

SHEEP TO SHEPHERD

INTRODUCTION

People today are coming to Christ for all sorts of reasons. *Note: You can tell a few short stories of people you know who have come to Christ, without telling any of the stories in a negative way.* But when you read the Gospels, you discover something unsettling: What drives people to Jesus today is not what drove the disciples. And that might explain why so few people who come to Jesus today ever end up following him.

People who come to Christ today are often looking for forgiveness, meaning in their lives, or a quick fix because their lives aren't working out. But have you noticed that none of the disciples (as far as we know) came to Jesus for any of these reasons. Rather, they followed Jesus simply because he passed them one day and said, "Follow me."

Isn't this where contemporary Christianity often gets stuck? When we offer it as the way to cure something (like sin) or as the guarantee of something (like heaven), we run the risk of having new believers lose interest once they believe their religion has done what they hoped it would do. So if their Christianity is shallow, it isn't because people are disinterested. It is more likely that they just don't get it. That's what the sixth SoulShift is all about. When we move from Sheep to Shepherd, we begin to take on the responsibility of someone else's spiritual life. We begin to worry, perhaps for the first time in our lives, about the spiritual climate of the places where we work and live.

TEXTUAL WORK: FOLLOW ME!

How were the first disciples called? From the very beginning, Jesus hinted that he had big plans for them (and us). Using Mark's gospel once again, let's trace the pattern of Jesus' call to his first disciples and to us:

- Mark 1:15–20. Jesus began preaching that the kingdom of heaven had come and called his disciples to follow him and become “fishers of men” (v. 17). Is it only because he was standing by the sea that Jesus used the metaphor of a fisherman? Or was he intentionally borrowing a metaphor from Jeremiah, who predicted that one day, when God was ready to restore his people, the Lord “will send for many fishermen . . . and they will catch them” (Jer. 16:16). From the very beginning, Jesus was not simply looking for followers or attracting a crowd. He was on a mission. Implicit in the call to follow is a call to enlist. With his disciples, Jesus continued moving from town to town and doing the same three things: (1) preaching the gospel, (2) healing diseases, and (3) delivering the oppressed from evil. *Note: You may read through these verses and highlight phrases that emphasize one or more of these activities (see Mark 1:22, 24, 26, 31–32, 34, 38, 40–42).*
- Mark 3:13–14. Jesus pulled his disciples aside and commissioned them to “be with him” and “preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (vv. 14–15).
- Mark 6:7–13. He “gave them authority over evil spirits. . . . They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them” (vv. 7, 12–13).

- Mark 6:30–44. Even after the disciples began to preach and heal, there was one more thing Jesus wanted to do with them. After calling them away again (v. 31), he saw the crowd that was gathering and “had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34). When the disciples insisted that he “Send the people away so they [could] go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat” (v. 36), Jesus handed them the keys and conferred onto them the authority and responsibility of a shepherd: “You give them something to eat” (v. 37).

The implication of all this is clear and powerful: (1) Jesus did not come simply to save us, but also to recruit us. Jesus is already partway through a campaign and is trying to recruit us to join. To anyone who once thought that being a Christian meant to be nice and follow Jesus, this is a perturbing thought! Jesus came to recruit us. And (2), Jesus is recruiting us to be more than leaders. He is recruiting us to become shepherds.

IMPLICATIONS: LEADERS VERSUS SHEPHERDS

Shepherds have internal qualities that set them apart. Sometimes they do things other people do, but shepherds have extra dimensions to their work that flow straight from their hearts.

Shepherds have compassion toward their sheep. They are not critical because they know their limitations. They can empathize with those under their care.

Shepherds know their sheep by name. They spend time with their sheep. They hear the same tired stories and put up with a lot of mundane things, but it is here in the small talk that the sheep learn their shepherd’s voice. Leaders don’t lead with voice as much as with vision. They decide where the flock needs to go but don’t worry much about who or how many are going.

Shepherds are self-forgetful. They lay down their lives. When something isn't working, they try again because shepherds are attracted to the sheep. Leaders are attracted to an idea. They are frequently worried about promotion and rank and recognition.

Jesus is looking for disciples to become shepherds, because the problem with the world is that so many people are "like sheep without a shepherd."

APPLICATION: MOVE FROM SHEEP TO SHEPHERD

Even today, Jesus wants us to engage in three activities to: (1) preach the gospel—not with sermons, but with stories of our own lives that are meant to convince our friends of the power of God; (2) heal the sick—not always by some miraculous sign, but by touching them in ways that empower them and help them to cope with their diseases; and (3) deliver people from their evil—not always by exorcising some demon, as in the movies, but by helping them disentangle from things that are destroying them.

Start where you are. What can you do within the boundaries of your authority to improve the spiritual climate of places where you have influence? Who in your field of vision needs to be fed? Who needs to be healed or delivered? You could start a Bible study, gather for prayer, organize a reading club, begin to witness, or write prayers and circulate them throughout the organization.

CONCLUSION

Whatever Jesus asks you to do, do it! You will protest that you don't have enough time, money, education, or authority; that you are not adequate; that you don't have the connections; and that you don't know where to start.

Somewhere in God's plan to save the world, he left room for us. Even now, he calls us to move forward, quit following him from a safe distance behind, and walk alongside him, helping him to do the things he is trying to do in this world.

It all begins when you hear the familiar voice of your shepherd say, "Those people over there are like sheep without a shepherd . . . *you* feed them!"