

“Shepherding God’s Flock”

1 Peter 5:1-4

Over the last couple of weeks, we have taken a close look at suffering for the glory of God. As chapter 5 begins, the theme is shepherding for the glory of God.

Having spent sufficient time encouraging the suffering little lambs of God’s flock, Peter now turns his attention to the shepherds of the flock. He has some words of exhortation to give to their leaders. Tough times demand that God’s people have true leadership. If judgment begins at the house of God, as Peter has said back up in 4:17, then that house had better be in order so it won’t fall apart. These leaders were to faithfully discharge their duties and lead the flock by example, through both word and deed.

The metaphor of a ‘shepherd’ is used frequently throughout the Bible to describe the leaders of God’s people. Going all the way back to the book of Genesis, the patriarchs of Israel—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—were all shepherds.

Moses was a shepherd. When the call of God came to him to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, we find him on the backside of a desert mountain tending sheep.

David was a shepherd turned king, anointed to lead and watch over the Lord’s heritage.

Psalm 78:70-72—“He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.”

I like that—he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and he guided them by the skillfulness of his hands. Character came first, and competency followed.

This was not always the case with Israel’s leaders. It was the leaders of the people who introduced idolatry and led the Israelites astray.

Jeremiah 23:1-6—“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: ‘You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,’ says the Lord. ‘But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,’ says the Lord. ‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.’”

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He said of Himself:

John 10:11—“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

A hireling doesn’t own the sheep, and he will abandon the sheep at the first sign of danger. That’s because a hireling doesn’t truly care for the sheep. But the

Good Shepherd loves His sheep and is known by His sheep. He lays down His life on their behalf. That's what our Good Shepherd did for us.

When it comes to shepherding God's flock, Peter calls on leaders to carefully consider the nature of their life's work. He wants them to know that Jesus is our ultimate example. Their service is characterized by sacrifice.

Peter mentions some roles that are established, some responsibilities that are outlined, and some rewards that will one day be handed out.

1. ROLES that are established (5:1)

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed...”

Notice that he uses the term 'elders' there in verse 1 to refer to the leaders of the church. Peter is not writing to one local congregation, but his letter is a circular letter that is intended to be read and circulated throughout all of the region where there were pockets and communities of believers. Each of these local churches had their elders and leaders.

In the New Testament, local assemblies were organized under the leadership of both elders and deacons. These two offices of the church are described in 1 Timothy 3.

“Elders” —*the word is ‘presbuteros’ and was used in Jewish life to refer to those who were advanced in life, or held rank or office*

Among the Jews, the term was applied to members of the Sanhedrin as well as to those who managed public affairs. The 'elders' were the leaders of the people. They were older men whom the community recognized.

Among the early church, the term was applied to those who presided over the local congregations.

The New Testament uses three terms interchangeably, each of which describe the same office—elders, bishops, and pastors. Each term illustrates a different facet of the leader's responsibility.

Presbuteros—elder

Episkopos—bishop

Poimen—pastor

The word 'bishop' is often translated as overseer. The word 'elder' speaks of the maturity of the office, while 'bishop' speaks of the responsibilities of the office. The word 'pastor' comes from a Greek word that means 'shepherd.'

Interestingly enough, Peter uses a form of all three of these words as he addresses leaders here in this passage. His primary concern is that the leadership of the local church be strong and healthy. The flock needed faithful shepherds who could help lead them down the rough and narrow path of following Jesus in a fallen world.

Notice that Peter appeals to the elders as a fellow elder, as a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and as a partaker in the glory that will one day be revealed.

As an apostle, he could have easily pulled rank. But rather than doing that, in humility he links arms with them and reminds them of the importance of their calling. His words here in verse 1 emphasize the importance of the leader's relationship with Christ. Leads from personal experience!

“Witness” —*the Greek word is martyr; descriptive of one who tells what he has seen and heard*

Peter could personally give witness to the truth of the gospel. Jesus Christ had changed his life.

In fact, you ought to read these verses in view of Peter’s own personal experiences with Jesus that we read about in the gospels. For example, when he speaks of himself as a witness of the sufferings of Christ, that takes us to the garden of Gethsemane where he witnessed Jesus praying in deep agony. Or, when he refers to himself as a partaker in the glory to be revealed, that takes us back to the Mount of Transfiguration where Peter had personally seen the radiant glory of Jesus. Peter had personally seen Christ’s glory after the resurrection.

Before he was an elder, Peter was a believer. He could personally give witness to the truth of Jesus Christ.

Peter is putting things in their proper place. Who you are in Christ is more important than what you do for Him.

Don’t confuse what you do with who you are. I hope you hear my heart when I say what I’m about to say. The ultimate purpose of your life is not having a position. Our identities cannot be wrapped up in what we do, but who we are. It is only when we are confident in who we are as the people of God that we will truly be content in what we do.

This is true for you, no matter if you are:

- a teacher
- an owner of a business

- a board president
- an officer
- a social worker

What we do falls into place only after we know who we are. Don't ever get the two reversed! Who we are in Christ is of first importance.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES that are outlined (5:2-3)

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

What does Peter say these ‘elders’ are to do? He says that they have the responsibility of shepherding the flock of God. Some translations say ‘feed’ or ‘care for’ the flock.

“Shepherd” — *the word is ‘poimaino’ and refers to the overall care that must be given to the sheep*

Peter knew that this was important because this was the heart of the Good Shepherd Himself.

John 21:16—“He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’”

A shepherd had several tasks to perform in order to care for his flock. For starters, it was his responsibility to protect the sheep from thieves. He also was responsible for leading the sheep into pasture so that they could have an

adequate diet. Their health was his main concern. There were times when the shepherd had to seek out the straying sheep that had wandered from the rest of the flock.

It is the character of sheep to follow a shepherd. That's the way that God created them. Goats, on the other hand, that's a different story...

(illus. of Jesus' parable about sheep and goats in Matthew 25)

The thing that the Shepherd sees in His sheep is a gentle and yielded spirit. Sheep trust their Shepherd. They follow His voice. On the other hand, goats have a spirit of defiance, self-will, or independence from God's involvement in their lives.

The main verb clause is 'shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.'

“Exercising Oversight” — *the verb is ‘episkopeo’ and means to look diligently into something; to oversee*

Warren Wiersbe — *“You will notice that the shepherd is both ‘among’ and ‘over,’ and this can create problems if the sheep do not understand. Because he is one of the sheep, the pastor is ‘among’ the members of the flock. But because he is called to be a leader, the pastor is ‘over’ the flock. Some people try to emphasize the ‘among’ relationship and refuse to follow the authority of the shepherd.*

Others want to put the pastor on a pedestal and make him a super saint who never mixes with the people. the effective pastor needs both relationships. He must be ‘among’ his people so that he can get to know them, their needs, and their problems, and he needs to be ‘over’ his people so he can lead them and help them solve their problems.”

Peter mentions three ways that this responsibility is to be carried out, and each way involves both a negative as well as a positive trait.

Willingness

“Not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you...”

This simply means that those who lead the flock ought not be compelled to do so. They aren't lazy or reluctant in the discharge of their responsibilities. Their arm doesn't have to be twisted, and they don't have to be coerced into taking care of God's flock. (illus. of man in bed)

Instead, they willingly shepherd the flock as God would have them do so. This statement implies that they clearly recognize their accountability before God. They view their responsibility in light of their accountability.

Notice that Peter doesn't say, “Shepherd your flock.” The leaders were merely stewards of a flock that had been entrusted to them by God. The flock belonged to God. Therefore, they must shepherd God's flock as God would have them to do so.

Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of this in his address:

Acts 20:28—“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

He went on to say that after his departure, he knew that the day would come when savage wolves would try to infiltrate their ranks, not sparing the flock.

Listen, if we have ever needed some faithful men who will shepherd the flock of God, the time is now.

We live in a day where people will embrace any way of thinking simply on the basis of how it makes their senses feel. If it sounds good, then it must be true. If it feels good, then it must be okay. The internet has given everyone a platform to popularize their ideas. Social media constantly bombards us with pressure to conform to the world's way of thinking and living. Truth has been turned on its head. Style is emphasized over substance. Pastors, teachers, and church leaders of every stripe have their work cut out for them.

What are we to do? Are we to cave into the world's pressure? No, we're to do what Paul told Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:1-4—“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

Those who are shepherds have been entrusted with a responsibility from the Lord to lead and feed and care for His flock, and it is to be done out of a sense of willingness that understands divine accountability.

Eagerness

“Not for shameful gain, but eagerly...”

Older translations say, 'not for filthy lucre.' The idea is that of leading only on the basis of what the flock can give or do for the leader, rather than what the leader can give or do for the flock.

Paul warned Titus against these individuals:

Titus 1:11—“...whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.”

Those who lead must not be motivated by personal gain, but must eagerly serve in a selfless and sacrificial way.

Meekness

“Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

Godly leaders exercise spiritual oversight out of a sense of willingness, eagerness, and meekness. Peter says that they must not be 'domineering' over those in their charge. They are not control freaks and overlords.

Sheep by nature cannot be driven; they must be led. The shepherd goes before the sheep and leads them, which means that he can't get too far ahead.

Micromanagers, control freaks, and insecure bosses abound in the world today. Some of you work for one. Some of you might be married to one. Some of you are one and you may not realize it.

A verse comes to mind:

Proverbs 29:2—“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.”

Church leaders are not to be overbearing and arrogant, but should demonstrate and model those qualities that they desire to instill in those they lead.

Instead of being an overlord, Peter says that the one who leads is to be an ‘example’ to the flock. What he hopes to see from others must be exhibited in his own life. He doesn’t just talk a good talk—he walks the walk.

We've all had our moments, haven't we? I for one am very thankful for the grace of God. None of us are perfect.

Leadership is not something that ought to puff a person up with pride, but ought to keep us humble. And yet time and time again, a person gets a position and it goes straight to their head.

In 1971, there was a Stanford University research team led by a psychology professor named Phillip Zimbardo that conducted a study known as The Stanford Prison Experiment. Twenty-four young men were divided into two groups and assigned the roles of either Prisoner or Guard and put in a prison-like environment in the basement of the Psychology Department at the university. The study was meant to last two weeks. However, the brutality of the Guards and the suffering of the Prisoners was so intense that the project had to be terminated after only six days.

The study provided a graphic illustration of how a position with a little bit of power can go straight to a person’s head.

Leadership and position in the church isn't an opportunity for the strong to boss the weak. It is not a show of strength and political power play. The church of Jesus Christ is to be led by those who are ‘examples’ to the overall flock.

“Examples” —*the word is ‘tupos’ and means pattern*

3. REWARDS that are given (5:4)

“And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

One of these days, the Chief Shepherd himself will appear, and those who have faithfully led and served the flock of God will receive an ‘unfading’ reward.

Let me tell you what gets you through the tough and lean times in Christian ministry. This is true for pastors, and it is true for Christians in general. It is not the success of the church, nor is it the prospect of greener pastures somewhere else. It’s the appearing of the Chief Shepherd that must be your focus.

When He comes, rewards will be given. The true test of our ministry is not what we see now, but what will remain once it has been evaluated by Jesus Christ.

(illus. of Spurgeon’s conversion)

Those who are leaders must be careful how shepherd the flock of God because one day we will have to give an account of our ministry to the Chief Shepherd. We must carefully go about our task as those who must give an account. And yet at the same time, it is important to remember that the flock will also one day give an account of how they responded to their leaders.

Hebrews 13:17—“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

This means that we have a responsibility to each other. I, along with our other leaders, have the responsibility of shepherding you. And you as a church have

the responsibility of following me. And together, we're sheep who are patiently waiting for the appearing of the Chief Shepherd.

Are you a sheep that belongs to God's flock? Is this something that you are confident in with 100% certainty? His sheep know His voice. If you're not sure that you are saved, then let me urge you to turn from your sin and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. He bled and died to save you from your sin, He arose from the dead, and you can be saved today now and forever by placing your faith in Him.

"Father, we praise You today for your faithful care over Your flock, which Christ Jesus purchased for Himself with His very own blood. Give wisdom to those who are leaders, and may we faithfully carry out our responsibilities as those who will one day give an account. May the flock love and support her under shepherds. And may we pray, serve, and labor diligently as we eagerly look forward to the day when the Chief Shepherd appears. Amen."