

12. Developing Leaders Who Are Following the Shepherd

In our last topic, we talked about the fact that John 10 tells us that Christ is the Good Shepherd. We saw that we want to help developing leaders hear the voice of the Shepherd. Today, we will focus on the second thing John 10 teaches us about how to help developing leaders. John 10:3-4 says, “To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” In these verses, we see that the sheep follow the Shepherd. One of the key things we want to help developing spiritual leaders make a part of their lives is learning to follow the Shepherd.

We begin by seeing that two things are mentioned here about the Shepherd. We see that:

- the Shepherd leads the sheep
- the Shepherd goes before the sheep

First, the Shepherd leads the sheep. Here, we see that Christ gives all Christians an example to follow. In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul said, “Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.” Paul does not just say, “Imitate me.” Instead, he says to imitate him, because he is imitating Christ. Developing spiritual leaders must learn to follow and imitate Christ, or they will never be effective in leading others. Instead, they will drive others, because they are controlled by fear themselves.

In Matthew 11:28-30, we see that Christ demonstrated two key attitudes that are often lacking today. Those verses say, “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.” In these verses, Christ says that He is gentle in heart and lowly in heart. Furthermore, Christ says that we are to learn these attitudes from Him. The reason we need to learn these attitudes from Him is due to the fact that they are the opposite of what the world teaches.

The goal of Satan is to destroy (John 10:10). In contrast, the goal of Christ is to restore. That is why it is such an important thing to show a developing spiritual leader how to be gentle in heart. The word that is translated “gentle”, and its related noun form, speaks of the attitude of the heart of one who accepts the dealings of God as good and without resistance. When a person has this attitude toward God, he will demonstrate this attitude in his relationships with others, in an effort to restore them to a right relationship with God. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” 2 Timothy 2:25 says, “In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth.” Titus 3:2 says, “To speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.” In all of these verses, we see that the Lord will use one with this attitude to help restore others.

A developing spiritual leader also needs to learn how to be lowly in heart. This same word is translated by the word “humble”, in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5. A humble attitude is something that should be developing in the life of every Christian, because we realize that whatever we have

has been given to us by the Lord. He is the one who deserves all glory in all things. In Philippians 2:3, we read, “*Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” If we are lowly in heart, we will also be lowly in mind. The result will be that we will always treat others with a very high respect. As we treat the thoughts and ideas of a developing spiritual leader with very high respect, we will be modeling what it means to be lowly in heart.

Second, we see that the Shepherd goes before the sheep. This is extremely important for a developing leader to understand, because a godly leader will face opposition from Satan. Whatever opposition we face, we need to realize that Christ has already faced that opposition, and He shows us how to respond when we face opposition. Christ faced opposition from Satan as soon as He began His ministry. The first principle Christ demonstrated was answering opposition with the Word of God. In Luke 4:1-13, Satan tempted Christ with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. In each case, Christ answered the temptations of Satan with the Word of God.

In addition to opposition from Satan, a godly leader will also face opposition from people. In Matthew 5:44, Christ tells us how to face opposition from those who treat us as enemies. That verse says, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” Here, we see that Christ gives us four ways to respond to those who oppose. However, Christ did not just speak the words, He showed us how to put this into practice by His actions.

First, Jesus showed love and respect to Judas, even though He knew Judas was betraying Him. In Matthew 26:50 we read, “But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” Christ treated Judas as a friend, even when he was committing the very act of betraying Christ. Certainly, we will never find a greater demonstration of love.

Second, Christ also blessed those who cursed Him. Matthew 27:44 says, “Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing.” We see that, at the beginning, both of those crucified with Christ cursed Him. However, Christ blessed one of those men in a very special way. Later that day, Luke 23:42-43 tells us, “Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’” Here, we see that instead of returning cursing, Christ blessed this man with eternal life.

Third, Christ did good to those who hated Him. In Luke 19:39-41, we read, “And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, ‘Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.’ Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it.” Earlier, in Luke 13:34, Christ had also said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen *gathers* her brood under *her* wings, but you were not willing!” Christ showed great love as He wept and prayed for the people who opposed Him.

Fourth, Christ prayed for those who spitefully used Him and persecuted Him. Luke 23:34a says, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do...’” Here, we see that regardless of how people opposed Him, Christ responded with love and kindness. This is such a key principle to show developing spiritual leaders by our example. We need to teach them what Christ did. Then, as they see us loving those who oppose us, they will see that Christ will give them the strength to return good for evil.

In addition to Christ going before the sheep to give them an example of how to face opposition, Christ also goes before the sheep, by leading them to a good pasture. In Ezekiel 34:15-16, God told how he would lead Israel. Those verses tell us, “‘I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick...’”

Christ gave spiritual leaders the responsibility to feed the sheep as He fed His disciples. In John 21:15-17, Jesus told Peter, “So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep.’”

Peter understood that responsibility and carried it out for the rest of his life. As he passed on instructions to spiritual leaders, he told them to do the same. 1 Peter 5:1-4 says, “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” Every developing spiritual leader needs to be shown how to feed and lead the flock, by the example of other spiritual leaders.

The Lord gives us a great privilege by leading us as the Great Shepherd. He also gives us a great privilege by allowing us the opportunity to show developing spiritual leaders how to lead and go before the flock as His under shepherds. May the Lord richly bless you as you show developing spiritual leaders how to follow the Shepherd.