

Austin Axen Ordination Message

It's an honor to be with you today.

I remember with great joy on my ordination day. And for me – it was one of the most significant days in my ministry life to that point. Deanne and I had just celebrated our 7th wedding anniversary – we were parenting our son and daughter and in our first pastoral assignment – planting Lake Hills Church – and in my late 20s. I was eager and blessed to be used by God in whatever ways that He asked.

Looking at you and Sarah today and having walked with you in your ministry over these past few years, Austin – I see a young man, still in your 20s, with your wife and soon to be two children, a son and daughter, eager and blessed to be used by God as a shepherd to his flock.

I want to reflect this morning briefly on the role of the shepherd. Here in Southern California, I don't think I've ever seen a shepherd with his flock of sheep. But it was a very familiar sight in the history of Israel.

These are three things I want you to remember about your role as a shepherd of God's flock that you need to do really, really well.

1. Follow the Good Shepherd
2. Be an example to the flock
3. Care for God's flock

#1 – Follow the Good Shepherd

Austin, you must follow the Good Shepherd every single day of your life – and you must listen for His Voice to *lead* you. You can't lead others if you are not first following Jesus.

John 10 is a beautiful picture of our relationship as sheep to the shepherd Jesus.

Austin – don't forget that you are a sheep.

Jesus says in John 10:1-5, "Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

What a beautiful picture of the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep! When the shepherd enters the sheep pen – the sheep do what?

- They listen to His voice. He calls them by name. He leads them out.
- He goes on ahead – and His sheep follow because they know His voice.
- And they do not follow a stranger's voice

Austin – know the voice of the Good Shepherd so well that every time you hear it – you obey. You are quick to follow.

Listen to His voice and follow.

I love the hymn “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us.” Listen to these cherished words...

Savior, like a shepherd lead us
Much we need Thy tender care
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us
For our use Thy folds prepare.

Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus
Thou hast bought us, Thine we are.
Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus
Thou hast bought us, Thine we are.

Austin – your number one job is to never forget that you are a sheep. Follow the Shepherd. Know Him. Be known by Him. Listen to His voice.

#2 – Be an example to the flock

The apostle Peter spent a lot of time with the Good Shepherd Jesus.

As you are preaching through I Peter right now – you will come to this marvelous text in chapter 5.

Peter instructs the elders in the church to shepherd God’s flock!

I will read the first three verses – and particularly focus on the very last phrase in verse 3: “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

So much wonderful instruction that you will get to unpack when you preach this passage. But note these two things:

1. The flock is entrusted to your care.
 - a. God is trusting you to lead/shepherd this church family.
 - b. Be trustworthy. Be worthy of that trust!
2. Be an example to the flock.

This isn’t only your responsibility – it is the responsibility of the leaders/elders of LOC.

But since I’m addressing you specifically, Austin – I am going to emphasize your responsibility to be an example – show your flock what it looks like to know the shepherd and make Him known. Show them – be an example of:

- How to make disciples
- How to trust Him in a pandemic
- How to love your enemies
- How to hear God’s voice in all the other noise

Be an example of humility, love, patience, kindness, self-control.

And as Paul told Timothy in his first letter to him – “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in (5 areas) – in speech, in life, in love, in faith, in purity.”

Austin – you are young. Everyone knows you are young. What a blessing to be young and called by God.

Be an Example! Follow the Shepherd!

#3 – Care for God’s flock

This, of course, is what shepherds do. They care for sheep.

Austin – care for the people of LOC- love them like the Good Shepherd loves them.

One of my favorite people in the Bible is, of course, King David. Before he was king, he was a shepherd – he cared for his dad’s sheep.

David says to King Saul in I Samuel 17:34-35, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him.”

He knew that caring for his dad’s sheep included protecting them from predators. That’s what shepherds do – they protect the sheep.

One of David’s most beautiful Psalms is familiar to all of us. Psalm 23.

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want.” Why? Because when the Lord is my shepherd – I have everything that I need.

I have to bring you back, Austin, to this truth. They aren’t your sheep – they are entrusted to your care. And your role as under-shepherd is to lead them back to the source of everything they need – Jesus.

Unless you know that He is everything you need – you won’t care for His sheep very well.

If you think they are your sheep and you try to care for them on your own – you will fail!

Jeremiah 50:6 –

“My people have been lost sheep,
their shepherds have led them astray
and caused them to roam on the mountains.
They wandered over mountain and hill
and forgot their own resting place.”

And this in Ezekiel 34:1-6 –

“The word of the Lord came to me: ²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ³You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵So they were scattered because

there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶ My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.”

It is so plain – *“Should not shepherds take care of the flock?”*

The answer is Yes – Absolutely. That’s what shepherds do.

I could unpack so much more here – but I really want to impress on you today, Austin –

1. Follow the Good Shepherd
2. Be a good example to the flock
3. Care for the sheep!

In Ezekiel 34:14-16, we read – ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.”

This is your example to follow, Austin.

Be a shepherd like the Good Shepherd.

- Lead them to good pasture
- Restore them
- Help them rest in God
- Care for their wounds
- Strengthen them
- Search for the lost and bring them in
- Shepherd with justice!