

Are You a Warrior in Search of Greener Pastures?

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Have you ever wondered where we get the expression “looking for greener pastures?” It comes from verse 2 of King David’s beloved Psalm 23 in the Hebrew Scriptures, “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” What do we generally refer to when we speak about greener pastures? Oftentimes, it is more power, money, responsibilities, new relationships, new skills, or simply more “success.” Our culture has taught us the value of fighting for these “important” things in life. The question is whether these things are truly as important as they seem? This article examines the concept of the warrior versus the shepherd in our culture, in David’s life and in Psalm 23.

The Warrior and Success

Helgesen (1995) suggests that all of “our public fields of endeavor ... ha[ve] been shaped by the ideals, images, values, and language of the Warrior” (p. 253). She adds that the result has been that the language of dominating, competing, winning the quest and strengthening yourself to stand strong autonomously has been built into the very structure and culture of our organizations. The attributes of “nurturing, mercy, participating in the growth of others, fostering human connection” are eschewed by the warrior because they weaken his resolve to compete. The role of aggressive warrior works when physical activity and protection are paramount for survival. For example, a friend recently returned from the war in Iraq. There, he worked seven days a week, from 8 a.m. until 11 p.m., because that is required in war time. We often act as if we are warriors with our organization at war, but are they truly at war? Where the warrior traits once were strengths, they are now often liabilities in our complex, global world.

In addition, O'Neil (2004) suggests that the mythic definition of success has required a very high personal price for many "successful" people. This price has included heroically giving up family time, vacations, sleep, exercise, their dreams and personal renewal time for the good of the job or organization. He states that personal issues warriors try to ignore end up popping out at the most inopportune times as weeds. He (2006) quotes Jung to highlight that the hidden issues also contain the dreams and future possibilities in seed form. These seeds of possibilities need time to grow and continual nurturing. Important elements in this nurturing process include providing sun, water, nutrients and time to rest in the ground, so the seeds will sprout roots and branches.

Helgesen (1995) contends that our culture will not survive if we allow warrior values to control our culture. Many of the nurturing and caring values have been considered feminine. For example, the warrior's wife created an oasis for physical and spiritual refreshment before he returned to the battle. However, our world has changed. Dual careers often mean that the wife no longer can create the oasis at home. Sometimes she needs an oasis herself. Women leaders are also bringing transformation to the workplace. Helgesen (1995) suggests that this phenomena is a cultural evolution because we can no longer afford to restrict nurturing qualities to the home. She provides several examples of very successful women who mastered the warrior skills and then moved beyond them to provide leadership models based on nurturing and rest principles. For the purposes of this article, we will call them shepherding virtues, which are gender neutral.

King David and Psalm 23

Clark (1996) states that Psalm 23 is most often attributed to King David, although Clark believes it was written after the Babylonian captivity. Barnes (1997) suggests that David wrote the Psalm later in life and was remembering his own tender care of the flocks and acknowledging that God had cared for him in the same way. Keil and Delitzsch (1996) indicate that the Psalm was written during Absalom's rebellion. Based on the above, this article assumes that Psalm 23 was written after Absalom's treason and towards the end of David's life.

King David was an extraordinary leader of Israel. Scripture provides us with a glimpse of a very human leader who pursued wrong relationships, actions, kingdom-seeking, and wrongful persecution, yet "kept a heart after God" (1 Samuel 13:14). He was a worshipper and built the tabernacle of David (2 Samuel 6), but for the purposes of this article we will look at his "work" life.

David had been a powerful warrior and cunning diplomat much of his life (Peterson, 2007). He exemplifies the warrior leader as described above. David came to prominence battling Goliath (1 Samuel 17:1-58). Saul persecuted David with weapons of war (1 Samuel 19:10) and as a result, David led a band of discontented soldiers in the wilderness (1 Samuel 22:1-2). He fought many battles to grow and retain his kingdom (1 Samuel 23, 30; 2 Samuel 5, 8, etc.). McKenzie (2000) adds that, “David maintained power in the same way he had attained it in the first place - by removing anyone who was in his way.” This is harsh when you realize that it is the same man who wept over the death of opponents (2 Samuel 1; 3-4). David indirectly assassinated Uriah to take Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).

When his son Absalom rebelled against him (1 Samuel 15; 18), the whole cycle started again. Absalom’s initial success indicated the people’s discontent with David’s leadership. Finally, David’s sin of numbering the people caused 70,000 of his people to die (2 Samuel 24). David even referred to his people as sheep (2 Samuel 24:7). It was in this context that David wrote Psalm 23. What was he thinking when he wrote the Psalm? Perhaps he was contrasting his leadership with God’s leadership and care for him, or perhaps he was longing to return to the shepherd lifestyle he knew before he became a warrior king. Let us compare Helgesen’s warrior and shepherd traits against David’s life and Psalm 23 to glean some insights.

Helgesen’s Warrior Virtues	David as Warrior	Psalm 23
Fearlessness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He was fearless against Goliath (1 Samuel 17:45-46). 2. David pursued his enemy when others wanted to weep (1 Samuel 30:6). 3. He acknowledged God is with him in both cases. 	V. 4: I will fear no evil, for you are with me.
Thirst for combat	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He fought many battles. 2. The long war between the house of Saul and David (2 Samuel 3:1). 	V. 5: Antithesis: Eating in front of enemies rather than battling.
Single-minded devotion to an ideal	David was devoted to God and had his heart after God, but he also wanted to maintain the kingdom given to him.	V. 1 & 6: Acknowledging the Lord as shepherd and dwelling in His house forever.
Aggression	He fights many battles.	V. 4: Trusting in God’s rod and staff.
Conceptualize others as enemy	“Assassinated” former friends, allies and sons.	V. 5: Antithesis: Eating in front of enemies rather than battling.
Fierce need to prove yourself in all contests	David proved his prowess in many battles and love conquests (e.g. Bathsheba and concubines).	V. 5: Antithesis: Eating in front of enemies rather than battling.

Table 1: Warrior traits in David’s life and Psalm 23

While Psalm 23 reflects on some aspects of the warrior, in many ways it is the antithesis of the warrior. Other Psalms such as Psalm 18:39 and Psalm 24:8 highlight God’s leadership as the warrior and equipping David for battle. We can conclude that the warrior is a definite theme for David in the Psalms, but not that much in Psalm 23.

David was disappointed that his call as warrior king (which included bloodshed) was the reason he was precluded from building God’s house (2 Samuel 7:1; Kings 5:3). This probably wounded his heart. Let us examine the shepherd traits in David’s life and Psalm 23.

Helgesen's Shepherd Virtues	David as Shepherd	Psalm 23
Nurturing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> David has nurturing qualities as a shepherd (1 Samuel 17:34-37). David is kind to different people: Abigail (1 Samuel 25), Mephibosheth and Barzilla (2 Samuel 19), and even Absalom (2 Samuel 14:25-33). God reminds David of his shepherd days before becoming the king (2 Samuel 7:8-9). He protects people by war. 	Provider: V. 1: I shall not want. V. 4: Prepare a table amongst enemies. V. 5: My cup runs over. Protector: V. 4: Rod and staff. Leader: V. 2 & 3: He leads, He makes.
Mercy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> He has mercy on Saul twice (1 Samuel 24, 26). He has mercy on Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9). 	V. 6: Mercy and goodness.
Participating in the growth of others	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> David shows repentance that his sin had caused others to die (2 Samuel 12, 24). He announced Solomon as king and instructs him (1 Kings 1-2). 	V. 3: Restores my soul.
Fostering interconnections	Friendship with Jonathan (1 Samuel 18).	V. 1: The Lord is my shepherd. V. 4: You are with me. V. 5: You prepare, You anoint. V. 6: I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
Oasis, physical and spiritual refreshing	The Psalms are full of this type of language.	V. 2: Makes me lie in green pastures, beside still waters. V. 3: Restores my soul, walk in righteousness.

Table 2: Shepherd traits in David’s life and Psalm 23

Psalm 23 definitely reflects David’s shepherd virtues. These exist in David’s life, but are more evident in his pre-king years. The warrior was the needed mode to keep his kingdom intact. Why was David considering these nurturing virtues so strongly? I believe it was because he was experiencing a gap between how he wanted to act and how he had performed in his life.

Burnout

Maslach and Leiter (1997) define burnout as the discrepancy between what people do and what they have to do or should do. In other words, a person perceives a gap between who they are and what they want or ought to be. Maslach characterizes burnout as exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness.

If Psalm 23 was written after Absalom's rebellion, David was witnessing the crumbling of his kingdom. His son had tried to wrestle it from him and his followers were dissatisfied. He was discouraged and tired. Alternatively, it could have been written when David learnt that he was not going to build God's house (2 Samuel 7; 1 Kings 5:3). God even contrasted his life as a shepherd to becoming king (2 Samuel 7:8-9) at this point. It could have been written after David had sinned and 70,000 people had died (2 Samuel 12, 24). Whenever it was written, it was clear that David was burnt out. He seemed to be looking for the antidote for burnout. He was seeking God for refreshing, rather than turning to his own strength. The warrior was longing for renewal from his God. Spurgeon (1865-1885) suggested that Psalm 23 was placed deliberately after Psalm 22 to increase the contrast. The blood shedding and feelings of forsakenness in Psalm 22 is a set-up for knowing the goodness of God's care as the shepherd.

21st Century Success Attributes

Warriors and shepherds approach situations very differently. Senge (2006) states that economies and businesses in our global setting requires a new mindset to operate successfully. Businesses are competing globally for markets and resources. Technology such as Blackberries, webmail and satellite phones provide the ability to be on call 24/7. The information rate of change is exponential. According to Arnold (2007), technical information doubles every two years. This means that half of what a technical student learns in the first year of a four-year program will be outdated in their third year. It is estimated that by 2010, technical information will be doubling every 72 hours. This implies that everything we understand is subject to continual change. Creativity is required to devise solutions for problems that do not exist today.

A warrior will charge autonomously to fight the prioritized battle to win the solution. In contrast, the shepherd leader will research, take time to ponder, collaborate with other people and integrate changing requirements, before reaching a solution. Marquart and Berger (2000) contrast the

differences between domestic (warrior) and global (shepherd) mindsets. Gryskiewicz (1999) compares a management (warrior) versus a creative (shepherd) approach to problem solving. He states that the creative approach is characterized by periods of incubation, great concentration, quiet time, complexity, initiating, sense of play, and a proactive mindset. This means that people need rest and quiet times in order to be able to create unique solutions to innovate and adapt to problems or changes in the future. It takes physical energy and thinking time to take in new information, process it against the current environment, scan for future changes, and create solutions that can be adjusted continually. Like the plants discussed earlier, we need the sun (Jesus), sun (vitamin D), water, nutrients, and rest so that the seeds of creativity will grow within us.

Finding Rest

Are you a warrior in need of energy and think time? Are you sick and tired of the warrior lifestyle? Learn from the Good Shepherd how to be nurtured, so that you can be a nurturing leader. In John 10:11-12, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep. This picture is in sharp contrast to that of a hireling. Warriors tend to be hirelings in an organization. Shepherds guide the organization to greener pastures and care for the sheep individually. Keller (1970) speaks of that care in detail in *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. These pastures create stillness and quiet in the soul. Is it time for you to seek the Good Shepherd to give you a new *modus operandi* for your work and personal life? All it takes is time in His transforming presence and then you will find the pastures greener and find quiet for your soul.

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