Memo – Reflections on *They Smell Like Sheep* by Lynn Anderson

The McKnight Crossings elders have decided that additional elder/shepherding training would be beneficial, particularly as we anticipate adding two new elders within the next 6–12 months. As part of that effort, we selected *They Smell Like Sheep* to read and discuss together. The following are my reflections on the book.

Overall, I found the book somewhat difficult to follow. It would benefit from stronger editing, as there are grammatical issues, occasional logical gaps, and stories that at times feel loosely connected to the main point. That said, the book does offer meaningful insight into the **character** of a biblical shepherd.

Specifically, the author emphasizes that elders should be men deeply connected to God—committed to Scripture, prayer, and personal spiritual discipline—and men who genuinely love and serve the members of the congregation (the "sheep"). This focus on relational and spiritual depth is valuable and consistent with biblical teaching.

Where the book is less helpful, in my view, is in addressing the **practical responsibilities and structure of eldership**. It offers little guidance on questions such as:

- How elders should organize their work and meetings
- What governance responsibilities they should carry
- How many elders are appropriate for a congregation
- What should be handled directly by elders versus delegated to deacons or ministry leaders

In other words, the book is strong on *who elders should be*, but much weaker on *what elders should do* and *how leadership should function in practice*. If one were planting a new church, the book could help identify men of godly character, but it would not provide a clear framework for structuring leadership or organizing the work of the church.

Additionally, the book occasionally uses language that feels somewhat one-sided—for example, suggesting that it helps "rediscover the biblical design for spiritual leadership." At times, this framing can imply that alternative perspectives on leadership structure or governance are less biblical. The author strongly emphasizes prayer, care, and relational ministry, which are essential. However, this emphasis can come across as downplaying the importance of organization, structure, and governance.

I believe both are necessary. Elders must be spiritually grounded and relationally engaged, but they also bear responsibility for leadership, oversight, and orderly functioning within the church (cf. Titus 1, 1 Timothy 3). These are not competing priorities—they are complementary.

An analogy may be helpful: a nurse must genuinely care for patients, but compassion alone is not sufficient. A nurse must also be trained, organized, and capable of carrying out responsibilities effectively. In the same way, elders must combine spiritual care with sound leadership and practical oversight.

I also want to affirm what I believe is the central and necessary correction this book is making. It rightly challenges any tendency for elders to become distant, administrative, or overly focused on organizational matters at the expense of personal shepherding. If elders are not praying, not in the Word, and not

personally engaged with the lives of the congregation, then no amount of structure or governance will produce a healthy church. On this point, I believe the book is both needed and correct.

Elders should not be reduced to administrators, but neither should they abandon oversight. Shepherding includes spiritual care, prayer, teaching, protection, discernment, and oversight of the flock as a whole. That naturally includes concern for how the church is organized, how resources are used, and whether the body is being led wisely and responsibly.

Elders should not obsess over budgets as if money is the mission. But they must care about budgets because money supports the mission.

Elders should not idolize structure or titles. But they must care about structure because healthy order helps the church function faithfully.

I agree that elders must be men of prayer, Scripture, and personal shepherding. That is essential. But I do not believe that means elders should ignore budgets, leadership structure, or organizational oversight. Those things are part of caring for the flock. If the church is disorganized, financially careless, or poorly led, the sheep are still the ones who suffer. So I think the right conclusion is not that elders should avoid such matters, but that they should handle them in a spiritual, servant-hearted, and non-worldly way.

My concern is that the book may be read in a way that creates a false choice between shepherding and oversight. I do not believe elders should function merely as corporate managers, but neither do I believe they should withdraw from matters of budget, structure, planning, and governance. Such matters directly affect the health of the congregation and therefore properly fall within the elders' responsibility. The issue is not whether elders should care about these things, but how they should care about them: spiritually, wisely, humbly, and always for the good of the flock.

Biblical shepherding includes responsible oversight, and responsible oversight includes attention to budgets and structure.

- Prayer and care are central, but they are not the only aspects of eldership.
- Oversight of the flock includes oversight of the ministry systems that affect the flock.
- Budget is not the mission, but stewardship matters.
- Structure is not the goal, but order matters.
- Delegation is wise; abdication is not.

A healthy eldership must resist two equal and opposite errors: becoming merely a board of directors or becoming disengaged from leadership and oversight. Biblical shepherding calls elders to be both deeply relational and responsibly attentive to the overall direction and health of the church.