

1 Peter 5: 1-7

SHEPHERDING IS NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART

“*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want*”—familiar words to most of us from the 23rd Psalm. We sang them this morning in our opening hymn. It probably brings to mind a serene scene with the Lord comforting His child and providing for that person’s specific needs. We refer to Psalm 23 during times of hardship, illness, and when facing death in order to remind ourselves that we are not alone in our circumstance.

The Lord Jesus when on earth referred to Himself as a Shepherd several times. Christ then appointed His disciples to become shepherds and we find there is another side to the picture. This morning we will look at that aspect of being a shepherd to the flock of God, according to 1 Peter 5:1-7 NAS:

*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, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;
3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be 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.
6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,
7 casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.*

When we concluded 1 Peter 4:19 we considered the concept of a *faithful Creator*. And that serves as our introduction to Chapter 5. As our Creator, God had planned the necessity of the sufferings of Christ as well as His future glory (5:1). We know that Christ endured suffering and hardship for our benefit and we will see the parallels with leadership in the Christian community, the Church. In 1 Peter 5:1–4, Peter explains the way leaders are to shepherd their congregations. He encouraged the elders¹ to shepherd,

¹ The “elders” of the New Testament church were the “pastors” (Eph. 4:11), “bishops or overseers” (Acts 20:28), “leaders” (Heb. 13:7; 1 Thessalonians. 5:12) of the flock. Everywhere in the New Testament bishop and presbyter are titles given to one and the same officer of the Christian church. He who is called presbyter or elder on account of

to care for, the people of God in the church to which they belonged. The imagery of the shepherd and the flock was also used by Jesus when instructing Peter in John 21:15–17 NAS, where we read:

*15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.”
 16 He said to him again 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, “Shepherd My sheep.”
 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.”*

The main point of this passage was that Jesus was emphasizing Peter’s responsibility of feeding and caring for Jesus’ sheep, the believers. Peter’s love for Jesus would be essential to being faithful to the task.²

Faithful church leaders are promised a reward from Christ, the Head Shepherd (Isaiah 5:4). So let’s now look at 1 Peter 5 beginning with verse 1 from the *New Living Translation*:

1 And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you:

Peter did not introduce himself in this letter as an apostle or a great spiritual leader, but simply as another elder. However, he did mention the fact that he had personally witnessed Christ’s sufferings (Matthew 26:36ff). The Greek word translated “witness” gives us our English word “martyr.” We tend to think of a “martyr” only as one who gives his life for Christ, and Peter did that; but basically, a “martyr” is a witness who tells what he has seen and heard.

When verse 1 speaks of “*the glory of Jesus that shall be revealed,*” it reminds us of Peter’s experience with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1–3 NAS:

*1 Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and led them privately up a high mountain.
 2 And he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his*

his age or gravity is also called bishop or overseer with reference to the duty that lay upon him (Titus 1:5–7; Acts 20:17–28; Phil. 1:1).

² Hughes, Robert B. ; Laney, J. Carl ; Hughes, Robert B.: Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 483

clothes became white as light.

3 Then Moses and Elijah also appeared before them, talking with him.

The pastor of the local church must be a person who has a vision of who Christ truly is in all His glory. He or she must have experienced the hand of Christ in his/her life. The pastor needs to be a person who walks with God and who is growing in his/her spiritual life. Paul admonished young Timothy: “*Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress*” (1 Timothy 4:15, NIV). The word “*progress*” in the original means “*pioneer advance.*” The elders must constantly be moving into new territories of study, personal growth, and ministry. If the leaders of the church are not moving forward in their own personal spiritual lives, then the church will not move forward. In fact if you are not going forward you are most likely starting to go backwards

Sometimes God permits trials to come to a church so that the people will be *forced* to grow and discover new truths and new opportunities. Certainly Peter grew in his spiritual experience as he suffered for Christ in the city of Jerusalem. He was not perfect by any means; in fact, Paul had to rebuke him once for inconsistency (Galatians 2:11–21). But Peter was submissive to Christ and willing to learn all that God had for him.

1 Peter 5:2,3 NLT:

2 Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God.

3 Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example.

The image of the flock is used frequently in the Bible. Those of us who at one time did not have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ could, when we were in that unsaved condition, be accurately described as stray sheep, wandering along the edge of a cliff high above a pit known as Hell. Fortunately for us the Good Shepherd found us and led us back to the sheepfold.

Sheep are useful animals. Jewish shepherds tended their sheep, not for the meat but for the wool, milk, and lambs. God’s people should be useful to Him as well by bringing others to the knowledge of Christ. Sheep were used for the sacrifices and again we too should serve as “*living sacrifices,*” by doing the will of God (Romans 12:1–2).

Sheep tend to flock together. God’s people also need to stick together. Sheep are not the brightest of God’s animals and will very likely wander away back toward the edge of that cliff if they do not follow the shepherd. Sheep are defenseless, for the most part, and need their shepherd to protect them (Psalm 23:4).

In verse 2 Peter reminded the shepherd-elders of their God-given responsibilities to *care*

for the flock of God. The shepherd had many tasks to perform in caring for the flock. He had to protect the sheep from attackers and thieves. A pastor has a similar responsibility for protecting God's people from those who desire to teach false doctrine and lead the sheep to question God's truth. Listen to Paul's words in Acts 20:28–35 NAS:

28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for 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.

29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

32 "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

33 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.

34 "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.

35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Sometimes the sheep do not take kindly to their shepherd pointing out when they are going astray, even when it is for their own good. A faithful shepherd not only protects his flock, but he also leads them from pasture to pasture where they can find food to nourish them. The shepherd always went ahead of the flock to make certain there would be nothing there to harm them. He would check for snakes, pits, poisonous plants, and dangerous animals. It is equally important for pastors to lead their people into green pastures where they will feed on the Word of God and grow.

Sometimes a shepherd had to grab hold of a wayward sheep and give it personal attention. Many pastors today are only interested in numbers; they want to build a large church and they have no time for personal relationships with the sheep. Jesus preached to large congregations, but He also took time to stop and talk with the people such as Nicodemus in John 3, the woman at the well in John 4, and others who brought their personal needs to Him. Paul also ministered to the people who needed his care in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:11) and loved them dearly.

If a sheep is as rebellious as I have been, the shepherd may have to discipline him/her in some way. If a sheep is hurt or frightened, the shepherd might have to carry it for a while.

You are probably familiar with this poem, but the truth in it bears repeating:

Footprints in the Sand

By Mary Stevenson

*One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there were one set of footprints.*

*This bothered me because I noticed
that during the low periods of my life,
when I was suffering from
anguish, sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints.*

*So I said to the Lord,
“You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life
there have only been one set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most, you have not been there for me?”*

*The Lord replied,
“The times when you have seen only one set of footprints in the sand,
is when I carried you.”³*

At the close of each day, the shepherd would examine each sheep to see if it needed special attention. He would remove any briars from the wool. A good shepherd would know each of his sheep by name and would understand their individual behavior.

It is not an easy thing to be a faithful shepherd of God's sheep. The work never ends and it quite frequently requires the supernatural power of God. Pastors must be careful how they minister to God's sheep because one day they will have to give an account of their ministry to Christ Himself. But the sheep will also have to give an account of how they obeyed or disobeyed their shepherds. Both shepherds and sheep have a great responsibility for and to one another. We read in Hebrews 13:17 NAS:

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

A pastor is not to be a religious lecturer who weekly passes along information about the Bible. Incidentally, even the word, “*pastor*” designates this shepherding function. The same word is used in the New Testament for shepherders and implies nourishing and caring for God's people. Hence the pastor is a shepherd who needs to know his people

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and who seeks to lead them by teaching and applying the Word of God to their lives. If he/she does not, then the pastor is at risk of being a “*blind leader of the blind*,” as Christ described in Matthew 15:14. So then the pastor must also lead by example. A pastor should do God’s will from his/her heart (Ephesians 6:6). When a man or woman has a pastor’s heart, he/she loves the sheep and serves them because he/she wants to, not merely out of duty.

If a pastor has no conscience, the ministry is a good place to be lazy. Church members rarely ask what their pastor is doing with his/her time, and he/she can copy sermons from other preachers and use them as their own. A pastor could spend most of his week on the golf course, at the movies, or watching talk shows. Saturday evening he could get on line and download someone else’s sermon for his message on Sunday. I wonder how such a pastor will feel when he/she stands before Christ to account for their ministry?

It’s OK, in fact even appropriate when the pastor is full time, for the church to pay their pastor.⁴ But making money should not be the main motive for the pastor’s ministry. Paul stresses this in his qualifications for an elder in 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7. Because of family or church situations, some pastors must be employed in some capacity outside the church. Paul was a tentmaker. But, as soon as possible, the members of the church ought to relieve their pastor of outside employment so he can devote himself fully to the ministry of the Word. Pastors need to avoid any involvement in moneymaking efforts that detract their attention from their flock. 2 Timothy 2:4 tells us: “*No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.*”

Peter also instructs pastors and elders to be an example to the flock in verse 3. He’s speaking here of leadership, not dictatorship. The warning in 1 Peter 5:3 about “*lording it over*” the saints reminds us of Christ’s lesson about true greatness in Luke 22:24–26 NAS, as well as the other times that He taught His disciples about humility and service. Luke wrote:

24 And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them (that is the disciples) was regarded to be greatest.

25 And He (Jesus)⁵ said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’

26 “But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.

Peter is reminding his readers that you cannot drive sheep like you can cattle or horses; you must go before them and lead them. It has been well said that the church needs leaders who serve and servants who lead. People are usually willing to follow a leader who practices what he preaches and who provides a good example to follow.⁶

⁴ 1 Corinthians 9; 1 Timothy 5:17–18.

⁵ Parentheses added.

⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Peter 5:2

1 Peter 5:4 NLT

4 And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor.

Peter brought in once again the promise of Jesus' return. His coming is an encouragement to us when we are experiencing suffering (1 Peter 1:7–8) and a motivation for faithful service. If a pastor ministers to please himself/herself, or to please his/her congregation, they will have a disappointing and difficult ministry. A visitor once commented to Warren Wiersbe after one of his services, "*It must be hard to keep all these people happy,*" "*I don't even try to keep them happy,*" he replied with a smile. "*I try to please the Lord, and I let Him take care of the rest.*"⁷

Jesus Christ is the *Good Shepherd* who died for the sheep (John 10:11), the *Great Shepherd* who lives for the sheep (Heb. 13:20–21), and the *Chief Shepherd* who comes for the sheep (1 Peter 5:4). As the Chief Shepherd, He alone can assess a pastor's ministry and give him/her the proper reward. Some who appear to be first may end up last when the Lord examines each individual's ministry.

I'm reminded of another story about Warren Wiersbe. He wrote the following:

"One summer day, I stood amid the ruins of a church near Anwoth in Scotland. The building at one time seated perhaps 150 people. By modern standards, it would not have been a successful church. But the man who pastored that flock was the saintly Samuel Rutherford, whose *Letters of Samuel Rutherford* is a spiritual classic. His ministry continues, though today his church building is in ruins. The Chief Shepherd has rewarded him for his faithful labors in a ministry which included a great deal of persecution and physical suffering."⁸

There were several kinds of "*crowns*" in Peter's day. One was the athlete's crown, usually a garland of leaves or flowers that would 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). Today a Christian worker may labor for many different kinds of rewards. Some work hard to build personal empires; others strive for the applause of men; still others seek promotion in their denomination. All of these things will fade one day. The only reward we ought to strive for is the "*Well done!*" of the Savior and the unfading crown of glory that goes with it (Matthew 25:21, 23).

What a joy it will be to place the crown at His feet (Revelation 4:10) and acknowledge that all we did was because of His grace and power (1 Corinthians 15:10; 1 Peter 4:11). We will have no desire for personal glory when we see Jesus Christ face-to-face.⁹

⁷ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Peter 5:4

⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Peter 5:4.

⁹ Ibid

Everything in the local church rises or falls with leadership. No matter how large or small a fellowship might be, the leaders must be Christians, each with a vital personal relationship with Christ, a loving concern for their people, and a real desire to please Jesus Christ. We lead by serving and sometimes we must serve by suffering. This is the way Jesus did it, and this is the only way that truly glorifies Him.¹⁰

Peter knew that a “fiery trial” was about to occur, and he wanted the entire church family to be prepared. As he closed his letter, Peter gave the Church three important gentle warnings to obey if they were to glorify God in this difficult experience.¹¹

1 Peter 5:5-7 NLT:

5 In the same way, you younger men must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, serve each other in humility, for “God opposes the proud but favors the humble.”

6 So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. 7 Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

The phrase in 1 Peter 5:5, “serve each other in humility,” takes us back to the Upper Room where Jesus put on a towel and washed the disciples’ feet. We read about this in John 13:3-8; 12–17 NAS:

3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God,

4 got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded¹² Himself.

5 Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

6 So He came to Simon Peter. He (Peter)¹³ said to Him, “Lord, do You wash my feet?”

7 Jesus answered and said to him, “What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.”

8 Peter said to Him, “Never shall You wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”

12 So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you?”

13 “You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am.

14 “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Peter 5:5.

¹² To encircle or bind with a flexible band (as a belt).

¹³ Parentheses added.

to wash one another's feet.

15 "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.

16 "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.

17 "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Peter had already advised the followers of Christ to be submissive to government authorities (1 Peter 2:13–17), the slaves to submit to their masters (1 Peter 2:18–25), and the wives to their husbands (1 Peter 3:1–7). Now he commanded all of the believers to submit to God and to each other. The younger believers should submit to the older believers, not only out of respect for their age, but also out of respect for their spiritual maturity. Not every older believer is a mature Christian, of course, because quantity of years is no guarantee of quality of experience. This is not to suggest that the older church members are to “run the church” and never listen to the younger members. Too often there is a generation war in the church, with the older people resisting change, and the younger people resisting the older people. The solution is twofold: (1) all believers, young and old, should submit to each other; (2) all should submit to God. “*Serve each other in humility*” is the answer to the problem. Just as Jesus laid aside His outer garments and wrapped a towel around Him to become a servant, so each of us should have a servant’s attitude and minister to each other. True humility is described in Philippians 2:1–11 NLT:¹⁴

1 Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?

2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

4 Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,

8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹⁴ Op cit.

Humility is not demeaning ourselves and thinking poorly of ourselves. It is simply not thinking of our position or ourselves at all. Now we can never be submissive to each other until we are first submissive to God. Peter quoted Proverbs 3:34 to defend his point, a verse that is also quoted in James 4:6. It takes grace to submit to another believer, but God can give that grace *if* we humble ourselves before Him. God resists the proud because God hates the sin of pride (Proverbs 6:16–17; 8:13). It was pride that turned Lucifer into Satan (Isaiah 14:12–15). It was pride—a desire to be like God—that stirred Eve to take the forbidden fruit. “*The pride of life*” is an evidence of worldliness (1 John 2:16). The only antidote to pride is the grace of God, and we receive that grace when we yield ourselves to Him. The evidence of that grace is that we yield to one another.¹⁵

We can see an illustration of the contrast between pride and a servant attitude of humility in the following story told in Today in the Word:

During the American Revolution a man in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers repairing a small defensive barrier. Their leader was shouting instructions, but making no attempt to help them. Asked why by the rider, he retorted with great dignity, "Sir, I am a corporal!" The stranger apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers. The job done, he turned to the corporal and said, "Mr. Corporal, next time you have a job like this and not enough men to do it, go to your commander-in-chief, and I will come and help you again." It was none other than George Washington.¹⁶

Next time we'll conclude our study of 1 Peter. Until then let's each one of us try to put into practice the following things that God has spoken to us through His Word:

- ✓ Care for others willingly.
- ✓ Lead others to Christ by example.
- ✓ Serve others with a humble spirit; do not be proud.
- ✓ Let God have all your worries and cares.

¹⁵ Op cit.

¹⁶ *Today in the Word*, March 6, 1991.