

The Statesman Learns from the Good Shepherd

Our Creator's purpose for Government is to provide an environment where each individual can reach his/her full God-given potential. God describes it as "a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Timothy 2:2). Great power has been vested in Government to do for the governed what they are unable to do for themselves with their limited power.

The analogy of the shepherd caring for the sheep seems appropriate when considering the process of Government decision-makers operating on behalf of the governed.

Ted Sorensen, special counsel to President John Kennedy, described that the "ideal" White House decision-making process should encompass:

...first: agreement on the facts; second: agreement on the overall policy objective; third: a precise definition of the problem; fourth: a canvassing of all possible solutions, with all their shades and variation; fifth: a list of all the possible consequences that would flow from each solution; sixth: a recommendation and final choice of one alternative; seventh: the communication of that selection; and eighth: provision for its execution.

This is clearly a cautious approach in order to ensure that decisions are made correctly. This reminds us of the need for a cautious and thorough response to the needs of the sheep. And it represents compassion for the sheep. This makes sense when we remember that six times in His instruction manual, God refers to the people as "sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Responding to this, Jesus taught:

I am the good shepherd. I know My own sheep, and they know Me, as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father. I lay down My life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)

Jesus' compassion for the sheep He saw as "without a shepherd" provides an interesting analogy to the challenges facing those who make decisions on behalf of others. The goal is to make decisions truly in the best interest of the sheep. Jesus said: "I know My own sheep". Jesus is speaking of knowing who the sheep truly are and what they need as attempts are made to make decisions to best meet those needs.

Why should we consider the analogy of "sheep without a shepherd"? Sheep are extremely insecure, easily frightened animals. They are unable to defend themselves against the challenges that lurk around them. Here, the analogy is clear as the challenges facing humans are often beyond their capacity to overcome by employing their own limited resources. They are extremely vulnerable and need the protection of good-hearted shepherds making decisions to protect them.

Humans, as sheep, live with a multitude of fears. Human shepherds present us with a picture for the Statesman. What we can learn from the analogy of the shepherd in becoming Statesmen?

1. **Listening to the sheep.** The lives of most Government decision-makers are far removed from the lives of those on behalf of whom they make life-impacting decisions. President Abraham Lincoln provided an amazing example of listening to the needs of his flock. He had an "open door policy" to his office that allowed individuals to address needs directly to the President without an appointment during several blocks of time each week.

He made it a priority to listen to the people from all levels of society to gauge their thinking and their needs on a variety of subjects. Rather than rushing to action, he took the time to hear their hearts before acting. Hence, it seems ironic that the Government decision-maker would ever consider that the needs of the people should ever get in the way of the “more important” work of Government.

2. **Compassion.** After hearing hearts, the shepherd applies compassion for the sheep in determining the course of action. Remember that Jesus gave us the model when he said “I lay down My life for the sheep.” This level of compassion gives the sheep confidence in the shepherd and gives the best hope for decisions being made in their interest.

3. **Knowing what the governed really need, not just what they say they need.** This is where it is essential to know what our Maker wants for His creation, not necessarily what we imagine for His creation or even what His creatures ask for. In Isaiah 55:8-9, God warns us to be careful about thinking we are adequate in our own understanding:
“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways.” This is the LORD’s declaration. “For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

We are warned against thinking that discern the appropriate decision in our own wisdom. Our thoughts are not automatically the same as His thoughts. And the sheep’s thoughts are not His thoughts. Both the thoughts of the sheep and the shepherds can be dangerously misled by our human blind-spots.

We must remember that there is one Over-Shepherd with a plan for great blessing and that Government decision-makers are under-shepherds responsible to carry out those plans.

This is where we must remember to appeal to our all-knowing, wise Heavenly Father for wisdom:

Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him (James 1:5).

What must I do to become more like the Good Shepherd (Jesus) in caring for the sheep entrusted to me?