

Tools for Wise Leadership

A programme of TWR-Africa, produced by TWR-Zimbabwe, presented by Rev Dr Roy Musasiwa

Series 10: The Leadership Style of Jesus

Talk 4: The Leader as a Shepherd

Welcome to the programme **Tools for Wise Leadership**. We have begun a series of programmes focussing on leadership style of Jesus. In the last programme we focused on the need to acknowledge the contribution of those who preceded us and those whose continued contribution is vital for our success. The benefits of acknowledging and thanking others include improved relationships, multiplying that which we are thankful for and giving ourselves a joyful way of life. If Jesus acknowledged the giants of the past, and the contributors of the present, so must we.

We now focus on Jesus as a Shepherd and the implications of this for our leadership today. God portrays himself as the Shepherd, such as in the well-known Psalm 23. Jesus also portrays himself as the Good Shepherd, especially in John 10. By this Jesus was drawing attention to the extent to which he knew and cared for his followers. In this same vein good leaders **know and care for their followers**.

But how did Jesus demonstrate the Shepherd role? What Shepherd qualities did he exemplify? We need to have an appreciation of the Palestine of Jesus' time in order to appreciate how Jesus could call himself the good Shepherd. Jesus recognized that just as sheep need a Shepherd, people need a leader at all levels, whether it be in the family, school, soccer team, church, tribe, nation. Followers are called sheep as they are often unable to properly take care of themselves. Some are fearful and timid, helpless against predators, easily panicked, stampeded and incapable of handling threatening situations. People are also prone to mob instincts. A sheep going in one direction is likely to be blindly followed by others. These sheep-like qualities of followers require the services of good shepherds or leaders. Jesus was the Good Shepherd – a demonstration of the best qualities of shepherds.

What qualities were needed to be a good shepherd or leader? **Firstly Jesus showed exemplary character**. Shepherds led sheep from the front. They did not drive from behind. That is how Jesus led. When he said "Follow me" he meant that what he taught and what he also illustrated with his own life. For example he both taught and illustrated the quality of humility when he washed his disciples' feet.

Then like a good shepherd Jesus knew his own sheep, and his sheep knew him. As Jesus said in John 10:14, "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own." He knows all of us by name and that is evidence of concern for the sheep.

Leadership studies tell us that some leaders are very much task orientated. The way they value team members is only in terms of how much they have produced of the goods and services the company or organization exists to produce. Such leaders, however, do not care for the team members as people. Loveless shepherds may view sheep as numbers in the registry, members on the books, employees on the payroll, or statistics about which to boast. Now there is no doubt that in the short-term the task-oriented leader will get more work done. But the human cost of that production can be too high. It can include people suffering burn-out. It can also include a high turn-over of employees as people resign after realizing they are only being used as productive units without being cared for and appreciated as people. Leaders who do not care for people have very little credibility with the people they lead.

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Other leaders are relationally orientated, with much of their focus being on caring for team members as people. Not only do these leaders take time to know the members by name, they also take time to know their circumstances, joys and sorrows. They find out about family issues of their team members, sickness within families and other matters that are important in the lives of team members. Such relational leaders take on the kind of shepherd role that Jesus demonstrated.

We have already said that knowing sheep by name is evidence of practical caring – the Jesus' type of practical caring. As Maxwell would put it, "followers don't care how much we know until they know how much we care." Here is a modern parable by Bradley Sallee to illustrate this idea of practical caring:

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out...

*A **subjective** person came along and said, "I feel for you down there."*

*An **objective** person walked by and said, "It's logical that someone would fall down there."*

*A **Pharisee** said, "Only bad people fall into pits."*

*A **mathematician** calculated how deep the pit was.*

*A **self-pitying** person said, "You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit."*

*A **Christian Scientist** observed, "The pit is just in your mind."*

*A **psychologist** noted, "Your mother and father are to blame for your being in that pit."*

*A **self-esteem therapist** said, "Believe in yourself and you can get out of that pit."*

*An **optimist** said, "Things could be worse."*

*A **pessimist** exclaimed, "Things will get worse."*

*A **Professor** gave him a lecture on, "The Elementary Principles of the Pit."*

*A **Health And Wealth Preacher** said, "**Just confess that you're not in a pit.**"*

Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

Here is a question: What is your attitude to the many people around you who are in a pit? Caring is what a shepherd does.

Moreover, Jesus as Shepherd also spoke of Commitment to the Sheep. He puts the interests of the sheep before his own. This is very different from the bad shepherds described in Ezekiel 34 who only looked after their own selfish interests. We have some such leaders today who inflate their own salaries while their team members are on starvation wages. They go on expensive holidays, boat cruises etc. But their workers cannot rest as they need to earn every possible extra penny in overtime just in order to survive. These are the shepherds who feed themselves, and who do not do much to feed the sheep.

Another quality of a good shepherd that Jesus demonstrated was courage. Palestinian shepherds looked after sheep at great risk to themselves. They had to guard their sheep against predators like lions who could be a danger even to the shepherds themselves. This was the difference between a hireling (or a hired hand) and shepherd. Jesus said:

The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep... Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.

You see Shepherds in Palestine put the safety of their sheep before their own. In the Old Testament, for example, David fought and killed a lion with his bare hands because the predator tried to attack his sheep.

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If you want to lead like Jesus did, you will need courage to defend your team members against attacks and other dangers. Dangers to our people are not just physical. There are also emotional dangers, psychological dangers and spiritual dangers. We have to care what our followers are exposed to.

But we need to say something about Jesus as a balanced shepherd. Earlier we said that some leaders are task orientated while others are relationally orientated. The uniqueness of Jesus is that he was both of these. He balanced relationships with the need to push these followers onward. On the one hand, he promised the disciples they would have his presence and comfort through the Holy Spirit. But he also turned their eyes to a task that needed to go beyond Jerusalem to encompass the world. So he told them in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Well today we have learnt many valuable leadership lessons from Jesus as the Good Shepherd. He knew his sheep. He cared for them in every way. He guided them – leading by example and not by driving from the back. He put their interests before his. He courageously defended them against predators. All these qualities should say something to you as a leader. Indeed these qualities give us tools for wise leadership that we should practice always.

Well, let’s make a date for the next programme as we continue to explore the leadership style of Jesus. Until then, stay blessed.

Discussion Questions

Is the *Leadership Style of Jesus* touching you? The discussion questions for *Tools for Wise Leadership* help you to explore further:

Study Question 1: for Personal reflection

What does this episode mean to you personally as a leader?

Study Question 2: for Group Discussion

What does this topic mean you as a group of leaders?

Study Question 3: for applying the topic

What can you apply from this topic in your role as a leader?

Can you take a few moments to reflect on these questions? Remember to tell a friend what you have learned. Here are the questions for the **Talk 4 - The Leader as a Shepherd**

Study Question 1: Personal reflection

How has Jesus shown you that He is the Good Shepherd?

Study Question 2: Group Discussion

Considering Jesus' example as the Good Shepherd, what do think is the most important characteristic of a leader?

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Study Question 3: Applying the topic

In your own situation, what can you do to balance relationship-oriented and task-oriented leadership?

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