

ARE THE SHEEP FLOURISHING?

Stephen A. Macchia

Published in BuildingChurchLeaders.com (Christianity Today, Inc.), February 2005

The fine art of leadership is something to be learned over time, and its effectiveness is measured by one's followers. The focus of leadership is on those being served rather than the one leading. Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd, and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep," (John 10:14,15).

The concept of shepherding is a fabulous metaphor for Christian leadership. Michael Youssef in his wonderful book *The Leadership Style of Jesus*, answers the question, "What makes a good shepherd?" from Jesus' perspective:

"For the shepherd, the reward comes in seeing that his sheep are contented, well fed, safe, and flourishing (my emphasis). His energies are spent not just to make a reputation for himself, but rather to supply the sheep with the finest grazing in the lushest pasture, to store winter feed, to find clear water. Good shepherds spare no effort in providing a shelter from the storm. They constantly watch for ruthless enemies, diseases, and parasites to which sheep are so susceptible. From dawn to dusk these good shepherds selflessly dedicate their days to the welfare of their woolly followers. They do not even rest during the night; they sleep with one eye and both ears open, ready to leap and protect their own at the slightest sound of trouble."

The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. What do followers of a loving shepherd look like as a result of their ministry relationship? Are they reaching their full potential, learning and serving out of their giftedness? Are they achieving desired results from their ministry efforts and are they willing to change with grace? Are they learning how to manage conflict among fellow team members and prioritizing the health of relationships? In other words, are the sheep flourishing?

In order for the sheep to flourish, we who are called to shepherd them need to consider ways of leading the sheep that are worthy of a following. The biblical constructs for shepherding leadership are defined by the example of Jesus. He led his disciples as the Good Shepherd. The disciples knew his voice, as it was distinguished so dramatically from the voice of the enemy. They responded to his loving leadership in their behalf. They benefited from time together and were transformed by his teaching. They were continuously led into new paths of discipleship and were challenged to trust him with their whole heart.

What will it take for you to become a leader who shepherds the flock of God entrusted to your care? Let me be so bold as to make a few suggestions:

- Be sure you are praying regularly for those you are called to lead. Don't merely give a nod of ascent to this idea, practice it daily!
- Be generous with your affirmation and appreciation of those who are a part of your team. Do this with words and with action; be creative in expressing heartfelt thanks this coming week!
- Be available to assist each of your woolly followers in their ongoing growth and development. Don't merely invite them on to the team and then abandon them in their service—become alert to the training and resources needed for their area of service, ask them what they need and do everything possible to meet their needs!
- Be aware of who on the team could step into your shoes at a moment's notice and begin today in considering your legacy. Don't assume you will be in your place of leadership forever—in fact, consider prayerfully how you can give your role away to the next generation of leaders!

The greatest gift you can give as a shepherd is love. When followers know that their leader loves them with sincerity of heart, both the leader and the team will flourish together. Left on their own, they will follow after the temptations of this world that will lure them off the pathway to spiritual vitality. Leaders, for Jesus' sake, eagerly shepherd the flock under your care with grace, joy, kindness and love. This is what the world of ministry needs most from you today.