



1 Peter 5:1-4 **Shepherd the Flock of God**

Summary: God entrusts the church to men who are called to love and lead like Christ.

One of the things that I find interesting about the Christian Scriptures is that there's only one volume. There's just the Bible, and we both have the same one. Now, we might have different translations, sure, but we're all working from the same text. Everything my Bible tells me as a pastor, it also tells you. So, if you want to talk about accountability or transparency: you have a copy of my job description and qualifications in your hands.

Today, we're going to talk about them – about what it means to be a leader in the local church, who should lead and how they should do it. And I'll tell you why you should listen and care.

First, because God wants you to know what to expect of your leaders. Peter included this material in a letter he wrote to churches – so, there wasn't a separate breakout session just for the pastors – no, everyone heard what Peter said to the church's leadership. Which means you know what to expect of church leaders and you can determine whether or not you should follow them. We asked you to consider someone for church leadership this morning, but I would love to be standing up here a year from now asking you to consider even more – do you know what to look for, and what to watch out for?

Second, because the leadership principles here are transferrable to every other ministry context – whether God has called you to be a pastor, a professional or a parent, or some blend of all three, the standards Peter lays out can be applied and help you serve God by leading and loving others.

So read with me and let's see what God expects of leaders in the local church:

1 Peter 5:1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **2** Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; **3** nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; **4** and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

When I read that, here's what I see: God entrusts the church to men who are called to love and lead like Christ.

So let's talk about that. First, let's notice that Peter exhorts men he calls elders to **Shepherd the flock of God**. Who are they?

Well, the Bible, and the church, use several different words for church leaders and to describe what they do. Depending on your church background you may be more familiar with certain terms than others, but the interesting thing is, there's a tremendous amount of overlap.

For example, here a group of men called **elders** is told to **shepherd the flock of God**. And the word shepherd is where we get our English word pastor. So, the elders are told to pastor. They're also told to serve as **overseers** which in Greek is *episkopoi* where we get our English word for bishop.

So, right here in these four verses one group of men are called elders, told to be pastors, and serve as bishops. They all overlap. Now, here at City Gates we currently have six elders, Trip will be number seven, and we tend to call the ones who are on staff 'pastors,' but Biblically there's no real distinction between the two – they're just different ways of referring to someone called by God to serve His people.

Which leads us to another important point – these men are called to **shepherd the flock of God**. Peter wants us to recognize right away, that the church belongs *to God*. It's not mine. It's not yours. We don't have the right to play with it or experiment, to use it for our purposes. We have to start by remembering that the church belongs *to God*.

Paul told the elders in Ephesus something similar when he said:

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.

Peter and Paul make the same point: elders are called to serve, love, and lead *God's church*. They are stewards, not owners. And right away that ought to drive a sense of seriousness and sobriety into them.

Here's something else to notice: both Peter and Paul tell us that elders are commissioned to serve *by God*. Paul says the Holy Spirit has **made** these men overseers. Peter says in vs 3 that God has **entrusted** the people to them.

This isn't an office you run for, or appoint yourself to. God has gathered a group of people to Himself, purchased them with His own blood, and then called some of them to step up and serve the rest as leaders. They are stewards, undershepherds, given a role and responsibility *by God*. It is a serious thing. It is something we must understand – who are these men and where do they come from? They come from the Church and they are selected by God.

We read in

Ephesians 4:11 [Jesus] gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Again we see that these leaders are part of God's plan for the church. We have said so many times that God's favorite tool is people – He uses people to reach people, to help people, to counsel and encourage people, and He uses people to lead His church.

What does this mean for us at City Gates? It means we should expect to see leaders among us. We should expect to see God calling people to rise up and serve in the church – we should discover them, develop them and deploy them in the ministries God has fit them for. And we should encourage them as they serve. God is raising up leaders from the church to serve the church.

But think about what else that means: Christian, you belong *in the church* where you will receive their ministry. Our culture exalts individuality and trains us to expect everything to center around me – what's convenient for me, what I like, what I want to do, where I want to go, when I want things to happen. And yes, God does deal with us individually, but then He adopts us into His family and that doesn't mean we get to walk around like spiritual teenagers with our headphones on, hang out in our bedroom alone all the time, and coming out occasionally for meals.

God wants us to be a family, He wants us to be together, and He wants to minister to us while we're together, through the gifts and callings He has given to other Christians – He has called me, appointed me, to be a pastor and given me to you, but He has also called, equipped and given us other people with other gifts as well and we all belong together where we can give and receive these gifts.

Look again at

1 Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you

The elders cannot serve and you cannot receive if we are not among each other, with each other, regularly. YouTube and podcasts and books are great – they can help you grow, but they should be supplements to the time you spend gathered with the family for spiritual meals in your local church.

Now that goes both ways, it applies to the leaders too – you have been called to serve the people around you. That means you need to be around the people – available to the people. Shepherds need to smell like sheep. And, they need to smell like the particular flock they've been placed with and not be looking for some other place to serve.

One last thing to say here: if you sense God calling you to step out or step up and serve, the best place to do that is right where you are. **Shepherd the flock of God which is among you.** Who has God put around you and how can you serve them? Parents, your family is a little flock, how can you shepherd them well?

To answer that question, we need to talk about what it means to shepherd, how to go about the task, and the reward God promises for the work.

You probably didn't pass any shepherds on your way to church this morning, but you understand what they do. Fundamentally, the role of a shepherd is to care for sheep – to guide them, protect them, lead them, care and provide for them. Shepherding is an action, an activity, it's not an honorary position for people who have been around church for a while, or who have leadership experience in other fields or who give heavily to the church.

The group of elders is not a theological debate club or discussion group, it's not a board room where all the big decisions are made – to shepherd, to pastor, to provide oversight, involves serving, caring for sheep – for people, who belong, first and foremost, *to God*. And so, when you are looking for new elders, you should be looking for someone who is serving.

Peter knows that first hand. Just days before Jesus was crucified Peter was telling Him how He could count on Peter for anything. And Jesus told him, 'You may think that now, but the truth is, you're going to deny me three times before this night is over.' Jesus knew Peter would betray Him. But, He also had a plan to forgive and restore the foolishly self-confident fisherman.

After He rose from the grave, Jesus tracked Peter down and on the bank of the lake, after a night of fishing, Jesus forgave, restored, and recommissioned the humbled apostle. Peter had denied Jesus three times, so three times Jesus asked him, Peter, do you love me? Each time Peter said yes, and Jesus told him, then feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep (John 21).

In other words, Peter, express your love for Me, by caring for My church, by shepherding My flock. Church, do you see the pattern that has existed from the very beginning? God calls out men from among the church to love and lead the church, to shepherd the flock of God.

In order to do that, the shepherd has to know the sheep. As I have mentioned before, this is one way that church membership is helpful, it gives us a list of people who have said, yes, this is my church. I support the things it teaches, the things it does, and the plans it is making, I am part of these people and they are part of me. I don't just wander in and wander out whenever it's convenient. There's a commitment and it flows both ways.

And once a shepherd knows which sheep he's responsible for, he has to keep an eye on them in case any go wandering off or disappear. He has to watch out for dangers – whether from wild beasts or thieves or harsh weather or dangerous terrain. The shepherd has an obligation to care about the well-being of the flock. When they are injured or ill, the shepherd has a responsibility to care for them.

The majority of the shepherd's time though will be taken up with simply ensuring the sheep are well fed – "Peter, do you love Me? You know I do Lord. Then feed My sheep."

That's why the number one priority of the church should be to proclaim the Word of God. As a church grows it can begin to take on all kinds of other ministries, it might open a food pantry, start an outreach program or a homeless ministry, it might begin teaching ESL classes or begin a school – those are all good things, but the shepherd must never lose sight of the importance of simply feeding the sheep.

And in light of that, I want you to know how often I hear feedback about our youth group and how much people appreciate the teaching the teens receive, that they are being fed the Word of God. I hear it from parents and from students. They come out, especially on Wednesday nights and Fridays, and they have fun – this place is swarming with teens playing basketball, volleyball, or gagaball, or skateboarding, or just sitting around hanging out and chatting – vibing if we want to use the current phrase, showing off their drip and maybe even cruising up in their whip.

But, then they get into the Word. You can have fun anywhere. You could stay home and watch Netflix, play video games, or learn new Tik-tok dances, but if you want to get into the Word of God and think about what it means, if you want to be fed spiritual food for your soul, you need some place to go, you need to be part of a flock, and have a good shepherd. And teens are finding that here at City Gates – Pastor Stephen and the whole team are actively, diligently, shepherding the flock of God.

But look, it's not just what the elders do, it's how they do it. Peter says here's your charge: [Shepherd the flock of God that is among you](#), but then He gives three warnings about motives and methods as well.

First, notice, he says elders, or pastors, should serve [without compulsion](#), without being coerced or cornered. The man must desire to serve on his own. He shouldn't be talked into by his wife or friends, or by circumstances, because no one else will step up. Elders are not drafted, they volunteer.

In *Biblical Eldership*, one of the best books on the subject, Alexander Strauch notes, "God is not a reluctant, unwilling shepherd. He cares for His sheep gladly, willingly, freely, graciously. In the same way that 'God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Cor 9:7), He loves cheerful, willing elders."¹

And, I want to make it clear, we view all ministries this way. I have said several times, and I will say it again – this isn't just true of elders. No one in this church should be serving because you felt compelled by someone else, or by some need. People deserve diligent care and you won't care if you're forced. Voluntary service is God's standard.

OK, but what if you're willing, you're just not sure if you're ready? Well, here's something that caught my attention lately. I don't think any of us are ever really ready. You see, whether it's the ministry of parenting, or starting a business, or leading a home group, or teaching God's Word, we look at people who are farther down the road than us and think

¹ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*.

well, I could never do that. But you're comparing yourself to someone with perhaps years of education and experience.

I tend to think in military terms by default, so forgive me if I use military examples too often, but it's like an eighteen year old looking at a Colonel and saying well, I can't do what they do. Of course not, but they haven't always been a Colonel. They started off as a Second Lieutenant. And before that, they were just student. So, instead of asking the question do I have what it takes to be a Colonel, how about asking the question, do I have what it takes to apply to Officer Candidate School or attend an academy? Start small, take the next step, and see where it leads over time.

And so too with the church – you might see your pastor or ministry leader and think, I can't do what they do, the way they do it. OK, but that doesn't mean you're not being called. When we're looking for new elders we're not looking for seasoned pastors, we're looking for men who meet the qualifications of Scripture – God will grow them over time as they willingly, cheerfully, serve.

So, they shouldn't have to be talked into it, but also, they shouldn't be greedy for money. Peter says they should serve [eagerly, not for dishonest gain](#). Or, as the 500-year-old King James translation puts it pastors should not serve for [filthy lucre](#). That's a fun phrase, isn't it?

Here's the point. Jesus said a workman was worth his wages, and several of Paul's letters make it clear, a church should pay its pastors. But the pastors should always be motivated by what they can give, not by what they can get. They're not hirelings or religious professionals seeking the best benefits package. They need to take care of their families and pay their bills, they need to be able to afford to live in the same community as the church, but they should never, ever, be driven by a concern for making more money.

Nor should they become drunk on power lording their authority over others. Unfortunately, you can find instances of both – pastors and ministries making a big deal about money, and churches that become controlling to the verge of being a cult, influencing or directing all the decisions you make. Church, Scripture says that's wrong. And you need to know what Scripture says because the danger isn't going away.

When you read the Bible you find Ezekiel in the Old Testament, Jesus in the gospels, and John in the Epistles, all warning about self-serving leaders among God's people. But in the true church, there is only one Lord and Master, Jesus.

The rest of us should be marked by mutual love, brotherhood, humility, and submission, preferring others above ourselves. Shepherds, elders, pastors, should love and lead but never dominate or bully. You're a servant leader, not a leader with servants.

Jesus wrapped Himself with a towel and washed the dirty feet of His disciples on the night before He was crucified. Help me understand how that gives leaders in the church the right to make a big deal about themselves?

Instead, by God's grace and through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we should all seek to follow Christ's example.

You should be able to look at the life of a pastor or elder and see things that you want to be. A pattern you want to follow. Paul said [Follow me as I follow Christ \(1 Cor 11:1\)](#). That doesn't mean these men will be perfect – I can give you a list of things I'm working on personally, but in general, and over time, you should see a man whose life is trending in the right direction because he's led by the Word of God and relying on the Spirit of God to be transformed.

And if the elders and leaders in the church are doing that, if they're growing and moving forward in their own lives, chances are very good that the church is also going to be moving in a good direction as well.

Now again, let's take that principal and apply it in other situations. Mom, dad, how's the family? Are you leading in the right direction? Setting a good example, a worthy example for people to follow? Or for any of us, in the work place or classroom or on your team, what kind of example are you setting? What if more people looked like you?

Jon Courson, a pastor in Oregon, said:

Let me ask you this question: If everyone at [church] was exactly like you, what kind of church would we have? If everyone prayed for the body of Christ as much as you do, how much prayer would we have? If everyone tithed exactly like you, how much would we be able to invest for the kingdom? If everyone came to morning worship as much as you, how many would come? If everyone helped in Sunday School to the degree you do, would the church be bigger, stronger, healthier? Or, would we be meeting in the park at Picnic Table Number Three? It's a very important question because that which each of us does or doesn't do affects the rest of us definitely.

Your pastors should be setting a worthy example for you to follow, yes. But if you're following them, then you should become a worthy example yourself as we all press into Jesus together and show one another patient grace along the way.

After all, Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and He has a crown of glory that does not fade for those who have been faithful in His service. In the ancient Olympics there were no gold, silver, or bronze medals, you received a crown made from branches – it looked great when they put it on you, but it became dry and brittle within days.

The crown Christ promises is a crown of glory and there's something really interesting happening here grammatically. Glory is what the crown consists of, it's the reality. The crown is the metaphor. So, it's a promise of glory that will be upon you like a crown, not a crown that sits on your head and gives you glory. Think about that and remember the old little Christian ditty: only one life, will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

Whether you're a leader or a follower in the church, we will all stand before the Chief Shepherd. Is that a day you're looking forward to, or a day you don't really want to think about? Are you ready for it? Are you confident in it? Can you say, right now, that you're living the way you believe the Chief Shepherd wants you to live, following His commands as well as His example? Are you serving in the ways He wants you to serve?

There's probably enough weight in that question to make any of us uncomfortable, but let me ask you this: if you had to grade yourself in terms of conformity to Christ how far away are you right now from where He wants you to be? Are we talking 50%? 70%? 20%?

Are you OK with that? What's your plan? When are you going to give more to Christ? He wants you, right here, right now. He wants to do more with you, through you, and for you. Are you resisting Him? Ignoring Him? Or are you willingly, eagerly, following Him and setting an example for others?

Look, the elders in the ancient church needed some exhortation, you might need some too – and this morning we've had it. So, how will you respond?

I encourage you to make yourself increasingly available to God – give Him a blank check for your life. Tell him, God you can do whatever you want with me. And let Him do it.

That might mean stepping up, or stepping out into ministry. It may mean following more carefully the pattern He's put in front of you, or it may mean surrendering your life to Him for the very first time. Whatever it is – the prayer is still the same – Lord, here is my life, forgive me for the mess I've made. Take it for yourself, and teach me to live your way.

Let's pray



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

1 Peter 5:1-4 Shepherd the Flock of God

Summary: When trials come your way don't think it's strange or be ashamed, commit your soul to God, rejoice and keep doing good.

- Why do you think Peter needed to exhort the elders? Do you ever need to be exhorted or encouraged in the things God has called you to do?
- How have you been positively affected or helped by a church or ministry leader? What about them had such an impact on you? Has there ever been a time when you observed a ministry leader who seemed to be in it for the wrong reasons or going about things the wrong way, what was that like?
- Christians belong to the flock of God with Jesus as our Chief Shepherd. What does that mean to you, does it give you any hope or confidence?
- Peter warns gives elders three warnings about service and offers three alternatives instead.
 - What are the warnings and alternatives?
 - How do these temptations manifest in your life?
 - How can you be strengthened in the alternatives?
- Jon Courson asked what church would be like is everyone was exactly as engaged as you.
 - Where do you feel you're setting a good example that more people should follow?
 - Where do you feel like you need to grow?
- Other qualifications for elders/pastors are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Review these passages and consider:
 - How many of them are character qualities?
 - How many of them are actual abilities – things the man must be able to do?
 - Are you qualified to be an elder? If not, why not?
 - NOTE: this doesn't automatically imply sin, it might be as simple as, "I don't desire it."
 - Have you noticed anyone else you think might be? If so, tell the pastors.