

LEADERSHIP 101

As someone who's often in the role of leading, I've always been interested in what makes a good leader. When I stepped into the role of a Lead Pastor, I read this passage and it shaped my approach to ministry ever since.

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! 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 the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

"Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. Ezekiel 34:1-10

God uses the metaphor of shepherds and flocks as he addresses the people of Israel and their leaders. In the Old Testament, there were 3 primary types of leaders we find: prophets, priests, and kings. **Most often the image of a shepherd was used in connection with kings and it's likely that the Kings of Israel were the specific target of God's frustration in this passage.**

The word "**Pastor**" actually comes from the Latin noun meaning "**Shepherd.**" *Illustration: Jim Manker- Price is right*

All that being said, whether you consider yourself a leader or not, I believe there are things we should all take to heart as we consider the passage we just read.

I heard something recently that stuck with me and it's our first point this morning:

*THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP OFTEN SHAPES THE QUALITY OF OUR EXPERIENCE

Leadership doesn't dictate the quality of our experience, but it will undeniably shape the quality of any experience. It doesn't matter whether it's a political leader, a boss, a pastor, a teacher, a coach, a parent, or a spouse; the quality of that leader will inevitably shape the experience of those associated with that leader.

Examples:

-Amy: Change of school presidents

-Churches: Change of pastors

-Boys: various teachers (favorite teacher = favorite class)

The quality of leadership shapes the quality of our experience, so we'd be wise to pay attention to what God says about leadership.

The shepherds of Israel provided a great lesson in what not to do as a leader. That's why God says, "Woe to you shepherds of Israel."

The word "woe" is a term of judgement. It's a way of saying, "Ooh, you done it. Now you're gonna get it." God watched His leaders repeatedly misuse their positions of leadership and enough was enough.

So what can we learn about leadership as we read this passage?

*WE ARE ENTRUSTED, NOT ENTITLED, WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFLUENCE

I use the word "influence" rather than "position" because you can have a position, but have no influence. Position provides an opportunity for influence, but it doesn't guarantee it. That being said, Look at verse 10:

As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. Ezekiel 34:7-10

5 times in 3 verses, God uses the phrase, "my flock." Whose flock is it? God's. And God says, "I will hold them accountable for my flock."

Whether you're a politician, a manager, a teacher, a pastor or church leader, a parent or a spouse; **whatever position or platform you have has been entrusted to you and you are accountable to God for how you use that platform, which leads to the next point...**

***IF WE DON'T USE OUR INFLUENCE WELL, WE MAY NOT HAVE INFLUENCE FOR LONG**

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. v. 10

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. The shepherds didn't shepherd well, so God promised to take away their flock. With rare exceptions or dictatorships, people who don't use their influence well, lose their platform for influence.

Politicians don't get re-elected. Managers lose their jobs or employees quit on them. Players check-out on coaches. And parents who don't care well for their children find strained or severed relationships with their children when they become adults.

So we need to carry out whatever role we have as a leader or influencer in a way that honors God and cultivates loyalty with those we are entrusted with. If we don't use our influence well, we may not have it for long.

***WE NEED TO GUARD AGAINST THE ABUSE OF POWER & POSITION**

You have ruled them harshly and brutally. v. 4

One of the most damaging things a leader can do is deal with others in a way that is harsh. That doesn't mean we always have to make everyone happy; we just need to be careful about being harsh or creating an oppressive environment.

Leaders have to keep their emotions under control. This is true of bosses, teachers, coaches, parents and spouses. Being a leader can be challenging and there are those who will frustrate us to the point that we want to lash out, but we can't let our emotions get the best of us.

***Share about God choosing Solomon, not David to build his temple.** We need to lead primarily out of wisdom and relationship, not power and position.

Ironically, over time Solomon shifted from ruling with wisdom to ruling out of power and position and he dealt harshly with the very people he'd been entrusted. And when Solomon died, his son Rehoboam became king, the people of Israel appealed to Rehoboam to be more reasonable. Look at what took place in 1 Kings 12:4-8:

“Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.” Rehoboam answered, “Go away for three days and then come back to me.” So the people went away.

Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. “How would you advise me to answer these people?” he asked. They replied, “If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.” 1 Kings 12:4-8

Seems like a reasonable request presented in a reasonable manner, followed by some really good advice... right? Well, Rehoboam rejected the advice of the elders and instead turned to the young men for advice:

The young men who had grown up with him replied, “These people have said to you, ‘Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.’ Now tell them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.’” 1 Kings 12:10-11

There’s a lot of lessons to be learned here, but I think one of the reasons the young men resorted to leading through power and position, rather than out of compassion was they felt like Rehoboam has something to prove. Their response reflected **insecurity** and **immaturity**. Their response reflected a **desire to control**. **All these internal insecurities and issues led Rehoboam to tighten his grip on the people rather than come alongside the people.**

Sadly, Jeroboam went with the advice of the young men and he ruled harshly and led in ways that were not at all godly. What resulted was **rebellion by the people** and the **10 northern tribes turned to someone else to be their king**. And God brought judgement on Jeroboam and ensured that his lineage would not be able to continue.

Whatever position or platform in which we find ourselves, we’d be wise to lead primarily out of wisdom and relationship rather than power and position. We need to guard against the abuse of power and position.

***WE NEED TO GUARD AGAINST INDIFFERENCE**

More common than the abuse of power and position is being indifferent when it comes to other peoples’ needs. This was the case with Israel’s leaders. They were given their positions to make sure that God’s people were cared well for, but they only cared for themselves.

Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! 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. Ezekiel 34:2-3

The criticism of the Shepherds wasn't that they cared for themselves; it was that they **only** cared for themselves. It's not wrong for us to tend to our own needs, but self-care can't be the only thing we care about.

God asks an obvious question: "**Shouldn't the shepherds take care of the flock?**" Then he lists all the things they do for themselves, all the while neglecting the needs of the very people they've been entrusted with.

Example: Hiring a dog sitter who didn't actually take care of your dog. *Would you ever entrust them with your dog again?*

The leaders were enjoying everything their position provided them, but they were completely indifferent to the needs of the people.

Ministry: Easy to get busy with the tasks of ministry, and not really invest in relationships or the needs of the people. **People are not an inconvenience; they are the reason we do what we do.**

Example: Upside down flow chart. Nobody was more important than Jesus, yet He said, "*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve others.*"

We need to be mindful that in whatever setting we find ourselves, we must always care well for people.

THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH

I mentioned this passage has been influential in shaping my approach to ministry. Sometimes when you read Scripture, there's the primary point of the passage, but a secondary concept emerges and God really speaks to you about that concept. When I first stepped into the role of a lead pastor and as I read this passage, I was drawn to the idea of three groups mentioned in this passage: **The flock, the lost, and the strays.**

I don't know that the passage is intended to distinguish between these three groups because they're all part of the same nation of Israel, but here's what I felt the Spirit impressing upon me....

*WE ARE CALLED TO CARE FOR THE FLOCK

Should not shepherds take care of the flock? v. 2

This passage calls us to care well for the flock. The people that came to my mind when I thought of the flock are those who are already connected with our church body.

We are called to care well for them, bring healing to the hurting, provide for one another, and tend to the spiritual growth of one another. Galatians 6:2 says, *“Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*

We don’t just attend a worship service and call it good. We need to care well for each other. Some of this will happen organically out of relationship as we carry each other’s burdens. But some of caring for one another happens when we have intentional structures that help us care for one another... things like Growth Groups and Flocks.

Often when people leave a church, it has less to do with not liking the preaching or theology or the music. It’s about whether or not we feel connected or cared for. **We must each do our part to care well for each other.**

***As a church, if we don’t care well for those God has already entrusted us with, why would he entrust us with more?**

***WE ARE CALLED TO REACH THE LOST & BRING BACK THE STRAYS**

You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. v. 4

My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them. v. 6

God talks about bringing back the strays and searching for the lost. It may be a subtle difference, but I believe there is a difference between straying and being lost.

Often in scripture, being lost refers to those who are outside of fellowship with God. In the story of the prodigal son, the father says, *“My son was dead, but now he’s alive. He was lost, but now he’s found.”* The son was outside of fellowship with God.

It may not sound very PC, but people without Christ are lost. And God calls us to be on the lookout for lost people and do everything we can with God’s help to bring them into fellowship with God.

Strays are a little different. They may not be lost, but they’re straying from fellowship with the father and often fellowship with His church.

Strays don’t usually deliberately walk away from God, they just get distracted. **Example: getting separated from my mom in the mall.**

God told his shepherds and us that we need to search for strays and bring them back. Not everyone will be receptive, but it’s our calling to try.

God criticized the Shepherds for being so focused on their own needs that they didn't even bother to go looking for the lost and the strays. Someone once said, **"Until the future of the world becomes more important than the future of the church, the church has no future."**

How much of what we do as a church is focused on meeting our needs and how much of what we do is focused on reaching those outside the church?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

*THE FLOCK

*THE STRAYS

*THE LOST

LEADERSHIP 101

*THE QUALITY OF _____ OFTEN SHAPES
THE QUALITY OF OUR _____.

*WE ARE _____, NOT _____,
WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR _____.

*IF WE DON'T USE OUR INFLUENCE _____,
WE MAY NOT HAVE INFLUENCE FOR _____.

*WE NEED TO GUARD AGAINST _____.

*WE NEED TO GUARD AGAINST _____.

THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH

*WE ARE CALLED TO _____ FOR THE _____.

*WE ARE CALLED TO _____ THE _____ &
_____ THE _____.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

*THE FLOCK

*THE STRAYS

*THE LOST

