

Caring for the Flock- Nigeria

As we think of what the role of an elder and pastor is, I think one of the best passages, the best verses, is Acts 6:2. This is where the disciples are speaking to the people and Peter is saying that you need to serve the widows, not that they weren't serving the widows, but the apostle saw the need that the widows were fed. Because he saw the necessity to feed the widows was so significant that it was taking away from the apostles' time in prayer, that they appoint what later becomes deacons because there had to be a separation of preaching, teaching, and praying and the physical work that the church had to be doing for caring for those that are weak. Notice what the apostles say, while they had a choice in ministering the Word and caring for the widows, which were they choosing? They say taking care of the widows was pushing out the preaching of the Word of God so they have to appoint other people so the widows are being taken care of. Before they delegated that responsibility they said they had to wait tables rather than minister the Word of God. I just want to emphasize that because as pastors and teachers, it's very easy to think that our role is the most important role, but the apostles say they were putting that role aside in order to care for the widows. In verse 2 it says, "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." Their temptation was because it was so important to do the physical ministry of the church, that when priority was given, the spiritual ministry was being diminished. It's really easy for us to say all our ministry is supposed to be about preaching and teaching the Word of God and that is the work of the church, but that's not the way the apostles saw it. They said we have to get someone else to do this important job so we can do other important jobs. Make sure that as you do have a duty to preach the Word, the apostles said that the care of the widows had to happen. We can make the opposite mistake that the apostles were making, where they said they neglected the ministry of the Word to wait tables, we can be so much about the ministry of the Word that we forget that the tables are supposed to be served. The leaders of the church have a responsibility to make sure the physical needs are met as well. James says it well, we can't just say we will pray for them when someone comes up who is hungry, who has problems, who is suffering. It is not sufficient to just say you will pray for them, you also need to feed them. Even though the elders have the responsibility to minister in preaching and prayer, as overseers of the church we have a duty to make sure the church is fulfilling their duty to God, which includes the purest religion before God and man, to aid widows and orphans in their distress. One of the things about doing member care well is making sure you delegate certain responsibilities. The responsibilities the church has to those in the church and outside the church, God has appointed elders to oversee the church of God and we need to make sure the church of God is functioning as it should. Israel was destroyed as a nation, Judah was destroyed as a nation because of how they treated the poor, they were more concerned about the wealthy than they were about the oppressed. They didn't defend the fatherless, they didn't plead for the widow, and God stopped them from being the people of God for these simple things. To stay the people of God you have to do the work of God. We are His body in the world and as His body in the world there are certain functions the church is required to do: seek justice, cease from doing evil, learning to do good, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, and plead for the widow. God wrote the book of Isaiah to say judgement was going

to come on Israel and on Judah and what I just quoted was from Isaiah 1 where He says why judgement is going to come. One of the primary responsibilities of being an overseer of the church of Jesus Christ doesn't mean that you go out and do the physical ministry of the church, but it does mean that you make sure that it gets done because this is the church's testimony to the world. This is what it looks like to love your enemies and if the church doesn't know how to love the people inside of it, we will have no testimony of loving the people inside of it. While I'm on this subject, I just met with the widows and multiple widows stood up with the same problem, multiple orphans stood up with the same problem. It wasn't a problem that required money, there were issues where the women were talking about money, but these issues that the orphans and some widows raised required not a naira from the church. What it required from the church was to show love, not how we usually think of love, but what is true love. A child spits in his father's face, if you do not use the rod on the child, you hate the child. You're treating them as if they're not your child if you do not discipline them. The problem that the widows and orphans spoke of was that members of churches stole from them. One of the primary responsibilities of elders and pastors is to love their congregation enough to do discipline. You probably would think it was terrible if a man was seen murdering someone else, the police come up and arrest the murderer and a judge says to just let them go because he doesn't care. The church cannot ignore sin. When it ignores sin it loses its testimony in the world, it stops all other kinds of crimes that are flowing around if the church says it's ok for the brother of a deceased man to steal his property. By remaining silent, never complain if you are stolen from, you have lost your position to complain that there are thieves in your society. God says He is the Father to the fatherless and if you won't expose when people sin against the fatherless in your churches, then you have no place to speak outside your churches. The church of Jesus Christ disciplines when a sinner sins. The church of Jesus Christ loves the people in the church so it does discipline. If a widow goes and says all her property has been stolen and she goes to the church and tells them and the church does nothing, stop calling yourself the church. The apostles said they would leave the ministry of the Word to wait tables. The church of Jesus Christ cares for the weak. God says in 1 Corinthians 10 that all the Old Testament was given for examples so that we could understand, Israel cared to fail for the widow and orphan, it failed to do justice, and it is no more. God says this is so you are warned. I understand there's not much wealth in Miango, but this isn't about the wealth in the church, this is about the light in the church. This is, do you expose evil or do you say he's an elder so you're not going to say anything, or he's the biggest giver in the church so I'm not going to say anything. I will tell you who the biggest giver in the church always is, the One who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. God always provides for faithful churches, He always provides for faithful churches. Don't hate the rich man because he bribes you, God can make that provision somewhere else. Dealing with sin in the church is one of the fundamental ways you love the church, especially the weakest members. What's the example Jesus Christ gives of what a faithful shepherd does? There's a hundred sheep and one wanders away, did he spend all his time making sure all the rams were really healthy, that the healthy sheep get healthier? That's not what Jesus Christ says He does, He goes and finds the lost one. God will judge how you do as an elder not with what you do to those who can reward you, not for those who are eloquent and what you do for them, He will judge you and your ministry based on what you do to the weakest. When Jesus came, who did He deal with? When John the Baptist came, who did he deal with? They dealt with the weakest. John the Baptist told

the rich Pharisees to get out, who told them to repent, who told you of the judgement to come? And he ministered to the common people. How much more Jesus Christ? He went to the lepers, He went to the blind. How about Peter? The lame man at the temple, that's who he went to. Who did Paul go to? He went to the lame man. The testimony of the church of Jesus Christ is what it does for the weakest. Are you dealing with people who are weak in the church or the ones that brush up to you, the ones that give? It's really easy to focus on the more prominent members, but that is not doing member care well. If you have a house full of children and one is sick and the other ten are healthy, where do your efforts go? They go to the sick child. In the church, there is a reason an elder has to be faithful in his home before he is given leadership in the church, because the lessons in the home are to be carried over into the church. As a father, you spend more time with the child that's sick, that child that's disobedient, the child that needs to learn more. You don't spend all your time focused on the ones that are strong and the church is to be no different. What you are doing with the weak people in your congregation? What are you doing for those members that are trapped in sin? Do you love them enough to confront them in their sin? One of the saddest things that can happen in the church is that pastors comfort their people in their sin because then they can never know if they are saved or not. It's in the response to rebuke that you find out where the heart is. Is it just that they are sinning and they need to repent or is it that they still have a heart of stone and they need to be saved? If you won't confront them you end up leaving many unbelievers in your church. Unbelievers are supposed to be uncomfortable in church. As I said on Tuesday, the elders and pastors are supposed to be feeding the sheep of God and some of those false things are in your flock. There's not just goats mixed among the sheep, there are also wolves mixed among the sheep. That's what Paul says, there are also wolves among the sheep and if you won't do church discipline you are saying it's ok for the wolves to devour the sheep. Ephesians 5:11, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather [a]expose them." Usually the excuse I have heard is that somehow this brings shame on the name of Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth. If the person is saved and you expose their sin and they repent, which if they are really saved they will repent, then the world sees the grace and mercy of God. If their sin is exposed and they're not Christians so they get put out of the church because they will not repent, then the world sees that the church is different. It is a holy people, that's why the Holy Spirit came and by making a division between the holy and profane, we testify to the holiness of God and God is glorified. When we say to people we don't want God's name to be muddied by this sin, we're saying the church should be just like the world because that's what the world always does. Christ's name is blasphemed when we fail to deal with sin in our churches. I've seen this happen very often, if it's a big giver to the church, how the church deals with it is different than if the person is struggling. If you read the Old Testament, what you find repeated over and over and over again is there is only one law, there is not a law for the rich and a law for the poor. I understand in Nigeria and America there is a law for the rich and a law for the poor, but the church is not to be like that. The elders need to show that the church is unbiased in its judgement because God says He has no bias. If we have bias in our judgement we are testifying to a different God before the world, the same God that the world believes in so don't be surprised if you have no testimony outside because you have no testimony inside. What you do about sin in your church defines what you think about God. If you believe God is holy then you are worried about holiness in your church. If you don't think God is holy then your God is

Satan because Satan is the one who set all the world systems in place and when the church of God accepts the world's standards, it's not worshipping God. The role of an elder and pastor is to lead people to worship God. This is one of the most basic ways that we do it, not just with music and with prayer, not just with preaching the Word, but in applying the Word that way God said it was to be applied. James 2 warns us how great a sin it is if we treat the rich man differently than the poor man, are you leading the church in a different direction? Are you testifying that you have a different God than the god of the world? Verse 4 of Acts 6 says, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." It's really easy to misunderstand what the ministry of the Word is, the ministry of the Word is the service of the Word not just the preaching and teaching of it, but the practice of the Word like what you do with widows and orphans, what you do with sin. That's the practice of the Word, but we should also consider what preaching and teaching should look like. John 21:15-17, this is when he is out fishing and he sees Christ on the shore and he dives in the water and swims to shore and Christ is there preparing breakfast for them. Then after breakfast He asks Peter three things. "So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep." Feed the weak, feed the newborn, one of the basic roles of an elder is they are to be the feeder in the church, but they are ministering in the Word. If you join those two together you get what you are supposed to be feeding them. What a lamb needs is the milk of the Word of God. When we put in our own ideas, when we put in our own thoughts that do not align with the thoughts of Christ, we are just feeding them trash and not what they need. One of the basic things to do to care for your flock is to make sure you are speaking the Word of God to them, to make sure even the person that was just saved, is hearing the Word of God. It's really easy to delegate this to someone else, let's delegate this to a Sunday School teacher, but Jesus Christ is speaking to Peter. He could have talked to all the apostles and spoken to the church and said to do this, but He's individually speaking to Peter and I think you should take that as a representative of an elder. Every elder is to do what Jesus Christ is telling Peter to do. Do you feed the new believers in your flock? Understand that the way you feed a sheep, a full grown animal, is different than how you feed a lamb. Hebrews 5 talks about this, that He is rebuking the church for only giving them the milk of the Word and not the meat of the Word, but Jesus Christ is speaking and saying to give milk to those who need milk. We talked about the weak in your church because they are widows or orphans or poor, but another part of weakness is someone who just came to faith who doesn't know much, they take a different focus of feeding. In a household when a new baby is born, there is a separate focus on feeding than the rest of the household. God plants these pictures in the world so we can understand them in the church. Then Jesus goes on and has the same conversation with Peter and again he says he loves the Lord and then Jesus says something different, He says to tend My sheep. Tend My sheep is what I was talking about when I said what to do for the widows. What do you do about sin in your church? What do you do about the needs of the poor in your church? Part of the ministry of the Word is to take the Word of God

and say this is what it says about this matter. For instance, no adulterer will enter the kingdom of God, none are saved, so if you find an adulterer in your congregation what should you do? It's really simple, tend your sheep, do church discipline. That's part of the ministry of the Word, God has revealed a truth about that person that is not part of the flock of God. If you find a strange animal in your flock, what are you supposed to do? You drive it out, especially if you think it might be a wolf. That's what it means to tend His sheep. By using the standards of the Word of God this is ministry of the Word. Then He turns around and says again to Peter, 'Do you love Me?' Peter says, 'Yes, I love Your Lord.' Again, He changes slightly what He says to him, 'Feed My sheep.' Before we heard 'Feed My lambs', 'Tend the flock', and 'Feed the sheep'. Make sure you are feeding them the Word of God and not just the milk of the Word. God splits feeding the lambs from feeding the sheep so we understand the difference between how we feed. We have to give some milk, but we have to make sure we are giving meat too. Could you imagine a 15 year old boy, if all you ever fed him was milk, how strong do you think he would be? He wouldn't have strength because he needs meat. He can no longer get the nourishment from his mother's milk for the work that he is supposed to do. If your church is weak ask yourself if you are feeding them the meat of the Word of God. Are you feeding them as if they are grown animals or are you feeding them like they are lambs? I spoke at Miango DCC last summer and I came in after another American group was speaking and I heard her treat other pastors in ECWA DCC Miango as children and I was ashamed for my country and ashamed for the American church, that we would send people to speak to pastors of the church of God and treat you like a six month old. You are men, you have a responsibility to meet and you can't feed your sheep meat unless you are eating meat. When your church is weak it's because they are not getting the meat of the Word of God. It could be because you are feeding them things that aren't what they need, your thoughts and great ideas, that's not what the flock of Jesus Christ needs. Man does not live by bread alone, but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. What they need is God's Word. Do you love Christ? Feed His lambs. Do you love Jesus Christ? Tend His sheep. Do you love Jesus Christ? Feed His sheep. The people don't need more of you, they need more of Christ. Make sure you are feeding them the Word of God and not you because you will kill them and Christ will give them eternal life. Feed Christ's sheep. Let me briefly touch on prayer. The important thing about the prayer of an elder is to make sure you understand Matthew 6:5-8, "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him." They love to pray at the beginning of the church service, they love to pray at a crusade, they love to pray when they are seen by men. They wanted to be seen by men and they've completely received their reward, they won't receive an answer to their prayer because they got their answered prayer. They wanted to be seen by men and they were seen by men, but you, when you pray, when you fulfill your duty as elder and pastor, go into your room and when you have shut your door, pray to you Father who is in the secret place and Your Father who sees you in secret will reward you openly. Don't pray on Sunday morning before the congregation if you're not praying

Monday, Tuesday, and the other days when no one sees you. The ministry of the Word in prayer is how you care for the flock but if you want your Father who is in heaven to reward you, the focus is between you and Him not you and the people. That doesn't mean it's sinful to pray on Sunday morning and it's not sinful to pray at a crusade, but if you're only praying then, then you're only doing it for men. The duty of an elder is to go into his room and pray. I can tell you from my own personal experience that it's easy to neglect prayer, prayer is so important because it's speaking to God. It's easy to have the ministry of the Word choke out prayer just like the apostles were afraid that waiting tables was going to choke out the ministry of the Word in prayer. Ministry of the Word is crucial to the church, but so is prayer. Be diligent, be strategic to make sure that you don't let ministry of the Word to choke out prayer because as much as the health of the church is based on the ministry of the Word, the health of the church is based on God moving in the church. When you pray, go into your room and when you shut your door pray to your Father who is in the secret place and your Father who is in the secret place will reward you openly. Make sure you are praying for the members of your flock. This is a key aspect of caring well for your members.

Question and Answer: *13 minutes left- can't understand questions*

1. ??

When we see Jesus, what He says in the Sermon on the Mount, He's rebuking the Pharisees, rebuking the hypocrites. Key to this is, are you a hypocrite? We see other places like in Acts 1, where after Jesus Christ ascends, where they don't know what to do, they gather together and pray. Men and women are all together and they are praying. They are all together in one place. Peter, when he is thrown in prison, the church gathers to pray and they are all crying out to God together. We clearly see examples in Scripture that this is perfectly acceptable. Another example is when Lydia is by the water, when the women gathered to pray Paul comes and doesn't rebuke them, he goes and joins them. There is plenty of Scriptural evidence that it is fine to pray in public and there is zero Scriptural evidence that it's ok to pray as a hypocrite. If you only pray in public, you are a hypocrite. If you are praying in private where only God sees and then you pray in public, you are praying to the same God.

2. He wants to talk about 'All my prayers', where you pray through the night. He's talking about praying all night, most of our churches have started doing that too, but most of the time people are singing and dancing. How should that change? How should that be?

The example of praying all night in Scripture is the same story of Peter being in prison. There might be other ones, but that's the only one I can remember and the focus was very specific. James had been murdered, they expected the same thing to happen to Peter. This isn't singing and dancing and doing anything else, this is really focused on praying for Peter's safety. When you think of all night prayers it should be moved by events. Like last summer when you had the Fulani come and kill hundreds, all night prayers where you are praying about that would be legitimate. To do all night prayers when you don't have anything specific to pray about you end up being like the next verse in Matthew 6, when you pray do not use vain repetitions like the

Hebrews do because they think they will be heard because of their many words. If you're just praying all night for the sake of being up all night, vain repetitions are not pleasing to God.

3. ???

Great question. Let me give you an example. You have a son that you know every time you give him 10,000 naira and you say to go to the market and buy food for the family, instead he goes to the nearest bar and buys beer and gets drunk, would you give him the 10,000 naira? You have it backwards. You don't have resources, not because God can't give you resources, He owns every single thing in the world. James 4:2-3, "You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." If the son wants to get 10,000 naira, the father has to trust that he's going to get the food with it or he's not going to get the 10,000 naira. God is a Father, He's not stupid. Turn around, repent, and be faithful and God, who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, will provide. You need to be trustworthy first.

Let me close us in prayer. Oh Lord God, You have set these men here in this place, for this time. You have given them the responsibility over Your church, may You convict their hearts of Your truths, may You give them character and boldness so they walk in Your ways. Give them the strength to feed the lambs, give them the understanding to tend the sheep, give them the wisdom and understanding of Scripture to feed Your sheep. You are the God who owns all things. You are the God who opens understanding. You are the God who took Peter, who was afraid of a servant girl, and in a few short days was standing before the rulers of the country and rebuking them. Oh Holy Spirit, move here, give these men strength and boldness to do their work with faithfulness and truth. Make them a blessing to Your name so that Your church in Miango can be a blessing to Your name. God move in this place for Your glory. We ask this in Your Son's name, amen.