
The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

Participant's Guide

September 2011

THE UNDERSHEPHERD – UNDER THE CROSS: ‘

“The Shepherd as Sheep”

1. Focus of This Study

This Bible study has the title, “The Shepherd as Sheep.” At best, that seems like a contradiction. Shepherd and sheep are two distinctly different creatures and have distinctly different roles. Is it possible for shepherds to understand themselves as sheep?

The Scriptures speak of those who have been entrusted with certain leadership roles in God's kingdom as shepherds. At various times, that includes kings, priests, and prophets of the Old Testament Israel. Then, in the New Testament, there are the pastors of the New Israel, the Church. The word *pastor*, taken directly from the Latin, literally means shepherd. Yet the Scriptures speak of *all* of those who are God's people as sheep. The great “shepherd king” David certainly recognizes his dual identity as he confesses: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” For him who was chosen by God to lead the People of Israel as a shepherd, it is most natural for David to see himself also as a sheep who depends on the gracious guidance and care of his Good Shepherd (cf. Ps. 23). For David, there is no tension between being a shepherd and being a sheep at the same moment.

In the Christian faith, we live with the reality that many matters of faith and life cannot be categorized by what may be called an “either/or polarity.” The very nature of Christ is the most obvious example. Scripture teaches and the Church confesses that “it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man” (Athanasian Creed, 28). No “either/or” there! Luther's understanding, based on Scripture, that a believer in Christ is *simil iustus et peccator* is another prime example. A believer is neither at one moment solely a sinner condemned under the Law, nor in a different moment a purely righteous individual justified by Christ. Rather, like the Apostle Paul, a believer is aware of his “wretched” nature, but at the same time is even more aware that in Christ there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom. 7:24 – 8:1).

God and man. Saint and sinner. Shepherd and sheep. All at the same instant.

For those of us who are called as pastors – undershepherds of the great Good Shepherd Jesus Christ – it is incumbent upon us that we never lose sight of our dual status. While we are called to keep watch over “all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made [us] overseers” (cf. Acts 20:28), we must never lose sight of the reality that we have exactly the same spiritual needs as the sheep in the flock which has been entrusted to us.

In this study, we who are shepherds are reminded that like the sheep under our care, we are constant beggars before God and, at the same time, we are the perpetual recipients of the gifts of God.

For Discussion

- As pastors, we are both shepherd and sheep. As we stand before God as beggars, how are our needs as both shepherd and sheep the same?
How do our needs in each role differ?
- We are both shepherd and sheep. Recognizing our differing and often distinctive gifts and personalities, in which role do we find ourselves the most comfortable? Please explain why.
- Is it possible that our identity as sheep (with faults and weaknesses) among the other sheep in our flock *lessen* their perception or understanding of the shepherding authority we are called to exercise in the Office of Undershepherd? Explain.
- Might our identity as sheep among the other sheep in our flock *enhance* their perception of us as their shepherd? Explain.

2. Scripture Search

Read Exodus 3:1 – 4:17

God identifies Himself to Moses and reveals His plan of rescue for His people. However, when God calls Moses from tending his flock to leading the People of Israel, Moses begs God neither for the strength nor for the gifts necessary to lead or shepherd the People of Israel but rather that God would find someone else.

- What arguments (chapter and verse) does Moses give against this service to which he has been called?
 - Were these arguments valid?
 - Identify in each instance God's provision.
- When we are called upon for the Lord's service – either to the public ministry or to other projects or positions of responsibility within the public ministry, what arguments have we given against the service to which we have been called?
 - Are our arguments ever valid? Why or why not?
 - Identify in your own ministry experience examples of God's gracious provision.

Read Luke 10:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:6

It is incumbent upon every shepherd that he strive to be faithful (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1-2). Nonetheless, the devil is at work wherever the Gospel is preached. Jesus certainly had this in mind as he sent out the seventy-two: "I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."

Every shepherd will experience opposition and accusations about his preaching, his teaching, his pastoral abilities, and his general competency.

After Paul's departure from Corinth and following his first letter, false teachers called into question both his teachings and his qualifications as an apostle.

- In describing his ministry in Chapter 2:15, Paul descriptively contrasts the perspectives that people have toward those who spread the knowledge of Christ.
 - In what instances have you been either the "stench of death" or the "fragrance of life"?
 - How has this affected your perspective about shepherding your flock?
- In 2 Corinthians Chapter 3:4-6, Paul places the focus of his confidence concerning ministry not upon his own skills or abilities, but squarely upon God who provides in abundance.

- Describe how this assurance serves those who are called to be shepherds, and specifically, how this assurance has and continues to serve you.
- If our competency is “from God,” might this excuse us from the responsibility to develop deeper understanding of the Scriptures and the Confessions or to develop specialized skills for pastoral care, for outreach, or other aspects of ministry? Do these not come automatically (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15)?

Read Isaiah 53:1-7; Ezekiel 34:1-10; John 10:12-13 &15

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord gives various pictures of the Suffering Servant. He is like a shoot and a root (Is. 53:2; cf. Is. 11:1-10). He is a man of sorrows (Is. 53:3). He is a lamb and a sheep (Is. 53:7). The One who identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (cf. John 10:11,15) becomes one of the sheep in order to give Himself as sacrifice for the other sheep who have gone astray (Is. 53: 5-6).

- As shepherds, we are also sheep who have gone astray. Rather than the faithful shepherd who searches and finds the lost sheep of our flock (cf. Lk. 15:3-7), at times through our own sinfulness we have, like the shepherds of Israel, been more concerned about ourselves (cf. Ez. 34:2-6). We have not always strengthened the weak, or bound up the injured, or searched for the lost. Like the hireling of John 10:12, at times we have fled from the flock rather than confronting the wolves that have come to us in various forms.
 - From what “wolves” have you fled?
 - Jacob, who was also a shepherd, confessed to God, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies...Thou hast shown unto Thy servant” (Gen. 32:10). The Apostle Paul, confessed that he was a “wretched man” (Rom. 7:24) and the “chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). How can our own sinful expectations of ourselves or the sinful expectations of others prevent us from honest confession?
 - Dare we, as “shepherds of God’s flock” that is under our care (1 Pet. 5:2) and “examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3) confess before our flock that we are “poor, miserable sinners”?
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd who also becomes the Lamb led to slaughter (Is. 53:7) for the sheep of His flock, for other sheep (John 10:16), and for us. In the vision of the multitudes in heaven given in Revelation 7, all who enjoy the triumph of eternal life are those sinners who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (14). Jesus is the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) by His sacrificial death on the cross and His triumphant resurrection from the dead. However, He is also the Shepherd of Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34:23-24, and Revelation 7:14 who in His ascension and exaltation leads and blesses His flock now and forever.
 - We are blessed beyond measure. As sheep, our Good Shepherd has sought us out when we were lost or straying, and through His Sacraments and Word has enfolded us into His flock and continually gathers us to Himself. He has laid down His life for us and has risen again. He has forgiven us. He leads us. He cares for us. He also feeds, nourishes, and refreshes us through His Word and Sacraments. He gives us the confidence of life eternal. In addition, as shepherds, He has entrusted us to be stewards of His life-giving Word and Sacraments, equipping and empowering us by the Holy Spirit. Describe the impact on you, as a shepherd, from knowing first-hand the grace and gifts of Jesus to you as a sheep.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

- Lutherans, perhaps better than any others, understand the special relationship between the pastoral ministry (shepherds) and the priesthood of all believers (sheep). While not all sheep in the flock are called to be shepherds, all shepherds are still part of the sheep. While we honor

the pastoral ministry (Predigtamt) as “the highest office in the church” (cf. Church and Ministry, Part Two, Thesis VIII), we also recognize that “The ministry is not a special or, in opposition to that of ordinary Christians, a more holy state...but it is a ministry of service” (cf. Church and Ministry, Part Two, Thesis IV). We are also familiar with the words of one of Luther’s Sacristy Prayers: “Lord God, You have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in Your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon You: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

- Discuss the danger when shepherds fail to see themselves also as sheep, both in failing to recognize that “we are all beggars,” and in failing to recognize that we all are the perpetual recipients of God’s grace, guidance, and blessings.

4. Points to Ponder

- Occasionally, a birthing ewe will reject one of its newborn lambs, especially in the instance of a multiple birth. Likewise, from time to time, a ewe will die giving birth. The result is a “bummer lamb.” Left to itself and without its mother’s nurture and nourishment, the bummer lamb will die. From time to time, another lamb in the flock will die during or shortly after its birth. Because ewes bond with their newborn lambs, in part due to the scent of their lambs, a ewe normally will not adopt a bummer lamb with its foreign scent. An age-old practice is to cover the bummer lamb with the hide of a lamb that has died and bring that lamb to the ewe. Smelling the scent of her own lamb, a ewe will allow the bummer lamb to nurse and, within a couple of days, will adopt the bummer lamb even when the dead lamb’s hide is removed.
- While this lambing illustration is not specifically given in Scripture, what may be applications for us in our role as sheep and as shepherds?

5. For Conversation

- “In my last church, my pastor preached as if he were preaching to himself as well as to the congregation. He included the words ‘we’ and ‘us’ throughout his sermons. In my new church, the pastor almost never speaks about ‘we’ and ‘us,’ but almost always uses the word ‘you.’ While I know that he is God’s messenger to the people of the congregation, it seems that he’s setting himself above the rest of us.” This comment by a faithful layperson is not uncommon when there has been a change of pastors. Different pastors not only have different preaching styles, they have reasons for their different styles. Remember the “either/or” polarity mentioned at the beginning of this study. Sometimes that polarity manifests itself in our sermons. Preachers are God’s messengers (cf. Lk. 10:16, Mt. 10:40; Jn. 20:21-13). Often, in Scripture, God’s messengers address their hearers with the second person ‘you’ (cf. 2 Sam. 12:7; Acts 2:22-14; 7:51; Luke 2:10-12). But His messengers also frequently use the first person words ‘I’ and ‘me’ and ‘we’ and ‘us’ (cf. Rom. 5:1-8; 7:4-25; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Jas. 3:2-3; 1 Jn. 4:7ff). Sometimes, in the course of the same message, they use both the first and second person (cf. Gal. 3:23-27; 1 Pet. 1:3-9).
- Shepherds as sheep, like all the rest of the sheep, are constant beggars before God. Discuss how our preaching reflects both our own spiritual needs as well as the spiritual needs of the sheep to hear the Law in its full severity and the Gospel in all its sweetness.
- Shepherds as sheep, like all the rest of the sheep, are perpetual recipients from God. Discuss how our preaching and our lives give testimony of God’s grace and providence both to us and the other sheep in His flock.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012
The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

THE SHEPHERD WITH EARS TO HEAR
The Shepherd – Under the Law, Under the Gospel

Participant's Guide

1. Focus of This Study

Read the excerpts below and discuss them individually.

“Under the Cross.” The world does not want to hear about the cross – not the cross of Jesus with its blood and suffering and death, and not the cross of his followers with its patience and self-denial.

What does it mean for the pastor to be “under the cross”?

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. Col 1:24-26 (ESV)

An LCMS pastor once conducted a funeral for a faithful and active member. A relative of the deceased in attendance, a pastor in a Pentecostal denomination, asked the pastor afterwards, “I couldn't help but notice that you preached the Gospel; do you always preach the Gospel at funerals?” Our pastor, taken aback, replied, “I don't have anything else to say.”

The Apostle Paul wrote, **“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”** (1 Corinthians 2: 2).

What does it mean to the preacher to “know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”?

How would the pastor knowing nothing about himself except this affect his hearing and proclaiming the Law and the Gospel?

Pastors from time to time get this question from people shaking hands at the end of the service: “Pastor, did you preach that sermon directly at me?” A good answer is “Yes.” Whether the preacher had that person specifically in mind or not, it hopefully was preached in such a way that each person present felt it was

specifically for him or her. And if it's truly a biblical sermon, rightly dividing Law and Gospel, it applies to everyone.

With hearers ranging in age from birth through 80s or even 90s, and with diversity in vocations, culture, socio-economic standing, etc., what are some things the preacher can do to make it personal and applicable to all the hearers?

Since the under-shepherd is also a sheep of the Good Shepherd's flock, does the preacher ever ask that question himself, "Was that sermon preached directly to me? Do the words of that sermon apply to me?"

2. Scripture Search

Read the following texts and discuss them individually.

*Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that **repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.** And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Luke 24: 44-49*

1. What does it mean and what does it sound like to proclaim repentance in Jesus' name?
To proclaim forgiveness in Jesus' name?
2. To whom should the parish pastor proclaim these messages and where?
3. In what way is the pastor a witness of these things?

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4: 16

1. What do people see when they look at you?
2. What is your example?
3. What do you do when no one is looking?
4. Are there things you do you do not want anyone to know? If so, how do those things affect you, your hearers, and your message?"

But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9: 27

And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Mark 2: 17

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6: 23*

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

“Practical and clear sermons hold an audience.” Apology XXIV.50

“The Third Commandment. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” SC

1. How do preachers despise preaching and God’s Word? Lack of preparation? Too much time on other things, like blogging – or worse?

“The Second Petition. *How does God’s kingdom come?* God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity. SC

“The Sixth Petition. *What does this mean?* God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attached by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.” SC

“The Seventh Petition. *What does this mean?* We pray in this petition in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.” SC

1. How does God use the preached Word to bring about all these things for which we pray?

“[B]elievers require the teaching of the law so that they do not fall back on their own holiness [B]elievers also require the teaching of the law regarding their good works.” FCFDVI.20, 21

“However, the law does not teach how and why the good works of believers are pleasing and acceptable to God The law demands total, perfect, pure obedience if it is to please God. Instead, it is the gospel that teaches that our ‘spiritual sacrifices’ are pleasing to God ‘through faith’ ‘because of Christ.’” FCFD VI.22

“...God the Holy Spirit does not effect conversion without means, but he uses the preaching and the hearing of God’s Word to accomplish it...” FCE p II.4

“...[W]here Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call and gather the Christian church, apart from which no one can come to the Lord Christ.” LC The Creed.45

“So that despair does not develop out of the sorrow or terror of the law, the proclamation of the gospel must be added to it, so that there may be a ‘sorrow that leads to salvation’ (2 Cor. 7: 10).”

Walther’s *Law and Gospel*, Thesis III: “Rightly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular. It is taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience.”

4. Points to Ponder

- We have no other message than these two paradoxical truths: Sin and forgiveness, curse and promise, death and life, Law and Gospel, all in Jesus' name.
- Every human being needs to hear these two paradoxical truths and they must be invited to hear them. (Remember, unbelievers are dead in their sins; they will not decide on their own to come and hear.)
- Every preacher is also a hearer.
- Woe to the hearer who does not respond to the Law; woe to the hearer who does not believe the Gospel.
- The Law is to be preached using all three of its uses, namely, curb, mirror and rule.

5. For Conversation

1. How often do your sermons bring terror to your own conscience and sweet comfort to your own heart? Can you give specific examples?
2. If a sermon has not clearly proclaimed the truth of Christ's vicarious atonement for all the hearers, has it really been a Christian sermon at all?
3. What is the difference between "preaching about the Gospel" and "preaching the Gospel"?
4. If someone took a highlighter to clear declarations of the vicarious atonement in your sermon notes, would anything be highlighted? What about clear and specific declarations of the Law?
5. How do we invite people to listen to God's two great truths (Law and Gospel)?
6. Discuss the concepts of the "alien work" and the "proper work" of the Holy Spirit (see FCFD V.11) and the implications for our preaching and other pastoral care.
7. What is the danger of preaching the third use of the Law? What is the danger of not preaching the third use of the Law?
8. Are you likely to err on the side of over-emphasizing either the Law or the Gospel?

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The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

SHEPHERDING WITHIN THE PATH
Path as Boundary, Direction, Goal, and Personal Expectation of the way.

Participant's Guide

1. Focus of This Study

Jesus gathered the Eleven for their seminary graduation. He makes it clear He has the right to send them, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”* Then He sends them, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”*. He sends them down paths He has chosen and marked, not paths of their own design, *“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* He gives encouragement to these shepherds in the critical work He has given: *“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18-20 ESV)

But is that enough for us? Or do we seek to go outside or beyond the path that our Lord has laid out for our work as under-shepherds of His flock?

- Specifically, do we think that it is the Pastor's responsibility to keep congregants from sinning?
- To make the church numerically successful?
- Do I trust the means the Lord has promised to use?
- Do I seek to alter the Word of the Lord to make it more acceptable?

On the sacristy door where I serve are carvings of the faithful Apostles and Judas Iscariot. Only Judas is without a nimbus (halo). He became a shepherd *off the path, outside the bounds* the Lord gave him. He stole from the common treasury (John 12:6). He disdained the true good that honored Jesus (Mark 14:3-10). He believed that it was his responsibility to save himself (Matthew 27:3-5). He went to “his own place” (Acts 1:25) rather than the place the Lord had prepared for him as His sheep from the foundation of the world.

2. Scripture Search

Please read and discuss the following texts:

Luke 5:1-11

What do Peter's words, “But at your word” reveal about the basis of his actions?

What is the difference between the hard work Simon had done all night in catching nothing and in this almost too successful haul of fish?

There is a critical difference between how Peter and his company caught fish (by net and large numbers) and how the vast majority of people think of catching fish today (fishing pole - one by one). What difference does this make in the efforts of the pastor and means he employs to catch fish?

Who is responsible for Simon Peter's big haul of fish? What did Jesus give Peter that moved him on to his successful catch?

How is Simon Peter's reaction to the miraculous catch similar to Isaiah's reaction to the heavenly vision in Isaiah 6 and why?

Luke 8:4-15

Is the Lord selective in where he sows?

If one wanted to focus on the numbers, what percentage of the seed sown actually produces the sower's desired results?

How might the low percentage of return tempt the shepherd to be more selective in both WHERE he sows and WHAT he sows?

1 Timothy 4:13-16

What are the contours of the path the pastor is to continue in his ministry?

What are the important implications for every pastor in the admonition: *"Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."*

Which is a bigger challenge to you personally: watching yourself or watching your teaching?

How can we help one another in this watching?

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

While we understand that the steward is to manage his master's household with the goods his master provides, is the steward free to manage his master's household with goods other than those his master gave him and charged him to manage?

2 Corinthians 3:4-6

The Lord makes it clear that our sufficiency and competency as ministers of a new covenant comes from the Lord Himself. What then is the only way that any part of our ministry will be sufficient and competent?

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

Augsburg Confession, Article V: The Ministry

"So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake. This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ's sake.

Our churches condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that through their own preparations and works the Holy Spirit comes to them without the external Word." (Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions)

How is the Holy Spirit given?

Who is responsible for working faith?

What is the pastor's responsibility as implied in this article?

Augsburg Confession, Article VII: The Church

"Our churches teach that one holy Church is to remain forever. The Church is the congregation of saints [Psalm 149:1] in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere. As Paul says, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:5-6)." (Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions)

Why must the basis/means of the true unity of the Church also be of the same basis/means which our Lord uses make and sustain the one true Church?

The Large Catechism, On the Third Article of the Creed:

“Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community or Christian people. Through it, he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases sanctification, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in the fruits of the Spirit.

Further we believe that in this Christian church we have the forgiveness of sins, which is granted through the holy sacraments and absolution as well as through all the comforting words of the entire Gospel. Toward forgiveness is directed everything that is to be preached concerning the sacraments and, in short, the entire Gospel and all the duties of Christianity. Forgiveness is needed constantly, for although God’s grace has been won by Christ, and holiness has been wrought by the Holy Spirit through God’s Word in the unity of the Christian church, yet because we are encumbered with our flesh we are never without sin.

Therefore everything in the Christian church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and through signs appointed to comfort and revive our consciences as long as we live. Although we have sin, the Holy Spirit sees to it that it does not harm us because we are in the Christian church, where there is full forgiveness of sin. God forgives us, and we forgive, bear with, and aid one another.”

[Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, p. 119.]

What comfort is afforded pastors in these brief paragraphs?

Luther’s Lectures on Galatians 1535, on Galatians 1:11-12

“This is why we continually teach that the knowledge of Christ and of faith is not a human work but utterly a divine gift; as God creates faith, so He preserves us in it. And just as He initially gives us faith through the Word, so later on He exercises, increases, strengthens, and perfects it in us by that Word. Therefore the supreme worship of God that a man can offer, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, is to practice true godliness, to hear and read the Word. On the other hand, nothing is more dangerous than to become tired of the Word. Therefore anyone who is so cold that he thinks he knows enough and gradually begins to loathe the Word has lost Christ and the Gospel. What he thinks he knows, he reaches only by speculation; and, as St. James says, “he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like” (James 1:23–24). This is what is finally happening to the frivolous fanatics.

Therefore let every faithful person work and strive with all his might to learn this doctrine and keep it, and for this purpose let him employ humble prayer to God with continual study and meditation on the Word. Even when we have done ever so much, there will still be much to keep us busy. For we are involved, not with minor enemies but with strong and powerful ones, who battle against us continually, namely, our own flesh, all the dangers of the world, the Law, sin, death, the wrath and judgment of God, and the devil himself, who never stops tempting us inwardly with his flaming darts (Eph. 6:16) and outwardly with his false apostles, so as to overcome some if not all of us.”

[*Luther’s Works, Vol. 26 : Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*. Saint Louis : Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1963 p. 64-65.]

What do you think of Luther’s assessment: “Nothing is more dangerous than to become tired of the Word.”? What temptations could arise from being “tired of the Word”?

What does Luther claim the Lord gives us through His word? (*Moreover, just as He initially gives us faith through the Word, so later on He exercises, increases, strengthens, and perfects it in us by that Word. Therefore the supreme worship of God that a man can offer, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, is to practice true godliness, to hear and read the Word.*)

How do you maintain time for prayer, study, and meditation on the word?

Luther’s Lectures on Galatians 1535, on Galatians 2:14

“Therefore let every Christian follow the example of Paul’s pride here. Let love bear all things, believe all things, hope all things (1 Cor. 13:7). Let faith, by contrast, bear absolutely nothing; but let it rule, command,

triumph, and do everything. For love and faith are exact opposites in their intentions, their tasks, and their values. Love yields even in trifles and says: ‘I bear everything and yield to everyone.’ But faith says: ‘I yield to no one; but everything must yield to me—people, nations, kings, princes, and judges of the earth.’ As Ps. 2:10–11 says, ‘Now, therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, etc. If you do not, you will perish in the way.’” [*Luther's Works, Vol. 26 : Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*. Saint Louis : Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1963 p. 119]

While love bears all things, is it possible for faith to yield to anything other than the Word of God?

4. Points to Ponder

- Simon Peter’s “but at Your Word I will let down the net” is a perfect motto for all Christians, including pastors. It confesses that the Lord’s Word may be at odds with our personal experience, but His Word is all that matters. Success is completely the Lord’s responsibility.
- The Lord has called pastors to faithfully baptize and teach. It is His responsibility to cause the harvest.
- “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58 NKJV)

5. For Conversation

1. What boundaries mark the path according to these questions from the Ordination rite (*LSB Agenda*)? In what way is the path broad? In what way is the path narrow?
 - a) Do you promise that you will perform the duties of your office in accordance with these Confessions, and that all your preaching and teaching and your administration of the Sacraments will be in conformity with Holy Scripture and these Confessions?
 - b) Will you faithfully instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine, will you forgive the sins of those who repent, and will you promise never to divulge the sins confessed to you? Will you minister faithfully to the sick and dying, and will you demonstrate to the Church a constant and ready ministry centered in the Gospel? Will you admonish and encourage the people to a lively confidence in Christ and in holy living?
 - c) Finally, will you honor and adorn the Office of the Holy Ministry with a holy life? Will you be diligent in the study of Holy Scripture and the Confessions? And will you be constant in prayer for those under your pastoral care?
2. What expectations do you think some in the Holy Ministry have for themselves that are beyond the path on which the Lord leads us? What expectations do others have for pastors that are beyond the path the Lord has marked for us? As a pastor, what unbiblical goals have you had for yourself, or been tempted to have for yourself?
3. What do you think of Luther’s advice to Joachim Mörlin?

Letter from Luther to Joachim Mörlin, October 2, 1544

To the esteemed gentleman, the Rev. Joachim Mörlin, doctor of theology, faithful bishop of the church in Göttingen, my beloved brother in the Lord: grace and peace in Christ.

Dear Doctor:

I marvel that you think it necessary to consult me, as if you did not know what you should preach. Do you not have the Law and the Gospel? According to thesis the Word of God must be rightly divided in order that you may wound and heal, kill and make alive. Perhaps you hope in vain that all will hear and love the Word, or perhaps you center attention on the Law to the exclusion of the Gospel, so that the people think that they are listening to you instead of to God or feel that they are being subjected to compulsion. Be satisfied if a quarter of the ground receives the seed—unless you think yourself better

than Christ or than Elijah, who was content with seven thousand. Be gentle with those who are gentle, and let those who resist your preaching of the Law quarrel with God about it, just so that you have done your duty. They may read the Scriptures for themselves if they do not believe you. The times are constantly getting worse, and many will turn from the truth.

Beyond this there is nothing that I can write. You yourself know the Scriptures.

Farewell in the Lord, and pray for us.

Yours,

Martin Luther, Doctor.

Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel, Theodore G. Tappert trans. and ed., Regent College Publishing: Vancouver, British Columbia, pages 310-311.

4. In some circuits pastors gather early in each week to study the texts for the coming Sunday. Would such a gathering be possible here? What might be the advantages of such joint preparation?

Closing

Consider praying together *Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord* by either singing or speaking. (*LSB 497*, Stanzas 2 & 3 were added by Luther to this beautiful hymn/prayer)

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012

The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

THE SHEPHERD AND THE WOLVES

Participant's Guide

1. Focus of This Study

The Christian pastor holds the greatest office of human responsibility in all creation. He is called to preach the Word, to teach the truth to God's people, to lead God's people in worship, to tend the flock as a caring shepherd, and to mobilize the church for Christian witness and service. The pastor's role also includes an entire complex of administrative and leadership tasks. Souls are entrusted to his care, the truth is entrusted to his stewardship, and eternal realities hang in the balance. Who can fill this job description?

Of course, the answer is that no man can fulfill this calling. The Christian pastor must continually acknowledge his absolute dependence upon the grace and mercy of God. As the apostle, Paul instructs us, we are but earthen vessels employed for God's glory. On his own, no man is up to this task.

Changes in the life of the contemporary church have produced a crisis of identity for many pastors and teachers. Thus, it is imperative that the pastor be clear as to his function and place in the body of Christ. His principal task is to edify the church by spiritual feeding. No one can ever overestimate the importance of the edification of God's people through regular and systematic teaching and preaching of His Word and the faithful administration of His Sacraments. A seminal Scripture for thought is Acts 9: 31 where Luke explains that, after Saul's conversion, "the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord." The implication is that as the church was strengthened spiritually, so it grew numerically. Such growth took place in a culture and spiritual context that was informed by the Old Testament Scriptures, especially Genesis 1-3. These three chapters inform and set the context for the message of the Gospel. Such success was not enjoyed by Paul while preaching the same message to the crowds in Athens and those areas where Genesis 1-3 did not inform or set individual or community's context before the one true God. Since the church can only grow and flourish where the Word of God has free course and is honored, any uncertainty as to the place of pastors in the Church militates against the spiritual stability, discipline, prosperity, and growth of Christ's people. It is not surprising that Satan uses confusion concerning their place in the Church as a subtle ploy to harm her.

Because of the nobility of the calling, the pastor makes an easy target for Satan. The subtle enemy of our own sinful nature constantly tries to make us think that God's requirements concerning our life and character are either unimportant or altogether too familiar. This study will serve to remind us of the most important things even though we know them already (2 Pet. 1: 12-15). To this end, we will examine adversity in the ministry and how we pastors can face enormous challenges and setbacks to our ministry in terms of our personal lives. It will use Psalm 42 and 43 to "launch pad" these issues and the hope that lies within us.

2. Scripture Search

These Psalms 42 and 43 belong to a genre of literature within the Bible we call lament literature, where the writer is complaining either about himself or about things outside of himself and sometimes of God himself.

Here is a cameo sketch of a man who is in trouble. He finds the going difficult. He is surrounded by adversity. We could have gone to a New Testament equivalent, something like 2 Cor. 4 and 1 Cor. 4 where Paul is giving biographical information about his own ministry. Recall what Paul experienced on his journeys: beaten, imprisoned, and more. He was dragged outside the city and left by the roadside. Paul is in midst of adversity even when things are going well, and there is a sense in which you and I are as well. We are never away from it.

Some of you who read this are at your wits end. Come to a bible study like this, and you are heavy laden, wore out, tired, confused, feeling yourself to be a victim of sudden, unexpected, unwanted problems. In addition, some may be very personal. A marriage issue, children rebelling, maybe elders issue or church council. It might just be just difficult people.

We all have them. I certainly do. I have a member who can never be civil. His every communication is negative. I can tell him the time of day, and I have told it the wrong way. There are people like that. We can develop the Elijah syndrome where I say, "I am the only one left." Or perhaps, "I'm the only defender of the faith." Everybody is collapsing all around me.

Do a read through of Psalm 42 and 43.

1. What is your overall sense of what is happening in each?
2. What words does the writer use in each to describe his inner being?
 - Any words you may have used? If so, what context?

In reading these Psalms, I thought of a chapter in Spurgeon's *"lectures to my students, the minister's fainting fits."* In addition, there are periods in our lives when we are prone to fainting fits. Sometime they come in midst of adversity. Sometimes they come for other reasons. Sometime they come because we have one, two, or three people who seem out to get us. At least this seems like our perception.

3. Ever had what you might call "fainting fits?" Not literally of course, but times when troubles and hardships got you so down you felt like it?
 - What were they? Are they? How did/do you handle them? How did they go away? How did/do you endure? .
 - Why is it imperative that any and all of our encouragement begin and end with the Word of God?

Recall the ground plan for building the New Testament church is given to us a Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asked the disciples about who the people and they thought He was.

"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matt 16:13-18 (ESV)

Part of what Jesus is saying is that he intends to build his church within enemy occupied territory. This reality is on display throughout the New Testament. In other words, we are in the sights of Mordor.

Recall the movie, *The Lord of the Rings*. At one point in the movie, Frodo and Sam looking are looking at gates of Mordor, and these horrible creatures come marching out and the entire structure and creatures are built and designed for death and destruction. That is where the church is built, right there. The smell of battle is wafting over us day after day.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

One evening, a recently retired LCMS pastor was discussing the ministry with his visiting son who was an active pastor in the Holy Ministry. In the course of their conversation, the father spoke heart-stricken about all the things he regretted in his ministry. As the conversation continued the son could tell that his father was truly troubled by them. Loving his father deeply and respecting him for the blessed pastor he was, the son offered his father the only comfort a pastor as for his people. He said to him, “Dad, remember, the doctrine of justification is for pastors too.”

AC - IV. [JUSTIFICATION]

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.

- Which pastor is exempt from this particular doctrine being true for them?
- Discuss the comfort a pastor is able to derive from hearing and believing in this simple and foundational truth in Jesus Christ?

In his Heidelberg disputation of 1518, Luther describes the essence of true theology as theology of the cross. The opposite of this is the theology of glory.

“That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as if it were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. He deserves to be called theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.” LW 31, 52. Theses 19 and 20 Heidelberg Disputation.

“He, however, who has emptied himself through suffering no longer does works but knows that God works and does all things in him. For this reason, whether God does works or not, it is all the same to him. He neither boasts if he does good works, nor is he disturbed if God does not do good works through him. He knows that it is sufficient if he suffers and is brought low by the cross in order to be annihilated all the more.” LW 31, 55

One of Luther’s favorite passages was Ps 4:3 and he says this: “Thus God exalts his saints, that the height of misfortune becomes the height of prosperity.” LW 14, 304

Luther describes the opposition between faith and experience especially by referring to the woes and troubles of this life and the great temptation to despair into which they plunge us. Our heart is afflicted by the present reality of severe trouble. The word of promise speaks of a redemption which lies in the future and is still hidden. Since we cannot see this hidden future, we cannot see the end of the present trouble either. We see only the beginning but not the end. Our vision is too weak and too nearsighted; it is unable to comprehend that hidden salvation which cannot be seen.

God, however, sees the end of our trouble; and it is he who speaks the word of promise to us. For this reason we must give heed to what he says in his word rather than to our own nearsighted heart. WA 40, 59

“God says, ‘to me, your trouble is only a point, a moment, a drop, a spark.’ But reason converts a mathematical point into an infinite line, because it does not see the end of the affliction.” WA, 40, 63 “The Lord says, however, I have better vision than you do.” WA 40 60.

“To believe means to abandon the viewpoint of reason and of our own heart and take a chance on God’s word and on his perspective. Faith sees the reality of trouble as God sees it. Then the troubles and anxieties which seem so great and terrible to the natural eye become quite small, indeed nothing at all. What are they compared with God and the reality of his eternal grace in Christ? This is what the divine and heavenly mathematics teaches us.” WA 40, 64.

4. Points to Ponder

There is a wonderful lesson in Jer. 20. Inside he is hurting, but when it came to defend himself as prophet, he does so as a man of God, strong and relentless.

- How can we do the same? What resources or avenues are open to us?

The Bible informs us that we have a high priest who can be touched by our infirmities.

- Ever wonder what Jesus felt when Judas betrayed him? Yes he knew it would happen but ever ask what he felt? What did he feel like?
- When Peter let him down in the courtyard because of voice of a young girl?

Do you have someone with whom you can confess the feelings and faults that burden your heart and hear the sound of the Office of the Keys speaking divine declaration of forgiveness and freedom to you?

5. For Conversation

On the cross, Jesus said, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46). We know that he was forsaken in a way that we never ever will be forsaken. Never will we experience the full abandonment by God, because he bore that for us. As pastors, in midst of adversity, we press on because even as pastors, we are merely disciples, followers of the Good Shepherd who always goes before us.

So press on through trial, through adversity and when the furnace seems most hot, remember the One dwelt with three other pastors in a furnace that was heated seven times hotter than usual. In its midst with Him, they had no bonds and when the time was right, the world called them out so that they might rightly worship the living God (Daniel 3).

Read the end of the Psalm. He ends up in hope in God. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 3:13).

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012
The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

CONFESSION & ABSOLUTION – For the Under-shepherd under sin

Participant's Guide

I. Focus of this study

The focus of this study is on the Scriptural and Confessional texts which will catechize us on the gift, purpose and value of Private Confession & Absolution (P C&A). The practice of P C&A is not widely used in the LCMS today, if it has ever had a real foothold in the Church that our Lord intended for it when He instituted the Office of the Keys. We will discuss questions as to how this has happened, what obstacles get in the way of re-introducing the practice, and how we can bring this precious gift back for the sake of the Sheep and the Shepherd in the Church.

Of great importance will be the discussion of a Father Confessor for the clergy of the Church. We will see how Luther and Walther both expressed a dire concern over the life of P C&A in the Lutheran Church if it is not even exercised by the Clergy for their spiritual welfare. The return and proper practice of P C&A in the Lutheran Church begins with a proper understanding and practice of a Father Confessor for the Pastors of the flock.

The Office of the Holy Ministry is under attack by the Evil One and one of his tactics is to keep the Pastor away from one of the gifts God has given to the Office. Our inability to sever ourselves from the 19th century Pietism of Europe has left us with Reformed notions and considerations as to the success and failure of the Ministry. Deep depression, anger and misspent energy have a very negative toll on the Pastor when he is expected by the congregation to perform in a manner that is measurable by dollars and ever new memberships. In an ever-increasing number of congregations, especially where the laity are ignorant of the Treasures of Heaven given by the Lord of the Church to the Church, the value of a Pastor is more and more predicated on his people pleasing skills rather than his faithfulness to those Treasures.

With these new measures at hand, it is ever more important that the Christ given means of ordinary pastoral care for the sheep, and for the shepherd, be at hand and faithfully used in the LCMS. The focus of this study is to present the Biblical and confessional evidence that P C&A is that Christ given means of ordinary pastoral care for His sheep. We will also focus on the wonderful blessing

this is to the pastor himself. Our prayer is that P C&A would be re-introduced into the ordinary pastoral care of the sheep and practiced by the clergy with a Father Confessor.

II. Scripture Search

How do Psalm 29:11 and 85:10 speak of the relationship God has with PEACE?

How do John 14:27 and 20:19-23 help us to understand what is meant by the term "PEACE"?

Read Psalm 32:1-5 (historical context is II Samuel 12:1-17) and then read Psalm 51.

- What is the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical effect of unrepentant sin?
- Which sins are to be confessed by the confessor?

What comfort does the promise in I John 1:5-9 offer?

With peace and comfort, absolution also brings strength. What is the strength spoken of in the following verses?

Isaiah 40:31, 41:10

Luke 22:32

Hebrews 12:4-13

Holy Absolution bestows forgiveness, peace, comfort, strength and finally courage. What is the courage spoken of in the following verses?

John 21:15-19

Acts 4:8-13

Acts 23:9-11

III. From our Lutheran Perspective

From the Book of Concord, the norm of our faith that has been normed, we find these references about confession and absolution. It is clear that the Lutheran Fathers had a concept of and a practice of Private Confession and Absolution. Read these references and ask yourselves if we reflect their thoughts and practice concerning P C&A today.

Augsburg Confession Article XI, XXV

Apology to the Augsburg Confession article XI, XXVIII (especially paragraph 5)

Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (paragraph 26, 60-61)

Other suggested reading:

- *Smalcald Articles IV, VIII*
- *Luther's Small Catechism chief part V*
- *Luther's Large Catechism chief part V (a brief exhortation to confession)*

IV. Points to Ponder

What emphasis do these two quotes from our Lutheran Fathers place on the role of P C&A in the life of the church today?

"...in an evangelical way, through instruction and exhortation, and through praising it, (he should) work toward the goal that it (P C&A) be diligently used in addition to general confession and that, where it is possible and advisable, it be finally reintroduced as the exclusive custom and that it be properly preserved where it exists. But by all means he may under no circumstances yield to a congregation which does not want to permit the use of private confession and Absolution even on the part of the individual members..." (Walther's Pastoral Theology, pg. 120).

"For it is the Christians' first, most necessary, and most useful school in which they learn to understand and practice God's Word and their faith, which they do not do so powerfully in public readings and sermons." (Luther as quoted in Walther's Pastoral Theology, pg. 121).

Walther uses two more quotes from Luther in his Pastoral Theology. What is Luther cautioning us with these words?

"But whoever has a firm, strong faith in God and is certain that his sins have been forgiven him, he may well omit confession and confess to God alone. But how many are there who have such firm, strong faith and confidence in God? Let everyone look to himself that he does not mislead himself."

and

"If, as sadly! Often happens, the preacher himself does not make use of this glorious means of comfort and so cannot speak from experience about its glory, it is not amazing if his teaching about this institution remains without results in his congregation." (Ibid. pg. 122).

With our doctrine of Church and Ministry (officially adopted by the LCMS in the convention of 1855) how do we address Walther's admonition to us in this quote?

"Every preacher should rather choose his own father confessor, confess to him regularly, and receive absolution from him. The preacher also needs this important means. How can he expect his listeners to respect the holy preaching office if he himself gives the appearance of despising it (by not having a pastor of his own)?" (Ibid. pg. 129).

Why have we lost use of P C&A in the LCMS as the ordinary means of Pastoral Care?

Why has the use of a Father Confessor fallen by the wayside?

What are the consequences we experience in the Ministry because of these neglects?

V. For Conversation

What is the difference between "general" confession and absolution; and "private" confession and absolution?

What do you think about Luther's comment that the absolution in P C&A is more catechetical than the absolution in the sermon?

Is Luther speaking the value of a Father Confessor in this quote: (LW 42:161) *"Thus others bear my burden, and their strength is my strength. The faith of the church comes to the aid of my fearfulness; the chastity of others the temptation of my flesh; the fastings of others are my gain; the prayer of another pleads for me."*

Is there a difference between "announcing" the forgiveness of sins and "bestowing" the forgiveness of sins? Use this analogy: If I announce to my brother that there is a sandwich in my lunchbox I only inform him of a truth. If however, I put the sandwich in his mouth I have given him that truth as a gift.

Discuss the following statement:

If the point of absolution is to do nothing else than communicate to him the intelligence that Christ has interceded for him in his sorry plight, and that God has restored him to favor, it has sold the sinner short. The sinner's problem was not ignorance but wrath. His load is not lack of information but unbelief, unbelief in the face of so much and such valid evidence that God is not pleased with him. Absolution does not inform a man about a change that has taken place once upon a time! Absolution changes the present relation to God by being the action in this time (in the voice of God) by the God whose act in Christ was once and for all time.

Soli Deo Gloria

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012
The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

Participant's Guide

The Shepherd's Heart

For the Lost, the Wandering, and the Wayward Sheep

February 2012

1. Focus of This Study

Our Lord's care and concern for people who had no faith relationship or a weakened relationship with God was a prominent part of His earthly ministry. Again and again, we see Him thinking about, praying for, speaking to, and acting on behalf of those who had separated themselves from God or were on the wrong path of life and were drifting away from Him.

Jesus used the shepherd imagery to describe His work, and He established the "pastoral" or "shepherd" office to carry on that work until He comes again as a shepherd to divide the sheep and the goats on Judgment Day (Matthew 25:31ff).

I once told my uncle, a dairy farmer, that I wanted to be a veterinarian. He looked at me and said, "You better think about that. Being a vet (especially for farm animals) is a dirty, stinking, nasty job. Are you sure?" The same could be said for the pastoral ministry. I have looked into the beaming faces of many young men heading to the seminary to prepare for the pastoral ministry. I am happy for them. It is a noble task as Paul says. But I have often thought, "How do I tell them what they are in for?" I do not want to discourage them. So, I usually commend and encourage them knowing two things: First, they will find out soon enough how rough the pastoral ministry can be. But, second, they will also find out how wonderful our Lord is in providing not only the greatest example of pastoral ministry, but also by providing the totally underserved grace, mercy and love for us as pastors which keeps us loving those who can be very hard to love.

For Discussion

Shepherding four-legged sheep is not an easy job. It was not a highly valued job among the Egyptians "for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians." GN 46:34 NKJV. What are some of the difficulties that you as a pastor have encountered while trying to care for the lost, the wandering and the wayward sheep? What would you like to tell a seminarian if you could without scaring him off?

2. Scriptural Study

Understanding God's Heart for the Lost

Read Luke 15:3-7

- This familiar passage truly shows us God's view of the lost. What is Jesus challenging us to give up in order to gain the lost?
- Why is this difficult?
- How can we overcome this difficulty?

Understanding the Lost, Wandering & Wayward Part One

Read Jeremiah 50:6; Ezekiel 34:4-12; Matthew 9:36

- These passages point out that an important factor in sheep getting lost has to do with those who have led them astray. In our society today, what people or things seem to contribute most to leading them astray?
- It is so easy for pastors to develop negative attitudes toward the lost and wandering. When we look at that list of members who have not been to a worship service in months or years, we can become frustrated, even angry. Nevertheless, where should that frustration really be directed? Toward the sheep? Toward someone? Toward something? ???

Understanding the Lost, Wandering & Wayward Part Two

Read Psalm 119:176; Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 2:25

- What do each of these passages teach us about the natural human condition? How can this help us in our attitude toward the lost and wandering sheep? How can our attitudes be shaped by false expectations?

The Tools that Turn the Sheep

Read Psalm 51:13; Romans 10:17; Titus 3:5; John 20:22-23; Matthew 26:27-28

- As pastors, we are keenly aware of the importance of the Means of Grace as the essential gifts that God gives to turn the lost. How are we tempted to resort to other means? What is the difference between turning the sheep and attracting the sheep?
- Should We (Pastors) Take the Time to Meet Face to Face with the Lost, Wandering & Wayward?
 - How did Jesus do this in His earthly ministry?
 - What examples of ministry to individuals can you remember from the rest of the New Testament.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

Practical Approaches to the Lost, Wandering & Wayward

- *Go:* I knew a pastor who had a little sign posted on the dashboard of his car that read "Eighty percent of life is showing up." What practical advice can you share that has helped you get going to reach these sheep?
- *Get to Know:* Dr. Kristian C. Kincade recently wrote "Dr. Walther reminds us of the necessity of private pastoral care (Privatseelsorge). The faithful Pastor is to visit his flock, to call them by name, to "know their wool," and to "let it be known that he bears in his heart a concern for every individual soul" (Walther, pg. 55). Visiting the flock in their homes, at the hospital, or care facility conveys pastoral concern and affords the opportunity to bring the comfort that God gives through His Word. Understanding the struggles, joys, fears, sorrows and trials the flock faces is aided by pastoral visitation. The Pastor moves among his flock because he cares for them. (*The Lutheran Clarion*, November 2011 Walther quote from *Pastoral Theology*, Lutheran News, 1995. Translated by John Drickamer from the Fifth Edition, 1906.)

Is it important for a pastor to know all his members by name? Do we exegete our hearers as carefully as we do the Scriptures? What practical tips do you have for this important aspect of pastoral ministry?

- *Guide:* We all know that building bridges is important. It is especially important to have some emotional capital with people if you are going to try to redirect them on their path of

life. However, in the end, as stressed in point five above, it is the Means of Grace that turns the soul toward God. How have you been able to talk about the Word, Baptism and Holy Communion in order to bring about needed spiritual changes? What is especially different about the way we do this on an individual level compared to preaching and teaching to groups? What role does experience play in this facet of ministry?

- *Give Them Time:* Jesus' answer to Peter's famous question, "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" MT 18:21 NKJV, is a tremendous challenge to all Christians and particularly to pastors. I have rarely seen people change that much after just one visit from the pastor. I have also heard many people say, "I'm sorry, I'll see you next Sunday..." You know where that often ends up. How much time should we give people? When should we draw the line? At what point must church discipline be exercised?

4. Points to Ponder

In the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Luke 14:15ff), Jesus said the servants went to the highways and hedges to compel them ... this is a lot of work!!! Are We Up to the Task?

- Read the following passages, and share others, to draw out the blessed encouragement the Lord offers pastors for this difficult task: Psalm 51:12-13; 2 Chronicles 31:20-21; 2 Corinthians 1:4-6; Colossians 3:23-24; 1 Timothy 4:15-16; 1 Peter 1:13.

5. For Conversation

I once met an ecclesiastical artist who told me that the Good Shepherd has traditionally been portrayed in two ways. The Italian artists often stressed His divinity with a halo, clean robe, and a cheerful countenance as He carried the lost sheep on His shoulders. The German artists often portrayed His humanity with gaunt eyes, wearing a hat, and trudging along with a dirty sheep on His shoulders.

- If you were asked to use one of these two illustrations to depict what being an under-shepherd is really about, which portrayal would you choose?
- Is the life of an under-shepherd an either/or of these two portrayals, or is it a combination of both and all others in between?

Whichever way we prefer to think of the Good Shepherd, Jesus did assure us that He finally returned rejoicing with His neighbors over the lost sheep that was found. As we look to God's word for guidance, as we pray and seek His help, we can be confident that God will bless the important labor of trying to save the lost, wandering and wayward sheep.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012 The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross “Shepherding Through the Contradictions”

Participant’s Guide

1. Focus of This Study

One does not serve as a pastor for very long without recognizing the contradictions. We serve and yet need to be served (we need our own pastor). We want to “fix” the many problems our people lay before us, yet the tools we have been given (Gospel and Sacraments) seem so inadequate to the task. Congregational pressures such as visitations or stewardship or evangelism or unrealistic expectations can all lead the pastor to seriously question his own vocation and where he fits in the life parish. How many of us have been faced with some of these questions?

- “Pastor, we need more income. Can you either do a stewardship series or get more members so that our budget will balance?”
- “Why do you spend so much time at X when you should be spending your time and energy on Y?”
- “Our services aren’t exciting enough. Can you make them more interesting with variety, but still keep it traditional?”
- “Is the Word I preach even effective? Is anybody listening?”

These and many other questions plague the life of the pastor every day. St. Paul exhorts us to preach the Word “in season and out of season,” (2 Timothy 4:2), to reprove with gentleness (Galatians 6:1), and yet to correct publicly when necessary (Galatians 2:11-15).

In the midst of our own vocational contradictions (or perhaps paradoxes), our flock has their own conundrums of faith and life. Luther’s *simul justus et peccator* certainly holds true when it comes to the contradictions of everyday life. Some of the many seeming contradictions our parishioners face every day might include:

- How do I provide for my family while spending time with them?
- Why does the church always talk about trusting in God and yet disaster seems like it is constantly happening?
- Why should I spend my precious time and energy doing things like prayer or going to church when there is not any real evidence that it does any good?
- How can God speak to me in words of Law at one moment and words of Gospel in the next? Why can’t He make up His mind?

2. Scripture Search

Believing the Unbelievable - Read 2 Kings 5:1-19

Naaman, an unbeliever, is faced with the terrible disease of leprosy. One can only imagine how this might incapacitate him as the commander of the army of Syria. His desperation leads him to trust the word of an Israelite slave. However, when the moment of truth comes for him to go into the water of the Jordan seven times, he cannot do it. The contradictions are too great. What he *sees* and what he *hears* are too far apart.

- What are the contradictions that Naaman faced in this episode?
- What are the contradictions that the King of Israel faced?
- What are the contradictions that Elisha faced?
- In what way might Elisha have been tempted to fix things by his own power, rather than by the Word of God?
- What is it that convinces Naaman to trust the word of the prophet and go into the Jordan River seven times?

Read John 20:19-31

Here we have the familiar territory of “doubting Thomas”. Let us examine this episode from a pastoral perspective. Our Lord appears to the ten disciples after His resurrection from the dead. He institutes the Office of the Ministry (“receive the Holy Spirit...”). But Thomas is not there. He does not hear the word and promise of our Lord with his own ears. He only hears it from the mouths of his fellow disciples, now apostles. Our Lord actually has to appear to Thomas and show him the wounds before Thomas will believe.

- What is the contradiction Thomas faces?
- How might this episode have been a source of frustration for the other disciples/apostles?
- What does Jesus do for Thomas at the second appearance?
- How does this story from Jesus’ life point us to the role that we pastors are to play in the lives of our people?
- Where do these verses fit into your own self-understanding as proclaimer of God’s Word?

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30–31 ESV)

Living with the Unlivable - Read Romans 7:7-25

The ultimate contradiction! Saint and sinner. Paul here gives us a picture of the struggle every pastor faces. Indeed, this is the struggle of every Christian! How is it that I can know what the right thing to do is, look it in the face, and then do the exact opposite?

- Why is this basic contradiction/paradox of the Christian life such a source of frustration, as a Christian and as a pastor?
- Do our people believe that knowledge of the Law will persuade or convince them to do what is right? Why?
- Where does the ability to carry out the Law (v. 18) come from?
- How might Paul’s description of our life as one of war (vv. 22-23) serve to help us understand the plight that our own parishioners face every day? How might this affect our message and ministry to them?
- Where is the victory, if it is not in our behavior?

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

The Paradox of Authority

A large part of the seeming contradictions in the pastoral ministry really center around what we are called to be and to do. Melancthon writes in the Augsburg Confession:

⁵ Our teachers’ position is this: the authority of the Keys [Matthew 16:19], or the authority of the bishops—according to the Gospel—is a power or commandment of God, to preach the Gospel, to

forgive and retain sins, and to administer Sacraments.⁶ Christ sends out His apostles with this command, “As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (John 20:21–22).⁷ And in Mark 16:15, Christ says, “Go ... proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation.”

⁸ This authority is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, either to many or to individuals, according to their calling. In this way are given not only bodily, but also eternal things: eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life.⁹ These things cannot reach us except by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as Paul says, “The Gospel ... is the power of God for salvation to everyone that believes” (Romans 1:16).¹⁰ Therefore, the Church has the authority to grant eternal things and exercises this authority only by the ministry of the Word. So it does not interfere with civil government anymore than the art of singing interferes with civil government.¹¹ For civil government deals with other things than the Gospel does. Civil rulers do not defend minds, but bodies and bodily things against obvious injuries. They restrain people with the sword and physical punishment in order to preserve civil justice and peace [Romans 13:1–7].¹

- In light of this, what are the tools at the pastor’s disposal to bring to bear on the situations he and his flock face every day?
- What other tools are we tempted to use along the way?

One of the great treasures of the Christian Church is St. Augustine’s homilies on the Holy Ministry.² In one of these sermons he writes,

Unless the Lord helps us carry our burdens, we shall sink beneath them, and unless he carries us, we shall fall to our death. My position at your head frightens me, but the condition I share with you consoles me. I am a bishop set over you, but a Christian in company with you. The first is the name of the office I have undertaken, the second of grace; the first of danger, the second of salvation. So it is as if we are tossed about by a storm in the raging sea of that office, but as we remember who has redeemed us by his blood, it is as if we enter the safety of a harbor in the stillness of that thought. Though this office is hard work for us personally, the common benefit provides us with rest.³

- Should the pastor be afraid in the face of the contradictions and irreconcilable challenges of the office?
- Where does our comfort, then, lie?
- How does St. Augustine see the paradox of being a pastor and a parishioner at the same time?
- Does the pastor himself need a pastor? Where does one go for pastoral care?

In his book, *Pastoral Care Under the Cross: God in the Midst of Suffering*, Richard Eyer recounts the story of one of his first calls to a deathbed as a young pastor.⁴ He paints the picture of a young pastor who is called to the bedside of a member of a neighboring parish. They cannot reach their own pastor for whatever reason. He goes, sits at the bedside, and watches the man die. He felt helpless and overwhelmed by the event, and useless as a pastor. After the “gentle death” occurred, the man’s own pastor came in, had a brief devotion with the family, and left. He then writes,

My own helplessness in the face of death seemed a problem to me at the time, but feeling helpless never feels good. In this case, however, to take charge and do something is an attempt to erase or cover up the pain of this death seemed a worse thing. To take charge is to succumb to the temptation to espouse the theology of glory, whereas a willingness to feel helpless in the face of suffering may

¹ *Concordia : The Lutheran Confessions*. 2005 (Edited by Paul Timothy McCain) (58). St. Louis, MO: CPHouse.

² “We Are Your Servants”: Augustine’s Homilies on Ministry. Trans by Audrey Fellowes. Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1986.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴ Richard C. Eyer, *Pastoral Care Under the Cross: God in the Midst of Suffering* (St. Louis: CPH, 1994), pp. 34–37.

be called being faithful. It is, after all, in faithfulness to the suffering Christ of the cross that we are called to be pastors. Glory will have to wait for the Second Coming (pp. 36-37).

- How do we as pastors balance the desire and need to bring the Word of God to bear on a situation with our own desire to fix the unfixable?
- What are the expectations of the mourners in a situation like this? How might those expectations be contradictory?
- What is the theology of glory, and how are we as pastors tempted to succumb to it?

4. Points to Ponder

Perhaps the greatest contradiction of all is that we are all dying. Sickness and disease, even death itself can create a trial of faith that is born out of our fundamental belief that “I’m a Christian. These things shouldn’t be happening to me.” Our lives are messed up, sometimes nearly beyond all recognition. This is made even worse, when the brokenness and sinfulness of the pastor himself causes situations in parish life to get worse, not better.

- How do we as pastors address the ongoing struggle of sin and forgiveness, which we talked about in Romans 7 in those we shepherd? ... in ourselves as sheep and shepherd?

Another key element in the contradictions is the role of repentance. We read in the Augsburg Confession:

¹ Our churches teach that there is forgiveness of sins for those who have fallen after Baptism whenever they are converted. ² The Church ought to impart Absolution to those who return to repentance [Jeremiah 3:12]. ³ Now, strictly speaking, repentance consists of two parts. ⁴ One part is contrition, that is, terrors striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin. ⁵ The other part is faith, which is born of the Gospel [Romans 10:17] or the Absolution and believes that for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven. It comforts the conscience and delivers it from terror. ⁶⁵

- What role does repentance play in your own ministry?
- Have you ever had occasion to repent and ask forgiveness of your congregation?
- How might you as pastor model repentance for your parish?
- What does repentance have to do with faith and the apparent contradictions we all face?

5. For Conversation

- How do I as a pastor avoid the trap of trying to fix the unfixable in others? ...in himself?
- What is the parishioner's expectation when they come to see me?
- How might I as the pastor help my parishioners to expect to hear the Gospel from me, and not simply solutions to their earthly problems?
- What role does referral play in the expectations of my members?

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⁵ *Concordia : The Lutheran Confessions*. 2005 (Edited by Paul Timothy McCain) (38). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.



Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012

The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

Participant's Guide

The Shepherd's Purpose: Feeding or Fleecing the Sheep?

April 2012

1. Focus of This Study

The saloon keeper said, “Sir, are you a pastor?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Come in and eat with us.” ... We sat down. “Pastor, please pray.” I prayed and had a hearty meal. He said, “Do you know Professor Walther?” I said, “Yes, very well.” He said, “I was in St. Louis with a sugar baker. I forgot his name, a well-known man. Walther tried to convert me but he couldn't.” I said, “Too bad; if you want to go to heaven, you must be converted.” He said, “Pastor, if the time comes, there will be a way. I am not a blasphemer.” I said, “Can I not preach here?” He said, “You see, formerly one came and said he was a pastor, held a service, and told the people travel costs money. They should raise a collection for him. They did. He went to the next saloon and spent it for drinks. Others did the same. We lost confidence.”

Lebenslauf, pg 48, manuscript of the life of Pastor Johannes Jacob Streiter.

“Wolves in sheep's clothing” are often associated with those who teach false doctrine. Unfortunately, these are not the only ones who can devour the flock. Taking advantage of parishioners for personal gain is a temptation pastors have faced for a long time. Their sin often scandalizes in such a way that the sheep lose faith, as the above story from our early LCMS history illustrates.

While these sins are often sex or money related, they are not exclusively so. What other temptations can lead a pastor to take advantage of his congregation, either collectively or individually, for his own personal gain?

2. Scripture Search

How do the following passages speak to the temptation of “fleecing,” rather than feeding the flock?

- a. “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.” Ezekiel 34:1-5

- b. "And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding." Jeremiah 3:15
- c. "He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep." John 10:12-13
- d. "For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed— God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ." 1 Thessalonians 2:5-6
- e. "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." 1 Thessalonians 2:8-9
- f. "... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:11b-13

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

"Therefore dear brothers, for God's sake I beg all of you who are pastors and preachers to devote yourselves sincerely to the duties of your office, that you feel compassion for the people entrusted to your care ... Christ Himself will be our reward if we labor faithfully. The Father of all grace helps us to do just that. To Him be praise and thanks forever through Christ our Lord. Amen." - Martin Luther, *Preface to the Small Catechism*

"Even if we assume that many of the members know what the rights and duties of a pastor are, a pastor still has an extraordinary opportunity of gaining the support of a large segment of the congregation, a majority that will back him through thick and thin. And then, when a dishonest pastor wants to promote his own ideas, there is a whole regiment that will support him, and the honest people won't be able to do a thing about it. Such a person usually cozies up to the leaders and the rich members who are very influential and from whom the less influential ones have borrowed money. Then, when the "big wheel," who has lent money to many of the poorer people, speaks up in the voters' assembly and says, 'It is just as Pastor says, and I won't stand for any criticism of him,' the less wealthy will think, 'He might very well call in his loan,' and so they will say nothing." - C. F. W. Walther, "Duties of an Evangelical Synod," *Essays for the Church, Vol II* (St Louis: CPH, 1992), p 36.

"The servant shepherd enters the ministry not because he seeks the power inherent in a leadership position, but because he can serve by leading and lead by serving. The servant shepherd examines, evaluates, and develops his ministry according to the servant shepherd criterion and not merely on the basis of job descriptions, performance reviews, and statistical criterion of success. The Good Shepherd develops within them servant shepherd and his flock the servant attitude of John the Baptist who said that Jesus "must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

The pastor will know that he may no longer be modeling the servant shepherd role when:

- His people attach themselves to his person and personality and not to Christ – and he enjoys this.

- He finds himself trying to live up to the expectations of any criteria or person other than Jesus Christ.
- He begins to direct the congregation's affairs on the basis of manipulation, persuasion, personality, legalism, or power maneuvers.
- The weaker members of the congregation – those who are poor, the children, and the feeble - no longer appear to be comfortable in his presence or seek him out, and he prefers it that way.”

Commitments of The Shepherd: Principles of Conduct for Ordained Ministers of the Gospel (A Statement adopted by the Council of Presidents – The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, September 1990), pgs 8-9.

4. Points to Ponder

Undershepherds have been called by God to feed those entrusted to his care with the Gospel. Pastors can be tempted to use others for their own purposes no less than anyone else.

Christ warns those who mistreat their flock and forgives those who repent of these sins.

The Holy Spirit gives the pastor a new heart with which to serve God's people unselfishly.

Christ can strengthen pastors to live in abundance or scarcity without abusing the flock entrusted to their care.

5. For Conversation

- Pastor Smith has been asked to perform a wedding which, due to attending circumstances, he does not feel comfortable doing. On the other hand, his family has incurred an unexpected expense because their washing machine just died. The wedding honorarium would relieve the financial crunch. In what ways could he safeguard himself to avoid the temptation?
- Pastor Jackson would like to be the shepherd of a nearby prestigious congregation in his District. On several occasions when he has discovered that certain members of that church have died, he has sent sympathy cards to the family, offering them his condolences. He has also stopped by to visit their members when he hears they are in the regional hospital. When the congregation's pastor took another call, these families spoke glowingly about how Pastor Jackson had been so thoughtful in their time of illness or grief, and ask that his name be put on their call list. What harm, if any, has been done?
- Rob and Mary received an invitation to come over to their pastor's home for an evening. The pastor has told them he has something he'd like to share with them. When they arrive, they find several other couples present as well. After some small talk, the pastor begins to explain why he's called them to his home. He and his wife would like to introduce them to a line of home products and tell them how they can earn extra money by becoming distributors of these products. Has an ethical boundary been crossed? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Pastor Williams is bi-vocational. He works 21 hours/week in the men's department of a large retailer. One Sunday after church he tells his parishioners that the store is having a competition to see which sales associate can get the most credit card applications. He tells the members that they could help him win 1st prize by filling out a credit card application. Has an ethical boundary been crossed? If so, how? If not, why not?

- e. Over a period of three years, several families have heard other church families casually remark that they've been invited to the pastor's lake cottage for supper on various occasions. These same families have been appointed to leadership positions in the church over the past year. They are always supportive of the pastor even when he does things that others find questionable. When others have asked the pastor about these things, he has responded by saying, "If you aren't satisfied here, perhaps you need to find a different church home." Recently he has excommunicated one of the families that questioned his actions rather than obey him. One of the leadership families has admonished one of the questioning families by quoting Scripture, "Touch not the Lord's anointed." This family has since called you, their circuit counselor for help. Where do you begin?

In your concluding prayers, ask God to bless all pastors with genuine concern for the lost and straying as well as for those under their spiritual care. Also ask God to guard them from material temptations as well as those of status, power, and greed. Finally, ask God to give pastors the courage to repent of any sins related to abusing the flock and to find comfort in Christ's forgiveness and power.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2011-2012
The Under-Shepherd – Under the Cross

Participant's Guide

The Pastor As Undershepherd - *According to Ease or Call*

1. Focus of This Study

Is the Office of the Holy Ministry to be carried out according to the pastor's ease, according to members he seeks to appease, or according to a desire to please the Lord of the call? (2 Corinthians 5:9)

Blessedly, the Good Shepherd gives us insight, grace, and mercy for the rugged nature of the call. He invites struggling pastors under the burden of the law to come to Him for *rest*. (Matthew 11:28) He offers a yoke that is the end of the law. (Romans 10:4)

A respected churchman of our LCMS believes more and more pastors are redefining the call as revealed in Scripture by the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. He writes, "I have heard too many pastors justify their neglect of those areas of ministry they don't enjoy with the words, 'That's not my thing, my strength, my joy, my passion'."

Shifting from the call to serve according to Christ's gift to our individual gifts/passions is frighteningly subtle but seismic.

- Do we view the call according to our own thinking rather than according to what Jesus designs, desires and does through us?
- How do we not fall into the trap of a Burger King call—*have it your way*?

A half century ago a pastor was called to teach, preach, administer the sacraments, make means of grace visits, study the Bible and pray. Today, in many ecclesiastical circles that list of fundamental tasks has mushroomed to more than twenty-five. Thus, there may be unrealistic expectations.

- How can pastors avoid taking on more than what our loving Lord bids?
- How can we avoid slippage into ministry crafted by people, programs, and worldly pressures from the world?

A sizeable number of pastors retire early, quietly quit, or are removed. Available research indicates that the pastoral survival rates in all denominations are abysmal.

2. Scripture Search

ELIJAH WALL BANGER

It is sobering when a major prophetic shepherd of God's flock, Elijah, burns out. The towering Tishbite teacher hits a wall. He had hoped for a glorious Reformation after whipping the Baal prophets. Instead, God gave him a cross – Jezebel. Before this, he had fallen into an ace clergy killer: **ISOLATION**. Isolated, he cannot think straight.

Review 1 Kings 19. Jesus comes to Elijah as the Angel of the Lord. What five things does Jesus lovingly do to re-inflate this deflated prophet?

- What can we do to help brother pastors avoid isolation or suffer skewed thinking?
- How can we be part of the crucial “iron sharpens iron” (Proverbs 27:17) for mutual edification?
- How did St. Paul keep himself from being isolated? As he is facing death, note Paul’s two-fold hunger. (2 Timothy 4:9-13)³

CULLING CAREFULLY FROM CHRIST’S CALL

An LCMS clergyman in two small parishes has the following holy habit. After reading 2 Timothy 2:1-10 more than 800 times over the past 15 years, do you think he views ministry as a walk through the park or as a challenging cross-country marathon? Do you think his continuous reading of these five epistles has helped to center him upon the boundless love of Christ and the boundaries of Christ for His/his office?

THE SEDUCTION OF EXTREMES

A highly respected Southern Baptist pastor said recently that pastors in his denomination get into trouble when they approach ministry with one of two attitudes. If they carry into the Office of the Holy Ministry a “my way or the highway” approach, or if they seek to be a “consensus appeaser,” they invariably run amuck.

- How does the Holy Spirit through Holy Scripture navigate us away from these two extremes?
- Read 1 Peter 5:1-5 and locate the golden middle paradox God gives pastors for avoiding these extremes. How is the pastor simultaneously both an overseer and under-roller (galley slave)?
- Pay close attention to how 1 Peter 5:1 hearkens back to John 13:4-5 to put on the apron of humility. How do these verses temper the pastor’s role of “overseeing” without extinguishing functional aspects of the pastors calling? (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

AVOIDING TENSION DEFICIT DISORDER

Peter reveals a picture of the pastorate that avoids tension deficit disorder. He reveals the tension of the pastor being not only sinner-saint but also a servant-leader. The overseer is an undershepherd who is also a beggar from the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9; 5:7) serving the God-Man who became the greatest of all slaves to set people free.

Read 1 Peter 5:7.

- How does this verse imply pastors are to be continual blessed beggars?
- How does this Petrine passage connect with the first beatitude of the Master Shepherd, the Lord Jesus? (Matthew 5:3)
- What hit-and-miss practice makes ministry much more miserable? (1 Peter 5:7)
- How does this omission shape the pastor’s call more into his own image and a law driven image at that?

In Paul’s letters, we see the apostle had a long list of prayer partners. Have we lost substantial blessings for failure to robustly exercise the great gift of prayer with fellow pastors?

BEAUTIFUL BIBLICAL BALANCE

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Corinthians 4:1)

React to the following statement made by a Lutheran layman, an engineer, who served on the Board of Elders of his congregation off and on for twenty years. He said, "I want my pastor to be a steward of God's mysteries and not a practitioner of mechanics."

- How does Jesus through 1 Corinthians 4:1 inspire Paul to steer pastors between the extreme of being a CEO with too much control or a man with only ardor and absolutely no order?

BRILLIANT IN THE BASICS

All of Scripture equips the pastor for the noble work as an undershepherd in Christ. (2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Timothy 3:1) From Acts 20:17-28 to Ezekiel 34, we see how the undershepherd of the Good Shepherd is to lead and feed the sheep guarding the gospel and being guarded by it. (2 Timothy 1:12, 14) Paul captures a huge chunk of pastoral landscape when he writes:

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ! (Acts 20:28)

To not to shrink from arduous agonizing aspects of our call and not let the call become more burdensome than Jesus intends it, the Holy Spirit reminds us to be brilliant in the basics. St. Paul says it all in 1 Corinthians 14:1. *Follow, then, the way of Jesus' love, while you at the same time set your heart on the gifts of the Spirit. The highest gift you can wish for is to be able to speak faithfully the Word of God. (Free Translation)*

- Without the first of these two *sine quo non* essentials, our pastoral ministry will sound like what? (1 Corinthians 13:1)
- Without the second of these *sine qua non* Holy Spirit marks, our ministry will be what? (1 Corinthians 15:2)

3. From our Lutheran Perspective

Martin Luther stated that three things make a theologian.

- How does this three-fold alchemy lighten the burden of a pastor and at the same keep him from reconfiguring the call into the Holy Ministry as one according to the pastor's ease?

Luther's famous paradox that every believer in Christ is *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time saint and sinner) signals how there is a tall temptation for the sinner-saint pastor to allow his Old Adam to tinker with the Office of the Holy Ministry, turning it into a law-driven office. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "an arrogant tone on the pastor's part is totally devastating."

- What uneasy task must the pastor daily apply in light of the reality of *simul iustus et peccator* to prepare for spiritual warfare and to be ready rightly to feed the sheep?

The Bible enables us to see ourselves. It is our interpreter of reality.

- In light of Scripture, do you have problems with easing the boundaries of Christ's call?
- Do you struggle with extraneous requests?
- Who and what are your mirrors in service of the gospel, knowing self, and knowing what pushes your buttons?

C.F.W. Walther at the apex of his ministry declared to pastors, “You are not rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel in the Word of God if you do not allow the Gospel to predominate in your teaching.”

Certainly this grand thesis applies not only to our preaching, but also to our teaching and visitations.

- If we attempt to control the sheep with a “my way or the highway approach,” how does the gospel become the dominant note of our ministry?
- Can we use this approach while also being kind, gentle, and patient with our sheep?

4. Points to Ponder

Serendipity: Read all. Each one selects a point.

- The public person must be a private person or he is not very good in the public. (Elton Trueblood)
- In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus often departed from the crowds in high stress situations in order to pray to His Father in heaven for strength to meet the crushing demands of His ministry. (Matthew 4:12; 12:15; 14:13)
- Where and when do we pray privately and fervently? For pastors there is the time-honored distinction that an undershepherd of Christ should have a place for prayer and study, and a place for his office. We need first to encounter the Burning Bush lest we are perpetually bushed.
- The man of God who wrote *rejoice in the Lord always* (Philippians 4:4) also wrote *we were unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself*. (2 Corinthians 1:8) Contradiction or paradox?
- Dr. Robert Sauer, former first vice president of Synod, said the key to a faithful ministry (he did not use the slippery word “successful”) is to have a deep devotional life, get to the sermon early, and visit the saints. What else could be added to this agenda?
- A theology of glory is according to a pastor’s liking. A theology of the cross is according to the Shepherd’s assignment. The first moves to creating God in our own image. The second moves to being conformed to the image of God’s beloved Son. How can we grow more toward the theology of the cross?

5. For Conversation

St. Augustine reminds us of the Seelsorge “cure of souls” aspect of the pastor’s call. Summarizing a good chunk of the Pastoral Epistles, he writes:

“Disturbers are to be rebuked, the low-spirited to be encouraged, the infirm to be supported, objectors confuted, the treacherous guarded against, the unskilled taught, the lazy aroused, the contentious constrained, the haughty repressed, litigants pacified, the poor relieved, the oppressed liberated, the good approved, the evil borne with, and **all are to be loved.**”

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