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## 6 Ways to Shepherd When You Can't See the Sheep

In the wake of our pandemic, many godly shepherds are now faced with the daunting challenge of shepherding from a distance.  
Jeff Christopherson

You can access Coronavirus-related articles, in addition to partner resources from Saddleback Church's PEACE Plan and The Humanitarian Disaster Institute at [CoronavirusAndTheChurch.Com](http://CoronavirusAndTheChurch.Com). The Leadership in the Coronavirus Crisis podcast is filled with key interviews. You can find it at [www.stetzerleadershippodcast.com](http://www.stetzerleadershippodcast.com).

Implicit in the biblical metaphor is that shepherds care for the sheep, protect the sheep, and lead the sheep to nutritious pasturelands. All of this seemingly necessitates physical presence as we lead under the authority of the Great Shepherd. The very language associated with shepherding connotes a proximity that keeps us smelling like sheep—we are intimately aware of their needs and constantly seeking out their best interest. Jesus is the Good Shepherd for His sheep because He was among them—calling them by name. So, it's difficult to imagine shepherding apart from proximity. But in the wake of our pandemic, many godly shepherds are now faced with the daunting challenge of shepherding from a distance. **Let me suggest 6 practices.**

**Thank God for what you do have:** Yes, technology is a meager substitute for presence, but the fact remains that you are not cut off from the sheep. You can still talk with them, see their faces, and hear their concerns. Rather than lamenting all that we've lost due to this pandemic, sensible shepherds remain thankful for God's common grace.

**Depend on the Spirit's work through Prayer:** While you can't be physically present, God, in His Spirit, is always present with His sheep. Perhaps this time of scattering is a gift to remind us that the assignment of shepherding was never our sole responsibility.

**Resist the Myth that Shepherding Happens Best in Crowds:** Most faithful shepherds know that much of the effective discipleship they've done through the years has happened through individual, one-on-one discipling conversations. The fact that shepherding a flock 'as a crowd' has become normative, doesn't mean that it's the only way.

**Mobilize a Decentralized Church:** Think back to the task of spiritual leaders explained in Ephesians 4:11-16. The assignment has always been to equip the saints to do the work of ministry. So, shepherds are at their best when they are equipping shepherds, and in so doing, are decentralizing the church's ministry function from the center to the missional-margins.

**Speak Prophetically, Not Reactively:** Shepherding, by nature, is forward-facing in its orientation. The shepherd knows from which direction wolves are likely to come, or where treacherous passes make it more likely for sheep to stumble or fall. They know where to find good water and green pasture. Based on this knowledge, they can point forward to a preferred future and lead the sheep toward safety and health.

**Give Personal Care to a Few:** Many have applied the mantra "do for one what you wish you could do for all" to things like short-term missions, foster-care, or adoption ministries. The premise is simple: We can't do everything to make the world better, but we can do something.

Perhaps more now than ever. Resist the lie that you are what you do. Rest in the Spirit's care and embrace the calling God has on your life. Remember, this pandemic did not redefine the biblical pattern for those called to lead God's church – it only underscored it.