To understand the role of shepherding, we must consider the person of the Good Shepherd. Phillip Keller explores why God chose this analogy of shepherd and sheep to illustrate His relationship with us in his book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. David, the shepherd, opens the psalm with a praise, “The LORD is my shepherd,” a statement of ownership, identity, and submission. We have been bought with the priceless blood of Jesus, and He recognizes that he no longer belongs to himself. Do you live as though you belong to Jesus? Do you smell with pride as you declare, “The LORD is my shepherd”? As you awake each morning, consider a declaration such as, “LORD Jesus, today I am Yours. I look forward to following you and your agenda.”

Phillip Keller expresses complete trust in God as his provider. And the biggest provision is God Himself. David had no need of anything because God was all he needed. God invites all of us to, “Taste and see that the LORD is good.” Fearing on God is not like fearing on physical food. After a big meal, we push away from the table and say, “No more! I’m full!” Just the opposite is true when we taste the love of the Lord. Our appetite is only whetted, and we desire more. But oftentimes our “taste” is a dry morsel of Christian religion.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters." I am intrigued by the word “makes” in this phrase. Why don’t we just lie down and rest easily? God is committed to our health and well-being, so committed that He will orchestrate our lives to insure rest. God walks ahead of us, leading us to waters of rest (the literal translation). Then comes the profound words, “He restores my soul.” There is more that needs restoring than our body. God sees the inner workings of our lives and brings rest and restoration. “He guides me in the paths of righteousness” The word “path” literally means track. Many tracks, many footprints, have been trod to form a path. In this case, this is the footprint of righteousness! These are the footprints of the Shepherd! As sheep we have the prerogative of walking as closely to His footprints as we desire. Why not? We are monarchs of a Christian religion. "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters." I am intrigued by the word "makes" in this phrase. Why don’t we just lie down and rest easily? God is committed to our health and well-being, so committed that He will orchestrate our lives to ensure rest. God walks ahead of us, leading us to waters of rest (the literal translation). Then comes the profound words, "He restores my soul." There is more that needs restoring than our body. God sees the inner workings of our lives and brings rest and restoration. "He guides me in the paths of righteousness" The word "path" literally means track. Many tracks, many footprints, have been trod to form a path. In this case, this is the footprint of righteousness! These are the footprints of the Shepherd! As sheep we have the prerogative of walking as closely to His footprints as we desire. Why not? We are monarchs of Christian religion. "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters." I am intrigued by the word "makes" in this phrase. Why don’t we just lie down and rest easily? God is committed to our health and well-being, so committed that He will orchestrate our lives to ensure rest. God walks ahead of us, leading us to waters of rest (the literal translation). Then comes the profound words, "He restores my soul." There is more that needs restoring than our body. God sees the inner workings of our lives and brings rest and restoration. "He guides me in the paths of righteousness" The word "path" literally means track. Many tracks, many footprints, have been trod to form a path. In this case, this is the footprint of righteousness! These are the footprints of the Shepherd! As sheep we have the prerogative of walking as closely to His footprints as we desire. Why not? We are monarchs of Christian religion.
a shepherd's guide
Questions for a shepherd

Margin—Does this person have adequate margin in his/her life for rest, seeking God, and spending time with family and friends?

Emotional Responses—Do you notice any strong emotional reactions or responses which should be pursued in further dialog?

Outlook—What is the person feeling about:
Life, relationships with God, ministry, family relationships and responsibilities?

God—Does he/she talk about what God is teaching them? Is there evidence of a growing relationship with God, and of the fruits of the Spirit? What can you do to encourage them in their walk with God?

Purity—Do you know their biblical convictions regarding sexual and moral purity? Does he/she have accountability with someone in these areas?

Family—Is a husband loving and enjoying his wife and children? Is a wife respecting and enjoying her husband and children? Can you identify an area in family relationships where they need help? As much as possible, do they have healthy relationships with extended family?

Forgiveness—Do they have relationships that need healing? People and hurts to forgive? Are they relating well within their team?

Resources—Is there a resource you could suggest that would be beneficial? Suggestions: funding development, PRT skills/tools/counseling, marriage counseling, local pastor, regional shepherd, local Bible study, Sunday School class, local church seminar, mission resources

Friends—Does this person have an intimate friendship with someone close at hand? Could you encourage them to pursue developing relationships with mentors and peers?

Health—Is there an area that would be helpful for them to pursue better physical health?

Environment of Grace—Are you a safe person for him/her to share these things with? What might you do to deepen trust between you?

What does it mean to shepherd someone—or a team of someones—and love them the way Jesus would? What can leaders do to maintain a strong staff team who encourage and model the love of Christ? In over twenty years of ministry I have seen a correlation between the success of new staff members and their first staff team experience. As I’ve grown in this area of caring for staff members, I have a deep conviction about the importance of shepherding people.

My first few years of ministry were spent on a team with a leader, Jim, who was not gifted as a shepherd, but who had strong biblical convictions about shepherding and community. Those of us on his team were a “tag tag” bunch of young staff who were driven to speak truth. Jim was coming off an experience with a previous staff team that he did not want to repeat. For one year Jim had no team on his campus. During this time God worked into him convictions that made him one of the best shepherds. When I reported to his team in January of 1987, Jim began to lead out of his new convictions. He taught and, more importantly, modeled the love of Christ. He sacrificially loved each one of us, and we began to do the same for one another. Eventually we all shepherded each other. Our team, even though we ministered on the hardest campus in the area, was one of the healthiest and happiest teams in the region. As an impressionable new staff member, this positive experience formed the rest of my ministry career.

Eventually I had the opportunity to shepherd and train several young women. One September a new woman, Kim, reported to campus. Kim graduated from a southern school where ministry was so easy it was referred to as Disneyland. Kim’s responsibility was to begin a new work in a dorm where we had no ministry. Almost daily I would find her hanging out in the dorm rooms of students already in the ministry. I did everything I knew to help her succeed, but it was to no avail. I began to resent Kim. I “invested” countless hours in her and she would not reproduce. I did not ask for her to be assigned to my campus. I did not want her. She took time away from me that I could be spending with students.

One day during my quiet time, God whacked me upside the head. I was reading Acts 20:28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church which He purchased with His own blood.” God so convicted me that Kim was valuable whether she reproduced or not because of the price paid for her—the price of Christ’s blood. I was, therefore, called to shepherd her well because of that. My attitude changed that day. I realized my responsibilities was to shepherd those the Holy Spirit put in my charge. If I were to be a leader, a shepherd, I needed to take seriously His command to “shepherd the flock among you.” If God called Kim to be part of my team, He also called me to shepherd her.

I learned some life lessons under Jim’s leadership and in my own experiences learning to shepherd. First, sacrificial love is required to shepherd people well. Second, if God entrusts one of His to me, I better take seriously this stewardship. Third, shepherding doesn’t just happen, it takes conviction, thought, planning and time. Fourth, I am there to serve “the sheep,” not the other way around. I believe God will bless and multiply a ministry when we take care of what God entrusts to us.