Toward a Model of Shepherd Leadership: Ecclesial Office or Function?

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Abstract

This paper employs a meta-analytic process to assess 27 articles published in the Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership (JBPL) to determine emerging patterns on the subject of shepherd leadership. The results yield similar patterns of shepherd leadership when compared to servant leadership; however, several articles distinctly describe shepherd leadership beginning with a specific call from God requiring a more assertive, individualistic role from the shepherd leader than that of the more team-oriented, accommodating servant leader. The articles further conflicted when attempting to place the shepherd leader as an ecclesial office or as a function of the church. Considering the overlapping roles of the shepherd leader as both an office and function, this paper will focus on how shepherd leadership can fill an ecclesial office while simultaneously functioning under the shepherd leader model as the body of Christ fulfilling the great commandment and the great commission.

Keywords: shepherd leadership (SL), servant leadership, shepherd, sheep, pastor

Shepherd leadership is a common theme found in the Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership (JBPL); however, each author's definition of the leadership form differs slightly from the other suggesting that the subject of shepherd leadership requires further exploration namely in terms of its role as an office or function of the church. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the shepherd leadership articles in the JBPL and determine the patterns that emerge highlighting the office and function of leaders as shepherds in the church.

Method

This meta-analysis of emerging patterns in shepherd leadership in the JBPL followed the format described in Timulak and Creaner (2013). The purpose is to study the descriptions, application, and utilization of the dimensions of shepherd leadership in an attempt to understand the office and function of the shepherd leader.

Selection of Articles

Twenty-seven (23%) of the 116 published articles in the JBPL explicitly mention the term *shepherd leadership* or *shepherd* at least once; however, for an article to be included in the meta-analysis, it had to have an adequate depth of related information and more than just a passing reference to shepherd or shepherd leadership. Table 1 provides an overview of the articles initially considered for selection based on some mention of shepherd leadership.

Table 1: Summary of JBPL for 2006-2018 Discussing Shepherd Leadership (SL)

Author	SL dimensions	Scripture reference	SL, shepherd	SL depth
Volume 1, issue 1, 2006				
Poon	8	John 21:17	Shepherd	Yes
Volume 1, Issue 2, 2007				
Longbotham and Gutierrez	3	Acts 20:27–31	Shepherd	No
Niewold			Shepherd	No
Faulhaber	1	1 Pet. 5:4	Shepherd	No
Volume 2, Issue 1, 2008				
McCabe	7	John 21:17	Sheep	Yes
Volume 2, Issue 2, 2009				
Buford	1	2 Sam. 7:4–17	Shepherd	No
Volume 3, Issue 1, 2010				
Story	3	Acts 20:28	Shepherd	No
Huizing	2	John 21:15–19	Shepherd	No
Bayes	5	John 10; Eph. 4:11	Shepherd	Yes
Cenac			Shepherd	No

Author	SL dimensions	Scripture reference	SL, shepherd	SL depth
Volume 3, Issue 2, 2011				
Oginde	4	John 10:11–13	Shepherd	No
Crowther	10	1 Pet. 5:1–6, Ps. 23:1, Ezek. 34:30–31, Jer. 23:4, John 21	SL, shepherd	Yes
Chandler		1 Sam. 17:34–37	Shepherd	No
Volume 4, Issue 1, 2012				
Mahan	3	John 10:2–15	Shepherd	Yes
Volume 5, Issue 1, 2013				
King	5	Mark 6:34	Shepherd	Yes
Banks			Shepherd	No
Chang	10	1 Pet. 5:1–4, Acts 20:28, John 10:2–16, John 21:15–17		
McKinney			Shepherd	No
Volume 6, Issue 1, 2014				
Serrano		1 Sam. 17:40	Shepherd	No
Bayes	11	Eph. 4:11	Shepherd	Yes
Volume 7, Issue 1, 2017				
Serrano		John 10:1–18	Shepherd	No
Wood		John 10:11	Shepherd	No
Bowers	4	Matt. 9:36	Shepherd	No
Brubaker	8	Matt. 9:35–38, Ezek. 34:1–10	SL, shepherd	Yes
Vanderpyl		Matt. 9:36	Shepherd	No
Volume 8, Issue 1, 2018				
Serrano		Eph. 4:11–16	Shepherd	No
Keebler		John 21:15–17, John 10:3–5		

Appraisal of Primary Articles

Appraising the journal articles until saturation was reached, analysis of the articles included a thorough review of the shepherd leadership dimensions or certain characteristics of shepherd leadership, scripture references, the word *shepherd* or term *shepherd leadership* used, and the usability of the information provided regarding shepherd leadership.

Data Preparation and Analysis

The analysis included reviewing the original articles for information related to shepherd leadership, the associated dimensions otherwise known as qualities and characteristics of shepherd leadership, and relevant Scripture. As shown in Table 1, eight of the primary articles reference shepherd or shepherd leadership, while one primary article references sheep. Two of the articles (22%) reference John 10:12–15, three of the articles (33%) reference John 21:17, one article (11%) references Ephesians 4:11, Mark 6:34, and Matthew 9:35. One article (11%) references both John 10:12–15 and John 21:17.

As illustrated in Table 2, most authors of the JBPL articles have come to a consensus regarding the dominant characteristics of a shepherd leader. Eight out of nine articles (89%) agree that a shepherd leader tends or cares for the flock. Five out of nine (56%) articles agree that a shepherd leader is self-sacrificing, and protects and feeds the flock based on his love for the flock as well as his love for God. Four out of nine articles (44%) agree that a shepherd leader is committed to God and the flock, is self-sacrificing, compassionate, and serves the sheep. Three out of nine articles (33%) agree that a shepherd leader nurtures and guides the flock and ultimately must be called by God to the task of shepherding. The remaining dimensions of a shepherd leader – being willing to lead, being humble, acting as a role model, and preparing the sheep – are also significant characteristics of a shepherd leader; however, they did not score high in certain articles based on the authors' intention of explaining the role or calling of a shepherd leader.

Table 2: Shepherd Leadership Dimensions Used in the JBPL

Dimension	Poon (2006)	McCabe (2008)	Bayes (2010)	Crowther (2011)	Mahan (2012)	King (2013)	Chang (2013)	Bayes (2014)	Brubaker (2017)
Feed	X	X		X			X		X
Tend/care for	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Commit	X	X		X		X			
Self-sacrifice	X	X			X	X			X

Dimension	Poon (2006)	McCabe (2008)	Bayes (2010)	Crowther (2011)	Mahan (2012)	King (2013)	Chang (2013)	Bayes (2014)	Brubaker (2017)
Love-based	X	X	X				X	X	
Prepare	X								
Nurture	X		X					X	
Guide	X			X					X
Protect		X	X	X				X	X
Compassion			X			X		X	X
Willing				X			X		
Humble				X			X		
Model				X					
Servant				X		X	X		X
Obedient				X					
Called				X	X				X
Wise							X		
Gentle							X		

Results

The results of the meta-analysis illustrate the current state, progress, and direction of shepherd leadership research and application evident in the JBPL articles. The following organization highlights the synthesis of the information and findings: (a) theoretical model selection, (b) theoretical dimension implementation, and (c) theory utilization.

Model Selection

The primary articles in the meta-analysis drew from nine different shepherd leadership descriptions to include: (a) Poon (2006), (b) McCabe (2008), (c) Bayes (2010), (d) Crowther (2011), (e) Mahan (2012), (f) King (2013), (g) Chang (2013), (h) Bayes (2014), and (i) Brubaker (2017). From the information presented in the JBPL articles, Mahan (2012) presented the least amount of three shepherd leadership dimensions while the most defined SL dimensions were outlined by Crowther (2011) with eleven. It must also be noted that the following articles contributed a significant amount of eight shepherd leadership dimensions: Poon (2006), Chang (2013), and Brubaker (2017), while McCabe (2008) outlined six, and Bayes (2014) provided five.

Four of the nine articles (44%) correlated shepherd leadership with the servant leadership model as noted by Crowther (2011) in 1 Peter 5:2 urging leaders to act as

shepherds caring for their flock not out of selfish gain but with eagerness to serve. King (2013) posited that spiritual leadership begins with service to others and referred to Mark 10:42–44 (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/1990) where Jesus tells his disciples, "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." Despite many similarities between servant leadership and shepherd leadership, shepherd leadership deserves its own place among leadership theories as its differences are unique, according to the other five JBPL articles that did not specifically highlight servant leadership as a required shepherd leadership dimension, although the highlighted dimensions allude to servanthood.

Dimension Implementation

From the nine different shepherd leadership articles, a combined total of 18 dimensions were highlighted to characterize shepherd leadership, as illustrated in Table 2. While most of the articles overlap in their shepherd leadership dimensions, such as feed, care for, commit, self-sacrifice, love-based, protect, compassion, and servant, as seen in Table 2, several other characteristics appear to be outliers, such as gentle, wise, role model, and willing, that are not necessarily unique to the role of a shepherd leader but hold the shepherd leader more accountable for his personal role and responsibility not only to the flock but also to Christ as the Chief Shepherd.

Theory Utilization

The meta-analysis showed that shepherd leadership could lead to a conceptualization of two distinct uses: (a) benchmarking or evaluation using shepherd leadership theory and/or dimensions, and (b) shepherd leadership theory development and refinement. Benchmarking, as explained by Chambers and Miller (2018), is an established standard or "method under which an individual is deemed more accomplished than another if and only if she has achieved more benchmarks, or important accomplishments" (p. 485). The nine JBPL articles set forth benchmarks that can be used to determine a person's shepherd leadership credibility. Theory development is comparable to science producing universal truths where theory development produces a standard measurement and refinement that are intertwined and can be reproduced (Easley et al., 2000).

Discussion

The patterns emerging from the JBPL articles exhibit both the office and function of a shepherd leader but present conflicting arguments in determining if the shepherd leader is indeed an office of the church or a function of the church.

Shepherd Leader Office

Crowther (2011) advocated for the shepherd leader filling an office of the church and compared the shepherd leadership office to the role of Old Testament elders, prophets, priests, and kings who were specifically called by God to lead the children of Israel. God established keepers of His flock and promised the children of Israel, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/1990, Jer. 3:15). The role of shepherd leader befalls not only on church leaders but also on monarchical, national, governmental, and organizational leaders who have been divinely positioned to carry forth God's will. Laniak (2006) emphasized the office of a shepherd leader when he asserted that pastors, elders, and overseers are called to serve behind the Great Shepherd adhering to Peter's instruction to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, 1 Pet. 5:2–3).

Shepherd Leader Function

Bayes (2010) contended that the fourth ministry gift of a pastor, in Ephesians 4:11, denotes the anglicized form of the Latin/French word for *shepherd*, further contending that shepherding, per the dimensions of love, compassion, care, and protection, are basic functions of ministry. As used in the New Testament, the term "pastor designates both an endowment for ministry and the one who fills that ministry but implies no fixed office" (p. 120). Although not every believer is specifically called to pastor or shepherd a particular flock, all are commanded to fulfill the great commission and to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20). As men are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do greater works than Christ, it behooves all believers to fulfill the great commission with or without the formal title of shepherd leader.

For Further Research

Despite the lack of a formally declared shepherd leadership theory, the JBPL articles outline 18 dimensions that could serve as benchmarks in further developing and establishing the theory. Further research is needed to determine if shepherd leadership is indeed a function or office of the church or perhaps both. Despite similarities between servant leadership and shepherd leadership dimensions listed in the JBPL articles focusing on people and relationships, the shepherd leader's dimensions appear more personal and accountable and stem from a divine calling and genuine love for Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Further research will definitively outline the shepherd leadership

theory and establish needed benchmarks to serve as a future compass for individuals declaring their calling, role, and/or function as shepherd leaders.

Conclusion

Just as God established rulers on earth for the benefit of the children of Israel, so He establishes leadership to carry out His will, not only in the church, but also within businesses, organizations, governments, and even households between the authority, love, and discipline of parents and children. Leaders are not to rule or lord over their subjects but are called to lead out of their own love for Christ, which is why Jesus, before commanding Peter to feed His sheep, asked Peter if he loved Him. Out of our love for Christ, His calling upon our lives, and being empowered by the Holy Spirit, believers are obligated to be His witnesses according to Acts 1:8, thus fulfilling the great commission in whatever capacity that may be.

About the Author

Michelle Gonzalez Segundo is a fourth-year Ph.D. student at Regent University, School of Business and Leadership, majoring in organizational leadership with a concentration in ecclesial leadership. Michelle's passion is people. Whether she's discipling others to realize their identity in Christ, calling, or leadership potential or serving the marginalized, she takes a "hands-on, boots-on-the-ground" approach to leading teams in engaging the community and connecting resources for sharing the gospel, particularly with the poor and homeless, disaster relief victims, families in need, at-risk youth, and foster children. Michelle currently serves as an intern with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) providing research for the Combating Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) division for the Eastern Southern Caribbean (ESC) region to safeguard children, empower women, engage stakeholders, governmental and NGOs, and develop sustainable policies that will help to eliminate human trafficking in the ESC.

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