

Shepherding 101
Session One
Leaders in the Larger Story
Life Groups - January, 2005

Our first session will explore how leadership among God's people is tied inextricably to God's leadership. God is the exemplar or the prime example of the shepherding model.

Talking Points:

1. We are emphasizing the shepherding model of leadership because it is the predominate leadership model in Scripture. Shepherding used in connection with leadership is used over 500 times in the Bible.
2. We begin with God because of the emphasis in Scripture of how God shepherds his people. God is the source of information that elders need as they lead God's people. Sometimes elders might be tempted to use leadership styles learned from corporate board rooms, or from other leaders they admire, or from traditional sources.
3. The prime example for elders in the way they lead the church should be God. He exists in loving community and is characterized by love. Love requires both the loving subject and the object of that love. Since God exists in community, because he is eternally three, love exists in God before the creation. Love is then the eternal essence of God, not just an attribute that appeared after the creation.
4. God is relational in nature. Even though everything in creation is fallen, he longs to have his children restored to his table (Isaiah 25:6-9). He wants his fallen community back together with him forever.
5. This is why God's leadership is described in the terms of a shepherd and his flock so often in Scripture. When Jacob blesses his son Joseph, in that blessing he says that God has been his "shepherd all my life to this day." (Genesis 48:15; also see 49:24).
6. The image of God as shepherd is carried in Isaiah 40:11.
 - ¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and his arm rules for him.
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.
 - ¹¹ 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.

God in power and sovereign majesty shepherds his people with loving care and concern. In all his greatness, it is eternal, communal love that overshadows all.

7. Psalm 23 also describes God as shepherd and because of that the sheep are well cared for.

8. When God instructs the human leaders he has set over his people, he is concerned that they function as shepherds. When Kings were set over Israel they were to learn their leadership skills from God. In Deuteronomy 17:18, 19, Israel is instructed that when a King is set apart in Israel that he is to “write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees.” Notice what was said about David when he was set apart as Israel’s King (Psalm 78:70-72).

⁷⁰ He chose David his servant

and took him from the sheep pens;

⁷¹ from tending the sheep he brought him

to be the shepherd of his people Jacob,
of Israel his inheritance.

⁷² And David shepherded them with integrity of heart;

with skillful hands he led them.

9. Prophets and Priests were also called to serve as shepherds over God’s people but they often failed miserably (Ezekiel 34:2-16).

10. Sheep and shepherding language was not foreign to the Children of Israel. The survival of Israel’s people was impacted by the way they cared for their sheep. “We all like sheep have gone astray.” (Isaiah 53:6) What God desires is for his human shepherds to care for his sheep with the same intensity and determination that was characteristic of God’s care.

Session One Group Questions

1. Read these two passages that have to do with God as a Shepherd —Psalm 40:10-12; Psalm 23. From these passages describe how God shepherd's his people —list some characteristics of His shepherding.
2. From the story of David and in view of Psalm 78:70-71, how were the Kings of Israel to shepherd God's people? Why was David particularly suited for the job?
3. Read Ezekiel 34:2-16. Describe the ways in which the prophets and priests of Israel failed as shepherds. What was God's reaction? How does God shepherd differently?
4. With Ezekiel 34 in mind, in what ways could shepherds in the church strengthen the weak, heal the sick, and bind up the wounded?