

The shepherd(s) and his sheep

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[0 : 00] Let's pray, first of all, for God's help, the Chief Shepherd's help, and then let's get into the passage. Heavenly Father, may these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing to you and be edifying for the congregation, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. What makes a good leader? That's the question our brother Paul Ling first asked last week. And he showed us that to begin answering that question, we must first allow our very hearts to be shepherded.

God looks at the heart, but our hearts are sinful and deceitful. They insist on having the final say, even as they go the wrong way. And so that's why we must come to the foot of the cross, humble ourselves and receive the sacrifice of Jesus.

The gospel of Jesus Christ must come and take hold of our hearts. We trust, as 1 Peter 2.24 says, that he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed. We were, as verse 25 puts it, like sheep going astray. But God's chosen shepherd found us, brought us back to himself, and now he acts as the overseer of our souls.

[1 : 37] That's what verse 25 says. And in other words, having rescued his flock, Jesus continues to look out for them and look after them up to this very day.

But you might very well ask, how does Jesus do that now? He isn't here in person anymore. He isn't literally hanging out with us the way he hangs out with his 12 disciples.

And that becomes an especially urgent question whenever we, his people, come under pressure. You see, that's what Peter's readers were facing.

In 1 verse 6, we discover they were facing all kinds of trials. In 2 verse 19, they're undergoing unjust suffering. In 3 verse 16 and 4 verse 4, they're being slandered and abused.

And the reason they're undergoing all this for verse 13 is because that's simply part and parcel of the Christian life. For just as Christ suffered on his pathway to glory, so God's people in every generation will also suffer in different ways, even as they await their moment of glory.

[2 : 52] We participate in Christ's sufferings. So how does Jesus act as the overseer of our souls today, if that's what we're going to face?

Well, the amazing answer comes in verse 2 of today's passage. The way the Lord Jesus will care for his church today is via human leaders.

He will oversee his flock via human shepherds. It is through the ministry of those named elders that he will accomplish his purposes.

Now, verse 4 makes clear that there is only one chief shepherd, Jesus himself. But it is the elders who will undertake the task given to them by the chief shepherd to love the flock, to feed it and guard it, to direct it in the ways they should go.

Now, it's quite amazing that Jesus would do this. After all, we saw last week that even King David did not turn out to be the best shepherd. And that wasn't the worst of it.

[4 : 03] In Ezekiel 34, the first reading that we heard this morning, we read about the massive failure of Israel's shepherds later in their history.

Instead of taking care of the flock, they prayed on the sheep instead. And yet, Jesus, in his infinite grace, in his wise providence, is not afraid to entrust people still to human beings.

He's such a patient God. But that does mean that it is essential that the elders should be the right people who go about doing their jobs in the right way, that is, in the manner of the chief shepherd himself, so that the tragedy of Ezekiel 34 is not repeated.

And more than that, if the church is to grow and persevere under pressure, that it is vital that the ministry of the elders be exercised well.

Now, notice that in 4 verse 19, the verse right before our passage today, it should appear on the screen, that those who suffer according to God's will, that is, all Christians should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.

[5 : 26] 4 verse 19, please, Isaac. Yep, so those are the verses, and that's the verse that appears right before today's passage, right? So, all Christians should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.

But the question is, how can we do so? And the answer lies in the very next verses, the passage that we're considering today. We can do so if the elders fulfill their calling.

And that means, by the way, that today's passage is for everyone. Most of us listening in today are not elders or leaders. And so given that the first four verses in particular are addressed to elders, we might think that's not relevant for us.

But actually, the opposite is true. We all have a stake in this, because if our elders thrive in their work, we all benefit.

If they blossom and mature into their roles, we will find ourselves more committed to God, more ready to endure, more zealous to do good.

[6 : 35] And that's why when this letter was first read out in the first century, this section was heard by the whole church, even though it's addressed to elders. Because all of us, myself included, need to hear what the elders are to do, how they should do it, and how the congregation are to regard them, so that for the next three years, we here at BEMKEC can commit ourselves to our faithful creator and do his will.

So let's have a look at 1 Peter 5, verse 1 to 7 this morning. And we'll look at the passage in four parts. The task of God's leaders, the ways of God's shepherds, the disposition of the shepherded, and the promise of the chief shepherd.

So firstly, the task of God's leaders. And I want you to pay attention, first of all, to how God's leaders are described.

They are, of course, called elders. Now, who are the elders of the church? In the Bible, the term elder is used in two ways. One, no surprise, is simply to refer to those who are older.

But more frequently, it's used to refer to those who lead God's people, those who are spiritually mature, which, by the way, doesn't necessarily have a correlation with age.

[7 : 59] You could be 70 years old and be very immature, or 30 years old and very mature. Now, of course, ideally, the more years you have walking with the Lord, the more spiritual progress you will make.

Which would be why we might look at someone older first when identifying potential elders. But maturity, as fleshed out in 1 Timothy 3, is the key here, not your date of birth.

And notice what elders are primarily to do. In verse 2, they're charged to be shepherds of God's flock. They pastor. The word shepherd is basically where we get the word pastor from.

And so that's what they do. That's the major component of their job description. Now, this might be surprising to some of us, since we often apply the title of pastor only to people like me, who are in full-time vocational ministry.

And we think of elders as a completely separate category. You know, maybe something like a board of directors for a company or something along those lines. So we think of them maybe as people who participate in policy discussions, people who vote in board meetings, and so on.

[9 : 21] You know. But in the New Testament, the terms elder, pastor, and overseer are all used more or less interchangeably of the same group of leaders.

They simply stress slightly different aspects of their work. We won't turn there now, but later on, you can have a look at Acts 20, verse 28 for yourself, and you will see a similar thing.

There, the elders are also known as overseers, and they are called specifically to shepherd. And that means they watch over the flock.

They look after them. They basically do everything that the shepherds in Ezekiel 34 were not doing. They strengthen the weak, they heal the sick, they bind up the injured, they go after the strays, they seek those who are lost.

Shepherding is the dominant image used of leaders in the Old Testament. And indeed, it is an image that recalls who God himself is.

[10 : 30] Think of course of Psalm 23 where we see the Lord as the shepherd who leads and refreshes us, who guides us beside still waters.

Or think of Isaiah 40 where God gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them in his bosom. But there is a danger that we overly romanticize shepherding.

Now, I am an urban boy and it's easy for people like me to think that shepherds are simply people who lie under the shade of the trees calmly watching over their cute little sheep as if they are sleeping babies.

And I think it's similarly easy to think that when we say elders pastor or that elders are to be pastoral. The image that comes to mind is something along those lines.

They're simply to be nice and zen-like. That's what we often associate with the word pastoral. Someone who smiles a lot, who simply pats your hand and offers you a cup of tea.

[11 : 42] But those who have been actual shepherds will tell you that that is not reality at all. It takes sweat and tears to shepherd.

For often, sheep are more like hyperactive toddlers than sleeping babies. They are vulnerable in every kind of season. They stray into places that they shouldn't go.

Sometimes they reject nutritious food or refuse to move from where they are. There are wolves out to harm them. And sometimes, sheep bite back.

Even in Psalm 23, don't forget where the shepherd is doing his work. It's not just in the green pastures or by the still waters.

No. He does his work in the valley of death and in the presence of enemies. enemies. It is the same picture if we read the whole of Ezekiel 34.

[12 : 45] Shepherds have to go where the wild animals are to search for lost sheep. They have to gather the sheep aimlessly running in different directions back together. They have to feed them daily to keep them from growing weak.

And sometimes, they even have to carry out justice against other bad shepherds. Shepherding work is clearly far more than being nice.

But it is redemptive work. Indeed, again, read through Ezekiel 34 in its entirety and see how often the word rescue or something similar comes up.

Because ultimately, what elders are meant to do is nothing less than to consistently and persistently bring the gospel and apply it to every area of our lives so that we won't get lost, we'll be built up and we're ready to be sent out.

They are not there so much as to fix your problems, but to guide those under their care to the safest place in the world, into the very arms of Jesus.

[14 : 02] Elders keep the strong healthy with good teaching and personal scriptural counsel, even as they, in the words of 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 14, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, and be patient with everyone.

It is a noble task. But it is also a tall task. And perhaps right now, those of us who have just been elected elders for the next few years are feeling the weight of it.

I certainly do. But just before you decide to resign on the spot, let me remind you again of the one who wrote this letter, and that is the Apostle Peter.

I wonder if you remember his life story. He was a bold, even brash personality who confidently proclaimed that he would never abandon Jesus. And yet, at that crucial moment when Jesus needed his support most, he denied even knowing Jesus, not once, not twice, but three times. And you would have thought that that would have disqualified Peter from ever doing anything for the Lord ever again. But in John 21, we find the risen Jesus calling out to Peter.

[15 : 29] And three times, deliberately echoing the number of times that Peter denied him, Jesus asked him, Peter, do you love me?

Then feed my sheep. Peter, are you ready to follow me? Then be a shepherd. I'm your good shepherd who knows you even at your very worst.

and I've laid down my life for you. Now go, feed my sheep. Tell them about the redemption that you've just experienced.

And that is the calling Peter now calls his fellow elders to. It is a calling that is fundamentally based on grace, not on merit.

So as those called by grace, elders shepherd by grace as well. Even the flock they shepherd is a gift of grace. Notice in verse 2 that it is God's flock that they look after, not their own flock.

[16:37] It is not something they created that they build up. And that should both free us and sober us. You see, this church belongs to God.

He bought it with the blood of the chief shepherd. God's shepherd. And that frees the elders. For that means we elders don't have to point you ultimately to ourselves, but to God.

We don't have to work ourselves to the ground trying to be your Messiah, but we point you instead to your saviour. So it frees us, but it sobers us as well, because it reminds us that the people we look after matter to God, they belong to him, not to us.

They have just been placed under our care. And so we who are elders are not meant to be at a distance from you. We are to be in your midst, getting to know you, feed you, care for you, and protect you.

And that brings us to the second part of today's passage that we want to look at, the ways of God's shepherds, the ways of God's shepherds. Three times in verses two to three, Peter says not this, but that, not this, but that.

[17:58] And in doing so, he's spelling out how the elders are to shepherd God's flock. Let's look at the first of those contrasts. Verse two again, watch over them, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.

And this is key. Those who are elders must never become so simply because they've had their arm twisted. They mustn't do so because they've been forced into it.

No, go in because you are willing. After all, as we've just seen, shepherding is hard work. Watching over people and being with them can be draining, even disappointing.

And don't forget the external pressures. After all, remember that Peter's readers were facing trials and even persecution from outside. And so if you are an elder simply because you have been pressured to become one, well, when the going gets tough, you won't persevere.

You'll give up. You'll have no motivation to continue because you never really wanted to do it in the first place. So even if you continue, you might simply fall into the mindset of, well, okay, I guess I better shepherd because that's what I'm obligated to do.

[19:21] Okay, I guess I better do this because that's what's expected of me. But the danger is that we begin to shepherd not with a willing heart but with a resentful spirit.

There's no love, only bitterness. And when that happens, we end up harming the sheep. And so that's why your leaders are to be willing, not forced to do so.

They are to look to the chief shepherd who was under no obligation to go and seek us out when we were still lost. But he gave up his rights, indeed his very life, to do so.

And that is the way of God's under-shepherds as well. Here's the second contrast, verse 3. Not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve.

And that's really meant to be a contrast to the world's model of leadership. The world's model of leadership is about being served. There's a hierarchy and the leader is at the top.

[20:27] His followers serve his will, his desires, his interests. And in that kind of model, the misuse of power can be all too easy.

In some church contexts, there can be a temptation to use position for financial gain, especially when the theology is prosperity oriented and the accountability structures are minimal.

Now, you might say that's not a problem in our context. And perhaps it isn't, although that doesn't mean we shouldn't still be alert to this danger.

And while we might not serve as elders for money, we can do so for other ungodly reasons. To gain a good reputation, or to gain applause, or to gain power and leverage.

Perhaps we don't start out that way, but over time, subconsciously, that becomes our goal. After all, we might think, oh, we've worked hard, haven't we? Surely we deserve those things.

[21:37] But it is eagerness to serve, that is to be the distinctive mark of those who shepherd. For isn't that Jesus? When he saw the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd, he didn't run away.

He had compassion on them and fed them both figuratively with teaching and literally with bread and fish. Instead of giving others burdens to bear, he bears their burdens.

He says, I'm glad to serve. Let me lighten your load. He is the God whom 2 Chronicles 16, verse 9 tells us, has eyes that range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

I mean, do you get that? God is saying that he is eagerly seeking to serve and bless all those who follow him. That's what Jesus does.

And that is the pattern to follow and eagerness to serve. And then we get the third contrast, verse 3 again. Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

[22 : 59] You see, elders are not just to serve, but they are to serve by leading. That's implied later in verse 5, and it is also clearly assumed in other places like 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 12 and 13, and 1 Timothy 5, verse 17.

They won't ever be content for the sheep to remain where they are, but they want to lead them to grow in Christ. But with that comes a danger.

And the danger is that that leading becomes domineering. The danger is that leading becomes overbearing. We experience it when an elder never listens, but speaks over you until you give in, who uses meetings simply to assert his power.

we experience it whenever a leader makes you feel inferior by intimidating you or by giving you the cold shoulder. Now, I think that most elders don't ever intend to lead in this way, but we might begin lauding it unintentionally whenever we face uncertainty or whenever we fear losing control.

And so sometimes we try to micromanage in domineering ways as our way of trying to retain control rather than trusting the Lord. And I've probably fallen into some version of this trap myself, and I've regretted it.

[24 : 35] But it is wrong because ultimately it bears false testimony to who Jesus is.

Domineering is just not what Jesus does. And so Peter points to a different way. How do elders serve by leading? Well, they lead by example.

They bear true testimony to who Jesus is with the entirety of their lives. Now, earlier I said that the job of an elder is ultimately to point to Christ, not to themselves.

But actually there is a sense in which we do point to ourselves. we are to point to ourselves in as much as we reflect Christ, whether that's how we relate to others, or how we bear with suffering, or even the fact that we are willing to say sorry.

And there isn't much that inspires more confidence than the visible example of a godly man. Now, the words of a well-crafted sermon might stay with you for a week, but the example of a godly life can stay with you for a lifetime.

[25 : 55] Now, just before we move on, let me address the congregation. What you heard so far clearly has direct application for the elders, but what about the rest of us?

If I'm not an elder, how does this affect me? Well, let me suggest a number of ways. One thing these verses should do is to affect your prayers.

Pray that we will have leaders such as this. Pray that all of us who serve as elders will be strengthened by God's grace to lead in this way. Pray that God will keep us from falling into ungodly ways.

But don't just pray. Encourage your elders to do this the best way they can. When you see them shepherding well, let them know.

And calibrate your expectations. Don't think of someone as a good elder simply because they are nice to you or someone as a bad elder simply because they forgot to smile at you.

[26 : 59] Instead, let your perspective be shaped by God's word. Are they attempting to provide for and protect the sheep? If so, give thanks because that's what a truly good shepherd is according to the Bible.

And where they are a good example to you, imitate them. And there is one other thing you can do and that brings us to the third part of our passage today.

The disposition of the shepherded. The disposition of the shepherded. Have a look at verses 5 to 7 and see if you can work out the main theme.

And the big clue is in the word that is repeated throughout. And that word, of course, is humility. That is the disposition of the shepherded.

Now, in verse 5, Peter now begins to address those who are younger. Now, by that, he doesn't necessarily mean younger in age, just as elder doesn't necessarily mean older in age.

[28 : 04] He's simply referring to those who are younger in standing in the church. To put it simply, those who don't hold any eldering responsibilities. So, basically, he's talking to anyone who isn't an elder.

And verse 5, he asks them to submit to their elders. Now, that requires a pretty big dose of humility, don't you think?

You see, how does it work? Well, elders must be servants of the flock. I think we see that pretty clearly in verses 2 and 3. They lay down their lives for the sheep.

But the congregation, as they experience the ministry of the elders, exercise in this way, should similarly be ready to submit. And that's how they show humility.

Now, that doesn't mean that they don't hold their leaders accountable, or follow them blindly if they act contrary to Jesus' commands. But it does mean that their default position is to follow their leaders, not to resist their initiatives, not to grumble about anything and everything under the sun.

[29 : 16] will do. Now, that isn't easy, is it? And why isn't it easy? Simple. Because we all have egos. We can be proud, thinking ourselves superior.

And so that's why Peter urges us, verse 5 again, that all of you clothe yourselves with humility towards one another. And that means everyone, the elders and the non-elders alike, are to submit themselves to God in dependence, because ultimately, elder or not, we are all still sheep.

We are all shepherded still by Jesus. And we can do this because verse 7, we know the chief shepherd cares for all of us.

The elders cast all their shepherding cares to God, knowing that he is good and in control. The non-elders cast all their congregational cares on God, knowing that he will oversee the flock, even as they submit to the elders.

Indeed, Peter himself models such humility all the way back in verse 1. Did you notice how this respected apostle addresses his audience?

[30 : 38] He doesn't say, oh, I, the great apostle Peter. Instead, he appeals to them as a fellow elder. He comes down to their level.

He clothes himself with humility. And he recognizes that we all need each other. He assumes that the church will have more than one elder.

You see, an elder needs his fellow elder to shepherd well, to help him identify his blind spots, to practice mutual encouragement and accountability.

And elders need non-elders because it is only as the whole body, the neck, the arms, the legs, all work together, that the body can act in a healthy way.

And to help us stay humble, Peter gives us a reminder at the end of verse 5. He asks, what happens if you let pride stop you from shepherding or from submitting well?

[31 : 43] Well, you've put yourself on the opposite side to God. Is that a good idea? But what happens if you humble yourself? Well, you get to be on the receiving end of grace and favour from a powerful and generous God.

Well, which deal is better? It's obvious. And so, that is to be our disposition. But fourthly and finally, there is the great promise of the chief shepherd.

As we look back at this passage as a whole, we recognise or at least I hope we do, that this is no easy task. So, why do it? Why would someone like Edward or Ben want to step up to this role?

Well, because we follow in Jesus' footsteps. And ultimately, guess what? Our suffering shepherd is also our glorious shepherd.

And that is how he is going to one day appear, verse 4. And when he comes, guess what? You, faithful elder, will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

[33 : 00] At the ancient athletic games, when you win a race, you get a wreath, a lovely one at that. And it's pretty good-looking, but the flowers on that wreath will eventually wither.

they will last forever. And the truth is, you could pour yourself out in service for God's people for the sake of reputation or popularity, and you might even get it.

That's your wreath, that's your prize. But it will last forever. But perhaps more likely, you could also pour yourself out in service for God's people, people, and no one will ever notice.

No one will ever say thank you. And you might wonder, you know, is there reward for our labors? What's the point? But when Jesus returns, it will become obvious.

There is a point to your work. It is never in vain. It wasn't a waste of time to open your Bible with this person, to pray for that person, to try to have a meaningful conversation with this other person, even to go and have planning meetings at night, even after a busy day, or have to watch YouTube videos of false teaching so that you can warn others about it, and so on and so forth.

[34 : 26] Now, perhaps you are not an elder, but you do serve in roles which involve some kind of shepherding, like those of us who are home fellowship group leaders or Sunday school teachers, and you're wondering, is there a point?

Yes. there is. It's hard work. But when Jesus comes back, you can be sure that you will have absolutely nothing to regret.

For when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. will you answer the call of Jesus?

So my brothers and sisters, and my fellow elders, what makes a good leader? The short answer is that it is someone who has been shepherded by Jesus so that he can shepherd like Jesus.

It's not an easy calling, but it is an honorable one. So will you answer the call of Jesus today?

[35 : 34] If you are an elder, will you shepherd willingly, eagerly, humbly, exemplarily?

And if you are not an elder today, will you pray for and encourage such leadership, being willing to submit and make the work of shepherding a joy rather than a burden for your elders?

Well, if so, then our chief shepherd can build something wonderful here at KEC. Now, what I'm going to do now is I'm going to call all my fellow elders up here on stage.

So if they can just make their way, I think one of our Mandarin elders is also here. And in my formal role as presiding elder, I'm going to pray for all of them, and especially for our first-term elders, Edward and Benjamin, as our other elders lay their hands on them.

And I'm also going to invite the congregation to stand up and also to stretch out your hands as I pray for our elders. And we want to commit them and commit all of us to our chief shepherd that we might be obedient and faithful to who us here he has called us to.

[36 : 55] Now, as they make their way up, I also want to use this opportunity to record my thanks to Bobby Langart, who has chosen not to seek a new term as an elder due to his increasing responsibilities on the national stage with the Gideons organization.

and thank you for all that he has contributed in his capacity as elders over the years. They're all behind me. If the congregation could stretch out their hands, I'll do that too.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we stand before you today aware that those of us who are called to be elders face a daunting task.

We know that we will one day have to stand before you and give an account of how we have shepherded your church, which you have entrusted to us. It is a sobering thought.

As we stand here, we acknowledge that we are just men from different walks of life, from different generations, who are fallible and weak. And we very much need your help and empowering of the Holy Spirit today.

[38 : 12] And we thank you so much that we have a chief shepherd who loves us and cares for us, and who asks us to cast unto him our every anxiety. And so that is what we do now.

We pray, Heavenly Father, first of all for us to be godly and to pursue holiness. We pray that we will not be overbearing, not quick-tempered, not violent, not drunkards, not pursuing dishonest gain, but that we will be hospitable and gentle.

We will love what is good, we will be self-controlled and disciplined. I'll help us to keep hanging on to the gospel, receiving from Jesus his grace and his mercy, and to protect his life-giving message, so that we might encourage others by sound doctrine and love.

Give us willing hearts and eagerness to serve, and the necessary stamina, not growing weary even in the face of disappointments and discouragements, but to press on to keep doing good.

We pray that you'll help each of us to be examples to the flock, to display the fruit of the Spirit, to love you and love our neighbor. We pray for wisdom.

[39 : 35] Father, we need to gain a discerning heart, one that is able to accurately observe and name the condition of our flock in all seasons, to govern in a manner that is filled with integrity, to have competence, to be able to act as peacemakers whenever there is a threat of conflict.

Father, we often feel inadequate to meet this task, so please, Lord, grant us wisdom and vision to give proper direction to where you want us to go, to ensure that the spiritual well-being of the people under our care is being met.

We pray for unity. We thank you that our brothers Edward Sukkar and Benjamin Baru have shown a willingness to undertake this noble task, and so we pray for them in particular, that you'll help them to adjust to their new responsibilities, communities, and we ask that they would be able to bring fresh perspectives.

We pray that together, both those elders who have served for a little longer, and the newer elders will, in the words of Ephesians 4, verse 3, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, and that they will each bring their unique giftings to make a significant contribution here at our church.

we pray for humility. Our Father, you remind us today from 1 Peter 5 verse 6, that we are to humble ourselves under your mighty hand, and that we elders are not excluded from the call to be humble. [41 : 12] We thank you that you promised to lift us up, and we pray that we won't seek to exalt ourselves in wrong ways, or to give in to wrong desires. We pray that we will not pursue temporary glories, but patiently await the crown of glory that you have in store, and to find contentment in that.

So Father, please lead us and refresh our souls, guide us along the right paths, and comfort and protect us with your rod and staff, that you might lead us home through the ministry of human shepherds.

We pray that our congregation and our leaders will be of mutual encouragement to one another, so that all together, we might fulfill what you have called us to do, to be a witness to your kingdom, and to bring you glory.

All this we pray in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.