

Sermon Series: Priest, Prophet, Shepherd, and King

Part 1: Gardening Our Strengths

(Sermon 7-30-22)

Tikvat Israel Messianic Synagogue

Rabbi David Wein

Let's pray...

Beloved: you are a priest. You are a prophet. You are a shepherd. And you are a king. But only because the Lord is the High Priest, the Lord is the Prophet like Moses, the Lord is our Shepherd, and the Lord is King. We are made in the image of God. However, on the other hand, we are made of dust, and He holds our very breath in his hands, and he animates me to say these very words. Between humility and the high calling to reflect the very character of God, we walk out our God-given purpose as Priest, Prophet, Shepherd, and King. These are the main offices in the Hebrew Bible, and they are going to be the focus of this sermon, the focus of some following sermons after that, the focus of our theme for next year, and the focus of the vision in our community for this upcoming season.

Remember, God put us in a garden. And that means that he has asked us to garden our garden, to pull out the weeds, to water and plant, to serve, to partner with him for the flourishing of his good world.

So today begins a new sermon series: Priest, Prophet, Shepherd, and King. And this is part one: Gardening our Strengths.

Let's begin with the mission, vision, pillars, and values of our congregation.
Do you know what they are? Let's take a look:



VISION

TO BRIDGE AND RESTORE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
YESHUA, THE JEWISH PEOPLE,
AND THE NATIONS



MISSION

TO BUILD A
CONGREGATION
FOR YESHUA WITHIN
THE RICHMOND
JEWISH COMMUNITY



PILLARS

WE ARE A SYNAGOGUE
YESHUA IS CENTRAL
INTEGRITY WITH GOD AND MAN



VALUES

HELP
OUTREACH
PURPOSE
EDUCATION



In addition to that, we have seasonal themes for the year. Two years ago, the Jewish year of 5781, we had what? Relational Gospeling. 1 Peter 3:15 was our theme verse:

Instead, sanctify Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with humility and reverence.

Then, we built on that this year with Relational Shalom, coming together as a community regularly, and this is our current theme verse from 1 Thess 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up—just as you in fact are doing.

I have also talked to our community members and leaders about the BIRDS. This is a strategy for healthy community life and ministry:

1. Be creative
2. Integrate
3. Raise up leaders
4. Disciple
5. Simplify

All of these ideas lead to healthy community. Moreover, there is another theme that I think about and pray about often in my capacity as Rabbi and

Shepherd, that I talk about often with the other leaders and with the members of our community. My sense is that in order for us to bridge and restore relationship between Yeshua, the Jewish people and the nations, in order for us to build Help, Outreach, Purpose, and Education, in order for us to relationally share the gospel with the Jewish community and those called to join us among the nations, in order for us build relational shalom and be a healthy community, we need to walk in our God-given strengths.

So the theme of next year is going to be: Gardening Our Strengths. It means we are learning to walk in our calling, our purpose, growing and serving in the community with healthy boundaries and humility. The theme verse for next year is the basis for what is often called “5-fold Ministry.” Raise your hand if you are familiar with this term. Ephesians 4:11-12 puts it like this:

Furthermore, he gave some people as **emissaries**, some as **prophets**, some as **proclaimers of the Good News**, and some as **shepherds** and **teachers**. Their task is to equip God’s people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah.

Here they are listed as Primary Strengths, with my own brief definition:

1. Emissary/Apostolic Strength--Leadership
2. Prophetic Strength--Visioning, Exhorting, and Encouraging
3. Evangelist/Gospeling Strength--Communicating the Good News and Interceding for those who are far from God
4. Shepherding and Teaching Strength--Nurturing, Educating, and Gardening People

So the question is, did Paul just pull these out of thin air in his letter to the Ephesians? By no means! Paul was deeply rooted in the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, and here is where I think he got them: the offices that existed in the older testament. This is where I got the title of the sermon series: Priest, Prophet, Shepherd, and King. I have mapped these offices onto the Ephesians

4 strengths that Paul talks about, and you can discern for yourself if you think it matches.

First, let's look at the Hebrew Bible office of priest. I spoke about the priesthood from the bima back in February, but here's a summary. The priest goes in and make sacrifices for the people, represents the people to God, and represents God to the people. When God looks at the priest, he sees his son, the children of Israel. When the people look at the priest, they are supposed to see the face of God. The priest mediates between the God and the rest of humanity. Israel is to be a priest to the Nations.

The Scriptures say that Israel is a kingdom of priests, and the new covenant writings expand this to all followers of Yeshua, hence why we are all priests, in a sense. A priest mediates blessing, and ministers the atonement and forgiveness of God. Think of the gospels, when Yeshua is going around ministering forgiveness, and some of the scribes and pharisees are shocked: who is this who can forgive sins? Only God can do that, and only a priest can minister forgiveness. We who understand the priesthood and divinity of Yeshua would say: yes, exactly. My sense is that the Hebrew Bible office of priest corresponds to the New Testament Strength in Ephesians of Gospeler. I used to think of a gospeler as someone who had a heart for those that were far from God and longed to draw them near. Which is true, but the priesthood of gospeling implies that they are really doing that which Job longs for:

“For he [God] is not merely human like me;
there is no answer that I could give him
if we were to come together in court.
There is no arbitrator between us
who could lay his hand on us both.

Job longs for a mediator, a priest, who could connect him with God, and advocate for him, in some ways like a defense attorney in the heavenly court, who can speak to the judge on behalf of the accused, and translate to the accused for the judge. A gospeler is not only communicating the good news of

Messiah, but they are also praying and interceding for those far from God and praying the mediation of blessing. You are all priests. You are all gospels, because Yeshua is the ultimate high priest and gospel, and you are made in his image.

Let's move on to the older testament office of prophet, which obviously corresponds to the prophetic strength in Ephesians. The general thrust of the prophetic strength is three-fold, in my understanding. Take the prophetic witness of the Scriptures: there are three basic themes. One, is exhortation. Hey, you guys should probably not be sacrificing your children to other gods, you need to make teshuvah, you need to come back home to God. The exhortation part of the prophetic strength should always be done in love and in the context of a trusting relationship. The second part of the prophetic strength is encouragement:

but those who hope in Adonai will renew their strength,
they will soar aloft as with eagles' wings;
when they are running they won't grow weary,
when they are walking they won't get tired. (Isaiah 40:31)

The third part of the prophetic strength is visioning the future, preparing God's people for what God is going to do. Amos 3:7 puts it like this:

Adonai, God, does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.

The key to the prophetic strength is humility. It's really the key to all of them, but especially this one. This strength can lead to pride, judgment, and idolatry. Pride because the person says, "Well, I'm a prophet, I hear directly from God." Judgment because the prophetically strong person may get a sense (whether true or not true) that another person needs to repent, and that can cause them to judge that other person or think that they are above them. Idolatry because they could put their prophecy ahead of the Lord himself. Anything more important than God to us is an idol. The prophetically strong

person has to be able to walk in humility, not saying, “God told me this or that.” It’s a vital strength in the body of Messiah, but it’s prone to these pitfalls, and I would love to spare you of them.

My sense is that the prophetic strength is often on the margins. Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, these guys weren’t always Mr. Popular. Even Yeshua himself was not always accepted, because the prophetic message is sometimes hard to digest, even when delivered with love. Messianic Judaism is, in my view, a prophetic movement, which means that we’re on the margins of two major world religions, Judaism and Christianity, and that makes us...awkward. Messianic Jews are awkward. Messianic gentiles are awkward. In some ways I feel very comfortable around my own people, the Jews, and in other ways I’m always aware that I cling to Messiah and there’s a distance and weirdness there. My advice? Embrace the awkward. The word awkward is itself awkward, but it’s got two w’s embracing the k in it, so be like the word “awkward” and embrace the awkward. If we are marginal, we identify with Messiah who blessed from the margins, the sidelines, and reached out to those who were on the margins: the poor, the widows, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the downtrodden. This is the nature of prophetic movements. Encourage yourself so you can prophetically encourage others. God is with you in the margins.

You are all able to operate prophetically, because Yeshua is the Prophet, the Encouragement and Exhortation, the Wisdom of God, and you are made in his image.

Next we come to the Hebrew Bible office of Shepherd, which of course corresponds to shepherd or pastor in Ephesians 4. This is a nurturing strength. A gardener of people, a heart to see others thrive and fulfill their calling, seeing them walk with God, seeing them conform to the image of Yeshua over time. This is my primary strength, and it’s the case for most pastors and rabbis. These individuals are marked by compassion, kindness, empathy, and encouragement to others.

Spiritual mothering and spiritual fathering requires a shepherd's heart. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. It was the heart of a shepherd that inspired Corrie Ten Boom and her Christian family to shelter and protect Jews from the holocaust, and to go to the death camps in their stead. It is the heart of a shepherd that inspires parents to make self-sacrifices for their children, like mine did for me growing up. My wife is currently not getting a lot of sleep right now, but I have not once heard her complain; she cares more about the sleep that our son is getting, so great is her love. You are all shepherds, because he is the Shepherd, and you are made in his image. Yeshua did not think of his own comfort on the tree, which is commonly called the cross. He thought of you; he put you ahead of himself, your need for rescuing from sin and death. Hebrews 12:1b-2 puts it like this:

Let us run with endurance the race set before us, focusing on Yeshua, the initiator and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame; and He has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Related to this strength in the Greek is "teacher," which is together in the Greek in Ephesians 4: Shepherds and teachers. A teacher can easily communicate and relate complex ideas, or make the Torah make sense for the people, as Ezra the Scribe did. In Hebrew, teacher is Rabbi. So the full title of this sermon has teacher in it in a subtle way: Priest, Prophet, Shepherd and King: Gardening our Strengths, by **Rabbi** David Wein. See, it's in there!

And this brings us to King, which I believe corresponds to the apostolic strength in Ephesians. This is a leadership strength, the ability to cast vision, to inspire others to follow, to organize people, to oversee, to manage. To remain calm and be the non-anxious presence to inspire shalom in others. God made Adam and Eve Kings, Co-regents under his kingship:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness! Let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the flying creatures of the sky, over the livestock, over the whole earth, and over every crawling

creature that crawls on the land.” God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them. (Gen 1:26-27)

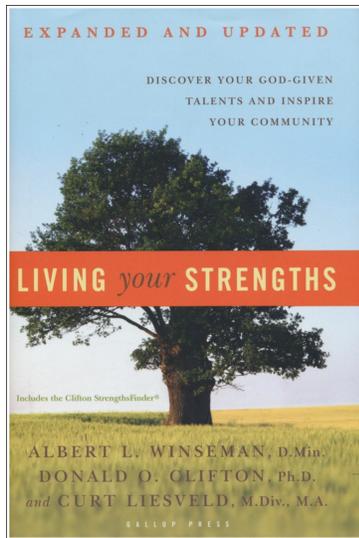
We are not to be tyrants, but compassionate kings, who lead through serving. Yeshua explains it like this:

But there was also a quarrel among them about which of them is considered the greatest. And Yeshua said to them, “The kings of the nations have mastery over them, and those exercising authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But with you, it is not so. Rather, let the one who is greatest among you become like the youngest, and the one who leads like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who reclines or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines? But I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:24-27)

You are, all of you, servant Kings, because Yeshua is the servant King, and you are made in his image.

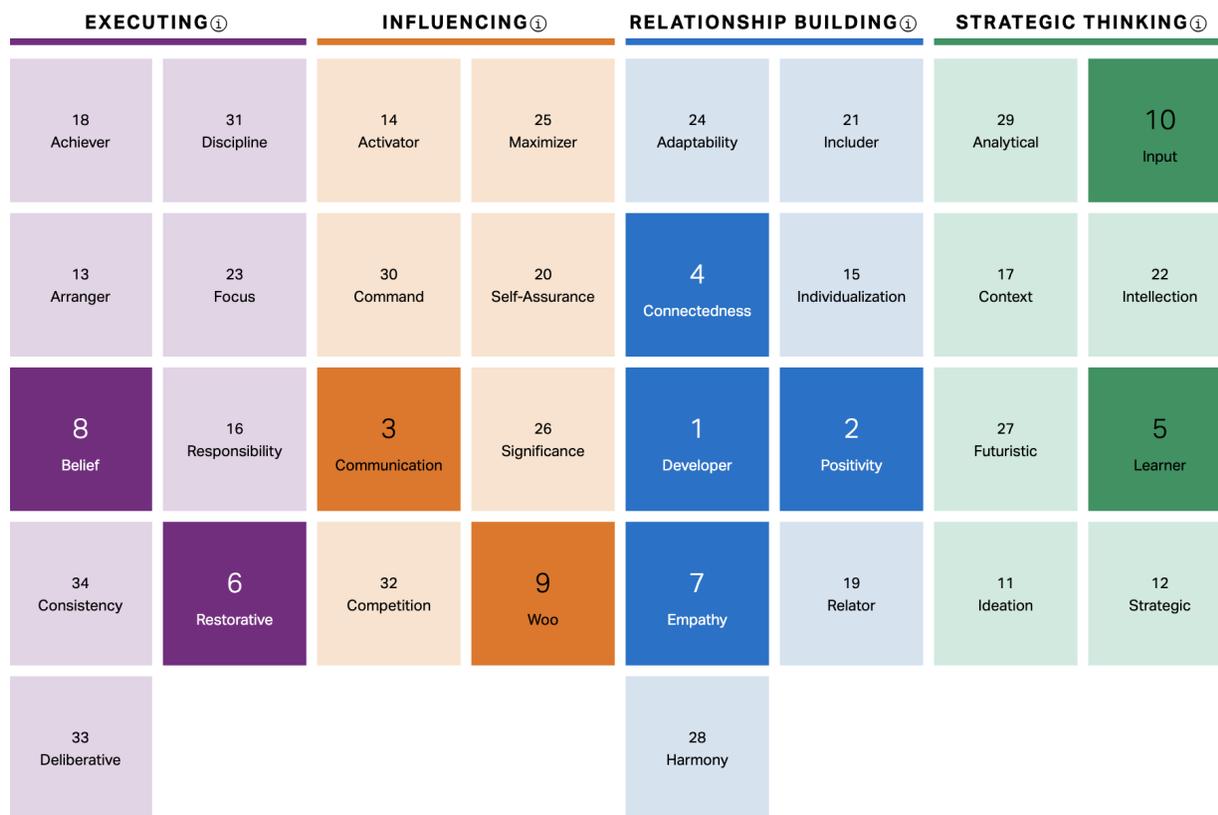
So we have covered all the Strengths: Priest, Prophet, Shepherd, and King. Or as my paraphrase of the Ephesians Strengths puts it: Gospeling Strength, Prophetic Strength, Shepherding and Teaching Strength, and Apostolic/Leadership Strength

3 years ago I started collecting data from a book called Living Your Strengths, also called Strengthsfinders. Here it is, and we sell it in the bookstore:



In the back of the book, if it's new, there's a code, and you can use that code to take a strengths test that is the most accurate and helpful personality test I have come across. Once you take it, it tells you your top five strengths. This book is research-based but also lines up with the Bible. All of our leaders have taken the test in the book, and many of our members. I love collecting people's strengths and talking with them about this. My top five are developer, which is like a gardener of people, positivity, which is about joy and humor, Communication, which is about explaining complex ideas in a helpful way, connectedness, which is about seeing how all people are connected and how God is behind all of that, and learner, which is about enjoying the process of growing and learning from my successes and mistakes.

Here is a picture of my top 10 strengths. Notice that there are four categories of the 34 strengths they have found in humans, which are labeled at the top: Executing (getting things done), Influencing (marketing, voice, communication) Relationship building (the glue that holds a group together), and Strategic thinking (visioning how things could be better). I was thinking about praying about these strengths categories one day and I realized they mapped onto the strengths in Ephesians. Notice that 3 of my top five: Developer, Positivity, and Connectedness, are relational strengths.



Here is a summary chart of the offices in the Hebrew Bible, the Strengths categories from Strengthsfinders, and the Ephesians Strengths. Let's bring it all together:

HEBREW BIBLE	Priest	Prophet	Shepherd	King
STRENGTHS FINDERS	Influencing	Strategic Thinking	Relationship Building	Executing
EPHESIANS	Gospeling	Prophetic	Shepherd and Teacher	Apostolic
DESCRIPTION	Interceding for those far from God and communicating the good news	Exhortation, Encouragement, and Visioning the Future	Nurturing, Gardening people, Education	Leadership, getting things done, management

What I have found with everyone I've done the strengths test is that those who have a cluster of strengths in a particular category almost always have that Ephesians strength as well. My strengths are clustered in the relationship category, and I'm called to be a shepherd. It lines up.

Now, I have said you are all of these, and that is true, in a sense. This is so that you don't think of them as titles. When I say evangelist, which is the common word for gospeler, many think of a slick-haired huckster on TV asking for money. But that's not what a gospeler is--it's a role of communication and intercession, and just because it may not be my primary strength, doesn't mean I'm off the hook if someone walks up to me and says, "What must I do to be saved?" I can't say, "well, I'm really more of a shepherd, maybe you should listen to an evangelist on TV." No, we are all called to give a reason for the hope that is within us, with reverence and humility. Likewise, the title or ordination of pastor or rabbi is not needed to be a shepherd. Also, we can all operate in the prophetic to some degree, and we are all kings of something. You are a leader in some capacity, even if it's being a King of your own finances, or your pets, or leading your family or children by serving.

On the other hand, Ephesians indicates that he has given all of us a certain measure of one over the others. Most of us are not equally strong in all the strengths--that's why we need each other. :) Most folks have a primary and secondary or tertiary strength. In other words, for example, some folks are just naturally good at sharing and communicating the gospel, even though we all should. Some folks are just naturally nurturing and pastoral and encouraging, even though we all should be to a certain degree. Also, they blend together. A shepherd can leverage that strength to share the gospel, as I'm doing with the Torah study I do with Jewish men every week, some of whom are not yet followers of Yeshua. A gospeler can encourage and exhort in the prophetic realm.

Again, the key ingredient to all of them is humility--that's the secret sauce. Gospelers have such a big heart for those that are lost, that they sometimes don't see where they end and others begin, or worse where they end and God

begins--the humility of boundaries helps gospelers to be effective. Likewise a shepherd often has a huge heart to want to help someone, that they can be manipulated and enabling of those that they want to nurture--the humility of boundaries is helpful. Likewise with the apostolic--authority can lead to pride--kings need to remember that they are servants, and that God is the true King. We have already talked about how humility enables the prophetic strength to operate in a healthy way. We are made in the image of God, and we are made of dust, as I said at the beginning of the sermon, and we must walk between these two tensions to garden our strengths.

So what can we do based on this information? Here are my encouragements:

1. Understand that, in some ways, you are all of these. You are a priest, prophet, shepherd, and King, and yet you can only do this because God enables you to do it. Serve in these strengths with humility.
2. Ask God to show you your primary strengths. Take some time this Shabbat to pray into it.
3. Get coffee with me and we can talk about your strengths. Now, I may be a bit behind in this, and there are some folks who I have meant to meet with and haven't been able to, because, you know, I'm gardening a small person at home. But I intend to get with you soon. :) My heart is to come alongside you in your garden and help you to get the weeds out, and to garden your strengths.
4. Find ways to practice your strengths here at Tikvat and everywhere. Look for ministry opportunities that fit you. garden your strengths through practice.
5. Think about your strengths in all the spheres of your life. If you have a prophetic strength, how does God want you to apply that here at Tikvat, or in your home, or in your workplace? How does that direct your vocation, your service to the wider community, your relationships with family and friends? Knowing who God has made you to be will help you walk in the calling and purpose that God has set up for you. Ask the Lord how you can serve in all these spheres, including the Jewish community

and the Church of the city. The next verse in Ephesians 4 says that these strengths are for the building up of the body of Messiah.

My sense for Tikvat Israel is this: if we are operating in our strengths, and gardening our gifts, if the gospelers are gospeling and the shepherds are shepherding, etc., then that's the ballgame! That's healthy community, that's Jewish people coming to know Messiah, that's folks getting healed and restored, that's the church of the nations understanding the Jewish roots of their faith, that's relational gospeling, that's relational shalom, that's the kingdom of heaven here in this synagogue, and even in this city. So, who wants to garden their strengths for the sake of the kingdom?

Let's pray...