

SIFAH LECTURE SERIES

You Are a Shepherd: The Trust of Leadership in Every Life

A practical lecture — knowledge you can act on

Ustadh Bilal Saleem

July 2026 · ~30 min read · Leadership & Responsibility



SIFAH

SCHOOL OF ISLAMIC
FOUNDATIONS &
ADVOCACY FOR HUMANITY

You Are a Shepherd: The Trust of Leadership in Every Life

In the eyes of Allah you already lead something, and one day you will be asked how you cared for it.

WHY THIS MATTERS

You Are Already a Leader

My dear brother, my dear sister, let me ask you something honestly before we begin. When you hear the word *leadership*, where does your mind go? For most of us it travels far away, to presidents behind podiums, to generals commanding armies, to CEOs in glass towers, to kings and rulers whose names fill the news. And then, quietly, we excuse ourselves. We think, *that is their burden, not mine. I am just an ordinary person living an ordinary life. Leadership has nothing to do with me.*

I want to tell you gently that this is one of the great blind spots of our time. In the sight of Allah, leadership is not a rare crown worn by the few. It is a **trust laid upon the shoulders of every single one of us**. It sits in your home when you close the door at night. It sits in your workplace when others depend on your decisions. It sits in the masjid where people follow your example. And it sits, most intimately of all, over your own heart and your own soul. There is not one man or woman reading these words who does not lead something. And there is not one of us who will not be questioned about it.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ shattered forever the idea that responsibility belongs only to those with titles. He placed every believer upon the watchtower of accountability with words so clear that fourteen centuries later they still make the heart tremble.

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ، الْإِمَامُ رَاعٍ
وَمَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ، وَالرَّجُلُ رَاعٍ فِي أَهْلِهِ وَمَسْئُولٌ
عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ، وَالْمَرْأَةُ رَاعِيَةٌ فِي بَيْتِ زَوْجِهَا وَمَسْئُولَةٌ
عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهَا، وَالْخَادِمُ رَاعٍ فِي مَالِ سَيِّدِهِ وَمَسْئُولٌ عَنْ
رَعِيَّتِهِ.

Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock. *The leader is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The man is a shepherd over his family and is responsible for his flock. The woman is a shepherd in the house of her husband and is responsible for her flock. And the servant is a shepherd over the wealth of his master and is responsible for his flock.*

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 893 and Sahih Muslim: 1829 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

Sit with the image the Prophet ﷺ chose. He did not say you are an owner. He did not say you are a boss. He said you are a *shepherd* — in Arabic, a *ra'i*. And a shepherd, my dear reader, does not own the flock. He tends what belongs to another. He wakes before dawn in the cold. He walks under the burning sun. He counts his animals at dusk to be sure none is missing. When one strays, he leaves the comfort of the group and goes searching in the dark. And at the end of it all, he must answer to the owner for every single head placed in his care.

That is exactly how Allah wants you to see yourself. Not as an owner who exploits, but as a guardian who will one day hand back what he was given and be asked, tenderly and terribly: *how did you care for what I placed in your hands?*

Heavier Than the Mountains

Our age has trained us to crave authority for what it brings us. Status. Income. The admiration of people. The little rush that comes when others must listen to us. We chase positions the way children chase shiny objects, without pausing to ask what we are really picking up.

Allah trains us to do the opposite. He teaches us to tremble before authority, not because of what it brings, but because of what it *carries*. Leadership is, before it is anything else, an *amanah* — a trust. And the trust, my dear brother and sister, is the heaviest thing in all of creation. Listen to how Allah describes its weight, in a verse that should make every one of us pause before we ever reach for a position.

إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ
فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ
ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا

*Indeed, We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and **they declined to bear it and feared it**, but man bore it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.*

Surah Al-Ahzab (33:72)

Imagine it. The mountains, in all their immense and ancient strength, shrank away from this trust. The heavens with their vastness, the earth with its solidity, all feared to carry it. And then came the human being, small and fragile, and he lifted it onto his own back, often without the faintest understanding of what he had just shouldered.

Every position of authority you hold is a piece of that trust. And the believer who truly grasps this does not run toward leadership hungry for the thrill of it. He approaches it the way you would approach something heavy and sacred, something both precious and dangerous, knowing that one day he will

answer for it. This changes everything about how we seek positions, how we accept them, and how we carry them.

THE VERSE OF GOVERNANCE

Put the Trust in the Right Hands

The very first law of this trust is that authority must be placed into the hands of those worthy of it, and then exercised with justice. Allah joined these two duties together in a single command that the scholars named the verse of governance.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا
حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا
يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا

*Indeed, Allah commands you to **render trusts to whom they are due**, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed, Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing.*

Surah An-Nisa (4:58)

Ibn Kathir, may Allah have mercy on him, explains that this single verse gathers the whole of just leadership into two duties. First: place responsibilities in the hands of those qualified to bear them. Second: rule between people with fairness once you hold them. And he adds something that stings the conscience of our age. To hand a trust to someone unworthy of it, out of favouritism, or tribe, or friendship, or a bribe, is itself a betrayal of the amanah before a single decision has even been made.

As-Sa'di, may Allah have mercy on him, widens the meaning further. The trusts here are broad. They cover the rights of Allah and the rights of people, every single duty placed upon you that others rely on you to fulfil. So the man who appoints his cousin to a task he cannot do, while the able and the honest

are passed over, has betrayed the trust before he even begins. The Prophet ﷺ warned that whoever appoints a man over a group while there is among them someone more pleasing to Allah has betrayed Allah, His Messenger, and the believers. Let that settle for a moment, because we live in a world that calls this networking, and Allah calls it betrayal.

A KNIFE'S EDGE

The One Who Craves It Is Often Least Fit for It

Here our religion turns the whole world upside down. The world tells you to campaign for the position. Promote yourself. Seize authority wherever you can grab it. Post about your achievements. Make yourself impossible to overlook. But the Prophet ﷺ taught something that the ambitious of our age have completely forgotten: that the safest leaders are often those who never sought the role at all, and that the one consumed by hunger for it is frequently abandoned to it, left to carry it without help from Allah.

There is a scene in the life of the Companions that breaks my heart every time I read it. Abu Dharr, may Allah be pleased with him, one of the most beloved and sincere of the Companions, came to the Prophet ﷺ and asked to be given a position of command. He wanted to serve. He wanted to lead. And the Prophet ﷺ, who loved him deeply, did not flatter him. He loved him far too much to deceive him.

يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ، إِنَّكَ ضَعِيفٌ، وَإِنَّهَا أَمَانَةٌ، وَإِنَّهَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
خِزْيٌ وَنَدَامَةٌ، إِلَّا مَنْ أَخَذَهَا بِحَقِّهَا وَأَدَّى الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ
فِيهَا.

O Abu Dharr, you are weak, and it is a trust, and on the Day of Resurrection it will be a disgrace and a regret, except for the one who takes it by its right and fulfils what is due upon him in it.

Source: Sahih Muslim: 1825 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Read those words slowly, because they place leadership upon a knife's edge. On the Day of Resurrection, authority will be *khizy wa nadama* — disgrace and regret, a public humiliation before all of creation. Except for one type of person: the one who took it by its right and discharged every duty within it. There is no comfortable middle ground. Either your leadership lifts you onto pulpits of light, or it drags you down into shame on the very day when every secret is exposed.

Do you see what the Prophet ﷺ was doing? He was not discouraging Abu Dharr from goodness. He was protecting him from a burden heavier than his shoulders could carry. And he was teaching all of us a principle we desperately need: the role is not a prize to be won. It is a load to be feared. And he warned the leader who betrays those under his care of a punishment that should freeze the heart of anyone who holds power over another human being.

مَا مِنْ عَبْدٍ يَسْتَرْعِيهِ اللَّهُ رَعِيَّةً، يَمُوتُ يَوْمَ يَمُوتُ وَهُوَ
غَاشٌّ لِرَعِيَّتِهِ، إِلَّا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ.

*There is no servant whom Allah places in charge of a flock, who dies on the day he dies while he is deceiving his flock, except that **Allah forbids Paradise to him.***

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 7150 and Sahih Muslim: 142 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

Now here is what we must understand about this word *ghishsh*, deceiving the flock. It is not only stealing from people. It is neglecting them. It is abandoning their needs while you enjoy the privileges of the position. It is sleeping comfortably in your bed while those under your care are being wronged and you look the other way. The manager who lets injustice run through his department and shrugs. The father who provides money but withholds his attention, his time, his guidance. The one with influence who feeds his followers what harms them because it earns him more. Every one of them is warned by this hadith. Authority that is not carried faithfully does not merely lose its reward. It becomes a wall between the servant and Paradise itself.

Justice, and the Pulpits of Light

If the trust is the foundation of leadership, then justice is its crown. Allah loves the just. He loves them so deeply that He has reserved for them a station so high the Prophet ﷺ could only describe it in terms of light. Those who rule fairly over whatever Allah placed in their care, whether it is a nation or a single household or one honest transaction, will stand on the Day of Resurrection in a place of honour beyond imagination.

إِنَّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ مَنَابِرٍ مِّنْ نُورٍ عَن يَمِينِ
الرَّحْمَنِ، وَكِلْتَا يَدَيْهِ يَمِينٌ، الَّذِينَ يَعْدِلُونَ فِي حُكْمِهِمْ
وَأَهْلِيهِمْ وَمَا وَلُوا.

Indeed, the just will be with Allah upon pulpits of light, at the right hand of the Most Merciful, and both of His hands are right hands: those who are just in their judgements, and with their families, and in what they are placed in charge of.

Source: Sahih Muslim: 1827 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Notice how tenderly the Prophet ﷺ widened the circle of justice in this hadith. He did not speak only of judges in their courtrooms and kings on their thrones. He named those who are just in their judgements, *and with their families*, and in *everything* placed under their authority. The father who is fair between his children, refusing to favour one over another, is among these people of light. The employer who pays the worker his full wage, and pays it before his sweat has dried, is among them. The believer who is fair even toward someone he dislikes, because Allah commanded that our enmity must never push us into injustice, is among them.

This is why Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, who governed an empire stretching across three continents, would walk the streets of Madinah at night, alone, to see with his own eyes

whether any of his flock went to bed hungry. And he said words that reveal the trembling heart of a true shepherd: that if a lost animal stumbled on the bank of the Euphrates, far away at the edge of his lands, he feared Allah would question him as to why he had not paved the road for it. Think about that. A camel, on a riverbank, hundreds of miles away. That is what it feels like to truly carry the weight of the flock. His justice did not come from policy or fear of the people. It came from a burning certainty that he would one day stand before Allah and be asked.

THE WAY OF THE PROPHET ﷺ

He Led by Consultation, Not Domination

Now let me show you the most beautiful and, I believe, the most misunderstood feature of the Prophet's ﷺ leadership. He led the greatest community in human history not by domineering over people, not by crushing them under his authority, but by *consulting* them. Think about how astonishing this is. He received revelation directly from the heavens. His words were guided by Allah. And yet Allah commanded him to seek the counsel of his Companions in the affairs of this world and to honour their views.

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ
الْقَلْبِ لَآنَفَضُوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ
وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

*So by mercy from Allah, you were gentle with them. Had you been harsh and hard of heart, they would have scattered from around you. So pardon them, seek forgiveness for them, and **consult them in the matter**. Then, when you have decided, place your trust in Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely upon Him.*

Surah Al Imran (3:159)

My dear brother and sister, reflect on the order of this verse, because it is a complete manual of leadership hidden in a single line. First comes gentleness, because harshness scatters people from a leader no matter how right he is. Then comes pardon and seeking forgiveness for those you lead, because a leader who cannot overlook the faults of his people will not lead anyone for long. Then comes consultation, *shura*, so that the people feel ownership of the decision and so that you benefit from minds wiser than yours in their own fields. And only then, after listening deeply, comes the firm decision and reliance upon Allah, so that consultation does not collapse into endless hesitation.

And Allah did not make this the character of one man alone. He praised an entire community of believers for it, describing them by this quality as if it were a badge of their faith.

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ
شُورَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

*And those who have responded to their Lord, established the prayer, and **conduct their affairs by mutual consultation**, and spend out of what We have provided them.*

Surah Ash-Shura (42:38)

But here is the thing that should melt every prideful heart. The Prophet ﷺ did not merely teach consultation with words. He lived it on the most dangerous days of his entire life. At the Battle of Badr, he chose a position for the Muslim army. And a Companion named al-Hubab ibn al-Mundhir, may Allah be pleased with him, came forward, and with the utmost respect he asked: is this a place Allah commanded you to take, in which case there is nothing more to say, or is this a matter of opinion and military strategy? When the Prophet ﷺ answered that it was strategy and judgement, al-Hubab said plainly that it was not the best position, and he proposed the army advance to the nearest well, seize it, and deny the water to the enemy.

And the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, the leader of the believers, the beloved of his Lord, the greatest human being who ever walked the earth, accepted the counsel of an ordinary soldier without a single trace of wounded pride. The army moved. Let that lodge deep in your heart if you are ever too proud to be corrected by someone beneath you in rank. The best of creation took the better idea even when it was not his own.

HE CARRIED THE LOAD HIMSELF

The Trench, the Prayer, and Muadh

At the Battle of the Trench, when Madinah faced an alliance of armies far larger than its own, it was Salman al-Farsi, may Allah be pleased with him, a Persian, who suggested a tactic the Arabs had never used: digging a great trench around the exposed flank of the city. The Prophet ﷺ approved the plan at once. And then, far from standing back the way commanders do, watching others sweat while they issue

orders, he picked up the pickaxe and dug alongside his Companions. He carried the earth on his own blessed back until the dust covered his body, and he tied a stone against his stomach to blunt the hunger that they all felt together.

This is leadership that *shares* the burden instead of merely assigning it. Ask yourself, honestly: when hardship comes to those you lead, do you disappear into your comfort, or do you pick up the pickaxe? The leader who only delegates the pain and keeps the ease for himself will never be followed with love.

And here is a scene so humble it almost defies belief. On a journey, the time for prayer arrived before the Prophet ﷺ returned to the camp. The Companions, needing to pray, appointed Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf to lead them. The Prophet ﷺ arrived to find the prayer already underway. What did the leader of all the Muslims do? He did not interrupt. He did not assert his rank. He did not stop the prayer to take his rightful place at the front. He quietly slipped into the rows and prayed *behind* his own Companion. The leader of the entire Ummah stood as a follower behind one of his men, teaching us that true authority is secure enough to take its place in the line.

And when he sent Muadh ibn Jabal, may Allah be pleased with him, as a governor and judge to Yemen, he did not hand him a rigid script to recite. As related by Abu Dawud and at-Tirmidhi, he asked Muadh how he would judge. Muadh answered that he would judge by the Book of Allah; and if he did not find the ruling there, then by the Sunnah of the Messenger ﷺ; and if he did not find it there, then he would exert his own reasoned judgement and spare no effort. And the Prophet ﷺ was pleased, and he praised Allah for guiding the messenger of His Messenger to what pleases Him. Do you see the genius of it? He entrusted Muadh with real authority and real responsibility. He trained him to think, to weigh, to decide, rather than reducing him to a man who only follows orders. That is how leaders raise other leaders: by trusting capable people with genuine responsibility.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

The Strong and the Trustworthy

A leader is only ever as strong as the people he places around him. And our religion gives us a precise, unforgettable standard for whom to choose. In the story of Musa in Madyan, when the righteous man considered hiring him, it was his daughter who named the two qualities that matter above every other.

قَالَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا يَا أَبَتِ اسْتَأْجِرْهُ ^{صَلِّ} إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَنْ
اسْتَأْجَرْتَ الْقَوِيُّ الْأَمِينُ

One of the two women said: O my father, hire him. Indeed, **the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy.**

Surah Al-Qasas (28:26)

Two qualities, and the whole of sound appointment rests upon them. *Al-qawi*, competence and strength to actually do the work. And *al-amin*, trustworthiness and integrity in the way it is done. Think about what happens when one is missing. Strength without trust is simply a capable thief, someone gifted enough to do real damage. Trust without strength is a sincere man who means well but cannot carry the task and lets everyone down. The believer who appoints people, whether in his business, in his community, or in his home, looks for both. And he refuses to hand a responsibility to someone merely because they are a relative or a friend.

And when Yusuf, upon him be peace, sought a position of authority, notice why. He did not seek it for wealth or fame. He sought it because he knew himself qualified to discharge a duty no one else could carry in a time of coming famine. He said, place me over the storehouses of the land, for I am a knowing guardian, *hafiz alim* — one who protects, and one who knows. He asked for the role precisely because he could fulfil its trust. And that, my dear reader, is the only honourable reason a person should ever seek authority: not to be served, but because you can genuinely carry what others cannot.

YOUR REAL FLOCK

Leadership in the Life You Actually Live

It would be a failure of this whole lesson if we spoke of shepherds and trusts as though they belonged only to the past or to people in high office. So let me bring it home. The flock Allah has placed in your hands is far closer than you think, and the questioning about it will be just as real.

The leadership of the home. The first and heaviest leadership most of us will ever hold is over our own families. A father is a shepherd, and his children are his flock. A mother is a shepherd in her home, and the Prophet ﷺ named her by name in the hadith we began with. And here is the trap: this leadership is not measured by how much money enters the house. It is measured by whether the hearts inside that house are being guided toward Allah. The parent who provides every comfort, every gadget, every holiday, yet never teaches the prayer, never sits down to guide, never shows fairness between the children, has neglected the very flock he will be asked about first. To lead a home is to be gentle as the verse commanded, to consult your spouse rather than dominate them, to be so fair between your children that not one of them grows up quietly believing they were loved less, and to carry your family toward the Hereafter and not only through this world. The Prophet ﷺ said the best of you are the best to their families, and he was the best of them.

The leadership of work and community. Many of us hold real authority over others through our work: a team we manage, employees who depend on us, a business whose conduct we set. Every one of us is a shepherd there. The manager who is just to those beneath him, who does not crush them, who pays the worker his due promptly and never exploits the one too afraid to complain, is practising the leadership of the pulpits of light without even realising it. And those who serve the community, who lead in the masjid, on its committees, in its schools, carry a trust over the very religion of people, which is heavier still. Leadership in the community is service, not a throne. The one who seeks a position on a board to feel important has misunderstood the whole affair. The one who takes it to lift a burden off the shoulders of the Muslims has understood it completely.

The leadership of influence. And in our time a vast new form of leadership has appeared that our grandparents never knew: influence over an audience. Anyone with a platform, a following, a voice that others actually listen to, has become a shepherd over the minds and hearts of those who follow them. And they will be asked about that flock. Did you lead them toward Allah or away from Him? Did you feed them truth or vanity, modesty or shamelessness, contentment or endless craving? The deceitful shepherd is not only the corrupt official in his office. He is also the one who holds the attention of thousands and uses it to lead them into heedlessness for the sake of his own gain. So if you have any influence over anyone, however small, know that it is a trust. And ask yourself, honestly, tonight: where am I taking the people who trust me?

Between Hope and Fear

Now I do not want a single one of you to walk away from this crushed by despair. That is not the goal. If you look back honestly and find that you have been harsh where you should have been gentle, or careless where you should have been just, or absent where you should have been present, then hear this clearly: the door of return is wide open, and it never closes while you breathe. A single sincere change in how you treat your flock can turn the entire account around. Allah is not waiting to catch you. He is waiting to receive you back.

And if Allah has already made you just and faithful in your leadership, do not grow proud of it, because the heart that admires its own justice is only one step away from arrogance. Many a leader was undone not by his failures but by his pride in his successes. So walk between the two wings of hope and fear: hope in a Lord who raises the just to pulpits of light at His right hand, and fear of a Day when a neglected flock will testify against the shepherd who failed it. The believer flies on both wings, and neither one alone.

And for those who are led, and that is every one of us in some part of our lives, our religion gives a duty too. Obey those placed in authority over you in all that is good, support them in righteousness, and pray for their guidance rather than only complaining about their faults. The Prophet ﷺ tied the welfare of an entire community to the bond of love and prayer between the people and their leaders.

خَيْرُ أَمْتِكُمُ الَّذِينَ تُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَكُمْ، وَيُصَلُّونَ عَلَيْكُمْ
وَتُصَلُّونَ عَلَيْهِمْ.

The best of your leaders are those whom you love and who love you, who pray for you and for whom you pray.

Source: Sahih Muslim: 1855 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Yet this obedience is never absolute, because there is only One whose command is obeyed in all things. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ drew the boundary so clearly that no one could ever use authority to drag people into sin.

السَّمْعُ وَالطَّاعَةُ عَلَى الْمَرْءِ الْمُسْلِمِ فِيمَا أَحَبَّ وَكَرِهَ، مَا
لَمْ يُؤْمَرْ بِمَعْصِيَةٍ، فَإِذَا أُمِرَ بِمَعْصِيَةٍ فَلَا سَمْعَ وَلَا
طَاعَةَ.

*To listen and obey is binding upon the Muslim in what he likes and dislikes, so long as he is not commanded to disobey Allah. But **if he is commanded to commit an act of disobedience, then there is no listening and no obeying.***

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 7144 and Sahih Muslim: 1839 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaquun Alayh (agreed upon)

This was the very spirit of the leadership of the rightly guided. When Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, may Allah be pleased with him, took authority after the Prophet ﷺ, he stood before the people and said that he had been placed over them though he was not the best of them. He asked them to help him if he did well and to correct him if he erred. He said the weak among them was strong in his sight until he secured their right, and the strong among them was weak in his sight until he took from them what was due. And then he spoke words that summarise our entire religion's view of authority: obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Messenger; and if I disobey Allah and His Messenger, then you owe me no obedience. That, my dear brother and sister, is a leader who knew he was a shepherd and not an owner, a servant of the trust and not its master.

WHERE THIS ROAD LEADS

The Promise to the Just

Let us not forget where all of this is heading, because the shepherd who tends his flock faithfully through the long, cold nights is steadied by remembering the dawn. The just leader is the first of the seven whom

Allah will shade beneath His Throne on the Day when there is no shade except His. The people of justice are raised to pulpits of light near the Most Merciful. And the believers are taught not merely to hope to be saved, but to hope to be made leaders *of the righteous*, guiding others to the good. This is the supplication Allah placed upon the tongues of His most beloved servants.

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ
أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

*And those who say: Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes,
and **make us a leader for the righteous.***

Surah Al-Furqan (25:74)

Reflect on this prayer one last time. The servants of the Most Merciful do not ask to be served. They ask to be made leaders who guide others toward taqwa, and notice where they begin: in their own homes, with their own spouses and children. Every act of justice you show to your flock, every burden you lift from those you lead, every time you consult instead of dominate, every time you serve instead of exploit, is a single step toward that station of the just, raised in light near your Lord. Do not measure these steps as small. Measure them by where they are taking you.

A REMINDER CARRIED HOME

Name Your Flock Tonight

So before you close this lesson and return to your life, I want you to do one honest thing. Name the flock that Allah has actually placed in your hands. Not the one you imagine or the one you wish you had. The real one. Your children. Your spouse. Your employees. Your students. Those who follow your voice online. The people who wait on your decisions. Write them in your mind right now, one by one.

And then weigh yourself against the questioning that is coming. Am I just among them, or do I quietly favour some and neglect others? Do I consult those I lead and overlook their faults, or do I dominate them and demand of them what I do not demand of myself? Do I carry the burden alongside them, or

do I hand them the hardship and keep the comfort for myself? And the one question that gathers up all the rest: if I were called this very day to stand before Allah and account for the trust He placed upon me, would I rise to a pulpit of light, or would I meet the disgrace and the regret of which the Prophet ﷺ warned Abu Dharr?

My dear brother, my dear sister, these questions are not meant to crush you. They are the lantern of the faithful shepherd who tends his flock in this life knowing exactly to Whom he will one day return it. So let us not admire these meanings for an hour and then lead exactly as we did before. Let us turn admiration into a plan, starting today.

☰ Your Action Plan: Tend Your Flock

Don't just read — choose what you will act on this week.

1 Name your flock on paper

Write down every person Allah has placed under your care right now: your spouse, each child by name, your team, your students, your followers. Beside each one, note one thing you have been neglecting. You cannot tend a flock you have never counted.

TODAY

Make it last: once you begin today, keep it every day after — until it becomes a permanent habit for life.

2 Choose consultation over command once a day

Before you decide something that affects those you lead, ask them first. Ask your spouse before the family decision. Ask your team before you set their task. Let them feel their voice reaches you, just as the Prophet ﷺ consulted his Companions on the gravest of days.

DAILY

Make it last: keep it daily until it becomes second nature — a habit for the rest of your life.

3 Fix one injustice you have been ignoring

Identify one place where you have favoured someone unfairly, withheld a due wage or right, or looked away from wrongdoing under your authority. Correct it this week. The just are raised to pulpits of light; begin your climb with a single honest act.

THIS WEEK

Make it last: once this first week is done, don't stop — carry it on as a lifelong habit.

4 Pick up the pickaxe

Find one burden your flock is carrying and share it with them physically, not just with orders. Sit with your child over their struggle, do the hard task alongside your team, carry what you would normally delegate. Lead the way the Prophet ﷺ dug the trench.

THIS WEEK

Make it last: once this first week is done, don't stop — carry it on as a lifelong habit.

🚩 The 7-Day Shepherd's Challenge

For seven days, end each night with one honest question before you sleep: 'How did I tend my flock today?' Name one person under your care, one thing you did well for them, and one thing you will do better tomorrow. Add a short du'a asking Allah to make you just, gentle, and a means of guiding them to Him. Seven nights is only the beginning; the goal is that this nightly accounting becomes the permanent habit of a faithful shepherd, so that the day you stand before Allah, your flock rises to testify for you and not against you.

Make it stick – and make it last

- ✓ **Write it down.** Put your chosen action on a sticky note on your mirror, desk, or fridge – somewhere you cannot miss it.
- ✓ **Print this plan** and tick each action off as you do it.
- ✓ **Set a daily reminder** on your phone or calendar so it never slips your mind.
- ✓ **Keep a one-line journal** each night – did I do it today? how did it go? – and watch your streak grow.

Don't aim for one good day or week – aim to keep it for life. A habit only counts once it outlives the challenge.