

LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD: THE SHEPHERD METAPHOR & ITS
PRIMACY FOR BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

by

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ABSTRACT

Like Sheep Without a Shepherd: The Shepherd Metaphor and Its Primacy for Biblical Leadership
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Metaphors are a vital part of the cognitive function that organizes and shapes our approach to ministry leadership. Great care should be taken, therefore, when choosing and promulgating a metaphor for ministry leadership. Although there are many metaphors for ministry leadership currently being promoted in religious literature, none of these has the comprehensive scope and authoritative weight of the Biblical metaphor of Shepherd.

I would like to thank my loving wife who supported me at all times in spite of often being a seminary widow; without her continual support I could not have finished this journey.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

God likes sheep. He also likes shepherds. One can hardly turn a page of the Old Testament without running into one of the woolly creatures.¹ I have a special appreciation and understanding of the work of shepherds because I was one for a time, albeit on a very small scale. When my wife and I first moved to northern Nevada from the sprawling Silicon Valley in northern California's bustling Bay Area, we bought a small ranch property. Wanting to fully experience country life, I acquired a small herd of goats and sheep, which quickly grew to be (for a first time herdsman) a very large herd of over 150 head of livestock.² I know what the Old Testament calls "small cattle" pretty well, and as a consequence of this have a heightened sensitivity to the pervasive presence of sheep and shepherds throughout Scripture.

Most of the patriarchs were herdsmen. The early Israelites referred to Yahweh as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, shepherds all. Interestingly, although Moses was highly placed in Egyptian society for most of his early life, it wasn't until he had spent time as a shepherd that God called him to shepherd God's people. Similarly, out of all

¹ Am I speaking of sheep or shepherds here, the reader may ask. Well, having known a number of sheep and shepherds I can attest that the similarities between the two can sometimes make such distinctions largely academic.

² The average female goat or sheep (doe and ewe, respectively) will more often than not bear twins or triplets. Even after taking into account loss from sickness or predation, it is not unusual for a herd to more than double or even triple each kidding or lambing season.

the people God might have chosen to anoint as Saul's successor, he passed over warriors and wisemen in favor of a brave, young shepherd named David.

The prominence of shepherds in the Old Testament is not surprising. Shepherding is one of the oldest of human occupations, and sheep and goats were by far the dominant herd animals in the ancient near east.³ Shepherds and sheep were so fundamentally a part of ANE cultures that those cultures often referred to their kings as shepherds of the people.⁴

God himself is pictured as a shepherd (e.g. Gen 49:24; Ps 23; Isa 40:11; Ezk 34:11-24). Jesus declares himself the shepherd of God's people (Mt 9:6; John 10:1-18). God's people are consistently referred to as his sheep (Ps 95:7; Ps 100:3; Isa 53:6; 1 Peter 2:25, to cite but a few).

It is the last part, wherein we are pictured in Scripture as sheep, which sticks in the craw a little. Sheep, after all, are often dirty, smelly, (reputedly) stupid animals unable to care for themselves and prone to wandering into the most awful situations, from which they cannot extricate themselves.⁵ Although shepherds and sheep are personally unknown to most of us in modern America, we are generally convinced that being a sheep is a bad thing. Sheep have become a metaphor for a group of people who will blindly follow anyone, who

³ Jack W. Vancil, "Sheep, Shepherd," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1187; Moses Aberbach, *Labor, Crafts, and Commerce in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1994).

⁴ P.L. Garber, "Sheep, Shepherd," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerald H. Wilson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988); Vancil.

⁵ My personal experience, and that of the shepherds and goatherds I have known, is that the animals are in fact quite hardy, canny, capable of surprising intelligence within their instinctive behaviors, and notable for the affection and trust they have for their regular caretaker in contrast to the distrust and wariness they will show towards those unknown to them.

do not think for themselves, who are waiting to be fleeced or slaughtered, and who are easy prey.

Shepherds do not fare nearly as badly as a modern metaphor, perhaps because it is a metaphor so rarely used these days. We tend to think of shepherds as quaint, solitary folk, spending their time with, well, sheep, and all that implies about those that follow the one doing the shepherding. Instead of calling leaders shepherds, we describe them by other metaphors having more punch and sizzle. No one gets on the cover of *Rev.*, *Ministries Today*, or *Christianity Today*, anymore for being a good shepherd.

Therein lies the problem for the modern church. We do not much care to apply the sheep metaphor to ourselves, and few Christian leaders these days seem to want to apply the shepherd metaphor to themselves. But if I read the Scriptures rightly I'm left with the inescapable conclusion that God does really like to call his people sheep and does expect those who lead his people to be shepherds. Indeed, I am convinced that the shepherd metaphor is the unifying metaphor for all ministry leadership. In other words, whatever other metaphor a ministry leader might wish to use to describe his or her ministry style, he or she is first and foremost to be a shepherd.

I have known many pastors in my life, but regrettably few shepherds. Most of the pastors I have known liked to think of themselves as skilled teachers or eloquent communicators, as powerful leaders, innovative entrepreneurs, or as winning coaches. I have known but a spare few who eschewed loftier-sounding titles and appellations and instead thought of themselves as shepherds of God's flock. From my perspective the seeming lack of pastoral folk in the churches I have had occasion to know leaves me feeling a bit

melancholy, for however nice it might sound to call oneself other things, God wants those who oversee his Church and care for his people to be shepherds.

CHAPTER 2

METAPHORS AND WHY THEY MATTER

Do the metaphors we use for ministry leadership really matter? Does it really make a difference what we call our leaders or what they call themselves? In a word, yes. Metaphors are extremely important; they reveal something of our thought processes while at the same time conditioning the way we think. The metaphors we use are in actuality reference points with which we access a deep body of data and experience, that includes both the concrete and the abstract. When we use a metaphor to access such information, an incredibly complex process of cognition, or thinking, occurs. So, one might say that metaphor reveals complex thought, and what and how we think directs our actions (Prov 3:27). Because of the linkage between metaphor, cognition, and action, metaphor usage has even been utilized in the analysis of organizational behavior in order to determine how the metaphors chosen by an organization influence the behavior of the organization and its workers.¹

Metaphor & Cognition

Simply put, a metaphor is a figure of speech wherein one thing is described in relation to a second thing that is often quite dissimilar to the first on a literal level. A metaphor is most commonly employed by saying the one thing is the second thing, such as in

¹ David Starr-Glass, "Metaphors and Maps in Evaluation," *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 30, no. 2 (2005): 199.

Shakespeare's "My love is a red, red rose."² We understand that Shakespeare's love interest isn't really a flower, but that he is using a metaphor to evoke a whole host of comparisons that will illumine the beauty of his lover in the minds of his readers.

The similarity between the two things being compared through use of a metaphor forms a linkage that conveys a large amount of information under a single, symbolic identifier. For example, to say that a man is a total hawk on the subject of Iraq is not to say he is an actual bird flying somewhere in the sky. To call someone a hawk in the context of war or foreign policy, however, is to in a single metaphor convey a complex descriptive impression of that person, namely that the man is believed to be assertive in his inclination for the U.S. to use military force in a given situation, and optimistic that said exercise of military power is the most prudent and efficient solution to the perceived international problem.

Metaphor usage is fundamental to thinking.³ It's powerful utility lies in its descriptive power and tendency to grow richer and deeper in evocative power over time. An early developmental psychologist and educational theorist, Jean Piaget, found that we think by forming schemata, mental structures which we build by experience and then use to organize and link later knowledge. Educational and cognitive theorists believe schemata begin with concrete experiences that provide a framework upon which to form the basis for abstract reasoning. In other words, "Cognition is a function of organizing information into modules within a larger mental structure."⁴

² Lisa C. Castillo, "The Effect of Analogy Instruction on Young Children's Metaphor Comprehension," *Roepers Review* 21, no. 1 (2007): 2.

³ Barbara J. Thayer-Bacon, "An Examination and Redescription of Epistemology," (ERIC: Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, 1997).

⁴ Julia Marshall, "Connecting Art, Learning, and Creativity: A Case for Curriculum Integration," *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research* 46, no. 3 (2005): 229.

Cognitive theorists have found in their research that the human mind organizes the world it experiences into categories; “the mind thinks analogously; it sees something in terms of something else.”⁵ Having formed these categories, the mind applies metaphors as a kind of placeholder or retrieval cue that allows quick access to an ever-growing mental database of information associated with that metaphor, which promotes swifter recognition, understanding, and synthesis of new, related data.⁶ Thus, the use of metaphor is not an arbitrary choice of language. Metaphor is central to cognitive processes: “The locus of metaphor is not in language at all but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another.”⁷

Metaphor is especially powerful where interdisciplinary learning or other cognitive processes are attempted. When one needs to assess needs or systems across diverse disciplines or specialties of study or performance, metaphors become an important means of categorizing, simplifying, and routinizing. Under a single metaphor, the mind organizes and forms linkages between otherwise seemingly divergent pieces of data.⁸

The organizing and categorizing function of metaphors, which is fundamental to all cognition, illuminates the importance of the metaphors we apply to ministry. Metaphors allow pastors and other ministry leaders to assimilate and synthesize the diverse bodies of knowledge and skills necessary for successful ministry. The need to acquire skills across a variety of disciplines (e.g. teaching, administration, nurture, strategic planning, etc.) is

⁵ Dedre Gentner, “Metaphor as Structure Mapping: The Relational Shift,” *Child Development* 59 (1968), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 229.

⁶ Aemilian Hron, “Metaphors as Didactic Means for Multimedia Learning Environments,” *Innovations in Education Training and Training International* 35, no. 1 (1998).

⁷ George Lakoff, “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor,” *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 203.

⁸ Svetlana Nikitina, “Pathways of Interdisciplinary Cognition,” *Cognition and Instruction* 23, no. 3 (2005); Gentner; Starr-Glass.

especially true in large-church contexts, where a ministry leader is often confronted with relational, personal, and institutional needs which are not easily encompassed by one skill-set. In cases such as these, the leader needs to organize, synthesize, and interconnect the various requirements of the ministry under a single category. The ministry leader then must call that category by a name which describes and reflects the demands of his or her ministry. This identifier, as we have seen, is almost always a metaphor drawn from some other field, like business or sports, or from the ANE in the case of the Biblical metaphor of Shepherd.

Metaphors are reflective of our thought processes, namely the universe of attributes and data which coalesce around a given metaphor, and in turn also shape and modify the way we view and act on that about which we speak metaphorically. The result of this process is that the metaphor we choose to describe ministry leadership both illumines the way we see ministry, while also shaping the praxis of ministry. One who views ministry leadership as being a shepherd will shepherd. One who sees himself as a CEO will lead as a CEO. One who see herself as a coach will lead as a coach. The problem is that only one metaphor for ministry leadership is supported by the Scriptural text, and that is the metaphor of the shepherd.

Metaphors in Modern Ministry

We call most of our church leaders “pastors.” The English word “pastor” is derived from the Latin word for “shepherd.” Today the term is not usually descriptive of what the pastor does, other than signifying that the pastor is employed by a church. This was not always the case though.

This original meaning of the Latin-derived word “pastor” finds its roots in the Old Testament word *ra'ah* and the New Testament word *poimen*, both of which mean

“shepherd.” When used in the NT, the word pastor, “designates both an endowment for ministry and the one who fills that ministry, but it implies no fixed office. . . . Rather than an office, it suggests a moral or spiritual relationship.”⁹

Today, unlike in the NT period, we more often than not use the word pastor as the title of an official, ecclesiastical position in the church. The word has become unmoored from its root meaning of being a shepherd. As a result, modern ministry leaders are constantly in search of a new metaphor for ministry that will inform and shape the work of the Pastor.

If we are to accept the prevailing metaphor at one time or another, these pastors are really Leaders, Coaches, CEOs, Teachers, Entrepreneurs, even Therapists. All these styles or nuances in leadership are acceptable and good, of course. We arguably have need of all these talents and skill-sets within the church.

Notwithstanding the value of leaders, coaches, CEOs, entrepreneurs, and all the rest, when one of these descriptors becomes the dominant metaphor for church or ministry leadership a significant problem arises. All these leadership attributes and skills are valuable to people, but God really appears to like shepherds. In fact, God likes shepherds so much he made shepherding the controlling Biblical metaphor for ministry leadership.

To be sure, that is a strong claim. It is an argument nonetheless supported by the Biblical evidence, and fully consistent with sound ecclesiology. Indeed, shepherding encompasses all those desirable qualities evoked by more common modern metaphors for ministry leadership, while any one of those other metaphors fails to convey the richness and fullness of the shepherding metaphor. A cursory examination of a few of these leading

⁹ W. R. Harris, “Pastor,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 679.

metaphors quickly demonstrates their flaws. Let us begin with one of the most common, that of Leader.

John Maxwell is a former pastor, leadership guru, and New York Times bestselling author. His conferences attract thousands of pastors and business people each year. “Everything,” says Maxwell, “rises and falls on leadership.” Whatever success one aspires to, argues Maxwell, will be either restricted or supported by one’s leadership skills.¹⁰

Few would wish to suggest that leadership is not essential to organizational success. For an organization to be deemed successful it must set and achieve its desired goals. Organizations, being made up of people, are by their very nature messy things not given to efficiency. Efficiency is found in effective leadership. That begs the question though, what is truly effective leadership?

Unfortunately for would-be leaders (although not for publishers), there is no easy answer to the question of what does or does not constitute effective leadership, which is evidenced by the truly staggering number of books on leadership published each year. Leadership is a remarkably flexible term. Leadership theorists broadly distribute leadership styles across a continuum with mechanistic models falling toward one end and organic models falling toward the opposite end.¹¹ Mechanistic models are typified by top-down hierarchal control. Organic models are typified by authority distributed horizontally and relationally through a web of interconnected teams.

¹⁰ John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of leadership: follow them and people will follow you* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 6.

¹¹ Bernard M. Bass, *Transformational Leadership: Industrial, military, and educational impact* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998); Derek Salman Pugh and David John Hickson, *Great Writers on Organizations*, 3rd omnibus ed. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

Leadership theorists also describe leadership styles in terms of whether they are transactional or transformational.¹² Transactional leaders achieve compliance from workers, and pursue institutional goals by rewarding or punishing worker performance. Transformational leaders seek to motivate workers by enlisting them in the leader's vision, motivating them to feel a sense of ownership, and encouraging them to find fulfillment by sublimating their self-interest in service to the organization or team.

Clearly the possibilities for nuance and variety between mechanistic/organic and transactional/transformational styles of leadership are immeasurable. For this reason, because leadership is so difficult to quantify, the metaphor of "Leader" is too nebulous to usefully serve as an organizing or controlling metaphor for ministry. Furthermore, as a metaphor it is insufficient. At its most basic, a Leader is one who leads. Surely there is more to ministry than simply leading, however well one achieves that aim.

In recent years, leadership theorists have begun to assert a modest consensus that organic/transformational leadership is more effective than mechanistic/transactional styles of leadership.¹³ In fact, productivity of organizations using organic/transformational styles of leadership where work is accomplished by self-managed teams is on average 35% higher than in traditionally managed organizations.¹⁴ Where individuals are allowed the freedom to exercise their creativity, ingenuity, and strengths in synergistic relationship with

¹² Bernard M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1985); Gary A. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2006).

¹³ Margaret Wheatley, "Goodbye, Command and Control," *Leader to Leader*, July 1997, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

others, guided by an overarching strategy and vision, the probability of organizational success is significantly enhanced.¹⁵

Teams can, of course, be a metaphor too. When applied to organizations, it's common to hear of "winning teams," a clear indication that Team is being used as a sports metaphor. Of course, in order for a team to win a team needs a good coach.

John Maxwell (along with many others) recognized this a few years ago and, in keeping with the prevailing winds of organizational thought, wrote a book entitled *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*. The book was bought and read, and presumably implemented, by the many pastors who follow Maxwell's work and attended his conferences on coaching winning teams.

Coaching is a perfectly acceptable metaphor to describe certain aspects of a ministry leader. Ministry leaders can coach teams of people to achieve a desired result, to attain levels of personal excellence of which they had not dreamed themselves capable. But coaches are primarily concerned with winning, and weak team members, players who are not an asset to the team, may be sidelined, traded, or fired.¹⁶ True, these kinds of choices do need to be made sometimes in a ministry context, but usually only as a last resort. Ministry is more than just winning a desired goal. Ministry is about growing people in Christ.

In recent years the metaphor of pastor as CEO has achieved some prominence. Andy Stanley is pastor of Northpoint Community Church, a phenomenally successful megachurch located in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. He is an accomplished writer and speaker whose contributions are regularly solicited by *Christianity Today*, *Leadership*

¹⁵ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: leadership for an uncertain time* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005), 28-29.

¹⁶ John C. Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: embrace them and empower your team* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 72.

Journal, and *Ministries Today*. He is also the cohost (along with John Maxwell, his mentor) of *Catalyst*, a major, annual conference for pastors and ministry leaders.

When interviewed by *Leadership Journal* in 2005 about how he views his own leadership, Stanley said he was quite comfortable with being viewed as a CEO.¹⁷ The interviewer asked Stanley if the church ought to stop talking about pastors as Shepherds.

Stanley responded:

“Absolutely. That word needs to go away. Jesus talked about shepherds because there was one over there in a pasture he could point to. ... It was culturally relevant in the time of Jesus but it’s not culturally relevant any more. Nothing works in our culture with that model except this sense of the gentle, pastoral care. Obviously that is a facet of church ministry, but that’s not leadership.”¹⁸

The interviewer then pressed Stanley asking “Isn’t shepherd the Biblical word for pastor?”

Stanley demurred:

“It’s the first century word. If Jesus were here today, would he talk about shepherds? No. ... By the time of the book of Acts the shepherd model is gone. It’s about establishing elders and deacons and their qualifications. Shepherding doesn’t seem to be the emphasis. Even when it was, it was cultural, an illustration of something. What we have to do is identify the principle, which is that the leader is responsible for the care of the people he’s been given. That I am to care for and equip the people in the organization to follow Jesus. But when we take the literal illustration and bring it into our culture, then people can make it anything they want because nobody knows much about it.”¹⁹

It is completely understandable why Stanley and other pastors of large churches, would find the metaphor of CEO attractive. The organizational complexity and budgetary income and expenses of many churches and parachurch ministries make them, among other things, major businesses. With staffs in the double or triple digits, budgets in the millions of dollars, and physical plants the equal of major local businesses, it ought not to be surprising that pastors

¹⁷ Andy Stanley, Marshall Shelley, and Eric Reed, "State of the Art," *Leadership Journal*, (Spring 2006): 27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

of these churches view themselves in much the same light as their business counterparts, and naturally turn to business leadership texts to learn and grow in their leadership abilities. Stanley himself says in the interview that the bulk of his reading consists of books on business and history.²⁰ My personal experience with a number of pastors of my acquaintance suggests Stanley is not alone in his reading preferences.

From an ecclesiological perspective pastors giving business experts precedence over the Biblical text when seeking direction for their own ministry leadership is regrettable; it suggests that the Bible itself is culturally irrelevant when addressing leadership concerns. Moreover, when these same pastors then mantle themselves with titles or leadership metaphors drawn from corporate America it ought to be troubling to the Christian conscience. Why are good pastors so quick to cast aside rich, Biblical metaphors for ministry? Generally speaking, in conservative Christian circles, a strain of Christianity in which Stanley locates himself, we do not go about second-guessing Jesus' choice of words. To the contrary, we treat Jesus' words with great care, exegeting them as best we can so as to appreciate their fullest meaning. Why then, when it comes to leadership issues, are we willing to treat Jesus' words in so cavalier a fashion?

Stanley undoubtedly cares deeply about the word of God, so it is regretful that he is quick to dismiss Jesus' choice of leadership metaphors as culturally irrelevant. What is also troubling is that Stanley is simply wrong on the meaning of his metaphors when he says the CEO metaphor is preferred because pastoring/shepherding is not leadership. Stanley asserts that in place of the shepherd we should envision modern ministry in terms of leadership, specifically the leadership of a CEO operating within a corporate structure. True,

²⁰ Ibid., 31.

a leader is one who leads someone or something from one point (metaphorical or literal) to another, but a leader does not necessarily engage in pastoral care. In contrast to this, a shepherd always leads, while also always engaging in pastoral care.

Furthermore, Stanley's chosen metaphor of CEO is clearly fraught with problems. A CEO always leads. Only in the most idiosyncratic of understandings, however, does a CEO engage in pastoral care. A CEO is concerned first and foremost with productivity, profit, market share, and share price appreciation. If Stanley is concerned that modern American Christians do not get anything of benefit from the shepherd metaphor, one wonders how he resolves the difficulties the CEO metaphor must present to a culture confronted with corporate scandals like those of Enron, Worldcom, and Goldman Sachs, wherein CEOs lined their own pockets to the financial ruination of shareholders and employees. Ironically, while pastors like Andy Stanley are rushing to adopt the metaphor of CEO, the secular CEOs they wish to emulate are rushing to divest themselves of their secular monikers and in their place adopt the Biblical metaphor of "evangelists."²¹

One of the newest metaphors being explored in ministry leadership circles is Entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is one who undertakes and assumes the risks and management of a new business venture. Usually an entrepreneur is an innovator who identifies a market opportunity and personally raises or supplies the capital necessary to provide the good or service for which there is a perceived need.

Using business language to describe ministry causes many to cringe. But if we say that an entrepreneurial ministry leader is a innovative person who identifies a ministry need and furthermore undertakes and assumes the risks of a new ministry venture meant to

²¹ Leonard I. Sweet and Edward H. Hammett, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: living with a grande passion* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2007), 13-16.

address that need, then we have always had entrepreneurs in the church. We used to call them apostles, evangelists, missionaries, and church-planters.

The entrepreneurial spirit and innovation go hand in hand. Consider some of the ministries entrepreneurial leaders and their churches have launched in recent years: restaurants, coffee shops, record labels, schools, affordable housing developments intended to improve the community's economic and physical condition. These types of ministry-run, non-traditional outreach operations are intended to move the ministry outside the walls of the church and into the community.²² The hope for these outreach efforts is that they will be expressions of Christian love and a desire to incarnate the gospel through praxis in addition to proclamation.

These types of outreach efforts are also reflective of the growing number of business people who are making the mid-career transition into vocational ministry.²³ These former business leaders bring with them financial acumen and a focus on methods which produce, which bring returns. Efficiency and productivity are as welcome within ministry as they are in business. To the extent that these can be implemented in such a way as to improve the ministries of the church they should be applauded.

Sometimes, however, an inappropriate focus on purely business concerns can result in ministry weaknesses. Tom Harper, author of the book *Career Crossover: Leaving the Marketplace for Ministry*, found in his study of the issue that the new breed of entrepreneurs in the church are often weak in “evangelism, ministry to church members, fellowship” and struggle to balance faith in God with budgetary concerns.²⁴

²² Ken Walker, "The Business of Ministry," *MinistryToday: Discerning Analysis for Innovative Church Leaders*, (March-April 2007): 26.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

John Jackson is pastor of one of America's fastest growing churches, and a strong promoter of the entrepreneurial model and metaphor for ministry. In his writing and conferences he calls for ministry leaders to adopt an "entrepreneurial strategy" for their churches which "combines the aggressive goals of business with God's heart for people."²⁵ It is actually my pleasure to know Dr. Jackson, and his ministry is pervasively evangelistic in its efforts. The vast majority of his church's efforts and resources are directed towards reaching the lost. Pastor Jackson's concern for reaching those not already in Christ is commendable.

Jackson welcomes an entrepreneurial outlook which defines "success in terms of making disciples," and which devises "ways to reach the lost instead of falling into a pattern of only communicating with the already convinced."²⁶ One wonders though, how does one go about making disciples when one doesn't see much need to communicate with the already convinced? Put differently, to be a disciple one must already be saved, to have become convinced of Jesus' saving work and to be in a saving relationship with him. If the church doesn't put much effort into pastoring the "already convinced," how will they grow as disciples of Christ?

This goes to Harper's concern that entrepreneurial ministers often neglect those aspects of ministry that are traditionally considered pastoral. Shepherding the flock of God, Harper seems to suggest, is not a priority for many Pastorpreneurs. Jackson himself gives some evidence of this when he writes, "Many of us who preach find it far easier to simply explain the text and apply it to the individual lives of our hearers from a *pastoral* perspective. While this is noble, *it is insufficient*. When a pastor stands before his people,

²⁵ John Jackson, *Pastorpreneur: Pastors and Entrepreneurs Answer the Call* (Friendswood, TX: Baxter Press, 2003), 17-18.

²⁶ Walker, 28.

there is an opportunity to fulfill the Old Testament roles of prophet, priest, and king. The leadership role is a prophetic and kingly assignment... (emphasis mine).”²⁷

Many might question whether a sound reading of the New Testament supports applying the OT roles of prophet, priest, and king, to the modern office of pastor. Setting those concerns aside for the moment, it is interesting to note that the adoption of the Entrepreneur metaphor for ministry, with its strong emphasis on innovation, productivity, and the exploration of new market niches, often results in at worst a dismissal, and at best a diminution, of the Biblical metaphor and function of a shepherd.

Indeed, in the worst of cases the people of God are not valued or ministered to but are instead primarily viewed as a workforce which may be plumbed for the utility in advancing the ministry leader’s entrepreneurial cause.²⁸ Moreover, innovation can have negative results as easily as its garners positive outcomes. As C. S. Lewis wrote in exasperation over pastors constantly trying out new ways of doing church on their parishioners, “I wish they’d remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not Try experiments on my rats, or even, Teach my performing dogs new tricks.”²⁹

A Pastorpreneur may not shepherd, but a Biblical shepherd always fulfills the core functions of a entrepreneur. A shepherd identifies new fields and pastures for his flock. He innovates ways to make his efforts at husbandry efficient. He is concerned with productivity, recognizing that herding is at least in part a business. A good shepherd searches for lost sheep, and for new stock which might be incorporated within the herd.

²⁷ John Jackson, "Preaching for Leadership Impact," in *Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox* (2007).

²⁸ Sally Morgenthaler, "Leadership in a Flattened World," in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2007).

²⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: chiefly on prayer* (New York: Harcourt, 1992), 5.

If shepherd is such a good and useful metaphor for ministry, why then is it so infrequently promoted in modern church circles? Clearly the answer, at least in part, is because the work of the shepherd is so foreign to our modern, technological society. Perhaps if we knew more about shepherds (especially Biblical shepherds) and their work, we could have a greater appreciation for the richness of the metaphor God has given us.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL SHEPHERDS (REAL & METAPHORICAL)

Having surveyed some of the leading but insufficient modern metaphors for ministry leadership, we are now ready to examine the Biblical metaphor of shepherd, and discover why it is to be preferred over any another. To understand the Biblical metaphor of shepherd we will look first at shepherds in the ancient near east, then proceed to a survey of the Biblical use of the shepherd metaphor.

Shepherds in the Ancient Near East

Shepherding is one of the earliest of human occupations, and was the economic foundation for most early societies.¹ In the ancient near east specifically, shepherd and flock imagery are among the earliest used pictorial and literary symbols, and is used repeatedly in the Bible to picture God and national leaders.² The ancient Babylonians, Egyptians, and Greeks, were all similar to the ancient Israelites in applying the shepherd metaphor to their rulers.³

¹ Juliet Clutton-Brock, *The Walking Larder: patterns of domestication, pastoralism, and predation* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-3, 115-118; Jack W. Vancil, "Sheep, Shepherd," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1187.

² P.L. Garber, "Sheep, Shepherd," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerald H. Wilson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988);

³ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: pastoral traditions and leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos/InterVarsity Press, 2006), 61, 69, 72; Garber; Vancil.

Any number of people within ancient near eastern societies might be shepherds. Although there are many references in the Bible to men, young or otherwise, engaged in herding, not all shepherds were men. Among the Bedouin, a young girl of eight to ten years old might begin herding as a trainee, and continue to herd until fifteen or sixteen by which time she would usually be married and begin housekeeping and childrearing.⁴ We also see evidence of this in Biblical stories about Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, and Jethro's daughters.⁵

In many cases those shepherding a flock were not themselves owners of the flock.⁶ Large herds often required multiple herders who would be hired by the herd owner under a contract which provided a salary, some clothing, food, and sometimes a grant of livestock from the herd's increase each year.⁷ Jacob's relationship with Laban is an example of the fluidity and practicality of these types of contracts (Gen 29-30). In timeless human fashion, shepherds hired to care for herds did not always care for them as well as an owner would, leading shepherds in the ANE to earn something of a negative reputation.⁸

Shepherding could be a dangerous occupation. Predators in the form of both wild animals and human thieves were abundant in the ANE; against these predators a shepherd had to be constantly vigilant (Gen 31:39; Amos 3:12; Isa 11:6; Jer 5:6; John 10:12). Faced with one of these threats to the herd, hired shepherds sometimes chose to save their own skins rather than risk themselves in protection of their flocks (John 10:11-13). Because predation was a constant problem, as was the loss of herd animals to sickness, a herd owner

⁴ Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times*, Archaeology and Biblical Studies. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 48.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 49; Laniak, 51.

⁷ Borowski, 49; Laniak, 55.

⁸ Moses Aberbach, *Labor, Crafts, and Commerce in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1994), 226.

expected to lose numbers of their flocks each year, but expected an honest accounting from their hired herders.⁹

Unfortunately, although hired shepherds were allowed to use some of the product of the herd for their own immediate sustenance, they were often tempted to cull from the herd without authorization, and sell the meat, skins, bones, milk, fiber, and sometimes, young stock. This was a significant problem, so pervasive that the dishonesty of hired shepherds was accepted as established fact. Laws were created forbidding people to buy wool, milk, lambs or kids, from a hired shepherd.¹⁰

In the modern church, one sometimes hears complaints of “sheep-stealing” when one church grows primarily through a transfer of people from other, less successful churches.¹¹ Pastors sometimes complain because there seem to be too many churches in a given locale, making competition for new members fierce. This is not a new problem. Shepherds have often fought over territory and pasturage, as is seen in the Biblical stories of Lot’s dispute with Abraham over pasturage, the shepherds of Abraham and Isaac’s dispute with the shepherds of Abimelek, and the shepherds Moses drove away after finding them accosting the daughters of Jethro.

The primary duties of a shepherd are to guide, provide food and water, protect and deliver, gather back to the herd those that were lost, and to nurture and provide security.¹² One of the clearest and best-known expositions of these duties is found in the first five verses of Psalm 23. In an arid environment such as that of the early Israelites, good

⁹ Laniak, 55.

¹⁰ Aberbach, 226.

¹¹ William Chadwick, *Stealing Sheep: the church's hidden problem with transfer growth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

¹² Thomas A. Golding, "The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (January-March 2006): 22.

pasturage was sparse. A shepherd needed to lead the herds to food, or bring the food to the herd, on a daily basis. Water also needed to be found or ported. Herds left to provide for themselves would, of course, struggle on and might indeed have managed to maintain some sort of herd structure in spite of living a feral existence. Such a herd was nonetheless at extreme risk of loss to predation, illness, and starvation.

Sheep are grazers. This means that their primary means of sustenance is found in low-lying ground vegetation. This in contrast to goats, which are browsers and which prefer to eat leaves and high-lying vegetation, although they will graze (and thrive doing so) if that is the only food available. A grazing herd of sheep can quickly become quite dispersed, each sheep with its nose to the ground moving from one plant to the next.

Both sheep and goats depend on their excellent eyesight to identify predators. Their sense of smell is essentially useless for this task, especially since successful predators will usually attack from downwind. When in a herd, at any given time there will be several sheep watching intently for signs of predators. Often goats are herded with sheep because the goats are extremely good at this task. When the herd becomes widely dispersed during grazing, however, this natural alertness becomes less effective. Young sheep and lambs are especially liable to move some distance from the main herd, becoming lost when the herd can no longer be seen or heard. These lone animals become extremely vulnerable and panic when they become aware that the protection of the herd is no longer present.

Shepherds provide a crucial added element of protection. Most predators of sheep recognize humans as predators themselves. Here in the western United States, I have often seen coyotes intent upon a herd only to slink away the minute a human comes in sight. Often only the presence of a human with a herd is enough to frighten predators away.

When predators were persistent, the ANE shepherd was not without implements of protection. An ANE shepherd always had a rod and staff at hand (e.g. Psalm 23:4), a sling with which to hunt and scare small predators, and a pouch for food and other small items (1 Samuel 17:12).¹³ The shepherd's staff was an aid in traversing rocky terrain, while the rod was primarily used as a defense against threats.¹⁴

Sheep and goats are both surprisingly expressive of affection and trust. They will readily recognize a trusted caretaker as opposed to a stranger. In my experience it is common to see a herd clustered about their herder seeking food and physical touch only to back away and become wary if another, unknown individual approaches. Jesus refers to this herd dynamic when he speaks of sheep knowing, recognizing, and following their shepherd's voice (John 10:3-5).

Jesus notes the trustful affection of the sheep toward their shepherd in the context of sheep in a fold. Often multiple ANE shepherds would gather their herds into a single enclosure at night for the sake of security and protection against threats. In the fold, the herds would mingle (Num 32:16; Judg 5:16; Jer 33:12-13; Ezekial 20:37).¹⁵ In the morning, each shepherd would call or signal to his sheep. The sheep recognizing their herder's voice would follow and leave the fold, while refusing to follow any other (John 10:4-5).

This relationship of trust is often not seen in the modern, large-scale western European tradition of herding. In that tradition, sheep are driven where the shepherd wants them to go, often with use of herd dogs. Driving the herd, by use of dogs or otherwise, was

¹³ Aberbach, 229.

¹⁴ Borowski, 49-50; Laniak, 56-57.

¹⁵ George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Publisher, 1989), 169; William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker, *John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 105.

foreign to the ANE shepherd.¹⁶ Herds were always led. Dogs were not typically used because they were considered unclean, for one reason. Also, herding behavior in dogs is a relatively recent development in the history of pastoralism; the only use of dogs known to the ANE was for guarding, not herding, the flocks.¹⁷ Only two Scripture references speak of dogs used in conjunction with the care of flocks, Job 30:1 and Isaiah 56:10. Given what is known about herding in the ANE, the function of the dogs mentioned in Job is probably to guard, not herd. In any event, no clear description is given of their actual function in the herd. In the Isaiah passage, dogs are not spoken of as herders but as inefficient guards.

Shepherds are also responsible for guarding against illness and treating and assisting in the convalescence of sick animals (needless to say, veterinarians were not available to the ANE shepherd). One common cause of ailments was inappropriate or harmful food, or distress. Sheep and goats are ruminants; they process their food through a long cycle of digestion and mastication. Any distress to the digestive system can result in lassitude, weakness, increased chance of infection, and sometimes sudden death.

Distress to the ruminant digestive system can come in the form of poisonous plants, lack of dry fiber combined with easy access to wet grass, and even severe stress brought on by fear or danger. For this reason, a number of Scriptures emphasize the peace and tranquility God's flock can find in him (e.g. Isa 11:6-9, 65:25; Ps 23). This can also be seen in ANE documents describing one of the kingly shepherds' most important functions as providing justice, peace, and well being for the people.¹⁸

¹⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 383.

¹⁷ Borowski, 133-136; Carson, 383; Mark Ziese, "Shepherds and Shepherding," in *Evangelical Theological Society, 50th National Conference* (Orlando, FL: 1999), 8.

¹⁸ Golding, 23.

How (Not) to Shepherd

Proverbs, ever practical and pragmatic, points out that taking good care of one's flock makes good economic sense:

“Pay careful attention to the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever, nor does a crown last from generation to generation. When the hay is removed and new grass appears and the grass from these hills is gathered in, the lambs will be for your clothing and the goats will be for the price of a field. And there will be enough goat's milk for your food, for the food of your household, and for the sustenance of your servant girls (Prov 27:23-27 NET-Bible).”

Good husbandry paid substantial dividends and the income both in goods and money derived from careful herd maintenance was evidently remarkably persistent in spite of the normal fluctuation of other economic conditions.

Nevertheless, despite the obvious benefits that inured to good shepherds, many shepherds chose to shirk their duties. The bad or lazy shepherd became in the prophetic literature a metaphor for selfish, lazy or predatory leaders of God's people. Some of the prophets use blistering rhetoric when describing leaders who have proved unworthy of their sacred trust, denouncing them with the most condemnatory of language.

Zechariah distinguishes between the kind of shepherd God wants for his people as opposed to what they currently had, a “worthless shepherd” who did not care about lost, scattered or injured sheep, did not feed those that were healthy but instead preyed on them (Zech 11:16-17). Zechariah here pictures a shepherd caught up with self-importance and the perks of his job.¹⁹ The bad shepherd pictured has forgotten, or has chosen to ignore, that it is not his flock but God's, and that God will demand an accounting.

¹⁹ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; an introduction and commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-varsity Press, 1972), 187.

Ezekiel (chapter 34) rails against these same kinds of bad shepherds, unleashing “a searing attack” on their greed and selfishness, especially for having “exploited the people as if the flock belonged to them, the shepherds.”²⁰ These shepherds feed themselves, and benefit from the meat, wool, and other products of the flock, but do not feed the sheep (34:2-3). Nor do they engage in the most basic of husbandry practices. They do not treat the ill, bring back strays, or protect the herd from predation (34:4-5). The herd is scattered, having lost its cohesion, a clear sign that the shepherd is not fulfilling his most basic duty to lead and provide a locus of herd coherence (34:10).

It also interesting to note that in Ezekiel 34 there is a metaphor shift. First the leaders of God’s people are called shepherds, but later they are called fat and strong sheep. Some are entrusted with the leadership of God’s flock. Those leaders are called and gifted for leadership, but are still sheep. Shepherds, in this sense, have no cause for pride or an understanding that they have a higher station than those they lead.

Both Zechariah and Ezekiel condemn bad shepherds as ones who, among other things, do not seek out the lost, do not feed the healthy and allow the herd to scatter. We find a similar situation in many churches today where one finds either an overemphasis on evangelism or an overemphasis on inward-directed ministries. The prophet literature decries either extreme. A good shepherd is one who both seeks the lost and, also, through proper care and provision, protects the healthy from harm, feeds them, and ensures they do not wander in want of care or nurture. Nowhere in the prophetic literature is there any suggestion that the healthy sheep of God’s flock should be left to care, feed, or otherwise shepherd themselves.

²⁰ Ibid., 219.

Shepherd Metaphors in the New Testament

Despite the poor reputation ANE shepherds had often earned themselves, the metaphor proved persistent in the New Testament period. If one accepts that God inspires Scripture, then the choice of that metaphor over other possible choices lends the shepherd motif added authority. If Scripture is inspired, then the metaphor is chosen not just through human literary artistry but also through God, who guides the human author to that metaphor. Viewed holistically, God could have chosen any society or culture on earth through which to make himself known in history. Out of all the times, epochs, and cultures at his disposal and choosing, he manifested himself through an agrarian society made up in large part by shepherds. A careful student of Scripture ought to recognize that God's choices in this regard carry meaning.

According to Mark, Jesus is compassionate toward the crowds because they are like sheep without a shepherd (Mk 6:34). Later Mark relates that Jesus applies the shepherd metaphor to himself when he says the people's shepherd will be struck down causing them to be scattered (Mk 14:27). Throughout his gospel, Mark makes use of the wilderness theme as a means of highlighting the role of Jesus as a shepherd to God's people.

Luke's most memorable use of shepherds is probably his recounting of the shepherds to whom the angels announce Jesus' birth. Luke also takes great care to emphasize the linkage between Jesus and David, perhaps to associate Jesus with the dual themes of kingship and shepherding.²¹ In the birth story Luke emphasizes that it occurred in Bethlehem, the city from which Micah prophesized the messiah would come (Micah 5:1-5), a

²¹ Laniak, 197.

town associated with David, and the town from which shepherds were hired to herd flocks in anticipation of the Passover slaughter.²²

Luke relates Jesus' parable of the lost sheep (15:3-4), and then later says he himself came to seek and save the lost (19:10). Luke (and Jesus) is clearly in the second instance referring back to the first. Jesus is the shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep.

Matthew calls Jesus the shepherd of Israel (Mt 2:6), a clear reference to 2 Samuel 5:2. Like Mark, Matthew says Jesus has compassion on the people because they are like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36). Like a shepherd, we see Jesus in Matthew's gospel consistently feeding the people, protecting the people, and healing the people.

John's gospel is replete with shepherd imagery, a few examples of which will suffice. He links Jesus with Moses (ch. 6), who was also a shepherd of God's people. In the good shepherd discourse of chapter 10, Jesus proclaims himself the model, the ideal, of all shepherds. In the final chapter of John's gospel, Jesus directs Peter to follow his master's example and become a shepherd of God's people. Indeed, repeating himself three times for emphasis, Jesus commands Peter to feed/shepherd Jesus' sheep (Jn 21:15-17).

Luke, in the book of Acts, demonstrates that the shepherd metaphor was understood and valued by the apostles. Paul affirms and continues the use of the shepherd metaphor when speaking to the Ephesian elders. He charges them to be shepherds of the flock of God (Acts 20:28-30). He warns the Ephesian elders that "wolves" will attempt to attack the flock. They are to guard the flock by virtue of the teaching they have received from Paul, and are urged to assist the weak among them.

²² Ibid.

In Ephesians, Paul explicitly links shepherding with teaching, and makes it an essential to the equipping and building up of God's people (Eph 4:11). Most modern translations render verse 11 as or similar to, "It was he (Christ) who gave some to as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers," (Eph 4:11 NET-Bible). The word which most translators translate as "pastors" is actually the word *poimen*, which literally means "shepherds." This causes confusion because in the modern church we identify the leader of a church by the official title of "Pastor," whereas Paul is referring not to an office of the church but to a spiritual gift of service (one who shepherds).

The phrase is also problematic from a linguistic perspective. Paul links "pastors (shepherds) and teachers." Scholars have for centuries debated whether the phrase *poimen kai didaskalos* ought to be translated as "pastors and teachers" to denote two different gifted groups of people, or in a way which would show Paul to be speaking of one group of "teaching pastors."²³ Some find any distinction between those who teach and those who shepherd without merit of any kind.²⁴ They argue that the construction of the verse in Greek clearly points to *poimen kai didaskalos* being treated as a single group, and cannot reasonably mean anything else.²⁵ Others disagree. Whichever side of the debate one prefers, this much is clear, the two are being treated by Paul as acting more or less in concert. One scholar suggests the best way to view the verse is as asserting that all pastors (shepherds) are to be teachers, though not all teachers will be pastors (shepherds).²⁶

²³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, Word Bible Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas, TX: Word Publishers, 1990), 250.

²⁴ William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 197.

²⁵ Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 203.

²⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: an exegetical commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 544.

In the midst of this discussion, the point should not be lost that Paul is not speaking here of church offices, but of people in the operation of their spiritual gifting. As we observed earlier, Paul had already urged all (not just those who were gifted as shepherds or shepherd-teachers) of the Ephesian elders to shepherd God's people (Acts 20:28-30). This reading of the Ephesians text is further buttressed by Peter's exhortation that elders (official leaders of the church) ought to shepherd the flock of God given to their charge (1 Peter 5:1b-2).²⁷

Towards the end of Peter's first epistle, he exhorts the elders of the churches being established throughout the Gentile (outside of Palestine) world:

“So as your fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings and as one who shares in the glory that will be revealed, I urge the elders among you: Give a shepherd's care to God's flock among you, exercising oversight not merely as a duty but willingly under God's direction, not for shameful profit but eagerly. And do not lord it over those entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock. Then when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that never fades away (1 Peter 5:1-4 NET-Bible).”

Probably very few of these elders had ever done the literal work of a shepherd, but Peter applies the metaphor to their leadership anyway. Peter appeals to them as a “fellow elder” when he urges them to shepherd God's flock, thus suggesting he too considers himself a shepherd. Peter's metaphorical use of “shepherd” (*poimaino*) conveys to the elders that shepherding includes leading or governing, caring, protecting, feeding, and nurturing, and directing or administrating.²⁸ Those they are to shepherd are called “God's flock.” The elders are stewards of a sacred truth; the flock is not their own, but is God's.

²⁷ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 300.

²⁸ Jerome Flasschoen, “Implications of the Shepherd's Role In 1 Peter 5:1-4 For Contemporary Pastors” (International School of Theology, 1989), 91-92; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 233.

Peter is undoubtedly passing along the charge, given him by Jesus, wherein he was commanded to feed and shepherd Jesus' people (Jn 21:15-17).²⁹ Peter's command for the elders to "shepherd," carries a special emphasis in the original Greek. Its grammatical construction conveys the meaning that this command is not given for a specified period of time but instead "establishes a pattern of behavior to be maintained until the end of the age."³⁰

Peter describes a shepherd's oversight as not "lording it over" the flock of God. This is undoubtedly a reference to Jesus' admonition that "those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions use their authority over them. But it is not this way among you. Instead, "whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all," (Mk 10:42-44 NET-Bible).

Unbelievers tend to construe and exercise authority and leadership in ways contrary to God's intent for the leadership of his people. Peter here suggests that the churches' leaders are "to be servants, not bosses; ministers, not executives."³¹ Peter's reaffirmation of the distinction Jesus drew between secular leaders and the leaders of God's flock and his warning to not make secular leadership an exemplar to follow should cause us to reconsider the thoughtless ease with which we modern Christians import business leadership models to our churches.

²⁹ Simon Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 190.

³⁰ J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Publishers, 1989), 282; Kistemaker and Hendriksen, 193.

³¹ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 180.

As shepherds of God's flock, the elders are to be examples to those under their care and oversight, as Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, was an example to them. Of course the exemplars of how to shepherd well and how to shepherd poorly extended beyond Christ and back throughout the entirety of Scripture. The behavior Peter warns against here, i.e. the use of the flock for personal gain and the abuse of authority, are echoes of the Prophets' indictment of the bad shepherds in their day.

Although this whirlwind tour through the Old Testament and New Testament uses of the shepherd metaphor has been necessarily brief, it should nonetheless demonstrate the pervasive and persistent nature of the shepherd metaphor within the Bible. Many models or structures of leadership change from one era of God's working through and in his people to the next. Kings may come and go. Judges and Prophets rise and then pass from the scene. The priestly class has been fulfilled in Christ and replaced by the priesthood of all believers. One thing remains constant. God names his people as his flock, and commands those who lead his people to do so as shepherds. This is why the shepherd metaphor is the unifying metaphor for all Biblical leadership.

CHAPTER 4

SHEPHERDS, ECCLESIOLOGY & LEADERSHIP THEORY

The shepherd metaphor, as the unifying metaphor for all ministry leadership, is thoroughly supported by the Biblical text. It is consonant with sound ecclesiology, and is not surprisingly consistent with what is currently being propounded in Leadership theory.

Adopting the shepherd metaphor as the unifying or primary metaphor for all ministry leadership does not necessitate a change in the structure of the institutional church. It may very well necessitate substantial changes for those holding official positions in the church in regard to how they exercise their ministries. The metaphor properly applied reorients the minister or church official to a Biblical perspective and assists the minister in bringing his or her ministry into alignment with Biblical priorities.

As we noted earlier, our modern tendency is to hire or appoint a single individual as the chief director of ministries and operations of a church and call that person a pastor. This practice was not given in Scripture but instead evolved in the church over its history (which is not to say that practice runs athwart Scripture, only that it is not explicitly taught there). The common use of the Latin term Pastor as a title for a church official was substantially formalized in the Geneva Bible as a result of Calvin drawing a hard distinction

between Pastors and Teachers in his commentary on Ephesians.¹ Prior to that time, Biblical translations typically used the term Shepherd instead of Pastor.²

The Bible itself allows for some fluidity of interpreting the basic leadership structure of a church.³ Indeed, it is reasonable to conclude from the absence of any mention of formalized leadership offices in the earlier of Paul's letters that formal structure was slow to develop in the early Gentile churches.⁴ Within the early house churches formed under Paul's ministry, leadership arose primarily from spiritual gifting as opposed to a formalized office.⁵ Indeed, in the earliest stages of the church, leadership was probably formed *ad hoc* to meet needs as they arose.⁶

That is not to say that formalized offices were not found in some churches during the earliest church period. Certainly deacons are appointed very early on in Jerusalem (Acts 6) and Paul speaks to Elders of the Ephesian church in Acts 20. It is likely that the early Jewish Christians borrowed models of leadership from the synagogue. The Gentile churches, as they began to move from homes to larger meeting places, borrowed from civil forms of leadership.⁷

Much of the origins of early church structure is speculative. Leadership structures varied to some degree from one church to another. It is without question, however,

¹ Harris, 679; Jean Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thess., 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, trans. William Pringle, 22 vols., Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1999), 279-280.

² Harris, 679.

³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 579-584.

⁴ Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: the importance of household structures in early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 192-193.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Rev. Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing House, 1993), 389.

⁷ Arthur G. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church: context, growth, leadership & worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 168-174.

that by the time of the Pastoral Epistles some formalized positions of leadership were common to most churches, namely those called Elders, Deacons, and Overseers.⁸

Generally speaking, every Christian church from the end of the early church period to the modern day utilizes some form of Elders (*presbuteroi* or *episkopoi*) exercising oversight, Deacons (*diakonoι*) providing works of service, and probably also Teachers (*didaskalia*), who may or may not have also been overseers, explicating the Scriptures and transmitting the core of the Christian faith and history.⁹ By the time Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles, it seems likely that teaching was considered a gifting and a skill, but not a distinct office.

Most modern churches organize their institutional structure around these Biblically designated offices of leadership, although those fulfilling these roles and functions may not be specifically called by the Biblical titles of Elder or Deacon. In America we generally have Pastors who assume the function of Elders and Teachers, and most churches have some board or advisory group that could be equated with Deacons.

The shepherd metaphor precedes all of these church offices. Long before there was an early church (except in its most nascent stage among Jesus and the disciples), Jesus commanded Peter to be shepherd to the flock of God. When the church was just beginning, Paul commanded all the Elders of the Ephesian churches to shepherd God's flock. Peter instructs the elders of the Gentile churches to shepherd God's people at all times. The metaphor does not replace or negate any of the Biblical offices of church leadership, but it does inform them.

⁸ Ivor J. Davidson, *The Baker History of the Church*, ed. John D. Woodbridge and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 126-127; Frederick J. Cwiekowski, *The Beginnings of the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 122.

⁹ Berkhof, 585-587.

Leadership theory is finally beginning to recognize what the Bible has always identified as the most productive form of leadership in tumultuous and dangerous times, times where missteps can quickly render an organization obsolete and find its customers seeking greener pastures. Organizations are best viewed as organic entities, the success of which is largely determined by how well the individual parts interact.¹⁰ The most consistently successful forms of leadership, it is now being found, are those which focus on healthy relational interactions between leaders and followers instead of imposing rigid command and control hierarchies.^{11,12}

Long before modern leadership theorists discovered this way of thinking, Paul knew the power of treating churches as the organic entities they are. Consider for a moment three of Paul's preferred metaphors for the church, its nature, and its operation – all three of which are organic and explicitly relational in nature. Paul calls the church a body, a family, and a building.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the church as a body, one that depends on its parts working in health and harmony for success. Paul's grammatical construction suggests that the very nature of the church is "body" giving corporeal presence to the risen

¹⁰ Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: leadership for an uncertain time*, 65-67.

¹¹ Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 2d ed. (Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 5-7.

¹² Pastors and other church leaders who argue that traditional, top-down hierarchies are essential because of the lack of competence, initiative, or other positive, productive traits among those working in the church may be indicting themselves. Recent studies have shown that the types of organizations people are involved in have a powerful effect upon those people's formation of self-identity and behavior. How leaders lead directly effects how followers behave and envision themselves and their abilities. See: Tom R. Tyler, "The Psychology of Authority Relations," in *Power and Influence in Organizations*, ed. Roderick Moreland Kramer and Margaret Ann Neale (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 251-260.

Christ.¹³ In Paul's estimation, all parts of the body of Christ are necessary and important, as necessary and important as every member of a human body is to its health and function. This teaching (even if imperfectly practiced) of the inherent equality of all the church's members was virtually unparalleled in the ancient Greco-Roman world.¹⁴ When parts of the body are not used, or are diseased, damaged, or left unused, the vigor of the body is diminished and the work of Christ in the world is robbed of its full impact. Part of a leader's oversight and direction of the body, therefore, is caring for the body's needs and ensuring its health. Such work is clearly part of the work of a shepherd.

Often even with the best of care, parts of the body are in tension with one another, lending comparison with the dynamics found in a family, another of Paul's favorite metaphors. Paul refers to the church as the "family of faith" (Gal 6:10), and "God's household", (Eph 2:19). Believers enter this family by being adopted as God's children (Gal 4:4-5), and therein become co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:16-17). Paul so frequently likens the church to a family that one author asserts, "More than any of the other images utilized by Paul, it reveals the essence of his thinking about community."¹⁵

The metaphor of church as family is not in tension but in harmony with the metaphor of church as flock. Just as a household leader must work to maintain family unity and resolve tensions, a shepherd must understand herd dynamics and work to resolve inevitable conflicts. In both cases, the dynamic undergirding the metaphor is fluid and organic rather than static and fixed within defined, organizational parameters.

¹³ David John Williams, *Paul's Metaphors: their context and character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 90.

¹⁴ Carl A. Volz, *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 52.

¹⁵ Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, Rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 49.

While Paul's use of a building as a metaphor for the church may seem at first glance to suggest something fixed and unchangeable, the metaphor is actually one which further stresses the relational nature of the church. The household of God in Ephesians 2:19 becomes in 2:20 a building founded upon the apostles and prophets with Jesus being the chief cornerstone. The building is strong and inhabitable because the people of God have been joined together, each part fitting together in Christ (2:21-22). This household, this building, having been joined together becomes a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (2:22). The "dwelling place" Paul describes carries the connotation of being firmly rooted; although the people once looked to a building made of stone as the dwelling place of God, now he dwells and is settled in his people.¹⁶

I suspect there is an arc here in Paul's rhetorical flourish that can be drawn into a full circle. Once God dwelt in a tabernacle among his people while forming them into a kingdom in the midst of a wilderness. Later he dwelt in a temple, a building of stone. Now he dwells in his people, and once again they are sent forth into the wilderness of the world to take part in establishing the Kingdom of God through the power of his son, Jesus. There in the wilderness we are drawn inexorably to the metaphor of God's flock, being shepherded by him and by those he raises up to assist him in the task.

Despite the organic nature of the church, too many pastors seek to draw wisdom and insight from business organizational theory. This is regrettable because most business theory still follows a traditional bureaucratic framework that imposes a hierarchal,

¹⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: an exegetical commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 414.

top-down pyramid of control.¹⁷ The rigidity of the model is antithetical to the organic nature of the church.

Although modern business and leadership theorists are beginning to move toward more relational models of leadership, even these models are too beholden to a business perspective. As Donelson trenchantly observes, “With the purpose of perpetuating the institution, a maxim of the task-oriented CEO-model could be: getting things done through people.”¹⁸ Contrast this purpose from God’s design for his flock, where, Donelson continues, “the Church’s function flows from a different source with a purpose of getting things done in people and through relationships and personal transformation.”¹⁹

The purpose of the church ought to be to assist people in the transformation of their lives in the image of Christ. The church is about soul-care. And for that we need shepherds, not CEOs.

¹⁷ William Bee Donelson Jr., “Shepherd Leadership” (Ph.D. Diss., Regent University, 2004), 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

BREATHING LIFE INTO A DEAD METAPHOR

Something is desperately wrong in the American church. Consider for a moment that, “North America is the only continent where the church is not growing; it’s not even keeping pace with population growth. America is the second highest missionary-*receiving* (emphasis mine) nation in the world. On a per capita basis, Ireland sends out more missionaries per year than we do.”¹

“Something,” a certain Dane would say, “is most certainly rotten in the state of Denmark.” Confronted with lackluster growth, church-going populations which act and vote no differently than the secular world around them, and a seeming inability to have the most negligible positive impact on the American culture as a whole, we cannot but conclude we are doing something wrong in the church.

Hugh Hewitt, a popular radio talk show host, former White House official, and Christian author, wrote a book in 1998, called *The Embarrassed Believer*, documenting the American church’s lack of vigor and influence. He noted that statistics show at any given time well over 50 million Americans declare themselves regular churchgoers. Since some number of those must be nominal Christians, Hewitt suggests that we discount that figure, for the sake of argument, by half in order to find the committed (bold) Christians. “Do you see

¹ E. Glenn Wagner and Steve Halliday, *Escape from Church, Inc.: the return of the pastor-shepherd* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 10.

the evidence of twenty-five million bold Christians at work in the U.S. in 1998?” Hewitt asks.

“Of course not! The counterargument is implausible. The country could not be—literally, could not be—in the condition it is in if there were that many bold Christians wandering around. Let me put it another way. If there were 2.5 million bold Christians in California, do you suppose the entertainment industry would be the way it is? The movie industry? The record industry? Of course not.”²

The conclusion that we, the church, are doing something wrong is inescapable. Figuring out what we’re doing wrong is more complex, but not unknowable. Among other things, we have lost sight of what Biblical leadership is meant to be. In E. Glenn Wagner’s words, many pastors, like Esau, “have sold our Biblical birthright as shepherds called by God for the pottage of skills and gimmicks designed by humans.”³ In Eugene Peterson’s estimation, pastors have forsaken the care of souls and adopted a much diminished identity of people who run churches, which, evidently, from the adoption of the CEO and Entrepreneur metaphors, are little different from secular organizations.⁴

CEOs, Entrepreneurs, Coaches, and Leaders, are all decent attempts toward envisioning ministry leadership. Nevertheless, they are fatally flawed. CEOs and Entrepreneurs are fundamentally engaged in utilizing people to accomplish something. The people themselves are valued primarily for their utility in achieving institutional goals. From a Christian perspective it matters not that in the church their utility might be realized in achieving noble ends, such as evangelism. The point is that the people are being treated primarily as a means, and are not being valued as an end in themselves, people who are God’s own. Granted, we all need and benefit from a good coach who comes along side us

² Hugh Hewitt, *The Embarrassed Believer: reviving Christian witness in an age of unbelief* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishers, 1998), 41-42.

³ Wagner and Halliday, 17.

⁴ Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: rediscovering the call* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 61.

and inspires us to give our all and helps us find out that we are capable of reaching goals we had hitherto thought beyond our grasp. Can we also not see that the Christian life is not about winning the game of life or choosing the best team members to help us achieve our organizational goals? Life in Christ is about glorifying God in the totality of our beings and persevering in walking the path Christ has set before us.

No one walks those paths alone. We, all of God's people, walk together and help each other along the way. We also need guides, shepherds who, although they may be fellow sheep themselves, have the experience, training, and insight to guide us through the wilderness of life. These men and women⁵ are called and gifted by God to lead us, while also caring for us. They know and anticipate the needs of those entrusted by God to their care, and with clear-eyed vision seek out safe passages through dangerous territory. They search for us when we are lost and when we are found restore us to health. They protect us from various dangers, those which we inflict upon ourselves as well as the dangers which come from others. They feed us and nurture us on God's word. Healthy flocks are almost by definition growing flocks for healthy sheep reproduce rapidly and regularly. The fast growth of the flock can bring tensions and problems, but the skilled shepherd anticipates this and plans accordingly.

Name a modern metaphor for ministry and upon a moment's reflection it is proven insufficient. The ministry metaphors of CEO, entrepreneur, coach, and others evoke some aspects, but not all, of the shepherd metaphor, while simultaneously being hobbled by the negative aspects of secular business practices that cannot be squared with the Biblical text. The metaphor of shepherd is not so encumbered. The shepherd metaphor encompasses

⁵ In the Bible, both men and women engaged in shepherding and ministry. It is not my intent here to comment on whether or not the Bible allows for women to hold the offices of pastor, elder, or other positions of oversight.

every desirable quality of competing metaphors. Ironically, just when modern pastors and ministry leaders are driving relentlessly toward the use of business and sports metaphors for ministry, current leadership theory suggests that CEOs, entrepreneurs and the like adopt a transformational/organic/relational mode of exercising leadership. This emerging model is, in effect, an attempt to become more like shepherds.

The duties of the Biblical shepherd can be summarized as leading, feeding, healing, nurturing, protecting, sheltering, and managing herd dynamics and growth. The modern minister who emulates the Biblical shepherd invests his or her time in these same tasks, albeit on an allegorical level. One who shepherds God's flock sees that they are provided with regular sustenance by which they grow in Christ. This sustenance may be given through the proclamation and explication of God's word and through the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Table.

When appropriate, the shepherd leads the flock to new pastures and new shelters. In the ANE, moving a herd from one place to another entailed many risks. The land was often dangerous and a moving herd is prone to wandering, bringing increased risk from predation or accident. Similarly, the modern flock of God needs to be about its mission of living out the Great Commission. A wise shepherd carefully plots out the paths his people will take in accomplishing God's purposes. Gifted by God and guided by Scripture and God's Spirit, the shepherd leads God's people according to God's purposes.

However noble a ministry's organizational goals for expansion may be, a wise shepherd recognizes first and foremost that the people he or she leads is are not a means to an end. They are the flock of God, and are precious to him. They are God's and have been given into the shepherd's care as a sacred trust. Their health and welfare ought to be

paramount. Indeed the people are the focus of shepherding; leadership is but one function of their care.

A good shepherd will protect the flock by guiding them through the pitfalls of our postmodern, hedonistic culture. He or she will equip God's people to read the Scriptures and therein discern God's will and purpose for their lives. Care must be taken that God's people are equipped with a sound understanding of God's word and a comprehensive Christian worldview with which to navigate life. He will alert them to those who would prey on God's people through manipulation or by the dissemination of false doctrine. There are many who would infiltrate the community of faith, desiring to prey upon the gracious, kind, and trusting people who comprise the church. The shepherd of the church ought to be vigilant against such as these.

A good shepherd shelters the flock by providing a sacred space in which to worship. To be sure, worship is also expressed through daily life, but just as a flock of sheep benefits from regularly being gathered together in a place of peace and safety, the flock of God similarly benefits from gathering together in a place strategically designed to enhance worship. Shelter is also found intangibly through the formation of a community of believers who can share each other's needs in prayer, provide comfort to the hurting, and engage in acts of service. The love that permeates a community of believers can act as a fire that warms, but also holds back the dark nights of the soul.

Shepherds provide healing for their flocks. Sheep can become injured by predators, through accidents, and by other sheep within the herd. Whatever the cause of the wound, an effective shepherd is ready and equipped to address the need. Wounds must be

bound-up, sicknesses treated, and preventative care must be exercised diligently to guard against an epidemic that might decimate the herd.

There will always be wounded among the flock of God. Effective shepherding recognizes these needs and seeks to meet them. Every community of believers has members whose lives are touched by loss, relational pathologies, addiction, and physical illness. Ministries of visitation, reconciliation, recovery and step-ministries (Biblically informed 12-step types of programs), and assistance with medical bills are all valid and appropriate expressions of the modern shepherd's work.

A healthy herd is by nature a growing herd. Sheep that are content and sound of body will reproduce with regularity. Young must be cared for. Sometimes, for one reason or another, a caretaker must be found for a lamb who has been orphaned or whose mother cannot provide for it. In these instances the young may be partnered with an older, more experienced animal that will raise it to maturity.

Similarly, a healthy community of believers will be a growing community where the members reproduce themselves, leading their family and friends to a relationship with Christ. The new believers need special care to ensure they too are healthy and growing in Christian faithfulness and maturity. Young believers may be partnered with more mature believers who can mentor them, and guide them in their spiritual formation.

A growing flock, be it literal or metaphorical, must be carefully managed. A good shepherd watches, identifies, and encourages "lead sheep," those sheep that the others naturally follow. Where the herd is too large for a single shepherd, undershepherds should be trained in one or more of the shepherd's duties, and employed in the care of the flock. By reproducing him or herself, the shepherd refines his or her craft, ensures that all the needs of

the flock are being met, and thus guarantees the health and longevity of those entrusted to the shepherd's care.

By accomplishing his or her job well, the shepherd proves himself or herself a skilled and competent leader. Because those that follow trust the shepherd, he or she need not drive the people through the raw exercise of ecclesial authority, nor by the more subtle arts of manipulation, but instead will simply lead the people to places appropriate and beneficial to God's purposes and the people's health. The people's trust is based upon their shared history with the shepherd, a history that has demonstrated the shepherd's character, competence, and credibility.

Shepherding is distinctively organic, transformational work. It recognizes that those who are being led are living creatures, each with his or her own desires, needs, weaknesses, and strengths. The most successful and productive of churches are those wherein the shepherd's feeding, care, and nurture makes it possible for the people to individually and corporately reach their highest level of health and usefulness in service to Christ.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Given that shepherding as the unifying metaphor for ministry leadership is supported by Scripture and is consistent with current leadership theory and its findings regarding the efficacy of transformational, organic leadership, why is it so common to see the shepherd metaphor cast aside in modern ministry circles? I can think of two main reasons for rejecting the shepherd metaphor for ministry leadership today. One is pragmatic, the other psychological. In the first instance, there are those who wonder whether the rural, agrarian shepherd metaphor is worth using in our very modern society. They rightly observe that knowledge of shepherds and their work is almost completely foreign to most ministry leaders. Because so little is known about shepherds, the metaphor may have lost its usefulness.

It is true that the shepherd metaphor may be, or soon will be, a dead metaphor. A dead metaphor is one where the image evoked by the metaphor is so far removed from the experience of the user that it has lost its power to evoke a useful response. Cognitively, it is so foreign that it does not easily lend itself as a meaningful symbol or organizing image. That may well be true of the shepherd metaphor.

For the sake of argument, let us grant that “shepherd” may be a dead metaphor for ministry leadership. Should we then abandon it? If one takes a high view of Scripture the only possible answer is “No.” We must deal with the metaphor given. It was God, after

all, who gave it to us. Ministry leaders regularly invest significant time and effort educating themselves regarding the original meaning and intent of Scripture in order to better apply it within modern contexts. Exegeting and applying the shepherd metaphor within modern ministry will prove worth the effort.

Lynn Anderson, a skilled, veteran pastor and author, was asked once by a parishioner why he didn't find a better metaphor for ministry leadership since shepherds, his preferred metaphor, were entirely absent from most people's experience. "I can't find any figure equivalent to the shepherd idea in our modern, urban world," Lynn explained, "Besides, if I drop the shepherd and flock idea, I would have to tear about five hundred pages out of my Bible, plus leave the modern church with a distorted—if not neutered—view of spiritual leadership."¹

If we can't get rid of the metaphor in favor of another, then we must breathe new life into it, study it, reflect on it, teach it and live it, so that it becomes meaningful and useful again. The obstacles to doing so are far from insurmountable.

The first step to breathing new life into the shepherd metaphor is to identify and experience it at its literal level.² Ministry leaders need to learn what a Biblical shepherd was like, the tasks shepherding entailed, the manner and means by which a good shepherd accomplished his work, and (importantly) the kinds of deficiencies for which God excoriated the bad shepherds of his flock.

¹ Lynn Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep: spiritual leadership for the 21st century* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishers, 1997), 12.

² Leland Ryken, "I have Used Similitudes': The Poetry of the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147, (July-September 1990): 263. Ministry leaders engaging in preaching and teaching might do well to note that, according to Ryken's studies, "the most impressive finding of research on metaphor in preaching is not that audiences found metaphoric statements more emotional, imaginative, and appealing than propositional statements," but that "people taking a test found metaphoric statements from sermons clearer than propositional statements (p 262-263)."

The second step is to reflect on the literal level of the metaphor, investing one's imagination in the world the metaphor evokes. C. S. Lewis, who was a highly skilled interpreter and critic of literature long before he was an acclaimed author, taught that only by allowing ourselves to be caught-up and overtaken by the power of the poetic image, holding in abeyance for the moment our interpretative critique, do we fully apprehend the fullness the poetic image is meant to awaken in us.³ When we understand the shepherd metaphor at a literal level, and then turn to the Scriptural text and invest our imagination in the ancient pastoral world of the Bible, we cannot help but be astonished at the degree to which the shepherd metaphor pervades the text. The pastoral theme in the Bible begins in Genesis with Abel and winds its way through the Bible to the book of John's Revelation.

The third step is to do what we always do when studying a Biblical text. We interpret it, using sound hermeneutics to bridge the gap between the ancient text and our modern world. We ask ourselves how the metaphor God has given us can be applied within our own ministry contexts.

For example, the pastor of the large church might consider how the role of undershepherds in the Bible informs how he hires and administrates staff to assist him in his duties. A departmental coordinator may wish to consider whether the goals she sets for herself include making sure those who work under her direction are not overextended, and that she is ensuring that they are being equipped for their ministry efforts and that due diligence is given to their spiritual health so that they may grow in Christ and thus be examples to those whom they serve in turn.

³ See, for example: C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1961).

The visionary pastor might want to reflect on whether or not he is putting as much effort into feeding and nurturing the healthy as he is into developing plans for expansion and event-driven evangelistic enterprises. The scholarly pastor, skilled in the history and language of the church and its sacred texts should also turn his eyes to the world outside his study, and ensure those wandering lost in the wilds are brought home in Christ. Whatever one's ministry, a shepherd recognizes that future growth and security depends on current herd health. A good shepherd always shepherds his or her flock.

Some pastors and ministry leaders dismiss the shepherd metaphor because they do not understand its prominent place in the Biblical text. For others, the use of the metaphor is psychologically or emotionally uncomfortable. And, it must be admitted that the shepherd metaphor is decidedly unattractive when compared to other metaphors of leadership.

To invoke the metaphor of CEO is to hear the hum of industry, see the gleam of hardwoods and sunlight on vistas glimpsed from high-rise corner offices, to feel the invisible surging buzz of technology working its marvels, and to hear the accolades of colleagues when the company exceeds its quarterly projections. To envision the entrepreneur is to mine a market niche unexplored before now, beating the competition to market, and feeling that delicious thrill of putting one's assets and reputation on the line to finance an incredible risk with no promise of return. Ah, but to win the wager is to win big. The coach in ministry can dream of a veritable stadium-full of heavenly witnesses thundering their approval as the ministry team makes the winning touchdown, while angelic commentators marvel at the coach's winning strategy.

The imagery conjured by the shepherd metaphor has none of the allure of these more lofty metaphors. The imagery it evokes is prosaic at best, repugnant at worst. As Lynn Anderson comments in the title of his book, one can always tell who the shepherds are; “they smell like sheep.”

I know something about shepherding. Many are the times I have come in from the fields reeking of sweat, spattered with mud, boots caked with manure. Sometimes overlaying the stench of the manure is the coppery smell of blood from a wound that needed tending, or from having had to reach into a lambing sheep or kidding goat to extract a breach birth before both mother and young are lost in childbirth. I know what it is to walk the fields looking for the lost one that has been ill lately and didn’t make it back to the fold that evening. I have lost count of the times of rising before dawn, staying up late, or making midnight visits to the barn to make sure an ailing but treasured creature receives the care it needs to pull through its sickness.

All these tasks are actually the highlights of a shepherd’s existence. Most of a shepherd’s world consists of putting out the morning feed and water, then putting out the evening food and water, checking eyes, checking hooves, counting noses, day-in and day-out, day after day after day. Few things I have ever done in life entailed so much drudgery; and few things I have ever done in life brought such a feeling of satisfaction and of being intimately involved in God’s creation.

So I salute and applaud the shepherds of God’s church, the pastors, teachers, and workers who care diligently for the people of God. They are people after God’s own heart, treasuring the people God gave them yesterday as much as they love and care for the

people God may send them tomorrow. They are few, but they are faithful, and they are helping to keep the church alive and truly relevant in our lives.

When I was an undergraduate student I was privileged to study under a Christian theologian named Frederick Parrella. He was a gifted, charming teacher, a *bon vivant* full of whimsical humor, and a scholar with the heart of a shepherd. He was paid to be our teacher, and he took great care to instruct us in the fundamentals of his field. Even so, what I appreciated more than his care in teaching the theology was the care he demonstrated for our growth and maturation in Christ, something he was not paid to do.

In his mind, theology is always better done from within the faith than from without, and the best theology of all is that done by living it out. Long before any “Emergent” authors were talking about “missional” or “incarnational” teaching, Dr. Parrella was doing “theology with skin on.” He demonstrated a shepherd’s understanding of ministry when, in addition to teaching, he inquired as to the courses we were charting for our lives. He would invite us to his well-appointed office and offer us a cup of tea. There he listened to our struggles and was always willing to lend a helping hand as we traversed the difficulties of college life.

Although he was hired to teach, he was clearly called to shepherd, and that is what he did. He had a profound influence on my life, as true shepherds always do in the lives of those their ministries touch. His ministry of teaching awoke in me a passion for studying and learning from Scripture, and for helping others to do the same. His shepherding impressed on me that the best of Christian teaching concerns itself with soul-care more than the mere transmission of knowledge. Would that there were more like him in the church today.

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