

This is not a sermon I thought I would ever preach or teach on a Sunday morning yet it is included in Peter's writings to the church so I am going to try to make this as meaningful as possible. Beginning in chapter 5, Peter spends some time explaining the role of elders in the church.

The role of elder has evolved and it is also looked at differently depending on denominational affiliation. My intention is not to give you a historical sermon about elders and their different roles in different churches but to look at and learn from Peter's writings on the subject.

Basically what he has done is layout the responsibilities and characteristics of people who are elders or leaders in the church. In the Church of the Nazarene elders refer to those licensed to pastor or those licensed to be in full time ministry and we receive that through the process of ordination. In many churches elders are lay leaders that serve the church by directing and giving guidance.

Since we have a lot of new people let me just say that we do not have elders as such in our church other than those on staff that have been ordained. We do have a church board and they function as a body of people that I use as a sounding board and consulting group to listen to where are going as a church. They would really be active if there were to be a lead pastoral change or if there were a moral or financial crisis in leadership.

Our church is staff led on a daily basis. The way it works is that as lead pastor I hire a staff that I believe in and that I can work with to lead the ministries of our churches. This staff is accountable to me as lead pastor and I am ultimately accountable for their work to both our church board and district leadership especially if the church is failing to accomplish its mission.

That gives you a little oversight into the process of leadership within our local churches. Now let's see what Peter has to say about spiritual leaders within the church.

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

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."* 1 Peter 5:1-5 NLT

In all probability Peter was using a passage out of the Old Testament book of Ezekiel for some of his thoughts regarding leadership. In Ezekiel 9 there is a story of a season of God's judgment being pronounced on God's own people. Ezekiel writes that God's judgment will begin at the house of God. Sound familiar? In fact last week I read a very similar verse found in chapter four

that says the same thing. Remember we are just looking at sections of scripture but you should read it all in context and at one sitting. The Bible is a fascinating commentary on itself the way it all flows together. In Ezekiel 9, we read these words: *“begin at My sanctuary.” So they began with the elders who were before the temple.*”

Peter had no doubt been reading and thinking about this story from Jewish history. At the beginning of chapter 5 he starts with the word “and” which refers back to what he has just said about judgment beginning with the house of God and in the OT Ezekiel story he also begins with the elders and leaders.

He is exhorting. He is teaching. He is laying down a pattern that we should acknowledge and follow with our lives.

Here then we find four things we should know and practice:

1. The leader’s role

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: ² Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. 1 Peter 5:1-2a NLT

Peter uses a common biblical metaphor to describe leadership in the church. “Care for the flock God has entrusted to you.”

I am addressing these remarks today to anyone who leads anyone else in the church. It could be one on one or a class of children. It could be a life group, Bible study or an outreach group. Regardless you and I are to be shepherds of the flock.

a. To care/shepherd the flock

What does it mean? To care and shepherd a flock of God’s people one must possess certain characteristics. Peter leaves no doubt about what that means. We are given the opposite of what true leaders should look like. To define the role we are going to borrow from some of the passages in Ezekiel that I believe Peter was borrowing from.

b. You must have character

Ezekiel gives a story of the shepherd leaders of his day. It is not flattering. In a vision he bores a hole into the house of God and sees leaders committing “vile abominations.” (Ez. 8:9) While in this vision the angel of God says these words to him:

Then He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, ‘The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.’” Ezekiel 8:12 NKJV

To be a leader you must be honest and true all the time. You must be the same when people are looking as you are when no one is looking. It is foolishness to live a double life. God sees. He sees and knows it all. To think that you can lead effectively while not obeying God is sheer folly. Be men and women of integrity and character!

c. You must understand your role

There is a fascinating word from God to Ezekiel found in Ezekiel 34:1-4. Look at these words:

Then this message came to me from the LORD: ² “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign LORD: What sorrow awaits you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. Shouldn’t shepherds feed their sheep?

³ You drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve.

⁴ You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty. Ezekiel 34:1-4 NLT

Godly elders and leaders will not be like they were in Ezekiel’s day. They will be men and women of Godly character. They will be in the dark what they profess in the light. They will not be selfish. They will seek out the weak. They will visit the sick and bind up the brokenhearted and spiritually injured. They will seek out those that go astray from the faith. They will be sacrificial. They will be generous. They will not be cruel. They will be men and women of gentle grace.

This list looks formidable. It looks impossible for one person to be and do all those things. God had a solution. I have told you over and over that Christians should have one goal and is to be like Jesus. To be Godly no matter what it may cost you.

d. **You must emulate the Chief Shepherd**

“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search and find my sheep. ¹² I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day. ¹³ I will bring them back home to their own land of Israel from among the peoples and nations. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel and by the rivers and in all the places where people live. . . ²³ And I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David. He will feed them and be a shepherd to them. Ezekiel 34: 11-13, 23 NLT

Jesus is God’s shepherd. In 1 Peter 5:4 He is called the Great Shepherd. It was Jesus who gathered thousands to the hillsides to hear the Word of God preached. It was Jesus who came to seek and to save those that are lost.

If you know anything about Peter you know he was a man of confidence in his own ability. He liked to hear himself talk. He made great promises to Jesus. He was qualified to lead. He had the right gifts and strengths but in the moment of pressure he denied even knowing the Lord three times. When Jesus came looking for him and found him it wasn’t to belittle him or to destroy

him; it was to forgive him and point him in the right direction as a leader. And what did Jesus say to Peter on that day of reconciliation? He asked him three times if he loved Him. And Peter responded, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Each time Jesus answered him He painted a picture of a shepherd caring for his sheep. Jesus said, “Feed my lambs . . . Tend my sheep. . . Feed my sheep.”

On the day Peter felt unable to lead God restored him and called him and made him fit for the office. God will raise up men and women not who are perfect but who are willing to be humbled before God who will learn to trust Him and follow Him. They will extend themselves to God’s people in a self-less way.

David Helm wrote it this way, “an elder must be a model of Christian maturity through Godly character. He must protect the flock of God through selfless service. He must feed the flock by expounding God’s Word. He must express his love for Christ by his love for God’s people.”

Having said that please remember that Jesus did not please everyone. Our goal is not to be popular. Even one of his “staff” turned out to be unable to work with Him.

Peter Drucker, perhaps the most noted authority on leadership in the 20th century, says: A leader is one who has followers. An effective leader is not someone who is loved or admired. He is someone whose followers do the right thing. Popularity is not leadership, results are. Leaders are highly visible. They, therefore, set examples. Leadership is not rank or privileges, titles or money. Leadership is responsibility.

2. The leaders readiness

Given the nature of leading the people of God, Peter presses on in his insistence that you must be ready. He gives us three not’s followed by three buts.

*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.* 1 Peter 5:2b-3 NLT

a. Be willing *Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly*

Those who serve may have days when it is by duty only but you must shake yourself out of that and love the people you serve. God’s people will not flourish if they are not loved. C.S. Lewis put it this way:

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 of 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.”

One sunny Sunday morning, Henry Jones awoke to find his wife standing over him, shaking him by the shoulder.

"You have to get up," she urged. "We have to get ready for church." "I don't want to go to church," he replied. "I want to stay in bed." Crossing her arms over her chest, his wife demanded,

"Give me three good reasons why you should stay in bed and not go to church."

"OK," he answered. "First, I don't get anything out of the service. Second, I don't like the people there. And third, no one there likes me."

Now can you give me three good reasons why I should go to church?"

His wife responded, "First, it will do you some good.

Second, there are people who really do like you, and they'll miss you if you aren't there. And third, you're the pastor!"

You must be willing to do the right thing even if you don't feel like it. You must grow a genuine love for the people you lead.

b. Be eager “. . . *not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God.*

"Be eager to do God's work for the right reasons. It is not about trying to get rich. There are ways I suppose that some have found to turn ministry into a cash cow of sorts. I can assure you no one on this staff is getting rich. A leader will always give back. A leader will not be selfish or hoarding of things. Every now and then I run across someone that thinks full time ministry looks like an easy way to make a living. I know there are some who may be lazy and skate by but I can assure you it is not an easy way to make a living.

We are supposed to love people yet people can suck the everlasting life right out of you. You have to constantly guard your heart and make sure that God is filling you with love for His people.

I'm a pastor, and theologically, I am not paid for the work I do, I am paid so that I may be free to devote myself to the ministry. It makes a difference.

The church does not pay me to preach the Gospel. I do that freely.

The church does not pay me to visit someone in the hospital. I do that freely.

When someone calls me at 3:00 AM and needs to talk to the pastor, I don't punch a time clock or report my time to someone.

Visiting a senior citizen—how can you put a price tag on that?

Counseling someone in crisis? I wouldn't know what to charge.

Taking a teenager out for lunch.

Watching people self-destruct knowing that if they had just listened to you they wouldn't be in your office or sitting across the table from you.

My salary is given to me so that I can be free to devote myself completely to ministry, and not be distracted by another full time job.

I'm reminded of a minister who was sitting with his Board of Elders. An elder said, "I don't see

why we should give you a raise just to preach one sermon per week.” The minister replied, “I preach the gospel for free. I’m paid to attend meetings and for that I’m woefully underpaid.”

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

3. The leaders reward

And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor. 1 Peter 5:4 NLT

We do labor for a reward. It is not on this earth generally that we receive it but on the day of Christ’s return we will receive an eternal reward. Peter like other apostles uses the end of all things to motivate people’s current behavior.

As a leader it is unlikely that you will get much reward on earth. There will be moments but that can cut both ways. I could write a book on the dumb things people say. Don’t worry I won’t include your name. ☺

There is an old story about a pastor leaving a church. At his farewell dinner, he tried to encourage one of the pillar members, “Don’t be so sad. The next pastor might be better than me.” She replied, “That’s what they said last time, but it keeps getting worse.”

4. Every Christian’s responsibility

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.* 1 Peter 5:5 NLT

Humility and submission were the consistent marks of Jesus’ character. It is always telling when someone starts struggling with authority. It is one of the most damaging things that can happen in a church setting. There has to be authority and it has to be trusted. It cannot be arrogant or selfish or self-serving.

"If you ever start to feel proud, just remember that soon after your body has been lowered into the grave, your family and friends will be eating potato salad and telling jokes, and you’ll be history."

Even Jesus resisted taking leadership before His time. He was content to “*increase in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*” (Luke 2:52) As leaders and as Christians we must know our places and be willing to accept our roles in God’s kingdom. Our goal is to serve others by denying ourselves in light of Christ’s incredible example.

We will be talking about humility later in this series but I want to just point out that there is an accepted mentoring relationship that should be practiced in Christianity. The older men and

women who have remained faithful in their walk with Christ should be mentoring and teaching the younger. It is one of the hardest positions to fill in the church. First of all you have to find a practicing older Christian and then find one willing to give up their time.

I remember the old story of a young soldier who was a Christian. After the lights were out in the barracks he would slip down on his knees by his bunk in order to pray. One night the sergeant, who had little use for anything religious or Christian, threw his very muddy boots at the boy, striking him on the side of the head. The next morning the sergeant found his boots beside his bed all clean and polished to perfection. He was so impressed by the actions of the young man that he was eventually reached for the Lord. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."