

St. Paul and Martin Luther: Paradigms of Shepherd-Leaders

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The Bible tells us that he started over a dozen churches throughout the Mediterranean world. Most call him the greatest missionary of all time with little argument from anyone. His ministry inspired the writing of countless books on leadership, missionary activity, and Christian character. His namesake adorns thousands of churches around the world. His name, of course, is the apostle Paul. What a leader!

Michael King, a Baptist pastor, took a trip in 1934 to Germany. There he learned about the life and work of a reformer, the likes of which the world has never since seen. This reformer had the courage to stand up against Pope and Emperor though his very life was in danger. He inspired millions down to this day to read the Word of God and draw truth from it alone. He gets credit for the existence of the concept of “denominations.” His name, of course, is Martin Luther. And in 1934, Michael King was so impressed with this man’s contribution to Christianity that he changed his own name to Martin Luther King. He also changed his five-year-old son’s name to Martin Luther King Jr.¹ What a leader!

But what makes a leader a leader? Take a glance at the *Strengthsfinder* list and you will see qualities like futuristic, achiever, activator, maximizer, strategic, and my personal favorite, woo. Does a leader need the right combination of strengths to be an effective leader? I suppose it doesn’t hurt, especially if you are interested in the way the world defines successful leadership. Americans are pragmatists. Leaders are people who get things done! They achieve their goal by whatever means necessary, even if that means stepping on some and ruffling others. But that’s not really the kind of leadership that Martin Luther and the apostle Paul exhibited. And, yes, I just said that about Luther, who said Erasmus was the “vilest miscreant that ever disgraced the earth.”² There are plenty of other choice comments that decency forbids me to quote here.

Very simply, neither Paul nor Luther took their cue from the world’s lessons but from Jesus, who radically redefined leadership. This is true Christian leadership: *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*³ Christian leadership is about service. Why did Luther do what he did? Certainly not for personal gain. There are better ways of going about winning friends than poking the papal bear! “Paul reminded his fellow leaders that he never used his position as a leader to take from others. He regarded leadership as a platform for serving others. Paul didn’t want his colleagues to take advantage of the weak, nor use leadership to enrich themselves – something leaders in every culture and age are tempted to do.”⁴

¹ Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 1.

² *Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 390.

³ Matthew 20:25-28 (NIV84)

⁴ Steve Moore, *The Top 10 Leadership Conversations in the Bible*, 13.

However, the assignment was not to speak only on leadership or even Christian leadership, specifically. The assignment was to speak on Paul and Luther as paradigms of *Shepherd* leaders. Where to begin? As I did my research for this project, I was overwhelmed at the number of angles one could take in tackling this topic. Just as there are 100 sermons in every text, there is a plethora of distinctly different paper possibilities on this topic. Where to begin?

A few months ago, I was sitting on the couch with my family for our evening ritual. We say our prayers together and then each child gets to pick a hymn to sing. Some of my children are trained well and will pick a Paul Gerhardt hymn because they know he is my favorite hymn writer. So, we will sing “O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is” and “If God Himself Be for Me” and “Now Rest beneath Night’s Shadow.” But my daughter in Kindergarten always picks the same hymn, “I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb.” It’s a beautiful hymn about her Shepherd and how he leads her. She picks it, in part, because of what we do after singing the last line, “Even calls me by my name.” We name everyone in the room as though the Good Shepherd is calling out each person by name. My youngest beams with pride when we finally say, “Nika!” She rejoices to confess, “I am Jesus’ little lamb.” So were Luther and Paul. Therefore, our paper will use that simple hymn verse as our outline.

“I am Jesus’ little lamb;
Ever glad at heart I am,
For my shepherd gently guides me,
Knows my needs and well provides me,
Loves me every day the same,
Even calls me by my name.”⁵

The writer to the Hebrews encourages, “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”⁶ The apostle Paul likewise says, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”⁷ Under God’s blessing, today we endeavor to do just that as we imitate St. Paul and Martin Luther as shepherd leaders.

I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb (A shepherd leader first recognizes that he is a sheep. Humility is in order.)

“When Jesus Christ utters a word, he opens his mouth so wide that it embraces all heaven and earth, even though that Word be but in a whisper. The word of the emperor is powerful, but that of Jesus Christ governs the whole universe.”⁸

“My sheep listen to my voice.”⁹ Now that is something admirable about sheep. They are not smart. They are utterly helpless on their own. They are prone to wander. But this one thing they do: they listen to their shepherd’s voice. Go to a watering hole in the desert of Palestine. You will find multiple shepherds and their flocks,

⁵ Christian Worship 432:1

⁶ Hebrews 13:7 (NIV84)

⁷ I Corinthians 11:1 (NIV84)

⁸ William Hazlitt (translator), *Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 135.

⁹ John 10:27 (NIV84)

all mingled together there because water is scarce. You would think that it would be tough to separate them all out, but it is not. All it takes is for the shepherd to call out and instantly the sheep follow his voice. Sheep will not budge for a stranger's voice. Jesus says, "My sheep listen to my voice."

How good are we at hearing *his* voice in the midst of all the rest? There are plenty of voices that want to lead you. There is the voice inside of us that says, "Follow your heart. Make life easier for yourself. Wouldn't Jesus want that? Follow your feelings and do what's right for you." That is an easy voice to listen to because we can convince ourselves of just about anything. But you have to ask, "Where does that voice lead you?"

The voices want you to follow. Your heart wants to beat, "I am my own little lamb." Friends that tempt you want you to sing, "I am my friend's little lamb." Greed gets us to sing, "I am money's little lamb." Academic knowledge for its own sake tempts me to sing, "I am my own little lamb." None of those sound right, do they? Friends, those voices do not lead to the joy and pleasure they promise. They lead to lonely places where faith withers and love grows cold.

Think of all the voices trying to fill the ears of the apostle Paul!

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.¹⁰

What a list! How does yours compare? How does mine? All those voices scream at Paul to simply give up. All those voices want him to look at the great price he paid for being a missionary and abandon the fight. But all those voices are not the one he listened to. Instead, "That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because *I know whom I have believed*, and am convinced that *he is able to guard* what I have entrusted to him for that day."¹¹ In other words, "I am Jesus' little lamb."

Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice." However, if you are like me, it makes me wonder then how well I can sing, "I am Jesus' little lamb." That is Jesus' point. If we are looking at ourselves for whether we are in Jesus' fold, we will always be questioning. If we are looking at ourselves, we are looking in all the wrong places, like your friend who says she seems to be attracted to only the worst of men. Every nice guy in high school heard, "Dave...(or whatever the name may be)...why do I always pick the losers? You're so nice; why can't I find a nice guy like you?" And the guy is sitting there silently screaming, "I'm right here in front of you! Stop looking in the wrong places!"

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:23b-28 (NIV84)

¹¹ 2 Timothy 2:12 (NIV84)

And that's exactly Jesus' response to the Jews in John 10: "You want to know if I'm the Christ, if I'm your Shepherd? Then look right in front of your eyes!" He says, "The works I do in my Father's name testify about me."¹²

This is the very point that Jesus had to pound into Luther's head. Look to me, not to yourself. Remember whose you are. As a young monk in Erfurt, Luther tortured himself with self-flagellation, fasting, vigils, and prayers, trying to earn his way into God's good graces. Luther once confessed for six hours! He confessed every possible sin he could think of and then would confess some more. Staupitz must have been at the point of pulling his hair out...though; I suppose he didn't have much hair to pull. Instead of looking outside of himself to his Shepherd who loved him, Luther was always looking in, never finding peace in his sinful body.

Contrast that with his later life. On his final trip to Mansfeld, shortly before he died, he wrote this to his wife, Katherine von Bora. Katie was understandably concerned with the toll this trip would take on Luther's body.

Grace and peace in the Lord! Read, dear Katie, the Gospel of John and my Small Catechism, of which you once said: Indeed, everything in this book is said about me. For you want to assume the cares of your God, just as if He were not almighty and were unable to create ten Dr. Martins if this old one were drowned in the Saale or suffocated in a stove...Leave me in peace with your worrying! I have a better Caretaker than you and all the angels. He it is who lies in a manger and nurses at a virgin's breast, but at the same time sits at the right hand of God, the almighty Father. Therefore, be at rest. Amen.¹³

In other words, I am Jesus' little lamb. Did you sense the humility of Luther in that quote? Not only did he rely solely on Jesus as his Shepherd; he recognized that God could supply ten Luthers if he had wanted. Luther is a good example to every man in here who has deliberated a call. Be careful of the Messiah complex. There is one Messiah and it is not you. That job has been filled! ***A shepherd leader first recognizes that he is a sheep. Humility is in order.*** It has rightly been said that humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. Luther said as much: "Humility is so tender and so precious that it cannot bear to look at its own face."¹⁴ When we focus on ourselves, our strengths, and our accomplishments, the true source of those accomplishments and our source of confidence in our ministry gets pushed to the background.

I do *not* think anyone could accuse the apostle Paul of suffering from a Messiah complex. "In the Graeco-Roman world into which the apostles were sent, humility was viewed as a weakness. The apostles, remembering Christ's words, considered it a strength. What's more, they considered humility as an absolute essential for pastoral leadership. True leaders humbled themselves in order to accentuate the gifts and needs of others and to build others up for the common good."¹⁵ You know the passages so well: "For I am the least of the apostles and do not

¹² John 10:25b (NIV11)

¹³ LW 50:302

¹⁴ Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, 671.

¹⁵ Daniel Leyrer, "New Testament Pastoral Leadership" (WLS Essay File)

even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”¹⁶ “Although I am less than the least of all God’s people...”¹⁷ “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.”¹⁸

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Paul did not glory in his strengths and accomplishments. Instead, he says the exact opposite and shows where his strength comes from as Jesus’ little lamb. “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”¹⁹ “I worked harder than all of them – *yet not I*, but the grace of God that was with me.”²⁰

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.²¹

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me....For when I am weak, then I am strong.”²² Paul was strong and confident, but not in himself. He knew whose lamb he was.

There are really two types of Christian leaders when it comes to this point, and we all probably shift from one type to the other, sometimes in the same day. There are those of us who are overconfident in our own strength. We walk around in life thinking (we would never say it out loud!), “God is really pretty lucky to have me, isn’t he? I have such great abilities – I’m a natural leader and a natural organizer, etc.” This arrogant attitude leads us to trust our own skill for results, which means we draw less and less deeply from God in his Word and in prayer. This attitude leads us to be jealous of others when they succeed, especially if they do what we do. This attitude leads us to treat those with fewer abilities as a waste of our time. But then in the same day the pendulum can swing and we look at people like I just described and we conclude, “I don’t have any abilities that could help. There’s no way that God can use me.” This attitude leads us to withdraw from service, underestimating the impact that God wants to have on this world when every member of the body of Christ is working for his glory. Both attitudes end in the wrong place because both attitudes are dwelling *on me*! Whether you know you are weak and it paralyzes you or you think you are strong, either way we are not trusting God’s power! Just as he did for Paul and Luther, in our lives God must make us realize our weakness so that we are forced to rely on his strength.

¹⁶ I Corinthians 15:9 (NIV84)

¹⁷ Ephesians 3:8a (NIV84)

¹⁸ I Timothy 1:15 (NIV84)

¹⁹ Philippians 4:13 (NIV84)

²⁰ I Corinthians 15:10b (NIV84)

²¹ I Corinthians 2:1-5 (NIV84)

²² 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NIV84)

Sometimes the ministry is overwhelming. Sometimes ministry presses hard, crushes us, and scares us. But isn't it wonderful? God is not harsh when we tremble; he does not ridicule us for our fears; he never mocks us because we are fragile. Instead, he encourages us. He doesn't encourage you by saying, "You can do it" or "Believe in yourself." No, he tells you about a person. Do you know who he is? He is the all-powerful creator of the world. He has no beginning and no end. But for you, he took on a beginning. For you, he lived the strong life for God that you couldn't. For you, he died on the cross in weakness for the weakness of your life so that you would not have to. He defied death and destroyed it by rising from the dead. He ascended into heaven to rule all things for you. He loves you. He loves you as though you were the only person in the world. If he had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. He is with you. He promises that every battle you enter, he will be with you to give you strength. When you do not have the words, he will speak through you. When you do not have the strength, he will carry you. When you do not know what to think, he will fill your mind with his answers through his Word. When you look to him, you will find your true strength. He is Jesus...*your* Jesus. He is your Good Shepherd and you are his little lamb. The apostle Paul says:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.²³

Shepherd leadership is not easy. And even though we know that Jesus is leading us as our Good Shepherd, we still wrestle with our weaknesses and feelings of inadequacy at times – it comes with the job. A couple come to you in your office for counseling and over time you realize that it seems like you care more about saving their marriage than they do. If you are doing outreach right, you will be rejected again and again and again. Your sinful flesh will get the best of you. You might lose young members of your flock to the empty promises of the world and the watered-down preaching of wolves. And you wonder, "Me, Lord? Who am I for this task? I am a weak jar of clay." Remember that you are in good company with the apostle Paul. Also remember that God uses the cracks in the jar, too.

I cannot remember where I heard this story, but it's about a 10-year old boy who had lost his left arm in a car accident. Thinking he needed something to do to get back to life, he decided to study judo. The boy did well, but he couldn't understand why after 3 months of training, the master had only taught him one move. The boy asked, "Sensei, shouldn't I know more moves?" But the sensei replied, "This is the only move you'll ever need." Not quite understanding, he continued to train and the sensei eventually took him to his first tournament. Surprising himself, the boy won his first three matches easily. Now in the finals, his opponent was bigger, stronger, and more experienced. For a while, the boy struggled and appeared to be overmatched. The ref even called a time-out, fearing the boy would get hurt. However, when the match resumed, his opponent dropped his guard for a moment and the

²³ 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

boy used his move and pinned him. The boy was the champion! On the way home, the boy discussed the tournament with his sensei and mustered the courage to ask what was really on his mind: “Sensei, how did I win the tournament with only one move?” “You won for two reasons: first, you’ve almost mastered one of the most difficult throws in all of judo. And second, the only known defense for that move is for your opponent to grab your left arm.” The boy’s biggest weakness had become his biggest strength.

God had promised in the Garden of Eden that he would send a Savior who would crush Satan’s head. Finally, after thousands of years, God sent a baby. This baby grew up in a house where even siblings did not think there was anything special about him. As a man, he lived a poor man’s life, teaching others as he wandered from place to place. He looked weak. Finally, he rubbed the wrong people the wrong way and wound up being tortured on a cross. And for the soldiers who crucified him, he only prayed, “Father, forgive them.” He looked weak. The devil looked like he had won this round. Until you realize that Jesus came to be your Shepherd. Shepherds protect and save. Seeing no one else who could save us, he laid himself on the altar of the cross and gave us the thing that Satan, the world and our sinful nature try to rob us of: forgiveness. What seemed to be Jesus’ greatest weakness in life was his greatest strength. It’s ours as well.

And grace beyond grace, he uses your weakness to display his strength in ministry. He shows you that he can use you as his under-shepherd because he is the one who gifted you in just the way he wanted you to be, but also let you have the exact weaknesses that he needed to get *his* work done. We feel weak, but then God often brings a couple to an “aha” moment with Scripture open before them and you had the privilege of being at their side. The guy you have been inviting to Bible Information Class for three years actually comes! God blesses you with a congregation that loves you and forgives you time and time again. He brings in a family with the kind of energy you thought you would never see. He so often knows *just* when to bless you with those things to remind you that he is still leading lambs to his side. It’s amazing how when I think back on ministry, all of the greatest “successes” came about in spite of my weaknesses, and my greatest “failures” came about because of my lack of humility. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

People are not effective in leadership merely because they are naturally talented communicators, because they have creative minds, because they have a flair for persuading people, or because of any other natural talents. In fact, if your own abilities are all you depend on as a leader, your own limitations will be your downfall. From a spiritual perspective, human ingenuity and human cleverness tend to corrupt more than they help.²⁴

Being a Shepherd leader is not first and foremost a list of dos and don’t dos nor a set of personality traits, but an understanding that the under-shepherd is Jesus’ lamb. We must start there and not take it for granted. The only perfect model of shepherd leadership is Jesus himself. When we realize that, we will rightly be humble and ask with Paul, “And who is equal to such a task?”²⁵ Thankfully, Paul gives us the answer: “Not that we are competent in

²⁴ John MacArthur, *Called to Lead*, 101-102.

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 2:16b (NIV84)

ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”²⁶ Therefore, we gladly confess, “I am Jesus little lamb” as shepherd leaders. And because of that fact, the next line naturally follows in our ministries: “Ever glad at heart I am.”

Ever Glad At Heart I Am (Shepherd leaders are joyfully optimistic)

“We cannot vex the devil more than by teaching, preaching, singing, and talking of Jesus.”²⁷

Paul was arrested for speaking the truth. He was dragged from one “court” proceeding to the next until he finally appeared before Festus. When Festus suggested a trial in Jerusalem, Paul appealed to Caesar. Festus had to declare: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”²⁸ The centurion Julius had custody of Paul. They set sail for Rome, but sailing in the Mediterranean in October is a bit like golfing in Wisconsin in January. The weather rarely cooperates. A Northeaster struck and the ship took such a beating that Luke records, “We finally gave up all hope of being saved.”²⁹ But Paul had a promise from God. An angel (Paul says, “an angel of God *whose I am*”) appeared to reveal that though the ship would be destroyed, no one would die because Paul must stand trial before Caesar. Paul concluded his speech with, “So keep up your courage, men, for *I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.*”³⁰

You see, no matter how dark the world appears, Jesus’ promise changes everything. ***Shepherd leaders are joyfully optimistic!***

Lutheran leaders are *men of joy*. Serving the Savior means service with a smile. How can we not smile when we know that Jesus has come that “we might have life, and have it to the full?” How can the joy of salvation not overshadow all the gloom of a greedy and obsessive world? We know that Jesus reigns. We know that He will come again. We know “that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18) We know that “he will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Philippians 3:21) We know that our tombstone will be erected over an empty grave. Men of God, “rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice.” (Philippians 4:4)³¹

The promise makes all the difference in the world. Paul said, “If only in this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”³² Without the promise, pessimism is the only option. With it, optimism is the only option. One of the privileges I had as the Northern Wisconsin district outreach chairman and now as the

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 3:5 (NIV84)

²⁷ *Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 110.

²⁸ Acts 25:12 (NIV84)

²⁹ Acts 27:20b (NIV84)

³⁰ Acts 27:25 (NIV84)

³¹ Mark Zarling, “Leaders in the Lord!” 8.

³² 1 Corinthians 15:19

chairman of WELS Congregational Counseling is to go out to many of the congregations of our Synod and help encourage this optimistic fervor for outreach. In many members and some pastors there seems to be a pessimism about outreach in their area and therefore comments like, “We tried that but they didn’t come” or “Everyone has a church in our area” rise to the top. First, no congregation has tried everything. Second, I do not know of a city in our country where everyone has a church. In fact, far from it!

We rejoice to live under the theology of the cross. Jesus said we would have trouble in this world. This is true. Life and ministry will never be easy. However, I wonder if we use it as a crutch when it comes to our congregational mission strategy. The theology of the cross does not mean we do not go out with the lifesaving message of the Gospel with optimism that God will keep his promise that his Word will not return to him empty. The theology of the cross does not mean that we mope around like Eeyore, saying, “Woe is me. Oh, well, that didn’t work.” Our attitudes as shepherd leaders undoubtedly have a psychological effect on the flocks we are called to shepherd. “Optimistic enthusiasm inspires followers. People will naturally follow a leader who arouses their hopes, and they will just as surely back away from someone who is perpetually pessimistic.”³³ You know the story of Katie Luther dressing herself in a black dress because of the depressed mood Martin was in. When Martin noticed it, he asked her, “Are you going to a funeral?” To which she responded with something along the lines of “No, but since you act as though God is dead, I wanted to join you in your mourning.” Sometimes we need that. I have a friend in ministry who will let me call and vent and when he senses that I feel like the weight of the world is on my shoulders, he will patiently let me finish and simply say, “It’s okay, Dave. Jesus still lives.” I need that sometimes!

Please understand what I am *not* saying. I am not saying every church that does outreach will *necessarily* grow in numbers. What I *am* saying is that churches who “get” FRAN outreach, who are positive about God’s desire for all to be saved, who get what their mission in life is, and who are optimistic that God promises his Word will not return to him empty do tend to reach more people with the Gospel. Is it possible for a congregation like that to shrink? Absolutely. Jesus told us that the love of most will grow cold in the end times. Maybe you did do all you could in your town and that is what has happened.

I had a wonderful example in my bishop. Ask any of his many vicars if this assessment is correct and they will confirm it. My bishop was a person who could go knocking on 99 doors and get the door slammed in his face every time. He would go to the 100th door with a smile on his face and say, “Hi, I’m from Living Word Lutheran Church...” That seems crazy! Why be so optimistic? Because Jesus says, “I have other sheep who are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.”³⁴ He was a great shepherd leader and I learned optimism from God’s promises through him. I will always be grateful. Your members will, too, as you emulate the optimism of the apostle Paul.

³³ John MacArthur, *Called to Lead*, 39.

³⁴ John 10:16 (NIV84)

Again, please do not get me wrong. Your congregation is not the Holy Christian Church, but believers in your church are part of that unstoppable gathering. What is Jesus' promise? "And the gates of Hades will not overcome it."³⁵ When is the last time you saw gates be used as an offensive weapon? The Church is on the offensive with the Gospel and breaks through the Gates of Hades to rescue people from death. A great Shepherd leader once said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."³⁶ Christ has accomplished this by his death and resurrection. As those serving a resurrected Savior, we are not the "Chicken Little" church or ones who cower behind locked doors. No, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ."³⁷

I love the St. Augustine quote: "Lord, give me what you ask of me, and then ask of me anything you want." Jesus says, "Go and make disciples." He gives you his Word and Sacraments. He gives you the life-giving Spirit through those means. He tells you his Word will not return empty. Our Good Shepherd has given us everything we need. He does not say, "Go, make disciples. And by the way, you are on your own." No, he follows his commission with "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."³⁸ A shepherd leader shows that he believes the promises of Jesus. And as Paul mentored young Timothy and as Luther dedicated much of his life to preaching in the churches and teaching at Wittenberg, it's a great encouragement to be with those you train at their side. There will be more on that in the next section.

Permit me one example from my ministry. At my previous congregation, we made use of a new mover's list. Many would say it's a waste of time, but even if the "success" rate is only as much as a telemarketer, it is great training and modelling for your congregation. Anyway, I went to a door and it was answered by a Hmong woman named Lana. I told her about our church and she explained that she practiced Shamanism. I asked if she had ever learned about Christianity. She looked around and leaned in and said, "You know, I've always wanted there to be like a class that teaches me about it without any commitment to become a Christian." I said, "That's great! Here's an invitation!" She came for a number of weeks and it was so cool to see the Holy Spirit work on her heart. Towards the end of the class, she needed to do a make-up lesson and so I met with her. She said, "Pastor, my father is a Shaman (she was a Pastor's kid!). Part of our role is to eat some of the offerings given. Now, I know that they are nothing and are sacrificed to idols. Should I feel guilty eating that meat? Does the Bible have anything to say on that?" I almost jumped out of my seat! I didn't think I'd ever have that contextually specific of an application of I Corinthians 8 in my life! But the point is, if we were not optimistic in our ministry, we may never have done something like a new mover's program and Lana may never have come to faith and been baptized.

³⁵ Matthew 16:18b (NIV84)

³⁶ John 5:24 (NIV84)

³⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:20 (NIV84)

³⁸ Matthew 28:20b (NIV84)

“My sheep listen to my voice.” Once, while I was preaching on Ephesians 1:13 (“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the Word of truth”), a 5th grader leaned over to her mom and said, “Thanks for being a Christian, so that I can be one, too.” My sheep listen to my voice. Will all listen? Certainly not. The reason they don’t listen to his voice is that they are not his sheep. But Jesus still has other sheep, he still tells us to rejoice always, and he still tells us through Paul to Timothy, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power.”³⁹

A congregation will often reflect the characteristics of their pastor over time. There are few more beautiful things than a congregation that embraces their Shepherd’s mission and zeal because it is their shepherd’s mission and zeal. It is one of the reasons people followed Luther. After being stolen away at the Wartburg for a year, Luther wrote to Frederick to let him know he was coming home. “I would have you know that I come to Wittenberg with a higher protection than that of Your Grace. I do not ask you to protect me. I will protect you more than you will protect me.”⁴⁰ Luther was a man who knew his Shepherd and the power of his Word. Luther’s optimism because of the Gospel was infectious for the people and they gave him a hero’s welcome when he returned to town. The churches could not hold all of the people who wanted to come hear God’s Word! He was their shepherd leader.

I have heard some *almost* use the doctrine of Election as a reason *not* to be aggressive in outreach (though I don’t think anyone would admit that bluntly). Anytime our hearts use one doctrine as an excuse not to carry out God’s will, then that’s a misuse of the doctrine. We will always want to wake up with the Great Commission on our hearts and do all we can to reach as many as we can. Then, and only then, can we fall asleep with the doctrine of Election, that Jesus did not lose one that was his today. C.F.W. Walther said, “Der Christ ist ein Optimist.”⁴¹ If that is true of Christians in general, then it is certainly true of shepherd leaders. I am Jesus’ little lamb, *ever* glad at heart I am!

For My Shepherd Gently Guides Me (A shepherd leader gently guides)

“Whereupon Saul [the Apostle Paul] said: Lord, what wilt you have me to do? Note, this man was a master in the Law of Moses, and yet he asked what he should do.”⁴²

A shepherd leader gently guides. The apostle Paul was a master in guiding others in ministry and into ministry. His concern was that more and more might be involved in the spreading the Gospel. Just consider a few of those examples. To Timothy he wrote, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”⁴³ To the Galatian church: “My dear children [Note

³⁹ 2 Timothy 1:7a (NIV84)

⁴⁰ Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 212.

⁴¹ “The Christian is an optimist.”

⁴² *Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 149.

⁴³ 2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV84)

the Shepherd's heart!], for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you."⁴⁴ To Titus: "Appoint elders in every town, as I directed you."⁴⁵ Paul's goal was to guide and train up leaders in all of the churches he established throughout the Mediterranean world.

It's clear that Paul was a genius when it came to people development. He met people with a hint of potential and invited them into a process of growth. He believed that even the most raw recruit could engage in a process of spiritual formation and leadership training. His goal was more than persuading people to accept the message. It was for their complete transformation and the establishment of an ever-expanding team of leaders.⁴⁶

I think you know where I am going to go with this. The Good Shepherd cries out, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go!"⁴⁷ The hymn writer asks, "Who will go and work today?" Will you gently guide those in your congregations who have gifts for ministry? Will I? I am not saying this from a "We need pastors because we have over 100 vacancies" perspective. I am not worried that the Lord of the Church will not fill the needs of his Church. But what a privilege to encourage others for this "noble task!" What if every pastor in this room made it a point to take one under his wing and guide him? What if we made a point of speaking about the privilege in our sermons, catechism instruction, and Bible classes – regularly? Truth be told, sometimes the child is willing but the parents are against the idea. What if we made it a point to encourage the parents, as well?

Personal reflection time: Am I the problem? Too often, I have heard from a pastor's kid that they never even considered ministry because their father looked like he was overworked and joyless in his tasks. Remember, they are watching. Show them the privilege and the joy you have! After encouraging the Philippians to "rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Paul says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble (literally, "worthy of worship"), whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things."⁴⁸ What is the ultimate in all those descriptors? It is Jesus! When I am down on life and ministry, the reason is that I have not thought about my Jesus enough and the true, pure, and lovely work he has given me the privilege to do!

The parish pastor gets to be the gatekeeper of heaven for those who are about to meet Jesus. There is no greater thrill than to preach to people you know, love, have laughed with and cried with, especially on Easter! The parish pastor knows the awe you feel when you realize that God used you, imperfect as you are, to bring someone into his kingdom. God works actual miracles through your hands as you distribute his body and blood in the Lord's

⁴⁴ Galatians 4:19 (NIV84)

⁴⁵ Titus 1:5b (NIV84)

⁴⁶ Jeff Caliguire, *Leadership Secrets of Saint Paul*, 137.

⁴⁷ Luke 10:2, 3b (NIV84)

⁴⁸ Philippians 4:4, 8 (NIV84)

Supper and make babies (and adults!) his children in the water of Baptism. What an honor! The parish pastor feels the overwhelming humility when God's people pour out gifts far too generous to match his efforts. I could keep going! I love what I do now, but I always say, "It's a different kind of fun." Being a parish pastor is one of the highest privileges known to man. Show those you encourage that you know it in your demeanor, in your words, and in your actions! Be a shepherd who gently *guides* others. Who do you know wants to be a pastor?⁴⁹

But a shepherd leader also *gently guides*. While Luther was cooped up in the Wartburg castle, Karlstadt and Zwilling were charging ahead with changes in Wittenberg. I know we don't always associate Luther with the term "gentle," but when it came to guiding souls, gentle is the perfect description. Karlstadt and Zwilling declared the vows of monks and priests invalid (based on some bad exegesis), they stated that taking communion in only one kind was a sin, and they had pushed forward with masses celebrated in German. They even celebrated the mass in an academic gown! Their "bull in a China shop" approach to reform was too fast for weak consciences. Luther understood the value of patiently and gently instructing until the change was fully understood. For this reason and because of the Zwickau prophets, Luther felt compelled to return to Wittenberg at the risk of his life.

He [Luther] had the all-important pastor's heart, such that he was deeply concerned not merely with being right but with how what one said affected the simple faithful. Luther knew that some had felt pushed too quickly and too hard by the changes that Karlstadt and Zwilling had championed, and this was a fatal error, for it was unavoidably part of administering the Gospel to care about those people whom Paul called "the weaker brethren."...So to be right required being right not just in what one did and said but *in the way one did and said things*. If one was not concerned with how one implemented some of these new practices, one would set everything back, as Luther was certain that Karlstadt and Zwilling had done.⁵⁰

Luther's method of gently guiding was by simply preaching the Word and praying to God to bless the results. He did not approve of bowling⁵¹ over consciences! Listen to how Luther pleaded with Karlstadt and Zwilling:

I took three years of constant study, reflection, and discussion to arrive where I now am, and can the common man, untutored in such matters, be expected to move the same distance in three months?...Such haste and violence betray a lack of confidence in God. See how much he has been able to accomplish through me, though I did no more than pray and preach. The Word did it all. Had I wished I might have started a conflagration at Worms. But while I sat still and drank beer with Philip and Amsdorf, God dealt the papacy a mighty blow.⁵²

When I first arrived at my assignment out of the Seminary, the congregation was being divided by calls for contemporary worship by some and "keeping it traditional" by others. What does a Shepherd leader do? Does he

⁴⁹ That's for the Milwaukee folks. My apologies that I did not ask Ernie Von Schledorn for his permission.

⁵⁰ Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 281.

⁵¹ No pun intended. Luther is in the bowling hall of fame for inventing 9 pin.

⁵² Quoted in Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 214.

force his preference in the name of Christian freedom on the congregation he is called to serve? No! He follows the paradigm of Luther. He instructs and prays. So we offered a “Worship Insights”⁵³ workshop to discuss the issue. We offered it six times throughout the course of a month. It lasted 4 hours! My associate with more experience wisely said, “No one’s going to come.” Nevertheless, I pushed forward anyway and to my surprise, God blessed us with over 200 people in attendance! This was clearly a hot button topic!

What did we do? We studied what God’s Word had to say. We looked at the principles of Lutheran worship. We listened for what both sides really wanted. In the end, it was apparent that the “contemporary” group didn’t necessarily want to throw the baby out with the bath water. They wanted variety in the songs of the ordinary. They wanted all of God’s musical gifts utilized in worship. They wanted freedom from simply following p. 15 every week. That sounds very Lutheran! It was also apparent that the “traditional” group wanted to honor the experience of the church and maintain the use of the Ordinary and Propers in the liturgy. They wanted to make sure the Gospel predominated in the songs and texts. They wanted the people to be a vital part of worship and not just spectators. That, too, all sounds very Lutheran!

Finally, after those workshops and home visit discussions and a long process of slow (read “gentle”) implementation, our worship incorporated some changes from the way we used to do it.⁵⁴ We implemented multiple settings of the Gloria and other songs of the ordinary. We used hymn settings on occasion for the Psalms. We made use of musicians and all instruments including piano, organ, violin, oboe, brass, saxophone, guitar, drums, tin whistle, bagpipes, etc. (sounds like a modern Psalm 150!). We were appropriately flexible to honor the past by utilizing the liturgy but understood that there was freedom to tactfully implement new forms as fit the occasion and the time of the church year. We were not “contemporary” or “traditional.” We strove for “timeless” worship.⁵⁵ The point is this: It did not happen overnight. It took years of gentle, patient instruction.

Permit me one more brief application. When it comes to inactive work, shepherd leaders will also “restore gently” as they guide those souls. The apostle Paul said, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.”⁵⁶ I do not think that excommunication letters should be written and mailed. This is face to face stuff (or on the phone if necessary). I have never heard of someone getting an excommunication letter and

⁵³ I am deeply indebted to Professor James Tiefel not only for his instruction, but also for many resources to put that workshop together. If anyone is interested in seeing it or using it, just email me: scharfdg@mlc-wels.edu.

⁵⁴ In the workshop, we decided as a group that for the sake of discussion, “contemporary” and “traditional” were not very helpful terms. Jon Hein says it well: “For example, the group *Koine* utilizes almost no modern songs or hymns, instead resetting classic hymnody to modern instrumentation. So, are they traditional or contemporary? Conversely, take the congregation that has purchased the entire hymnody of Keith Getty but plays those hymns by organ whenever possible. Are they traditional or contemporary? *Christian Worship’s* “Service of Word and Sacrament” omits the historic canticle “Gloria in Excelsis,” used by believers already in the early Christian church, and replaces it with “O Lord, Our Lord,” which is only a few decades old. Is that a traditional or contemporary move?”

⁵⁵ Thank you to Jim Huebner for letting me steal that term 13 years ago!

⁵⁶ Galatians 6:1 (NIV84)

saying, “How thoughtful! You know, I think they are right, I am going to repent.” Instead, I have much anecdotal evidence that those letters infuriate rather than heal. I know it is hard. I know it is time-consuming. But souls are worth the effort. Let them see your love for them. By the way, the irony is not lost on me that I am trying to make an application based on a man who wrote most of the letters of the New Testament! However, Paul wrote so many letters due to necessity. He would have much preferred to be face-to-face with his people to gently guide them. “God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”⁵⁷ “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong.”⁵⁸ “Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.”⁵⁹ A shepherd leader *gently* guides.

Knows My Needs And Well Provides Me (A shepherd leader loves God and loves people by suppling people’s need)

“When someone asked Saint Augustine where God was before heaven was created, he answered, ‘He was in Himself.’ When someone asked me the same question, I said, ‘He was building hell for such idle, presumptuous, fluttering and inquisitive spirits as you.’”⁶⁰

Love God. Love his people. This sums up the verse fairly well and is the core of what makes for a good shepherd leader. To love God means that we will also love his Word. To love his people means that we will know what they need and well provide for them. In our day and age, the bulk of American Christianity seems to be moving away from a clear law and gospel focus to felt needs preaching. We want practical! And so the temptation for preachers is to assume the gospel and/or soften the law. Resist the urge. Is this really what they need? No. Because a shepherd leader loves his people, he will supply what they need. The Word of God is profoundly practical. Before we can live our lives of sanctification, the Spirit’s sword must first cut our hearts with the law and heal them again with the Gospel. Paul said, “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”⁶¹

Finally, they need to see Jesus. The bigger and brighter they see Jesus, the better their lives of sanctification will be. The Greeks came to Philip with a simple request: “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”⁶² This is the request your people have of you. And you know they need it. You get to show your people the only One who can help and save. You are here to show Jesus to the friends and family and guests your people bring. To those overcome and overwhelmed by their sin, feeling they need to hide their face in shame from him, you are here to offer the comfort

⁵⁷ Philippians 1:8 (NIV84)

⁵⁸ Romans 1:18 (NIV84)

⁵⁹ 2 Timothy 1:4 (NIV84)

⁶⁰ *Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 42. It might be a stretch but I like this quote. One of my professors once said, “Half of good theology is knowing the right answers. The other half is asking the right questions.” As a doctrine prof for two years now, I realize that this is sometimes what students need to hear!

⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 2:2 (NIV84)

⁶² John 12:21 (NIV84)

that only Jesus can give. It is what they need. Well provide it! They would see patient Jesus with his disciples. They would see the tenderness and compassion of Jesus with his mother and John at the cross. They would see the love of Jesus on that cross. They would see the victory of Jesus with his resurrection. They would see the power of Jesus at his ascension. To sum up simply: They would like to see Jesus. It's what they need. Well provide it.

This is the very shepherd's heart that moved Luther to observe the need of people when he visited the churches and concluded, "The common people, especially in the villages, know nothing at all about Christian doctrine; and many pastors are quite unfit and incompetent to teach."⁶³ He knew what people needed. So what did he do? He gave them law and gospel. He wrote the small and large catechisms. In his 1528 preface to the Large Catechism, Luther wrote, "One should thoroughly instruct young people in the various teachings of the Catechism or the children's sermons and diligently drill them in putting them into practice."⁶⁴ In his 1530 preface, Luther wrote:

I too am a doctor and a preacher...yet I continue to do as a child does that is being taught the Catechism. Mornings, and when I otherwise have time, I read and recite word for word the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, Psalms, etc. I must still read and study the Catechism daily, yet I cannot master it as I would like, but must remain a child and student of the Catechism. This I gladly do.⁶⁵

The people needed to constantly teach the truths of God's Word to their households as well as instruct themselves in those truths. Luther well provided for that need!

In order to "well provide," we need to be in the Word listening to our Shepherd's voice. Paul told Timothy, "And how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."⁶⁶ Jesus took the disciples away from the press of the crowd to be with just them. He wants to be alone with you, too! Professor Deutschlander has spoken about God's attribute of "Immanence" when discussing the pastor's Bible study. God's immanence means that God cannot be divided. Wherever God is, he is completely. Therefore, when you are reading his Word, you have more of his attention than he has of yours. What an awesome thought! Your Shepherd knows your needs and well provides you through his Word so that you can do the same for his sheep under your care!

Amidst all the voices, there is still Jesus' gentle voice. Think of how the Good Shepherd well provides you. Quietly, without splash or splendor, he called you at the baptismal font, made you his lamb and lifted you into his arms. Quietly, yet sweetly and systematically, he speaks to you through his Word as you read it, hear it, ponder it.

⁶³ Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, 117.

⁶⁴ Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, 10.

⁶⁵ Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, 6.

⁶⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV84)

Quietly, he lays a table before you in the Lord's Supper and, filled with his forgiveness, your cup overflows. Consistently, goodness and love follow you every day of your life and you will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Luther is a good paradigm for us: "Luther was a praying teacher...He continually discussed with his heavenly Father the problems which weighed heavily upon his heart. He asked the Lord to guide him so that he would give the best advice at all times to his students and to his parishioners."⁶⁷ Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows your needs and will continue to well provide you.

Loves Me Every Day The Same (*Shepherd leaders are consistent*)

*"I would not have preachers torment their hearers, and detain them with long and tedious preaching, for the delight of hearing vanishes therewith, and the preachers hurt themselves."*⁶⁸

Consistency is a challenge. **Shepherd leaders are consistent.** That is hard! There are the stresses of deadlines. It seems like everyone is living together before marriage. Your co-workers are doing the same annoying thing. That one member that takes more time than you give to your family is in your office again. You tell your secretary that you will be gone on Monday morning but back in the office on Monday afternoon and she says with eyebrows raised, "It must be nice to take a Monday morning off" and it just bugs you the whole day. How can we be consistent?

Have you ever noticed how many of the qualifications for ministry have to do with consistency? Look at Paul's list of qualifications he gives to young pastor Timothy in I Timothy 3: Above reproach, hospitable, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, manage his own family well. Those take consistency. How many times do you have to mess up, mistreat a visitor, lose your temper, ask about making Synod code, or have your kid get arrested for any of those qualifications to come into question? I think you all know the answer to that.

At the Seminary, I was sure that a professor gave me a great rule of thumb for ministry: Never get frustrated.⁶⁹ When is the last time your temper paid dividends in ministry? If you pound your fists at the council or are rude to a guest or say, "I'm the Pastor, I'm in charge,"⁷⁰ it will be the only thing they will remember. Those are hard things to erase. On top of that, the sheep under your care need to know that you love them unconditionally as you reflect the love the Good Shepherd has for you. A fickle shepherd who is kind one day and stand-offish the next

⁶⁷ Erwin Scharf, *Martin Luther: Reformer in the Making*, 93.

⁶⁸ *Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 255. Luther kept it to an hour. Apparently, long-winded preaching is not loving. Perhaps he would say the same about Symposium papers!

⁶⁹ I've asked numerous professors if they told us that and all of them said it wasn't them, but then add something along the lines of "But that's a good rule of thumb for ministry!"

⁷⁰ Please don't ever say that.

will frustrate the sheep and make them insecure about approaching you. They need to see a forgiving, loving smile consistently, the kind of smile that kids look for on the face of their parents to know they are loved, that everything will be okay, that today is going to be a good day. They need a shepherd who will love them every day the same. Jesus is their rock, but you are his representative. It will serve you well in ministry to post “NEVER GET FRUSTRATED” on your computer screen and keep as your bookmark in your Bible. A shepherd leader needs to be consistent. But how?

For Jesus, Paul, and Luther, the key was to keep their eye on the prize and keep the big picture constantly before them. Think of all the times Jesus said that he “must” do something. “I *must* preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.”⁷¹ “The Son of Man *must* suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”⁷² “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me.”⁷³ Jesus always had the big picture in mind in our place. He always had his final goal in mind: your salvation.

The apostle Paul could be consistent because he always carried with him the goal he had in mind for his hearers: their salvation. “Though I am free and belong to no man, *I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible*. To the Jews I became like a Jew, *to win the Jews...To the weak I became weak, to win the weak*. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means *I might save some*.”⁷⁴ Though imperfectly, Paul strove to love his sheep every day the same and kept his eye on the prize for himself and his hearers.

Luther could keep going with his reformation efforts because he knew that souls were on the line. It was always his goal for people to hear the true voice of their Shepherd, Jesus, have certainty in their salvation, and be with him in heaven one day. While Luther was staying at the Coburg for the Diet of Augsburg, he wrote a touching letter about heaven to his son, Hans.

I know of a pretty, beautiful, and cheerful garden where there are many children wearing little golden coats. They pick up fine apples, pears, cherries, and yellow and blue plums under the trees; they sing, jump, and are merry. They also have nice ponies with golden reins and saddles. I asked the owner of the garden whose children they were. He replied: “These are children who like to pray, study, and be good.” Then I said: “Dear sir, I also have a son, whose name is Haenschen Luther. Might he also be permitted to enter the garden, so that he too could eat such fine apples and pears, and ride on these pretty ponies, and play with these children?” Then the man answered: “If he likes to pray, study, and be good, he too may enter the garden.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Luke 4:43 (NIV84)

⁷² Luke 9:22 (NIV84)

⁷³ John 9:4 (NIV84)

⁷⁴ I Corinthians 9:19, 20a, 22 (NIV84)

⁷⁵ LW 49:323-324

His eyes were on heaven. His eyes were on the goal for himself, his children, and his sheep. Though imperfectly, it is what enabled him to show tireless consistency and love Jesus' lambs every day the same.

What is our motivation for loving our sheep and keeping their salvation in mind? We will do this because Jesus always had your salvation in mind. "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."⁷⁶ Isn't that the coolest thing? Who are these "other sheep?" You! 2000 years ago, Jesus called your name to his mind – "I must bring them also." And so he set in motion all the events that brought you into this world 2000 years later and put all the people who would encourage you in your faith into your life to get you to be here right now with the privilege of serving as Jesus' undershepherd! When you think of how different your life could have been, it sends chills down your spine!

He still speaks these words today – "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also." He used apostles (like Paul); he used church fathers; he uses pastors and teachers; he uses moms and dads; he uses Christian friends; he uses you, to be the Shepherd's voice for the other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.

This is John and Bertha (pictured to left).⁷⁷ They came over from Germany in the 19th century and were farmers in Brownsville, WI. They had 8 children. Every day in their home, the Shepherd's voice was heard in prayers and family devotions – every Sunday, Jesus' voice was heard in church. One of their middle children was named Erwin, who eventually became a professor. He and wife, Irene, had 4 children (3 girls and a boy). In that home, too, the Good Shepherd was the silent guest at every meal and in every devotion and church service. The son of the family, Ralph, went on to become a pastor and married Nettie. They have 14 children and are up to over 40 grandchildren and counting (pictured to the right). Maybe one of the adult boys looks familiar to you (me!).



There are pastors and teachers, nurses, a farmer, blue-collar and white-collar workers pictured there. But that's not the thing that matters. What matters is Jesus keeping this promise to call other sheep. What matters is what my mother says when she looks at this picture: "I thank the LORD every day that everyone in this picture follows their Savior." That's the miracle. Jesus keeps his promise to bring his other sheep through you.

By God's grace, that's my story. It's a comfort that 2000 years ago, he was thinking of Beckie, KT, Debbie, Erika, Jon, Angie, David, Cindy, Nate, Ben, Julie, Matt, Charissa, and Annie when he spoke these words. And by God's grace, that is your story, too. Jesus was thinking of you.

⁷⁶ John 10:16 (NIV84)

⁷⁷ This paper even has pictures!

That perspective changes things. What do I want for this person (i.e. sheep)? That's easy: heaven. It begs the question: How can we get frustrated? And it invites us to ask: How can I love this person to get them to their goal? Shepherd leaders love their sheep every day the same.

Even Calls Me By My Name (A shepherd leader knows his sheep)

*"Without God's will and our own consent, the devil cannot hurt us; for God says: 'Whoso touches you, toucheth the apple of mine eye.' And Christ: 'There cannot fall a hair from your head, without your heavenly Father's notice.'"*⁷⁸

Each one is precious to Jesus. Jesus says, "My sheep listen to my voice." Don't miss what comes next: "I know them."⁷⁹ So simple, but so profound. There are 7 billion people in the world. Some propose that there are 70 sextillion stars in the universe. He calls each by name. He made it all. And your living Shepherd says that he knows you - and he doesn't even need the Synod directory. He knows you because not only did he make you, but he made you his own little lamb in your baptism. It's why you can sing, "I am Jesus' little lamb."

A shepherd leader knows his sheep and calls them by name. Look at Paul's letters in the New Testament to hear him greet and send greetings to his fellow saints. Half of the last chapter of Romans is a listing of his fellow workers, fellow Christians, and sheep under his care. Each one is precious to him. Andronicus, Junias, Ampliatus, Urbanus, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Rufus – very few of those names mean anything to us, but they meant the world to Paul and he called them by name.

Read any biography of Luther and you get the impression (as we have seen from earlier quotes) that he was concerned about the individual. He hosted countless friends and students at his home, the Black Cloister. From those exchanges, we get his famous Table Talks. He translated the Bible into German⁸⁰ so that people could hear their Shepherd call them by name in their mother tongue.

"Unlike many other university professors of the day, Luther drew many of his students into a bond of personal friendship. The slow student received helpful attention. He often went out of his way to find some merit in that which a slower student did have to offer, when he recognized honest effort on the student's part."⁸¹ Luther and Paul understood that each one of their sheep was precious.

⁷⁸ *Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 365.

⁷⁹ John 10:27a (NIV84)

⁸⁰ "He [Luther] brought not only accuracy to this new work but with the supreme genius of an ear so attuned to the dramatically variegated German language of his day that what he accomplished in translating the entire Bible...not only succeeded in revolutionizing the Christian faith in Germany but also had the effect almost of creating a new German language." (Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 273.)

⁸¹ Erwin Scharf, *Martin Luther: Reformer in the Making*, 95.

How well do you know your flock? I understand that the following encouragement sometimes receives some guffaws as unrealistic, but I will encourage it anyway. I am a huge believer in the home visit because it allows you to get to know your parishioners like no other interaction a pastor has with members. When I left my previous parish, we were a congregation of about 2300 people. Could I call each by name? Sadly, no. But I tried. Yes, I interacted with the people in the hospital, shut-ins, counselees, catechism students, etc. But you don't interact with everyone in those ways. The most valuable thing I did (outside of preaching the Word!) was to attempt to do an every member visit. It was hard, and my wife was gracious, but it was so immensely worth it.

What are the blessings? Once you spend an hour with people in their home, you will always be able to call them by their names. Once you hear their stories, your preaching becomes so much better. When you take the time to visit them in their living room, your relationship with them forever changes. You heard their story. You know them. And more importantly, they know it. In fact, in a church the size of the one I served, there were people that I had no *meaningful* interaction with for eleven years, but eleven years later that visit was still bearing fruit. They would come up to me and greet me like we were best friends who knew everything about each other. On the list of things the pastor does, I would cut other things first before face-to-face interaction with my members. In fact, in the long run it saves you time because they know you love them. After all, you call them by name.

If you have already done the every member visit, might I suggest a more streamlined "annual check-up"? Schedule a block of twelve visits for an evening where members come into the office for fifteen minutes to talk about life and their life with Jesus. We⁸² go to the doctor for an annual physical check-up. Wouldn't it be even more vital to have a spiritual one? A shepherd leader knows his sheep and even calls them by their name.

Conclusion

I have outlined *a* paradigm for shepherd leadership that I found in my research of Luther and Paul. A shepherd leader first recognizes that he is a sheep. Humility is in order. He is joyfully optimistic. He guides by training and encouraging others for ministry as well as by instructing his people in a gentle way. He loves God and loves people by supplying what people need and is consistent. Finally, a shepherd leader knows his sheep and calls them by name.

⁸² In theory...

Please understand: I am no expert. I do not claim to have done perfectly all the things I lay out here. I have failed at every one of these six characteristics of a shepherd leader. Yes, Luther and Paul are paradigms for us as we remember our leaders and imitate their faith as shepherd leaders. However, they would be the first to say, do not look at us. Look at the one we are looking at. Listen to the one we are listening to.

Friends, look at *him*. Jesus is right in front of you just like every good shepherd is, leading his sheep from the front, not driving his sheep from behind. Jesus himself followed a voice, the voice of his Father. It led him into our world. The Shepherd came to save his sheep. All his life, the Father's voice led him. And then one day it stopped. All that could be heard were the sound of nails being pounded, insults being spoken, and spittle being thrown. But from the Father's voice? Silence. Then came the cacophony of voices. Every sin I have ever done and failure as a shepherd leader screaming in his ears until he screamed his last. But after three days, *the* voice broke through the other voices in our lives: "Do not be afraid, it is I...peace be with you...follow me." It is the voice of our risen and living Shepherd. Do you hear it?

It is the voice above all the others. I heard a story that in the British air force, there are pilots who need to be involved in air-to-air combat. One of the difficulties in combat is that there are so many voices and noises coming into pilots' ears that they start to lose track of the voices. There is so much chatter that they start to phase out the noise and won't even hear the stall alarm when they are climbing too high too fast. That is a problem! Do you know how they solved it? Programmed into the computer with the stall warning is each pilot's child's voice, so that in the midst of the battle when all the chatter is so intense, "Daddy, you're about to stall," comes through. It's the voice you will hear amidst all the other voices. This is the way it is for our Shepherd's voice. Amidst all the voices screaming at Paul and Luther, what sets them apart as shepherd leaders is that they listened to the one voice above all the rest.

After Luther died, a scrap of paper was found in his pocket that read, "Hoc est verum. Wir sind alle Pettler."⁸³ "This is true. We are all beggars." This *is* true. Jesus is everything. And yet God uses you and me. He gives me, beggar that I am, the opportunity to be part of his life-changing and eternity-changing work. May we always remember that and sing with our children, "I am Jesus' little lamb; ever glad at heart I am, for my shepherd gently guides me, knows my needs and well provides me, loves me every day the same, even calls me by my name." The Lord richly blessed his church with a shepherd like this in St. Paul. He blessed it with such a shepherd in Martin Luther. May he so continue to bless us with such shepherds!

S.D.G.

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⁸³ James Kittelson, *Luther The Reformer*, 297.

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