

The Challenge of Leadership

Introduction

- I. There's a story told of a woman driving through a snowstorm just outside of Denver. She was completely lost and struggling under the hazardous weather conditions. She was relieved when she finally saw a snow plow. Since she was lost she decided to follow the truck and kept as close to it as she could while it removed the snow from the road. After some time the truck stopped and the driver got out and came back to the car. "Lady, where are you going?" he asked. "I'm on my way to Denver." She replied. The truck driver replied, "Well, you'll never get there following me! I'm plowing a parking lot!"

- II. Tonight we are going to study a very important subject: leadership. We're going to consider "The challenges of leadership" within a local congregation
 - a. Strong homes come from strong leadership

 - b. Strong business are built by strong leaders

 - c. Strong churches are led by strong leadership
 - i. The opposite of each is true as well – there is a severe and catastrophic consequence of leadership

Israel's Failed Leadership

- I. The nation of Israel was a failed nation.
 - a. It is obvious in reading through their history how they struggled in their obedience and loyalty to God

 - b. For this they were punished frequently, and they were punished severely: the end result was their 70 year captivity, taken from their land

 - c. As much as the problem came from the lack of their individual devotion to God, in many ways, the failure of Israel can be attributed to its leaders.

 - d. Think back to the reign of the kings
 - i. When you read through the books of kings what we often find is that the heart of the people and their closeness to God followed that of their king

 - ii. During the reign of the wicked kings, the people were involved in wickedness and turned away from God, which ultimately led to their captivity

II. Ezekiel 34:1-10

- a. Ezekiel was a prophet to the captives, and through Ezekiel God has a message to the leaders of His people.
 - i. He refers to them here as shepherds – the image most used in the Bible to describe leadership is that of the shepherd

 - ii. Whether it be an old testament leader such as a priest or king, or it is referring to the office held in a local congregation we often call elders – the Bible uses the image of a shepherd to describe and define the role of leadership

 - iii. Here, the shepherds or leaders of Israel would be referring to prophets, priests, and or the King.

- b. Notice the charge God makes against these leaders:
 - i. V. 4 – they had not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bound the injured, brought back the lost. With force and severity you dominated them. This is not the way to treat sheep
 - ii. V. 5 – they were scattered because there was no shepherd, they became prey/food for the beasts
 - iii. V. 6 – they were scattered with no one to seek them
- c. What you see are carelessness and neglect over the needs of the people.
 - i. The people suffered and strayed because there was no one leading them
- III. Where these shepherds failed, ought to indicate where shepherds today must excel
 - a. As Paul would say, “shepherd the church” (Acts 20:28)
 - b. A shepherd is one who cares for the needs of the people (the souls) they are over
 - c. A shepherd leads and protects the sheep
 - i. Without active shepherds in a congregation, souls are vulnerable to the predator, the prowling lion (1 Pet. 5:8)
 - d. This shows us that to have the heart of a shepherd is to have the heart of a servant – putting the needs of others before my own – investing in the lives of others.

The Old Model

- I. This way of leading, as a servant/shepherd is different from what many congregations and elderships are used to
 - a. Many churches and elders have adopted a thinking which came from the post WW2 era.
 - b. After the war men returned with the mentality of rank on their mind. They brought this into the church
 - i. An elder was seen as a rank/ a position of rule. The elders were viewed as the visible bosses of the church. They were the ones in charge
 - ii. With this thinking came the neglecting/forgetting about the heart of a compassionate servant
 - e. This led to elders placing much more emphasis on decision making (focusing on the building, or on the treasury) than placing their main emphasis on the care of each soul
 - f. This image of the eldership models corporate America. The elders serve as CEO’s and CFO’s and the deacons serve as managers who carry out the work. The CEO is concerned with profit, expenses and budgets. The HR department takes care of the people’s concerns
 - g. This model has been passed from generation to generation. To show the extent of this, many elders meetings consist of decisions about the parking lot, when to order new supplies. These thoughts dominate elders meetings.
 - h. Now certainly elders/shepherds must make decisions for the congregation, but they cannot be distracted nor neglect their primary responsibility: the souls under their care, the souls in the local congregation
 - i. They must consider the needs of each individual soul (spiritual, emotional, physical...)

ii. Because they are responsible for each one

IV. Hebrews 13:17

- a. Shepherds are to “keep watch over the souls” in their congregation – you are responsible for each soul!
- b. They are to do so understanding that they “will have to give an **account**”
 - i. This shows us that the consequences of failure is catastrophic
 1. For the **flock** – they are not fed, led, or protected – prone to suffer and stray
 2. For the **shepherd** – not doing as he should, having to answer to God for the way you’ve led
- c. Understanding this ought to show us what a great responsibility this is, to be one of the shepherds of the congregation
- d. Also, it ought to create a strong desire in wanting to learn more about the concept of Shepherding.
- e. So let’s consider what God teaches us about shepherding:

Shepherding

I. 1 Peter 5:1-4

- a. Here we see different titles for the same role/man; titles which define and describe his work
 - i. He is an elder – an older man
 - ii. He is an overseer – manage, watch over the souls of the congregation
 - iii. He is a shepherd – a leader, a servant
- b. Peter reminds us about 2 things through this passage of shepherding:
- c. The shepherd is not a position of power/prestige – it is the role of a **servant**
- d. Also, a shepherd leads by **example** (v.3)
 - i. It is not a pointing from the sidelines giving orders, rather it is leading the way – showing how the work is to be done by demonstrating the work
 - ii. Do you want the members to be more hospitable, to engage in outside studies, to visit the sick?
 1. Lead the way! Have people in your home. Engage in studies. Go visit the sick
 2. The members will follow the example you set for the congregation.
 - iii. It has been said that “churches will reflect the personalities of their leaders.”
 1. Hard work, selfless devotion, joyful, excitement – what example are the shepherds setting for the sheep?

- e. Shepherds are not about power and prestige. Shepherds are servants, shepherds set the example.

II. Proverbs 27:23

- a. Shepherds must know their flock
 - i. There's an old quote about elders which says, "they smell like sheep"
 - ii. Someone would smell like sheep by spending a lot of time around sheep
- b. That's the role of the shepherd. You are to know your flock
 - i. To know them beyond their name, occupation, members of the family, and favorite hobby/sports team
 - ii. How are they? How is their walk with the Lord? Are they struggling? Do they need some help?
 - iii. Are they discouraged? Are they going through a specific hardship?
 - iv. How is their family? How is their marriage? How are their children doing?
 - v. What are their talents? Are they being used well?
- c. In knowing the flock, he will understand that the spiritual needs of a couple who are in their 60's and have been Christians for 40 years are not the same as someone in their 20's who was baptized last week.
 - i. The "one size fits all" in terms of classes, studies, so forth, is rethought with shepherding
 - ii. Just what are the specific needs/concerns of this congregation
- d. This shows us: you cannot learn all of this information through our few moments together after services
 - i. The role of a shepherd doesn't take place in a board room. It takes place in the family room
 - ii. You are involved, invested in the lives of the people
- e. That's what a shepherd is concerned with – he knows well the condition of the flock
 - i. Are they hungry? Are they eating enough? How do you know?
 - 1. And each sheep is going to need different kinds and amounts of food
 - 2. A lamb has different needs from an adult sheep
 - ii. Are they sick? Are they injured? Are they happy, upset?
 - iii. Are they lost? Have they wandered? Has a wolf gotten a hold of them?
- f. This passage reminds us that shepherds know the people, – they invest great time into the members

III. Psalm 23:1-4

- a. Learning from the true Shepherd, our God we learn about shepherding
- b. Shepherds ensure the sheep are fed (green pastures). Are the members in the Word? Are they learning? Are they being properly nourished on the words of life?

- c. Shepherds lead the sheep down the right path (path of righteousness). Are they heading in the right direction? Are they on the narrow way, or have they strayed to the broad path?
- d. Shepherds are with the sheep in the valley, in the difficult times of their lives (valley of the shadow of death) – from the funeral home, the hospital, the nursing home, the unemployment office, you are to be with the sheep, offering your love, care and support when they are low
- e. What we are reminded from this passage is that the shepherd has the sheep's best interest at heart

IV. Do we not see all of these qualities demonstrated in our true shepherd, in **Jesus**?

- a. Consider His example:
 - i. Jesus made Himself available to the people
 - ii. Matt. 9:26 – Jesus was moved with compassion – He cared for the people, and for their needs
 - iii. Jesus was quick to offer a sympathetic ear and a compassionate heart
 - iv. He allowed Himself to be distracted for the sake of the people. His day was often focused on the needs of others
 - v. In His own words, I came not to be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:28)
- b. Jesus is called the shepherd 3x in the NT:
 - i. He is the GOOD shepherd (Jn. 10:11)
 - ii. He is the GREAT shepherd (Heb. 13:20)
 - iii. He is the CHIEF shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4)
- c. In John 10:3-5, 11-15 we find Jesus describing the work of the good shepherd. Notice what we see in Jesus' role as a shepherd:
 - i. The sheep listen to the shepherd (v.3) – which implies communication. They hear the shepherds voice and trust his voice
 - ii. The sheep are called by name (v.3, 14) – each sheep is identified. Each sheep is unique. They each are known by the shepherd
 - iii. The shepherd makes sacrifices (v.11, 15) – the ultimate sacrifice is to lay down one's life. The sheep come first to the shepherd
 - iv. The sheep are protected by the shepherd (v.12) – implied by the series of contrasts, the hireling flees but the shepherd stays
 - v. The sheep are the concern of the shepherd (v.13)

- V. From our quick look at verses dealing with shepherding, can you see then what it means to be a shepherd of a congregation:
 - a. Shepherds lead by example
 - b. Shepherds know the sheep
 - c. Shepherds feed, tend, and care for the sheep
 - d. Shepherds are servants of the sheep
 - e. Their primary focus is on the wellbeing of the sheep

Help!

- I. Looking at this list might bring you to drawing a logical conclusion – if we, as the shepherds, are focusing on the souls of the congregation – that takes a lot of time and energy – how are we to get everything else done?
 - a. What about the building? What about the budget?

II. Acts 6:1-4

- a. Here we find this very situation. The needs of the congregation had grown. There were some widows who were needing daily care
 - b. Notice that the Apostles didn't try and do everything themselves. Doing that would stretch them thin. Their work would suffer.
 - c. They had a responsibility to prayer and the Word (v. 2, 4). So what was the answer?
 - d. They appointed 7 men over the task – to take care of it
 - e. In fact the context says that they were “appointed over this business”
 - i. “put in charge of this task” NASB
 - ii. “we will turn this responsibility over to them” NIV
 - iii. They were not micromanaged. The apostles didn't tell them how to care for the widows, which food to get, to come back with 3 quotes on chicken
 - iv. Under the Apostles guidelines, the congregation picked 7 men of character, and those men fully took over the work, allowing the apostles to fully focus on their responsibilities
- III. That's the answer! God has given the role of servants/deacons in a congregation to help with the work
- a. Whether or not these men were considered “deacons” the principle applies.
 - b. There is much work to be done in this congregation, and the work is not to be done by a few – or just by the elders
 - c. The shepherds have an important obligation in caring for the souls of this group –
 - i. Let your deacons serve the congregation by caring for the other responsibilities
 1. To handle insurance matters – to take care of budgets and brooms and supplies
 2. To initiate repair and maintenance projects
 3. Care for needy saints
 - a. Not just physically – but spiritually
 4. Use your deacons to serve in the “spiritual” work of this church
 - a. Think about this: in the 1st century there were no church buildings, but there were deacons.
 - b. Today, without a building, most deacons would have nothing to do.
 - c. Their work shouldn't be confined to physical, upkeep of the facility – use them for spiritual service to this congregation
 - ii. The deacons are able to do their work well because they have the trust and support of the Shepherds
 - iii. You are allowing and empowering the members to manage and make decisions that once burdened the elders and kept them from truly shepherding

1. So that now the shepherds can focus on their responsibility – the people
2. They can focus on planning, next year – next decade – helping this congregation grow closer and stronger in their walk with God

- IV. Can you see what we're talking about in the leadership God designed for His church?
- a. What a difference it would be if elders shifted away from being business managers and a corporate board, and became lovers of sheep, caring for and nurturing the sheep.
 - b. What would happen in our congregations if our leaders, our elders, put their primary focus on the souls in that congregation?
 - i. If they knew when they were hurting, or struggling...
 - ii. If they went after those who were lost/straying...
 - iii. If they encouraged you, and brought out the best in you...
 - c. There most certainly is the challenge to become the leaders God expects you to be – that this congregation needs you to be
 - i. Many leaders/elders today are in autopilot mode – content to continue things as they always have been without any reason or thought
 - ii. Instead of leaders who are constantly evaluating themselves, and their role with the sheep – ensuring they are bringing about the best for the congregation – following the example of Jesus
- V. As we began noticing – there are severe and catastrophic consequences to a lack of leadership
- a. Whether it be in a business, or in the home, or in a congregation – the lack of leadership can be detrimental – it can bring about some major consequences for those following you
 - b. But great leadership can bring about the best in others
 - i. Great parenting can bring about children who grow up faithful to God and a blessing to those around them
 - ii. Great leadership in a church can bring about strong, faithful members – a congregation that is active, growing, a blessing and honor to God
 - iii. The many wonderful things this church will go on to do, the amazing things this local congregation will become all goes back to the role of the Shepherds.
- VI. Here are some things happening in many congregations today...
- a. Jesus the loving shepherd left the 99 for the 1