

WHICH SHEPHERDS DO YOU FOLLOW?

II Timothy 1:6-8, 15-16, 2:1-2, 8-9, 14-19, 22-26, and 3:10-11

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These past two years, America has gone through quite a spiritual upheaval and metamorphosis. Never in our history in America, has there been a time when most churches have shut down in person services for a period of time or as we had drive-in church for 11 weeks. Many churches across America in California and some other states, are still closed for physical attendance. In Oregon, at the Pacific Coast, in the church my son Aaron pastors, this Sunday is the first Sunday the Governor of Oregon has told everyone—"You may attend church without a mask if you so desire." What has happened during Zoom church meetings has been remarkable, but doors have been flung wide open for believers to seek shepherds outside their local church. That has been very helpful for some, but in other cases, it has been disastrous. Professing believers in America have made a significant shift in thinking, and pastors, mentors, disciplers, instructors, and teachers, have discovered that it is more difficult to pastor or mentor or disciple through a screen. On-line attendance is hard to really measure. As of August of 2021, most churches in America reopened so people could physically return. What we all figured out in this crisis in America was that God was right, when He called us in His Word to get together in person to encourage one another. None of us have stopped needing to gather together as God commands us in Hebrews 10: 24-25. The Holy Spirit is still drawing us to gather together, and He is drawing us to Himself. We all have spiritual needs that need to be filled. The Gospel has not changed its transforming, life-changing power. No matter what happens in our world, God remains faithful.

Every generation matters to God. In this time of millions of believers being at loose ends, many have found new pastors or at least, Sunday morning preachers they follow. Praise God for every Gospel preaching pastor, shepherd, and preacher who delivers the Word of God. But as Pastor Larry read today from II Timothy 1-3, not all mentors, shepherds, disciplers, preachers, and pastors are preaching or teaching the truth. Millions of professing believers in America have started re-examining their faith, and as they have done so, which can be a good thing, many have decided having a pastor or a local church is not important for them anymore. This re-examining of our faith, and this changing of our values to be in contrast with the Scriptures, means our values no longer match the Word of God. This is now called "deconstructing" our faith. Ted Olsen, the Executive Editor of Christianity Today, wrote in this new March 2022 issue, "People deconstructing their faith is often just apostasy. For example, when former pastor Joshua Harris announced on Instagram, "I am not a Christian," he added, "I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus." The popular word now for what Josh Harris has done, as well as hundreds of thousands of other professing believers, is deconstruction, but the Bible calls it falling away from the faith." When Paul wrote to Timothy in his second epistle, he pointed out names of false teachers leading the flock of God astray, Hymenaeus and Philetus, (2: 17) men like Jannes and Jambres (3:8) Demas, who deconstructed, deserting Paul, in love with this present world.

(4:9). Paul said in I Timothy 1: 20 that because of their deconstructing, rejecting that Jesus Christ died to save sinners, Paul saw two false teachers making shipwreck of their faith, so he handed Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan so that they would learn not to blaspheme. Paul called out Alexander the coppersmith, who did him much harm in II Tim. 4: 14.

Paul made it a habit to warn the churches about those that wanted to enable the Christians to deconstruct or fall away from their faith. The whole book of Galatians is written to warn the churches in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, not to follow the Judaizer Christians who required circumcision to be saved. In Acts 20: 28-32, Paul warned the Ephesian elders in Miletus of the issue of deconstructing of their faith. Never forget that Paul taught in II Corinthians 13: 5, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you fail to meet the test?” Wrestling over the scriptures or struggling with God over an issue you are facing is right and proper. But be certain, those struggles are not easy. Thomas Aquinas (born in Roccasecca, Italy, in 1225 AD, died in 1274 AD at age 49. He was a theologian’s theologian. His writings comprise more than 10 million words. Yet, when God gave Thomas Aquinas a vision of Himself in his late 40’s, Thomas said, “All my work is straw. I must put down my pen.” He found his millions of words were silenced in the presence of the One who Himself is the Word of God. He stopped writing. Jacob wrestled with God, became a prince with God, and confessed, in Genesis 32: 30, confessing, “I have seen God face to face.” Yet, Jacob thereafter walked with a limp. Don’t be afraid to test your faith, and learn to trust God in the darkness, and love Him in the silence and darkness. Yet, be aware that this warning message on which shepherds we should follow is not a warning about truly examining our faith with an open Bible, but I am warning us of apostasy when we would abandon our faith. What are the four credentials we should look for when we seek a pastor or a shepherd, a discipler or a mentor, or someone to be for us a spiritual mom or a spiritual dad, as Paul was to Timothy?

LOOK FOR A SHEPHERD, MENTOR, DISCIPLER, OR SPIRITUAL MOM OR DAD WHOSE TEACHING IS BACKED UP BY THEIR LIFE. (I.)

Notice II Timothy 3: 10,11. We read, “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, and sufferings, that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.” Paul reminded Timothy of what he was mentored by in Paul, his spiritual dad or father. We can call these the nine-ministry fruit, the backup to the nine fruit of the Spirit—and all 18 signs in ministry and fruit, we should look for in those who would be shepherding or mentoring us. (1) **His or her teaching—is it from the Word of God?** Or is their teaching/doctrine based on passion, lusts, self-esteem or self-love, or upon other pastor’s or theologian’s words? The Gk. Word for teaching or doctrine is **didaskalia**—which means biblical instruction. (2) **His or her conduct—do their lives bear out their message?** The word for conduct or manner of life is **agoge** meaning their course of life, their training and personal

discipline, which agrees with the Word of God. (3) **His or her purpose—are their motives taught in the Word of God?** This word for purpose is **prothesis** which means their proposals, intentions, setting forth of counsel. Are their clear motives and purposes before God easy and clear to see—as under God’s searchlight as pure—as the shewbread in the tabernacle? In other words, are their motives, purposes, and counsel clean as pure water? (4) **His or her faith—is their faith in themselves or in God alone?** Whom are your shepherds or disciplers putting their confidence or dependance upon—in themselves or in God and God alone?

Number 5. (5) **His or her patience—do they keep faithful regardless of your responses to them?** Do they stick with you, teach you, and love you regardless of how you respond to them, and regardless of the attacks of the enemy? John 10: 10-12 speaks of hirelings or false shepherds leaving the flock when the wolf comes to snatch a lamb or to scatter the sheep? (6) **His or her love—do they love you with selfless agape love for the long-haul?** Or do these pastors or spiritual parents pour out their lives as Jesus did or do they oppose the truth as Jannes and Jambres—insisting on “their way or the highway; playing their way or they’ll take their marbles and go home? (7) **His or her steadfastness/perseverance—do they teach the same truths year after year?** This Gk. Word is **makrothumia** which means, longsuffering with you for a long, long time, having the power to avenge, but refraining from it. Do your shepherds have backbone for Jesus, fortitude? Can you trust them with your life, with your confidences, and with your heart? (8) **His or her persecutions—have they paid the price for sticking by the truth?** This Gk. word is **diogmos** which means to be attacked or pursued with hostility. This is the price a mentor, spiritual mom or dad or shepherd pays for sticking by the truth, no matter the cost. (9) **His or her sufferings—do they weep when they see you reject God’s word?** **Pathema** means hardships, physical and emotional, or afflictions. Do they cry when you go astray, or do they yell at you, hit you, threaten you or accuse you? Peter said in I Peter 2: 20, “If when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.” I ask you about those whom you allow to shepherd you, as your pastors, your disciplers, your mentors, or your spiritual moms or dads—not, are they perfect for none of us are, but do they pass the ministry-fruit test? If they don’t, don’t submit to their teaching, even if they say what you want to hear. May God spare us all from surrendering ourselves to being led by men or women who claim to walk with God, but who in major ways, fail these nine biblical ministry fruit tests given to us by Paul. Secondly,

LOOK FOR A SHEPHERD, MENTOR, DISCIPLER, OR SPIRITUAL MOM OR DAD WITH AN “ANTIOCH” HOLY BOLDNESS. (II.) Notice in verse 11 that Paul asks Timothy to remember his persecutions and afflictions or sufferings that happened to him at Antioch of Pisidia. This is part of modern-day Turkey today. So, what example of boldness is Paul telling Timothy to recall? Luke’s actual record of this boldness is found in Acts 13: 13-52. This boldness sometimes means we must face demonic strongholds and be bold in the face of overwhelming opposition. How often Timothy must have heard the stories of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey! On the way to Antioch of Pisidia,

Paul and Barnabas faced off with demonic forces in Cyprus. Listen to Acts 13: 6-12. That is holy boldness. The only entire message of the apostle Paul is found in Acts 13: 13-52. Paul ended his message in Acts 13: 38-39, saying, “Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man (Jesus) forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by Him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” Then notice in Acts 13: 44-52.” “The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves un-worthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” By the way, did you know that news travels fast, and guess who would have heard of all that happened in Galatia? One of those cities was Lystra, where a young man, Timothy, perhaps between 16-21, heard Paul’s teaching and stories, and he himself would be chosen of God to join Paul on his second missionary journey in Acts 16: 1-5. I ask us all, “Are your shepherds and mentors and disciplers bold in encountering evil, and bold in speaking the truth, regardless of the cost?” Thirdly,

LOOK FOR A SHEPHERD, MENTOR, DISCIPLER, OR SPIRITUAL MOM OR DAD WITH AN “ICONIUM” RELIANCE ON THE LORD. (III.)

Notice in II Timothy 3: 11 we find, “my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me...at Iconium.” Although there appears to be no city in modern-day Antioch of Pisidia, there is a big city of 2 and a quarter million people today at ancient Iconium which is Konya, Turkey. So, what example of relying on the Lord happened in Iconium? Listen to Acts 14: 1-3. “Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So, they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands” Here again in Iconium, Paul was bold or waxed bold. The Gk. word is **parrhesiazomai**. It means frank in our speaking, confident in spirit, waxing bold, meaning getting bolder and bolder, relying on the Lord. The NASB preserves this meaning in Acts 14: 3, saying, “Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the Word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.” Notice along with this boldness, relying on the Lord, the Lord was giving them complete or total boldness so that He was using

their testimony/their witness to the Word of His grace. The Gk. word for witness is **martureo**, which means to bear witness to what you are so sure of, you are ready to die for it. Timothy knew about Paul being stoned and thought to be dead in Lystra, his home town, Beloved, do your shepherds and mentors and spiritual dads and moms have a Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego reliance upon the Lord, so much so that they are willing to face death or the fiery furnace for it? Those three men in Daniel 3: 18, testified to the king, “Even if God does not deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” Are your pastors and disciplers willing to die for their faith, as Esther saying, in Esther 4: 16, “If I perish, I perish!” There is a fourth and last credential of a godly shepherd.

LOOK FOR A SHEPHERD, MENTOR, DISCIPLER, OR SPIRITUAL MOM OR DAD WITH A “LYSTRA” UNWILLINGNESS TO TOUCH GOD’S GLORY. (IV.) Notice in II Timothy 3: 11, we read about Paul’s

persecutions and sufferings that happened in Timothy’s hometown, Lystra.” There is no city where Lystra used to be. What happened there? Turn to Acts 14: 8-18. There is a good, good chance, that Timothy in his own hometown, heard this message Paul preached in Lystra after telling a crippled man to stand upright, and God healed the man. This was Paul’s chance to take the glory to himself after this amazing healing. Paul would have none of it. Paul and Barnabas tore their robes and cried out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the Gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. Does your mentor, discipler, pastor or shepherd want the glory? Do they play to the crowd, take applause for themselves, and not give the glory to the Lord? Acts 14: 19-22 tells us Paul was stoned, almost to death, but God raised him up. God delivers us. We are immortal until our work is done.

Last week, visitors questioned the salvation, sincerity, sanctification of our pastors, of me, and of you, God’s people. It was my job, joy, and jealous love for you all, as brothers and sisters, to tell them their diagnosis was wrong. We aren’t perfect or near perfect. We belong to Jesus and the Lord belongs to us. We are part of the eternal Bride of Christ. I have delivered my soul today and warned us about charlatans with evil intent in their adulterated Gospel. Beware of those failing the ministry fruit test, who shepherd, mentor, and disciple without holy boldness, reliance upon the Lord alone, and who want the glory for themselves. As I finished this message, God reminded me of a “Linked In” message He ordained Gus Bess send to me last Thursday. He wrote, “Rich my dear friend, who I’ve always known as a man after the heart of our Lord, I am so blessed to hear what God is still doing in Rock Springs and in your beautiful District!!! We are in Bastrop, Texas, and the Lord, in the beauty of the Holy Spirit, is doing a great work here. We leave at the end of the month, and we are praising our Lord for this wonderful opportunity!!! Blessings and blessings to you my friend and to your beautiful bride.” Beloved, God will vindicate His real shepherds. Let Him do so for you as you disciple, mentor, shepherd, pastor, and say yes to becoming a spiritual Mom or Dad.