

Title: What Leadership Looks Like
Text: 1 Peter 5:1-2
Theme: Elders in harmony with the congregation
Series: Reset, Renew, Refocus
Prop Stmtnt: Christ has entrusted the care of his flock to shepherds (elders) who represent him to the flock, so that the flock will represent Christ to the world.

A local church is organized with elders, deacons (and often deaconesses) and the membership. The NT speaks a lot about the relationship between the leaders (shepherds) and the flock. The shepherds are to love, lead and esteem the flock and the flock is to love, follow and esteem the shepherds. Both are called to humility. When this occurs, it is sweet because it adorns the gospel and looks like Jesus. The flock is called to:

“respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” (1 Thess. 5.12-13)

Speaking of those who “devoted themselves to the service of the saints” – *“be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer.”* (1 Cor. 16.16)

“Obey your leaders and submit to them.” (Heb. 13.17) Why these commands? And, how should we understand these? In other words, what is the tone and posture for the relationship and fellowship of the congregation with the leadership? I want you to see that these commands are not harsh threats, but are pleading admonitions to do that which is good for your soul, the health of the church and ultimately the honor of Christ. This morning, in this series on the church, I am addressing the elders so we can see why we should value and esteem good elders. Christ has entrusted the care of his flock to shepherds (elders) who represent him to the flock, so that the flock will represent Christ to the world.

Read Text:

The Apostle Peter wrote this epistle to the “elect exiles of the dispersion.” (1.1) The elect is another term for believers (people chosen by God to believe). Exiles (strangers and pilgrims) refers to the people who are in a land that is not home and the dispersion means these people feel like they do not have a home here. When you come to faith in Christ (gospel), you become a member of a kingdom that is not of this world. This world is not your home. You are just passing through. You feel out of step, like the wind of the culture is in your face, because it is. This world finds our faith odd, and our gospel a threat. Faithfulness through suffering is a theme in this book and Peter tells these believers (4.12) not to be surprised by the fiery trial when it comes. Don’t invite persecution for being a jerk or being sinful. If that happens you deserve it. If, however, you suffer for being a Christian, do not be ashamed. In fact, glorify God in that name! (4.16).

Chapter 5 begins with the word “so” because Peter now turns his attention to the elders (pastors) of the local churches who are experiencing persecution. This brings up a very

important point. The reason why Peter hones in on the elders is because in times of persecution, they are the first to get shot. Of the many responsibilities that an elder has in the congregation, the reality is, he is at the head of the line when persecution breaks out against God's people.

Some of our missionaries cannot be named and their fields identified because it would invite persecution. That same reality is coming here. Some of you work for companies that have social and political positions that are in opposition to Scripture and if it was widely known that you were a member here, or an elder in this church, you could possibly lose your job. It won't be long before some of you will absolutely lose your job if your leadership role in this church is known. That is part of the cost. Beloved, recognize that ...

I. **The office of Elder is a necessary and weighty role.** (5.1)

In this exhortation (encouraging challenge) to the elders, Peter refers to himself in three related ways: 1) As a fellow elder. 2) A witness of the sufferings of Christ. 3) a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. This is rich. Peter who was the apostle whom Christ used in a pivotal way on the day of Pentecost to birth the church. Peter was also the apostle who preached and witnessed the first Gentile converts as well. Peter was a major player in Christianity, but here, he does not focus on that part of his resume. He states that in the introduction (1.1). But here, he calls himself, a fellow elder. By doing this, Peter is letting these brothers know that he esteems their position even by his own identification with it.

"A witness of the sufferings of Christ" reminds elders that our leader suffered, so we should expect that suffering is part of the role of an elder, but that suffering is not the end of the story. We are *partakers in the glory that is going to be revealed*. It will be worth it. Difficult ministry will be worth it.

Congregation, how does this text inform your view of an elder? (unpack) and why does God repeatedly exhort the congregation to respect, honor and esteem her leaders?

II. **The work of an elder is that of a shepherd.** (5.2a)

The image of shepherds caring for their sheep is one that enjoys a rich tradition and wonderful treatment in Scripture. The picture is characterized by intimacy, caring, tenderness, concern, skill and hard work. The image is even used to describe the relationship that God has to His people (Ps. 21) and the OT uses the same analogy in Ez 34 to describe the work of those who lead God's people. It is important to note that the responsibility to shepherd the people of God in the NT churches is given to the elders (plural) not to a single person (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-2). Here in v.2, shepherd is a verb.

A. **Shepherds Protect the Flock** – Acts 20:17, 28-31a

An elder must protect the people from is false teaching and false teachers. There are unbiblical influences that can come from without and that can come from within. The ones that come from without can be intimidating if they come with “success” stories attached. The ones that come from within can be devastating because they often force a person to make a perceived choice between friendship and truth. That is why Paul says in Titus 1:5, 6, 9 that an elder has to be able to refute those who contradict sound doctrine. The elders are the ones who judge doctrinal error. Like the apostles, the Jerusalem elders had to be knowledgeable in the Word so they could protect the flock from false teachers. (illus. Racism and Critical Race Theory – both wrong and both undermine the gospel)

Protecting the flock involves seeking lost, straying sheep, disciplining sin, admonishing improper behavior and attitudes (1 Thess. 5:12) and stopping bitterness and divisive fighting in the church. Protecting the flock is so important because sheep are inherently defenseless creatures.

A good elder (shepherd) is always on the alert to danger. He knows that the enemy is subtle and that he wants to devour the sheep. So, the elder must be on spiritual high alert and must be ready to act wisely, decisively and quickly as needed. That is why elders/shepherds must be watchful and prayerful. They have to watch the changing issues and challenges in society and in the church. They must be continuously learning the Scriptures, they must diligently take heed to their own lives and then the lives around them. They must pray for the flock and for the individual sheep.

Being spiritually alert demands courage. It takes courage to discipline sin in the church, especially when it affects long-standing friendships or prominent families. It takes courage to confront internal strife and to stand up to powerful and persuasive teachers. It takes courage to expose false teaching as error and wrong assumptions as heresy. Without the courage to fight for the truth and for the lives of God’s people, the local church would be washed away by every doctrinal storm or internal conflict. And it demands humility not to take things personally when you are attacked unfairly or when you faithfully pour your life out for people who simply walk out on your life.

B. Shepherds Feed the Flock – “*shepherd the flock of God that is among you.*”

It is virtually impossible to overemphasize the role of teaching in the NT church. The teaching of the Word was so central to the church that we have providentially preserved the very lesson plans that were written and taught to the early churches. The great commission emphasizes the Making of Disciples by going and teaching. Peter was told, “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:17). The apostles were teachers, the early church devoted themselves to teaching (Acts 2:42). Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch so that he would teach the believers there. (Acts 11:25, 26) Paul exhorted Timothy to give attention to the “public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” (1 Tim. 4:13) The gift of teaching is listed in 1 Cor 12:28 as one of the greater gifts that should be desired in the congregation (1 Cor 12:31) and is listed in Romans 12.

Elders meet, pray, plan, work, make decisions, administrate, organize and delegate. But, elders are first and foremost not Board members who lord over others or talk down to those in their care. Elders are shepherds who feed the flock by teaching them. In fact, the role of teaching is so important that Paul said that some elders commit so much time to it, they need to be compensated for that, they need to do it full time and be paid for that. (1 Tim 5:17, 18) That is why we have a Pastoral staff.

C. Shepherds Lead the Flock – “*exercising oversight*”

A shepherd does not follow the sheep, he leads the sheep. Leading clearly involves ruling, governing, and managing. An elder has to be able to decide. That is why Titus 1:7 says that he must be morally and spiritually above reproach because he is God’s steward. He has the official stewardship of God’s church, God’s household and cannot serve with a view toward feathering his own reputation or nest, but serving the Lord Christ. Elders are called “overseers” which means that they supervise and manage the church.

Elders lead through managing. A congregation needs leadership, management, governance, guidance, counsel and vision. Therefore, all elders must be to some measure leaders and managers. The elders must clarify the direction and the doctrine of the church. The elders set goals, make decisions, steer the church toward accomplishing those goals, correct failures, affect change, motivate people. Elders have to evaluate, plan, solve problems, manage people and think through scenarios.

A healthy flock of sheep do not just appear. A healthy church does not happen by accident. A healthy flock is the result of skillful management of both the flock and the resources. The shepherd must manage with care and sensitivity to the needs of the flock. All flocks are not the same. A shepherd knows that people can hurt each other, they can be stubborn, he has to be patient, gentle and at times he has to be tough and firm. When he doesn’t know, he has to listen and learn.

D. Shepherds care for Practical Needs.

James 5 makes it clear that Elders pray for those who are sick. They visit, they comfort, they counsel, they help to manage the day-to-day details of the inner life of the members. Although elders lead and are officially responsible for the spiritual oversight of the whole church, they are not the total ministry. They are not THE ministers. Ministry is the work of the whole church. Ministry is not the work of one person or even a group of people. Good shepherds smell like sheep.

The local church is a flock, but it is also described as a body of Spirit-gifted, Spirit-placed members, royal priests who minister before the Lord and His people. The elders are dependent upon the gifts and skills of others. One of the key ways that the elders care for practical needs is to make certain that they have identified, trained and deployed the deacons and deaconesses to do their jobs as well. (explain) The secret to caring is love. The best elders are those who love to be with God’s people. There is no substitute for a passion for people.

Congregation, how does this text inform your view of an elder? (unpack) and why does God repeatedly exhort the congregation to respect, honor and esteem her leaders?

III. **The heart of an elder is one of Godly desire.** (5.2b-3)

We need godly elders. We need double the amount of elders that we have so that we can care better for the flock. But, we do not want elders who serve because they feel like they have to and can't wait to get their term over with. V. 2 says that elders are to serve willingly as God would have you. I Tim. 3 speaks of having a desire to serve as an elder. Isn't that sweet? Isn't that the kind of elders and pastors you want? You want men who want to serve you because they love you, not men who view you as an adversary. Hirelings will run when danger comes. Shepherds stand between danger and the flock.

Being an elder is a calling, for some it is a full-time vocation and it is not an easy one. Some of you have a family member who is in a bad place, going in a wrong direction, or is having a tough go of it right now. This person occupies the attention and emotion of many. You know the weight of that. Elders care for dozens and dozens of people. In some cases, we see people take to heart our counsel and turn around. The joy is sweet. In other cases, hours and hours of love and counsel are treated as trash and your heart is crushed. But still, the elder serves. He loves.

He does not domineer. He does not threaten or intimidate. He seeks to be an example to the flock, so that perhaps down the road, when repentance does come, the gentleness of the shepherd lingers with the person so they desire to return and restore the fellowship. God has to give a man the desire to be an elder, otherwise he will not be able to bear up under the weight.

Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd (John 10) who knows his sheep by name, who seeks the lost, who protects them from the enemy and is willing to lay down his life for them. 3 chapters later, just before Jesus lays down his life for his sheep, he serves them by washing their feet in one of the most amazing and stunning accounts in all of Scripture. He then tells them (these leaders) that what he has done is a pattern for them to follow and they are called to do that. In other words, take others more seriously than you do yourself. That is the heart of being an elder. We don't take ourselves seriously (thinking too highly of ourselves) because ministry is serving. But, we take the church seriously. If we take ourselves too seriously then we will perform for what we get from it (or what we try to get from it – respect, admiration, etc.). Then the basis for our decisions comes from “how will I appear to be?” instead of, “what does God's Word say?”

Congregation, how does this text inform your view of an elder? (unpack) and why does God repeatedly exhort the congregation to respect, honor and esteem her leaders?

IV. **The reward of an elder is worth it.** (5.4)

The Lord of the Church is the Chief Shepherd. Isn't that beautiful? The shepherds of the church serve the Chief Shepherd and we serve him best by pointing people to him. He protects, feeds, leads and cares for the sheep so perfectly, that he will lose none of them and get everyone of them home. I am capable of forgetting someone's name and certain details of their life. But not Jesus! The Chief Shepherd is glorious! And the Chief Shepherd not only cares for the flock, he takes particular note of the faithful elders in the flock and rewards them with an unfading crown of glory.

I have on my office wall medals from races I have competed in and marathons I have run. I know full well that when I die, they are going in the trash. They don't matter. They will fade and the ribbons will decay and unravel. All trophies in this life do. But, there is a crown of glory that the Chief Shepherd promises to those elders who serve faithfully. It is an unfading, irreplaceable and priceless. To my fellow elders, I have found this text to be so needful for my soul this week and so encouraging. Our work is necessary. It is weighty. It is hard, but it is noted and will be rewarded because the Chief Shepherd esteems shepherding. This is hard, but it is worth it.

Humility is the touch point for every member of the congregation. Treat the elders with humility, not hostility, not assuming ill intent or even misjudgment. As members of the church you should be informed and you should want to be informed. We consistently communicate with you. Read what is given and read it in the spirit with which it is given. We want to share this ministry with you. We want you on board and unified. We want to serve you and help you look like Jesus. And we pay a price for that. So, ask questions as needed, but do so from a posture of humility (v.5) not distrust. All of us need to cultivate an atmosphere of trust because honestly, the elders and deacons and deaconesses deserve that for investing so much of their heart in this church. There are a lot of thankless jobs that have to be done in order for the church to be healthy.

Congregation, don't make it harder than what it already is. In fact, make it a joy! Esteem elders not only in obedience to Scripture, but because it creates a culture that values what God values. You get what you praise. Humility is our mutual pursuit and calling.

Pray for your elders
For more elders
For more vocational pastors and church planters
That we would be a generous people who can support more gospel work