

Redeeming Power

From Control to Compassion

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In Ezekiel 34, God uses the powerful metaphor of shepherding to speak to you, as men, about how you are to be husbands, fathers, office-bearers, bosses and friends.

Shepherds had power over their sheep. They decided where the sheep went, when they rested, what they ate and whether they were protected or exposed. The shepherd was the one who determined whether sheep thrived or languished.

And when danger came, the shepherd would make the decision if he would risk his life for the safety of the sheep or if he would protect himself. The question was always before the shepherd: Do the sheep exist for me? Or do I exist for my sheep?

Brothers – this is the same question that God puts before you: Do the sheep entrusted to your care **experience a shepherd who is concerned for their well-being** and flourishing as children of God? Or do they experience dominance, harshness, and selfishness?

In Ezekiel 34, God is very direct and he rebukes the shepherds for using their power for themselves: feeding themselves, ruling with force and harshness, neglecting the wounded, and choosing comfort over protection. The result was scattered and exposed sheep – sheep who were afraid, vulnerable, and in danger. Sheep who went astray.

God strongly condemns the way the shepherds misused their power and hurt his sheep. But notice that God does not condemn shepherding itself. For in reality, the authority and power he had given to the shepherds **was meant to be a gift to his people.**

That power was meant to provide, to protect, to guide and nourish those under their care. It was meant to help them grow in their love and worship and walk with God.

And so, through Ezekiel 34, God asks you: What kind of shepherd are you? How are you using the power God has given you? Are you ruling harshly and in a controlling way? Or are you blessing and nourishing the sheep entrusted to you by creating a life-giving environment for them to flourish and deepen their walk with God?

It takes courage to examine your own heart here. It takes humility to consider the possibility that you have used the power you have been given to wound rather than to heal.

Brothers, I want to encourage you not to distance yourself from this consideration – misusing power does not necessarily look like constant abuse, domination or narcissism. Even good and godly men can misuse their power in subtle ways.

So we want to take a closer look, not only examining where we struggle or fail but also looking for ways to grow. Ways to redeem the power that God has given you in your various roles.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD-GIVEN POWER

To slow this down a bit – let's be clear on what kind of power you have, and what its purpose is.

First, each of you has been given **relational power** – the ability to influence and affect others. You will see this

at work every day. If you come home from work stressed and irritable and your family has to tiptoe around your mood – that is relational power.

When you listen to your wife's concerns and she feels valued, or when you dismiss her and she withdraws – that is relational power.

Every one of us – young or old, male or female – has the ability to **affect and influence others**. This is an important gift from God that must be stewarded well.

But in addition to this, men receive something more from God. He also gives you specific **positional power**. This is authority given to you by God because of the position you hold as a husband, father, leader, or boss. (Boyfriends – you do not yet have this power, but if you marry this is something you will be given by the nature of the role you will carry as husband).

This power is not something you earn or something you deserve because of who you are or your abilities. It comes from God – the one who holds all authority.

Positional power means that there are people under your care – not because they are less than you or less capable – but because God has entrusted them to you: wives, children, employees, church members. And God has given that authority so that those entrusted to you might experience safety, stability, spiritual growth, and flourishing. God creates leadership and headship so that his sheep will flourish. So that they will grow in faith and trust in God – that they learn to live wisely and to love others well.

This is a significant calling on you who hold positional power. And your Saviour Jesus gives you a clear way to evaluate how you are using this positional power. He describes rulers in Mark 10 who “*lord it over*” others and “*exercise authority over them*.” This is the first pattern – **Power Over**. It is dominating, controlling, fear-based, and self-serving. It benefits the shepherd at the expense of the sheep.

But then Jesus says something that every Christian man with positional power needs to hear: “***It shall not be so among you.***” Jesus says that whoever would be great must be a servant. So, the opposite of power over is not giving up power – that is what the world suggests – it is **redeeming power**. It is using power as Jesus did – to serve. As **Power Under**.

Look at Jesus and his compassionate heart. He held all authority in heaven and earth – yet he made himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant (Philippians 2). He bent low. He touched the unclean, associated with sinners, welcomed children, answered questions, pursued the lost, washed feet, and ultimately laid down his life for the sheep. This is Power Under – strength and authority used sacrificially for the blessing of others.

Power Under is not passive. It is not avoiding leadership or responsibility. It is not weak. It is strong, intentional, sacrificial, and costly love.

How does this redeeming power show up in daily life?

1. POWER UNDER LOOKS LIKE SAFETY

“With force and harshness you have ruled them.” **EZEKIEL 34:4**

PHYSICALLY: It should go without saying that a home should be physically safe – free from violence and even the threat of it. You do not have to hit someone for them to be afraid of you. Neither violence nor the threat of it is acceptable to God.

But more than this – a good shepherd uses his power to create a home that is **safe for the heart**.

EMOTIONALLY: Bad shepherds create a culture of fear – emotionally and spiritually. The sheep have to hide from their shepherd – and stay out of the way of Dad to keep him happy. Bad shepherds mean the home is **not a place of rest**. The sheep are fretful and unsettled because the home is emotionally unsafe.

Yelling, shaming, mocking, sarcasm, ignoring, explosive anger, or the silent treatment are all part of that.

By contrast, a good shepherd creates a restful place. A place where the sheep can expect kindness, patience, and understanding. Where difficulties and struggles are met with calmness and the shepherd comes alongside his sheep.

Power Under also looks like being steady in your emotions rather than volatile. Your family should not have to manage your moods or anxieties by tiptoeing around you or placating you. This does not mean suppressing your emotions – it is good to share them – but it means taking responsibility for them and not expecting your family to manage your moods for you. It means not letting your emotions dictate how you exercise control over your family.

SPIRITUALLY: A good shepherd also creates a home where sin and struggle can be brought into the light and met with mercy and grace. This is not ignoring sin – but addressing it in a way that leads to repentance and growth rather than shame and fear.

It means focusing on discipling and formation rather than punishment and perfectionism. It means your sheep know it is safe to come home, even when they have failed deeply.

Can your wife and children confess sin to you? Or do they feel the need to hide it? Do they trust that you will respond with compassion?

GROWTH MINDSET: A safe home is also one where people can be limited, weak, tired, or simply different from you. They do not have to perform in order to receive your love: not in the home, not in the bedroom, not at school or at church. They do not have to look like you to be accepted.

This means that Power Under has a **growth mindset**. It allows space for people to grow and develop – not only in skills (like mowing the lawn) but also in character and spiritual maturity. Sheep get to make mistakes and even sin. And a good shepherd, while not excusing sin, does allow for growth and learning at every stage of life – even grown-up stages!

A good shepherd uses their power to pursue formation over perfection, compliance, or conformity. Do your sheep have room to grow?

CONFLICT: And finally, safety includes the ability to have honest disagreement.

Your wife and children are allowed to have different opinions and even respectfully challenge you. They are able to speak these without fear of your anger, withdrawal or punishment. Safety does not mean the absence of conflict – but it does mean that conflict will not cost love, belonging, or dignity.

2. POWER UNDER LOOKS LIKE PRESENCE

“You have not searched for the lost...so they were scattered.” **EZEKIEL 34:4,5**

God condemns the bad shepherds not only for cruelty, but for absence. Good shepherding requires that you be near.

PHYSICALLY: This begins with **physical presence**. Are you actually with your sheep? Or are work, hobbies, responsibilities, church work, or your phone keeping you away? These things are not necessarily wrong – but they must not interfere with your ability to be present with your sheep. You can’t shepherd sheep you are not spending time around.

EMOTIONALLY: But presence is more than being physically present. It also means having **emotional engagement**. Peter says: *“live with your wives in an understanding way.”*

Do you know your wife’s heart – what she feels, thinks, and worries about? Do you stay present when conversations become serious or uncomfortable? Or do you withdraw, dismiss, dominate, or impose yourself – cutting her off? Avoiding emotional intimacy?

A good shepherd listens, asks questions, and seeks to understand. He engages with the hearts of his sheep.

SPIRITUALLY: This means that when your wife or children are dealing with fear, anxiety, anger, grief, or confusion – you do not pull away. Even when it gets messy: You remain. You walk with them. You speak gospel hope, you tend to their wounds, you strengthen them in the Lord. You say: I am with you. And the Lord is with us. Are you present?

3. POWER UNDER LOOKS LIKE PURSUING

“I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out.” **EZEKIEL 34:11,16**

SPIRITUALLY: Good shepherds pursue their sheep. You have been given your authority as husband and father to keep your sheep close, as far as it depends on you. So you do not hold back when it comes to initiating reconciliation and forgiveness.

Just like God pursues sinners, like he initiated love toward you even though you did not deserve it, you pursue your wife, your children, and others – even when they have wronged you.

Wisdom and discretion are needed but a pursuing love offers grace, mercy, and a path back. This applies to how you discipline, how you connect after an argument, and how you deal with sin in others.

EMOTIONALLY: Pursuing is not just spiritual – it is also emotional. When you notice distance growing between you and your spouse or children – a good shepherd seeks out ways to overcome that distance – making intentional connection through conversation and time together. Again – you do not wait for the other to make the first move – you initiate that connection. You pursue relationship. It is part of what you have been given that positional power for.

You need to go after your sheep both spiritually and emotionally. This means seeking and nurturing intentional relationship with them.

4. POWER UNDER LOOKS LIKE SERVICE

“You eat the fat...but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back.” **EZEKIEL 34:3,4**

This passage condemns shepherds for what they failed to do. They did not serve – they were self-focused and entitled – pursuing their wants, desires, pleasures. This is an important place of examination.

Jesus teaches that service is at the heart of your calling – it is the way you are to exercise your positional power. You have been given leadership in your home and relationships so that others would be built up and nourished – not so that you can live in comfort.

This is more than doing jobs around the house. It is a **posture of the heart**. It means serving willingly and faithfully without complaint, without keeping score, and without drawing attention to what you do. It means not expecting your wife or family to “pay you back” for what you do for the family – and for you married men – may I say, you are not asking for payback in the bedroom.

Instead service means giving your time, energy, and resources freely, your power – without strings attached. This will require real sacrifice. It may mean setting aside your preferences, wants, hobbies, quiet time, computer time, or comforts so that you can direct your energy, your authority, your leadership towards the growth and maturity of your family.

Are you willing to live a life of service for your family?

A HIGH CALLING

Practicing this kind of Power Under – compassion, service, and sacrificial love instead of control – is not easy. It is a high calling, and we have only touched on a few areas where this applies. There is conflict, intimacy, money, decision making, your work, church life, and more where this dynamic of power under can be applied.

The question will be there for you to ask yourself in each of these areas: Who is benefiting from the authority and positional power you have been given – you, or those entrusted to your care?

This is a weighty responsibility. God has entrusted something very important to you.

And when you examine your life honestly, you will see your failures. You may hear God's voice of condemnation for those who destroy his sheep instead of causing their flourishing. You may feel guilt or shame.

But God does not warn to destroy you, to paralyse you with fear or shame you – **he warns you to invite you to change and ultimately so that you will depend completely on him.**

For you are not able to shepherd well on your own – and you are not meant to. **He wants you to see that.** Because you shepherd as a sheep yourself – weak, dependent, and in need of grace. And the God who calls you to shepherd is first of all your Shepherd. He has compassion on you. He will help you.

So the call is not simply to try harder – but to come to him for mercy and help to have the courage to grow. To ask God to redeem your power. To find **his strength in your weakness** so that you might exercise your authority with compassion, to create safety, and to serve those entrusted to you so that they might grow in their trust and worship of God.

For he is also the Good Shepherd of your sheep – and he will never leave them or you, nor forsake you. May he help each one of you use your power redemptively.