

# The Sheep and their Shepherds

## 1 Peter 5:1-5

**October 11, 2015**  
**Steve DeWitt**

Our exposition from 1 Peter has us in 1 Peter 5:1-5,

*"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, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:1-5 ESV)*

This church suffering in Asia Minor had many needs. In the first four chapters Peter exhorted them with truth, the example of Jesus, his own example, the gospel, future judgment, and eternal reward. All those are wonderful. All are helpful. Are those enough? Are those all a Christian needs? Are those all a local church needs? Is all a Christian needs is his or her Bible and prayer?

Then the Holy Spirit inspires Peter to write chapter 5 and we discover that every Christian needs something in addition to those wonderful gifts. What is it? A Shepherd. A pastor. Every church needs leadership and every Christian needs a soul shepherd.

In our individualistic and self-dependent society, we would like to think that Jesus and our Bible are all we need. A sheep all alone is in a dangerous place. Sheep need water. Sheep need food. Sheep need protection. A sheep by himself may be able to provide some of that, but why do sheep always come in flocks? Why do sheep seem to be made for flocking together under a shepherd? That's how God made sheep to be. You know, oftentimes in movies, they'll have a common story line where you have somebody who wants to be someone they are not. It's the sheep who wants to be a lion. Kids love story lines like this. But generally, by the end of the story, what does the character discover? He's happiest being who he is.

Spiritually, we may all aspire to be lions or tigers roaming the world alone. But in the end we discover that God has made us to be what we are and we need to embrace it. Spiritually, we are sheep. We get to do flock life around other sometimes wonderful, sometimes annoying sheep in a flock called a church. God has ordained leaders over the flock whom he calls elders/overseers/pastor-shepherds.

So for any flock to be successful, the shepherds and the sheep need to understand their role and relationship. When things get clunky between sheep and shepherds all chaos can ensue. Perhaps you've been in church situations where shepherds neglected their duties or sheep started carrying rods and staffs. When you see a sheep carrying a staff, something's gone wrong. So I want to spend a week expanding our exposition of verses 1-5 from last week and doing some application.

## The Good Shepherd

This title is taken from Jesus' self-description as 'the good Shepherd.' Peter calls him "The chief Shepherd." "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." (1 Peter 5:4) The chief shepherd is Jesus. Shepherds (elders and pastors) in the local church serve as under-shepherds. Deputy shepherds. Jesus' shepherding is perfect. Everything that sheep need from a shepherd is perfectly found in him. So deputy shepherds have a perfect model to follow in Jesus. How does Jesus shepherd the sheep? Here is where Psalm 23 provides not just a comfort for sheep but a model for under-shepherds in what real shepherding looks like.

- <sup>1</sup> "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.
- <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.
- <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.
- <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.
- <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
forever." (Psalm 23)

Poetically beautiful. Filled with truth. The Lord shepherds by providing for our needs. The Lord provides rest. The Lord provides sustenance. He leads us toward righteous living. He calms our fears. His rod disciplines and his staff guides. He is a friend when enemies surround us. The effect of his shepherding is the overflowing resourcing of our faith. This is the perfect model of shepherding. Who wouldn't want this kind of soul-care?

## What Does a Shepherd Do?

### Shepherds lead the sheep

We see this in verse 2, "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight." Jesus deputizes human under-shepherds with authority and responsibility to lead the local church.

Here are other admonitions to elders about leading:

- "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)
- "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it." (Titus 1:9)
- "Let the elders who rule well..." (1 Timothy 5:17)

- “[He is] God’s steward.” (Titus 1:7)

Elders are stewards over the flock. Overseers. What kind of oversight? How did the chief Shepherd conduct himself? Was he an autocrat? A dictator? Hard to say that when he clothed himself with a towel and served. *Spiritual leadership is servant leadership.* This is true in the home and the calling upon the husband to spiritually lead his family. This is true in the church and the calling of the pastor/elder. While having authority, it’s not about power or position. It’s not to be heavy-handed or dictatorial. And it’s never to be driven by selfish ambition or desire for the limelight.

Elders lead for the good of the flock just like Jesus led and where did his leadership take him? To the cross. This is why the character of the elder is so much more the focus than the gifts of the elder. It will be the integrity and heart of the shepherd that in the end, will faithfully lead the sheep.

When I read through the Pastoral Epistles, I find myself surprised over and over by this emphasis. Listen to Paul in 1 Timothy 3. Here is what an elder’s life looks like:

*“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”* (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

I don’t have time to take this all apart. We have done so in the past. I put this before you to shape our understanding of what a real shepherd’s life looks like. Jesus is the epitome and nobody but him does this perfectly. But the shape and contours of the elder’s life should reflect this description.

Why the focus on character? I believe it is because of what 1 Peter 5:3 says, *“but being examples to the flock.”* It will not be the organizational skill or the oratorical skill or visionary skill of the elder that makes the difference; it is the example of his life. Sheep follow examples. God wants elders who are examples of the gospel, grace, and holiness of life.

The elder leads primarily *by example*. Peter knew that the sheep can overlook many quirks of personality or style when they can look up to his moral and spiritual example.

### **Shepherds love the sheep**

*“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”* (John 10:11-16)

Lots of people want to lead; fewer want to do the hard work of loving the sheep. Why? *"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* (John 10:11) Obviously Jesus is using the metaphor to describe his mission. He came to save the sheep by dying for the sheep. He accomplished his mission on Calvary's cross crying out, *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30) In this way, his mission is absolutely unique. But the heart of caring for the sheep is something all spiritual leaders must have. Jesus emphasized this to Peter, *"Do you love me?... Feed my sheep."* (John 21:17) Why do under-shepherds love and care for the sheep? They love Jesus and see the sheep as his sheep. When you love someone, you love what they love. This is his flock, loved to the uttermost by Jesus. They are objects of his eternal and redeeming love. We shepherds love the sheep for his sake.

So biblical shepherds lead the sheep and love the sheep.

## **The Good Sheep**

I would guess there is a lot more critique of shepherding than "sheeping."

You have heard the old adage of the critical church family who each Sunday has the pastor for lunch—his reputation, his sermon, and their perception of his faults.

Did you know the biblical shoe fits on the other foot too? Or in this case, hoof? Sheep have responsibilities as biblically mandated as shepherds do. We'd better understand this role too.

- *"We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you."* (1 Thessalonians 5:12)
- *"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."* (Hebrews 13:17)
- *"Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders."* (1 Peter 5:5)

## **Sheep are to follow their shepherds**

This is Sheep 101. The Hebrews passage describes the manner of following as obeying and submitting. Is the wool on the back of your neck rising? Does that verse make you a little hot under the woolly collar? Words like obey and submit can rub us the wrong way. What does it mean?

This is part of God's work in us. Naturally, we want to be independent and free from oversight or responsibility. But when we believe in Jesus, we submit to his rule in our lives. We come under his lordship and leadership. We come into his flock. And there we discover that submitting to the chief Shepherd means coming under the leadership of his deputy shepherds. This is a challenge because it's much easier to submit to the God-man than it is to a fellow man. In fact, the more we get to know them, the more like us they seem to be—imperfect. In need of the same gospel. How do we "obey and submit" to under-shepherds?

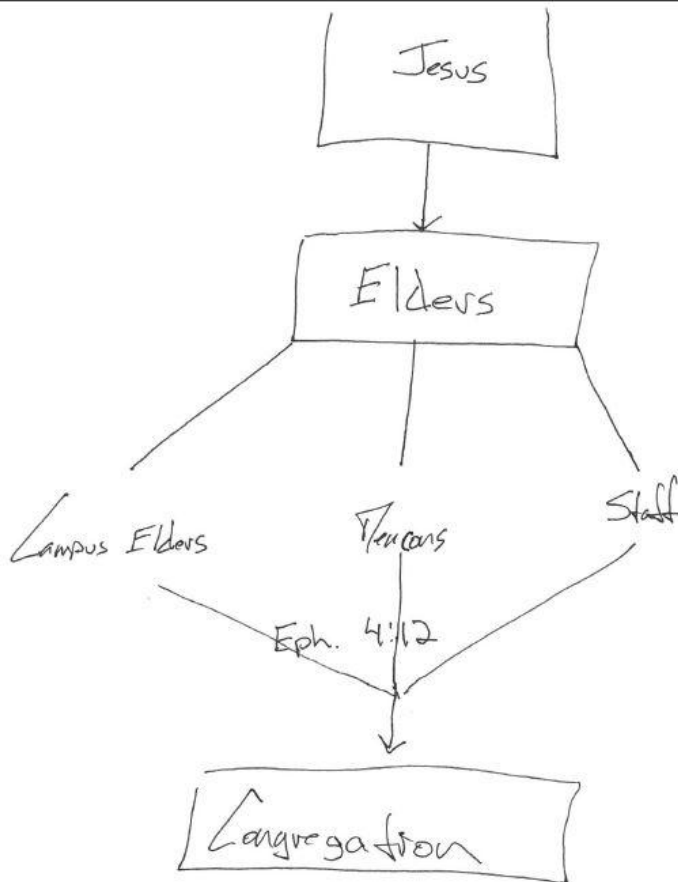
Look at the rest of verse 5: *"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"* (1 Peter 5:5) It takes humility to be a good shepherd and it takes humility to be a good and biblical sheep. All of it comes back to the glory of Christ. The shepherd takes his responsibilities seriously because he will give an account to Jesus for his labors and is responsible for sheep that Jesus loved and died for. Sheep are people who show their submission to the rule of Jesus by honoring and following Jesus' under-shepherds. This takes humility because everyone knows the under-

shepherds are sinners in need of God's grace too. So when a shepherd makes a mistake, makes a wrong turn, or shows his humanity, gospel humility is applied as we hope humble gospel grace is applied to our failures as sheep.

Shepherds humble themselves by serving the sheep and sheep humble themselves by following the shepherds. Gospel humility makes this work without it become toxic or political.

### What This Looks Like at Bethel Church

---



OK, so obviously, who's the head of the local church? *It's all about him.* Jesus. But the way that this works in our church is that we have elders here who are called to shepherd the church. Be sure to encourage your elders.

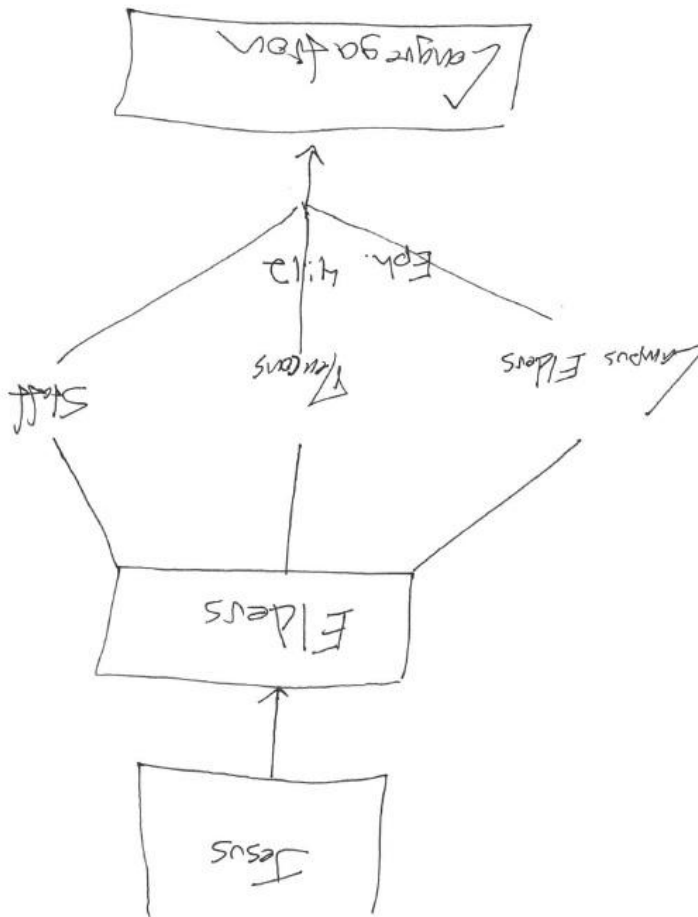
But just like Jesus deputizes, or gives authority to elders to lead, our elders have done the same. We have three main categories of additional shepherding in the church. We have campus elders, we have a wonderful deacon ministry, and we have the aspects of leading and shepherding provided by our staff.

But it doesn't stop there though. The purpose of these is *"to equip the saints for the work of ministry."* (Ephesians 4:12) Their ministry then flows down to you, the sheep. The equipping of the saints to do the work of the ministry. The goal is not for the leadership to be running around like chickens with their heads cut off while they're trying to meet all the needs of the church. Then all you get is what they can do. When we unleash the power of

the congregation and the spiritual gifts within the church, now the body is ministering to itself. When a member of the church serves you that is leadership serving you.

From this then flows the congregation which is called to be built up to be loved, to be led. What this means, friends, is that if you need ministry, it's not only the ministry of an elder to you that counts. Or it's not only the ministry of a campus elder or a deacon or a staff member that counts. Our job is to equip people to minister to people; sheep ministering to sheep. So when somebody comes to you from your small group or from some other ministry that your involved in, they're the ones who minister to you in the hospital, or they bring a meal to you, or they come alongside you and love you, or they're at the funeral or whatever it is, that is the body, that is Jesus ministering as these people are his hands and feet. And this unleashes then, the congregation to both minister and to be ministered to, and to see all of that as being the ministry of Jesus to his church through his flock.

Now let me show you how this actually works though (yes, it's supposed to be upside down):



That's actually the leadership of the church. When we recognize that the "higher" you are in the church, really the lower you are. This is a ministry of washing feet. That is why leadership is taking up that basin and the towel. This is what keeps the church from being a hierarchy, being a dictatorship, some kind of a political entity. When the leaders of the church are loving and leading by serving the flock, the rest of the flock gets the idea that service is where it's at and that that is greatness in the eyes of God. Isn't that what Jesus

said? In the kingdom of God, what does it mean to be great? To be the servant of all. And so we aspire to leadership, but we do so in kind of a descending way, which is a call then upwardly to minister to the congregation and who then gets all the glory from all of this? Jesus. He remains at the head.

So when shepherds love, and the sheep honor and follow the shepherds, the chief Shepherd is pleased with his flock here at Bethel Church. And all the sheep said, "Baa-aa-aah." That's health. And praise God for what we have of that happening now. And may God bring more of that as this just becomes increasingly the culture of our church.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Permanent Text Edition® (2016)*. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

© 2015 by Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address ([www.bethelweb.org](http://www.bethelweb.org)) on the copied resource.