

A warm, winsome, and captivating forty-day journey to Godly leadership. It makes me, as a parent and Christian leader, want to follow the Shepherd more closely as I seek to be a shepherd after God's own heart.

Anne Graham Lotz, Founder and President, AnGeL Ministries

Real-life stories of the rugged nomadic lives of shepherds bring to life numerous Scriptures to teach us the hard lessons of leadership. Leaders are called to be not only tender and loving, but also tough and disciplined.

Dr. John M. Perkins, President, The John M. Perkins Foundation

More than an inspirational read, this book is a timely invitation into the shepherd's world which will compel you to reflect on your Christian life and leadership with a new sense of awe and assurance. Be prepared to be taken deeper in your spiritual journey as you embark on this forty-day retreat.

Dr. Barry Corey, President, Biola University

In my work with Christian institutions that train leaders in the majority world, I discern a scarcity of mature theological reflection on the person and practice of the leader. Because Laniak's reflection is so deeply grounded in Scripture and its cultural context, I will recommend this work enthusiastically to Jesus' undershepherds everywhere, who will find its orientation immediately relevant.

Dr. David Baer, President and CEO, Overseas Council

In a day when leadership is often more about the leader than anyone else, Laniak helps us see our role as God's undershepherds and our responsibility to care for those whom we lead. Laniak's refreshing insights provide a roadmap for further reflection long after the 40 days of readings have been completed.

John Pellowe, CEO, Canadian Council of Christian Charities

Accomplishing what few authors can, Laniak creates powerful images with fascinating stories, exegetical insights, and stunning photos, bringing biblical leadership to life for pastors and lay leaders alike. I recommend this theologically integrated, visually stimulating, and thoroughly spiritual journey for today's shepherd leaders.

Dr. James F. Cobble, Jr. Founder, Institute of Church Leadership

Laniak invites us to pause beside still waters and consider forty inspiring and practical lessons at the intersection of biblical scholarship, organizational leadership and ministry practice. Anyone entrusted with ministry responsibilities will be treated to exceptional leadership insights, welcome guidance, and rare encouragement to renew their passion for attending to the needs of God's flock.

Dr. Mark W. McCloskey, Lead Faculty, Transformational Leadership, Bethel Seminary

Laniak brings to life the realities and rewards of leadership by illuminating a centuries-old image. Reading his fascinating anthropological observations and rich scriptural insights will make spiritual shepherds anywhere in the world better leaders and better followers.

Dr. Samuel J. Voorhies, Director, International Leadership Development, World Vision

A spiritual quest that could have been written specifically for military chaplains who, like the Bedouin, travel barren wildernesses, self-sacrificially serve God's people, and advocate for the lonely and lost. I enthusiastically recommend this book for institutional chaplains whose work is beyond the confines and security of the parish setting.

Captain Jessie R. Tate, Fleet Chaplain, Commander US Fleet Forces Command

After pastoring for twenty-five years and reading everyone from Covey to Kostenbaum and Friedman, I have never found anything as valuable for engaging the topics of pastoral leadership. A *must read* for those who desire to lead congregations and bring the essential values of the Kingdom beyond the parish to the world.

Marty McCarthy, Rector, Saint John's Episcopal Church, Charlotte, NC

Foreword

Those of us in leadership today like to think of ourselves as “shepherds,” but we may have created shepherds in our own image. Tim Laniak agrees that, as Christian leaders, we should think of ourselves as shepherds, but he brings to our identity an unsettling biblical and cultural realism. Shepherding a flock in the Near East has always been demanding and often demeaning work, and it took all a person could give to do it well. Laniak, Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, has spent a portion of his life researching shepherds up close and personal, and in the following pages he guides the reader to appreciate—and embrace—all that biblical shepherding involves.

Almost forty years ago Philip Keller wrote a soul-opening book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. The journey in the following pages will take you beyond that devotional classic. With insightful words and splendid photographs, Laniak brings both a scholar’s mind and a pastor’s heart to his writing. Elders and deacons, pastors, parents and seminary presidents are correct in regarding themselves as shepherds. *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks* raises our job description to a divine standard.

—Dr. Haddon Robinson



Tim Laniak

A u t h o r

Tim Laniak (Th.D., Harvard University) made his first trip to the Middle East in 1977 and has enjoyed opening up the history and cultures of the biblical world to students and leaders ever since. He and his wife Maureen have lived in Israel and occasionally guide study tours to the region. This book contains insights gleaned primarily from a year of field research while on sabbatical from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Charlotte, North Carolina) where Tim is Professor of Old Testament, Coordinator of the Urban Ministry Program, and Mentor for the Christian Leadership Doctor of Ministry Program.

WHILE SHEPHERDS WATCH THEIR FLOCKS

Reflections on Biblical Leadership



Timothy S. Laniak

Photography by David Ormesher

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While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks

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The names of those interviewed have been changed to protect their privacy. While some details from different sources have been combined in the stories, the facts and sentiments are conveyed accurately.

While shepherds watch their flocks: reflections on biblical leadership/Timothy S. Laniak.

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Editing by Janet Thoma and Tabitha Plueddemann

*Dedicated respectfully to Dr. Robert E. Cooley,
a model shepherd who brings the highest level of scholarship
in Bible and Anthropology
to his understanding and practice of Christian Leadership*



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I want to thank a team of specialists who have contributed to this book and related resources. My old friend Dave Ormesher took time off from his company in Chicago to share an adventure and get back behind a camera. Photos were also contributed graciously by Todd Bolen (www.bibleplaces.com), Jim Martin (www.preservingbibletimes.org), Matt Doll, and other accommodating friends. I can’t express my gratitude enough to editors Janet Thoma and Tabitha Plueddemann, midwives who helped me give birth to forty chapters that each came with labor pains. Layout was designed and executed superbly by Carl Etzel, artist extraordinaire, and Tyler Gordon, source of our daily pdfs—two men who proved patient with an author who found it too easy to ask, “What if we tried...?” Many thanks to Tina and Jeremy Long who helped with image treatments and to Trish King and my mother, Jane Laniak, for proof reading.

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with the book after I was finished, organizing a discussion among a diverse group of pastors to assemble the *Field Notes for Pastors*.

My appreciation runs deepest for my family. Our “kids,” Jesse and Adrienne, were great travelers (even on cranky camels) and joined in the fun of interviewing. Adrienne still reminds me that I needed her to translate for me. Jesse may regret turning down an offer to become a Bedouin someday. Aaron was studying back in the U.S.—never able to explain to his friends why Dad spent a year with sheep and goats! My incredible wife Maureen—model shepherd, partner in ministry, and my fellow sojourner in green pastures and dark valleys for more than twenty-five years—has supported this project from its inception, as she has all of my endeavors.





*We are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.*

—Psalm 95:7

Introduction

"Hey Mister!, what is there to research about us? We are nothing! Just spend our lives running after sheep and goats. Neither home, nor an address. Sleeping under the open sky, in winter, summer, and rains... Year after year we measure the length of roads by our feet, carrying cooking utensils on camels and mules. Can't even rest in one place for a week. Why waste time, then, yours and ours?"¹

These are the words of young shepherds trying to make sense of an outsider studying their way of life. They find their own lives marginal and enigmatic, so why study them? Paradoxically, here on the fringes of society, a marginalized vocation older than civilization holds the key to understanding leadership in our own day. Not just leadership generally, but *biblical* leadership.

The following pages provide personal access into the lives of real shepherds. Shepherds from many countries across the Middle East and beyond. Shepherds from many historical periods.² The kinds of shepherds the Bible makes much of. This book came as the result of my own personal journey into these lives, searching for the context and meaning of the persistent pastoral imagery in Scripture. I wanted firsthand exposure to the cultural fabric of this central metaphor chosen to convey profound and timeless truths about leadership.



The opportunity came during the academic year 2003–04 when I took a sabbatical at the Albright Institute for Archaeological Research in Jerusalem. Mixing library research with field interviews in Israel, Jordan, and the Sinai, I began to unlock the metaphor that has enlightened the work of leaders for millennia. I grew to love the deserts and wildernesses where Bedouin³ tribes raise their flocks. I am indebted to so many for taking me into their tents and opening up their worlds to me. Their comments on the common everyday world of shepherd work began to shape my understanding of biblical passages on leadership in unexpected ways.

Returning to my work of training shepherds for the church, I found an eager audience for these images and insights and their implications for contemporary ministry. Though some have their doubts, I am convinced now that the shepherd metaphor needs to be reinvigorated rather than replaced.

Through this book I invite fellow Christian leaders to trek into the wilderness and reflect together on our lives and work as shepherds. Seize this