



They Smell Like Sheep: Spiritual Leadership for the 21st Century

By Dr. Lynn Anderson Dr.

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What kind of leadership will effectively lead the church into the morally turbulent twenty-first century? The same kind of leadership that led it through the morally and politically chaotic first century. Shepherding.

This is the kind of leadership Jesus used, and this is the kind of leadership that will take his church where he wants it to go.

While the term "shepherd" produces warm images of love, care, and tenderness, it also describes a form of leadership that is perilously protective, dangerous, dirty, and smelly.

"Shepherd" is something that every follower of Christ, the Good Shepherd, is called to become.

Lynn Anderson, in this important book, leads us backwards in time to discover and identify the biblical leader for the future needs of the Christian community. Anderson's deep dig for truth will concern, convict, and confront us about where leadership has been, and will set a new standard for where the future leader must go.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Lynn Anderson has been in the ministry for over thirty-five years and currently serves as president of Hope Network, a ministry dedicated to coaching, mentoring, and equipping spiritual leaders for the twenty-first century. He received his doctorate from Abilene Christian University in 1990.

Anderson's lifelong career of ministry has involved speaking nationwide to thousands of audiences and authoring eight books -- including *The Shepherd's Song*; *Navigating the Winds of Change*; *Heaven Came Down*; *They Smell like Sheep, Volume 1*; and *If I Really Believe, Why Do I Have These Doubts?*

He and his wife, Carolyn, live in Dallas. They are the parents of four grown children and the grandparents of eight wonderful grandchildren.

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Shepherds on the Hills of Bible History

One Sunday, a dear friend and member of my congregation cornered me after a sermon in which I repeatedly referred to elders as "shepherds."

"Why don't you find a better way to communicate this spiritual leadership idea? No one in our church knows anything about shepherds and sheep—especially the way all that stuff worked in the ancient world. That picture just doesn't connect with a modern church."

Admittedly, the shepherd metaphor does sound strange in the cyber-world of our daily experience. We don't normally see these picturesque, rural characters rolling down the expressways or eating at our local McDonald's. But, after carefully considering my friend's suggestion and searching in vain for a contemporary metaphor that would better connect the biblical notion with our times, I finally had to explain, "I can't find any figure equivalent to the shepherd idea in our modern, urban world. Besides, if I drop the shepherd and flock idea, I would have to tear about five hundred pages out of my Bible, plus leave the modern church with a distorted—if not neutered—view of spiritual leadership." God keeps pointing shepherds to the pasture to struggle with sheep.

In Bible times, the shepherds were as common and familiar to most Middle Easterners as are telephones and supermarkets to modern-day Americans. Almost anywhere in the Bible world, eyes that lifted to gaze across the landscape would fall upon at least one flock of sheep. As my friend Ted Waller reminds us, in antiquity,

the family often depended upon sheep for survival. A large part of their diet was milk and cheese. Occasionally, they ate the meat. Their clothing and tents were made of wool and skins. Their social position often depended upon the well-being of the flock, just as we depend upon jobs and businesses, cars and houses. Family honor might depend upon defending the flock.

Shepherds throughout History

The shepherd metaphor shows up more than five hundred times in Scripture, across both Old and New Testaments. Without question, the dominant biblical model for spiritual leadership is the shepherd and flock. If we want to understand the biblical model for leadership, we must embrace the concept of shepherd.

God as Shepherd

In the "olden days" of the Old Testament world, the watch-care of God himself is pictured in the shepherd/sheep relationship. Most of us can quote the familiar words, "The Lord is my shepherd." The prophet Isaiah penned this less familiar but equally eloquent picture of God, "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." What a winsome picture of our God!

Can't you just envision the awkward and delicate little lamb, ears askew, one gangly leg dangling near the shepherd's elbow? Notice that the shepherd tilts his head so that his beard nuzzles the lamb's cheek and his resonant voice murmurs gently to the lamb as they move through the twilight toward the rest and safety of the sheepfold. Old Testament readers would have pictured just such a gentle, caring relationship between God and his people—"the sheep of his pasture." And although "we all, like sheep, have gone astray," we still have a "good shepherd" who will love us and lead us gently back to the fold.

Prophets, Priests, and Kings as Shepherds

Later, God pictured his prophets, priests, and kings as shepherds. When God chose David—the shepherd-king after God's "own heart"—he "took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people. . . . And David shepherded them with integrity of heart."

God also expected the prophets and priests of Israel to shepherd his people, but they often failed miserably at their task. Although many did not live up to their role as shepherd, God came back again and again to the idea that the leaders of his people were shepherds—even though some were bad shepherds.

God warned these "false shepherds" in graphic language; and in no uncertain terms, he pronounced woes on their heads. The prophet Jeremiah blasted the "shepherds" of Judah for misleading their flock, setting it up for captivity in Babylon.

My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place.

Leaders who were responsible for the spiritual well-being of Judah shirked their duties and instead indulged their own selfish desires. The Lord's rebuke comes through loud and clear in this passage from Ezekiel:

Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds 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.

Then he spells out their sentence:

Weep and wail, you shepherds; roll in the dust, you leaders of the flock. For your time to be slaughtered has come; you will fall and be shattered like fine pottery.

The shepherd metaphor for the leaders of Israel was not lost on the Israelite people. Those ancient folks knew that the food on their tables and the clothes on their backs—not to mention the family honor—was inexorably linked to the way they cared for their flocks. And thus, they understood that the very spiritual survival of their nation hinged on the quality of work done by their leaders.

It goes without saying that the prophetic warnings against the unfit spiritual shepherds of Israel hold implications for today's church leaders. Today's leaders carry life and death responsibility for their people, just as did the prophets, priests, and kings of old.

Jesus as Shepherd

In the New Testament, Jesus is our shepherd. In the Old Testament, God had dropped hints of the coming shepherd through the prophet Ezekiel: "I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them . . . and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them."

Speaking of himself as the loving shepherd, Jesus says that he leaves the ninety-nine in the open country and goes in search of the lost one. "And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home." He drapes this stinky, wayward sheep around his neck and carries it home. Think of it. Jesus left the comforts of heaven and came into our universe, our pasture, to smell like sheep! Jesus sweated like we do. He walked our pathways, braved our wolves, faced our temptations, and shared our struggles. The Holy One of Israel came in Jesus Christ to be our good shepherd.

My friend Roy tells a fascinating story about a trip to Palestine some years back. One afternoon, he stood on a ridge overlooking a long, narrow gorge. Below him, the gorge opened out into rolling grass-covered pasture lands. A single trail meandered down the length of the gorge floor, then branched out into dozens of trails when it reached the grasslands. A group of shepherds strolled down the gorge trail, chatting with one another, followed by a long, winding river of sheep. At the forks of the trail, the shepherds shook hands and separated, each taking a different path as they headed out into the grasslands. Roy recounted the fascinating sight that followed.

As the shepherds headed their separate ways, the mass of sheep streaming behind them automatically divided into smaller flocks, each flock stringing down the branch trail behind its appropriate shepherd. When the various shepherds and their flocks were distanced from each other by a few hundred yards, each shepherd turned to scan his own sheep, noting that some strays had been left behind and were wandering in confusion among the rocks and brush.

Then one of the shepherds cupped his hands around his mouth and called in a strange, piercing cry, "Ky-yia-yia-yia-yia." At his shout, a couple of stray lambs perked up their ears and bounded toward his voice. Then a second shepherd tilted back his head calling with a distinctly different sound, "Yip-yip-yip-yipoo-yip." A few more strays hurried straight toward him. Then another called his strays with a shrill, "Hoot-hoot-hoot!" Each shepherd, in turn, called. Each of the strays, hearing a familiar voice, knew exactly which shepherd he should run to. "In fact," my friend Roy marveled, "none of the wandering sheep seemed to notice any voice but the voice of his own shep..."

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