The Smell of a Good Shepherd

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While we live our lives in ultimate surrender to the Good Shepherd (Jesus Christ), we also do this through submitting to the shepherds who lead us.

So, how does one know the smell of a good shepherd? In John 10:11 (NIV) Jesus says, 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep'. In the same way, those who lead us are shepherds who live lives imitating Jesus in this very verse. Laying down their lives for us, their sheep.

Some time ago, I came across Chris Staples' previous blog titled 'When Sheep Bite' on the Four12 website. There he writes about the shepherd's godly and appropriate response when 'sheep bite'. This post is a response from a 'Zimbabwean sheep's' perspective (yes, that's me), but with a different angle. My objective is two-pronged: firstly to answer the question, what makes a good shepherd smell like "the" Good Shepherd? And secondly, how do we as sheep know we are being led by a good shepherd?

> While we may experience disappointment in our leaders at times, we still must ensure that we go through this experience in a godly manner that honours the Lord and our shepherds.

[Please note, when I use the term "shepherd", it is in reference to the elders/leaders.]

In the 20 years or so that I have known and walked with Jesus and His people, I have been a part of a colourful assortment of churches across different denominations, cultures, cities and countries. I have encountered many amazing, godly shepherds, but I also had to wrestle with disappointment in shepherds, partly rooted in my own brokenness and partly rooted in their own sin or brokenness. While we may experience disappointment in our leaders at times, we still must ensure that we go through this experience in a godly manner that honours the Lord and our shepherds. We must ultimately never lose hope in the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and in the shepherds that lead us.

How Do We Know the Smell of a Good Shepherd?

Firstly, a good shepherd is walking closely with and has the smell of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and as a result, they are living lives that are 'to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing' (2 Corinthians 2:15).

Secondly, a good shepherd has a close and intimate relationship with his sheep. By virtue of this, a sheep will know the smell of their shepherd (and vice versa).

Thirdly, 1 Timothy lists the biblical requirements for elders (and deacons) and essentially tells us what makes a good shepherd.

- 'The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep' (John 10:11, NIV) – Since joining the Joshua Generation family, various shepherds have laid down their lives for me, time and time again, in various ways. Through financial and emotional support, godly guidance and lovingly guiding me towards a life that imitates Christ.
- A good shepherd is 'temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable' (1 Timothy 3:2 NIV) and 'not violent but gentle' (1 Timothy 3:3) – A good shepherd is an approachable shepherd, one whom sheep can approach without fear. This does not exempt us from times where our shepherds will lovingly rebuke us, but the ultimate goal and heart is to point us to Christ.
- A good shepherd 'must not be a recent convert' (1 Timothy 3:6 NIV) – this point speaks for itself, but is still important to mention. As a former Bible School student with two (well, three) theological diplomas, I am one who thoroughly enjoys a good theological debate. In the last year, I have had the pleasure of engaging with shepherds who were able to give good, solid answers but were able to guide this sheep through a deep knowledge of the Word.

> As sheep, we are called to live in submission to our leaders, but they too must give an account for how they lead us.

What is My Responsibility as a ‘Good Sheep’?

We, as sheep, also have a responsibility to not ‘bite’, but to respect our shepherds, not as worship unto them, but as worship unto the Great Shepherd.

Paul’s directive to all of us as sheep is reflected in healthy submission to leaders, as reflected in Hebrews 13:17, ‘Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you’. As sheep, we are called to live in submission to our leaders, but they too must give an account for how they lead us.

And what is it that drives/motivates any good shepherd to serve and lead a flock of sheep? Love. John 15:13 says, ‘There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life…’ And when we trust and understand that our shepherds are motivated by love, not just any love, but love that reflects the heart of the Great Shepherd, we can look past the pain of past disappointments and walk into family freely.