

Feeding Time

Written by Frank Garner

Long, long ago in a far-away time, I was a teenager. Believe it or not! My parents were people with a rural heritage, but like so many at that time, they had migrated to the city because that was where the jobs were. As soon as the opportunity came, they moved back to the "country" to a forty acre plot near Wylie, Texas. There, my brother and I were introduced to all of the pleasures of country living. Seriously, I loved it, and I still remember it fondly.

There were fences to build, barns to shore up, and roofs to repair and paint. Corrals had to be built. Brush had to be cleared. There was mowing, plowing, planting, and hay hauling. Of course, there were the animals; cows, horses, sheep, and a few chickens. It did not take me long to learn that with those animals came some responsibility.

Mom and Dad were up very early each day and heading off to Dallas. Early on, I had the job of feeding the animals in the morning before school. I remember the task when it was dark before sunlight, cold, cold, cold, and wet, wet, wet. I learned that the animals needed to be fed regularly. They had to be checked each day, morning and evening. If I came in late in the afternoon, I had to go find them in the dark and call them in. One of the warm memories of the time is that the animals quickly determined that I was a good fellow. I meant food, and they were eager to see me coming.

When it came to feeding, each set of animals needed a particular food. They needed to be fed on schedule. They needed the right amount of feed. Their feed had to be in the feed box or hay trough, and those had to be kept clean. Stalled animals needed fresh water morning and evening. With special animals, usually horses, the feed was often mixed in just the right proportion and amount, the hay was a partial block of alfalfa and a set number of blocks of the best hay we had, usually coastal Bermuda grass. I know that these experiences are no different than many of your experiences. There is nothing special or earthshaking here. I do not claim there is, but I do want us to consider the feeding time.

One of the most poignant scenes in the New Testament is recorded in John 21:15-18 where Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved the Lord. Each time Peter answered affirmatively, and each time Jesus told Peter "feed my lambs" or "feed my sheep." It is understood that Peter was being given a very special charge by the Savior. He was to tend the church, care for the church, protect the church, and feed the church. His charge was to care for the young and old, the individuals as well as the flock. Peter was to feed them the eternal food that would bring them **eternal** salvation. That is one of the Scenes in the New Testament that I have often tried to visualize and hear.

What were the tones of voices? What were the facial

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expressions? What a powerful responsibility was being laid.

In a meeting with the elders from Ephesus, Paul told them, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Feed the church of God. This was important. The elders were to "take heed." Take the re-sponsibility seriously. They had been appointed as overseers. They were to take care of the flock of God, the precious flock that Christ had bought with His precious blood. What a powerful responsibility was being laid.

Today, when we step before the congregation to "feed the flock," we are bound by these charges. We would do well to consider the import of the responsibility we are given and taking upon ourselves when we step into the pulpit. Consider the similarities to our feeding responsibilities of old. It was important to be consistent, on time. The flock, herd, or individuals were there waiting. It was time to be fed. Today, are we there when the flock gathers? Are we on time? Are we ready to feed them when they are to be fed? Or, do we come at our convenience, perhaps late? Is it important to us to feed the flock? Our timeliness answers that question. We need to be there and be ready, prepared. Our timeliness says to the flock that the food is worth gathering for. It says to them that they are important, and we care about feeding them.

Often, I would get a nicker or lowing when I approached the barn at feeding time, a greeting if you will. I am convinced that animals are perceptive to human moods. If I were the grouchy, grumbling and irritable, the animals picked it up. To the contrary, I could say, "Morning guys!" and talk to them. We would have a good feeding session. The Lord's flock is far more perceptive than animals. With the Lord's flock, when we are responsible for feeding them, how is our attitude? Do we exude the grouchy, grumpy, attitude that strongly suggests that we would rather be doing something else? "This is an inconvenience, and I am doing it because I am obligated." Or, are we enthusiastic, glad to be there to feed the flock? Do they know that we have something good for them, and we care for them? They should, and we should.

I do not suggest that all of the animals in the barn or on the farm were easy to get along with. There was a cow that was wild all the time. There was an old ram that was just plain mean. A horse or two would delight in biting if they could. However, they all responded in varying degrees to my attitude. And, more importantly, they all had to be fed with the same care and attention as the rest. They were a part of the menagerie. At times, some of the flock of the Lord may be difficult. As the person responsible for feeding the flock, we should be aware of that. We must feed them the good food anyway for God is no respecter of person.

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When I fed the animals, I could take time to do it right or I could rush and just get it done. The goal was important. Was my goal to care for the animals, or just get some feed in the box so I could get on with other things? When Jesus told Peter to feed His sheep, He meant more than just throwing the feed in the box. Peter's feed was to be good feed. It was to be the best. When we feed the flock today, it must be good feed (the best we've got). It must be in the right amount, and it must be appropriate for the flock. Just any old feed delivered in any old way will not do.

Would I be taking care of my Dad's animals if I hastily grabbed the old dusty feed out of the corner because I was in a hurry and did not take time to open the new bag? At one time, the stalled horses got oats, sweet feed, bran, and vitamins all in the proper amount. If I decided to pitch some stale cattle cubes in their boxes, would that be acceptable? Would I be caring for them if I took up the old moldy hay piled to the side instead of opening a new fresh bale? Am I caring for the flock of God when I grab any old thing that will take up about 30 minutes and deliver it to them as spiritual food? We are feeding the flock of God. That requires the best we have. The flock deserves the best we've got. The Lord demands it for His flock.

The point in this little piece is simple and plain. The Lord's flock is there, ready to be fed, needing to be fed. They need the feed that will provide them with the spiritual nutrition to make it to the promised land. When we step to the podium, we are responsible for feeding them with the best demeanor, the best preparation, and the best feed we have at our disposal. It does not matter that we might be tired. It does not matter that we are stressed with daily things. It

does not matter that we are not in a very good mood. What matters is that the flock gets fed and fed well. -PO Box 841, Princeton, TX 75407