

Leading by Feeding

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of leading by feeding, focusing on the central work of a pastor to feed God's people with His word. It highlights the significance of loving Jesus as the foundation for shepherding others and the necessity of prioritizing the word of Christ in all aspects of ministry. The sermon concludes by pointing to the ultimate goal of glorifying God through a life dedicated to feeding and leading others in the ways of Christ.

Scripture: John 21:15, John 14:15, Psalms 63:3, John 10:27, John 6:63

Topics: "Shepherding", "Feeding God's People"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of leading by feeding, focusing on the central work of a pastor to feed God's people with His word. It highlights the significance of loving Jesus as the foundation for shepherding others and the necessity of prioritizing the word of Christ in all aspects of ministry. The sermon concludes by pointing to the ultimate goal of glorifying God through a life dedicated to feeding and leading others in the ways of Christ.

Transcript

So before we look at the text, a few personal words of thankfulness. Since 1975, when I was ordained in Pasadena, California, at Lake Avenue Church, that's what, 46 years, only one document has hung on the wall of my study. This one.

I don't have any problem with any of you, including my son, or Ray, who hangs diplomas on your wall from colleges and high schools and wherever. No problem. That's a token of gratitude to God for the schools.

It's a celebration of love, teachers. But I just wanted to make a statement that God's call on my life to the gospel ministry, and then the churches gathering around through an ordination council to confirm that call, which is what ordination is, is the ground and sustaining grace and the goal of all my academic work. And so this is the one thing that's been on my wall for all those years.

That's one reason I bring it, to show it to you. There's a more important reason, I think. The first name right there is Raymond C. Ortlund, Sr. Now, you've got to feel the significance of this, the providence of this, the sweetness of this, that the man who shepherded me through seminary and toward ordination had a son.

And his son was the founding pastor of this church and became the man who shepherded my son toward ordination. That's a sweet providence. And I want to give public thanks to this Ray and Janie for their

significant role in this providence.

What a debt two Pipers owe two generations of Pipers owe to two generations of Ortlunds. It is, Ray, really quite, from me to your dad, from Barnes to you, incalculable. And so God is to be praised.

Now I invite you to turn to John 21, if you have a Bible or a device where you would like to follow along. And it would be wonderful if you did. John 21, I'm going to read verses 15 to 19.

Let me tell you the point of the message ahead of time and what I'm going to do with the point. And then you can look for it when we read the text. And it will be obvious to you where the point comes from, I think.

The point of this message is that the central work of the pastor is leading by feeding. So Barnabas, if there's one phrase from 40 years from now, when you think back on this message, you remember maybe it will be leading by feeding. Here's what I'm going to do with that point.

So the main point, the central work of the pastor is leading by feeding. What I'm going to do with it is ask, where does leading by feeding come from? Second, how do you do it? And third, where will it take you? All right, let's read it. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? He said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

He said to him, feed my lambs. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, tend or literally shepherd my sheep.

He said to him a third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you. And Jesus said to him, feed my sheep.

Truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands. And another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.

This, he said to him, to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. And after saying this, he said to him, follow me. So the situation is Jesus is raised from the dead.

This is his third appearance. It's by the city of Galilee. He has just performed a miracle by telling to drop their nets on the other side of the boat.

They gather 153 big fish into a net. They recognize it's Jesus. Peter dives in, goes, drags the net to the shore.

They have breakfast with Jesus. And then come these questions. Verse 15, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? Verse 16, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Verse 17, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Now, just a few weeks earlier, in John 13, verses 36 to 38, on the night of Jesus' betrayal, Peter had said this to Jesus.

Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, it was just hours away from cross. Jesus answered him, where I am going, you cannot follow now. You will follow afterward.

Peter said to him, Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I'll lay down my life for you. And Jesus answered, will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me

three times. In other words, I know four things you don't know, Peter.

One, you're going to deny me three times tonight. Two, you don't love me the way you should. Three, you cannot, therefore, follow me now.

Four, you will follow me. I love the sovereignty of Jesus. I know you're coming down, I know you're coming up.

Nothing surprises me. I've got this under control here. Your sin is certain, and your forgiveness, and your redemption, and your serving, and your following, and your rock-like role is certain.

That's an amazing statement. Here's the way Luke put it when he recorded it. Jesus says, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat.

But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned, not if, when you have turned, strengthen your brothers. So Jesus prayed for Peter.

He knew the answer. And Peter's faith, and love, and courage failed, but not utterly. He wasn't Judas.

You will follow me afterward. Yes, you will. And when you have turned, strengthen your brothers.

And the reason you're going to have strength to strengthen your brothers and do the work I call you to do is because you're going to love me then. So here we are beside the sea, three questions corresponding to three denials. I deny you, I deny you, I deny you.

I love you, I love you, I love you. And Jesus responds three times, feed my lambs, shepherd my sheep, feed my sheep. Chapter 14, he had said three times, if you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Chapter 14, verse 21, whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. Chapter 14, verse 23, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word. And now he applies that to Peter right here in this situation and his shepherding obedience.

Feed them, feed them. And that feeding interprets the shepherding. So feed, shepherd, feed.

What do you mean by shepherd the people? I mean feed them, feed them. That's what I mean by shepherd them. So feed them with what? Feeding them with what? Chapter 6, verse 35, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Chapter 6, verse 51, if anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. Chapter 6, verse 54, whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.

Now that was so bizarre, commending cannibalism, so bizarre that people just left. He's crazy. Many of his disciples, this is verse 66 of chapter 6, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him, even though Jesus had clarified what he meant.

Verse 63, it is the spirit who gives life. The flesh, the flesh is no help at all. The words, the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

It's the words. Don't leave me. I don't mean cannibalism.

It's the words. It's the words. If you want to have the life that I give, feed on my words.

My words are spirit and life. So when we come to John 21 and we hear him say, feed my sheep, feed my sheep, we understand, feed them with my word. Feed them with my word.

I am the life-giving nutrition that they will receive through the fullness of your feeding them with my word. Now, if you're tracking with me, you should ask at this point, you said the main point of the text and the message was leading by feeding. And you haven't said anything yet about leading.

You just, so are you done with the text? So my question is what happens when you feed sheep? Well, with the words of Jesus. I'll read you what happens. It's chapter 10, it goes like this.

The sheep hear his voice, his words, and he leads them out. The sheep follow him for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow for they do not know the voice of strangers.

I have other sheep that are not of this soul. I must lead them also. My sheep hear my voice, my word, and I know them and they follow me.

Faithful shepherds are so relentless in feeding with the word of Christ that true sheep hear, they taste the food of the word and they follow that shepherd. And in Barnabas, it's the only kind of following you want. You don't want non-sheep following you.

Now, if the main point is the central work of a pastor is to lead by feeding, where does it come from? Where does a pastor get that capacity? And how does he do it? And where does it lead him? Number one, where does it come from? That's right here in the text. Everybody sees it. It comes from loving Jesus.

Do you love me? Feed my sheep. Do you love me? Shepherd my sheep. Do you love me? Feed my sheep.

It's just clear, it's unmistakable. You don't need any high-level education to see that. Love for Jesus overflows in feeding the flock with the words of Jesus.

That's what lovers of Jesus do. They feed people with the words of Jesus. Now, gotta clarify something here.

Don't jump to the conclusion that loving Jesus means obeying Jesus. It doesn't mean obeying Jesus. It's the cause of obeying Jesus.

That's important. John 14, 15, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments. I've heard so many people argue loving Jesus is obedience.

It's not is. It results in obedience. They're not the same thing.

That's gonna be very important in a moment. It's gonna be very important in the second service. That's another sermon that I'm thinking about right now.

Loving Jesus means receiving the bread, drinking of the living water, and saying, that's really good. I am satisfied with that bread and that water. I am in love with that bread and that water.

That's love to Jesus. Whoever loves mother or father more than me, Jesus said, is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Peter, do you love me? Do you love me? Means, Peter, do you value me as all satisfying bread? Do you value me as all satisfying living water? Am I your soul's treasure? That's what loving Jesus is. So the first and greatest battle, Barnabas, in the ministry is to love Jesus. It's a battle.

To love him more than money. To love him more than fame. To love him more than success.

Success in the ministry. To love him more than family. To love him more than life.

The steadfast love of the Lord is better than life. Psalm 63. So give yourself to the greatest task every day.

Feed on Jesus to your soul's satisfaction. That's where leading by feeding comes from for all of us. And you know, this is an ordination message and I'm thinking mainly of Barnabas, my son.

But every one of you leads. You lead a family. You lead a small group.

You lead a friend to Christ. Everybody's a leader at some level and therefore this message is for every believer. Second question.

How do you do it? Now I'm not thinking mainly of preaching here. Though its implications for preaching are massive. Leading by feeding happens or not everywhere you open your mouth.

Everywhere you put your fingers on a keyboard with an email or a blog or a tweet. The fulcrum is feeding. Am I feeding? Am I leading by feeding? Barnabas, you're gonna be called upon to counsel people in amazing array of issues beyond your imagination right now of how bizarre and complicated they're going to be.

You're gonna be called to stand besides some dying saints with their family all around you expecting you to speak words of inestimable preciousness. You're gonna speak at weddings and banquets and conferences and school chapels and small groups and staff meetings and family devotions and gospel encounters on the street. You're gonna write books and blogs and tweets and Facebook and Instagram and who knows what technologies in the next 40 years.

And every time you open your mouth you will lead somebody somewhere. Every time you write something or say something you will feed and lead or not. Some shepherds, this is why I said a moment ago the only following you want are the sheep.

Some shepherds try to get a following, they try to grow a church, they try to lead a movement by being trendy in the way they dress, clever in the way they talk, culturally cool in their references to the latest movie, sharp in their organizational skills, stirring with their emotional stories, relationally manipulative with flattery, impressive with rationality, overwhelming with the force of their personality, shrewd in their branding. And when those methods of leading succeed and they do the church grows and the followers increase but not with the sheep. My sheep hear my voice.

And they follow me. They're hungry, Barnabas. They're scattered.

Jesus said, I have other sheep that are not of this fold. They're everywhere. You can't see them.

They're dead in sin right now. They don't look like followers of Jesus yet. And in the moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the voice of Jesus, they awaken shrewd leadership in order to grow churches other ways than the word fed, succeed to our own destruction.

Be so saturated with the word of Christ that every time you open your mouth, small group, staff meeting, counseling session, sermon, God's people feel. Let me give you a personal story. So I led a church for 33 years as a pastor.

They called me lead pastor for preaching and teachings. No, no, what was it called? Pastor for preaching and vision. That's what it was.

So I sat with 40 elders at the end. So for years and years, we had 20 to 40 elders. I was never the chairman of the eldership.

And I led the elders. How do you do that? How do you lead the elders in a church if you're not the chairman of the elders? Not by political, this is my testimony to what I tried not to do. I tried not to lead with political maneuvering.

I tried not to lead by threats. I tried not to lead by self-pitying innuendo, though I think I would be good at that. Like, oh, the burdens are so great.

You men just don't understand. You should go along with what I say because the burdens are just so great. It takes one to know one, right? I hate that.

I could go off on a tangent here about politics, but I won't. Not by currying favor, not by taking people out to lunch, not by creating factions. How did you do it, Piper? Here, put it in a little testimony.

So we're coming to the end of an elders' meeting, and Tim Johnson, remember him, Barnabas? What a brother. A man in whom there's no guile, led our elders for decades, two decades maybe. So Tim Johnson, he comes to the end, been a rousing discussion.

Meeting's coming to a close. He looks up at the elders, and he says, Pastor John is a teaching machine. What did that mean? What did he mean by that? Because I'm just sitting there, one of the elders, you know.

What he meant was, Pastor John walks into these meetings every three weeks with a relentless orientation on the word of God, and with explanations of texts that relate to the issues at hand. And I'll tell you what, if you bring Bible verses to bear with true, contextually accurate interpretation relating to the issue at hand, you lead sheep and elders. The man who knows his Bible best, applies it best, winsomely, humbly, speaking the truth into it, doesn't matter what rank he holds, doesn't matter what office he holds, eyes turn.

Okay, I could name one or two other elders that we had over the years that stopped my mouth with text. My way didn't win, because he understood the text better. Oh, that was wonderful.

That was wonderful, to know that elders had been raised up that could put my mouth to silence by the word of God. So Barnabas, when you set your heart to lead God's people into faith, and hope, and love, and righteousness, and justice, and mercy, and missions, and courage, and strength, and Christ-exalting joy, remember this. In the next 40 years, so you'll be 70 soon, 77, 76, 77, so in the next 40 years of your ministry, a hundred winds are going to blow, with every one of them carrying a new idea about how to lead church.

It will be very discouraging to read those magazines and those blogs, and be, oh no, here comes another idea that I have to. So they're gonna blow over your life, relentlessly for the next 40 years. One thing will not change.

It will be as true in 2061 as it is today. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. You don't want any other following.

So you just let his voice be heard in every staff meeting, in every devotion, in every chapel, in every conference, in every sermon, in every conversation. Final question, very briefly, where does that lead? Where does leading by feeding lead? Let's read it, verses 18 to 19. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, Peter, you're gonna stretch out your hands, nice.

This is a picture of crucifixion. You're gonna stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you don't want to go. This, he said, to show by what kind of death he was, he could have just said to die, and he said by what kind of death he was to glorify God.

And after saying this, he said, follow me. Now you remember, just weeks ago, Peter had said, Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I'll lay down my life for you. And Jesus said, you're not gonna follow me now, and you're not ready, and you don't love me as you ought, and you don't have the courage to do what you're saying you're gonna do.

You don't, you're not ready, but you will follow me afterward. Now you're ready. I'm in it, Peter, I'm in it.

You're gonna follow me all the way down. You're gonna be crucified. That's why I'm testing you.

With that, every romantic notion of leadership evaporates. Oh, I thought this was gonna be cool. A big following, a big church, lots of great music.

It means crucifixion for Peter. So I don't know, Barnabas, whether the Lord will call you or me to martyrdom. In a sense, that particular detail is not the main point.

Verse 19 points to the main point. Jesus said this to show by what kind of death he would glorify God. Living and dying to the glory of God, that's the point.

That's where leading by feeding leads. If we feed on Christ daily and find our deepest joy in him, and if what comes from that overflows in feeding others, God will be glorified, whether we live or whether we die. So there's no better way, Barnabas, than leading by feeding.

There's no better way to get ready to live fruitfully and to get ready to die than to lead by feeding. So Father, as we sing again and as we set Barnabas apart for this great work of leading by feeding, would you do the miracle that this morning would be for him in particular a line in the sand, a sealing, a work of the Holy Spirit? Paul said some amazing things about what happened when the elders laid hands on people, that you might grant him from this day forward to be bumped up to a new level of joy in feeding on you and leading by feeding. I pray this in Jesus' great name, amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/leading-by-feeding/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net