

Shepherding with Integrity of Heart
Psalm 78:70-72

Psalm 78 is a fairly lengthy psalm. It's a psalm of instruction – of warnings not to repeat the sins of the past; but even more, to remember God's saving acts and His marvelously persistent grace, and to offer this gracious God our faith and allegiance. And then, after many highs and lows and broken turns, the psalm draws to a close by focusing on a simple servant among the sheep pens. *"God chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending sheep he brought him to be shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance."* (vs. 70-71) Here, we find the Lord God choosing a servant-leader for His people.

Now look at the final verse: *"And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them"* (v. 72). The very first statement about David's performance as a servant leader was about his *integrity* ... not his abilities, not his military accomplishments, not his victory over Goliath, but his integrity.

What is integrity? ... Integrity is (1) an unimpaired condition (2) a firm adherence to a code especially of moral values (3) the quality of being undivided. Integrity means being the same inside and out; there are no double standards. It's not simply what you do – it is the quality and character within you that causes you to do what you do.

But what we need to remember is this – as King David shepherded the people with integrity of heart and skillful hands, it was a result of God's work in his life. After all, these closing verses of Psalm 78 harken back to God's calling of David in 1 Samuel 16. God directed the Prophet Samuel to go to the home of Jesse, where he would anoint the next king. Samuel reasoned the way so many of us do: He was certain that Jesse's oldest son, Eliab, with his confident bearing, height and impressive good looks, was the one God would choose. *"But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature ... For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart'"* (1 Samuel:16:7).

To God, the heart – a person's innermost motivation and attitude – is of prime importance. *“This is the one I esteem,” says the LORD, “he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word”* (Isa. 66:2).

1 Samuel 16:13 says, *“So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.”* David wholeheartedly sought God's will. He didn't withdraw from the responsibilities of life. The biblical record shows that, the more conditions around David deteriorated, the more he sought after the Lord, and the more he grew in character.

Now, David certainly was not perfect – there were clear times when David sinned against God and his fellow man – sin which brought him to a place of great humiliation, pain, loss, and most importantly, repentance. And through God's grace – God's sustaining, restoring, enduring grace – David put his trust in God throughout his life. *He was only ever able to be faithful to God because He knew the God who would always be faithful to him – the God who is ever-faithful.* [P]

In the book of Acts, Luke records these words of the Apostle Paul: *“God raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will’”* (Acts: 13:22). What a tribute to the former shepherd boy who became king. [P]

So as we've taken a glance at this shepherd-king, and as we continue to ponder God's unique call upon our lives, we know that some are called to serve as spiritual leaders. So, *what does it mean to be a servant leader?* This morning, let's consider three core components: *1. Who you are, 2. How you think, 3. What you value.*

True leadership is first concerned with ***who you are***, not simply what you do. God focuses on those inward qualities, that character of the heart ... those things that take time and discipline to cultivate. When you are a man or woman after God's heart, that means you are moved by what moves the heart of God. But if we expect to be sensitive to this, to be attune to and led by the heart of God, than we need to become mature in

our walk with God. Spiritual maturity occurs through planned & purposeful training – through intention and commitment to practicing spiritual disciplines every day.

We get *rooted and girded* through the inward disciplines of meditating on the Word, prayer, fasting & study. We are *enriched and made effective* through the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, service & stewardship. We *reach out and are revived* through the corporate disciplines of confession, celebration, worship & witness.

Now, the temptation is to focus simply on the activity (the doing), rather than the purpose of it all – to reflect more and more the image of Jesus Christ – to possess his character. This is key to leadership. It starts with an integrity of heart and a God-directed vision.

Secondly, to pursue purpose like a leader, *we must think like a leader*. But to think like a leader, we must know the mind of our God. How can we possibly know the mind of God! He is omniscient – All knowing! His ways are infinite! His thoughts higher than our greatest capabilities, grander than our farthest imaginations! And so, the only way for us to ever know the mind of God is if He so desires to share it with us – to reveal it to us – and thanks be to our gracious God, that He has done so – in His Creation, in His written Word, and most wondrous of all, in the person of His Son, Jesus. Through what the Lord has spoken and through what He has displayed, we are recipients of His revelation – we are witnesses of His ways.

Psalm 103:7 says, “*God made known his ways to Moses, His acts to the people of Israel.*” God's ways reveal His purpose – His intent, His commitments, His goodness, His love, His joy working itself out. And so, knowing God's *ways* helps us know Him intimately and to embody His attributes. Knowing God's ways is essential to knowing God Himself. Most people are more interested in knowing what God can do for them. But just as a created thing cannot know its true purpose or worth except in its relationship with its maker, so it is with us. If we are to reflect God's character, we need to first understand His character; and if we want to possess that understanding, we must seek out and soak in all the ways He has revealed Himself to us.

2 Chronicles 16:9 explains it this way: *“The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”* God is not looking for magnificent specimens of humanity. He’s looking for deeply spiritual, genuinely humble, honest-to-the-core servants who have integrity of heart.

And that brings us to that final core component of servant leadership – ***what you value***. Values are beliefs – a special kind of beliefs pertaining to what is important to us. Values influence behavior – because we seek more of what we value. Our values becomes our character. But without biblical values, a person can have the best training in the world; a keen, perceptive mind; an endless list of skills – but still not make a strong leader.

So what are the marks of a strong leader? Of a servant leader? [P] I want to drive home two such markers – the first one we’ve already touched on ...

Personal Integrity – The Apostle Paul spoke of his failures & struggles w/ an openness that few of us are prepared to copy. He wrote: *“In Christ, we speak before God with sincerity”* (2 Cor. 2:17). That is an essential quality of leadership. God wants his people to show a transparent character, open and free of deception. The servant leader must be sincere in promise, honest in speech, faithful in duty, and dedicated in service.

And as the first marker points to what lies within, the second marker points to what happens beyond ...

A Humble Lasting Influence on Others – Nehemiah raised the morale of his fellow workers as they faced the overwhelming task of rebuilding the walls of a Jerusalem that lay in ruins. He built up their faith by redirecting the focus away from the “impossible” toward *the greatness of God*. He uttered assurances grounded in faith: *“the God of heaven will give us success”* (2:20) ... *“the joy of the Lord is your strength”* (8:10). Faith builds faith. Pessimism dismantles faith. *The servant leader’s primary task is to build the faith of others in such a way that they are equipped and driven to do God’s Kingdom work*. Such influence is an indispensable part of the servant leader’s work.

Something else ... *Leaders cannot be equipped to all aspects of God's service.* The ministry is not electronic equipment, but a body with discernible parts. Every member of the body has a giftedness. Each one has a field of effectiveness. As much as possible, focus your life and ministry in the areas where you have been called and equipped. If you work according to your gifts, two things will happen: 1) You will become effective, and 2) You will enjoy serving, for it will be service unto the Lord.

Consider the advice of A.W. Tozer: *"A true leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position by inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the press of circumstances... The one who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader. The true leader will have no desire to lord it over God's heritage, but will be humble, gentle, self-sacrificing and altogether ready to follow when the spirit chooses another to lead."*

Abraham, Joseph ... Moses, Joshua ... Deborah, Esther ... Peter, Paul – leaders who never aspired to be put into leadership, but *chose to trust and obey – to serve and lead – with the indispensables of integrity and influence – grounded in and dependent upon the grace and power of God every step of the way.*

May we do likewise.