

## The Shepherd, the Gate, and the Sheep: A Caring Model for Christian Leadership

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### Abstract

*John 10 presents a leadership model called the shepherd leadership. As one of the many passages in the Bible that speak about shepherd, John 10 presents the shepherd's caring attitude toward his sheep, which is the object of his care. An examination of the passage in John 10:1-18 reveals that Jesus' two *egō eimi* (I am) statements—the gate and the good shepherd—provide the basis for constructing the model of caring for Christian leadership, which consist of at least seven points.*

The shepherd model of leadership is probably a topic that has not been given much attention in the arena of Christian leadership. Literatures that deal with this model may be found scarcely in bookstores. Leadership authors such as Joseph M. Stowell (*Shepherding the Church into the Twenty-First Century*, 1994), Lynn Anderson (*They Smell Like Sheep*, 1997, 2007), and Blaine McCormick and David Davenport (*Shepherd Leadership*, 2003) have all tried to introduce this model, but it seems that other models are still more prominent than this one.

In spite of that, the shepherd model of leadership should be considered important in Christian leadership since it is the kind of leadership that the Bible mentions in connection with the people of God in the Old Testament (Patch, 1956, 2764). The Shepherd has frequently been a metaphor for the leaders of Israel in the Bible (cf. Psalm 23; Isaiah 56.9-12; Jeremiah 23.1-4; 25.32-38; Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 11). In John 10, the author of the Gospel of John alludes to Ezekiel 34.23 regarding the one shepherd over the people of Israel (Morris, 1995, 443). Other commentators are of the same opinion (Deffinbaugh, 2004, para. 2).

This paper is a study of the shepherd in John 10. The purpose of this study is to examine the shepherd's caring attitude toward his sheep, which is the object of his care. The 'gate' will be examined in connection with the shepherd's caring attitude. Through this examination, this paper will establish what it means for Christian leaders to follow Jesus. A Christian leader should lead their people with an attitude of caring just as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, cares for his sheep.

This study will analyse the text of John 10.1-18 only. Although the passage should end in v. 21, as Stibbe (1993, 114) suggests, this paper intends to examine vv. 1-18 only, because the scope of this study is limited. The study goes in three parts. First, it will consider some contextual background, which leads to the passage. Second, it will analyse Jesus' *paroimia* (figure of speech) in vv. 1-6. Third, it will analyse vv. 7-18, giving particular attention to two of Jesus' *egō eimi* (I am) statements found in the passage. Based on this analysis, it will then draw out a model of Christian leadership that puts great emphasis on caring for people.

One thing needs to be clarified before delving into the discussion: this paper is a technically heavy exegetical study of the passage. Rather, it is a study that has employed exegetical tools as part of the process into arriving at the model.

### The Jewish Leaders' Care: A Contextual Background

Before going further into the text, it is important to consider some contextual background of the passage. John 10 is a chapter between two chapters that narrate Jesus' miraculous signs. Morris (1995, 443) puts it as the seventh discourse of Jesus. In chapter 11, John tells of Jesus' seventh and the last miraculous sign: the raising of Lazarus from the dead. In chapter 9, John tells of Jesus performing the sixth miraculous sign: healing a man born blind.

The conduct of the Pharisees in John 9 is in sharp contrast to the good shepherd's care of chapter 10. Chapter 9 provides a picture of how the leaders of Israel treated their flock. In the case of the narrative in chapter 9, the man born blind and his parents were treated uncaringly. As possible official representatives of

the Sanhedrin (Morris, 1995, 430), the Pharisees did not care for the people. However, the good shepherd in chapter 10 cared for his flock.

Several indications in the narrative portray the kind of treatment the leaders gave to the people. From these indications, we can construct a basic list of characteristics of uncaring leaders.

First, when the Pharisees heard that the man born blind had received his sight, they called him for interrogation. Instead of praising God and being glad for the man, they did not want to believe him. Two times the man was called to answer their questions (vv. 15-17 and vv. 24-27). Unsatisfied by the man's answer during the first interrogation (vv. 15-17), they interrogated his parents in order to verify the fact that he was born blind (vv. 18-23). Thus we see three interrogations in total. The fact that this happened reveals that they really wanted to discredit Jesus. This also indicates that the leaders would only listen to what they wanted to listen. Morris (1995) notes that the questioning was persistent (431), giving the case away (433) and restless (437). We can infer from this indication that uncaring shepherds or leaders do not believe their people. They do not have a high degree of trust in them. Instead, through selective listening, they look for evidence to disprove the fact. Maxwell (1995, 66-69) regards trusting and believing people an essential element for leadership. The absence of such elements in a leader may render him as uncaring.

The second indication is described in vv. 22-23. When the parents of the man were asked by the leaders, they gave a safe answer. They told the leaders that their son was old enough to speak for himself. John commented in v. 22 that the parents said so because they feared the Jews. The leaders had apparently agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus or gave support to him would be put out of the synagogue. Any deprivation of synagogue privileges, though temporarily, would cause fear in any Jew (Morris, 1995, 433-435). Inferring from this indication, we could say that uncaring leaders create an atmosphere of fear by threatening to ban anyone who would not comply with what they have dictated.

Vv. 28-29 provides another indication. When the man replied the Jewish leaders, they abused him, then contrasted their position with his. What they said revealed their arrogance. They prided themselves as Moses' disciples but said that the man was Jesus' disciple, implying that they were speaking out of certainty (Morris, 1995, 437), though it may be the other way round. Uncaring leaders—exemplified by the Jewish leaders—pride themselves of their position. They take advantage of the authority that comes from their position. However, it is an illegitimate source of authority (Blackaby, 2001, 87-88).

Fourth, when the man responded to their ridicule of him (vv. 30-33), they became angry (v. 34). They felt challenged. They scolded him back and pointed out that he was 'steeped in sin at birth' (v. 34). The culmination of the drama was that they threw him out, which could mean both 'put out of the synagogue' as in v. 22 (Morris, 1995, 438) and 'ordered him to get out' (Barclay, 1975, 46, 49) from their assembly and from the building. The man lost his privileges of participating in synagogue worship (v. 34). Uncaring leaders are truly uncaring. They would not even care about people's opinion. When they feel threatened, or even challenged, they would make sure that those who challenge them would get paid for it.

Perhaps we could also include v. 40 as another indication that portrays the attitude of uncaring leaders. When Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind' (v. 39), the Pharisees who heard him said this denied the statement (v. 40). The way they said it seemed to indicate their unwillingness to admit that they did not see the truth of the matter. Uncaring leaders would not admit that they may be wrong. Instead, they would defend their stand despite clear indications that they are wrong. Instead of making it right, they would deflect the blame on others and would make it look like another's fault.

The man had been thrown out. Jesus heard about it. When he found the man, he led him into believing the Son of Man (vv. 35-37). Perhaps John is trying to portray a contrast between the Jewish leaders of Jesus' days and Jesus himself. Jesus cared for people. He pointed the man to the One whom he truly needed.

Stibbe (1993, 113) commented that Jesus' conduct in chapter 9 is that of the *kalos poimēn* (model shepherd). It is intriguing to note that Stibbe uses 'model' as a translation for *kalos*, which literally means 'good'. This would certainly give *kalos poimēn* a sense of leadership model, which is the purpose of this study. He further said that the Jewish leaders rejected the man but Jesus found him, implying that the leaders had failed to 'shepherd' the flock, and that he had come to model the true shepherd of Israel. 'The Pharisees threw the beggar out of the synagogue, but Jesus led him out of Judaism and into the flock of God' (Wiersbe, 1989, 329).

## The Gate and the Shepherd: Jesus' Figure of Speech (Verses 1-6)

The figure of speech (*paroimia*, v. 6)—not a parable (*parabole*)—opens with the expression *amēn amēn legō humin* (literally, *amen amen I say to you*). This expression, as elsewhere, never begins a discourse but always follows up some previous teaching. It indicates that the following statement is not only important, but also has a connection with the preceding one. This passage, therefore, must be understood in close connection with the story in chapter 9. It is appropriate that immediately after Israel's shepherds have failed as in the case of the man born blind, the nature and functions of the Good Shepherd is set forth (Morris, 1995, 444, 446).

Jesus portrays what the shepherd of the sheep does in vv. 2-4. He describes this in two stages. In the first stage the shepherd enters the sheep pen (vv. 2-3). There are several activities happen during this stage. First, the shepherd enters by the gate. This is in total contrast to the thief and the robber in v. 1 who enter by some other ways. Second, as he enters, the gatekeeper or the watchman opens the gate for him. Obviously, the watchman knows the shepherd. Third, he calls the sheep by name and they listen to him. This also implies that the shepherd recognises each sheep personally. Fourth, he leads them out.

The second stage occurs outside the sheep pen. When the shepherd has brought them all out, he walks ahead of them. His sheep follow him because, as Jesus said, they recognise his voice (verse 4). Jesus contrasts this with how the sheep respond to a stranger whose voice they do not recognise. Jesus says the sheep will run away instead of following the stranger.

The sheep pen in view in v. 1 is a large solid-walled enclosure with one door. Customarily, several flocks find shelter in the pen. A doorkeeper is hired to guard the gate. If a man does not enter the door in the normal way but climbs over the wall, then it is clear that he is there for no good purpose. Jesus labels them as thieves and robbers. By contrast, the one who enters by the door is seen as the shepherd. He has the right to enter and is recognised by the doorkeeper (Morris, 1995, 446-447; Constable, 2010, 160).

It seems that the word 'voice' plays an important role in the relationship between the sheep and his shepherd in vv. 3-5. Four times it appears in the passage: three times in its nominal form (*fōnē*) and once in its verbal form (*fōneō*). Perhaps this shows the kind of familiarity the sheep has with the shepherd, unseen he may be by the sheep. This idea of familiarity is obvious when the shepherd calls the sheep by name. It seems that the shepherd has given each of them a special name, which was a common practice in Jesus' day (Blum, 1983, 309; Tenney, 1981, 108), so that each time he calls them by name, they would recognise his voice and follow him. It is a different case, however, when a stranger attempts to call the sheep. Even when dressed in the shepherd's clothing and attempting to imitate his call, the sheep would not respond, because they do not recognise the voice (Morris, 1995, 448).

The shepherd leads his flock by walking ahead of them. The sheep follow because they know their shepherd's voice. This is a very different picture from that of driving the sheep. Some even used dogs to help them. The later portrays a picture of someone who scares the sheep away in order to reach a certain destination (Constable, 2010, 161).

## The Gate and the Shepherd: A Caring Attitude (Verses 7-18)

When those who heard him do not understand what he is telling them, Jesus explains and expands what he means (Harris III, 2005, para. 16). This section also opens with the expression *amēn amēn legō humin*. Jesus expands two ideas from the *paroimia*. The first is the idea of the gate for the sheep (vv. 7-10) and the second is the idea of the good shepherd (vv. 11-18). Both are his *egō eimi* (I am) statements.

### 'I Am the Gate'

Two times Jesus makes the statement 'I am the gate' (*egō eimi hē thura*, vv. 7, 9). Both occurrences follow the same construction. In the first occurrence, Jesus said, 'I am the gate of the sheep' (*egō eimi hē thura tōn probatōn*). Wallace (1996, 100) suggests that *hē thura tōn probatōn* has the idea of 'the door that opens for the sheep'. However, v. 8 seems to add the idea that the 'gate' in v. 7 is primarily that Jesus provides the door by which the *shepherd* must enter in order to bring his flock in and out. Those who enter otherwise, and of which Jesus mentions in v. 8 as preceding him, are thieves and robbers. The implication here, therefore, is that if leaders are to bring other people into God's fold, they must enter it themselves (Morris, 1995, 451).

In the second occurrence (v.9), Jesus repeats the statement 'I am the gate' without 'of the sheep'. As compared to v. 7, this time the emphasis is rather on the gate as the way by which the *sheep* go in (Morris, 1995, 450). Beasley-Murray (1987, 169) points out that some ancient Near Eastern shepherds slept in the gateways of their sheepfolds and so served as human gates. If this is the case, then the expression points to the absolute safety of the sheep in the care of the Good Shepherd.

In this second occurrence, Jesus expands the statement by adding the benefits for the sheep, applicable to those under his care. Jesus mentions particularly three benefits for anyone who may enter through him. First, he will be saved (*sōthēsetai*). Second, he will come in (*eiseleusetai*) and go out (*exeleusetai*). Third, he will find pasture (*nomēn eurēsei*). All this denotes some sense of confidence, freedom and security. Constable (2010, 162) suggests that the freedom of going in and out 'represents the security that God provides', and the pasture 'stands for what sustains their spiritual health and growth'. He then concludes, 'Jesus provides for his people's security needs and for all of their daily needs 24 hours a day'.

The line of contrast between the thief's and Jesus' intention of coming is clearly drawn in v. 10. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, but Jesus comes so that the sheep may have life, and have it to the full. Perhaps the meaning of the Greek *hina zōēn echōsin kai perisson echōsin* (literally, *that they may have life and they may have to the full*) gives the sense of abundance and extravagance. Jesus provides the fullness of life as he comes to his sheep. Barclay (1975, 60) emphasises that the Greek phrase gives the sense of having a superabundance of life.

#### **'I Am the Good Shepherd'**

Jesus' statement *egō eimi ho poimēn ho kalos* (I am the good shepherd) appears twice (vv. 11, 14) in verses 11-18. Both occurrences appear with identical construction. However, each statement is followed by a different set of description. Therefore, I think it would be helpful to analyse the passage in two levels. The first level goes with the first occurrence of the statement (vv. 11-13) while the second level goes with the second occurrence (vv. 14-18).

In the first occurrence, Jesus contrasts himself with the hired hand (*ho misthōtos*). As the good shepherd, Jesus is willing to die for his sheep. This is a rare occurrence among Palestinian shepherds. He is indicating that he is not just *a* good shepherd, but that he is *the* Good Shepherd (Morris, 1995, 453, 454). In contrast, he gives a picture of what the hired hand would do in the case of danger. The hired hand would not care. He would abandon the sheep and run away when he sees the wolf coming. As a result, the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep because no one is there to protect them. The hired hand runs away because he is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. He is just hired to look after the sheep. His interest is in wages, not sheep. He is not deeply concerned for the sheep, and neither is he involved in their situation (Morris, 1995, 454). Tenney (1954, 165) agrees with Morris. He suggests four characteristics of the hired hand: (1) lacks the spontaneous responsibility of the shepherd for the sheep (v. 12); (2) is cowardly, and flees in the face of danger (v. 12); (3) has no particular concern for the sheep (v. 13); and (4) has interest only in the recompense (v. 13).

The second occurrence describes the way Jesus cares for the sheep as the good shepherd. He knows his sheep. His sheep know him. There is a relationship of mutual knowledge between him and his sheep. It is reciprocal knowledge that is not superficial but intimate. Jesus compared this kind of knowledge with the kind of relationship he has with the Father. Just as the Father knows him, so does the shepherd know his sheep, and vice versa. It seems important to know the extent of one's love for and knowledge of the other, as in the case between the Father and the Son, and between the shepherd and his sheep. In the case of Jesus and his Father, the knowledge that he possesses of the Father results in his willingness to lay down his life for his people (Morris, 1995, 455-456).

His care extends to other sheep as well. He mentions specifically about the sheep that do not belong to the sheepfold. He must bring them in also. Interestingly, the sheep will listen to him, which means that they also recognise his voice. In the Bible, the sheep that are in the sheepfold are the Jews and those who are not are the gentiles. In saying this, Jesus casts a vision, that "there shall be one flock and one shepherd." There would be one church and one shepherd that is Jesus. This unity is not a natural unity, but one brought about by the activity of the Shepherd in 'bringing' them in (Morris, 1995, 455-456).

Jesus willingly dies for his people. It is significant to note that Jesus does this by his own authority. He has authority to give and take back his life. The Father has loved him and even more so because Jesus has willingly obeyed the Father's will. The whole picture links death and the thought of resurrection with the Father. The Father gave the commandment, and Jesus is simply doing his will (Morris, 1995, 456-457).

## A Shepherd Model of Caring in Christian Leadership

Following the shepherd model of leadership in John 10 requires one to follow Jesus' model of caring. The analysis of vv. 1-18 in the previous section provides the basis for constructing a model of caring for Christian leaders. This model will be explained in seven points, but not in the strict order of occurrence in the passage. Instead, they will be presented in a logical sequence that builds up one upon the other.

**Point 1:** *A caring leader would have only one purpose that is to bring people into an intimate relationship with God.* This point may not be immediately obvious in the passage. However, through process of deduction, we can assume that the implication of the mutual knowledge between the shepherd and the sheep, and between the Father and Jesus, provides an indication that the relationship with God is in mind. Furthermore, by saying that there shall be one flock and one shepherd, Jesus could be implying that a relationship with God must exist.

Bringing people into a relationship with God is a worthy purpose of Christian leaders. As far as God is concerned, a relationship with him is what matters (Blackaby, 2001, 127-133).

**Point 2:** *A caring leader must first enter into a relationship with God if he is to bring people into that relationship.* This is portrayed by the imagery that the shepherd enters and exits the door of the sheep pen, one of which Jesus makes his 'I am' statement. 1 Timothy 4:16 echoes this idea. Earle (1981, 375) comments on this text regarding pastoral duties, 'the first thing that every Christian worker must watch is himself, not only his outward life but also his inner thoughts and feelings. . . While he is watching over others, the pastor must keep an eye on himself'. Paul states in this verse that by so doing, Timothy will save both himself and his hearers. Caring leaders are truly concerned about the salvation of both themselves and others. By entering into a relationship with God, they are putting everyone in connection with the One who can keep them from falling.

As an implication of having entered into a relationship with God, caring leaders would make sure that they are doing God's will faithfully as they bring people into a relationship with God. Just as Jesus does the commandment he receives from his Father (v. 18), so do Christian leaders with God's commission.

**Point 3:** *A caring leader knows the people under his care very well.* This idea is drawn out from the depiction of the shepherd calling out his sheep by name. This is very important because as leaders lead, they must also understand the people in order to be able to minister unto them. The idea here is that the leader must spend considerable time to learn about the people under their care and get acquainted with them. They need to know their names, personalities, spirituality, physical well-being, family welfare, etc. Despite the saying that familiarity breeds contempt, the leader understands that this is not always the case. Over time, familiarity breeds not contempt but a healthy relationship (McCormick & Davenport, 2003, 33).

On the other side of the coin, the people also know their leader as someone who is truly caring. They reciprocate by trying to know more about their leader. This mutual knowledge and recognition develops over time, and it indicates a healthy relationship.

**Point 4:** *A caring leader does not lead by force or manipulation, but by way of trust.* The image that is involved here is the shepherd walking ahead of his sheep. He leads them, not drives them out to a destination. The sheep follow because they are familiar with his voice and are not afraid of him. Here, again, 'voice' plays an important role. Familiarity, as it is, would breed trust overtime (McCormick & Davenport, 2003, 33).

An important implication of this idea is that the leaders should not drive their people to do something that they have not done before. When the leaders lead their people to an uncharted territory, they must have gone through such experience of pains and joy of the journey before they could let them go through it. They do not leave them alone, but bring them along and show them the way. As a result, the people trust that their leader cares for them, and that their leaders know what they are doing and where they are bringing them. They are familiar with their leaders' caring style of leadership.

**Point 5:** *A caring leader brings a sense of confidence, freedom, and security to the people he cares about.* The picture in view here is the coming in and the going out of the sheep through the gate freely, and the shepherd bringing them to good pastures. Jesus claims that he is the gate, which provides the sense of confidence, freedom and security to the sheep.

How do leaders bring this sense to the people under their care? The text seems to suggest that it is by means of giving them assurance that their basic needs of life are the leaders' matter of concern. When people know that their leaders care about even their basic needs, they have a reason to be confident, and to have a sense of freedom and security in life. They know that their leaders will be by their sides when they need him. This should be the case when the leader has the heart like the Good Shepherd (Anderson, 2007, 7-15).

**Point 6:** *A caring leader cares for his people's physical and spiritual well-being.* In other words, caring leaders want people under their care to have the best possible quality of life. This idea is represented by Jesus' statement that he comes to give the fullness of life to the sheep as compared to the thief. What this means in practical terms is that the leader would make it a point to visit their people in order to find out if they are well both physically and spiritually. If they are not well, they would make sure that they do all they possibly could to help them. Just like God, they would have a heart for people because for them leading is all about people (Anderson, 2007, 95-114).

**Point 7:** *A caring leader protects the people under his care.* This idea is a contrast to the picture of the hired hand that runs away when he sees the wolf coming. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus is willing to save his people at the cost of his life. Caring leaders stay with and support their people in the face of challenging situations or danger. They protect them not only because they have that sense of ownership for them, but also because of the intimacy of relationship they have with them. Caring leaders are faithful to their people despite persecution. They are not concerned too much about wages, because what they care about is people. Of all the elements of caring in this model, perhaps this is the most significant.

## Conclusion

The importance of the shepherd model of leadership is underscored by the fact that the Bible uses the shepherd as a metaphor for the leaders of Israel. John 10 is one of the many passages in the Bible that touches on this idea. It is important to note that Jesus has presented himself as the gate and the shepherd in the chapter. Since this is the case, Christian leaders should lead their people with an attitude of caring just as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, cares for his sheep.

The portrayal of the good shepherd in John 10 is better understood in connection with John 9. Both chapters present a contrasting picture of how leaders should care for their people. John 10:1-8 in particular is presented in such a way that Jesus *egō eimi* (I am) statements are expansions of his *paroimia* (figure of speech). The structure of the passage goes in three parts: the *paroimia* (vv. 1-6), the 'I am the gate' statements (vv. 7-10), and the 'I am the good shepherd' statements (vv. 11-18). The study in this paper has followed the structure quite closely in analysing the text in order to draw a model of leadership that put great emphasis on caring. Jesus is the Gate and the Good Shepherd that truly cares for the sheep. He even does this at the cost of his life.

What this study has found is that there are at least seven elements in the model of caring. It has been arranged in such a way that it follows a logical sequence that builds up one upon the other. It suggests that the purpose of a caring leaders is to bring people into an intimate relationship with God. However, in doing that, the leaders must first enter into that relationship themselves. As they lead, they are to be familiar with their people and vice versa, they are to lead by way of trust, not force or manipulation, they are to care for their people's needs in life, and they are to protect their people.

This study is not a complete picture of the model of caring. It needs further development by taking into consideration several passages such as Ezekiel 34 and Psalm 23. The picture of a shepherd as autocrat over his flock as suggested by Morris (1995, 443) is also worthy of further examination. Nevertheless, this study has presented a picture or a model of leadership that puts great emphasis on caring as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, does.

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