CHAPTER 3

Lessons on Leadership from the Shepherd Metaphor

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Leadership in an ever increasingly complex, fast-moving, global environment is more challenging than ever. In response to the call for leadership solutions which also satisfy the desire for morality, avoid ethical failures, and offer meaning and purpose, contemporary follower-friendly leadership theories and popular writings have proliferated. Unfortunately, theoretical fundamentals are often difficult to grasp and even more difficult to practice. It is in simplifying and clarifying complex human or organizational constructs that metaphors can be especially effective. The shepherd metaphor is one such illustration that while used to depict leadership for thousands of years, has lost many of its powerful lessons within non-agrarian societies of today (Swalm, 2010).

Leaders seeking effective moral approaches have swarmed to servant leadership, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership theories, and all of them offer unique insights into the difficult roles of leadership. The shepherd metaphor, modeled by Jesus and used throughout Scripture, not only offers an example of leadership that creates trust and successful group outcomes, but is both more practical and time-proven than the popular wisdom often depicted as six rules, seven steps, or three habits when appearing in contemporary blogs or business publications. Metaphors are simply easier to understand and apply than theoretical concepts.

For most leaders, the nuances of shepherding are foreign and often only the comforting element of the shepherd imagery remains (Thompson, 1997), but the depth of the metaphor and the need for leadership render shepherd leadership a model worthy of study. Individually, people

are vulnerable and unfulfilled, so they seek to join the flock and follow a good shepherd. While self-direction and autonomy are applauded as progressive in today's workplace, as Thompson (1997) noted, "Other sheep respond to the voice of the shepherd, not the bleating of the flock" supporting the fundamental need for leadership by an individual not a collective. The shepherd metaphor for leadership is not new, nor is it only for the church, even though the Latin transliteration of pastor to shepherd has increased awareness of the shepherd model within the ecclesiastic community (Brand, Draper, & England, 2003). While recently those who have investigated the shepherd as a leadership model are primarily from spiritual environments, the shepherd and the shepherd's crook have long been common symbols of leadership across cultures, although few have fully developed and operationalized the concept (Swalm, 2010).

The other major Scriptural metaphor, the servant leader has received a lot of attention since Greenleaf wrote his seminal 1970 essay entitled, *The Servant as Leader* (Spears, 1995), yet Rardin (2001) connected the two metaphors of servant and shepherd such that the shepherd metaphor was the primary leadership image and the servant was a modifier. That is, the manner of caring for the sheep with a heart of servanthood refined the good shepherd model. Shepherd leadership as depicted in Scripture reflects not just behaviors, but motives (Lynch & Friedman, 2013); not just the hands but the heart of leadership. Servant leadership, ethical leadership, and spiritual leadership among other contemporary enlightened leadership theories are all more focused on why rather than how. Shepherd leadership contributes by operationalizing such leadership theories and demonstrating how those other morality based theories are to be practiced. The modeling of behaviors by leaders establishes norms and defines culture, and the shepherd metaphor assists by providing leaders an example from which to model.

Incorporating a spiritual foundation in leadership theories ensures that their practice will include eternal and moral components, and avoid the ethical shortfalls that arise from viewing morality through our own eyes (Miller, 1995). Shepherd leadership as developed in scripture incorporates such morality of course, and like many of the scriptural lessons on leadership including those within servant and spiritual leadership theories, the insights offer sound wisdom to guide leaders across the organizational spectrum.

Shepherd Characteristics for Today's Leaders

Miller (1995) clarified the distinction between leading and managing, observing that "no one is really eager to be managed, but the entire world is hungry to be led." (p. 24) While definitional differences of leadership and management proliferate, in the metaphor, one can imagine that the herd dog manages while the shepherd leads. The herding keeps processes and people moving and 'gathered,' while the shepherd, through relationship and vision, influences the flock to collectively and individually follow the shepherd to a better place. The shepherd and sheep hold a special place in Scripture as they are referenced over 500 times (Swalm, 2010). The shepherd imagery appears from Genesis to the prophets, throughout the Psalms, and in the New Testament parables. In the beginning, Abel was described as a shepherd (Genesis 4, ESV), and most early heroes including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were shepherds. As John closed his Gospel with Peter being restored by Jesus, Peter was instructed to shepherd the church (John 21). The prophets Ezekiel (Ezekiel 34) and Isaiah (Isaiah 40) both spoke of the coming Messiah as the Good Shepherd, and David and Moses were prepared for leadership through actual shepherding before being called to shepherd the Israelites. Shepherds were even the first notified of the birth of the Messiah in Luke's Gospel (Luke 2). The shepherd metaphor is so significant that Jesus referred to himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10), and in one of the most endearing

and widely known sections of Scripture, David described the Lord as his shepherd in Psalm 23. The shepherd metaphor depicted a wise, benevolent leader style which is central to the Godly leadership Jesus modeled.

The ageless characteristics of shepherd leadership are instructive for contemporary leaders as shepherd leaders guide, provide, and protect, but shepherd leadership is more of a state or attitude than a strategy (Swalm, 2010). The shepherd leader model is more about "who a leader is, not what a leader does" (Swalm, 2010, p. 9). The power of a metaphor is in how it illustrates more than how it instructs, and for the leader, the shepherd image offers modeling guidance. In Psalm 23, the shepherd provided not only care, feeding, and fellowship, but peace and rest even in the face of death (Psalm 23). For leaders, providing such a steady, confident assurance in times of change and anxiety is an admirable and effective leadership quality. In the prophet Isaiah's pericope of hope, while prophesying the coming of the Messiah, Jesus was pictured as tending to the Israelites as a shepherd cares for the flock (Isaiah 40:11). In one of the earliest references to the Good Shepherd, Ezekiel 34 clarified the difference between those inadequate shepherds of Israel and the coming Good Shepherd, the Lord God. The Israel leaders were self-centered, harsh, kept the best for themselves, care for themselves first, and would even abandon sheep, while the coming Good Shepherd would care for the flock, strengthen the sick and weak, be loving and gently, and gather and protect the flock (Foster, 2010). The Good Shepherd was just, caring, and a servant to the flock because that was His nature. The most significant illustration of the Good Shepherd appeared in John 10, where Jesus was self-described as a protector, caring, sacrificial shepherd who had a relationship with the sheep, and the individual caring nature was further reflected in Luke 15:4-7 as the shepherd cared for even one lost sheep reinforcing the importance of each follower. The Good Shepherd characteristics

throughout Scripture described attributes and practices of an effective leader and created an image for aspiring leaders to model.

The Scriptural shepherd metaphor model of leadership can guide contemporary leaders and included a robust list of leadership characteristics including:

- The shepherd led from the front, calling the sheep who recognized his voice and followed him to trust that they would be led to good, peaceful pastures (John 10, Psalm 23)

- The good shepherd cared for the sheep as one who was an owner, willing to freely lay his life down while leading sacrificially (John 10).

- The relationship that developed trust so deep that the flock would follow the shepherd's voice was created by extended, un-busy times and repeated daily provisions (Psalm 23; Swalm, 2010). That trust illustrated by following the shepherd's voice reflected a deep, radical trust.

- While the shepherd cared for even one lost sheep (Luke 15), the shepherd primarily focused on calling, caring for, protecting, and provisioning the entire flock demonstrating that there is greatest power within a team.

- The shepherd leader was more paternalistic than many of the empowering leadership approaches popular today. The leader did not ask the flock where they would like to go as a group, but wisely led them to safe, green pastures, down paths of righteousness, and comforted them with the rod and staff, with goodness and mercy (Psalm 23).

- Shepherds were not highly respected in the world, but to the sheep they were viewed differently. The shepherd was to serve the flock, not gather worldly accolades which could be a corrupting influence to effective leadership.

- The shepherd was always diligent, watching for danger and even securing the flock by lying across the gate at night to keep the flock from harm.

- Inspiration and vision were not just concepts to the shepherd, but translated into practical actions as the flock was guided to provisions and good pastures. The hope and aspirations of a better place were conveyed within the shepherd leaders' voice and a hopeful outcome was expected by the followers since the leader had demonstrated wisdom through previous journeys. The wise shepherd leader always kept the flock together and on the proper path to better conditions and outcomes.

- There was strength in the collective. Alone people are vulnerable and will naturally seek a shepherd, a leader (Thompson, 1997). Whether in sports or business, the effectiveness of teams has been proclaimed (Stewart, Manz, & Sims, 1999), but the shepherd metaphor suggested that teams need strong, caring leadership and do not lead themselves.

- Flocks, no matter how many talented sheep were gathered, needed strong leadership. Quoting an old Russian proverb, Thompson (1997) noted, "Without a shepherd sheep are not a flock" (p.183).

- Ensuring team unity and purity was a concern of the shepherd as described in Acts 20:28-30 when Paul warned of wolves infiltrating the flock from without and within, and admonished the leaders to be vigilant. Leaders must ensure sheep are

committed to the flock and that intruders or dangerous elements are prevented access.

The prescriptive characteristics of the shepherd leader as presented in Scripture are powerful, but in some cases deviate from practices which are popular today. The shepherd leader was more engaged, directive, and paternalistic than many contemporary leadership theories would suggest, but those ancient leadership practices are quite consistent throughout. That is, Scripture suggested that the flock be led, not that sheep lead themselves.

Shepherd Leadership as an Operational Leadership Model

While the shepherd metaphor applied to leadership as an operational model is more active and directive than many contemporary leadership theories, many practices are consistent with other contemporary leadership theory constructs. Authentic leadership, ethical leadership, servant leadership, spiritual leadership, and transformational leadership principles are all illustrated within the shepherd leadership metaphor. The fact that shepherd leadership has much in common with other leadership theories supports the effectiveness of using the shepherd metaphor as a model to aid the leader in practicing those leadership behaviors that research has found successful. There are a significant number of examples of how shepherd leadership relates to and operationalizes popular contemporary leadership theories:

Transformational leadership. Transformational leaders encourage superior results by employing one or more of the pillars of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration to energize and motivate followers (Bass & Riggio, 2010). Idealized influence is the modeling of desired characteristics by the transformational leader and such leaders are respected and trusted (Bass & Riggio, 2010). The shepherd leader demonstrates such modeling and is viewed by followers as capable, determined and to be trusted

to care for the flock. Creating a team spirit and projecting an attractive future state reflect the inspirational motivation of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2010) and the shepherd in calling the flock and leading them to fresh, protected pastures metaphorically demonstrates the relationship-based visionary inspiration of the inspirational motivation pillar of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2010). While the shepherd is generally visualized as caring for the collective flock, in Luke 15 the parable of the lost sheep demonstrated the Good Shepherd's concern, diligent searching, and rejoicing at restoring even one sheep of the 100 in the flock. Healing, and carrying a sheep if needed, the shepherd models the individualized consideration of the transformational leadership model (Bass & Riggio, 2010). The shepherd metaphor does not offer an obvious operational example of intellectual stimulation, the fourth construct of transformational leadership.

Servant leadership. There are a variety of opinions describing how servant leadership and shepherd leadership are related. Rardin (2001) posited that shepherd leadership is concerned with the organization collectively and is the primary leadership metaphor, while servant leadership is concerned more with individual followers and modifies shepherding in a way that promotes the Good Shepherd model. Rardin even named his leadership measurement instrument the Servant-Shepherd Leadership Indicator (SSLI) demonstrating the close connection. In a contrasting perspective, McCormick and Davenport (2004) viewed shepherd leadership as independent and complimentary to servant leadership with both being metaphors of serving. Similarities between shepherd leadership and servant leadership theories are considerable and include characteristics of awareness or listening, empathy, healing emotional issues, persuasion rather than forcing, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the collective well-being, and a concern for the individual followers' well-being (Lynch & Friedman, 2013). Both the servant

leader and shepherd leader models are sacrificial, the servant leader viewing themselves as servant of all first (Lynch & Friedman, 2013) and the Good Shepherd a leader who will lay down his life for the flock (John 10). Within the models, there are also some differences. The shepherd leader leads from the front, is more obviously paternalistic or authoritative, and serves the collective flock more than the individualized servant leader (McCormick & Davenport, 2004; Swalm, 2010). Whether servant leadership and shepherd leadership are complimentary or servant leadership adds texture to the shepherd leadership model, the two are closely related and the shepherd metaphor can assist the servant leader in practicing scripturally defined leadership such that both the shepherd and flock prosper (McCormick & Davenport, 2004)

Emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence has been found to be relevant to effective leadership (Yukl, 2010) and includes attributes of empathy, emotionally effective verbal and non-verbal communications, self-regulation and the ability to manage stress, change, setbacks, and crisis (Yukl, 2010) which are all among behaviors demonstrated by the Good Shepherd. The emotional caring and the connection of the shepherd to the flock of followers are consistent with and demonstrative of the leadership behaviors and emotions within emotional intelligence that theorists are discovering as effective for leaders.

Trust as prime mediator and LMX. Trust forms the basis of influence between leaders and followers, with the level of trust in an organization reflective of the "quality of the relationship between the leader and follower" (Goodwin, Whittington, Murray, & Nichols, 2011, p. 422). The underlying trust results from the leader-member exchange (LMX) relationship building process. In the shepherd metaphor, "The sheep hear his voice … and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice" (John 10:3-4, ESV) illustrated leadership based on a trust which had developed over time as the shepherd continually demonstrated care and benefits for the

followers. The iterative process and exchange nature of LMX parallels the trust building method that occurs between the shepherd and sheep. Both leaders and followers prosper from the relationship and arrangement of the shepherd and flock (McCormick & Davenport, 2004). Goodwin et al. (2011) in investigating the role of trust, found trust fully mediated leader behavior (transformational leadership) and positive outcomes and in the shepherd metaphor, trust holds a similar primary role in leadership. The Good Shepherd's sacrificial nature reinforced trust as followers recognized that their well-being was valuable enough for the shepherd to even lay down his life (John 10:15). Trust is a primary characteristic of effective leader-follower relationship and the shepherd model illustrates a relationship that both develops and depends upon trust.

Lead like a shepherd. The shepherd metaphor of leadership contained in the over 500 scriptural references is far more complex and multifaceted than contemporary non-agrarian societies may perceive. As leaders continue to seek guidance and consider the progressive leadership models such as servant leadership, ethical leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership, the shepherd metaphor as modeled by Jesus and demonstrated throughout scripture can operationalize leadership in ways that help illustrate a caring, sacrificial, team-oriented, and strong leadership model. The shepherd leadership metaphors can be powerful and more easily understood than purely philosophical leadership concepts

Unfortunately, for many contemporary leaders, shepherding practices as metaphorically depicted are unknown, but the Bible offers a plethora of information and examples of shepherding as God intended and as demonstrated through the Good Shepherd. Some of the shepherd constructs; the importance of the collective, the paternalistic nature of the shepherd leader, and the sacrificial nature of shepherd leadership, can appear to conflict with secular

leadership theories, but through careful study of the fundamental elements of shepherd leadership and the reconciliation of those differences through the lens and primacy of Scripture, shepherd leadership can offer unique insights into leadership as God designed and demonstrated.

Leadership models that reflect the Good Shepherd offer the hope of wise, strong, caring, and loving leadership that is effective not just in ecclesiastic settings, but in business, government, non-profits, families, and wherever Godly leadership is required to serve God's purposes. Leaders that act like the Scriptural shepherds, spending unhurried time, building deep trusting relationship, and continually seeking wisdom and direction to greener pastures, are more likely to create flocks that are productive, happy, and committed. Today's leaders could do well to simply act like shepherds.

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