

# God Shepherds His People

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] with my work, we sometimes have committee meetings a couple times a year. We'll have committee meetings that go over a couple of days. We'll sometimes have dinner together. So this past week, we had meetings all day on Wednesday, and then some of us went for dinner. After that, we went to a restaurant that we've often gone to for these things, or we've gone a couple times.

The restaurant now has a new name, and it has new management. But I think maybe it now has no management, because nobody really seemed to know what was happening. The waiter came out, and he took, first of all, he took orders, an order for drinks. People gave him their drinks orders, and he read them back. And what he read back didn't correspond to what any of us had said.

Eventually, he went away, and he came back, and he brought all the wrong things. We're saying, oh, this isn't what I ordered. He said, oh, I'll go get the manager. And we think, well, no, don't go get the right drink. You don't have to go get the manager. He went away, and he came back with other drinks. And they took the food order. I ordered one thing, something with lamb. And then he went away, and he came back, and he said to me, oh, you ordered such and such. That wasn't actually what I'd ordered. I said, well, yes. He said, we don't have that, but we have this other thing with chicken.

And it's just the same. I thought, well, I'm from a chicken. That's clever. I don't know what came. It tasted nice. I don't know what it was. But the whole evening went like that. And it was fine.

It didn't really matter. We all ate, and everyone was happy, and that was all right. But they seemed to have no leadership or no idea what they were doing. Now, if we're honest, sometimes, well, often, most of the times, we don't like to be told what to do. But equally, if we're honest, sometimes, we need to be told what to do. Being without a leader, not knowing what to do, that can be a big problem, can't it? Sometimes it's kind of amusing in a restaurant. Sometimes it can be disastrous.

[ 2 : 0 2 ] There's a passage in the Old Testament where this kind of imagery is used. Ahab. Ahab was a wicked king, and he wanted to go out to fight a war. And the prophet Micaiah answered him, and he said, I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. And the Lord said, these people have no master. Let each one go home in peace. It was a disaster for them as an army to be without a leader. The good news for us is that God hasn't left us without a leader.

So we look at this passage in 1 Peter 5. We'll see, we know ultimately, of course, Jesus is our shepherd. He's our leader. But we see also in this passage that Jesus exercises that leadership through under-shepherds that he's raised up. So we're going to look at that passage this morning, and we're going to use that image that Peter uses here of a shepherd to organize our thoughts.

There's three things I'd like us to look at as we consider this passage. The gift of shepherds, the attitude of shepherds, and then the pattern of shepherds, or the pattern for shepherds. The gift, the attitude, and then the pattern. So first of all, the gift of shepherds. In verse, sorry, chapter 5, verses 1 and 2, Peter says, 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 to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight. God has given us shepherds. I'm actually slightly borrowing that expression, the gift of shepherds. I'm borrowing that from another passage in the New Testament.

In Acts chapter 4, sorry, Ephesians chapter 4, Paul uses similar language. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 7, But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore it says, he quotes the Old Testament, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and gave gifts to men. Paul is saying there that Jesus gave gifts to men. He gave gifts to his church.

[ 4 : 35 ] And what are those gifts? In verse 11, he says, And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we attain to the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.

The gifts that Jesus gave to his church are people. Paul there mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers.

And notice two things there. How is it, according to Paul, that the church grows? Well, the church grows in part through these gifts, through these people.

God has given shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Notice also that the world is not benign.

The world is not a safe place sometimes. Paul goes on to say that this training takes place so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

[ 5 : 55 ] Maybe some of you like the sea. Maybe some of you like sailing. I've never really gone sailing much. It might seem kind of idyllic. Paul also uses an image of sailing possibly being very dangerous if you're tossed about by waves.

Coming back to our passage here in 1 Peter 5, we can ask those same questions or see those same two things. How is it that we grow as a church?

We've seen as we've gone through 1 Peter that Peter is writing to people who are going through very difficult times. People who have an experience that's much worse than ours.

People who are suffering and being persecuted because of their faith. And notice in chapter 5 and verse 1, Peter begins with, So, all along, Peter has been explaining how we cope in this world.

And now as he comes to chapter 5, he's continuing to teach us how we cope with that world. So, I exhort the elders among you, having elders in the church is part of the way that the church grows.

[ 7 : 00 ] And then notice, secondly, that the world is not benign. What kind of animal are you? Yeah, according to this passage, what kind of animal does this, what metaphor does Peter use to describe you?

We're sheep, right? What kind of animal does Peter mention in verse 9? Sorry, verse 8.

Lion. Okay? In his world, these two images, I grew up on a farm and we had sheep, and no offense to any of us since we're the sheep, but sheep are stupid and sheep are utterly helpless.

And on the other end of the spectrum, the other animal that Peter chooses, a lion, in his world, that's the apex predator, right?

I suppose in a biblical world, people might also have known about elephants. Elephants aren't predators, but they're quite fierce, aren't they? Crocodiles. Lions sometimes, not regularly, I don't think, but lions sometimes hunt crocodiles.

[ 8 : 13 ] Lions sometimes hunt elephants. The point of the image is, this is the most fearsome thing that Peter could choose. And we are the most helpless animal that Peter could choose.

And how is it that we're going to cope in a world like that? How is it, if we are so weak and helpless, left to our own devices, and we live in a world, to be clear, sometimes there's many nice things, many good things that we live in a world, but it's not a benign world.

It's a world that potentially is extremely dangerous to us. How is it that we are going to cope in that world? How are we going to survive? Well, God has given us shepherds.

Jesus is shepherd, and we're going to come to that. But Jesus often works through means. And one of the means through which Jesus works are the elders whom he has called.

This is a really, really important fact as we consider the Christian life. There was recently, in the last month, I think, there was a poll that was taken.

[ 9 : 26 ] The poll was taken in England. I think it related specifically to the Church of England, but it would apply much the same to Scotland. There was a poll that was taken, and 75% of the people who responded to that poll said that the church was irrelevant to their life.

Now, that's tragic. I suspect that's simply accurate. But what I found particularly interesting, I know about this, because Jacob and I were in the car yesterday, and I had the talk radio on, and they were discussing this.

It was a call-in show, and they were discussing this fact. And one woman phoned up, and she said that she had not grown up a particularly religious person, but when she was in school, she mentioned, particularly through her science classes, she came to the conclusion that actually the world was such that there probably was a creator.

It made sense, actually, to recognize that there was a God. And because of this, she started reading more. She started looking at the history of Christianity, the history around Jesus, and she came to the conclusion, furthermore, that Jesus was who he claimed to be.

that as astonishing as it seems, that Jesus was raised from the dead, and she came to trust in Jesus.

[ 10 : 48 ] And she said on the call-in program that therefore, to her, the church wasn't irrelevant. The church was profoundly important. And I thought that was amazing to hear such an articulate Christian on the radio.

And then the host of the program said to her, well, that's fine for you. And many people would agree with you to an extent. They would say yes to God. They would say yes to Jesus even, the host said.

But they would say no to the church. And I think that's an attitude that a lot of people in our society have, that you can be religious, you can be spiritual, but you do that yourself.

And we have a profound skepticism of any kind of institutional religion. Now, as we think about that, we have to admit that the church is far from perfect.

And the church has done a lot to cause people to be skeptical of it, sadly. There are various explanations for that. We could say that there are false shepherds.

[ 11 : 50 ] And we could say that there are societies that profess to be churches, but aren't. That is true. But we also have to admit that there are lots of societies that are churches and lots of people who are Christians who have nevertheless done very bad things.

We have to acknowledge that. That is sadly true. But nevertheless, there is a church. Jesus has a church. Jesus said that he would build his church.

And it's wrong for us to reject the church. And so here in verse 5, for example, Peter says, likewise, those of you who are younger, be subject to the elders.

Now notice in the ESV here, it translates it as the elders. I think that's correct. Maybe I could point out that if you read it in the NIV, it translates it as the younger, be subject to those who are older, to older people in general.

I think in the context, because in verse 1, Peter has just been speaking about older people who are elders, that is, who have an office in the church, who are leaders in the church, it makes most sense to think that that's the same people that Peter is speaking about in verse 5.

[ 13 : 04 ] Peter calls us to be subject to those whom God has given us as leaders, those who are under shepherds, if you will, shepherds under the chief shepherd.

In another passage in Hebrews, the author says, obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, shepherding language, as those who will give an account.

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. When I arrived late and Ross had to step up and take this, maybe he was moaning a little bit.

But the Bible calls us to recognize those who are leaders and to submit to them, to recognize that God has given them to us and God has given them to us for good, for our good and to build us up.

Now notice, in this passage, Peter uses an image. He talks about leaders as shepherds, yes. Notice that he uses two other terms to describe these people who are leaders.

[ 14 : 08 ] Did you notice those? In verse 1, do you see what he calls them? So I exhort the elders among you. And then if you notice, in verse 2, he uses a slightly, well, a different term.

He talks about those who exercise oversight. So, elders and overseers, those words could also, they get translated different ways in English.

The word for elder, it literally refers to people who are older, yeah, but then it is also sometimes a title for a particular office. It's the word that's sometimes translated presbyter.

It's sometimes, in English, has been translated priest. Some Christian churches will have priest. It's a reference to this word. I think that's very misleading because if you read the Old Testament, a priest is a very different kind of thing, right?

A priest is someone who offers sacrifices. Ministers don't do that. Elders don't do that. But nevertheless, this word that's elder could be presbyter. Sometimes it's translated priest.

[ 15 : 09 ] You have that word. And then the other word in verse 2 that's translated oversight or those who exercise oversight, those who are overseers, that's the word that is sometimes translated bishop or has been translated bishop.

So presbyter or priest, bishop. Now, sometimes in the history of the church, those have been viewed as different things. A priest or presbyter was in charge of one congregation.

A bishop was in charge of many congregations. That's episcopacy as a form of church government. Notice two things in this passage.

First of all, in this passage, there are other passages that do this as well. It makes it quite clear, I think, that actually presbyters and bishops are the same thing. They're not different classes of leaders.

And notice also, so I exhort the elders among you. Notice that they have more than one presbyter or bishop per congregation.

[16:13] That they have a group of these people in each congregation. That's part of why we do what we do as Presbyterians. Haddington Community Church is a Presbyterian church.

And so we have presbyters or overseers, we simply typically call them elders in our congregation. And they are the shepherds that God has appointed over us.

Now, we have three elders. It's nice that I can preach on this passage. Ali doesn't have to preach to his elders. They're not having to preach about it. I can tell you what to do, so to speak.

We have four elders in our congregation. I don't know if you might find that surprising. You might think that we have three. We have Barry, and Ross, and you, and you might think that we have three elders.

We have four elders because Ali Sewell, our minister, is also an elder. In Presbyterian churches, we would recognize that the minister, we typically refer to them as the minister, is also an elder.

[17:19] The one who is the minister is somebody who is set apart. They particularly have responsibility for preaching, for teaching normally. Because of that, that they get special training for teaching, for preaching.

They're set aside that they get paid to do that so that they have time to do that so that they don't have to work another job. We do that because we think it's biblical. In 1 Timothy 5, Paul says, let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor.

That expression, double honor, it's usually taken to mean payment because of what Paul goes on to say. He says, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the scripture says, you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.

And the laborer deserves his wages. So we have four elders. And we have one elder that is set aside especially for preaching and for teaching. He's trained for that.

He's remunerated. He's paid for that so that he can focus on that. And that's God's gift to us. We don't live Christianity on our own.

[18:31] We live Christianity, we experience our Christianity as part of a flock, part of God's people. And over us, Jesus is our shepherd, but Jesus exercises that care through the people whom he has raised up as elders, as minister in our congregation.

Jesus hasn't left us on our own, but he has given us people to feed us, to lead us, and to protect us. So first of all, there is the gift of elders.

Secondly, the gift of shepherds. Secondly, as we look at this passage, we see the attitude of shepherds. Now, interestingly, as we look at this passage, it doesn't say a lot practically or specifically about what elders do, does it?

There are other passages that do that. if we wanted to use the imagery that Peter uses here, the sort of shepherd imagery, if Jesus is our chief shepherd, I suppose you could say that the role of under-shepherds is to gather together Jesus' sheep, to bring the sheep to the shepherd.

Yes? The role of under-shepherds, the role of elders in a church, is to bring people to Jesus and to help people walk with Jesus.

[19:53] Maybe we could think of the role of shepherds, the role of elders in that sense. In this passage, though, the focus isn't so much on specifically what they do, but the attitude of the people who do this.

Notice that Peter says in verse 2, 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.

As we come here today, I suppose there are three kinds of people who are here today. There are people who are here today who are already elders, and then if that's true of you, then we should hear these words as a challenge to us, showing us how we should fulfill the responsibility that we've been given.

Some of you are here today and you're not elders and you never will be elders, and that's normal because if you use the image, there's always going to be more sheep than shepherds, aren't there?

This passage still speaks to us not just because of verse 5. Verse 5 tells us, likewise who are younger, be subject to the elders, but also this passage speaks to us because it tells us what we should expect from our elders.

[ 21 : 16 ] What should they do? What kind of people should they be? What kind of people ought to be elders? So maybe we're here today and we're not an elder and we won't ever be, but this passage still speaks to us.

Maybe there's a third group in between them. Maybe you're here today and you're not an elder and you should be. By that, I mean that you aren't currently an elder or minister in a church, but maybe God is calling you into that because the fact is we have three or we have four elders in this congregation.

That's a tremendous blessing, but God's church in Scotland needs many more elders and it needs many more ministers. I'm sure you've heard this statistic.

There's something like 2% of the population in Scotland that goes to church. That means that there's 98% of the population that are effectively lost, sheep that need to be brought to Jesus.

And so the church needs many more shepherds, under shepherds, many more leaders to do that. And if that's the case for you, then you should hear this passage as a challenge to you to consider, is God calling me to this?

[ 22 : 30 ] Now to be clear, that's not something that happens overnight, but maybe God is working in your life. So as we come here today, we're probably in one of those three categories.

And notice that as Peter speaks to us about the attitude of shepherds, there are three contrasts here. There are three things, one thing you shouldn't do and one thing you should do. So the first one, not under compulsion, not grudgingly, but willingly.

Secondly, not for shameful greed, sorry, shameful gain, not for greed, but eagerly. And then thirdly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

So there are three contrasts that Peter uses here to describe the attitude of shepherds. We could look at all of those. I would suggest that we could summarize that with one word.

If you wanted to pick one word to describe the attitude of people who are shepherds and the attitude that all of us, in fact, should have, it's humility. Okay?

[ 23 : 35 ] The reason that we're not to do our work grudgingly, resenting the flock, is because we are to be humble. Because we are humble, people who are shepherds don't pursue that out of greed.

And then because shepherds are humble, they're not domineering, they're not lording it over those who have been entrusted to them. As we look at this passage in Peter's letter, I would suggest that he gives us an example of humility and then secondly, a reason for humility.

Okay? First of all, the example of free humility, if you look in verse 1, so I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ.

Peter says, I'm writing to you as your fellow elder. Is that true? You think, of course it's true. Look at chapter 1 of 1 Peter.

How does Peter describe himself there? Peter. He doesn't say he's an elder there. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

[ 24 : 48 ] The person in chapter 5 who describes himself as just another elder is in fact an apostle of Jesus Christ. Peter was one of the original 12, the apostles whom Jesus had appointed.

He was chosen directly by Jesus. Peter spent three years with Jesus. He was viewed as one of the pillars of the church in Jerusalem. He was the first among equals.

Jesus referred to him as the stone upon which he would build his church. That Peter is writing to them. And he's the one who says, your fellow elder. Peter himself is an example of humility.

One commentator describing this passage says that nothing could be further from the picture of a pompous bishop. That sounds like someone who'd experienced bishops that he didn't like.

But he's making the point Peter is nothing like that. The sort of pompous self-important person that you might imagine. The kind of person that he could have become. He was one of the most important people in the church.

[ 25 : 54 ] And yet he doesn't present himself in that way. Just very briefly, that word that he uses there for witness, that can mean a variety of things in verse 1. It could mean simply that he means he was an eyewitness of Jesus.

That is true of Peter. In the context, it seems more likely that what he means by that was that he was not just a witness of Jesus' sufferings, but that he participated in them, in the sense that he had shared them.

Notice immediately after that, that he goes on to describe himself as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Peter had suffered. The point that I'm making here is that Peter wrote to these people, he's not expecting anything of them, and he's not telling them to do anything other than what he himself had experienced and had done.

Peter gives us an example of humility. And if you compare Peter here to younger Peter that we read about in the Gospels, he's a very different person, isn't he?

Peter had grown in humility, and he'd become a humble person. So, if you are a leader, Peter calls upon you to do that humbly.

[ 27 : 05 ] He gives you an example of humility. But then he also gives us an example of humility. At the beginning of this letter, in chapter 18, with this question in our mind, why should leaders in the church be humble?

Peter goes on to say all of us should be humble. Why should we be humble? In chapter 1, verse 18, Peter says, knowing that you are ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

If you're a Christian, you're here today, and you are a Christian, and you stand before God, not because of who you are, and not because of what you have done, but because of what Jesus has done.

And that may be offensive, yes? I remember years ago when one of the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, the Narnia films came out, and there was a review of the film in The Guardian by Pauly Toynbee, and spoiler alert, Pauly Toynbee didn't like the film.

That's putting it mildly. And it wasn't because of the production values or the acting or the special effects. I don't actually remember what she thought of that, but that wasn't why she disliked the film.

[ 28 : 30 ] She disliked the film because of the message. Okay? She hated this idea of Aslan, who would give his life to save others. Who asked him to, she said?

Pauly Toynbee hated the film because she hates Christianity. And there's an aspect of the gospel that's offensive, isn't it? Because if this is true, if Jesus had to die in order to save me, then it means that there's something profoundly wrong with me, doesn't it?

But I don't like to admit that there's something profoundly wrong with me because I want to be a good, upstanding, respected person, right? But if Jesus died to save you, then it means that all wasn't well.

And that's hugely humbling. And sometimes we don't like that. Ultimately, it's tremendously joyful, isn't it? Because it's necessary. And isn't it astonishing that Jesus would do that for me?

But that is profoundly humbling. And so why is it that elders in a church, why is it that any Christian should be humble? Because of what Jesus has done for us.

[ 29 : 41 ] So Peter here describes the gift of shepherds. God hasn't left us on our own. Jesus is our shepherd, and Jesus has raised up individuals to lead us.

We see the attitude of shepherds, what should characterize somebody who is a leader, should profoundly be characterized by humility. And then as we conclude, just very briefly in conclusion, notice the pattern for shepherds.

And by that, really, I mean the person who is the pattern. Do you notice verse 4? When the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

All along I've spoken about shepherds in the church leaders and the church being under shepherds because we have a greater shepherd. And that's tremendously encouraging, isn't it?

that's encouraging if you are an elder. Because if you are an elder, maybe you feel that this is a really hard job. And you may feel that the bar is very high in terms of what's expected of you.

[ 30 : 51 ] You may be aware of your shortcomings, your failings, your mistakes. It may seem all too much. And if I say that, I'm sure you won't think that I intend that as any sort of a critique of those who are our elders, the apostles felt that.

The apostle Paul reflecting on his responsibilities at one point said, who is sufficient for these things? If Paul could feel insufficient for what he was called to, then I'm sure the rest of us should as well.

And that might be overwhelming. But how encouraging is it to know that Jesus is the chief shepherd? To know that he will accomplish his purposes.

Because Jesus died for his sheep. He will certainly build his church. And the remarkable thing is that Jesus has chosen you, if you're a leader in the church, Jesus has chosen you, leaving aside all of your insufficiencies, he has chosen you to work through you.

And that's a tremendous thing. This is also tremendously encouraging for all of us. because at the moment, in Haddington Community Church, we're tremendously blessed, aren't we?

[ 32 : 08 ] We have a congregation where the gospel is faithfully preached, we have faithful elders who watch over us, but it may be the case that at some point in your life you'll be in a place where that's not the case.

You may end up someplace where there isn't a faithful church for you, and that can be really discouraging, isn't it? But even there you can know that Jesus hasn't abandoned you, because he is still the good shepherd, he is still the one who loved you, who laid down his life for you, and he will certainly continue to watch over you, and to feed you, and to lead you, and to protect you, until you're with him forever.

Will you bow your heads with me as we close in prayer? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.  
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.