Do Shepherds Make Bad Decisions

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BIBLICAL REFLECTION

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DO SHEPHERDS MAKE BAD DECISIONS?

Actress Brittany Murphy once said, "Life presents you with so many decisions. A lot of times, they're right in front of your face, and they're complicated, but we must make them." While she was not what we would consider "an influential leader," Murphy brings up an important point: every individual *has* to make decisions in life, even if the outcome is unfavorable. Like conflict, decisions are inevitable, and history has shown how leaders in all capacities faced critical moments of making decisions. In the same vein, Saaty (2008) states that individuals are fundamentally decision-makers; everything we do consciously or unconsciously is the result of a decision.

Daft (2008) defines a decision as a "choice made from available alternatives." Ivancevich, Matteson, and Konapaske (2018) describe a decision as a "means to achieve some result or solve some problems or outcome of a process that is influenced by many forces" (p. 374). Both definitions illustrate that decisions lead to resolution. Daft (2008), like Ivancevich et al., states that decision-making is categorized into two groups. Programmed decision-making involves situations that are repetitive and routine, where a definite procedure or developed formula is applied. Non-programmed decision-making refers to unique conditions that are poorly defined, unstructured, and have no established process for handling the problem, either because of uncertainty or complex decisions that result in essential consequences. Ivancevich et al. (2018) highlight the importance of decision-making in every aspect of life, including both personal and professional. Moreover, they outline how decision-making can impact employees, customers, shareholders, and, ultimately, a company's reputation (p. 371). Additionally, Yukl (2013) highlights how the decision process is often characterized more by confusion and emotionality rather than rationality (p. 26).

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Joshua as a Shepherd

There are multiple biblical instances where God's assignment of men leading is compared to a shepherd tending sheep (2 Sam. 5:2, Isa. 40:11; Ps. 23:1). The shepherd metaphor illustrates Christ's relationship with His followers, as He is our Great Shepherd (Resane, 2014). God often chooses people to lead in the same way that Christ led His followers. One such example is Joshua, a protégé and successor of Moses, who was selected to lead the Israelites. While Moses was a prototypical shepherd, he is considered to have been a vessel of the Spirit of Yahweh; this Spirit is seen as a "must" to assist the individual with his tasks (Laniak, 2006). Therefore, it can be assumed that Joshua made decisions through the help of God's Spirit, just like Moses, King David, and other leaders who loved God.

The Biblical Account in Joshua 9

Joshua 9:26 offers an illustration of decision-making in a biblical context. This passage shows how Joshua's decision-making hinged on the availability of information and the possibility of failure, yet did not factor in certainty, risk, uncertainty, and ambiguity. According to Johnson (2011), biblical theology fundamentally undergirds decision-making processes. Every decision requires individuals to interpret and evaluate information (Robbins & Judge, 2013). However, Joshua, when approached by the Gibeonites, made a hasty decision, and the result was that he was deceived. Joshua believed the claim that the Gibeonites were told to follow him and allowed their provisions to be sampled by the Israelites–all without seeking the counsel of God (Josh. 9:4, 14). Moreover, Joshua made a treaty of peace with the Gibeonites, letting them live, which the leaders of the assembly ratified by oath (Josh. 9:15).

This account is an example of Joshua failing to conduct sufficient investigation. Proverbs 19:2 says, ". . . It is not good for a person to be without knowledge, and he who hurries his footsteps errs" (NAS). The decision-making framework is congruent with bounded rationality; a decision-making tool seeks satisficing solutions and sufficiency, i.e., basing decisions on limited knowledge and time or on choices that appear plausible for the decision maker's purpose (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Ivancevich et al. (2018) also emphasize that time pressures, incomplete information, limited human resources, and other factors impact the decision-making process (p. 379). When we look at the story of Joshua, we see that he opted to utilize a fast and frugal procedure; this infringed on the fundamental tenets of classical rationality. Consequently, this decision-making process led to an ineffective decision, resulting in allowing the Gibeonites, who were enemies of the Israelites, to live close to Israel (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996; Prov. 9:16).

However, while Joshua played a central role in the negotiating process, unnamed others were involved; the biblical account speaks to an assembly of leaders who also supported the ratification of the peace treaty (Sutherland, 1992; Josh. 9:15). On a similar note, Ivancevich et al. (2018) sum up the process of such decision-making challenges:

> Managers rarely have all the information they need or want; decision makers are not aware of all possible alternatives and are not able to predict consequences; early alternatives and solutions are quickly adopted because of constraints and limitations; the organization's goals constrain decision-making; and conflicting goals of different constituents, for example, compromise solution. (p. 379)

In many cases, decision-makers choose the first alternative that satisfies minimal decision criteria. However, making a "good enough" or acceptable choice might not be the optimal decision for moving forward (Ivancevich et al., 2018, p. 380).

Non-Programmed Decisions vs. Programmed Decisions

Leaders are continuously faced with making decisions, and decision-making is primarily concerned with creating solutions that will resolve present problems and limit potential future issues (Ivancevich et al., 2018). Likewise, the effects of a leader's decisions usually impact all members of an organization (Robbins & Judge, 2013); a prime example of this is the consequence Israel faced as a result of Joshua's decision when granting the Gibeonites a peace treaty (Daft, 2008).

Leaders are mainly judged on the effectiveness of their decisions (Cray, Haines, & Mallory, 1994). Given the importance of decision-making (to both the leader and the organization as a whole), decisions should be made using logic and strategies; this can be done by pooling all available resources, evaluating, and interpreting information while developing an action plan (Robbins & Judge, 2013). While potential challenges come with any decision process, its foundation rests upon the two classifications of decisions: programmed and non-programmed.

Programmed decisions relate to routine situations. Due to the repeated nature of the problem, the leader is more likely to make decisions by using historical information (Cray et al., 1994). In this regard, leaders can create processes to handle the situation (Ivancevich et al., 2018). Programmed decision-making is used in an extensive array of contexts, ranging from simple to very complex.

In contrast, non-programmed decisions are those made amid unfamiliar situations (Ivancevich et al., 2018). Due to their uncertainty, non-programmed

decisions require a degree of creativity and intuition by the leader in an attempt to make the best decision (Prentice, 1975). However, even with this category of decision-making, rationality is tantamount and should be utilized to make consistent, sound, value-adding decisions (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Personal Decision Framework

Making a decision is one of the most critical functions performed by leaders (Yukl, 2013, p. 105). Indeed, while not all managers make decisions in the same way, they all have a dominant style that impacts how they make their decisions. Similarly, Joshua also had a dominant decision-making style. To think more critically about what that style was, one must ask: what personal decision framework did Joshua use most of the time?

Daft (2008) proposes that decision styles differ, depending on how people perceive problems and make decisions. To emphasize this, Daft cited how researchers identified four major decision styles:

Directive style which is used by individuals who prefer simple, clear-cut solutions to problems; analytical style, where individuals consider complex solutions based on as much data as they can gather; conceptual style, which considers a broad amount of information; and behavioral style, characterized by having a deep concern for others as individuals. (2008, p. 301)

Based on Joshua's interaction with the Gibeonites, the decision style most clearly modeled is directive; Joshua made what he thought were simple, clear-cut decisions without consulting elders or others in the hierarchy. Joshua's dominant decision style could have been a result of his background as a trained member of Pharaoh's army.

Why Do Leaders Make Bad Decisions?

Even the best manager will make mistakes; most poor decisions are errors in judgment that originate in the human mind's limited capacity that managers display during decision-making (Daft, 2008). Campbell, Whitehead, and Finkelstein (2009) also add that decision-making lies at the heart of personal and professional lives. They suggest that individuals depend primarily on two hardwired processes for decision-making: pattern recognition, which is a complicated process that integrates information but can mislead us; and emotional tagging, by which emotional intelligence attaches itself to thoughts and experiences that are stored in our memories, sending signals that tell us if we should pay attention to something or not. Equally important, Daft (2008) discloses six biases that can assist leaders in making effective choices: being influenced by initial impressions, justifying

past decisions, seeing what you want to see, perpetuating the status quo, being affected by problem framing, and overconfidence.

From a biblical perspective, why did Joshua make a wrong decision, and what shaped his bad decision when he fell for the Gibeonites's trick? In this story, any of these factors could have influenced his ineffective decision. Examining the literary relationship between Deuteronomy 29:6 and Joshua 9:12–14 may shed some light as to why the Israelites were so easily deceived (Kearney, 1973). In Deuteronomy 29:6, God reminded the Israelites that as Moses led them out of Egypt and into the desert, they had neither bread nor strong drink. However, in Joshua 9:12–14, the Gibeonites brought bread and wine to the Israelites, saying that they had heard what God had done for them in Egypt and that they were sent by God to make a covenant with the Israelites. The Gibeonites's deceiving words connected with the Israelite's past, specifically where God led their ancestors out of Egypt and had provided for them. Similarly, the Gibeonites's false story made an emotional connection with Joshua and the Israelites. The result was that the Israelite's minds gave excessive weight to the information presented by the Gibeonites; that information acted as an anchor to subsequent thoughts and judgment (Daft, 2008).

Influence of Power

Daft (2008) defines power as the potential ability to influence the behaviors of others, creating interaction between leader and followers. He added that influence is a significant component in control, as it is the result of a person acting on the attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors of others. According to Robbins and Judge (2013), power is categorized into two general groupings: formal power, which is based on an individual's position in an organization; and personal power, which comes from different and unique characteristics.

Having discussed the meaning and origin of power, we can see that Joshua exemplified formal power in Joshua 9:1–18. The question is, how did Joshua showcase his power? Joshua was Moses's faithful assistant during the Exodus and succeeded him as Israel's leader after Moses died (Richards, 1999). Furthermore, before Moses died, he blessed Joshua and appointed him as the leader of the Israelites; both God and Moses approved Joshua. Under those circumstances, Joshua influenced others because of this position within the organization (i.e., Israel).

Legitimate power, also known as position power, is broader than the ability to coerce and reward, but it includes member acceptance of the authority of a position (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Interestingly, Ivancevich et al. clarify that power is frequently prescribed by the structure within the organization's social system rather than attributes formed by an individual (p. 311). DeSilva (2008)

posits that early Christians shared social values and ways of developing and maintaining relationships such as patronage, kinship, and methods of ordering the world. For example, the significance of the relationship between Moses and Joshua caused Moses to take a deep, abiding interest in equipping Joshua for the future (Richards, 1999). Moreover, a secure connection brings out the best in people and provides them with the greatness that, in Joshua's case, eased the transition after Moses's death (Richards, 1999, p. 79).

Quality Decision-Making

Decision-making is a critical component of management, crucial at all organizational levels and made among different courses of action (Buhler, 2001). For example, the rational decision-making model commonly uses the framework to make decisions; however, it is appropriate for some, but not all, decisions (Buhler, 2001). Robbins and Judge (2013) indicate that the model makes logical value-maximizing choices within specified constraints. Also, the rational decision model relies on the decision-maker having enough information to identify suitable options in an unbiased manner, choosing the high utility option (p. 175).

Conversely, in Joshua 9:1–24, rational decision-making was not utilized. Saaty (2008) discusses that when making decisions, individuals must know the problem, the need and purpose of the decision, the criteria of the decision, their sub-criteria, stakeholders and groups affected, and alternative actions to take. Because Joshua never investigated the Gibeonites's claims utilizing the rational model, the results were unfavorable. It wasn't but a few days after the treaty that Joshua realized what the Gibeonites had plotted; however, at that time, it was too late to alter his decision because the Gibeonites were within close proximity. Additionally, because he and the leaders of the assembly had made an oath in God's name, they had to abide by their pledge.

Conclusion

The story of Joshua is a cautionary lesson for leaders; decision-making should never be taken lightly. Although not all circumstances carry the same weight, each decision has a consequence that impacts everyone involved. Joshua's decision emphasizes the importance of rational decision-making in every scenario. Leaders must use available resources to solve situations as they arise and utilize analytical decision-making techniques.

In the same way that Joshua *should* have inquired of the Lord, who was the ultimate Source to consult in this scenario, leaders should also employ wise counsel or ask experts when making significant decisions. Even though he was a shepherd of the Lord, Joshua leaned on his own knowledge and

understanding and thus made mistakes. Any Christian leader, like Joshua, must learn from their mistakes to avoid making the same faulty decisions in the future.

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