SHEPHERDING COHORTS

A COMMUNAL PRIESTHOOD

Name: _____

Leader(s): _____

Location: _____

We meet every month on the:

first | second | third | fourth

Sunday
Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday

Time: _____

Schedule

Session 1: _____
Date

Session 2: _____
Date

Session 3: _____
Date

Session 4: _____
Date

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Introduction

WHAT IS SHEPHERDING?

Jesus calls himself the "good shepherd." He tells his disciples that he knows his sheep and that they know him. He tells them he will even sacrifice his own life for his sheep (John 10:14-15). Chapters later, Jesus extends this role to his followers when he asks Peter, "Do you love me? Then take care of my sheep" (John 21:17)

Since the beginning, God has been inviting humanity to join him in caring for his sheep (Genesis 1:28; 2:15; 12:1-2). This was the role of his "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6), a title that would later be extended to the Church (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

But how does one act as a priest? What are the qualifications? Surely one of the greatest mysteries of the Incarnation is that the Creator of the universe steps into his creation to repair what has been broken, not with transcendent powers, but through the slow, fragile, and sometimes exhausting practice of human relationship. In Jesus, we witness a true priest—the greatest Shepherd—a human who is *with* and *for* others.

Whether it is someone you work with, someone you live with, a neighbor, someone in whose life you already have influence, or someone for whom you have been moved with compassion, shepherding is a commitment to be *with* and *for* another.

A shepherding cohort, then, is a collection of invidivuals who have devoted themselves to others: a community of priests seeking to know, feed, lead, and protect specific "sheep" in their lives—striving to both model the Good Shepherd and guide their "sheep" to him.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK:

This workbook was designed to be used by a **small group** of people who have each identified 1-3 "sheep" whom God has invited them to intentionally shepherd. Each shepherding relationship will look unique, but all "shepherds" are expected to intentionally interact with their "sheep" one-on-one *at least as often as the group plans to meet*. This means that participants of a cohort that meets **monthly** should likewise plan an intentional meeting with their "sheep" at least once a month, but would be welcome to meet with their sheep bi-weekly, or even weekly, if desired.

The curriculum is made up of **four sessions,** each beginning with a practice of scripture meditation leading to a discussion time organized around participants reflecting on their shepherding relationship(s), discerning aspects of the relationship(s), and planning intentional ways to more fully engage in the relationship(s). Each week ends with a time of prayer for the "shepherds" in the room and the "sheep" they carry in their hearts.

Following each session is space devoted to **journaling**. Participants are first invited to journal/pray *consecrating* their next conversation with their sheep. They are then invited to journal/pray *reflecting* on that conversation. The same journal space and prompts are provided following each of the four sessions.

FACILITATOR TIPS:

DISCUSSION: You can decide the style of discussion that works best for your cohort (it may be related to the size of your group too). Certain groups thrive with "popcorn" style discussion—the more casual style of speaking up when you desire. If "popcorn" style discussion isn't working as well as you hoped (e.g., either no one is speaking up, or the same person is dominating the conversation), you might try "round robin" discussion—the more structured style of going around the room, person by person. Since participants are given substantial time to think about the activities in this curriculum, they are typically willing to share in this style, though you can always give people the option to "pass."

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION: These sessions are designed to invite honesty and vulnerability from the participants. Therefore, the facilitator may, at times, need to act as a spiritual director—seeking to guide the time and conversation toward hearing from the Spirit. Feel the freedom, as well as the sacred responsiblity, to care for those in your cohort during the group time, even if that means straying from the plan.

SILENCE: Prescribed times of silence have been planned throughout these sessions, but feel free to utilize silence as needed. Some groups may naturally use silence following every question to give people time to think; others may insert silence after every scripture reading; others may use it when conversation feels stuck or weighty in a disorienting way. Silence often slows us down in order to catch back up to God.

"They lowered him right in front of Jesus"

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

As one person reads aloud the passage below, the rest of the group is invited to close their eyes and visualize the scene.

Mark 2:1-12

The house where Jesus was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven."

But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, "What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!"

Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts? Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk'? So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!"

And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, "We've never seen anything like this before!"

Now, as the text is read a second time, visualize it again, this time putting yourself and your "sheep" into the scene either as a named character (i.e., Jesus, the paralyzed man, one of the four men, the teachers of religious law) or as an unnamed character among the visitors.

SHARE: Who were you in the text, and why? Who was your sheep, and why?

GROUP DISCUSSION

REFLECT: Which of the four functions of a shepherd listed below (i.e., know, feed, lead, & protect) best describes your current relationship with your "sheep"? Explain.

FOUR FUNCTIONS OF A SHEPHERD

KNOW ***Who is your "sheep"?*** *The intentional pursuit to learn your "sheep's" joys, sorrows, giftings, and longings*

FEED ***What influences your "sheep"?*** *The intentional promotion of conversations, relationships, and other mediums of influence that express the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) to your "sheep"*

LEAD ***What burdens your "sheep"?*** *The intentional offering of yourself to equip, edify, or assist your "sheep" so they might be free to live a holy life*

PROTECT ***What threatens your "sheep"?*** *The intentional provision of time, energy, and resources to preempt controllable threats and to comfort your "sheep" within uncontrollable threats*

DISCERN: Where do you sense God leading you in this relationship?

PLAN: What's one thing you could do to more intentionally grow your relationship with your "sheep"? (*Feel free to answer this question or to ask the group for their wisdom*).

SENDING PRAYER

PRAYER FOR THE SHEPHERDS
transposed from Isaiah 61

Spirit of the Sovereign Lord,
  equip us to bring good news to the afflicted.
Show us how to comfort the brokenhearted.
Restore our hope that captives *can* be released
  and those in bondage *can* be freed.
Give us the words to share with those without hope
  that God wants to repair what has been broken,
  and that he will fight to end what has done the breaking.

Take two minutes to pray silently for your sheep; for your upcoming conversations; for your fellow cohort members; or to just remain still, knowing that the Lord is God.

PRAYER FOR THE SHEEP
transposed from Psalm 23

Lord, you are the true shepherd of our sheep.
May they know that they have all
  that they need.
Grant them rest in green meadows
  and walks beside peaceful streams.
Renew their strength.
Guide them along right paths,
  bringing honor to your name.
And when they walk
  through the darkest valley,
  reveal your presence close beside them.
Use your rod and your staff
  to protect them and to comfort them.
May they hear your invitation to feast
  at a meal you've prepared for them
  in the midst of those who work against them.
Give them purpose and honor,
  like anointing oil on their head.
May their cup overflow with blessings
  as they come to realize that
  you will never stop pursuing them
  with your goodness and unfailing love.
Welcome them, Lord, into your house forever.
Amen.

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CONSECRATE CONVERSATION 1

Before *meeting with your "sheep," use the provided space to write your prayers; note what you hear God saying; or record ideas he brings to mind as you prepare. If prompts are helpful, consider Jeff Clark's questions below from "Praying on Offense."*

God, what are *your* desires for this person?

Are there any ways that my sin or woundedness is getting in the way of this person's potential?

What have you put inside this person that they do not yet believe about themselves?

What act of fearless humility on my part can give you space to help this person become more fully who you designed them to be?

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REFLECT ON CONVERSATION 1

After *meeting with your "sheep," use the provided space to write your prayers; note things you want to remember; or record ideas for future conversations or follow-up. If prompts are helpful, consider the provided questions provided below.*

What was significant that I should be careful to remember?	What follow-up, if any, might be beneficial?	Was anything about my own character revealed during our conversation?	What specific prayer can I continue to pray for my "sheep" this month?

"A farmer went out to plant some seeds"

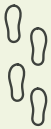
SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Read the passage aloud:

Luke 8:4-8, 11-15

One day Jesus told a story in the form of a parable to a large crowd that had gathered:

"A farmer went out to plant some seeds.
As he scattered it across his field,



some seed fell on a **footpath**, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it.

Other seed fell among **rocks**. It began to grow, but the plant soon wilted and died for lack of moisture.

Other seed fell among **thorns** that grew up with it and choked out the tender plants.

Still other seed fell on **fertile soil**. This seed grew and produced a crop that was a hundred times as much as had been planted!"

And then Jesus told them the meaning of the parable: *"The seed is God's word.*

*The seeds that fell on the **footpath** represent those who hear the message, only to have the devil come and take it away from their hearts and prevent them from believing and being saved.*

*The seeds on the **rocky soil** represent those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation.*

*The seeds that fell among the **thorns** represent those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity.*

*And the seeds that fell on the **good soil** represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God's word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest."*

SHARE: Which soil signifies the life-situation of your "sheep" ? Explain.

GROUP DISCUSSION

REFLECT: What's been one of the highlights of your relationship with your sheep?

DISCERN: What do you hope for your sheep? What are some of the greatest hindrances to this hope?

PLAN: Where is the fruit of the Spirt growing around you? What's one way you could invite your "sheep" into those places of "good soil" (i.e., your home, friendships, habits, etc.)?

PRAYER FOR THE SHEPHERDS*

Lord, make us an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

SILENCE

O divine Master, grant that we may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Take a minute of silence to consider the context and disposition of your "sheep." What do you sense God inviting you to sow into them?

Write what comes to mind in the format of this prayer:

Where there is:

_____

let me sow:

_____

After a minute of silence, the prayer continues . . .

Take two minutes to pray silently for your sheep; for your upcoming conversations; for your fellow cohort members; or to just remain still, knowing that the Lord is God.

PRAYER FOR THE SHEEP

transposed from Psalm 23

Lord, you are the true shepherd of our sheep.
May they know that they have all
that they need.
Grant them rest in green meadows
and walks beside peaceful streams.
Renew their strength.
Guide them along right paths,
bringing honor to your name.
And when they walk
through the darkest valley,
reveal your presence close beside them.
Use your rod and your staff
to protect them and to comfort them.
May they hear your invitation to feast
at a meal you've prepared for them
in the midst of those who work against them.
Give them purpose and honor,
like anointing oil on their head.
May their cup overflow with blessings
as they come to realize that
you will never stop pursuing them
with your goodness and unfailing love.
Welcome them, Lord, into your house forever.
Amen.

This prayer first appeared in a small spiritual magazine in Paris ("La Clochette," The Little Bell, 1912). The prayer was published written by "Anonymous" with the title of "A Beautiful Prayer to Say During the Mass." The author was probably the publisher, Father Bouquerel himself, but remains a mystery. Around 1920, the prayer was printed on the back of a widely distributed image of St. Francis (who died in 1226) and is therefore often attributed to him.

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CONSECRATE CONVERSATION 2

Before *meeting with your "sheep," use the provided space to write your prayers; note what you hear God saying; or record ideas he brings to mind as you prepare. If prompts are helpful, consider Jeff Clark's questions below from "Praying on Offense."*

God, what are *your* desires for this person?

Are there any ways that my sin or woundedness is getting in the way of this person's potential?

What have you put inside this person that they do not yet believe about themselves?

What act of fearless humility on my part can give you space to help this person become more fully who you designed them to be?

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REFLECT ON CONVERSATION 2

After *meeting with your "sheep," use the provided space to write your prayers; note things you want to remember; or record ideas for future conversations or follow-up. If prompts are helpful, consider the provided questions provided below.*

What was significant that I should be careful to remember?	What follow-up, if any, might be beneficial?	Was anything about my own character revealed during our conversation?	What specific prayer can I continue to pray for my "sheep" this month?

"Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk"

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

As one person reads aloud the passage below, the rest of the group is invited to close their eyes and visualize the scene.

John 5:1-9[a]

Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, **"Would you like to get well?"**

"I can't, sir," the sick man said, **"for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me."**

Jesus told him, **"Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!"**

Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking!

SHARE: How is your "sheep" like the paralytic?

One person reads the passage a second time. Again the group is invited to close their eyes and visualize the scene.

SHARE: How are you like the paralytic?

GROUP DISCUSSION

REFLECT: What's been difficult, frustrating, or wearisome in shepherding your "sheep"?

DISCERN: What do these responses to your sheep reveal about your own nature?

PLAN: What might God be inviting you into, and how does this practically play out in your next conversation with your "sheep"?

PRAYER FOR THE SHEPHERDS*

We are no longer our own, but thine.
Put us to what thou wilt,
  rank us with whom thou wilt.
Put us to doing, put us to suffering.
Let us be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
  exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let us be full, let us be empty.
Let us have all things, let us have nothing.
We freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
  you are ours, and we are yours. So be it.
And this covenant which we have made on earth,
  let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.

Take two minutes to pray silently for your sheep; for your upcoming conversations; for your fellow cohort members; or to just remain still, knowing that the Lord is God.

PRAYER FOR THE SHEEP

transposed from Psalm 23

Lord, you are the true shepherd of our sheep.
May they know that they have all
  that they need.
Grant them rest in green meadows
  and walks beside peaceful streams.
Renew their strength.
Guide them along right paths,
  bringing honor to your name.
And when they walk
  through the darkest valley,
  reveal your presence close beside them.
Use your rod and your staff
  to protect them and to comfort them.
May they hear your invitation to feast
  at a meal you've prepared for them
  in the midst of those who work against them.
Give them purpose and honor,
  like anointing oil on their head.
May their cup overflow with blessings
  as they come to realize that
  you will never stop pursuing them
  with your goodness and unfailing love.
Welcome them, Lord, into your house forever.
Amen.

**The Wesleyan Covenant Prayer was adapted by John Wesley, the co-founder of Methodism (along with his brother, Charles). The prayer was first used in a covenant renewal service held on Monday, August 11, 1755, in London, with 1800 people present.*

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CONSECRATE CONVERSATION 3

Before *meeting with your "sheep," use the provided space to write your prayers; note what you hear God saying; or record ideas he brings to mind as you prepare. If prompts are helpful, consider Jeff Clark's questions below from "Praying on Offense."*

God, what are *your* desires for this person?

Are there any ways that my sin or woundedness is getting in the way of this person's potential?

What have you put inside this person that they do not yet believe about themselves?

What act of fearless humility on my part can give you space to help this person become more fully who you designed them to be?

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REFLECT ON CONVERSATION 3

After *meeting with your "sheep," use the provided space to write your prayers; note things you want to remember; or record ideas for future conversations or follow-up. If prompts are helpful, consider the provided questions provided below.*

What was significant that I should be careful to remember?	What follow-up, if any, might be beneficial?	Was anything about my own character revealed during our conversation?	What specific prayer can I continue to pray for my "sheep" this month?

"He had compassion on them"

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

As one person reads aloud the three scenes below, the rest of the group is invited to close their eyes and visualize the narrative.

Matthew 14:13-23

SCENE 1: Jesus left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

SCENE 2: That evening the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves."

But Jesus said, "That isn't necessary—you feed them."

"But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!" they answered.

"Bring them here," he said. Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children!

SCENE 3: Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone.

Now, as the text is read a second time, visualize the text again, this time putting yourself into the scene either as a named character (i.e., Jesus, the crowd, a disciple) or as an unnamed character.

SHARE: Who were you in the text, and why?

GROUP DISCUSSION

REFLECT: Share about a fish and loaves moment with your "sheep" or about a time when you experienced God's grace through someone else's faithfulness.

DISCERN: What currently feels impossible in regard to your "sheep's" growth?

PLAN: What's one small offering you can give toward reaching this impossibility as an act of faith (i.e., time, energy, attention, priority, finances, space, etc.), believing that God could in fact multiply your gift and accomplish the impossible in your "sheep's" life?

PRAYER FOR THE SHEPHERDS*

May today there be peace within.
May we trust God that
  we are exactly where we are meant to be.
May we not forget the infinite possibilities
  that are born of faith.
May we use the gifts that we have received,
  and pass on the love that has been given to us.
May we be content knowing we are children of God.
Let this presence settle into our bones,
  and allow our souls the freedom to
  sing, dance, praise and love.
It is there for each and every one of us.
Amen.

Take two minutes to pray silently for your sheep; for your upcoming conversations; for your fellow cohort members; or to just remain still, knowing that the Lord is God.

PRAYER FOR THE SHEEP

transposed from Psalm 23

Lord, you are the true shepherd of our sheep.
May they know that they have all
  that they need.
Grant them rest in green meadows
  and walks beside peaceful streams.
Renew their strength.
Guide them along right paths,
  bringing honor to your name.
And when they walk
  through the darkest valley,
  reveal your presence close beside them.
Use your rod and your staff
  to protect them and to comfort them.
May they hear your invitation to feast
  at a meal you've prepared for them
  in the midst of those who work against them.
Give them purpose and honor,
  like anointing oil on their head.
May their cup overflow with blessings
  as they come to realize that
  you will never stop pursuing them
  with your goodness and unfailing love.
Welcome them, Lord, into your house forever.
Amen.

**This prayer is often attributed to St. Teresa of Ávila or St. Thérèse of Lisieux (and sometimes even Mother Teresa), but more recently it's been attributed to British poet Minnie Louise Haskins (1875-1957).*

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CONSECRATE CONVERSATION 4

Before *meeting with your "sheep," use the provided space to write your prayers; note what you hear God saying; or record ideas he brings to mind as you prepare. If prompts are helpful, consider Jeff Clark's questions below from "Praying on Offense."*

God, what are *your* desires for this person?

Are there any ways that my sin or woundedness is getting in the way of this person's potential?

What have you put inside this person that they do not yet believe about themselves?

What act of fearless humility on my part can give you space to help this person become more fully who you designed them to be?

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REFLECT ON CONVERSATION 4

After *meeting with your "sheep," use the provided space to write your prayers; note things you want to remember; or record ideas for future conversations or follow-up. If prompts are helpful, consider the provided questions provided below.*

What was significant that I should be careful to remember?	What follow-up, if any, might be beneficial?	Was anything about my own character revealed during our conversation?	What specific prayer can I continue to pray for my "sheep" this month?

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