

# Shepherds and Hirelings

by Zac Poonen

---

*A true shepherd cares for his sheep, lays down his life for them, and fights with Satan to deliver them, while a hireling seeks his own gain and works for pay.*

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 17:34, Ezekiel 34:3, Ezekiel 34:11, 1 Timothy 3:1, 1 Peter 5:8

**Topics:** "Church Leadership", "Spiritual Guidance"

---

## Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the role of shepherds in the church, drawing from Ezekiel 34 to highlight the contrast between hirelings who seek their own gain and true shepherds who sacrificially care for and protect the flock. He emphasizes the importance of spiritual fathers who go beyond preaching to personally care for and strengthen the spiritually sick and lost, likening them to shepherds who fight against spiritual enemies to deliver the lambs. Poonen warns that the failure of shepherds can lead God's people into spiritual Babylon, urging aspiring elders to see it as a noble work of serving and blessing others rather than seeking titles or honor.

---

## Transcript

In Ezekiel 34:3-6, the Lord rebukes the shepherds of Israel. He rebuked them for eating the fat of the sheep and clothing themselves with their wool. They had not strengthened the sickly, nor healed the diseased, nor bound up the wounded sheep. They had not gone out to bring back the scattered sheep, nor protected the sheep from wild animals. Instead they had ruled the sheep with force and severity. They were hirelings and not true shepherds. Hirelings are like teachers. They seek their own and work for pay. In contrast, we see in verses 11-16 how a true shepherd behaves. He cares for his sheep, feeds them, leads them to rest, seeks the lost sheep, brings back the backslidden ones, and strengthens the sick ones. A good shepherd even lays down his life for the sheep.

A spiritual father is such a shepherd to his flock. This is our calling as servants of the new covenant. We must not think of our ministry as consisting merely of preaching in the meetings. Maybe there is some discouraged brother somewhere who needs a visit and a word of encouragement. Someone else may need deliverance because he is being oppressed by Satan. We have to look at all such people as lambs that have been captured by Satan the lion (1 Pet.5:8). Like David, we must go out against the lion, attack it, and deliver the lambs out of its mouth (1 Sam.17:34,35). That is how a true shepherd acts. When he comes across a difficult brother, he fights with Satan, and doesn't criticise the brother. Thus he delivers the lamb from the lion's mouth.

Haven't we all seen fathers and mothers sitting up with their sick children, by their bedsides the whole night, caring for them. Teachers have no time for such self-denying care. They will only tell their sick students to come back to school after they get well. It is when we have spiritually sick brothers in our midst, that we discover whether we are actually fathers or teachers. If you have a difficult wife, you will soon discover whether you are a shepherd-husband or a hireling-husband. If you had a spiritual wife however, you might never have discovered your true state!

God told the shepherds in Ezekiel's time that Israel had gone to Babylon because of the failure of their shepherds. Many of God's people are dwelling in Babylon today, for the same reason : Their shepherds have failed them.

1 Timothy 3:1 says that if a man aspires to be an elder in a church, he is desiring a fine work. Yes, it is certainly a fine work to be a blessing and a help to others in the church, as a spiritual father.

May none of us however desire the title and the honour of being known as elders and servants of God.

May God help us to take this matter seriously.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/shepherds-and-hirelings/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**