

Warrior - Shepherd

Dr. Mark George

Dr. George

Today we're going to talk about this warrior shepherd imagery, and I'll say a little bit about why that's something I know something about, and then I'll leave time for at the end for questions and answers. And let me say that I like to work dialogically I will stop at a few points and ask for questions, and I'm going to lead off with a question for you all.

Once we get through some of the background pieces. And if you have questions, please interrupt, I'd rather be interrupted and understood than to go too fast.

So, a little bit about me, I've been teaching at the University of Denver/Illiff School of Theology, for almost 30 years. I just recently took an early retirement option and have stepped out of that position. If you add 10 years or so of graduate study behind that with a Master's of Divinity and then my doctoral work. I've been in the formal study of Bible for quite some time. My focus is on the Old Testament, or as we refer to it as the Hebrew Bible.

I was a literature and economics major in my undergraduate work. And I tell people, oh, I got all the good stuff... I know Jesus walked on the water and that's nice, but like Moses actually parted the waters so he could get 600,000 men and children and everyone else through. So I like to tease my New Testament colleagues and have some good conversations about the merits of each.

Right now, I'm finishing a book on Deuteronomy, and the title has changed as publishers want to do, but I just got an email this week that it's finally in production, which has been a very long process. It's a book about Israel's identity as a people and how that's being formed in Deuteronomy and that includes thinking about royal relationships and governance. This ties into a long history for me and my Masters of Divinity work. I wrote my doctoral thesis on shepherd imagery in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, and I've worked in the Pentateuch for most of my academic life with some forays into other parts of the Old Testament canon.

I'm also an ordained teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church USA, so that I have that as part of my ministry.

One of the reasons I'm so pleased to have this opportunity is that I have a lot of family connections with military service going back several generations. My father-in-law was in the military as a surgeon. My former wife was a military chaplain and so I very much appreciate the work that you all do. When she was stationed in Germany with my younger son, at Bomberg, and troops were going downrange to Afghanistan and Iraq and I heard those stories about

helping troops prepare, helping families prepare. For staying behind, and the re-entry process, One of my former student, CH Zachary Moon came wrote his dissertation on transitioning from full-time military service into civilian life. I found that a very interesting project too, and some of you may be familiar with his work.

So hopefully that gives you a sense of who I am and why this is of interest to me.

Let's move into the warrior shepherd imagery, and I'm going to do a little bit of historical background. I'm going to talk a little bit about both warrior and shepherd as images. And then The traits that I think are present in the shepherd imagery from the ancient materials is the very old image that gets used not just for pastoral, and I don't mean ministry things, but herding occupations, people who did that, but also for political purposes. It's a title kings used, and I'll show you a couple of examples of that.

Let me also say that I take very seriously Isaiah 1.8, come let us reason together in the King James, or as the New Revised Standard version puts it, come let us argue it out between God and the people. I'm a professor that's sort of baked into my profession, but I hope that we can have some good conversation about this too. And as Jeff said in last month's meeting, I think about the Bible very often as just posing more questions than giving simple answers. I almost never understand a piece from the Bible without wondering what certain things mean. So as you have questions, I welcome those.

I'd like to start with a question, if I may. What words, what ideas come to mind when you think about warrior shepherd imagery in the Bible? Is there anything that leaps to mind for anyone in the group about this imagery?

Cal

I have a picture of General Ian Dury in war where he had a shepherd's crook And it was one of the ways that he could be identified easily by his troops.

Dr. George

Yes, I think of young David fighting Goliath, you know, with a sling, I guess. Yeah, yeah, yeah, great.

Unidentified:

I think what first jumps to my mind, of course, is you hear shepherd, you think Psalm 23.

which doesn't necessarily cover everything that's there about shepherds in the Old Testament.

Dr. George

Right. Good. Well, thank you for that. We're going to talk about that one in more detail in just a few minutes.

Okay, if it's helpful, because I want to respect time, you might throw something into the chat and I'll try to be attentive to that. The reason I ask is to help me understand what sorts of things come to mind for you all and where we start and how you can help me think about what this imagery does for US military chaplains as someone who hasn't put on the uniform and served I hope this can be part of our dialogue. So I want to make a few comments about warrior to begin, even though I'm going to move and focus more on Shepard, because this I was curious.

In Hebrew, there are a variety of terms that are used for warrior, a man of war and Ishmael Hama. I don't know how many of you read Hebrew.

But this is a term that gets used often in the Pentateuch and some of the earlier literature.

Later, we have a term, the language shifts to this term gibor or gibor chayil, a valiant one or a valiant man.

Sometimes this is translated as hero or a mighty one, a warrior. These terms can also sometimes in English be translated as soldier.

I was fascinated by the Gibor or Gibor Heil term because women can be labeled this in non-military contexts and Aisha Heil. But Boaz is named this in the book of Ruth. and it is not restricted to a military use. It says something about the integrity, the character of the person involved.

And what was striking to me is that this fits with the historical evidence we have of the region about who and what is in an army.

And it's different in Greek, where we have these terms, for soldier or this term, strateuomai, one who does military service, serves in an army, engages in a military conflict, By that point with the New Testament, the writers are certainly aware of the Roman army. and much more formalized training for the army.

A few historical details then about...warrior and armies in the ancient world. And I think that this is important for our discussion to see the differences here.

There is no standing army in Israel before the 10th century. That is the rise of the monarchy. Saul begins without one by the end of his reign. The biblical material suggests that he does have one.

Certainly, David is forming one. These are not militaries on the size of militaries today. They're smaller groups partly because militaries also draw in farmers, tradespeople, folks who are herders, etc. who are conscripted in for military purposes, for fighting in the army, And then they go back at the end of the campaign and resume their lives.

So we have probably smaller, historically probably have smaller groups of what we would consider standing army and then we have that supplemented in certain ways.

Mercenaries are part of this. David's band of troops in 1 Samuel 22, if you look at that, the number of people who come to him that are sort of... on the margins of society, they're shunned in some way and it's not uncommon.

Uriah the Hittite, which we know from the story of David and Bathsheba, he seems to me to be a mercenary. that he's been brought in for his military skills. There are bodyguards.

Sometimes in the English, we see references to guards of the king. These seem to be their private positions the force of men who are there to protect them and to regulate who's coming in and out of the palace and whatnot, Saul and Rehoboam. Rehoboam is the first king after Solomon.

With the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in what's now modern Iraq, part of the Mesopotamia region, We really see, I've got the 10th to the 6th century. This is what the period scholars talk about with the Neo-Assyrian army.

I think the imperial parts really start about the middle of the eighth century, so about 750 BCE.

And there we clearly have a standing army, and it's a quite fearsome army. The kings talk about it. But that, I think, would be the point where we – our notions of a standing army begin to match up better with the historical evidence.

Okay, any questions so far? All right, I'll go on here.

The Shepherd imagery to shift to that. The Shepherd has both pastoral, that is agricultural meanings, and political meanings. We know about the pastoral meetings. People are shepherds. They follow their herds.

There are herders of Abram and Lot in Genesis 13 that are in dispute, that's part of that dispute. Abel, Moses, and David are all referred to as shepherds. Several of you have mentioned David and his role as shepherd. And as a shepherd. He's identified that in 1 Samuel 16 by his father. And in the David and Goliath story, he doesn't go to battle because He's out tending the sheep. And I think that that's also suitable for his political rise, because kings are thought of as They have to feed and water their flocks. They have to shear the sheep. They have to protect them from thieves and from wild animals.

Other predators, they have to cull them at certain times of the year. If you're going to have sheep for sacrifices in Israel's worship practices, That means you have to have sheep at certain times. The shepherd is knowledgeable about the flock. And if sheep go missing, if they wander off, the shepherd has to be alert to that. So you have to know how many sheep you have and which ones are prone to wander off and to go find them.

In the political realm these images come to describe and characterize, they serve as a metaphor for the king's responsibilities. And we're going to look at those in particular.

The use of shepherd as a metaphor goes back to the third millennium BCE. Gudea of Lagashir, which is... really Southeast Iraq at this point, a city-state in Southeast Iraq. He describes himself as the true shepherd of the land, the shepherd chosen by Nyingirsu. Nyingirsu is one of the gods in the Mesopotamian pantheon. There's evidence of this title being used to describe kings.

Throughout the centuries, but to jump down closer to Israel's time period, Esarhaddon of Assyria, He's part of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, refers to himself as Shepherd a lot. He is one example, of someone who reorganized the confused people and made light shine forth from them.

I think that's an interesting description of what he's doing as shepherd. And then Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon, late in the seventh century, I shepherded with the utmost care the peoples that my lord Marduk had handed over to me. I directed them on the proper course and toward the correct behavior. I protected the loyal. I destroyed the enemy.

This gives you just a flavor of some of the use of this metaphor across time. across the region. I could have picked other examples for you to give you a sense that that kings liked to be understood as shepherd. And I think that that gets to the heart of how this is a useful image for us to think about today.

What sorts of characteristics do we learn about for the political shepherd's responsibilities? They're divinely chosen. And because they're divinely chosen, they're also responsible to the gods, to God or the gods.

They provide for the flock's needs, food, pasturage, care for them. They govern by establishing social order. If I go back a slide here to the Esarhaddon quote, the true shepherd, pardon me, who reorganized the confused people. That always tickles my fancy a little bit. Because it's a, well, I don't know how many of you have heard of sheep. I haven't heard of them, but I have family who are ranchers and know a little bit about sheep. Doesn't that just... Isn't that the whole thing about being sheep? Because they move as a flock and you could...

say that they're confused. I'm a Presbyterian. We like to say we do things decently in order. Confused sheep just seems like saying the obvious. So they, excuse me, kings are responsible for

establishing the social order. That's part of their being divine children... divinely chosen in their mandate. They direct the people in the proper ways of living. We're going to see that in Psalm 23.

Who Leads me in safe paths, right? And protects them from harm and destroys enemy, they bind up their wounds, they bind up the injured and care for them for their health needs.

And as the kings do this, as a shepherd does this, this is how justice is enacted. This way of caring for the flock is how the justice and the order that the gods command the kings to establish within the kingdom. These are the ways in which they're doing that. And it's not, you notice with the shepherd metaphor, it's not the heavy-handed iron fist type of rule, but rather one that nurtures and seeks the well-being of the flock.

The king has a duty of care for the well-being of the people and is the one responsible for them and for that relationship.

This is different from an imperial view. This was part of my work in Deuteronomy where emperors put all that responsibility for the relationship with subordinates on the subordinate.

And we see some of that actually operating in Deuteronomy. So When we think about, for me at least, based on the Bible and the surrounding culture's evidence, when I think about the shepherd imagery for someone in authority, we might think of it as a sort of lowly common position.

Based on the agricultural images, but it's actually one with a great deal of responsibility. And I think that that is something for us to consider.

How much did the kings at that time truly embrace this versus project this image? I mean, when you think of Nebuchadnezzar and whatnot, how violent and whatnot he was, was this something that was politically advantageous to take on this? Kind of image? Yes, thank you. Great question. And You haven't seen all my slides, but I'm going to get to that in part. But let me say the short answer is yes.

A good king would embrace it, take it seriously and what I mean by embrace I think the kings who should um holding check their own self-desires and see themselves as serving the people in their role. They were embracing that. Did they do everything that is part of the metaphor? No, but sometimes the ideals are important to articulate.

Because they say, this is what I'm striving for, even if I fall short. By the same token, it was political propaganda. There's no doubt about it.

Kings wanted to be known this way. And, you know, That's just sort of how the politics, well, I guess politics hasn't changed that much because you're still trying to project an image I do think that Israel had a negative experience of Nebuchadnezzar.

Judah was taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. They had a worse image of the Neo-Assyrians who were ferocious warriors. They were reluctant warriors, I think, as you get into the material. But when it came time to fight, they fought all out. And there's some really gruesome texts that describe that.

So for those on the outside, the kings were really not shepherds, but for their own people, They probably had a more, I want to say, conflicted notion about the king. Okay, the king's trying for this, but... when the king forces me into servitude or I have to pay this tax, it doesn't really feel like a shepherd to me. Hopefully that helps.

All right, I want to, I encourage you to hold these ideas in mind, these characteristics, because these are the characteristics that Shepherds in the Bible, when that gets invoked for a king, these are the qualities that are being taken up.

Now we have pastoral agricultural images. I've mentioned some of these, Abel, Moses, and David.

But the kings are also described this way. Both Israel and Judah, these kings, This notion of being a shepherd of the flock is present. I've cited texts from 2 Samuel 5 and 7-7 where The responsibilities of the king from God to shepherd the people are mentioned.

There are good shepherds and bad shepherds, so particularly in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. I'm going to talk about these in just a minute.

There are characteristics of the shepherd that that list that I've just showed you will see show up in the description of Good and Bad Shepherds.

And then, of course, God is the divine shepherd. And in addition to Psalm 23, which I'm going to talk about, there's also... In Jeremiah 23 and in Ezekiel 34, God's saying, I will be the shepherd and I will do these things and we'll see these characteristics come back.

The term for shepherd is this term ro'eh, one who shepherds or tends the sheep.

And it's very common in the Hebrew Bible. I didn't write just exactly how many times it shows up, but it's... similar to the term for friend, which makes it a little harder to find all these. In the Greek, in the New Testament, We also have this language of shepherd and the shepherds in the fields who get the angelic announcement of Jesus' birth in Luke 2.

Grom this term poimain or poimaino. And then Jesus, of course, is the good shepherd, the one who protects the sheep. So When this language is taken up about Jesus, Jesus uses it to refer to himself as the good shepherd or is talked about as the shepherd.

We're really tied into that political imagery. What seems to be behind this is the language that we've seen. I'm going to go back to this divine choice, providing for the flock, establishing social order, proper ways of living, all of these qualities are present for both Israel and Judah's kings And I think if you look at the New Testament texts, they're operating as ways to describe Jesus. That's, I think, part of the motivation to claim that and for Jesus, it not only,Connects with with the people with whom Jesus is speaking, but it's also a way to capture some of these royal overtones and to express the kind of relationship that Jesus understands himself to have with the people. All right.

As I said, there are good and bad kings. And in the writings in the Old Testament, which are often pretty negative about the institution of human kingship. Often they're bad kings.

And they get referred to as the bad shepherds. And I'm showing a quote here from Jeremiah 23.

So that we have a little bit and what I'm going to read this, but what I've underlined are the ways in which the kings are being condemned, the actions that they're doing that work against the expectations of a king. Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, says the Lord." Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people, it is you who have scattered my flock and have driven them away.

I just hope God never says those words again.

I like to remind students, and this is not what you want to have a prophet say to you. But you can see that the kings are being evaluated by God and found to be falling short because they're not doing the things and they're destroying and scattering rather than nurturing and keeping together.

They are not seeking the lost. They're not attending to their needs.

So again, this set of characteristics we see at work here in the negative evaluation of the Kings of Israel. God is pretty condemnatory of this behavior.

Now I shift to Ezekiel 34, and I've done the same thing. I've highlighted or underlined phrases for the kinds of actions that the king is supposed to do. And as you scan through this or as I read this, hopefully you'll hear that list of characteristics coming out.

Mortal, God says to Ezekiel, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to them, to the shepherd in case anyone's missed the fact that this is to the shepherds, thus says the Lord God, ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves.

Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the sheep.

You have not strengthened the weak. You have not healed the sick. You have not bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strayed. You have not sought the lost.

but with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd.

And scattered, they became food for all the wild animals.

So this is an interesting passage for me, I find, because of of just this catalog of behaviors that the kings have failed, the ways that they've failed. And it's very specific.

And you can make a list of this and just say, yep, check, they failed in this. Yep, check, they failed in this. Yep, check, they failed in this.

And what's interesting to me as we think about the imagery and how that helps us think about faith and military chaplaincy is kinds of responsibilities that God places on us that are operating within this image for us to consider.

God, of course, is the good shepherd. And I suspect you're all very familiar with Psalm 23, which I have reproduced here.

And I want to point out, again, with the underlining here, that certain actions that are characteristics of the shepherd even God as shepherd. And it's a, it's, We may know it so well that we sort of go on autopilot and don't pick up certain things about it. The psalmist is speaking as an individual.

The Lord is my shepherd. There's an awareness. The sheep knows the shepherd, Jesus will say in John.

I think Jesus may have something like this in mind, right? The psalmist is saying, I know I'm a sheep.

I have a shepherd and I'm without want.

I lie down in green pastures. I'm beside still waters. My soul or being, my nephesh is being restored.

I am led in right paths. Deuteronomy talks a lot about the path that the Torah provides to Israel. It's the right way to live.

I don't fear evil. You're with me. The soldiers now are the, uh, The shepherd's not on vacation. You comfort me with your rod and staff.

this imagery cal of the general with his staff. It's very interesting that the general used the imagery.

I use the staff for that purpose. Preparing a table, anointing my head, my cup overflows, goodness and mercy follow me, right? These pieces of this well-known Psalm show us those characteristics of being a shepherd.

And of course, in the New Testament, Jesus is a shepherd. He shepherds Israel.

He has compassion on the people who are like sheep who've gone astray. He judges the people.

Between sheep and goats, this is part of that culling of the herd, making decisions, protects the people and provides for them.

So, we see Jesus is not presented as a sitting monarch in the New Testament.

He's designated as the Messiah, right? We can talk about those royal...

that are part of the identity of Jesus, but he's not yet in that office. And yet these images from shepherding are fascinating.

uh associated with him so uh i know i'm running a little bit long um I want us to finish with a few ideas about how this imagery might be useful for us in faith.

And in military chaplaincy, and here I'm going to, I'm looking forward to the conversation because I turn it over to you as experts in this about how this might work.

but here are a few thoughts that might get us going. The responsibility of a shepherd over those whom he or she exercises authority.

that this being designated as one of God's servants and serving in this capacity gives us a certain authority and responsibility for our flocks.

It's a responsibility that stretches, that includes both one and all.

individuals and the whole unit or army. Providing for various needs, physical, mental, spiritual, safety, healing.

And being attentive to those aspects of the flock and the responsibility for that. It's not ours alone, right? We don't have to do everything, but to be attentive to it.

The defense of the flock, internal and external, I'd be interested to hear some discussion about how that might work for military chaplains. I've heard a little bit about that.

orders or treatments of enemy combatants or other circumstances that might we might think about in terms of a Shep, this is the action of a shepherd to defend oneself or the troops. That needs good judgment to be able to observe the troop and know those with whom you have authority and how to act for them.

And I've added this last one because last month the meeting was talking about lethality.

And how do military chaplains think through some of those issues? Killing and death are part of a chaplain's responsibility. To cull the herd is an act of killing. It's not wanton, it's not disrespectful, but it I thought this was an interesting aspect of Shepherd to maybe discuss with you all.

I'm going to stop there and just say thank you for this time. Again, I look forward to our discussion and hopefully I've given you enough to think about even if this has gone rather quickly.

Yeah, I see there's some really good comments here that are put in here, and I wonder if Art or Robert, if you'd like to maybe take the lead and bring some of these issues out.

Art

Sorry, I'm just seeing these... Sure, I can talk for a minute. I was just...

as I was listening to your uh slides mark and what you were uh explaining um these verses that I put on there about Jesus restoring Peter and John with Jesus specifically leading the sheep they just immediately came to mind. And I found the...

The slide with the virtues of the shepherd, particularly insightful, because uh it helped me picture and recognize okay the shepherd is a leader um And he's one who is steering the crowd. And maybe that crowd is your troops underneath you. Maybe it's your small group at church, maybe it's just, maybe it's your family, but in all cases, you're charged with steering the crowd in a certain direction. And then, you know, the challenge of, okay how do I appropriately apply the right uh steering metrics if you will because you do it differently with the troops when you can give them orders than you do with a group of friends that maybe need some biblical correction, right?

I found that particularly insightful and had me reflecting on How do I take and use that even in my own small group here at my church? So, yeah, I thought it was spot on. I appreciate all that you had to say. Thank you for that.

Dr. George

I think, so I have images of shepherds You know, when the sheep are grazing and it's lush, I picked a green background for my my slides to sort of subliminally evoke green pastures. But I can imagine shepherds, they probably get bored lots of the time, but they have to be aware. And sometimes they have to go out and say, okay, it's time for me to lead the flock, to be at the head of the flock.

Hopefully, they have a good sheepdog with them or something to bring up the rear. At other times, they're driving them forward, right? The flock knows where it needs to go. And the shepherd can, if I can put it this way, lead from behind.

And those may be images to think about in the different contexts, right? I said that the shepherd has to lead with wisdom with insight to know the needs of the flock, to know which ones are stray and whatnot.

And in my experience, I have family that run a ranch in central Washington state.

I have book knowledge. They have life knowledge. They can read animals. They can read people. They can read the land and the weather in a way that I'm clueless. I'm always so impressed with that.

I'll put it this way, there's a skill that we develop, right? in becoming shepherds. And I think that knowing which one There's no easy, somebody like me with book learning, I can't proclaim that.

So that's that interesting skill piece that comes up. And I think you're right. It's acknowledging the differences and then at which time to use which skill. So that's insightful. Thank you.

So one more thing I'll add, just because you reminded me of another thought I had while I was looking at that slide. You know, we're constantly called by the Bible to kind of be on guard with our own hearts, our own our own motivations, how we go about doing that. And as I was looking at that and realizing like, okay, if I'm If I find myself as a shepherd and I'm trying to lead because I think this is the right thing or I this or I that or I whatever list. And I'm not... I'm heading them in the direction of salvation.

The direction of the king and the direction of the character and where the king would have me take them uh then i'm doing it wrong uh and so it really gave me another um kind of graceful insight to how to deal with my own at times, conflicted motivations, you know, conflicted passions and how do I bring that to bear to, to, doing what Jesus would have me do even when, you know, my own, uh ,human desires sometimes are shouting at the complete opposite. Right. Um, but realizing like, no, it's your, you will have a privilege as a shepherd to, to lead these people. It's not a status that you get to wear because you're in charge.

And so yeah, I thought that was all really helpful.

Yeah, good. One of the things that captured my attention about Deuteronomy is this notion of a path that one is on and it of all the books in the Pentateuch is the most insistent, yeah, and this is where your answers are. So I can imagine a response. I'm just looking at Deuteronomy. It says, yes, and all of the things that you express about you know, human condition and our internal conflict, I think the writers would say, yes, you have that. And the word helps you uh reflect on that right it's a conversation partner i like to think about the bible as a conversation partner with us um and and that's part of that book of questions piece for me right well then how do i do this and how how does that work and how do i know the right thing and those writers knew that struggle too.

Colin

I was called as a 15 years ago to a certain university later and then um realized the only way to do that was to join the military not to go and tell my testimony and whatnot but uh I was also called as a 15-year-old to be a pastor, but I was not a military chaplain. I was a combat officer of tanks.

Pulling triggers. And it felt so right by the Lord. But even 10, 12 years in my career, I was like, am I disobeying the Lord? Because I'm not a pastor and it was going through many of these scriptures you presented today that helped me realize the essence of being a commander and an officer is shepherding the flock that God has given me.

Mission first get the mission done take care of soldiers always and uh completely changed how I viewed my calling, specifically in the combat arms of the Army. Another thing that helped, and you alluded to this a little bit, was not only seeing Christ as the good shepherd, but also as the greatest warrior.

You know, your topic here about the warrior shepherd, he is bar none, the best warrior That's ever walked this earth. Look at what he did and what he suffered to achieve the mission. Utterly obedient unto his commander.

Dr. George

Right. And as we think about that, how do we lead like Jesus? so relevant for the military Christian fellowships. How do we lead like Jesus in uniform and encourage those? And the warrior shepherds, And the scripture that goes behind is just so relevant.

I've been working on this this week I don't know in particular and struck again by how, just say this, I find the shepherd metaphor daunting as a leader.

It's a huge amount of responsibility. It requires...

Everything, it seems to me, at least for me, everything I have, all my experiences to feed into how best, right, to...lead like a shepherd. And I hung around some farmers. I mean, I know people can be harsh with animals, And that's what's being condemned with the bad shepherds, right? That they exploit them for their own purposes.

And so I also find it an inspiring image, but it's a daunting one.

You know, suck it up and get going because it's a high bar.

What's the verse where Jesus talks about John 10, I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

For Jesus, right, I think that has a much broader scope than any human could hope for.

But maybe that picks up on it, right? You're right. There is that question of how do we define, how do we know our flock so that they'll know us as shepherds? In some contexts, I think that's pretty well defined.

But I appreciate your thinking about right. And in a moment of conflict and battle where one shepherd is leading his flock and another shepherd on the other side is leading his flock. There's conflict there. That's the nature of the engagement.

And I don't think the Bible provides an easy answer for that, right? The Bible is very one-sided. it doesn't take a universalistic view.

In the Old Testament, these are the writings of the people of Israel.

And I teach students who are very social justice committed and very peace oriented.

And it's an interesting context to teach in. And they struggle with the partisan nature of God. Yeah.

Israel understood its God as partisan, but so did everyone else. Israel didn't deny that there were other gods.

Syria had its gods, Egypt had its gods, the Hittites had their gods, so on, right? And everyone's gods were partisan for themselves. So again, for me, I don't have an easy answer for how to resolve that.

That's something I think that we're left with to struggle with and that we interact with the scriptures.

And with Jesus' example and with the Old Testament witness testimony, to think about right and in this how do we do this how do we honor our commanders how do we how do we How do we

honor our flock in very, very tough circumstances? And I guess the beauty of what Jesus did in John 10 is he says, you know, the sheep hear my voice and they know me.

He changed it from a politically defined entity to an entity of people like where we can come from anywhere.

but we're all united under this one shepherd. So it's almost like we're sheep.

by choice, you could say, kind of, or by this knowledge between us and the shepherd.

And that's why, yeah, it's beautiful to be working in acts and seeing. Yeah.

uh fellow sheep over there in uganda and other places where we're all really now you know we're not in different flocks you know under Christ but in our organizational purposes we have Yeah. Yeah. Thank you.

I'd like to add Isaiah to this and the contrast of the warrior and the shepherd there.

Because in Isaiah 59, he shows God is a warrior who puts on armor.

and fights injustice. But the same warrior in Isaiah 40, is a shepherd who tethers the lambs. So I think that's another reinforcement of what you've been talking about so well.

Yeah. And thank you. There are too many instances to discuss everything.

My occupational hazard is to go in too deep too fast.

So I would say with both of those instances, and thank you for those, that Those both strike me as characteristics of being a shepherd, right? You have to defend your flock.

You're fighting against enemies, those who would take them, those who would kill them, the wild animals, thieves, right? It strikes me one of the challenges in the Palestinian in the West Bank right now is that settlers are taking the flocks of Palestinian herders as a way to, remove their livelihoods, right? So we still see this sort of thing happening, other instances of it as well.

So that need to defend, but at the same time, right? Almost with the same breath or the next breath to be able to care for the flock to this this this it's not just one role right it's it's a movement back and forth between them I see a question from Art Lees about a mixture of Greek with Hebrew in the Torah.

and whether there are Greek words to explore in the context of warrior shepherd. I'm not sure I know what you mean by the mixture of Greek with Hebrew in the Torah.

But yes, of course, right, I'm a scholar, so I have to answer yes to this.

there are Greek words to explore the context of warrior and shepherd. I'd have to do a little bit more work about what I might recommend with that, but If you have other questions, maybe we can work out an email exchange for that. Jeff? Yeah, could I interdict something right here? I think, with your permission, Mark, I'm going to send these slides out to everybody.

So you can process this through in your own way, in your own time. But Art, I, you know...

Dr. George provided us some Greek words and Hebrew words for shepherd and warrior.

And I think if we triangulate between those concepts, that would probably start to answer these questions.

because they are out there. The second thing I would say is in the biblical principles for military ethics bible studies we look at Jesus's interaction with the centurion in Luke 7.

And it's almost this duty of care.

where you can't deny that the Centurion is a warrior, but at the same time, he isn't identified for his military competence, he's identified for his ability to care for others beyond his immediate command.

And I think that's an interesting text to explore these relationships.

And the second piece of that, which I think ties to Luke 7, is Jude's question or Jude's comment about the restoration of Peter by Jesus.

where you see Jesus operating as the good shepherd to put Peter back together and put him back on mission after Peter failed.

And the personal experience we have where our Lord...

brings us to a new reality of who we are and what we can accomplish because we've been called by God.

And that reference is John 21. So...

There is a lot of give and take in these concepts within scripture.

Bye.

We're getting close to our closing time. Is there anything else for the good of the group? Or any other comments? I'll throw out one more thing I was just thinking about that maybe everybody finds useful is you know, as thinking about the idea of, okay, if I am a shepherd leader, and I'm called to have the resources necessary to take care of these other people you know, who's my leader, right? And obviously scripture says that it's God. But then the question is, do I really depend on him in that way? Am I really trusting that he truly is equipping me when I don't

necessarily see all the things that are happening, right? And And do I look at him as my shepherd in all things, the one that is leading me on on the path of life? And, you know, there's times where I think all of us can go through difficulties or challenges and you find...

is that still there, right? And so, you know, just something maybe all of us can think about is how do I look on God as my shepherd? How do I see Him equipping me. What do I need from Him to help me? And I think it's good to remember as a young military officer that I kind of remind them is it's not all just – the way you protect and you care for your soldiers and everything is to also prepare them for battle, which also means you're going to treat them because ultimately that's how you end up protecting them. If you're too soft on them, they will fail at the crucible, right? So, So sometimes you can get this image of it's just, you know, green pastures and the lamb on my shoulders or whatever. But there's also a...

toughening up, you know, that, you know, you can see that within the animal kingdom where the moms, the way they treat their little kids, you know, it's like, okay, you got to start walking now. You got to do this. You got to do that. And so, so there's that, um, Just a reminder sometimes for the young officers that as a Christian officer, you can also be a very tough officer too and be good.

I think Noel has his hand up. Yes, I do. And actually, of course, since I put my hand up, various comments have got my brain going even in other directions. So I'm not even sure I want to ask this question now, especially at this time when we're almost to the close, but I was thinking, how does a chaplain, my background Army, British Army, Command, Infantry, How does a chaplain these days minister as a shepherd, a loving shepherd, looking after his sheep? to one of those sheep who comes to him or her for counsel.

and yet their belief system is completely different to that belief system of the chaplain. Obviously Christian and I'm thinking in terms of things like the marriage, sexuality and so on. It can go into lots of other areas as well, but particularly those are on my heart.

Just wondering if there's any observations on that. It may be too big a subject to just deal with today.

I think one of the things, Noel, and I think it's ongoing for any Christian in the military, The chaplains tend to have a chaplain insignia on them, which makes them marked exemplars for this.

But I think all Christians struggle with this, especially in pluralistic contexts.

in the military and in the u.s army chaplaincy we have this concept of a ministry of presence which really translates is we don't kick sheep out of the flock.

We realize there's one flock and Actually, we use the idea that we are sheepdogs at best. We aren't the shepherd. Jesus is the shepherd. We're sheepdog. We work for the shepherd.

And I think that we help the shepherd keep the flock together.

And I think the first thing chaplains do is we have to grant ourselves the responsibility and accountability that we don't kick people away from the flock.

And that comes up really important in terms of who we counsel.

how we counsel, which means we don't necessarily become this anything goes kind of person. But at the same time, we understand there are people who see things differently and are struggling with these issues themselves.

And we have to find ways of respectful conversations in doing that. A very quick story is um some chaplains and it was a derogatory term used to call me mary and zos or something because i would perform ceremonies for anybody And that does not necessarily mean sexual orientation. It means those who did not pass any individual chaplains test for if they would marry something. In other words, go talk to Zos because he'll talk to anybody. I saw it as a compliment.

But I think that's how chaplains have to deal with things in a military standpoint.

This is what I believe, but I'm here and I'm here for you.

It's Jesus and Nicodemus talking or Jesus and Zacchaeus or Jesus and the Pharisees talking.

We always hold those things in tension. Sorry, long answer, but I think it is the question to ask, I think.

Yeah, I like that thought that we're sheep dogs, and that Jesus is the shepherd.

Just an observation. Yeah. Thank you very much. You're welcome, Noel.

Can I add to that? Thank you for the question. It's a really challenging question, but I also think about Jesus' example of the Samaritan. Shifting metaphors here, images, but that ability to care, to pick up on what Jeff said, seems to me to be part of that. If Jesus was the good shepherd and could use the Samaritan, as the example of commendable behavior. I think that also needs to be in part of the mix.

Can I come back to something Andy said about preparing troops for battle? I agree.

uh with that and also i would add and i didn't go into this one of the things that's that's baked into the shepherd imagery for um a leader is that while the leader has all this responsibility for the flock, the flock has to trust the leader.

And the sheep knows the shepherd's voice, right? Why would the sheep go to the shepherd's voice if the shepherd is beating them all the time or doesn't feed them? So I think that the ability to build trust and that your troops those for whom you're responsible know to, you're reliable I think that's a piece of this, right? In some ways, it seems to me that's also baked into the person of Jesus.

that Jesus is a reliable person to talk to. He's not gonna pull the rug out from underneath you, right? We don't talk about...

Jesus as just, you know, I got to do this, but a little quirky, you know, I don't hear conversation about Jesus is pretty unreliable. The God of the Old Testament That's a little dodgier, some of the more challenging texts in the Old Testament.

God has a temper. And you don't want to be on the wrong side of that. The fear of the Lord is sometimes just...

sheer fear because it's a very We don't control God. We don't have God in a box. And God's free to act as God sees fit. Jesus...

as God's son, we don't see that in the New Testament. Yes, you know, overturning the tables of the money lenders in the temple. But Jesus is reliable. And that's a piece that I think also fits into this imagery of how, as shepherds, do we cultivate that experience.

Anything else I can address or that's come up? Yeah, that.

conflict that you're discussing. I wonder if that's kind of the imagery for that as the rod and the staff.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Sometimes it's to protect them from outsiders, but sometimes it's to get the sheep in line as well.

You know, I want to talk. I'm sorry.

When we're talking with young officers, I think it's important to point out to them that there's a difference between being a commander who just tells people what to do and being a commander who sees what people's needs are and then gets those needs so that they can be trained to be the best that they can be.

When I was a commander in the Air Force, my oldest son said, Dad, you have the easiest job in the world. You just tell people what to do.

And then he went to be a missionary in England. And when he was made a team leader, he responded and said, Dad, I didn't realize how tough it was to be in charge of other people and have to worry about what they're doing and how they're doing it and everything.

And so I think that it's really important that we especially emphasize that people have to have an idea of what it is they're trying to do and what kind of a person they want to be as a leader as we interact with them. Yeah.

And that was my point with my relative. He was talking about what he saw in Vietnam.

And he was watching somebody move, not sheep, but oxen.

And they had a rod with them. And he noticed that they wouldn't necessarily strike the animal with the rod.

They would tap it on the shoulder and the animal would respond to the tapping and move or change direction.

to it. So it wasn't necessarily pleasant, but nevertheless it was a guide or a guard which I think just kind of reinforces what you were saying, Rick.

Is there anything else that anyone would like to contribute? If not, I have a message from Major General Wakalo I'd like to share with everyone before we sign off.

Okay, if I could share this very quickly, and then if someone would volunteer to pray for the group, I would appreciate it.

General Wakalo gave his apologies for not being able to join us today.

But he writes this in his email to me. He says, and this brings me to a message I want to...

with my American brethren, but I think it applies to everyone. He said, during our church prayer time and during worship, I got into a trance about Kirk, who was assassinated recently.

and I saw him in the background and I heard a voice saying lying in state And that was immediately followed by a written message I saw that said forgiveness.

I was one of the people who was traumatized by his assassination, and my immediate prayer was...

let the culprit be apprehended. And thanks to Jehovah that he was arrested.

and about that message which I want to leave you to think about I see God in full understanding about that incident and more and about the gun violence and it's related in a social divide that is occurring. Let the law take its course and let national forgiveness be sought. Sincerely in Christ, Major General David Wakalo.

So I just leave that with you, that a brother halfway around the world is praying for our nation.

Would someone be so kind to pray for us? And until next month, thank you for being here. And thank you to you, Dr. George.

We appreciate this. Press.

Lord, thank you for this time. Thank you for Dr. George who spent time thinking about this and sharing his thoughts with us. Thanks to you.

for what you revealed to him, Lord. And Lord, it's just so great that not only do we have your words, but we have you modeling everything.

your words in order for us to follow, right? And thank you, Lord, that you have entrusted us too with sometimes taking that role as shepherd or a sheepdog but being part of helping the flock, Lord. And we just pray that we do it well, that we represent you well.

and that we take our cues from the Good Shepherd, Lord. Help everyone who is here.

uh from around the world lord help them with the issues they're dealing with and just help us to be um Good bearers of your name in Jesus Christ's precious name. Amen. Amen.

We'll see you all and peace be with you. Amen. Thank you.