

The Ailbe Seminary  
*A Ministry of The Fellowship of Ailbe*

Shepherding  
Preview and Introduction

Preview

*Summary*

Shepherding is the Lord Jesus' appointed means for making disciples, building His Church, and advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Yet in our day, this ancient discipline and practice is largely neglected. The purpose of this course is provide an introduction and practical guidelines for pursuing the work of shepherding in local churches.

*Rationale*

The Lord Jesus, ascended in glory and reigning at the Father's right hand, is advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, a Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit which He has given to His saints to seek, enter, enjoy, live, and proclaim.

The Christian life consists of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and being transformed into His image as we realize more of the presence, promise, and power of His Kingdom in our lives.

Believers are citizens and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God advances on earth in the soul of each believer, as we work out our salvation in fear and trembling, and the Spirit of Christ overflows from us like a river of living water into our individual spheres of influence.

As the light of Christ and His Kingdom increases *in* us, the darkness is dispelled; as the Kingdom of light advances *through* us, the darkness, which cannot overcome the light of Christ, is rolled back, and the righteousness of Jesus and His reign increases without end.

But this doesn't just happen. To ensure the progress of His Kingdom and the advance of His light, truth, and life, Jesus is building His Church, which constitutes His living and visible presence on earth. Local churches are called to seek and save the lost as Jesus did, and to make disciples of those who assemble with them. Local churches are part of the Lord's flock, and He has placed shepherds over them, who are charged with watching over the souls of God's people and equipping the saints for works of ministry in their Personal Mission Fields.

The work of the church is to make disciples, and *shepherding* is the Lord's method for carrying out this charge. In this course, we will consider the work of shepherding as Jesus taught and practiced it, and show how local churches can fulfill their calling by taking up this work as their primary effort at making disciples.

*Shepherds and shepherding in Scripture*

The image of shepherds and shepherding, and the work that goes with that, had a prominent place in the life of God's people throughout Scripture. For God to speak of His relationship with His people in such terms, and to charge the leaders of His people to relate to them as shepherds, would have seemed neither strange nor irrelevant. Indeed, the image of shepherding would have spoken to God's people, from the days of Abram to John, of the Lord's love and care for His cherished and precious possession, that His flocks might bear maximum fruit for His glory.

Consider the place of sheep, shepherds, and shepherding throughout God's Word:

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were shepherds, entrusted by the Lord with many flocks.

Moses learned leadership and responsibility by serving as a shepherd in Midian, prior to his being sent to shepherd Israel across the desert.

David was called from shepherding his father's flock to shepherd the people of Israel as their king.

God described Himself as the Shepherd of His people in various places in the book of Psalms.

The rulers of Israel – local magistrates and priests, judges and princes, prophets and kings – were considered by God to be shepherds of the people of Israel, whom He regarded as His precious and cherished flock.

God promised a great Shepherd in the line of David would come to retrieve His flock and care for them, bringing with Him other shepherds to assist Him in His work.

Jesus declared Himself to be that Good Shepherd, and showed the importance of this work by example and teaching.

The apostles Paul and Peter commanded the elders of Christ's churches to regard themselves as shepherds and to care the people entrusted to them accordingly.

Paul explained that shepherd/teachers have been appointed in every church for making disciples, growing the church, and advancing the Kingdom of Christ.

We neglect the work of shepherding, *as that work is explained and exemplified in Scripture*, to the peril of ourselves and the flocks of God who have been entrusted to us.

### *Course overview*

In this course you will:

1. Discover the Biblical foundations and significance of the work of shepherding;
2. See how church leaders from previous generations have practiced the work of shepherding;
3. Learn the goals and promises God attaches to the work of shepherding;
4. Learn and begin to practice the disciplines involved in the work of shepherding;
5. Work through problems associated with implementing a work of shepherding;
6. Assess the state of your church with respect to the work of shepherding;
7. Develop a plan for giving the work of shepherding its proper place in your church.

We will pursue these objectives through a varied approach to learning, including brief video presentations, interaction with Scripture, readings and submissions, assessments and written exercises, and the development of a shepherding plan for your church.

For more specific details on course outline, resources, and format, see the Introduction that follows.

### *The discipline of shepherding*

Shepherding is not whatever we decide to do in managing the life and work of our churches. Shepherding is a *highly specific undertaking*, demonstrated and defined by Jesus, and practiced in the churches of the New

Testament. The work of shepherding has been applied, with varying degrees of faithfulness and effectiveness, throughout the history of the Christian movement.

From the second-century document, *The Shepherd of Hermes* to contemporary books by Jay Adams, Brian Croft, Timothy Witmer, and others, a focus on shepherding as the Lord's work for making disciples has never been absent from the Church.

The first great manual of shepherding, Gregory the Great's, *Pastoral Handbook*, was treasured by the great Irish *peregrini* Columbanus, who thanked and commended Gregory for this important book.

During the Reformation, Calvin and others organized the churches entrusted to their care so that shepherds could encourage and assist the people to grow in their faith and witness for the Lord.

As we shall see in the *Morning and Evening* readings for this course, church leaders in many different periods have embraced and applied the work of shepherding to their callings. Their instruction can be helpful to us as we rediscover the true nature and practice of this most important disciple-making work.

Shepherding the flocks of the Lord is not an option for churches. In our day, we tend to draw our inspiration and guidance for building the local church from models developed within secular arenas of education, business, marketing, athletics, and even entertainment. Certainly, we may derive important and useful principles to enhance our work of shepherding God's flock from such sources; however, we must not allow such sources to *supplant* or *replace* the work of shepherding as that work is revealed in Scripture. Either we are shepherding the Lord's flock as He teaches us in His Word, or we are trying to build the Lord's house our way, rather than His, and are thus failing to hold to the pattern of disciple-making He demonstrated and taught.

Shepherding God's flock, in short, is crucial to the progress of Christ's Kingdom. As we take up this work, we are following the Lord's example and instruction for how He intends us to seek His Kingdom, gather His sheep, make disciples, redeem and reconcile the world, and realize more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

We trust you will receive this course as it is intended, as a primary resource for helping you to make sure you and your church are following the Lord's agenda, and employing the Lord's means, for realizing more of His presence, promise, and power in your midst.

## Introduction

### *Welcome*

*Shepherding* is an exploration of the Biblical model for making disciples, building Christ's Church, and advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus declared that He would build His Church (Matt. 16:18), and He has delegated that work to His Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22), working through shepherds and the saints of God (Eph. 4:11-16). We want our churches to grow in unity and maturity in the Lord, so we must do the Lord's work in the Lord's way.

And this means shepherding the flock of God.

This course provides an overview, practical guidelines, and resources for launching and sustaining a ministry of shepherding in your church.

### *Format*

This course unfolds around the following activities:

**Presentation:** Each lesson includes at least one brief online video, which you will review and discuss during the Tutorials.

**Studies in Scripture:** The workbook, *Shepherding God's Flock*, provides the Biblical foundations and practical guidelines for a ministry of shepherding. **NB: This workbook is required for this course. It is included piecemeal in the lessons, but can also be purchased in its entirety through The Ailbe Bookstore.**

**Devotional exercises:** The course provides 56 days of *Morning and Evening* readings on the work of making disciples through a ministry of shepherding. These readings are based on selections from the works of shepherds of God from previous generations. They will help in grounding this work Biblically and historically, and will lead you to think about the implementation and practice of shepherding in your church.

**Practical exercises:** Each lesson includes a practical exercise, focused on that lesson. In addition, you will be led through the process of preparing to implement a ministry of shepherding in your church. These exercises will include, but not be restricted to, working through problems associated with implementing and sustaining a work of shepherding.

**Submissions:** Each Lesson a Submission to your Course Reader a summary of your learning and work.

Each Lesson in the course is presented in seven assignments. You can do as many as you like at a time, but you should try to finish an entire lesson in one week. The assignments are prepared to allow you to spend a little time each day working through the material of the course. You need not do them daily, but we recommend you try to finish each lesson within a week, to keep on pace for the course. At the end of each Lesson, complete the brief Submission, and send it to your Course Reader.

### *Course Outline*

- Unit 1: The Priority of Shepherding
  - The Shepherding Model in Scripture
  - God as Shepherd
  - The Good Shepherd
- Unit 2: The Disciplines of Shepherd
  - The Shepherd Knows the Sheep
  - The Shepherd Leads the Sheep
  - The Shepherd Lays Down His Life for the Sheep
  - The Shepherd Defends the Sheep
  - The Shepherd Brings Other Sheep
  - The Shepherd Gives Eternal Life to the Sheep
- Unit 3: Implementation
  - Start Where You Are
  - A Blanket of Shepherding
  - A Structure for Shepherding

### *Objectives*

In the Kingdom of God, we seek ever to improve our walk with and work for the Lord by growing in love for Him and our neighbors (1 Tim. 1.5). Accordingly, the following objectives have been identified for this course:

1. Love for God:
  - 1.1 To understand and embrace the Lord's way of building His church through shepherding
  - 1.2 To understand, accept, and pursue the Lord's goals for healthy, growing churches
2. Love for Neighbor:
  - 2.1 To understand and embrace the role of shepherd as the Biblical paradigm for making disciples
  - 2.2 To prepare a plan for implementing a ministry of shepherding in your church

By the end of this course you will:

1. Understand the Biblical mandate, guidelines, and goals for a work of shepherding.
2. Determine any changes required to bring your own approach to ministry more into line with the Biblical model of shepherding.
3. Clearly understand the connection between making disciples, growing the local church, and advancing the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.
4. Establish a plan for implementing a ministry of shepherding in your church.

### *Course materials*

The materials required for this course are incorporated into the Lessons:

*Growing into Christ: Morning and Evening* devotional readings (provided in Lessons, available in PDF)

*The Work of Shepherds: Morning and Evening* devotional readings (provided in Lessons, available in PDF)

*Shepherding God's Flock* workbook available at our online bookstore, [click here](#)

### *Getting started*

To get started, make sure you have registered at The Ailbe Seminary (upper right hand corner of home page), then complete the registration on this page. Make sure you have downloaded all the materials for this course, and have ordered *Shepherding God's Flock*. Then proceed to Lesson 1.