

Wanted: Humble Shepherds

1 Peter: Hope Away from Home

1 Peter 5:1-5

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Please open your Bibles to 1 Peter 5. Last week Chris resumed our study of 1 Peter. And he reminded us of something we may have forgotten after being in the Psalms for so many weeks: 1 Peter is all about how to live in exile. Christians are citizens of heaven, not this world. And so, as we wait for our true heavenly home, we experience difficulties and dangers; opposition and suffering for our faith.

So far Peter's given a lot of instruction about how individual Christians should conduct themselves during our exile. Our text this morning is a little different. It teaches us mainly about how leaders in the church should conduct themselves in our exile. Peter addresses the elders in the church. Their health and their heart are critical for the church to flourish during our exile.

Now this may seem like an irrelevant passage for you. After all, most of you are not elders in the church. But I believe it's relevant for all of us.

It's clearly relevant for those who are currently pastors and elders. And also, for anyone who may want to be a pastor or elder someday. But it's also relevant for the congregation as a whole. After all, the congregation nominates and elects its elders. And Peter seems to be arguing that the well-being of the whole church is in some measure tied to the kind of leaders it has.

So, this is a relevant topic for us all. Let's begin by reading the passage.

1 Peter 5:1-5¹

¹So 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: ²shepherd 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; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

This is the Word of the Lord.

I have a simple goal this morning. I want to answer two questions from this passage. First, what kind of leaders do we need in the church? And second, what should the attitude of the whole church be? We'll spend the bulk of our time on the first question.

WHAT KIND OF LEADERS DO WE NEED?

What kind of leaders do we need in the church? Our passage addresses this question in three categories. It deals with the role of elders, the requirements for elders, and the reward for elders.

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

Role (vv. 1-2a)

First, what is the role of an elder? The churches in Asia Minor all had elders. Elders were men recognized by the church as having spiritual seniority.² The congregation looked to them for direction. They had an authority. And gave oversight to the church. But Peter is reminding them that their role involved more than authority.

Their role needed to have a very distinctive character. Look at verses 1-2. “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: *shepherd* the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...”

The distinctive role of an elder is that of a shepherd, or a pastor. In fact, the terms elder, overseer, and pastor or shepherd all refer to the same leadership office in the church. But the shepherd imagery is the dominate picture of a pastor-elder in the Bible. And it provides a rich metaphor for us to understand the role of an elder.

Remember the church is living in exile. Or in other words, the flock is living in the wilderness. And sheep are vulnerable in the wilderness. They’re exposed to the elements, threatened by predators like wolves. They don’t always have access to food and water. Not to mention the fact that sheep are prone to wander.

So what kind of leadership does the church need? It needs shepherds who will lead the flock to streams of water, who will feed the flock in green pastures, and who will protect the flock from danger. Shepherds lead, feed, and protect the flock.³

And so those are the main responsibilities of pastors and elders as well. We’re called to lead by setting direction for the church. We’re called to feed the church on the Word of God through teaching. And we’re called to protect the flock from sin and false teaching and by going after strays. We’re not managers or a board of directors; we’re shepherds!

But at the outset we must say something else about the role of a shepherd. Something much more foundational than the responsibilities of a shepherd. It has to do with who shepherds are ultimately responsible to!

Notice what Peter says in verse 2. “Shepherd the flock *of God* that is among you.” The most fundamental truth in pastoral leadership is to remember that the flock doesn’t belong to pastors or elders. The flock belongs to God.

In the Old Testament, God is called the shepherd of his people (Ps. 23; 80:1). In the New Testament Jesus is called the good shepherd (Jn. 10:11) or the chief Shepherd (1 Pt. 2:25; 5:4). Christ laid down his life for the sheep. He purchased the church with his blood (Acts 20:28). So, the sheep belong to him.

And yet, God has determined and delights to give the church pastors to shepherd his flock; he gives elders to oversee the church (Eph. 4:11). But because the church belongs to him, pastors and elders

² Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Jobes is following R. Campbell.

³ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology

have to see their role as under-shepherds. Our role is a stewardship role. And that should control everything we do in our role!

The sheep need shepherds. But they need a certain type of shepherd. A shepherd who's accountable to God. A shepherd that wants to shepherd God's flock in God's way.

Requirements (vv. 2b-3)

That's the overarching requirement for an elder. So, what are the ways God wants his flock to be shepherded? In verses 2-3 Peter gives us three sets of requirements. They're not so much prerequisites for elders, like we find in Paul's letters (1 Tim. 3:1ff). They have more to do with *the way* elders are called to exercise oversight in the church.

I think the background for these requirements comes from Ezekiel 34. In Ezekiel 34 we see the shepherds of Israel taking advantage of the sheep. They're feeding themselves instead of feeding the flock (vv. 2-3). They're not going after strays and nursing the injured. They're domineering (v. 4). So, God removed them.

God wants shepherds who would treat his flock the way he treats it. We see that same principle at work in 1 Peter 5. God gives three wrong ways to shepherd his flock. And three right ways to shepherd his flock.

First, they should exercise oversight not under compulsion, but willingly (v. 2b). Their leadership shouldn't be mere duty. It should also involve delight.

Why does Peter lead with this requirement? Well, remember the situation the church is in. It's suffering persecution. And remember what Chris taught us last week. The suffering we face as Christians is God's way of testing the genuineness of our faith. And this testing begins with the elders in the church (4:17; cf. Ezek. 9:6).

Leaders are often on the frontlines of persecution in the church. So, some of the elders may be a bit reluctant to serve. Their role may make them a lightning rod for opposition.

Peter understands this. He knows what it means to suffer as a leader of Christ's church. That's why he begins this chapter addressing the elders as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ. He understands the suffering involved in pastoral leadership. And he knows the temptation to shrink back and to not stand firm (cf. 5:12).

But he also knows that the Good Shepherd was willing to suffer for him. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. And so, Peter was willing to lay down his life as well. And eventually, he did lay down his life; he was crucified just like Jesus.

It was the love of Jesus that made Peter willing. And the love of Jesus should make us willing to serve and suffer as well. Why do I say that?

Well, remember John 21. While Jesus was being led to the cross, Peter denied him three times. After his resurrection, Jesus restored Peter by asking him three times if he loved him. This was Jesus' way of showing his love for Peter. And three times Peter said, "Yes, Lord, I love you." And what did Jesus say in response? "Feed my lambs." "Tend my sheep."

Peter was called to shepherd the flock. And now he's giving the shepherding responsibility he received from Jesus to the elders in the church. Peter's motivation for shepherding was his love for Jesus. And his love for Jesus was motivated by Jesus' love for him.

The same should be true for shepherds in the church today. It's Christ's love that compels us. Jesus willingly suffered for us. He laid down his life for us because he loved us. Doesn't it make sense that we would love the sheep out of our love for Christ and be willing to lay down our lives like Christ?

That's the first requirement. Let's look now at the second and third requirements at the end of verse 2 and in verse 3. Elders should exercise oversight, "Not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

These two requirements really remind me of Ezekiel 34. The shepherds of Israel were taking from the flock instead of giving to the flock. And they ruled them with force and harshness (Ezek. 34:4).

This is shocking. And the reason it's shocking is because shepherds are supposed to be protecting the flock from dangers, not being dangerous. They're supposed to be protecting them from wolves. But instead the shepherds had become wolves! They were devouring the sheep by taking advantage of them and dominating them. Peter didn't want that to happen in the church.

God's under-shepherds are called to shepherd according to God's ways (v. 2), not according to the world's ways. The world's leaders are domineering. They lord authority over people. They make them obey. But Jesus told his disciples they should be different. He said they should serve. For even Jesus himself, the chief Shepherd, came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45).

Elders should follow his example. And in so doing, they should *set* an example for the church. And our example should encourage people to want to follow us. We should be able to say, "Follow me, as I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

We've seen the role of an elder and the requirements for an elder. The requirements listed here are by no means exhaustive, but hopefully you have a picture of the heart needed to shepherd the flock.

Reward (v. 4)

Let's now look at the reward of a faithful elder. If an elder shouldn't be motivated by money or power, what should he be motivated by? We've seen love is a motivation for serving as an elder, but there's more. Look at verse 4. "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

Leadership in the church is hard. It involves suffering. And we shouldn't be surprised by this. Christ also suffered and died, but Christ was then raised to glory. Peter frames the call to shepherd the flock in terms of Christ's suffering and his glory. Elders who serve him willingly, eagerly, and by his example, will go the way that he went. They will be given the unfading crown of glory.

The crown spoken of in verse 4 is an amaranth crown. The amaranth is a flower with a crimson red blossom whose color never fades. When an athlete won an athletic competition, they would be given an amaranth wreath to wear on their head as a trophy for their victory.⁴

⁴ Jobes

Those who persevere in shepherding the flock, will one day receive that unfading crown of glory. They will receive eternal life. They will be raised from the dead. Suffering is the lot for those who serve the church now. But there is a glory that awaits us. That's what should motivate us to shepherd the flock of God.

It's always a little awkward as a pastor and an elder to teach on the role of pastors and elders. It's also quite sobering. I realize how far I fall short of God's standard and God's heart for his flock. But at the same time, passages like 1 Peter 5 really encourage me.

I believe you have a group of elders and pastors in this church who are walking the walk. I've been on the Elder Board for ten years now and Lead Pastor for nine years. So, I know first-hand that your pastors and elders view their role as shepherds. They're not perfect, but I know they have no desire to take from you. They have no desire to lord their authority over you. They love you. And are acting for your good. They have given their lives to lead, feed, and protect you.

And I'm convinced that the Lord has used the elders to faithfully shepherd the flock not just over the last decade but over many over decades. And that's one reason why this church has thrived in the wilderness. That's one reason why this church is as healthy as it is and has by and large been a light in our community. Let us thank God for our elders.

We've now answered the first question. What kind of leaders are needed in the church? Let's now look briefly at the second question.

WHAT SHOULD OUR ATTITUDE BE?

What should our attitude be? We've looked at the responsibility of the elders. But what's the responsibility of the whole church?

There are three commands in this passage. The first is to the elders. We've covered that. The second is to those who are younger. They're called to be subject to the elders. And the third command is to both the elders and the younger.

The command to those who are younger could literally be for younger men and women in the church who are more prone to disregard authority. Or it could apply more broadly to those who are simply not elders.⁵ I think this second option is the most likely, but many commentators disagree with me!⁶ Regardless, there are other passages in the New Testament that explicitly call the whole church to submit to their leaders. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

But the emphasis in this passage isn't about authority structures and organization charts. The emphasis in this passage is on the heart. And that's drawn out in the second part of verse 5. Everybody in the church, leaders included, are called to humility. "Clothe yourselves, *all of you*, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"

If the church is going to survive in the wilderness of exile, it needs to be marked by humility. Humility is the oil that greases the gears of the church. Without humility there will be a struggle for

⁵ Jobes

⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary; Edmund P. Cowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, The Bible Speaks Today; and David R. Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ's Sufferings*, Preaching the Word

power. And the whole machine will come to a screeching halt. But that's not the way the church should conduct herself in our exile.

Everybody in the church needs to have humility and to submit to their leaders. But the leaders in the church also need to exercise humility.

I think that's another reason why the dominate metaphor for pastors and elders is that of a shepherd. In the ancient world, shepherds had no status. They occupied the lower rungs of society's ladder. They were nobodies in the world's economy.⁷

The same is true in the church. Leadership in the church is not for fame or fortune. It's not for power or position or prestige. We follow Jesus, the one who served in humility. He taught his disciples that the greatest should become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves (Lk. 22:26).

I think humility is the summary quality needed in elders. Everything Peter is calling the elders to requires humility. A humility that recognizes that the church doesn't belong to us but God. A humility that sees that we're dependent upon God. We need him to enable what he requires of elders. A humility that says we're sheep of the chief Shepherd long before we ever became under-shepherds in Christ's church. A humility that acknowledges that all that we have and all that we are is completely dependent upon God's grace.

The sheep need humble shepherds.

If you are an elder or pastor, let this sink deep into your heart. If you aspire to the office of an elder, pray for God to grant you humility. If you're involved in nominating elders and electing them, insist that the elders of this church have humility. That's the kind of leaders you need if you're going to make it in your exile. And for all of you, humble yourselves, because Christ humbled himself.

He didn't look to his own interest but the interests of others. He humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. And he's now been exalted to the right hand of God.

Those who humble themselves like Christ will be exalted like Christ.

⁷ John MacArthur, "[Wanted: A Few Good Shepherds \(Must Know How to Wash Feet\)](#)" Oneplace.com