

Shepherding in the Household of God

1 Peter:5:1-4 | October 6, 2019

Pastor Trent Casto

Simon Peter wrote the verses we just read. You remember Peter. The one who said he loved Jesus more than anyone else, and even if everyone fell away, he never would. Well, he did. Three times he denied Jesus in shame and fear. Jesus was crucified, dead, buried and rose again. But perhaps believing himself to be disqualified from ministry, Peter went back to fishing. And Jesus came and found this lost sheep and made him breakfast. This is what happened next.

"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, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him 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, 'Tend my sheep.' 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 everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'"

(John 21:15–17)

Three times Peter denied Jesus and three times Jesus asks Peter to affirm his love once again. And if it is true that Peter does love Jesus, how does Jesus ask Peter to express it? By shepherding Jesus' sheep. Peter got the message. And now he's passing that message along to the elders who receive this letter. Do you love Jesus? Shepherd the flock. For you who are elders, that's your calling in the church. For you who are parents, that's your calling in the home. And much of what I'm going to say to shepherds in the church is applicable to shepherds in the home.

Shepherding is not an afterthought in the household of God. It's not a second-tier priority after evangelism and discipleship. When Jesus asked Peter if he loved him three times, and Peter said yes, Jesus didn't tell him to go move overseas and preach the gospel. He told him to tend and feed his sheep. Yes, some are called to go and pursue the lost sheep in other countries and cultures and we're all about that as a church. But I want to highlight and elevate for you the central role of shepherding the flock that is among you. As surely as we are a missions church, we aspire to be a shepherding church. The elders have been working at this for some time and we are ready to launch a new shepherding emphasis at Covenant. It's not a new program; it's a new way of leading and doing church. That's why we're taking a detour from 1 Timothy for two weeks to talk about the ministry of shepherding in the church. Today our focus is going to be on the responsibility of elders and those men and women they appoint to help them shepherd the flock. Then next week we'll look at the responsibility of the sheep to be shepherded.

I. THE ELEVATION OF SHEPHERDING.

Peter writes to a church that is facing persecution and suffering on account of their identification with Jesus. Consequently, there would've been some temptation for the leaders to lie low or neglect the flock in order to protect themselves. But this simply will not do. So Peter exhorts them as we read in 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..."

First, I want to look at the way Peter raises the level of shepherding by describing himself as he does:

1. HE IS A FELLOW ELDER.

Peter is an apostle. He was one of the hand-picked followers of Jesus to be eyewitnesses of his life, death, and resurrection. Peter spent years with Jesus. Peter wrote some of the New Testament. But he doesn't appeal to that in his exhortation to shepherd. Rather, he exhorts the church as a fellow elder, as one who was called by Jesus to shepherd the flock. He knows the trials, he knows the difficulties, he knows the frustrations and the sufferings of this ministry and yet he says, "shepherd the flock." He is making them (and us) aware of their commission as elders, that we are now called to fulfill part of the role the apostles once played: to shepherd the church.

2. HE IS A FELLOW WITNESS TO JESUS' SUFFERINGS.

Some think he's talking about being an eyewitness of Jesus sufferings. And he did witness most of them, though he fled before the crucifixion. But it seems that he uses 'witness' in the sense of one who gives verbal testimony to something. Namely, he witnesses to others of what Jesus suffered through his life and death on behalf of his flock. In light of Jesus' sufferings, he can exhort his fellow elders to follow also in Jesus' steps. Those who give witness to Jesus' sufferings, should prepare to share in those sufferings.

3. HE IS A FELLOW SHARER IN THE GLORY.

Peter's understanding of suffering is always followed by the expectation of glory, even as it was in Jesus' ministry. He writes earlier in 1 Peter 4:13

"But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

Those who share in the suffering of Christ as witnesses, will also share in his glory when it is revealed at his return. That's true not only of Peter and the apostles, but it's true of the elders. And it's not only true of the elders, it's true of all of those who are part of the people of God. As an apostle, Peter is placing himself beside the church's elders, not above them. All are elders, all are witnesses to Jesus, and all are waiting to share in Jesus' glory. But he is not condescending to their level; rather he is elevating the elders to his level.¹ To be an elder is to share in the work of the apostles.

So with these words, Peter is setting us up for the command he's about to give. He speaks as one of us, as a fellow elder who understands the challenge of leading in a household, of leading in the household of God. He speaks as one who regularly witnesses to the sufferings of Christ for the salvation of his people, a suffering into which we are called to follow him. And finally he speaks as one who is certain that to whatever degree we are identified with Christ in his suffering, so we will share in his glory. And with that, he delivers:

II. THE IMPERATIVE OF SHEPHERDING.

The clear command here that governs everything in this passage is found in verse 2,

"shepherd the flock of God that is among you..."

The verb is literally "Pastor the flock of God." All elders are called to be pastors. In our church, we call 'pastors' those of us who are paid to do this work exclusively and we call 'elders' those who do this work while supporting themselves through another vocation. But all of us are called to pastor the people. Likewise, moms and dads,

you're called to pastor the flock in your home. This activity of shepherding involves a number of key activities and shepherding actual sheep is a very helpful metaphor. A shepherd must:

1. Know the Sheep. That's as true in the church as it is in the pasture. All members at Covenant and their children are the sheep we're committed to shepherding. Regular attenders are dearly loved, but it is to members we have made vows of shepherding, and it is for those members that we will one day give an account to God. We would love to have you regular attenders join the church formally so that we may give you the same level of ministry. As you know, our church has grown steadily over the years and we have many more sheep than we do shepherds. Yet, the sheep must be known to be shepherded. So we are launching an expanded effort at shepherding here at Covenant. We don't presently have enough elders to shepherd the whole flock directly and so we are utilizing lay shepherds, deacons, and small group leaders to assist us in this work. All of them are under the oversight of an elder, and all of you have access to an elder. But we believe for the sheep to be known and cared for, we needed more help for the elders. Your shepherd wants to get to know you, pray for you, serve you, help you along the road to maturity. They're planning to have significant contact with you multiple times through the year so they can be of best service to you and your family. We want to shepherd the sheep in good times and bad. Help them know you. We'll talk more about that next week.

2. Lead the Sheep. Shepherds lead sheep. It's well-known that sheep aren't driven. You drive cattle, but you lead sheep. And that means going first. Shepherds must lead the sheep to green pastures and make them lie down beside quiet waters. This requires having a vision of where we're heading, and living life closely enough to you to be able to follow. The elders have already laid down the path through the mission, vision, and Rhythm of Discipleship. Now we desire the elders and other shepherds of Covenant to walk alongside you. To encourage you, and to model for you what it looks like to Worship, Grow, Serve

and Go. We believe that a person who is living that kind of Rhythm in response to the gospel of Jesus Christ is going to grow to maturity and that's our aim. We want to present every single one of you mature in Christ. Shepherds, if we're going to lead in this way it must be clear to all your flock that you know Christ and are growing.

3. Feed the Sheep. Shepherds specifically are called to feed the sheep and the food the sheep need is the Word of God. And so we do that on Sunday mornings, and there are many other opportunities given during the week for you to be fed. But shepherds must also be able to take the Word and apply it to the lives of individuals and families and help them grow through trials and challenges. Parents, the feeding of the sheep here at church is not a substitute for you feeding the sheep at home. We've got resources available to help you do that and would love to talk to anyone looking for guidance here.

4. Protect the Sheep. There are many dangers facing sheep, but two of the primary ones are going astray and wolves. The elders' job in the church is do everything in our power to keep sheep from going astray from Christ and the gospel, from leaving the fellowship of believers. Our plan is to develop a shepherding ministry in such a way that if you're not here for a few weeks in a row, you'll get a call from one of us checking in to see if everything is alright. Wolves are those who would prey on the sheep, whether through false teaching or trying to fleece you out of money or dupe you into something foolish and harmful. Shepherds must be alert to bring people back when they go astray and to defend them against the wolves. This and more are what Peter is talking about when he says: "shepherd the flock of God that is among you..."

At Covenant, our elders rule the church and have to make governance type of decisions. In many churches that's all elders do. But that's not the heart of our elders. Running a church isn't the heart of an elder. The heart of an elder is to shepherd the flock and they make those types of decisions as part of their shepherding care for you. And we need more of that kind of man.

We saw in 1 Timothy 3:1

"...If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble TASK."

God is looking for men who want to do the work of a shepherd, and not just bear the title of elder. He wants men who are burning with passion to shepherd the people of God. That's what we're looking for in our shepherds: men with a burning passion for the people of God, to see the flock thrive, grow, and mature in Christ. Their hearts beat with love for the church just as the Father's heart beats with love for the church. It's a noble task because it's the task closest to the Father's heart. And that burning desire to shepherd the flock starts with being diligent to shepherd your own family as we saw last week. Those of you who aspire to church leadership, and you should, need to practice this type of shepherding in your homes. Whether you're married or a single mom or dad, these are the tasks that fall to you as leaders of your homes, and those who demonstrate these tendencies are to be identified as potential church leaders. E.M. Bounds wrote: "The church is looking for better methods, but God is looking for better men."

These are the kind of men and women we're looking for to shepherd the flock, those with a heart for God, His Word, His flock, and those who are astray.

III. THE ADVERBS OF SHEPHERDING.

After giving this very clear command, Peter then lists a series of adverbs that very helpfully show us what the shepherding should and should not look like. When he calls us to shepherd, he makes clear the right and wrong ways to go about it:

1. Not under compulsion...but willingly (v.2).

Shepherds do this work in the church and home not from external compulsion but from internal compulsion. We are compelled by love for Christ and people to care for the flock entrusted to us. There is an important distinction between love and duty. C.S. Lewis writes, "A perfect man would never act from a sense of duty; he'd always want the right thing more than the wrong one. Duty is only a substitute for love (of God and other people) like a crutch which is a substitute for a

leg. Most of us need the crutch at times; but of course it is idiotic to use the crutch when our own legs (our own loves, tastes, habits, etc) can do the journey on their own."² Sometimes we must rely on duty, but we were made to be driven by love for God and people! And this willingness to suffer in the service of others was modeled by our Lord Jesus Christ who willingly laid down his life to serve us and save us. When you're gripped again and again by his sacrificial love, you'll find sacrificial love more frequently compels you into the same kinds of selfless service. You won't have to be compelled to love God's people, but you actually will love them and do the actions of love as he does!

2. Not greedily...but eagerly (v.2). We don't do this for what we get out of it, but rather eagerly because of what we've already been given. If your motivation to shepherd is primarily what you can gain from it - status, honor, recognition, or money - you're not going to be very good shepherds. The Bible calls that kind of shepherd a 'hireling' and you can recognize them because they're unwilling to sacrifice for the sheep. They'll only do things when they can see what's in it for them. But love is sacrificial. Shepherding is sacrificial. We do what's right and what is good for the sheep even if it costs us personally.

3. Not domineering...but by example (v.3).

One man has written, "A spiritual leader is the kind of person God-hungry people want to be like."³ That's a shepherd. The Pharisees were not shepherds. They were known for laying heavy burdens on people that they themselves didn't even attempt to live by or walk with people through. Paul and Peter were shepherds. Paul said,

"Be imitators of me..."

(1 Corinthians 11:1)

All followers of Jesus should be living their lives in such a way that they can say to their kids, "Imitate me" or to their employees "Imitate me" or to their friends, "Imitate me." If we can't say that, we're not to remain content. We're to repent, believe the gospel, and walk in obedience. That's what a shepherd does. Ask yourself: if everyone

was as generous as I am, would the needs of the poor be greater or less? If everyone shared the gospel like I do, would there be more followers of Jesus or fewer? If everyone talked about others like I do, would there be more or less criticism, backbiting, and negativity? If everyone prayed like I do, would we see a greater or less move of God in our day? Of course, all this kind of leadership starts in the home, and those who shepherd in the home should approach their task in the same kind of way. So, shepherds, as you go about this work are you doing it willingly, eagerly, and as examples?

IV. THE REWARD OF SHEPHERDING.

While suffering is to be expected and we go into this ministry to lay down our lives in service, it's not without its rewards. He writes in verse 4,

"And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

Three things to see here about the reward:

1. What it is: the unfading crown of glory. For most of us, on the surface that doesn't sound particularly motivating. But it's intended to motivate so let me help you get a better sense of it. The crown is a metaphor of course, but the glory is real. I don't know about you, but I'm a glory junkie. There is no better glory today than sports glory. I absolutely love to watch the end of a major sports championship. Whether it's a tennis grand slam or the Super Bowl, I love to watch when the competition ends and the crowd goes wild and the confetti goes flying and the victor drops to the ground to take in the moment. I love that moment! It captures my heart. It makes me cry, even when I don't like the winner! But it's just that. It's a moment. And everyone who has experienced it will say it's the greatest feeling ever, but it fades. Martina Navratilova, no stranger to tennis glory says, "The moment of glory is much too short to live for that and nothing else." She's absolutely right. But that's what's stunning about the promise here for faithful shepherds. The glory that is coming will be far greater than that glorious moment any athlete experienced. And

it won't end. Ever. It won't fade. You will bask in the glow of this glory forever. We might change Martina's words to say,

"The unfading nature of the glory coming for us is far too amazing to even consider living for anything else!"

That's what awaits you!

2. When to Expect it: not now. The glory is not now. Give your life to shepherd the sheep not because you'll be celebrated now or rewarded now, but because love for him compels you. There are rewards as we care for God's flock today, no doubt. But even when it's not rewarding, we still have a motivation far greater. When it's difficult, when people are treating you like a servant, when your ears feel like the trash can into which everyone's garbage goes...remember the glory is not now. It's coming.

3. Who bestows it: the chief shepherd. In a large flock there were often more than one shepherd required to keep track of all the sheep. In such a case, one of the shepherds was the chief. So it is with God's flock spread all over the world. He raises up shepherds in every single church, but then over them all is the Chief Shepherd Jesus Christ. It is him we serve as undershepherds, and it is his sheep we're tending in the home and church. And he hasn't left us alone for this work. He is with us, even shepherding us as we seek to shepherd others.

So my fellow shepherds, do you think the Lord is unable to reward your service? Do you think he is miserly and tight-fisted and unwilling to pour out great gifts upon those who serve him with their whole heart? Do you think there's anything you can lose or give up in this world that he is unable to make up to you a thousand times greater? What's too precious to be given up in the service of his sheep? Think how he loves his sheep! He purchased them with his blood. He calls them his bride. He is not a cold-hearted

husband! He is passionate for his bride. He loves her with everything in him, he shed his blood for her. If you lay down your life for her, if you give up free time and activities to love her members, if you engage in messy situations in order to help her be whole, will he fail to look on that service with delight and gratitude? To be clear, because we 'care for his bride' that does not mean he owes us anything. We actually owe that to him and far more. He doesn't owe us anything. There's no quid pro quo here. But he has promised by his grace to reward those especially who labor in shepherding his flock.

So that's what we're aiming to do at Covenant.

In obedience to the Scriptures and out of love for Christ and the church, we're going to shepherd the sheep. I exhort you elders, you lay shepherds, small group leaders, and deacons who are assisting the elders, and you parents in the home: shepherd the sheep. Know them, lead them, feed them, protect them. Not because you have to, but because you want to. Not because of what you will get, but because of what you've been given. Not primarily by what you say, but by how you live. And no matter what it may cost you in this world, the reward of glory that Jesus is bringing with him will be worth far more than anything you lose in this world. Jesus beckons:

Sermon Discussion Questions:

1. Prior to today, how important would you have said shepherding is in the life of the church? How has your view changed, if at all?
2. In some way or another, everyone in the household of God should be aspiring to help shepherd Jesus' sheep. If a Christian doesn't aspire to shepherd people, what might be some of the reasons? How can those be addressed?
3. If you've been a part of a church where the elders know the sheep, feed the sheep, lead the sheep and protect the sheep in Biblical ways, share about your experience. If you haven't been a part of that kind of church, how does it sound to you?
4. If you're a parent, how does understanding your call to parenting as a call to shepherding affect the way you will be engaged in your children's lives? If your children are grown, how does the task of shepherding change over the years?
5. Take some time to pray for the shepherds at Covenant, and that, by God's grace, we will faithfully care for God's church. Pray also for parents to faithfully shepherd those in their households in accordance with God's Word.

Daniel M. Doriani, 1 Peter, Reformed Expository Commentary, 204-205.

C.S. Lewis, Letters of C.S. Lewis, July 18, 1957, as quoted in David Helm, 1 & 2 Peter and Jude, 161-162.

Lynn Anderson, They Smell Like Sheep, vol.2, 8.