How To Be a Good Shepherd

1 Peter 5:1-5 ***[1]Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, [2] shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion, but willingly, according to God; and not for dishonest gain, but with eagerness; [3] nor yet as lording it over those allotted to you, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. [5] You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders. And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.***

Difficult times demand that God's people have appropriate spiritual leadership. Since judgment begins at "God's house" 11 Peter 4:17), His "house" should be in order. Hence, Peter wrote this special message to the leaders of the church to encourage them to serve as faithful shepherds. Leaders who run away prove that they are hirelings and not true shepherds (cf. John 10:12-14).

The New Testament classified the leadership of the church as elders and deacons (cf. I Timothy 3). The words *elder* and *bishop* refer to the same office (cf. Acts 20:17, 28). The word *bishop* is also translated "*overseer*" (cf. 1 Peter 5:2—this title is applied to Christ in 1 Peter 2:25). "Elder" refers to the maturity of the officer, and "bishop" Refers to the responsibility of the office. The word, pastor (which means "shepherd") is another title for the same office (cf. Acts 14:23), where the verb "ordain" means "to appoint by raising of hands—which implies each congregation had the privilege and responsibility of voting on qualified men.

When the "fiery trials" come, Peter was concerned that the leadership of the churches would be the very best. So, what were the personal qualities that make for an effective, God-honoring Pastor

1. A Vital Experience with Christ (5:1). Peter had NOT introduced himself in this letter as an apostle or great spiritual leader, but simply as another elder. However, he did mention that he had personally witnessed Christ's sufferings (cf. Matthew 26:36). The Greek word translated "witness" is μάρτυς (*martus*) from which we get the English word, "*martyr*." Normally, we think of a martyr only as one who gives his life for Christ (of course, Peter did), but basically a martyr is a witness who faithfully tells what he has seen and heard.

In that regard, chapter 5 has flashes of Peter's personal experiences with Jesus:

- **Gethsemane,**
- **Calvary,**
- **The *glory* of the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-5, 2 Peter 1:15-18),**
- **The shepherd and sheep of the Lord's admonition to Peter as recorded in John 21:15 -17.**

The warning in 1 Peter 5:3 about "*lording it over*" the saints is a reflection of Christ's lesson about true greatness recorded in Luke 22:24-30, as well as the other times that Jesus taught His disciples about humility and service (e.g., *"clothe yourselves with humility*" [5:5] reminds us of what Jesus did when he put on the towel and washed the disciples' feet [John 13:1-17]).

In other words, Peter wrote these words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, drawing on his own personal experiences with Jesus. His vital and growing relationship with Jesus enabled him to minister effectively to God's people.

Therefore, the pastor of the local church must be a man who walks with God and who is growing in his spiritual life. As Paul admonished Timothy: "*Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them. So that everyone may see your progress*" (1 Timothy 4:15). If the leaders of the church are not growing in their knowledge, experience, and spiritual maturity, the church will also be stagnant.

Sometimes the Lord will permit trials to come to the church (as well as to individual Christians) to facilitate growth, obedience, and new opportunities. Certainly, Peter grew in his spiritual experience as he suffered for Christ. Of course, Peter was not perfect; Paul rebuked him for inconsistency (Galatians 2:11-21). However, Peter was yielded to Christ and was willing to learn all that God had for him.

2. A Loving Concern for God's Sheep (5:2-3). The Bible often uses the image of the flock to instruct God's people (Psalm 23; 100; Isaiah 40:11; Luke 15:4-6; John 10; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:20-21; Revelation 7:17). In that regard, all of us were once stray sheep, wandering toward ruin, but the Good Shepherd found us and restored us to His fold.

Unlike pigs and dogs, sheep are clean animals (2 Peter 2:20-22). Sheep tend to flock together—in like manner, God's people need to be together. Sheep are notoriously ignorant and are prone to wander away if they do not follow the shepherd. Sheep are defenseless and need the protection of the shepherd (cf. Psalm 23:4).

On the other hand, sheep as very useful animals. The shepherds tend their sheep, not for their meat, but for wool, milk, and lambs. In like manner, God's people, His flock, should be useful to Him by reproducing themselves by being "living sacrifices" in doing the will of God (Romans 12:1-2).

Peter reminded the shepherd-elders about their God-given responsibilities:

1) Feed the flock of God (v. 2). The Greek word for "feed" is ποιμαίνω (poimainō) which means "*shepherd, care for.*" Of course, the shepherd has many tasks in caring for the flock, which includes protecting the sheep from thieves. In like manner, the pastor must protect God's people from those who could adversely affect the flock (cf. Acts 20:28-35). Sometimes the flock does not like it when their shepherd rebukes or corrects them, but his ministry is always for their good.

A good shepherd not only protects the flock, but he also leads them from pasture to pasture to provide adequate food and water. When leading the flock, the shepherd always searched the land to discover dangers that might harm the flock. It is important for pastors to lead their people into the green pastures of God's Word so they might feed themselves to grow and stay healthy.

There are times when it is necessary for the shepherd to seek out a wayward sheep to give it personal attention. It is wonderful to have a large flock, but it is necessary to give appropriate attention to individual members of the flock. Jesus preached to large crowds but took time to talk with Nicodemus (John 3), to minister to the woman at the well (John 4), and to go home with the tax collector, Zaccheus.

If sheep become rebellious or unruly, the shepherd needs to discipline them accordingly. If a sheep has a special need, the shepherd might carry it in his arms until it recovers. At the end of the day, the shepherd must inspect his flock to see if any need special attention. A good shepherd would know his sheep and would know how to tend them according to their own needs.

It is never easy to be a faithful shepherd of God's people. It is a task that never ends and that demands the supernatural power of God to be accomplished faithfully. What makes the task even more demanding is that the flock is NOT the shepherd's—it belongs to God. It has been purchased by the precious blood of His Son (Acts 20:28).

Because one day they will give an account for their ministry, pastors must be careful how they minister to God's sheep. In the same way, the sheep will give an account for how they obeyed their spiritual leaders (Hebrews 13:17).

2) Take the oversight (v. 2). The word, *bishop*, means "overseer—one who looks over for the purpose of leading." The shepherd is both "among" and "over" the flock. Although the pastor is among the members of the flock, because he is called to be a leader, he is also "over" the flock. This dual relationship can be problematic.

The danger is that the flock might emphasize the "among" relationship and deny the shepherd's authority or the flock might emphasize his "over" relationship and try to make him a "super saint" who is better than the members.

The effective pastor needs BOTH relationships: *among* the members to know their needs and problems, and *over* the members to provide leadership and solutions to problems. There must be no conflict between *pastoring* and *preaching* since they are both essential ministries of a faithful pastor: the preacher must be a pastor to apply the Word of God to the identified needs of the people; the pastor must be a preacher so that has the authority to address the people's needs. The shepherd of the flock must know his people and seek to help them through the Word of God.

Being a spiritual leader has its dangers, and Peter points out some sins that elders must avoid:

- ***Laziness*— "*not by constraint, but willingly*." When a shepherd has a pastor's heart, he will serve his sheep because he *wants* to, not because he *has* to!**
- ***Covetousness*—"*not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.*" "*The workman is worthy of his hire.*" The salary of the pastor should be as fair and generous as fiscally possible. However, "money" must not be a primary motive for the pastor's ministry (cf. 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). He must not be a lover of money nor devote himself to pursuing money.**

Many pastors must engage in outside employment when the financial position of the church does not allow an adequate salary. However, as soon as possible the church should relieve the pastor of outside employment so he can devote himself fully to his ministry call (cf. Acts 20:17-38).

3) Be an example to the flock (v. 3) The contrast is between *dictatorship* and *leadership*. Sheep cannot be driven—they must be led! It has been said, "*The church needs leaders who serve and servants who lead*."

It is through his example that the pastor solves the tension between being among" the sheep and "over" the sheep. The pastor cannot lead people to where he himself will not go! Of course, each pastor has a *flock* that he is responsible to serve and lead, but the sheep he leads belong to FLOCK of Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd.

There should be no competition between pastors and their churches because we are all serving the will of God. Pastors are "*overseers*" and not "*overlords*."

3. A Desire to Please Christ Alone (5:4). In his epistle of hope, Peter reminded his readers of the Lord's promise to return. His coming is an encouragement in times of suffering, as well as a motivation for faithfulness (1 Peter 1:7-8). If the pastor ministers with a desire to please himself or the congregation, he will have a disappointing and difficult ministry. The best attitude is for the pastor to *strive to please the Lord and let the Lord take care of the rest.*

Jesus is the *Good Shepherd* who died for the sheep (John 10:11), the *Great Shepherd* who lives for the sheep (Hebrews 13:20-21). And the *Chief Shepherd* who comes for the sheep (1 Peter 5:4). As the Chief Shepherd, He alone evaluates each person's ministry and gives the proper reward—Jesus said, "*the last shall be first, and the first shall be last!*"

There were several kinds of *crowns* in those days. Peter mentioned the athlete's crown—usually a garland of leaves or flowers that quickly fade away. The faithful pastor's crown is a *crown of glory*, a perfect reward for an inheritance that will never fade away (1 Peter 1:4).

In ministry, there are many kinds of *desired* rewards: some work to build personal empires; some strive for the applause of men; and some seek promotion among peers. Of course, all these kinds of rewards will fade away.

The only reward that we should seek is a "*Well done!*" spoken by the Lord Jesus and the unfading crown that He promises. On that day, we will recognize that all we accomplished was by His grace and power (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:10; 1 Peter 4:11). Then, we will bow before Him and place every crown at His feet (Revelation 4:19).

Everything in the church rises and falls with leadership! Therefore, every leader in the church must have a vital, personal relationship with Jesus, a loving devotion to the members, and a whole-hearted desire to please and honor the Lord Jesus Christ!

In short, we lead by serving, and we serve by suffering! This is the example of Jesus and is the only way we can truly glorifies God!