
Teaching the Gospel from Agency Theory in the Bible

MICHAEL E. CAFFERKY
Southern Adventist University
mcafferky@southern.edu

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to show how the basic ideas of Agency Theory can be taught directly from the Bible through the use of biblical sheep-shepherd-hireling imagery and in so doing, naturally open an opportunity to lead business students to the call of the Gospel. To pursue this purpose, the paper will briefly review contemporary business scholarship on the concept of agency. Following this, the paper will consider evidence of Agency Theory from the biblical record focusing on the biblical foundations for caring for the economic asset of sheep, the work of the owner-shepherd, and the work of the hireling-shepherd. The paper will present a summary of the principles of agency as addressed in the Bible. Finally, the paper will present suggestions for how to integrate this material into the teaching-learning processes in the business school curriculum.

THE CONCEPT OF AGENCY

This article assumes that the scholar who wishes to integrate the biblical perspective on agency has an understanding of agency theory. Thus, only a brief introduction to the concept is provided here.

Agency, in the contemporary business perspective, is primarily a legal-economic concept; however, some theorists suggest that the concept goes beyond legal and financial relationships, applying across a wide spectrum of social situations, including informal relationships. In the broader view, an agency relationship “exists whenever there is an arrangement in which one person’s welfare depends on what another person does” (Pindyck & Rubinfeld, 2001, p. 609) or when the relationship involves cooperative effort (Jensen, 1998). In the field of economics, the concept is often associated with game theory (Scott, 2003). It has been commonly applied to discussions of financial management, capital structure, accounting, executive contracts, organization theory, and management in general (Brennan, 1995; Eisenhardt, 1989; Harris & Raviv, 1991; Keown, Martin, Petty & Scott, 2005).

Examples of agency relationships are everywhere in commerce: A company hires an employee to be a manager

or supervisor of other workers. The salesperson accepts a job selling goods for a retail store. A computer programmer agrees to act as an independent contractor for a company to develop an App. A partner in a business acts on behalf of the partnership. An attorney represents a client. A real estate broker negotiates the sale (or purchase) of real property.

Agency finds its roots in English common law that evolved from the ancient Hebrew and Roman concepts the employer-employee relationship (Young, 2003). An example of both the legal and economic dimensions, the ancient Hebrew concept is found in Exodus 22:14: “And if a man borrows anything from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not with it, he shall make full restitution” (NAS).

In the world of business, a distinction is drawn between an agency relationship and a fiduciary relationship. In a fiduciary relationship, one party has the obligation to act on behalf of another, especially in financial matters, such as in investing, buying and selling real estate, and so forth. The one serving the financial interests of the other has a degree of expertise or knowledge that the other party lacks. Such a relationship requires a high degree of trust. When these concepts

are distinguished, the agency relationship emphasizes the dimension of delegated authority to act in ways that bind the principal to contracts. In practice, delegated authority often carries financial implications for the principal.

Current law that specifies official fiduciary responsibilities is called the “law of agency.” In the agency relationship, there are two parties who must voluntarily agree. Agency results from the consent of one person to another to act on behalf of the other. The principal is the one who asks the agent to act with authority on his or her behalf. In this, the principal allows someone else to be responsible for some of his or her financial interests. Furthermore, the principal exercises managerial control over the agent. An agency relationship can be created only to accomplish a lawful purpose; agency contracts that are created for illegal purposes are not valid.

A common form of agency is called “express agency” where the authority to act is expressly stated in a written or verbal agreement. In an “implied agency” the agent’s extent of decision-making authority is determined by the circumstances of the situation. Implied agency can be inferred from commonly accepted industry practices, prior dealings between the parties, or the agent’s position in the company.

Principals ask agents to do things they themselves don’t have time to do or don’t have the capability to do. This creates interdependency that has a two-way moral dimension. An Agent may be a person, a partnership, or an organization that has legal capacity to have rights and accept responsibilities to act on behalf of another. Thus, by delegation of hierarchy of authority, agency has the potential to encompass all employer-employee relationships.

Discussions among contemporary business scholars regarding the economic or fiduciary dimensions of agency were sparked by Jensen and Meckling (1976), whose work continues to be heavily referenced. “The agent is the person who acts, and the principal is the party whom the action affects...*The principal-agent problem is that managers may pursue their own goals, even at the cost of obtaining lower profits for owners*” (emphasis in the original) (Pindyck & Rubinfeld, 2001, p. 609). The principle of agency emphasizes faithfulness to the one in the position of authority over financial assets.

In many agency relationships, both principal and agent act in good faith by fulfilling their duties to each other. This awareness has led some to propose an alternative to Agency Theory which is based on the recognition that agents are not always self-serving. This theory is called the stewardship theory (Davis et al., 1997).

At times, however, the agent acts in a self-interested way with respect to the interests of the principal. It is the self-

interested behavior of agents that has traditionally served as the primary focus of discussions of agency theory. When the agent’s self-interests conflict with the interests of the principal, this has been called the agency problem. The costs associated with managing the agency problem are called agency costs. Both parties to the relationship typically desire to minimize the costs associated with managing the agency problem (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Jensen, 1998). A moral hazard occurs if one party uses specialized, asymmetrical knowledge to take advantage of the other party.

Agency is based on the fundamental moral principle of serving each other through making decisions in a mutual relationship, regardless of whether individuals compensate each other monetarily. In the organizational setting, principals hire agents to do work that they cannot do. This establishes an interdependent relationship with the principal dependent on the agent for tasks performed and the agent dependent upon the principal for compensation (Young, 2003).

Agency relationships apply in publicly traded corporations as well as in privately held firms. This has raised the debatable issue regarding for whom the Agent works. Some people think that the Agent works directly for the shareholders of a corporation (Shankman, 1999). Others say that the Agent works for the corporation and only indirectly for shareholders (Boatright, 1994; Young, 2007).

Another debatable issue that has arisen in contemporary scholarship is what might be called the moral foundation for the agency relationship. One perspective, called here the narrow view, limits the moral foundation for the agency relationship as whatever the principal requires of the agent within the law. In this view, the moral foundation is determined by the wishes of the principal. The agent’s role is limited to legal and financial matters, which trump any other concerns. Another, broader perspective, is that agents have broader moral standards that must be followed in all their work. These standards exceed what is in the law regarding financial obligations. Agents must honor agreements, avoid lying, respect the autonomy of others, and avoid doing harm. They must act with higher morals for one of two reasons. They must act as they would in any other situation in society as the principals are expected to act in relationship with any other interested party. This requires a broader set of moral standards that are higher in priority than mere financial goals.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE OF AGENCY RELATIONSHIPS

A few business scholars have discussed Agency Theory from a Judeo-Christian viewpoint. Hill (1991) explored the

tension that the Christian agent will experience when facing obligations to the principal that conflict with Christian values. In 2000 at the CBFA Annual Conference, two papers were presented relating to Agency Theory and the Bible (Barlow & Usrey, 2000; Proffitt, 2000). Proffitt reviewed the debate over the sufficiency of Agency Theory. One of the strengths of Agency Theory is that it recognizes the agency problem and that humans are not perfect. This is a result of sin. Yet, accountability is clearly taught in the Bible (Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:12; 1 Peter 4:5). Applying this to the level of the corporation, the firm is an agent of society as a whole and, because of this, accountable to society.

In Barlow and Usrey's (2000) paper, the authors compared legal Agency Theory and biblical teaching. They asserted that the Bible and legal theory "are quite complementary in their focus on relationships and the duties and responsibilities of people in the midst of a fiduciary connection" (p. 6). They cited biblical examples of agents at work. Included in their list of examples are Saul and David, the first two kings of Israel (1 Samuel 9-10; 14:1-13), partners (Philemon 1:17), Jesus' disciples (Luke 10:16-17; John 17:1-12), and the inauguration of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry (Matthew 3:16-17; John 1:34). In their discussion of the relationship between employers and employees, Cohn and Friedman (2002) considered the perspective of the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. While employees are agents of employers and must be careful to observe their obligations under the Torah (e.g., thou shalt not steal), employers also have obligations. Rewards and punishments are useful for managing the agency relationship.

To the biblical examples cited in previous publications, a few others can be added. The purpose of providing additional biblical evidence is to provide instructors with additional illustrations to bring to students from the Scripture when teaching agency theory. In these examples, it can be seen that agents can be either faithful or unfaithful in meeting their obligations. They can be other-serving or self-serving.

Abraham sends his oldest servant, Eliezer, on a mission to find a wife for his son, Isaac. Jacob sent agents to contact his brother, Esau. In a somewhat complicated agency relationship, Jacob was a hired hand, nephew, and later son-in-law while serving as Laban's agent. Joseph was appointed Pharaoh's agent, complete with his signet ring, fine linen garments, and authority over all people to establish and enforce national economic policy and laws. When a potential conflict of interest came up (Joseph's family moving to Egypt), Joseph informed Pharaoh. Aaron became an (unfaithful) agent of Moses while Moses was on Mount Horeb. The twelve spies sent into Canaan were

agents working on behalf of the entire nation. At Jethro's counsel, Moses appointed many agents to assist him in managing. Judges Gideon and Jephthah and Kings Saul, David and Josiah all used agents to carry out their interests. King Josiah used trusted agents to disperse temple repair payroll. The story of King Darius offers an interesting commentary regarding the need for agents. Solomon entrusted his vineyard to caretakers. Daniel records that King Darius appointed 120 agents over his kingdom so that he would suffer no loss. (Genesis 15:2; 24; 29:6-10; 32:3-6; 41:37-45; 43:19; 44:4; 45-47; Exodus 4:28; 18:21-22; 32; Numbers 22:5; Judges 7:24; 11:12-19; 1 Samuel 16:19; 19:11-21; 2 Kings 12:15; 22:7; 1 Chronicles 28; 2 Chronicles 35:21; Psalm 105:17-22; Song of Solomon 8:11-12; Daniel 6:1-2.) Each of these deserves careful study on its own. Jacob's experience will be explored below.

SUMMARY OF THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ON AGENCY

The root idea of being a servant of someone else and their interests means being responsible for a resource committed for protection or a task given to be accomplished on behalf of others. The idea of committed resources assumes two things: a) the *legitimacy* of resource ownership or task accomplishment and b) the *authority* of the one who is asking another to serve on their behalf.

Considering the broad scope of biblical teaching, including its fundamental theological themes, this paper offers a summary of this concept of agency. Agency is rooted in God's character — His sovereignty and faithfulness to His covenants. The fundamental covenant relationship is that since God created us, He will lead us as a gentle Shepherd (Psalm 100:3).

In the biblical perspective the ultimate Principal Owner of all assets is the Creator of the earth, God himself (Psalm 50:10; 104:24). Humans have been delegated with authority to care for the Creator's assets (Genesis 1:26-28). Thus, agency, as a social relationship, was founded at Creation: Created in God's image and following His example, humans pursuing faithfulness to God will be faithful to each other and to the social community.

Agency is a concern of the larger social community, not just an individual. Both owner and hired agent are responsible for the property and interests upon which they and others depend. For example, in the exegesis of the covenant principles, Moses explains that care for assets extends beyond the primary relationship between one person and another. It is communal by nature: "You shall not see your countryman's ox or his sheep straying away, and pay no

attention to them; you shall certainly bring them back to your countryman” (Deuteronomy 22:1; see vv. 3-4). But the communal dimension of agent responsibility over assets extends further than this. It applies to the care of wealth-building assets that belong to persons who are enemies: “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him” (Exodus 23:4).

True agency is covenantal by nature. Responsibilities of an agent extend beyond financial-economic interests to the broader interests inherent in the covenant between agent and principal and between the principal and others the community. Above all else, agents are expected to be as faithful in carrying out their responsibilities as the owner of the property would be. The covenantal nature of the relationship means that agents are willing to voluntarily put themselves at risk on behalf of asset owners.

Agency is based on covenantal truthfulness: Faithfulness extends to giving honest reports to the owner. This means that it is rooted in morality of action. Human agents falter in their faithfulness of action when they pursue self-interests at the expense of those to whom they serve, including the broader community and God himself. They are willing to use asymmetrical knowledge and deception to gain an advantage over others. Examples of the “agency problem” include Genesis 29-31, Numbers 20:2-12, Matthew 24:45-51, and Luke 16:1-3. Unfaithful agents undermine not only the image of God and the character of God, they also undermine the community order created by God.

To see the richness of this biblical concept of agency, it pays to understand more completely the concepts of sheep, shepherds, and hired hands in the Bible.

CARE OF SHEEP: THE ASSETS

Sheep were the chief asset of many Hebrew families. Specific biblical instruction regarding care for the wealth-building asset of sheep appears in Proverbs 27:23-27. These animals were central to the Israelite economy. Mutton, the most valuable element of the sheep, was considered a delicacy. Wool provided fibers for weaving. Fat had a variety of uses. Sheep could be used as currency (Post, 1898, pp. 487-488; Ryken, Wilhoit, & Longman, 1998). Sheep, a highly liquid asset, were “a kind of four-legged bank” carrying with them instant ability to generate revenue (Mein, 2007, p. 497). The products of sheep also provide the raw materials needed to serve a variety of community needs — physical, social, and spiritual — and thereby produce potentially more than one revenue stream for the owner. Sheep can survive on little water and the barest of pasture land. These

are gentle, submissive creatures. Feed and water them and they will give you their wool and milk as they grow fat for the market. With careful breeding the owners can expand the size and quality of the flock. Sheep become loyal to their shepherd. After they learn to recognize his voice, they will follow that voice (Klotz, 1981; Mein, 2007; Ryken, Wilhoit, & Longman, 1998).

The source of economic advantage of sheep also lies at the root of its disadvantages. Shepherding requires competencies more complex and subtler than are required in other occupations. For example, discriminating which are the “best” sheep requires wisdom (Mein, 2007). Sheep cannot be left penned in or left to themselves. Compared with goats, they prefer gentle slopes and valleys rather than hills and mountains. They are more delicate, being completely dependent on their shepherd for food, water, protection, and care for injuries. These seemingly unintelligent creatures are “unable to find their way to a sheepfold even when it is in sight” (Ryken, Wilhoit, & Longman, 1998, p. 782). If spooked, they may stampede away from the shepherd. Sheep are particularly vulnerable to loss due to wandering off, attack by wild animals, or theft. Lions, bears, and wolves laying in ambush are the sheep’s chief predators (1 Samuel 17:34-37; Psalms 10:9; 17:12; 104:21; Proverbs 30:30; Lamentations 3:10; John 10:11). Thieves do not have the voice that sheep recognize and the sheep may not follow them. However, since the sheep do not know the thief, they will scatter when the thief comes (John 10:4-5). The most vulnerable are the lambs that can be easily carried away or stranded when the adult sheep are scattered. The helplessness of sheep helps to explain what it takes to make a good shepherd (Golding, 2006b; Klotz, 1981; Ryken, Wilhoit, & Longman, 1998; Tenney, 1981, p. 108).

THE OWNER-SHEPHERD: THE PRINCIPAL

The vulnerability of sheep helps to explain what it takes to make a good owner-shepherd. “The primary roles of a shepherd with his sheep were guiding, providing food and water, protecting and delivering, gathering scattered or lost sheep, and giving health and security” (Golding, 2006a). Shepherds know the physical limits of their sheep and will take care not to force them to walk too long without rest (Genesis 33:13). “Psalm 23, built around a typical day in the life of a shepherd, is a virtual handbook of these shepherding practices” (Ryken, Wilhoit, & Longman, 1998, p. 782; cf. Rice, 1995). Ezekiel 34 is another passage that describes the work of the shepherd. “Their role was to preserve and care for [them]... to strengthen the weak, heal the

sick, bind up the crippled, and bring back the stray among them, to guide them gently and keep them together (Ezek 34:2-6)” (Ryken, Wilhoit, & Longman, 1998, p. 783).

The shepherd selects the pastures for feeding since sheep are not good judges of food. “Since sheep tend to wander, a concerned shepherd must search for them and bring them back when they become lost or when for some reason the flock has become scattered. A sheep’s lack of natural defenses leaves it susceptible to the attacks of predators” (Golding, 2006a, p. 22). In short, what sheep need most the shepherd provides: simple, virtuous leadership.

The shepherd followed grazing routes determined by the spatial relationship between three factors: water, good pasture, and shelter (Golding, 2006b). The availability of water and pasture land are significant opportunities. Drought and famine are always strategic threats to this method of economic activity (Genesis 13:10; 42-46). Daytime heat and nighttime vigil against wild animals took its toll on shepherds’ wellbeing (Genesis 31:38-41). Depending on the abundance in pastures, some shepherds, by necessity, may have needed to live a nomadic life in order to stay close to their sheep. Others may have engaged in multiple occupations and lived within a particular geographic region (Matthews, 1981).

Because sheep are the primary source of wealth, owner-shepherds voluntarily put their own life and health at risk on behalf of the sheep. The reason is clear: Loss of the flock meant starvation for the family. Simple technology provided the shepherd with an advantage over predators. The shepherd carried two pieces of equipment for protection: a shepherd’s staff used to count and guide the sheep and his rod, a club-like weapon (Ryken, Wilhoit, & Longman, 1998, p. 782; Rice, 1995; cf. Psalm 23:4).

All of the personal attention paid to the sheep is exercised out of economic self-interest (Mein, 2007, p. 495). In some cases a family’s entire livelihood is centered on the care of sheep. Children of the family, both males and females, were active participants in shepherding (Genesis 29:9; Exodus 2:16-17; 1 Samuel 16:19). When the owner-shepherd lacked sufficient numbers of children who were old enough or fitted to assume shepherding responsibilities, he hired shepherds to help.

HIRED SHEPHERDS: THE AGENTS

In contrast to the owner-shepherds who were willing to make a life-giving sacrifice to care for and protect his sheep, the hireling shepherd is portrayed. Other than the few details recorded in the Bible, no ancient documents directly from

the Hebrew culture have survived describing details of the relationship between owner-shepherds and their contract shepherds. However, according to scholars ancient records from Mesopotamia such as the Code of Hammurabi show “a continuity of practice from the Old Babylonian period to the Persian period” (Mein, 2007, p. 496; cf. Morrison, 1983; Finklestein, 1968; Van Seters, 1969; Postgate, 1975).

Hireling shepherds were employed by the owner-shepherd to watch over a flock of sheep for a period of a year at a time. Agreements were drawn up in the spring after the shearing. The shorn sheep were counted and passed to the control of the hired shepherd. At the end of the year the sheep were returned for shearing and counting (Morrison, 1983).

Hirelings were obligated to generate a minimum level of economic return for the owner which usually meant an increase in the size of the flock. Allowances were made for the loss of a proportion of the flock each year provided that the hired shepherd produced the animal skin as evidence of the loss. The expected birthrate in some agreements was eighty lambs per one hundred ewes and allowance for a fifteen per cent loss rate (Morrison, 1983). If the sheep was lost and no skin could be produced, this would be cause of great concern on the part of the owner since the hired shepherd might then be suspected of misappropriating the animal for personal gain. In return for their work, hirelings were allowed to keep any surplus but also were obligated to make up any shortfall. Some may have received additional payments in form of clothing or grain rations. Incentives were built into the relationship so that hired shepherds could work hard, learn, and generate a profit for the owner (Mein, 2007, p. 497; Golding, 2006b, pp. 166-167; Morrison, 1983; Cf. Genesis 29-32; Amos 3:12).

In spite of the economic incentives to be good shepherds, hired shepherds developed a reputation for being unreliable when it mattered most for the reason that they were more interested in their own welfare rather than the welfare of the sheep. The “hireling has no duty to the sheep; they are not his, but belong to another. In no way is he obliged in justice to face the wolf on their behalf; the owner should, but not the hireling” (Neyrey, 2001, p. 283; Cf. John 10:1-15).

Jacob’s experience in his troubled family and relationship as a hired shepherd for his uncle Laban illustrates the complex nature of the agency relationship (Genesis 29-31). Since this relationship occurred in the Hebrew culture, it must be assumed that both parties were aware that their mutual obligations were covenantal by nature. Morrison (1983) believed like others that, with a few detail exceptions, the agreement between Jacob and Laban bears a resemblance to Old Babylonian herding contracts.

As partial payment for his work, Jacob asks for his cousin's (Rachel) hand in marriage (Genesis 29:18). Compared with other shepherding agreements, this provision was unusual, altering what otherwise might have been a straightforward arrangement. In effect, the shepherding agreement became the first part of a marriage agreement (Morrison, 1983). This interesting payment relationship provides an opportunity for the instructor to explore the various ways that compensation can be offered to an agent. In other words, compensation is not only monetary.

Knowing that the price elasticity of demand for his daughter's hand in marriage was near zero, meaning that Jacob would pay a high price through his labor, and suspecting that Jacob was unaware of the local custom preventing marriages of younger girls prior to the marriage of their first-born female sibling (Genesis 29:26), Laban used his asymmetrical knowledge. Through outright deception, he gains an advantage over Jacob in negotiations over the provisions in the relationship. Ultimately, this created tension in the relationship that spilled over into the marriage relationship (Genesis 29:30-31).

For his part, Jacob must have been aware of how dependent Laban was for Jacob's expert shepherding. This is inferred from Genesis 30:29-30; 31:38-41. He took the animals from Laban's flocks that had the lowest value and used his asymmetrical knowledge of shepherding and breeding to gain an advantage over Laban. The biblical record indicates that Jacob worked for Laban for twenty years. In the two meetings recorded (Genesis 29:21-27; 30:25-36), Jacob reviews his service record declaring that he has fulfilled his obligations.

In the end, Jacob became so wealthy that this precipitated jealousy and the eventual separation from Laban. This occurred at the time of the counting and shearing of the sheep, which probably took place at the end of a contract year (Genesis 31:1-3, 19). Because they had not received a dowry, Laban's daughters stole valuable idols from their father (but didn't tell Jacob) (Morrison, 1983). Further, Jacob did not seek Laban's permission or blessing before leaving (Genesis 31:20), taking with him Laban's daughters and his flocks and herds across the Euphrates River and on toward Canaan. He had completed his obligations to Laban but covenantal courtesy and the patriarchal authority of Laban would have required him to, at the very least, notify Laban of his intent to depart. Jacob's precipitous action can be no other than a breach of the agreement provisions as well as family customs (Mabee, 1980; Gordon, 1940). In the end Jacob and Laban, now equals, engage in legal dispute resolution debate and at the end seal the permanent terms of their relationship with a covenant (Genesis 31:43-55; Morrison, 1983).

BIBLICAL IMAGERY: THE LINK TO A GOSPEL CALL

It is quite easy to make the connection between Jesus the Good Shepherd and his work of salvation for students. However, the biblical imagery of sheep, shepherds, and hirelings goes much deeper than this. Offering students a glimpse of these images contributes to improved biblical literacy.

Deeper linkages between the contemporary concept of agency and the Gospel are made in Scripture between the interrelated images of sheep, shepherds, wild animals, and hired shepherds. The first general reference to God being the Shepherd and people as sheep came from Jacob, one of the wealthiest sheep herders (Gen 48:15; 49:24). (See TABLE 1: Israel as God's Spiritual Wealth-building Asset – His Sheep.) This metaphor is carried forward and used with power throughout Scripture. The beautiful passage from Genesis 48:15 prefigures both Moses and the Messiah. In this passage, God's actions as a Shepherd are described in terms of leading, feeding, and redeeming (Brueggemann, 1982, p. 362).

In Numbers 27, the image of sheep is used as a metaphor for God's people. When Moses contemplated the situation that the children of Israel were in, he realized that they needed someone who could serve them as a shepherd serves his sheep keeping them from scattering. Moses asked God to appoint a person over the congregation as the human shepherd. This person was to have the authority of Moses to whom all the congregation should obey. Joshua was that chosen person (Numbers 27:15-23). Ever after, this became a recurring theme in Scripture, especially when leaders were involved. This theme is carried through into the ministry of Jesus Christ.

The metaphor of the shepherd is used to refer to God (Psalm 79:13; 95:7; 100:3; cf. Anderson, 1972). It is God who guides, protects, saves, gathers, nourishes, and leads (Exodus 14:15; 15:22; 16:1; 17:1; Psalm 77:20; 78:52; 80:1; Ezekiel 34:22; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10; 50:19; Micah 2:12-13; Cf. Anderson, 1972; Murphy, 1998). The metaphor of God being the Owner of a wealth-producing asset for which he cares and protects is also used with reference to the vineyard (Isaiah 27:2-3; Matthew 20; Mark 12; John 15:1-2). "The idea that gods shepherd their people was common in the ancient Near East" (Wenham, 1994, p. 465).

In the Bible, the shepherd metaphor also is used to refer to God's anointed leaders (Numbers 27:17; 2 Samuel 5:2) and to false leaders (Ezekiel 34; John 10). "This [referring to false leaders] is a highly ironic use of the shepherd image. Those who should have been protecting and caring for the flock had turned into its savage attackers! Such imagery is intended to evoke responses of shock and outrage in a way

Table 1: Israel as God’s Spiritual “Sheep”

Occasion / Situation	Bible References
Jacob, the shepherd, is the first to use the metaphor of Shepherd to refer to God.	Genesis 48:15; 49:24
Moses and Aaron lead the people as shepherds.	Psalm 77:20; 78:52; Isaiah 63:11-12; Acts 7:35-36
Moses realizes that the congregation needs a Shepherd leader to care for them; Joshua is chosen under God’s sovereignty to lead the people where they should go.	Numbers 27:15-17
Moses predicts the scattering of Israel if they are unfaithful to the Covenant: imagery of sheep.	Leviticus 26:33; Deuteronomy 4:27; 28:64; 30:3
David is a good and faithful shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for his sheep; he is chosen to be a shepherd of the people. Foreshadowing the Messiah, he is voluntarily willing to lay down his life in the struggle with the powers of evil (Goliath and the Philistines).	1 Samuel 17:34-37; 2 Samuel 5:2; 7:7-8; 1 Chronicles 11:2; 17:6-7
Micaiah the prophet speaks to the King of Israel using this metaphor.	1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chronicles 18:16
David & Solomon use the metaphor of people as sheep and God as their Shepherd.	Psalm 23; 28:9; 44:11-12, 22-23; 49:14; 74:1; 78:52, 70-72; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; 106:27; 119:176; Ecclesiastes 12:11
The prophets evaluate the people in terms of the sheep metaphor, false shepherds, scattering of God’s people (sheep) in fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy. God is the true Shepherd who gathers his scattered sheep through His servant “David” (i.e., the Messiah).	Isaiah 11:10-12; 13:14; 31:4; 40:11; 53:6-7; Jeremiah 9:15-16; 12:3; 13:24; 17:16; 18:17; 23:1-6; 30:11; 31:10; 32:37; 50:6, 17, 44; 56:9-12; Lamentations 4:16; Ezekiel 6:8; 11:16-17; 12:15; 20:23, 34-41; 28:25; 22:15; 34:4-12; 36:19; 37:24-26; Hosea 5:14; 6:1; 13:7; Joel 3:2; Amos 3:12; Micah 2:12; 3:1-4; 5:2-4; Nahum 3:18; Zephaniah 1:1, 8; 3:3-4; Zechariah 1:19-21; 7:14; 10:2; 11:16; 13:7
Referring to Moses’ prophecy, Nehemiah prays that God will gather His scattered people.	Nehemiah 1:1-11
The Messiah is the fulfillment of God’s promise to gather the scattered sheep; He is willing to voluntarily lay down his life for them; predicts the future of the church in terms of sheep; he is the great Shepherd.	Matthew 2:6; 9:36; 10:6; 15:24; 18:12-14; 25:31; 26:31; Mark 6:34; 14:27; Luke 15:4-6; John 10:1-27; 11:52; 21:16-17; Hebrews 13:20 (Cf. Zechariah 11:16; Micah 5:2-4, 7-9; Acts 5:37; 20:28)
Peter evaluates the church and its leaders in terms of sheep and shepherds.	1 Peter 2:25; 5:2-4
John’s prophecy that the Lamb is the Shepherd.	Revelation 7:17

that mere propositional statements could not. The behavior of Judah’s leaders was a betrayal of the fundamental relationship expressed by the shepherding imagery” (Golding, 2006a, p. 28). The connection between the shepherd image and David in Ezekiel 37 is one of the more significant uses where David prefigures the Messiah to come (Youngblood, 1992, p. 850). This connection between the Shepherd and the Messiah is described by Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman (1998) as follows:

In addition to the generalized picture of God as shepherd of his people, the Bible develops a motif that focuses specifically on the Messiah, as prophesied

in the OT and fulfilled in Christ in the NT. Like David, from whom he is descended (2 Sam 5:2; 1 Chron 11:2; Ps 78:7-12), this figure is described in shepherd-like terms. Thus Ezekiel prophesies, “My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd” (Ezek 37:24 RSV). In the NT this figure is directly identified as Jesus (Mt 2:6), who parabolically speaks of himself as searching for the lost sheep and bringing it home (Lk 15:4-7) and directly identifies himself as the shepherd of the abandoned and scattered people whom he cares for and gathers (Mt 6:34; 9:36; 15:24; Lk 19:10). (p. 784)

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is described as feeding the 5,000 in a pastoral setting much like a shepherd would feed his flocks. Mark's comment is that he began to teach (care for) them as if a shepherd would care for sheep that had been without a shepherd. This spiritual feeding culminated in the physical feeding of the people (Mark 6:34; cf. Johnson, 1968). Jesus also used this imagery of sheep and shepherd to focus the people's attention on his mission, his death, and the final judgment (Tenney, 1981; Tooley, 1964).

When a wild animal comes, the hireling shepherd runs away to protect his own life, leaving the sheep vulnerable to attack. This is something that the owner of the sheep would not do. The hired servant is more interested in his wages than in faithfully pursuing the interests of the owner of the sheep (Genesis 30:32-43; 1 Samuel 17:34-37; 2 Samuel 12:2; 1 Samuel 17; Ezekiel 34:1-16; Luke 15:4-6; John 10:12-13; Job 7:1-2).

Threats to God's people who are His sheep are described using this imagery more than once in the Bible. Other nations are depicted as wild beasts (Jeremiah 50:17; Daniel 7). Satan is described as a roaring Lion seeking to destroy God's people (Ephesians 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8). God's people can lead each other astray, destroy each other, or wander off on their own (Psalm 10; 17:9-15; 119:176; Isaiah 53:6). Wicked rulers also are threats to God's people (Proverbs 28:15; Zephaniah 3:3-4). False priests and prophets turn from caregivers of God's people to death- and destruction-givers (Ezekiel 34; Jeremiah 23:1; Tenney, 1981, pp. 108-109). In a strange twist of the metaphor, God Himself is described as one of the wild animals set upon His people who have broken the covenantal relationship (Psalm 74:1; 106:27; Isaiah 31:4; Jeremiah 9:11; 50:44; Hosea 5:14; 13:7).

The Messiah is the Good Shepherd that rescues His people. In John, the good shepherd is essentially the genuine, noble shepherd who voluntarily lays down his life for the sheep. Others might claim to be shepherds, but they are unable to save the sheep (Beasley-Murray, 1987, p. 170). "Jesus' death, then, benefits both the sheep currently around him and those 'scattered.' Similarly, in an unmistakable reference to his death, Jesus says: 'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself'" (12:32) (Neyrey, 2001, p. 284; cf. Martin, 1978). He also is the vulnerable Lamb and the King like David (Ezekiel 34:23-26; Matthew 2:6; 15:24; 18:12-14; Mark 6:34; Luke 15:4-6; John 10; 1 Peter 1:19; Hebrews 9:13-14; 13:20; Revelation 7:17; see also, Tenney, 1981, p. 109). "Although Moses is 'the shepherd of the sheep' whom God 'led out' from the land of Egypt, Jesus is the 'great shepherd of the sheep' whom God 'led out' from the realm of the dead. He alone is the mediator of an everlasting covenant" (Lane, 1991, p. 562).

The observations made above leading to the awareness that Jesus Christ is the complete fulfillment of the sheep-shepherd metaphor in the Bible bring forth some of the most sublime thoughts. Such thoughts affect a deeper understanding of God's great plan of salvation. The imagery considered here creates a natural segue to considering the appeal of the Gospel.

The Gospel call imbedded in this imagery is a call to become aware of what scatters you from your Good Shepherd. It is a call to recognize that the one sent to save is not a hired, and potentially unfaithful, servant but rather the Creator-Owner of the universe! Thus, it is a call to a faith relationship with the Creator. But it is also a call to a certain way of living. The Gospel calls us to experience faith in the Good Shepherd. Psalm 23 contains one of the more eloquent expressions of what this faith means. On the one hand, faith is a joyous fellowship with a person who is like a shepherd and a host. We, like sheep, will have an abundant life as we live in trustful dependence as sheep and guests of the Divine Host. God's call is a call to enjoyment of this faith relationship in our life.

The threats to God's people are primarily spiritual in nature. Modern life offers many substitutes for the Good Shepherd, but without God, these will prove to be mere "hirelings." Thompson (1997) suggested that one such hireling is the Enlightenment notion that success comes from developing autonomous individuals who seek meaning for themselves. But staunch individualism isolates persons from the greater community and ultimately from God.

Using the biblical imagery, several Gospel-call questions naturally arise. Are you being scattered by social relationships that stampede away from true spirituality? Are you letting "friends" lead you astray from God? Are temptations for an exciting lifestyle slowly crowding you out of the lush pasture, away from the still waters where God wants to lead you? Or are you simply wandering off by yourself not listening to the Good Shepherd's voice? Is the power of consumerism pulling you away from the safe pastures toward the isolation but also bondage of the marketplace? (Thompson, 1997, p. 184).

In the context of the workplace, all are agents of someone else. Have you misused your agency relationships for selfish gain at the expense of others? Have you used asymmetry of specialized knowledge to take advantage of someone else?

Humans are like sheep harassed and scattered having no shepherd. We often lead each other astray and yet are oblivious to the destruction that is in the path we have chosen (Isaiah 53:6). But Jesus is the faithful Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd who comes to save his sheep from destruction (Psalm 100:1-5; Matthew 9:36; 10:6; John

10:2-27; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4). He knows the sheep and they know him (John 10; 2 Timothy 2:19; cf. Matthew 7:22-23). “Jesus is no victim — he dies unconquered; he is not mastered by anyone (see John 18:4-6). Second, the reason for Jesus’ death lies entirely in his own hands: he can both “lay it down” and “take it up.” It would be fair to say that he dies voluntarily and is unvanquished and unconquered, which are marks of a noble death” (Neyrey, 2001, p. 285).

If you find yourself isolated from the spiritual community of God’s Kingdom (the flock), what kind of shepherd do you want to solve this problem: a human hired hand whose self-interests dominate, or the genuine Shepherd who voluntarily gave his life on your behalf?

INSTRUCTIONAL USES

The purpose of this paper is to show how the basic ideas of Agency Theory can be taught directly from the Bible through the use of biblical sheep-shepherd-hireling imagery and in so doing, naturally open an opportunity to lead business students to the call of the Gospel.

The paper has explored the biblical concepts, metaphors and imagery directly related to the agency relationship; however, it is not assumed that everything in this paper will automatically be brought into a class period. Some of the biblical information here is meant to provide the instructor with background information upon which to engage students in a conversation at a depth with which the instructor is comfortable.

The material addressed in this paper can be dealt with in several ways. The following are examples:

- **Lectures and illustrations.** Provide one or more lectures on the topic of agency covering not only the biblical perspective but also the contemporary ideas. A whole range of options exist from simply drawing upon Scripture examples of Agency Theory in the biblical narrative to devoting a whole class period or two to the topic to explore the material in-depth.
- **Discussions.** The instructor can start one or discussions with students, in class or online, on the concepts of agency by:
 - o Bringing a controversial issue for consideration
 - o Presenting two opposing views on agency
 - o Asking students questions such as:
 - How would you compare and contrast one biblical character’s (e.g., Joseph) experience with another biblical character’s (e.g., Jacob) experience?

- Why do the Bible writers refer to God’s people as sheep and God as their Shepherd?
- What might be the deeper significance for why Jesus our Savior is called the Good Shepherd?
- How would you synthesize the overall teaching of the Bible on agency issues? What elements of Agency Theory does the Bible not comment on?
- Why might a communal perspective be taken in the Bible? How might this add something to the contemporary perspective that emphasizes the individual?
- What would happen in contemporary business if the biblical ideas are put into practice?
- How can the faithful follower of Jesus take the biblical ideal of agency relationship into the marketplace?
- Identify the various elements of the agency relationship in the biblical narrative about _____.
- When have you experienced the agency relationship? How close to the biblical ideal did the parties in that relationship live?
- **Written assignments.** Instructors may want to assign students the task of writing an original paper on the topic of agency in the Bible, comparing the biblical perspective with contemporary theory and practice or another related topic.
- **Student presentations.** Student teams can be formed for the purpose of preparing and presenting one or more of the elements represented in this article. Student presentations require students to not only learn details but also integrate what they have learned into knowledge they already have.

As a business concept, agency can be found in the finance, business law, accounting, management, economics and business ethics curricula. Thus, it has potential for application in a variety of undergraduate and graduate business courses across the business school. But its potential lies beyond providing a means by which to simply illustrate contemporary concepts. Its potential is great for transforming a teaching-learning experience where the Bible is merely tacked on to a part of the curriculum that otherwise is not essentially different from what can be found in a so-called secular business school. The transformation foreseen here fully integrates the Scriptural foundation for this important business concept. In addition, its potential includes creating a setting in which the power of Gospel can be shared with students, encouraging them to establish and maintain a relationship with the Good Shepherd. Yes, Jesus is the Good

Shepherd, who is the Savior. But he also is the fulfillment of the hopes and dreams of God's faithful people from ancient times until the present.

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