

Wilderness

The wilderness brings out our bewilderment, abandonment, and inner terror to reveal our soul's restless cravings and fundamental neediness. In the wilderness, we lose our bearings, or regain them. We need to leave our "stuff" behind, removing every distraction and preparing for stillness. We must choose to meet God alone in the wilderness.

Provision

"Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding." Jeremiah 3:15

*"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. **You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back strays or searched for the lost.**"* Ezekiel 34:2-4

Called to Care

Shepherding is not always dramatic, not always vocational, but a life-mission, none-the-less

Q: What core elements of my original call (to shepherding) have remained intact throughout my transitions to my present role?

Q: What doubts exist? How about my vision and desire to care for, disciple, raise up leaders?

Streams in the Desert

"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." Jeremiah 2:13

Q: How parched is my soul? How long do I go without savoring fresh, life-giving water? Am I in danger of becoming dehydrated? Where are the 'still waters' for me? Am I leading others there? (My wife 1st?) Am I guarding my heart, the well-spring of my life?

Spring Up, O Well!

Knowing where and how to dig wells is essential... may make use of natural cisterns or constructing our own dams, cisterns, wells, 'well-chains' that feed into each other... but, the most common way to get at underground water is the hardest way... digging wells.

Q: Do I direct the attention of those I serve to the Source, or do I sometimes, in exasperation, use the 'tricks' of skills and strategies to accomplish heaven's work?

Greener Pastures

Seeing God Himself as our 'greener pasture'... God as life! How do we forsake Him for what we hope may be a green pasture?

Feed My Sheep

Leading means feeding spiritually (John 21:15-23, bosko 2x / poimano 1x), through God's Word studied and meditated upon, devotional classics, theological treasures, inspiring biographies, etc. Know well the condition of your flock.

Shepherd Healer

It is amazing the variety of ways sheep find to die. But, a good shepherd can counter every affliction. Leading means healing and strengthening. Shepherding (remedies) require touch, with compassion, passing under the Shepherd's rod to be checked (nightly).

Watch for subtle symptoms of ailments in a toxic environment. Constantly assess the presence of lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, anger, envy, and pride. We may need to quarantine the 'contagious' from positions of influence, at times. Have we created safe places for fragile, suffering souls?

Midwives and Nurses

"As apostles of Christ... we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children." 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7
Leading means mothering. Nurturers need nurturing; life-givers need life poured into them. Over-burdened caregivers need to be supported with compassion and competence. Casualties come to some who are 'driven hard' (especially in the name of ministry).

Lost and Found

Leadership means looking for the lost. Shepherd leaders (must) feel comfortable in places where 'sheep' get lost... bars, shelters, tough neighborhoods, etc. One of the essential tasks is the arduous retrieval of those who, for whatever reason, have lost their way. Reflect on the relentless persistence of the Good Shepherd. Finally, we must 'test ourselves to see if we are in the faith.' 2 Cor. 13:5

Gathering the Scattered

We (self included) are prone to wander from God and His path (James 5:19; Galatians 6:1). People without proper leadership are sheep without a shepherd harassed and downcast... susceptible to calamity of all sorts. We all need encouragement to live by faith on Earth. Gathering skills are essential to building community.

Satisfaction and Restoration

Biblical restoration: *returning to a place of divine provision where comprehensive care is available and where life can be restored.* Satisfaction involves having genuine, whole-person needs met and resources replenished, toward re-creating God's ideal. We need to promote a rhythm of rejuvenation and restoration for ourselves and those we lead (Matthew 11:28-30).

>Thank God for Jim Anderson and his message on Sabbath Rest! What a gift he is to us and all we serve together<

The Staff (a symbol of care and provision)

It represents a guiding presence... at times, rescue... a way to be 'in touch.' Leadership requires someone with sincere interest and gentle persistence to reach over a gap... reach out and, if necessary, rescue!

Common messages God speaks in His Word – "do not be afraid" and "I am with you" (providing advocacy... counsel... friendship... support... restoration, and so on).

Named and Known

Due to counting, checking, carrying, nursing back to health, protecting, and rescuing, sheep become like family. To be 'with' them every day is vital, or one shouldn't be their shepherd. The Good Shepherd modeled leading them to lie down, to be restored, to be guided, to be comforted, etc. Known by name = cared for and counted. Leaders are followed because their "voice is known."

Protection (courage)

"I will raise up shepherds to tend them, and they will no longer be terrified." Jeremiah 23:4

In ancient Greece, shepherd-warrior leadership was associated with military leadership. God's people were threatened by abusive leadership and invading armies. Some 'religious' leaders Jesus implicates as thieves, hirelings and wolves. A church health question, "How to balance nurturing, compassionate provision with vigilant, courageous protection. Shepherding requires identification with our flock that frequently leads to personal risk and sacrifice.

While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks

“The Lord will guard you from all harm; He will watch over your life.” Psalm 121:7

Some essential traits include – insight, instinct, perception, and vision

Look after people, look out for dangers, look in on / watch over / oversee the well-being of the flock

Q: Who might be “hiding” in ineffective busyness? Who might be suffering under bullying and abuse?

Leaders must develop that extra sense, like trained counselors, to see that people often communicate without words.

As leaders, we also need to think more carefully about the impact of change, scout out new areas and prepare for major transitions.

Recognizing the Wolves

Biblical writers designated human predators who destroy communities from within as “wolves” (often as “deceitful teachers”). Teachers can lead to truth, or mislead toward error by distorted truths. New motto: “trust & verify!” In any community malicious intent is possible, even likely... leadership requires backbone to name, confront, and chase wolves away.

Facing the Lions

Our enemy, the devil, is our accuser, adversary, and tempter, who relentlessly pursues God’s people, often masquerading as an angel of light.

David and Jesus went after the enemy, liberating the vulnerable (full armor of God protects against the powers of this dark world).

The Other Lion

God, as holy Judge, requires intercession on behalf of the flock and His shepherds, when His righteous judgment is imminent. “When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forget Me.” A good shepherd is expected to stand in the gap, interceding for mercy.

Gatekeepers

Again, intercession is required for sensitivity regarding needed spiritual protection.

Dogs

Watchdogs keep the flock together by constantly circling... they bark incessantly to warn of coming dangers.

Protecting the flock requires confronting wolves, who prey on sheep without mercy.

Justice

We are to cause justice to prevail, and combat wickedness and evil, so that the strong might not oppress the weak.

What distinguishes sheep from goats is their treatment of “the least of these.”

Goats show no compassion or mercy to others... they’re self-serving by exerting their strength and independence.

In what ways has my compassion led to justice–initiatives. How am I speaking up for poor & needy who can’t speak for themselves?

The Rod

It symbolizes might, order, rule, and equity. Protection & discipline breed security... “Your rod and staff, they comfort me.” Confronting and removing abusive members from a congregation is as much a shepherd’s work as nurturing young & needy ones. “I can’t support the assumption that shepherding is simply about nurture and ‘pastoral care’.” (author)

A Living Sacrifice

In Jesus Kingdom, leading means bleeding. (e.g., “I die every day.” (Paul, 1 Cor. 15:31) Am I willing to die to personal ambition, comfort, and self-centered cravings? Whether in living sacrifice or literal death (martyrdom) we are called to “die,” so that others may receive resurrection life. What attitudes, possessions, or habits are hindering me?

Darkness

Darkness in the Bible is the evil one's time when God's people and plan are put 'at risk.'

When the light we're hoping for does not dawn (desperate isolation + cold darkness = seasons of testing).

In the midst, will we continue to walk by faith and not by sight? Can we treasure one another in this place of the deep work of God?

Guard Yourselves

Many 'hired' shepherds could not be trusted to guard the owner's flocks. Paul, in Acts 20:28-31, in his warning to the Elders at Ephesus, makes an alarming prediction that many who were currently faithful guardians, would eventually turn into wolves!

Guardians can become wolves, false shepherds, if / when they lure God's people away with false teaching. They're often effective communicators, persuasive and attractive – their doctrine "looks" and "smells" like biblical truth, but their teaching is subtly divisive and ultimately destructive. Some sheep thrive on controversy and confusion.

We must ask ourselves, "Do I exist to serve the Shepherd and His sheep, or am I in it for _____?" Is ministry a gift to share with others, or a means of vocation and financial security (e.g., Paul's decision to be self-supporting, not a 'peddler' of the gospel)? Becoming a wolf only takes a combination of skepticism and time... we're all susceptible to fatigue to fight the good fight of faith, or false humility... the shadow of cynicism creeps into our once tender hearts.

My Sleepless Shepherd

The Good Shepherd never sleeps, and at the end of the day, leading means "letting go." I have to ask myself, "Do I carry the burden of responsibility as though it were exclusively mine to bear, or do I trust the owner of the flock to cover the night shift?"

Guidance

Shepherds guide people in God's ways, using God's wisdom, as His human instruments. "You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." (Ps 77:20) A good shepherd manages an entire flock, with an eye for each individual.

Following the Leader

Leading with tenderness to a place of rest and refreshment "Nahal"

Straight forward guidance (cloud pillar in Exodus) "Nakhah"

Directive herding accomplished best from the back of the flock "Nahag" imposing the will of the shepherd over fatigue & distraction

"He leads (nahal) me beside still waters... He guides (nakhah) me in paths of righteousness... Psalm 23:2 & 3

Leaders are both shepherds and sheep. Leading always involves being led. Even Jesus frequently sought counsel from the Father. Followership is the beginning and the end of effective leadership.

Righteous Ruts

Knowing the environment well enough to recognize where each trail leads, anticipating potential pitfalls.

Trail and path imagery in the Bible celebrates normative patterns for godly behavior, following God's directions.

What written and unwritten guidelines exist in our ministry that serve as pathways to keep everyone on a safe track?

Working Together

Demanding work becomes a forge for life's deepest friendships. Co-workers through crisis and transitions creates strong bonds. Paul, in his church planting ministry, names about 30 people involved. Leadership is not / should not be reducible to an individual.

Indigenous Leadership

Goat-like independence can be a good quality (Isaiah 14:9; Jeremiah 50:8; Zechariah 10:3).

A shepherd's donkey (or 'Maria') can be a suitable substitute for his presence within a flock, for up to 2 days.

Productivity

"If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:8) Fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, etc. (Galatians 5:22) Gifts of the Spirit: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, discernment, etc. (1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

Reproduction

Leading is bleeding – (a sign of health and vitality and of divine blessing). Am I personally reproducing myself through evangelism and discipleship.

Think Flock

We must understand that management is a significant expression of shepherding... making decisions with a priority on the collective whole (administrative heads / chief contractors / field shepherds).

Finding Good Help

Expertise and skill: recognizing and catering to the needs of the flock. Much hard work: which should bear fruit in improved conditions of the flock (poor work ethic is most common complaint). Trustworthiness: to not steal sheep or pursue personal gain (servant-stewardship) As Messiah, Jesus models "the Bedouin Way" with much hard work, living with, instructing, teaching and modeling rest, etc.

Authority and Abuse

Not all shepherds are good shepherds. Scripture promotes a proper use of authority (not dominating, brutal, bullying or terrorizing). Authority is given for edification, not destruction. Relational influence is key (not for personal agenda or "lording over" others).

Adaptability

Going with the terrain... Bedouins live in a constant state of triage – Confident agility: nimble shifting between roles. Synergistic response to rapidly changing needs... Fluid existence, reflecting attachment to the flock and their activities.

Ministry requires making constant modifications to meet the daily needs, without losing sight of the big picture. Need a theology of interruptions and obstructions, resisting the tendency to quickly or hastily "fix" or resolve as quickly as possible, in order to get on with our agenda, without regard for their potentially redemptive dimensions. The flock of God may be better served if we possess the flexibility, agility, adaptability, and opportunism observed among Bedouins.

Being There

"I am with you" assurance of God's personal presence (23rd Psalm) runs like a golden thread throughout Scripture

- Abraham giving up his permanent home, identity and inheritance for the promises of God Genesis 26:3
- Jacob's descendants long-suffering in Egyptian slavery Gen. 31:3
- Moses, the shepherd, leading them out of slavery Exodus 3:12
- Wilderness wanderings by cloud and pillar Ex. 33:12-15
- Joshua leading them to occupy the promised land Deuteronomy 30-1; Joshua 1
- David from shepherd in a pasture to being enthroned as king 2 Samuel 7:8-9
- Jesus as Immanuel, God with us Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; John 1:14
- Holy Spirit, with us forever John 14:16

(Proximity + attentive, responsive listening + time = leadership... "watching" the flocks)

Home

Our only permanent dwelling is in Heaven (2 Cor. 5:1; Hebrews 11)

God is a "tent dweller" and His pilgrim people (2 Sam. 7:5) [...future forfeiture of the temple to dwell with them in exile]

The Son of Man had no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). ***Earth is simply a place where we promote God's interests.***

We are a "mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." (James 4:14)

Our ultimate objective, goal, and strategic initiative is ***to get everyone home.***

Epilogue

What strikes us most about the life of the shepherd is the comprehensiveness of it (ministry, too!)... the creative tension between self-care and self-sacrifice, adaptability and determination, humility and wisdom, working alone and together, etc. The final paradox: ***Good Shepherds raise sheep to become fellow shepherds.***