

“From General to Particular”  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
 Sermon for 4 August 2024  
 Texts: 1 Tim. 3:1-7

Joseph, the great governor of Egypt in a time of severe famine, had his origin as a shepherd boy in a large family (the twelve sons of Jacob). He had big dreams (his family might have said “delusions of grandeur” but they proved portentous of his significant future as a world leader. Later, King David would emulate this pattern: growing up from a shepherd boy to be king of Israel. Moses, at age forty undertook to be a shepherd of Jethro’s flocks. So the imagery of pastoral leadership reflected this nomadic shepherding profile: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all the first patriarchs were shepherds, and amassed their wealth through the management of enormous flocks of sheep. Hayward (the foreman at the Steven’s farm) and I tended sheep together in South Bridgton, on the shores of Adam’s Pond when I interned there during high school. But I suppose that sheep tending is not a common life experience of very many members of this particular flock—this was not the case when our church was founded. Many farmers had a flock of sheep, spinning, fulling and carding wool—all parts of home manufacturing of women cloth was common then. Woolens would peak in the 19th century, and later be supplanted by cotton and, eventually, synthetics—the last needing neither shepherds, flocks, nor very many workers. Many towns coalesced around fabric mills and mill workers were a significant demographic well into the 20th century. The transitions from the fur trade to woolens covered a span of two to three centuries and mills coincided with the harnessing of waterpower on dammed streams and canals and sluiceways. All of that is history, but the pastoral setting of divine self-disclosure, as it unfolded through the ages of pastoral care (sheep, shepherding and cloth manufacturing) offers us much of the imagery surrounding the provision, protection and prosperity of the world’s people.

It is quite fascinating to note that animal husbandry, the whole pastoral scenario, has become problematic, even suspect to the contemporary world to the point where the herding of animals and the whole interdependence between us and domesticated animals (pets excluded, of course) has evolved into an ecological threat—methane emissions/carbon dioxide being viewed as a contributing factor in global warming! The alienation of this life-style, a self-sustaining agrarian lifestyle complicates our access to the biblical narrative and imagery. Shepherds have been downsized as heroic figures and ancient texts holding pastoralists in contempt have been elevated/highlighted as it were. **The Lord is my Shepherd** has decreased in currency as the industrial revolution and urbanization have increased<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Way of the Shepherd: Seven Secrets to Managing Productive People](#) by Kevin Leman and William Pentak (2004) “When William Pentak had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to interview Ted McBride, one of the most respected CEOs in America, he was shocked by what McBride was willing to share. McBride taught him the seven secrets he inherited long ago from his mentor--an eccentric but brilliant professor who passed on these time-tested management principles that, while ancient in their origin, are still applicable in today's fast-paced, high-tech world.” “Throughout *The Way of the Shepherd*, you'll learn how to infuse your work with meaning, no matter your role, title, industry, or the size of your team. Uncover the tried-and-true best practices for how to engage, energize, and ignite your workforce by:

- Getting to know your team, one person at a time
- Relentlessly communicating your values and your mission
- Defining the cause for your people and showing them where they fit in
- Having a heart for the people that you're leading
- Understanding that great leadership isn't just professional, it's personal

If you're ready to transform your team, create a culture of belonging, and truly learn to lead by example, it's time to discover *The Way of the Shepherd*.

—as cited from Amazon site.

Leman and Pentak authored a classic rebuttal in 2004 to this notion of shepherding as obsolete in a high instructive book on management built around Ted McBride's modern example of sheep tending.

What I hope to accomplish this morning is this: I want to move from the general direction of Ephesians 5:21 to the particular directions affecting family life. That is, from the thoughts of mutual submission out of filial fear of the Lord. We want to embark on an exploration of *the particular duties* of the Christian husband and wife. Obedience is performance-based, I know, how obvious—except when it isn't. **Walking worthy of our vocation, or calling, in Christ** (Eph. 4:1) requires performing our duties. William Gouge says, startlingly, “A bad husband, wife, parent, child, master, servant, magistrate, or minister is no good Christian.” (p. 19)! Tim. 3:1-7, the key passage of the qualifications for an elder which aligns with Exodus 18:21: **Moreover you shall provide out of all the people “able men” such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness/greed (un-bribeable men) and place them to be rulers/judges over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.** This initiative seems to have been replicated in the reign of King Jehoshaphat (879-843 BC) with the restoration of Yahweh worship, princes, judges and priests in tow.

*The right, proper and conscientious performance of our duties determines what kind of a Christian we actually are.* -Gouge

The apostle Paul describes particular duties pertinent to private families in Ephesians. And so he designates distinct **orders** in those families: namely, husbands and wives and then parents and children. He includes the duties pertinent to each of those orders. These duties create bonds and those bonds produce cohesion, unity, *family solidarity*. They are duties we are variously called to by God which require diligence, time, energy and expenditure of resources. The reason: the family is a seminary (a nursery/greenhouse) of the church and of the nation in that order. ***Our deportment as citizens is a ripple effect of home life—for better, or for worse.*** Family is supposed to be a beehive and, as an active beehive, it is meant to swarm so as to grow and increase as a divine instrument in the redemption of the world! We are bred, educated and brought up to be sent forth into church and nation—that is our mission, purpose and duty. America will be great and good as a result of our families being great and good—that's the plan. And as R C Sproul once stated, “There is no plan B.”

In the beginning, we note, the increase of the human race was out of the family. God joined Adam and Eve in marriage, making them first husband and wife (in a helpful relationship) and then gave them parenthood by the blessing of “children.” Health, provision and prosperity come about through child rearing. Note the original order: prior to magistrate and subject, minister and people, socialization by peers and education—all these subsequent things are parts of a fitting for some (subjection as followers) and the determination of who should be in leadership, positions of authority of others.

The first principles of government, or subjection are family-based and mastered at an early age, or they may never be mastered at all. This outcome is observable in the aftermath of family destruction in society. That this is God's plan also seems so obvious, again, until it isn't. I mean that by neglect and/or dereliction, the essential duties and training of the young may not occur, being diverted to others (schools and churches for instance)—where others, who are least equipped to accomplish this training, growth and maturation. If a child does not learn governance in the home, the chances are they will not pick up governance at all. Result: all are driven about by whim, fancy—social media and influencers other than those God-ordained to train the nation up!

Sons, in scripture who became troublemakers, Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu; Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas; Jacob's eleven sons (excluding Joseph?) and David's, Amnon and Absalom and Adonijah; are all prime examples of failed parenting—and died ignoble deaths. And by that I mean they had fathers who spent their time *outside their calling as fathers*. The public paid the price of negligence. It is no coincidence that fathers who could not father their children, or rule over their own house were forbidden the offices of elder and bishops in the church. There's work enough at home in governing well to keep a godly man busy. Nothing in my citation of troubled sons should lend itself to the conclusion that some daughters were not troublemakers as well! Lot's daughters gave the sons of Noah a run for the money!

“A wife, if she is also a mother, and faithfully does what she is bound to do by virtue of her calling, likewise, will find enough to do.”

“The whole calling of children is to be obedient to their parents.” (p. 21) What? I just wrote that down and looking at it I think, “How shocking . . . simple, shocking and true.”

Of first rank in the order of a family are the husband and wife. They are chief in the family governance and all under them are single persons over whom the husband and wife govern. Thus they are examples for all these under them, and if they fail, in their duties to each that failure goes all the way down—everyone assumes that they can be negligent and careless. If the husband is disrespectful and rude to his wife, the governed may feel empowered to be rude and obstinate to each other and especially so to those considered to be lower than themselves. This accounts for much disorder in some families. Or, if the wife is distrustful, suspicious or unfaithful to her husband—if she steals from him the children will take courage from her example to do the same from those in authority over them. Thus, there is in the couples failure a double fault—first to each other, and secondly to those to whom they give occasion to sin! This should secure a high degree of attentive conscientiousness in performance of spousal duties. Everyone is watching, everyone is taking their cues from those above. They expect guidance and will take careless, or negligence be that guide.

The apostolic pattern is this: to take the duties of subordinates first, and then to proceed to the reciprocal duties of their superiors. (Eph. 6:1; cm with Col. 3:18, 20, 22)) 1 Peter 3:1 follows suit: Thus we are to understand that subordinates must give honor and perform duties to their superiors, implying that the superiors act in such a way as to be worthy of that honor and service. (Exod. 20:12) Reason: perhaps subordinates are least likely to undergo the duties of their place. Everyone seems to want to be in charge, no one wants to be accountable. *It is far more challenging to govern well than it is to be told what to do.*

To rule and govern requires foreknowledge, experience, wisdom, care, watchfulness, diligence, and the like virtues than to obey and be subject.” (p. 25)

The superior must not only choose the best way as well as forecasting what lies ahead and to adjust what is adequate now against what might be dangerous just ahead. After all he may direct someone to sin, who in following that command does not sin—such as when Joab carried out the census that David knew God had forbidden.

Commonly those who are younger, weaker in seed, poorer in estate, more ignorant in understanding, and the like are in places of subjugation; the elder, stronger, wealthier and wiser, and such persons are for the most part, or ought to be in places of authority. **Woe to thee, O land,**

**when thy king is a child.** (Eccl. 10:16)” “Men must first learn to obey well before they can rule well.” (p. 27)

“All that are under authority: learn how to win your governor’s favor, how to make your yoke easy, and your burden light, how to prevent mischief which by reason of the power of your superiors over you may otherwise fall upon you. First do your duty. A wife’s submitting to her husband is to be voluntary. Her husband is the Lord’s representative. He bears the divine image. He has fellowship and partnership with the Lord—hence **be ye subject, as unto the Lord**—those who will not submit to their own husbands are unlikely to submit themselves to the Lord!

**Amen.**