

3. Jesus Caused His Sheep to Lie Down in a Good Fold

In Ezekiel 34:14-15, we read, “‘I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,’ says the Lord God.” In these verses, we see that one of the ministries, that was predicted of Christ, was that He would cause His sheep to lie down in a good fold. This is one of the areas where we want to help developing leaders learn to follow the example of Christ as we help them develop.

In the context of Ezekiel 34, we see that Christ had been talking about the unfaithful shepherds of Israel. In the same way, a developing spiritual leader, who does not learn to do the things Christ did, may be unfaithful in leading others, because of their ignorance of what Christ promises to do as He leads His sheep. The things Christ does, as He leads the people of Israel, are also the things He wants Christian leaders to do as they lead other Christians.

Here, we see that Jesus wants those who follow Him to lie down in a good fold. To “lie down” speaks of stretching out and getting comfortable. A good fold is one that is good and beneficial to the flock. From this, we see that Jesus wants those who follow Him to be comfortable in a fold (church, Bible study, or any other group of Christians that is good and beneficial for all of the Christians who are a part of that flock). It is the responsibility of the leaders, and developing leaders, to create the kind of a fold where the Christians will experience peace and joy. Probably the greatest hindrance to a flock feeling comfortable is internal conflict.

First, there is conflict between those who are developing as leaders. Jesus had to deal with this form of conflict several times with His disciples. In Mark 9:33-34, we read, “Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, ‘What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?’ But, they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.” Here, we see that these future leaders were experiencing internal conflict.

In response to this internal conflict, in Luke 9:47-48, we read, “And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, and said to them, ‘Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great.’” The word that is translated “receive” means *to accept or to receive into one’s family*. Here, Christ shows that a developing leader must learn to take his eyes off himself and his desires, and instead, reach out to accept and make the physical and spiritual young at home in the family of Christ.

Jesus had to deal with this same attitude again, in Mark 10:35-45. In Mark 10:35-37, we read, “Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.’ And He said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ They said to Him, ‘Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.’” We see the response of the other disciples, in Mark 10:41. “And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.” In these verses, the disciples were

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Updated October 2025

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focused again on their own desire for power and position, and it was again causing internal conflict.

Christ responded to this request, in Mark 10:42-45. In those verses, we read, “But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” Here, Christ told these developing leaders that, if they wanted to become great, they had to learn how to serve others. In fact, Christ said that spiritual leadership means that a person chooses to become the bondservant of all. This is exactly the opposite of worldly leadership. Only as they become a bondservant to all in the body they are leading, will they help those people to feel comfortable in that part of the body of Christ.

Even as the time of His death approached, the disciples had not yet learned to apply what it meant to be servants to one another in the family of Christ. This was demonstrated very clearly the night before Christ was crucified. Luke 22:24 says, “Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.” Here, we see that the disciples were more concerned about their own personal positions than they were about applying the principles Jesus had taught them about making others in the family of Christ comfortable.

One of the things a person did in that culture to make a person feel comfortable, and at home, was to wash his feet. However, the disciples had not yet learned to make one another comfortable in the family of Christ. John 13:2 says, “And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him.” In this verse, we see that supper was already over, and no one had volunteered to wash the feet of the other disciples. No one applied the principle Christ had been teaching about making others comfortable by serving one another.

As we know, Christ then washed the feet of the disciples. Then, in John 13:16-17, Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” Christ told the disciples that it did no good to know Biblical principles unless those principles are applied by focusing on the needs of others, instead of our own needs.

Second, we also need to be concerned to help one another lie down in a good fold in the family of Christ by resolving conflicts between various members in the body of Christ before those conflicts bring envy, strife, and division. Jesus taught these developing leaders that principle in Luke 17:3-6. In Luke 17:3-4, Christ said, “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.” A developing Christian leader needs to learn how to handle conflict between himself and another Christian.

Christ gave four steps to resolve a problem between two Christians when the other person has sinned against you:

- Go to that person – Matthew 18:15-16 adds: go to that person alone and if the person refuses to

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hear you then go to that person with one or two others.

- Rebuke that person in love.
- Give that person an opportunity to repent.
- Forgive that person.

When conflicts are resolved between two Christians, both Christians can feel comfortable when they are together in the family of Christ. However, if conflicts are not resolved, both will feel uncomfortable. A godly leader takes the first step to resolve the problem, rather than waiting for someone else to take the first step.

Third, we help other Christians lie down in a good fold and feel comfortable in the family of Christ as we help them learn to love and accept one another. Christ said, in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Here, we see that after giving the disciples the example of serving one another, Jesus went on to give them this new commandment that summarizes the way Christians will make one another comfortable in the family of Christ. These developing leaders were told to love one another in the same way they had seen Christ love them during the previous three years.

However, Christ knew that the disciples had to hear this new commandment more than once that night. Later that evening, they were walking toward the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus said, in John 15:12-14, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” Christ reminded these developing leaders that it was not just a suggestion that they love one another. Instead, it was a commandment that they love one another as He had loved them, if they were going to be effective spiritual leaders. That would help them show all others who would follow how to help the sheep of Christ lie in a good fold.

It is a tremendous privilege to help developing leaders learn how to follow the example of Christ and help His sheep to lie in a good fold. This will only happen as a developing leader learns that he must have a learner's attitude and a servant's heart that causes him to love other Christians as Christ loves them. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to serve Christ by helping His sheep to lie in a good fold.