

Small Group Discussion Guide

Perilous Waters | *Navigating the Dangerous Currents Shaping the Church*

Part 5: Authority Without Abuse

BIG Idea: The answer to abusive authority is not the absence of authority, but authority restored to the pattern of Christ.

Application: Learn to recognize biblical spiritual authority, place yourself willingly under healthy shepherding, and remain humble enough to receive both the care and correction Christ provides through His Church.

Discussion Questions

Icebreaker: Who was an authority figure you actually liked having in charge when you were growing up—a teacher, coach, boss, parent, youth leader, etc.? What made them good at leading?

1. When you hear the phrase “**spiritual authority**,” what is your first reaction? Why do you think authority has become such a difficult subject in the Church?
2. Read Ezekiel 34:2–6. What specifically made these shepherds unfaithful? What does this passage reveal about how seriously God takes the treatment of His people?
3. Read Matthew 20:25–28 and 1 Peter 5:1–4. Jesus doesn't eliminate leadership—He changes the way it is exercised. What should make Christian leadership different?
4. Sunday emphasized that “**no shepherd in Christ's Church ever stops being a sheep**.” Why is it important for pastors and other spiritual leaders to remain accountable and correctable themselves?
5. Read Acts 20:28–30. What dangers was Paul asking church leaders to guard against? What might some of those “wolves” look like today?
6. Read Hebrews 13:17. Which part of the verse is harder for you: believers being asked to obey spiritual leaders, or leaders knowing they will answer to God for how they shepherd people? Why?
7. How can we tell the difference between **loving biblical correction** and controlling or abusive spiritual authority?
8. Why is meaningful correction and church discipline so difficult in a culture where we can simply leave whenever a relationship or church becomes uncomfortable?
9. Read Ezekiel 34:11–12 and John 10:11. How does Jesus as the Good Shepherd reshape the way we think about both spiritual leadership and our willingness to be shepherded?

Join us as we read the Bible together in 2026. <https://bit.ly/ReadwithMe26>

10. What is one healthy response God may be asking of you this week—healing from past church hurt, becoming more open to biblical correction, strengthening your accountability, or praying for and encouraging those entrusted with spiritual leadership?

Prayer Prompt: Pray first for anyone carrying wounds caused by unhealthy spiritual authority—that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, would bring healing without minimizing what happened. Pray for Lifehouse's pastors, elders, and ministry leaders to remain humble, accountable, courageous, and faithful. Ask God to make all of us willing to receive His care and correction, and to raise up a new generation of good shepherds who will faithfully care for Christ's Church.