

13. Developing Leaders Who Know the Voice of the Shepherd

In our last two topics, we have talked about “Developing Leaders Who Hear the Voice of the Shepherd” and “Developing Leaders Who Are Following the Shepherd”. John 10:3-5 gives us another characteristic that we want to see develop in the lives of developing leaders. Those verses say, “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. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” In these verses, we see that we want to help developing leaders really get to know the voice of the Shepherd. To hear the voice of the Shepherd involves learning to ask the questions: “Who”, “What”, “Where”, “When”, “Why”, and “How”? By asking these questions, developing leaders learn what Christ wants them to do, as well as the way to do what Christ wants them to do.

However, getting to know the voice of the Shepherd involves another kind of growth. In 1 John 2:12-14, we read, “I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.” In these verses, we see that spiritual children know the Father. In contrast, spiritual fathers have known Him who is from the beginning.

In the same way, it is possible for Christians to hear the voice of the Shepherd, and follow the Shepherd, long before they really get to know the voice of the Shepherd. Paul made a very important statement after he had been ministering for many years. Philippians 3:7-10 says, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” In verse 10, we see that Paul desired four things. He wanted:

- to know Christ
- to know the power of His resurrection
- to know the fellowship of His sufferings
- to be made conformable to His death

Getting to really know the voice of the Shepherd involves getting to know the Shepherd and having a deep personal relationship with Him. A person can know all about Christ, and yet, not get to know Christ. We can read history books and get to know all about Julius Caesar. However, that does not mean that we know him. To be an effective spiritual leader, we have to get to really know Christ, not just know about Him. That involves the four things Paul mentioned in Philippians 3:10.

First, we want to help developing spiritual leaders really get to know Christ. The twelve got to know Christ in a very personal way as they walked with Him and talked with Him. John describes that relationship in 1 John 1:1, where we read: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life.” The original disciples had the privilege of doing four things to get to know Christ:

- ♦ they heard Christ
- ♦ they saw Christ
- ♦ they really looked upon Christ
- ♦ they were able to touch Him with their hands

Although all of the Twelve were able to do all four of these things, only eleven really got to know Christ. Judas traveled with Jesus and the other disciples, did all of the things that they did, and yet, never got to know Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:1 tell us, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. For ‘who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ. And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.” A natural or carnal person will never get to hear Christ or get to know Christ, because he or she will never be able to understand spiritual things.

We may not see Christ with our physical eyes, but we can really look upon Christ. “To look upon a person” has the thought of meeting with a person so that we are able to really perceive and understand him. In Luke 24:45, we see what happened the evening after Christ rose from the dead. That verse says, “And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” Although Christ is not physically present, so we can look on Him with our physical eyes, Christ promised in John 14:26 that the Holy Spirit will give us that spiritual sight and understanding. John 14:26 says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” We can help developing spiritual leaders really get to know Christ as we help them to learn to ask the Holy Spirit to give them a fuller understanding of Christ as they study the Word.

Second, we want to help developing spiritual leaders really get to know the power of the resurrection of Christ. Many spiritual leaders struggle, because they try to serve the Lord in their own strength. They seem to have the idea that once everything else fails, then it is time to pray. When that happens, they will never get to know the power of the resurrection. They may know about the power of the resurrection, because they have read about it in the Bible; however, because they are depending on their own strength, they are not experiencing that power in their daily lives.

An effective spiritual leader will pray through his schedule to begin each day asking the Lord to give the Lord’s wisdom and power to deal with each situation that will be faced during the day. Then, throughout the day, that person will continue to pray that the Lord will work, rather than the person depending on self-effort. The more years a developing leader continues this pattern, the

greater will be his understanding of the power of the resurrection. A growing leader will learn more and more to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit and less and less on his own strength. Regardless of how long we live, we still recognize that there is much more to learn about the power of the resurrection.

Third, we want to help developing spiritual leaders get to know the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. Most developing spiritual leaders go through three phases in their service for the Lord. First, they say, “it is fun to serve the Lord”. Second, they begin to realize that it is work. Third, they begin to realize that they are in a spiritual war. As long as they were doing little or nothing, things seemed to go fairly easily. However, as developing leaders begin to depend more and more on the Lord, they begin to realize that Satan is not happy with what the Lord is doing through their lives.

That is why we read the progression in Acts 14:22-23. We read, in those verses, that after Paul and Barnabas made many disciples, they were, “Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’ So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Paul and Barnabas realized the need to strengthen the souls of the disciples, encourage the disciples to continue in the faith, and prepare the disciples for much tribulation, before appointing them as leaders in the church.

Fourth, we want to help developing spiritual leaders become conformable to the death of Christ. As Paul approached the end of his ministry, he wrote in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.” Here, we see that Paul was ready to die if that was what the Lord chose. However, he was also willing to live if that is what the Lord chose. The thought of “becoming conformable to the death of Christ” means that *whether we live or die we want to please the Lord*. It is the thought of dying to self, so that Christ is glorified in all things. This will begin to happen as a developing leader makes pleasing Christ more important than worldly success. In fact, we each need to regularly ask ourselves the question, “Is my greatest desire to please Christ or to be a success?”

It is a great privilege to help developing leaders get to know the voice of the Shepherd. As they get to know His voice, they will see the Lord work through their lives to bring glory to the Father. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders really get to know the voice of the Shepherd.