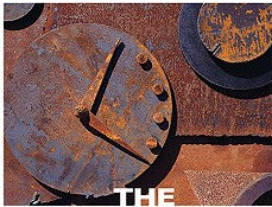


FEED MY SHEEP

GCI pastoral intern discussion starter
by John Halford



**THE
UNNECESSARY
PASTOR**

Rediscovering the Call

**MARVA
DAWN**

**EUGENE
PETERSON**

Recommended Reading:

*The Unnecessary Pastor:
Rediscovering the Call* by
Marva Dawn & Eugene
Peterson, pages 241-249.

In 1994, when I was working in England, I was driving through the countryside on a beautiful summer day. The sky was blue with puffy white clouds and the scenery was picture perfect. Wild flowers lined the narrow roads through the picturesque fields and farms.

But something was missing. There were no animals. No sheep in the fields or cows gathering under the trees. No pigs grunting in the farm yards.

When I reached my destination – the home of a church member who was a farmer – I asked him what had happened.

“We had to kill them all,” he said sadly. “This whole region was infected with foot and mouth disease. We had to slaughter all our livestock.”

“You had to kill them all!”

“Sadly, yes. They all had to go.”

Though no worse than a bad case of flu in humans, once foot and mouth disease is found in a herd of animals, none of them can ever be used for anything to do with human consumption.

“They have no commercial value. We can’t afford to keep them alive. They have to go.”

The economic reality of modern agribusiness dictates that an animal must be thought of as an APU (Agricultural Production Unit), and if an APU has no commercial value, it has to go. So whole herds and flocks of healthy animals were destroyed. .

The farmer told me how much they hated to do this. “We are not businessmen at heart. We are shepherds and herdsmen. We don’t like to think of our creatures as just units of production. But that is what farming has become.”

The Biblical model for a pastor is that of a shepherd, watching over a flock of sheep. Nowhere does the Bible describe the job as a manager or business executive. Sadly, that is what the job has become for many pastors. For them, religion is a commercial enterprise where success means following the techniques and methodology of the business world.



Progress is measured by numbers of new people attending, magazines distributed and radio and TV coverage. The mega church, run like a commercial operation, has become the model for successful evangelism.

In such an organization, the individual can become lost in the overall system. Pastors tend to look at how to “use” people to advance the program and sell the product. Individuals become “Evangelical Production Units,” valued in terms of their “potential” and the pastor’s role is to “manage” the resources with maximum efficiency.

This was not what Jesus told us to do. His instruction was “Feed my sheep,” not “Get my ducks in a row.”

Jesus’ idea of a shepherd was that of a loving servant, knowing his sheep by name, looking out for their welfare, seeking the lost ones and paying special attention to those in trouble. We need to be careful not to exchange the humble role of a shepherd for the perhaps more glamorous and superficially more rewarding role of a dynamic manager.

What is our attitude toward those we have been called to serve? Have we organized our churches and lives around “using the members to get things done?” Are our people valued for what they can do, rather than for who they are?

Before Jesus was crucified, he prayed for his disciples: “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. *None has been lost* except the one doomed to destruction.” Will we be able to say the same? Will Jesus be pleased to hear us say, “Of the ones you gave me, I guess I lost most of them? But it’s no great loss. They were a pretty useless bunch who just were not with the program. But look, I have recruited some replacements, built a mega church with several ministry teams and many missions...”

As you begin your career as a pastor, it’s a good time to think carefully about these things. It is all too easy to lose sight of what counts, looking instead at those God has entrusted to your care as mere resources to be used in carrying out predetermined programs and ideas. Imagine how Jesus’ conversation with Peter in John 21 would have gone had this been the case:

After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Master, you know I love you.”

Jesus said, “Then get these people organized, so they can be used.”

He then asked a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Master, you know I love you.”

Jesus said, “Then make sure they are all using their gifts to best advantage.”

Then he said it a third time: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, “Do you love me?” so he answered, “Master, you know everything there is to know. You’ve got to know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Well, the way to prove that is to make this church grow.”

But that is not how the conversation went, was it? Jesus’ command, restoring Peter to ministry, was simply, yet profoundly, “Feed my sheep!”

How was Peter to do that? How are we to do that today? Well, a key understanding that we derive from Incarnational Trinitarian Theology is that we are called to participate in what Jesus is doing. And so we must ask, how is Jesus now feeding his sheep and how may we participate? Truly, this is our calling, and food for much thought, discussion and prayer.

Discussion starter questions:

1. The recommended reading is a treasure trove of information. Why have the authors titled the book, *The Unnecessary Pastor*?
2. Read Jeremiah 23:1-4. To what extent do these verses, directed at the priesthood of ancient Israel, apply to us today?
3. Read 1 Peter 5:2-3. In what way could a pastor find his or herself, “lording it over those entrusted to you?”