

# Friday Focus

## From Emory

### *Are you a Rancher or a Shepherd?*

A famous Bible teacher recently told a story that almost all of us can relate to. He and his wife raised two girls who he admits were not the perfect angelic answer to submission, but who were seldom directly disobedient or defiant.

However, there was an occasion when he and his wife were keeping his brother's son for a weekend, and for entertainment he decided to take his young 8-year-old nephew to a movie. David (not his name) set the story up by saying that in raising girls, he had occasionally seen the rebellion one of his girls might express, like copping a bad attitude or arguing with their sister, but generally he had forgotten what it was like to deal with a strong-willed young boy.

They had not been seated in the theater long before David noticed that his young companion (I'll call him Chase) was enjoying kicking the theater seat in front of them and watching it move back and forth.

David asked him to stop. He kicked it again. David, in a stronger tone, said: "Chase, don't kick the seat again." A few moments went by and Chase softly nudged the chair with the front tip of his shoe. David said: "Chase, if you touch that chair in front of you again I am going to break your leg." After David said that, he noticed Chase crease a smile (the cat-that-ate-the-canary smile). Obviously a bit embarrassed by having threatened bodily harm, David realized that Chase had won- he had pushed all the right buttons to make his uncle react and to get attention in a way that he knew would succeed.

I tell this story not to glorify the threat of child abuse of one's kin, but to highlight the difficulty we all have in rearing and teaching children. I can certainly relate to the frustration that can be felt, but I believe the real solution goes beyond having appropriate responses and is more than having children obey out of fear.

Recently, while reading a description found in a professional journal, a thought came to me that I believe provides a good comparison and makes an interesting child-rearing analogy which relates well to the most difficult of all of the jobs we encounter in this earthly life. I believe that the approaches of two contrasting styles involved in the profession of raising livestock: shepherding versus cattle ranching, are similar to raising children (and teaching school).

In looking at these contrasts, I believe that we can draw some insight, as they can apply to parenting. Now I am certainly not suggesting that raising cattle and sheep are equal in terms to our task as parents or as a school, but I do believe that there are some similarities in the approaches which point out the differences in philosophy that we can apply.

Ranchers often speak in terms of the size of their enterprise and the significance of their operation by speaking of 'head of cattle' that they are responsible for supervising or the acreage of the ranch itself. They are rarely in direct daily contact with their herd, and are not directly and 'in-person' responsible for the constant care and physical protection of the animals. The daily routine, habits, and traits of the individual animals often go unnoticed by the rancher.

A child-rearing version of the rancher is the 'hands-off' mom and dad who treat an 8-year-old as if he were 22 and living at home while trying to find work after graduating from university. This child has very little responsibility or requirements expected of him on any regular basis, as the parents are often

content to enjoy their own solitude and peace, even if it is offered at the altar of a babysitter called *Playstation 3*.

The rancher-teacher is an aloof, business-only instructor who is generally only interested in correct responses by the student. An attitude of 'they either get it or they don't, it's up to them' prevails.

"Shepherding," on the other hand, is a different enterprise altogether. Shepherds are in constant contact with their herd. Each of their sheep is recognized by temperament, demeanor, and the unique traits that are ascertained by the constant daily scrutiny of the caretakers. Much care is taken to head off eventual issues and safety concerns by the persistent, watchful eye of the shepherd, and they are never out of eyesight from the watchful eye of the shepherd.

The shepherding parent (and teacher) become a student of their children and can recognize and prescribe the words or actions that draw out the best in that child.

Our view of the parental role often determines the approach that we take in the rearing of children. As the child matures, the parental roles mature as well, and in a healthy relationship, the parental approach will likely shift from one that is full-time 'shepherding' to more of a part-time 'rancher.' Likewise, our school should have obvious levels of change as our students ramp-up to higher grades and greater expectations and responsibility.

Investment and involvement in the lives of our children are the keys to helping shepherd them. Different personalities do that in different ways. No teacher has perfected the formula that works for every student in every situation. You must be yourself with your own personality. However, I believe there certainly are some basic fundamentals that must exist.

1-Before you can *truly* love your students, you must love the Father. (*We love because He first loved us*. I John 4:19). And as Steve Brown says: "we can only love to the extent that we have been loved." Just like an archaeologist, you will have to dig through a lot of dirt to get to the treasures buried underneath the rubble. In order to get through the process of digging out the best in every student you will be required to love them even though you may not like them nor want to get involved in their issues.

2-You must truly care about your students and they must know it. Students can read a phony very quickly. The amount of effort you put into digging them from under the 'dirt' goes a long way in your earning the right to advise them. Sarcasm, disrespect, and cynicism damage opportunities to lead and instruct and are the anti-dote to any relationship, including that of teacher-student.

3-You should know and love the subject you teach and have a burning desire to bait your students into loving it as well. You must *know* the material and have a passion for helping your students learn it.

Training, direction, correction, and expectation are hard work and are analogous to the work a shepherd does in herding his flock. The protection over what they are exposed to, as well as how they respond in their environment, are crucial in ensuring that they have opportunity to mature into Christian adulthood.

*"Leadership is the flower. Responsibility is the seed. If you don't get responsibility planted early, leadership never blooms."* Author Unknown