“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” (1 Peter 5:1-4 NIV)

As Christian leaders, we desire to lead people to where God wants them to be which is noble and right, but we must remember that we are to do it Jesus’ way. The Apostle Peter here reminds us that Jesus’ way is to lead like a shepherd of God’s flock. In his book, Lead Like a Shepherd, Dr. Larry Osborne outlines three leadership principles gleaned from the way shepherds lead sheep in contrast to the way that cowboys lead their cattle.

1. **Shepherds lead by relationship.**
Shepherds care for their sheep so well that the sheep learn to trust in the shepherd’s voice. This trust enables the shepherd to lead the flock from the front guiding the sheep by the sound of his voice and his example.

In contrast, cowboys lead from the back of the herd using dogs who “nip at the heels” of the animals to keep them moving at the cowboy’s desired pace. They also lead with a whip and a gun, controlling the flock by fear and intimidation.

Like shepherds, leaders must care for and build relationally with those they lead. People willingly follow those whom they know care for them and lead from the front which is leading by example.

2. **Shepherds lead at a measured pace.**
Shepherds move their flocks at the “speed of the sheep.” They ensure that all of their sheep get to their destination at a pace that is best for the sheep, not the shepherd. They don’t become angry with stragglers because they understand that every individual has a different pace.

 Shepard-like spiritual leaders take their cues from Jesus. They’re filled with compassion and concern for the weak and burdened. They offer help, rest, and a lighter load; not a tongue-lashing or a spiritual beatdown.  

In contrast, cowboys drive their herds as fast as possible, and get frustrated with stragglers because they need to get the herd to market. If an animal falls behind and is unable to be coerced to keep up with the rest, they are often left behind or shot as to not impede the speed of the herd because for them, “time is money.”

Like shepherds, leaders need to meet people where they are and graciously lead them to where God wants them to be. Leaders don’t acquiesce and appease the sheep, letting them stay as they are, but lead them to God’s destination at a reasonable pace.

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1 Lead Like a Shepherd, by Dr. Larry Osborne. P. 136.
3. **Shepherds know and pursue their sheep.**
Shepherds know each of their sheep and know when one is missing. If one gets lost or wanders off, the shepherd will leave the flock in a pen to pursue the lost sheep. Shepherds care for each of their sheep and do everything in their power to get them to their destination.

If one of a cowboy’s herd gets lost or falls behind, it is usually left behind. It is financial loss for the cowboy for sure, but not as big of a loss as if the rest of the herd does not make it to market in time.

Like shepherds, leaders need to know those they lead individually and take the time to lead individuals not just groups. This involves significant time; therefore, leaders need to shepherd through other leaders multiplying their effectiveness.

**Discussion Questions:**
- From the above leadership principles outlined, which one stands out to you the most and why?
- When have you led more like a cowboy than a shepherd? What can you do to lead more like a shepherd than a cowboy?

**Prayer:**
- Pray for wisdom and understanding to lead like a shepherd.
- Pray for the current people in our groups that we lead.