



Strand: AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP	Subject: <i>Authentic Christian Leaders as Caring “Shepherds”</i>	Lesson: THREE
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Authentic Christian Leaders as Caring “Shepherds”

If you are a leader (church or secular), you occupy a role of privilege and responsibility, for your business and for people.

The image of Jesus as the “Shepherd Leader” is one of the most effective metaphors in the Bible. (The same image is used in relation to God, Psalm 23, 80:1; Moses, Psalm 77:20; and David, Psalm 78:70-72). It was understood in Jesus’ day; many people were pastoralists. I have observed sheep with Bedouin shepherds in the Middle East; the close relationship is powerful. In Australia, where flocks run into thousands, the lesson is lost. Some men and women lead people (valued as people) in a New Testament way; others drive human resources (commodities) like graziers.

In a modern market/industrial world it is crucial that leaders who are Christians care for followers according to a Biblical paradigm, leading rather than driving.

Most Christians who are leaders operate in a secular environment. They do not run Christian organisations. But they are called to be “salt” and “light” and understand how to “practice the presence of God” in the workplace, in their vocations - that can be a balancing act. Christians who are leaders do not stop being Christians (temples of the Holy Spirit, manifesting His fruit in their lives, with a Christian world view) simply because they are in the marketplace. As leaders they have a “pastoral” role that involves people. They mentor teams, care for individuals, provide direction, counsel and manage performance and output. The question is: how can they lead in a non-Christian environment (subtext = in a “Christ-like way”)? The Shepherd model shows how the world operates and how Christian leaders ought to do so.

Two Types of Shepherds (Ezekiel 34)

Society’s Model:

“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 those who are ill 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.”

God’s Model

“I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and make them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice..... I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.”

*Shepherding is often viewed through a narrow “church lens”.
All leaders have pastoral functions.*

Jesus the Shepherd Leader (John 10)

What do we see about Jesus’ role as our shepherd leader (Hebrews 13:20)? Think about these in terms of people *you* lead.

- He knows His sheep individually, by name
- He is always “there” for *us*, not for self-interest
- He gains trust/confidence through mutual relationship
- He goes ahead of us (leads from the front), gives focus and clear direction
- provides for them
- He is motivated by a desire for our highest good (“abundant life”)
- He nurtures the young, inexperienced, weak
- He cares for those who stray - keeps a watchful eye on them
- He unites us as one flock; this is very important in an individualistic society like ours
- He picks up those who stumble (genuine shepherds are redemptive, not judgemental)
- He patches up the wounded
- He defends the defenceless - knows there are always dangers
- He does not do it for gain (as some do), but because He cares for us (“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.” 1 Peter 5:7)
- He does not walk away (as some do) when the going gets tough
- He focuses on people, not tasks, rules or processes
- He gives His life for the sheep (not conditional)

Jesus is our model of caring leadership (for leaders both inside and outside of the church).

Shepherding in a Secular Society

*“People” are more than “human resources”.
Leadership involves loving and caring for them.*

Leaders who are Christians are *ideally located* to:

- **care** for others (love them) and keep an eye out for their well-being
- **listen to them**, show empathy and awareness (walk in their shoes)
- **influence** them through position, relationship, commitment, persuasion and doing good
- **lead from the front**, engage, energize, motivate (inspire) and empower people
- **set the tenor/mood**, create a positive culture (it all comes down to the leader)
- **create trust**, confidence and unity, deal with ambiguity (and differences between peoples)
- **use authority and power responsibly**, to build cohesive and collaborative teams
- **provide direction**, provide a clear vision, set and explain the goals (rather than coercing people)
- **take responsibility** for planning, problems & outcomes (not play the “blame game”)
- **recognise** individuals who are vulnerable and unfulfilled (this requires taking a genuine interest in them)
- **acknowledge** those who do well, encourage them to use talents (*what God gave them*) and skills (*what they have learned*) to excel; celebrate their successes, show them gratitude
- **mentor** staff and build other leaders, with generosity
- **model** the right values & behaviours ethically
- **give assurance**, oppose destructive and negative forces that threaten people
- **exemplify wisdom** (James 1:5) in times of stress, change, setbacks, crises
- **model servanthood** (Luke 22:27) and character (humility, forgiveness, respect)

this is all very well but

Who Shepherds the Shepherds?

Leaders also need shepherds?

- people will not feel safe or *follow* you if you do not demonstrate integrity (even if you are positionally their manager); ask yourself: “*Why* should this person follow me?”
 - o power is not the same thing as authority
 - o a “manager” is not necessarily a good leader (cf John 10:4, 5, 12, 13)
- leaders also need care; we are not invincible (1 Corinthians 10:22); *everybody* has weak spots; everybody is vulnerable, with human emotions, reactions and breaking points (Zechariah 13:7; Luke 22:31; John 10:10)
- shepherd leadership requires humility, mutual submission and teachability

- support, wisdom and guidance can come from superiors, other leaders, prayer partners, spouses & followers who help us carry the load (don't underestimate them)
- we owe it to one another to be on the look-out, for mutual benefit ("Who is sufficient for these things?" 2 Corinthians 5:16)
- leaders get tired, make mistakes, need rest, time out and renewal (burn-out is counter-productive, from every angle), cf 2 Corinthians 4:16, Revelation 3:12

People follow leaders, not programs. They need to know their leaders are themselves being well led.



Living Your Faith and Caring for People in a Secular Environment

Ten Tips

Most Christians interface with non-Christians in secular settings every day. Such contact may be the only time these unbelievers (who will have a range of views about God and faith) see and hear what a Christian is really like.

Leaders who are Christians have unique opportunities to reach other leaders (political, military, public service, business, education, community) and express their faith genuinely and non-confrontationally in a message their hearers can understand. Consider the following *Ten Tips*.

- Remember that that God has placed you where you are. He can use you where you are. You may have come to your world for “such a time as this”.
- You may be the only genuine Christian in a position to speak into their lives. They may never go to church; their culture or personal circumstances may render it unlikely. They probably have preconceptions and may have had negative experiences with real or assumed Christians.
- Understand what you believe - and learn how express it in your own words. Use your own the language and of those around you, not “theological jargon”. Practice how to express your faith meaningfully.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where to start.
- Remember that your life, character, integrity, trustworthiness and track record can open/close conversations about spiritual topics. Your role as a leader whom the other person respects may incline them to your influence, or at least enable them to be open to having the conversation.
- “Actively listening” to the language of the other person can provide clues to initiating the conversation and to the context/meaning. Jesus engaged the woman at the well, Nicodemus, Zacchaeus and the man born blind in very different but individual ways. He was never driven by formulae.
- Keep your heart attuned to the “felt needs” of others. Everyone has needs; Jesus came to relate to the whole person. Many people are more spiritually aware or open than might otherwise appear to be the case.
- Try to understand what others believe and be prepared to share what makes the Christian message unique and appealing. Many of the world’s religions lack assurance of salvation, relationship with God, meaning and purpose in life, freedom. Learn what you can about the beliefs of the other person; this will add to your credibility (but remember that conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit; only He can convict, convince and change hearts).
- Be sensitive. Keep the “conversation” alive. Avoid red herrings that lead to fruitless arguments and closed opportunities. Get a good sense of when to speak and when to be silent.
- Be a genuine friend or colleague. Kindness, consistency and genuine care go a long way.