

The SHEPHERD
AS
LEADER

John MacArthur
GENERAL EDITOR



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INTRODUCTION

The first Shepherds' Conference was held on March 19, 1980, at Grace Community Church, where 159 men gathered to focus on the theme of pastoral ministry. From the beginning, the goal was to live out Paul's mandate to Timothy: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

What started as a small event has, by God's grace, blossomed into an international movement with thousands in attendance each spring. Over the years, pastors from every state and nearly 100 countries have come to the conference to be challenged and encouraged in areas of preaching, theology, leadership, discipleship, and counseling. My own heart has been deeply blessed by the faithful men I've met and fellowshiped with at the conference.

Since its inception, the Shepherds' Conference has featured hundreds of sermons specifically directed at pastors and church leaders. Because the truth of God's Word is timeless, those messages are still as rich and powerful today as when they were first preached. That is why I was so grateful when Harvest House Publishers approached me about publishing this second volume—a collection of the most memorable Shepherds' Conference messages on the topic of leadership.

Today more than ever, the church needs a restored model of leadership that is based on God's Word and that brings Him glory, which is why

a book on this subject is so timely. The aim of this volume is to encourage pastors to fulfill their pastoral mandate: to exemplify the truest kind of leadership, which according to Christ, demands service, sacrifice, and selflessness.

This book is for all spiritual leaders, whether you've been to the Shepherds' Conference or not. As you read it, my prayer is that your passion for truth will burn brighter and your resolve for Christ's glory will grow stronger as you seek to serve and lead His church.

For the Great Shepherd,
John MacArthur

HUMILITY: AN ESSENTIAL FOR MINISTRY

“Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me,
and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me;
for the one who is least among all of you,
this is the one who is great.”

LUKE 9:48

HUMILITY: AN ESSENTIAL FOR MINISTRY

John MacArthur

Shepherds' Conference 2005

Luke 9:46–56

It is easy to be proud when we are right. Our theology is right. Our understanding of the Word of God is right. Our view of Scripture as the inerrant revelation of the holy God is right. Our understanding of the gospel is right. We have the right message to preach to the world. It is difficult to be humble when we are right, for we can become intolerant and heavy-handed. The reminder to be humble is a helpful one. The reminder to speak the truth in love and to be patient is necessary. Ironically, we live in a world that exalts self-love, self-satisfaction, self-promotion. For the world, it is considered virtuous to exalt self. But as pastors, we are forced to live in a counterculture way by being models of selfless humility in a world that sees that as a weakness.

The Perils of Pride

Children of God are commanded to be humble because Scripture sees pride as an ugly sin that the devil committed along with the other angels who joined his rebellion. Pride is the sin that led to Adam and Eve being thrown out of the Garden. It is that damning sin that produced rebellion against God and His law, for it was pride that sought to dethrone God,

strike at His absolute perfect sovereignty, and replace Him with self. This kind of pride naturally grips every human heart.

Pride is the reason it is difficult to come to Christ. After all, who wants to hate and deny self? Yet Jesus taught just that message—a message that one cannot come into His kingdom if he does not hate himself. It is tough to refuse to associate any longer with the person you are—to set aside your own desires, ambitions, dreams, goals, and come empty-handed, broken, and contrite to Christ.

It wasn't too many years ago when a wide-eyed first-year seminary student asked me, "Dr. MacArthur, how did you finally overcome pride?" A genuine but silly question because no one will ever overcome pride until this fallen flesh is forsaken. Battling pride will continue until the day of glorification. However, this does not give people an excuse to hold onto their pride. Pride has to be broken for individuals to be saved, and it has to be continually broken for individuals to be sanctified.

The Pastor's Pride

My fear is that pastors who attend conferences like the Shepherds' Conference, who read the right books, and who accumulate the right knowledge may be motivated and energized to go out and fight the battle for the truth in the wrong way. I fear that well-equipped pastors are often too ready to pound on people who are slow to learn and accept certain truths. Pastor, the more you know and the more mature you are, then the more impact your ministry has, the more blessing you experience upon your life, and the more likely you are to feed your pride.

This is what the apostle Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians when the Lord sent him a messenger of Satan; I believe that is a reference to a group of false teachers who came to Corinth and troubled the church. The chaos this group caused devastated the apostle. Paul experienced much agony as he watched a church be shredded by false teaching—a church into which he had invested so much of his life. He even prayed three times for the Lord to remove this thorn, but he recognized that the Lord had sent it to pierce his otherwise proud flesh. Paul said the reason God sent this message of Satan was to keep him from exalting himself.

**It is when you come to the end of yourself that you
experience the power of God.**

Paul had seen many revelations, had been to heaven and back, witnessed things unspeakable, was caught up to the third heaven, and had personal private appearances of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 12:1-7). This man had plenty to be proud of, and when the Lord needed to humble His otherwise proud servant, He sent a demon in the purposes of His providence. In the midst of this pain, Paul knew that God's grace was sufficient and that God's power would be perfected in his weakness. Beloved, it is when you come to the end of yourself that you experience the power of God.

A Lesson on Humility

In Luke chapter 9, Jesus taught a lesson on humility. At this point, the disciples had been with Jesus for more than two-and-a-half years, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They were constantly in the presence of Jesus, and every location was a classroom and everything was a lesson. These followers experienced relentless teaching, and everything Jesus taught them was absolutely right. Every word Jesus spoke came from a divine mind and because of this, the disciples were taught perfectly.

In addition, the disciples were given authority to represent Jesus Christ by proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom from town to town and village to village. These men were given so much authority that if they went into a town that did not receive their message, they were to pronounce a judgment on those people, shake the dust off their feet, and leave. The disciples were also given the power to cast out demons and to heal diseases. Common, ordinary men received an immense amount of truth, authority, and divine power to wield in the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, their flesh was having a difficult time fighting pride, and it was necessary for our Lord to teach them what it meant to be humble. Jesus did exactly that in Luke chapter 9, and Jesus' class on humility applies to us as well.

In the beginning of Luke 9 we read that the disciples were given power and authority to cast out demons, heal diseases, proclaim the kingdom, pronounce judgment on cities, and shake the dust off their feet. With this power and authority they went “preaching the gospel and healing everywhere” (Luke 9:6). To add to that, Peter, John, and James were taken up to a mountain with Jesus, where He pulled aside His flesh and was transfigured (verses 28-29). On that mountain, those three disciples saw the shining glory of God and met Moses and Elijah. These men experienced an astonishing, unique, and unequaled event.

With all that they had experienced, it was difficult for the disciples to stay humble. So as they came down the mountain, they had an argument “as to which of them might be the greatest” (9:46). You can imagine what was said during that argument. One of them may have said, “Well, you never know, it could be me.” And James could have responded, “Well if it was going to be you, you would have been on the mountain with us.” Instantly, the group would have been narrowed to three. One might have said, “We were taken up on the mountain, you weren’t.” Then another may have chimed in, “In the last village we visited, how many people did you heal?” The answer would’ve come, “Well, I had some minor healings.” The retort, “Ha! I had five major healings.” One can just imagine the argument taking place between the disciples.

It is important to remember that the disciples are listed in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts. In each of the lists, three groups of four disciples are mentioned. The groups appear in the order of their descending intimacy with Christ. Every time those lists are given, each disciple stays in his group, and the first name in each group never changes. This means that there were leaders over each of the groups. Peter was the first name listed in the most intimate group. He was the leader amongst the other leaders. So to put it simply, there was a pecking order. The first group was very bold. Peter was in this group along with James and John, also known as the Sons of Thunder. And because the disciples lived in a world of hierarchical understanding, they were arguing over who the greatest was by comparing all of their spiritual experiences, opportunities to display power, personal moments with Jesus, and even the incredible event on the mountain.

Evidently the argument was so intense that James and John asked their mother to go to Jesus and plead their case to sit at His right and left hands. The Sons of Thunder did this because their mother was related to Jesus' mother, and they assumed they had the inside family track. These men had the right message and were God's chosen representatives, yet they still faced the issue of pride. In this text, Jesus taught the disciples—and us—a needed lesson on humility.

Pride Ruins Unity

The first principle Jesus taught is that pride ruins unity. Luke wrote, "An argument started among them" (9:46). The Greek word translated "argument" entails a battle in which unity is fractured. The disciples were a team, and they were not supposed to be competing with one another. This first generation of gospel preachers needed to give their lives for Christ and yield their hearts to one another. Instead, they were destroying their unity in the midst of a crucial mission. Pride is capable of destroying the most intimate kind of unity. Even Jesus, while on the verge of suffering on the cross, spoke to the disciples about His own personal suffering yet could not hold their attention because they were too busy alienating one another with their desire for personal glory. Pride has the capability of destroying relationships.

For example, pride destroyed relationships between the believers in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 12:20, Paul wrote that he feared a visit to their church because he was concerned that he would find among them strife, jealousy, anger, disputes, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances. He did not know if he could handle the factions that had stemmed from pride.

Pride is capable of causing much harm, and that is why Paul wrote in Philippians 1:27 that believers were to be "striving together for the faith of the gospel." He urged the Philippians to not compete with one another but to maintain unity:

If there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent

on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (2:1–8).

As a pastor you can preach on the topic of unity until you are blue in the face, but as long as pride exists in the church, it will continue to destroy relationships.

Pride Raises Relativity

The second principle Jesus taught is that pride raises relativity. The essence of the argument is to determine who is comparatively greater. Pride desires superiority over others, seeks to elevate itself, and compares itself with everyone else. That is exactly what Jesus accused the Pharisees of doing. These leaders loved to be noticed by men, loved the place of honor at banquets, loved the chief seats in the synagogues, loved respectful greetings in the marketplace, and loved to be called rabbi. A proud heart is incessantly fighting for the top and raising relativity by comparing itself with others. However, Jesus had and continues to have a different definition of greatness: “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11).

Pride Reveals Depravity

A third principle Jesus taught is that pride reveals sin and depravity. Luke wrote that Jesus knew “what they were thinking in their heart” (9:47). Jesus always knows what is in the heart of a person. How would you like to spend three years with God constantly reading your thoughts? That may be the greatest evidence of God’s grace in using imperfect vessels. Though He knows all our thoughts, He still utilizes fallible and weak people.

No matter how much you may try to avoid creating disunity or some sort of spiritual pecking order, given enough time, the sins of the heart will still come out. Time and truth go hand in hand. A proud pastor may keep his pride under wraps for a while, but eventually the congregation will find out that he is driven by a proud heart. That is one of the main reasons some pastors have a short ministry.

The Lord, in His response, was not reacting only because of the damage pride causes, nor because of the relativity that occurs, but because of its sinfulness. Jesus knew what the disciples were thinking in their hearts as He “took a child and stood him by His side” (9:47). It was a child small enough to hold (see Mark 9:36), and yet grown enough to stand up before Jesus. This image depicts a person who comes to the Lord with no achievements, no accomplishments, and void of any self-worth. God does not care how many degrees you have, how widely you’ve read, how clever you are in communication, or how strong a leader you are. The only way you can approach Him is as a meek and humble child.

In that culture, children were considered the weakest, most ignored, and most vulnerable of all people. They were viewed as having little value, and many of them didn’t survive to become adults. Jesus used this little child to teach the disciples that they were viewing themselves as kings when they were acting like children. The sin of pride fails to recognize the complete and utter dependence on God that a person needs to have. Pride reveals sin and depravity.

Pride Rejects Deity

Fourth, pride rejects deity. Jesus said in Luke 9:48, “Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” The child is representative of those who are Jesus’ disciples. Jesus made it clear that unless one becomes like a child, he will not enter the kingdom. Therefore, those who reject Christ reject the presence of God in other believers. These children of God are precious to the Lord, and they must be precious to us as well.

As pastors, may we never say that we do not have time for other Christians, because the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. The disciples felt that Jesus was wasting His time by interacting with children, but note

His response to them: “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14). We must be very careful when it comes to rejecting, offending, or belittling other believers, because when we do, we’re offending Christ, who dwells in them. Pride thinks it’s better than another believer in whom Christ dwells, and thus pride rejects deity.

Pride Reverses Reality

The fifth principle Jesus taught is that pride reverses reality. “The one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great” (Luke 9:48). This truth upsets the world and overturns conventional wisdom. Worldly wisdom claims that whoever is the most popular, the most widely known, the most influential, and the most powerful is the greatest. Pride attempts to reverse the reality that it’s the servant who is the greatest. Paul stressed this truth in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 when he wrote about the Lord establishing His church with not many noble, not many mighty, but instead the lowly, the base, and the weak. He did this so that the glory might be His and that there would be no other explanation for the existence of the church other than the purposes of God.

Beloved, we are the lowly and the least. Our battle should focus on seeing who can serve the most, because “whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 20:26). Pride attempts to reverse reality, and this is seen even in the Christian world. People who are honored, popular, and have accomplished all kinds of things tend to become relentlessly self-promoting. As ministers of God, this is a battle we have to fight, and we are to strive to be lowly like Jesus.

Pride Reacts with Exclusivity

Sixth, pride reacts with exclusivity. For this lesson we look at Luke 9:49: “John answered and said, ‘Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us.’” Here we see John reacting with exclusivity. John was a dynamic, driven man; he was not meek. What did not help was that he had just come down from the mountain of transfiguration. It is in the midst of

all this that John came across someone casting out demons in the name of Jesus Christ, and John attempted to hinder him because that person was not one of the disciples who followed Jesus. John basically said, “Hey, you’re not in our group. You don’t wear our label.”

We read that this individual not only tried to cast out demons, he was casting them out in the name of Jesus. Maybe he was one of the seventy who were sent out, but he was not a part of the Twelve. To be doing something in Jesus’ name indicates consistency with Jesus’ identity and mission. Apparently this individual was a believer, though not an apostle, and he was serving for the glory of Christ. The original Greek text indicates that the man kept doing what he was doing, and John and some others were trailing along, trying to stop him. They did this because he wasn’t in the group.

Pride is always sectarian and narrow. This man was not an unbeliever like Simon Magus, who was trying to buy the Holy Spirit’s power (Acts 8:18-19). However, he was not directly affiliated with Jesus’ group of disciples, and John had a problem with that.

I sometimes get questioned why I associate with a specific organization or person, and why they associate with me. If I were to limit my associations only to people in my group, then the world would be a lonely place. Pride wants to do exactly that. Pride says, “I know more than you. I don’t know if I can work with you. You need correction. You need help. You’re not quite there. Once you get there, then I’ll work with you.” Humility says, “If you’re doing this in the name of Christ and doing your best to serve Christ, I’ll come alongside you,” because there is latitude and generosity among the humble.

Jesus made it clear that there is no middle ground. If someone is for Christ and is doing his best to serve Christ, then stop trying to hinder him. Jesus replied to John, “Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you” (Luke 9:50). The true church is a very diverse place. I have been all over the world, and it is evident that cultures, styles, and expressions of worship vary from region to region. Though I might do certain things differently, if they are for Christ, then I am called to not hinder that effort. But it’s difficult to be humble when you think you’re right. We must humble ourselves and realize that we are all still in-process.

**Humility belongs to those who understand that the
way down is the way up.**

Humility pursues unity by seeking to exalt others. Humility refuses relative comparisons. Humility purifies the inner person of all selfishness. Humility belongs to those who exalt God alone as the object of worship, and recognizes that they should not reject fellow believers, but honor and love them. Humility belongs to those who understand that the way down is the way up. Humility is characteristic of those who embrace the diversity of true believers.

Pride Restrains Mercy

The seventh and final principle Jesus taught is that pride restrains mercy. As we approach the end of Luke 9, we read that the Galilean ministry has ended and the days were approaching for Jesus' ascension to Jerusalem and ultimately the cross (verse 51). The scene changes, but the lesson on humility continues, and here we find an illustration of how pride restrains mercy. To show mercy is to be generous, kind, and selfless. The opposite is a lack of mercy, which is reserved for the rankest kind of people—those filled with vengeance, vitriol, and viciousness. On this occasion, we read that some of the disciples were merciless: "He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?'" (Luke 9:52-54).

The Samaritans were a mixed race of Semite pagans left over from the Northern Kingdom. After the Northern Kingdom was invaded by the Assyrians, the people who were left intermarried with pagans and became loyal to the Assyrian king. They were hated by the Jews because they were considered to be half-breeds who had rejected their race and their faith.

While the Jews rejected the Samaritans, Jesus did not. In John 4, we read about ministering to these people because the gospel was intended for

the Gentiles too. So in Luke 9, Jesus visited a Samaritan village to preach the kingdom. As He approached, Jesus sent out messengers to make preparations. However, the townspeople rejected Jesus and prevented Him from coming. They refused Him because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem, and they despised the Jews. Because the Samaritans were not allowed to worship in Jerusalem, they had to build their own place of worship at Gerazim. To make matters worse, in 128 BC, their temple at Gerazim was destroyed. This made them hate the Jews even more.

When James and John saw this rejection, they asked the Lord, “Do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” Well, that’s a strange reaction to unbelief. They didn’t show a missionary heart. And when did these disciples ever have the ability to express such a power? Where did they get that idea? Remember that they had just been with Elijah at the transfiguration, and most likely they were recalling an incident that is recorded in 2 Kings 1.

There, we read that Ahaziah, the king of the Northern Kingdom, sent 50 men along with a captain to take Elijah prisoner. When the captain saw Elijah, he said, “O man of God, the king says, ‘Come down’” (verse 9), which was another way of saying, “You’re under arrest.” Elijah answered, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty” (verse 10). And fire came down from heaven, and consumed the men. The foolish king sent another group of men, and the captain of this group said, “O man of God, thus says the king, ‘Come down quickly’” (verse 11). Elijah answered, “If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty” (verse 12). Once again the fire of God came down from heaven, and this group was consumed.

The king sent a third group. At least this captain was rational—he came before Elijah, bowed on his knees, and pleaded, “O man of God, please let my life and the lives of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight” (verse 13). He continued, “Behold fire came down from heaven and consumed the first two captains of fifty with their fifties: but now let my life be precious in your sight” (verse 14). As a result, the angel of the Lord said to Elijah:

“Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.” So he arose and went down with him to the king. Then he said to him, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron—is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word?—therefore you shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die’” (verses 15-16).

We learn in verse 17 that the king died “according to the word of the LORD.”

Going back to Luke 9, the disciples remembered what Elijah had done and wanted to call fire down from heaven as well. Instead of receiving confirmation, however, the disciples received a rebuke from the Lord: “He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.’ And they went on to another village” (verses 55-56).

Jesus was on a mission of mercy, but the disciples’ pride restrained their mercy. We can never turn the opponents of the gospel into the enemy. If we attack everyone who disagrees with us by labeling them, assaulting them, and calling them names, then we are distancing the mission field from ourselves. The lost are not the enemy; they are the mission field. The fire will come one day, but until that day, we are commissioned to participate in a mission of mercy.

That little Samaritan village was saved from physical fire. And later we read in Acts 8 that Philip, a deacon in the early church, preached in Samaria. Perhaps many of the Samaritans were also saved from the eternal flame by Philip’s preaching.

As pastors, we are on a mission of mercy, and we cannot alienate the very people we are called to reach. Yet pride will do just that because pride restrains mercy. We know the truth, and we have the truth. But we should not let this knowledge make us proud; rather, we are to preach the truth with love and humility. Jesus said, “Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful. And be humble, as Christ who humbled himself.”

PRAYER

Father, Your Word is precious. Your Word is rich. Your Word is powerful. May we learn well these principles on humility. Jesus could have brought down fire from heaven, but instead, He just went to another place. Help us manifest all the characteristics of humility and none of the ugly characteristics of pride. We commend ourselves again to Your grace and to Your Word, which is able to build us up and give an inheritance to us, which we wait for with joy. In Christ's name, Amen.