



**ARTICLE**

# **3 ways to lead Christ's sheep through the valley of the shadow of COVID-19**

**BY CASEY B. HOUGH**

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The Apostle Paul lived with a pastoral concern for his churches. In several of his letters, we encounter the apostle's heart for Christ's sheep, especially when they faced suffering and persecution on account of faithfulness to Christ. As pastors seek to lead through the current COVID-19 crisis, I believe we would do well to consider how Paul cared for his congregations in difficult times. To that end, here are three things from 2 Corinthians 5:1-6:2 that we can learn about leading Christ's sheep.

## **1. As pastors, we need to remind our people of eternal life.**

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-5, Paul was concerned with making sure that the church in Corinth had a biblical perspective about eternal life in the face of death. As Paul would note, with each ache and pain, our flesh is groaning for the day of its full redemption through Christ Jesus. With each funeral that we attend, we are reminded that sin leads to death and that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Creation itself, as Paul would teach us in Romans 8, is groaning. The groanings of this life remind us that we need eternal life.

## **2. As pastors, we need to teach our people that they must live by faith instead of sight.**

In 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, Paul reminds the church that the Christian life does not consist of what can be seen with physical eyes. As Paul says in verse 7, "We live by faith, not by sight." If our gaze is reoriented to the things above, away from the things below, we will not be driven by fear; we will see our circumstances differently, like Joseph did after being reunited with his brothers in Egypt after being sold into slavery. Because Joseph's perspective on his life and situation was oriented around the sovereign plan and goodness of God, he was able to see that while the intentions of men were evil, God's intentions were always good for him and for his family. Such a perspective only comes through faith in God.

Pastors must work to point their people to these divine, transcendent realities in the midst of crisis. This, of course, does not mean that pastors should not weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn. There is

absolutely a place for lament in our present situation. However, we do not weep and mourn as those without hope.

### **3. As pastors, we need to help our people understand the biblical priorities in this present life.**

As Paul continued in 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2, he laid out the importance of understanding biblical priorities in this present life. Because Christians often struggle to view their world through the biblical priorities of seeing others reconciled to God, we tend to trivialize the importance of what really matters. What I mean by this is that there is a tendency for us to forget our own mortality and the mortality of others. When we do this, we often think that we have plenty of time to share the good news of Jesus with our lost neighbors or family members. We lack an urgency for the advancement of the gospel because we lack a proper perspective about this present life. Yet, as Paul would say, “We should no longer regard anyone from a worldly point of view.”

Our perspective on this life should be informed by a heavenly vision of the kingdom of God and our obligation to see others “reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).

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In other words, our perspective on this life should be informed by a heavenly vision of the kingdom of God and our obligation to see others “reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). We, as Paul, ought to be encouraging our people as ambassadors of the embassy of Christ’s kingdom to be pleading with the lost to be “reconciled to God.” If the Apostle Paul was willing to plead, should we not also plead in light of our present situation with a global pandemic?

How people do we know that are living with unresolved conflict with family members because they feel like there will always be time in the future to ask for forgiveness and be reconciled? How many of us are living with unconfessed sin before God because we feel like we have all the time in the world to repent and be reconciled to God? How many of us are not sharing the good news about Christ's salvation to our friends and neighbors because we feel like there is nothing urgent about the present circumstances?

There is something about living with an awareness of walking through the valley of the shadow of death that ought to trivialize many of the temporary things that we have deemed important and escalate the importance of a few things that we have placed on the sidelines. In all of the heinousness that is COVID-19, maybe some people will wake up to the reality of life and death and be provoked to think and act differently in this present world because of the work of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

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