

## A Shepherd's Compass I Peter 5:1-4

A hiker was hiking along one day when he came to a wide river.

Seeing another hiker on the other bank, he called out, "Hey, how do I get to the other side?"

The second hiker looked slowly along the bank to the left, then along the bank to the right, thought a bit, then called back, "You ARE on the other side!"

We all know what a compass is. Most cars are now equipped with them providing a general heading as you travel. Hunters and hikers carry them.

The main functions of a compass are:

- tell which direction you are traveling - your heading
- tell which direction an object is from you - its bearing
- keep you following a straight line of travel

As we come to the final chapter of I Peter, the Apostle and author provides some compass headings for these believers to help them navigate in difficult terrain of persecution.

In our passage today we consider a challenge Peter gave to the leaders of those churches that will help set a course and keep a bearing for them to follow. If the leadership doesn't know where they are headed, it's difficult for the church to follow.

This becomes a compass for us as leaders who have oversight over you that will help guide you. This passage is not only an asset in guiding the church leadership speaking specifically to those with pastoral care, it is an assessment on how well I am doing. Call it a performance review if you like.

With that in mind, turn to I Peter 5:1-4.

In verse 1 Peter begins by appealing to the elders.

### I. APPEALING TO THE ELDERS – v. 1

Remember that this is a general letter to the churches scattered throughout Asia Minor or

modern day Turkey. Each of these churches had a leader responsible for their spiritual well-being. He calls them elders.

Elder was a word that was borrowed from Judaism. Because many of these believers were Jewish they would have been familiar with the term and the role. Some scholars suggest that Peter is referring to elders in terms of age since he refers to older men in verse 5. But most agree that he is not speaking about age but in terms of position within the church.

The New Testament uses three interchangeable terms to identify the person or function of leadership within the church.

The first term is bishop or overseer. This term speaks of the responsibility entrusted to the leader of the church. As the term suggests he oversees the ministry of the church as well as the oversight of the people within the church like general well-being.

The second term is pastor or shepherd and speaks of the care the leader provides through the priority of teaching God's Word. We'll talk about this in a little more detail later but generally think of this as a term borrowed from the Old Testament and correlate the care of a pastor and his congregation with that of a shepherd and his sheep.

The third term is the word elder, which speaks of the leader's spiritual maturity. Paul says that he shouldn't be a new Christian. While a new Christian can be mature in things like character or wisdom the emphasis here is on spiritual maturity. There is a depth to his character that can only come through time spent with the Lord in cooperation with the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in his life. As an elder it is assumed that he is continuing to grow in his faith. If the pastor isn't growing, the church won't grow either.

All three terms are used by Peter in verses 1 and 2 and apply to the same person or office.

Peter just finished a lengthy discourse on persecution and I think he is saying here that during such difficult times either for an individual or for the church good leadership is required that will help the church navigate through those tough times. Strong leadership will help a congregation stand firm in their faith when testing comes along. Good leadership will help unify the church under the pressure of stress.

Peter begins with an appeal or exhortation (KJV) to them. It means to come alongside of someone and generally means to encourage or compel in a certain direction just like a compass points you in the right direction.

In the noun form the same word refers to the ministry of the Holy Spirit who comes alongside us.

While Peter's very first statement addresses the pastor/elders among them, it is a measuring rod for the church to determine if their leaders are doing their job.

So what does Peter have to say to these elders?

#### A. It's An Appeal Based On Positional Empathy

"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder."

In the beginning of this letter Peter addressed these churches as an Apostle of Jesus Christ establishing the authority by which he could write to them.

Now he is speaking to these elders as someone who shared the same office and responsibility as they did. He understood the tremendous care and responsibility for the personal and spiritual needs of his congregation that it can be a tremendous weight to help people in the church through turbulent times or maturing times.

The elder should care about you when there is sickness or long term illness.

The elder should care about you when there is tragedy in the family from the death of a loved one, to job loss or job stress, to concerns over family matters and struggling marriages or interpersonal relationships within the church family.

The elder should care about you to ensure you are being spiritually fed so that you can mature in faith. That's a primary role according to Ephesians 4. As a fellow elder Peter empathizes with them.

#### B. It's An Appeal Based On Personal Experience

"To the elders among you, I appeal as...a witness of Christ's sufferings."

The word witness comes from the Greek word *martus* from which we get the word martyr. We often associate that word with someone who was put to death for their faith. We see it used in Revelation 6:9 speaking of those "who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony (*marturian*) they had maintained."

In time Peter will be one who will experience martyrdom for his faith. So he is not speaking of that kind of witness here as obviously he is still alive. A *martus* or witness is also someone who proclaims the gospel and preaches the suffering of Christ. That's the commission Jesus gave the Apostles and us in Acts 1:8.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses (*martures*) in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Not too long after that on the day of Pentecost Peter preached the suffering, crucified, risen Christ. Acts 2:22-24

After the healing of the beggar on the steps of the Temple, Peter again preached a message about the suffering, crucified, risen Christ.

Acts 3:11-15 (notice v. 15 "witnesses")

And yet again in Acts 5:32 Peter and the other disciples were held and questioned by the Jewish religious rulers and Peter testified “We are witnesses of these things.”

Throughout Christ’s ministry Peter witnessed the verbal assault of the religious leaders against Christ. He was in the Garden of Gethsemane when Christ suffered the anguish of what He was about to endure and the betrayed and arrest. He was in the courtyard during the first trial of Jesus. Peter could appeal to these elders because of his own personal experience as a witness of the sufferings of Christ. A witness is simply someone who testifies from firsthand experience.

### C. It’s An Appeal Based On A Promised End

“To the elders among you, I appeal as...one who also will share in the glory to be revealed.”

During the time of Jesus’s ministry Peter was privileged along with John and James to witness the transfiguration of Jesus when His glory was revealed for a short time (Matthew 17:1-2). Peter is going to “share” or “participate” in that glory again and it will be forever.

John writes about it in his gospel (John 1:14) “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Following the wedding where Jesus turned the water into wine John wrote (John 2:11) “This, the first of His miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him.”

Peter is saying that as an elder, a follower of Christ, he will one day share in Christ’s future glory.

In the first verse Peter appealed to the elders. In verses 2-3 we are going to see what he is

encouraging them to do in approaching the flock.

## II. APPROACHING THE FLOCK – vs. 2-3

It is not by accident that Peter refers to the church as a flock or that he calls the elders shepherds. Peter may be recalling his discussion with Jesus on the seashore following the resurrection.

John 21:15-19

It’s also possible he may have been thinking about the parable Jesus told in John 10 (1-17) about the shepherd and the hireling. The shepherd is the one who really cares for his sheep and does everything to protect and provide for them while the hireling runs at the first sign of trouble.

Statistics vary among denominations but some surveys indicate that the average length of stay for a pastor is somewhere between 5-7 years. Reasons vary for this short tenure. All too often when trouble crops up the pastor leaves.

I think Peter is saying, don’t be like the hireling; the flock needs someone to guide them through the tough times.

Sheep require more care than any other class of livestock. Other animals can find their way home. Not sheep. If they are in a new area they can easily get disoriented. If they get lost they can’t find food or water or shelter on their own. Left by themselves sheep will eat both healthy and poisonous plants. They secrete an oil that permeates their wool making it easy for dirt and debris to stick to it. They can’t clean themselves so all that stuff remains in there wool until the sheep are sheared. They are passive and defenseless against predators. Now notice something important in what Peter says. While these elders are the shepherds of the flock notice that this is “God’s flock” that they are caring for. These sheep don’t belong to the elders, they belong to God. Christ paid the price for these people to become part of God’s flock. Paul says we

are not our own we were bought with a price,  
Christ's shed blood (I Corinthians 6:19b-20a).

There is one other passage that Peter may have been thinking about as well. It's found in the Old Testament and it's a scathing indictment by God on the religious leaders of the day. We read in Ezekiel 34:1-16 that instead of caring for the spiritual needs of the Israelites by teaching to love and obey God, they were greedy and exploited the people. The remainder of the chapter is a vision given to Ezekiel of the coming Shepherd of God's people, the Messiah. Under His care they would never suffer again because "there will be showers of blessings." And we read in John 10:11 Jesus refers to Himself as "the Good Shepherd".

Peter addresses three general ways the flock was to be approached by the shepherd. Shepherding implies feeding, caring, leading, guiding, protecting, disciplining, and instructing. He speaks of both the motive and manner in how to approach the sheep.

#### A. Willingly Approach God's Flock – v. 2a

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be."

A willingness to shepherd is a matter of the will. He shepherds not out of obligation because he has to but because he wants to. It is a choice and he does so cheerfully and without complaint.

It's never a chore or a duty to him.

He never says "if no one else will do it I guess I will."

Willingness presupposes humility on his part. He faithfully goes about his responsibilities without the thought of what's in it for him.

He shepherds God's flock because he enjoys it, even though at times it can be rough.

He never loathes his work or his people.

He serves with the right motive.

But here's a helpful word from Hebrews for you that can make his work easier.

Hebrews 13:17 "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

He is diligent not lazy.

He is faithful not forced.

He is passionate not indifferent.

#### B. Eagerly Approach God's Flock – v. 2b

Eagerness expresses the idea of great zeal, readiness and enthusiasm. It speaks of a mind that finds delight in his work. Sure there are challenges along the way, but that doesn't diminish the enthusiasm to serve the flock.

Peter suggests that the opposite of eagerness is doing it for the money. The term "filthy lucre" in the KJV or "greedy for money" in the NIV speaks of seeking wealth by shameful acquisition. He does it dishonestly. For him it's never about the money.

While scripture speaks of the pastor being worthy of his hire, he doesn't go around looking for a raise or seeking to do the job halfheartedly if he isn't compensated well for his work. He doesn't spend his time on the golf course and chalk it up to study time or counseling troubled souls.

Even the Old Testament speaks out against such ill-conceived behavior.

Isaiah 56:11

Jeremiah 6:13

Micah 3:11

This shepherd eagerly approaches God's flock.

Peter gives one more way the shepherd is to approach the flock.

#### C. Exemplarily Approach God's Flock – v. 3

Like sheep, the church needs to be led not driven. The shepherd needs to be out front leading by example.

Warren Wiersbe aptly writes “We cannot lead people where we have not been ourselves.”

As your shepherd I need to set the pace by being a godly example for you to follow.

Someone once said that the best test of leadership is to look behind you and see if anyone is following.

How am I doing?

Is my example clear?

Is my example consistent?

Is my example compelling?

Much of the past leadership style in business was to lead by force. Just tell people what they were to do and expect that they do it. In time that model has changed. Business is finding that leading by example produces greater results.

Unfortunately some pastors lead like that. A pastor can lead by force and tell the congregation what to do and over time they will begin to wander.

Peter was an Apostle but he did not lord it over these churches or elders. He didn't demand of them certain expectations. He was setting an example of the kind of behavior they should imitate.

Jesus sets for us the greatest example.

Matthew 20:20-28

Now compare that with III John 9-10 “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.”

Diotrephes was a church leader who was a dictator

in his church called out for detrimental his actions.

Paul in writing to the Corinthians said “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (I Corinthians 11:1)

Now, of the two, Diotrephes or Paul, who set an example as a shepherd over God's flock?

Paul wrote to Timothy: “Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” (I Timothy 4:12)

What kind of example am I setting for you or are there times you feel as though I'm domineering?

From the passage we read in Ezekiel the religious leaders were harsh and demanding. My life should be an example for God's flock.

The shepherd is never lazy about his work.

The shepherd leads with eagerness, enthusiasm and zeal.

The shepherd takes delight in his work.

My prayer is that I will shepherd after God's own heart. (Jeremiah 3:15)

If these elders would approach God's flock in a way that demonstrates godliness they could expect to be awarded for being faithful. We see it in verse 4.

### III. AWARDING THE FAITHFUL – v. 4

First, there is the appearance of our Chief Shepherd.

#### A. The Appearance Of Our Chief Shepherd – v. 4a

“And when the Chief Shepherd appears”

Peter is speaking of something that is yet to come, the promise of His return. That should in itself be the greatest award we could receive, the appearance

of Christ.

Jesus gave that assurance Himself.

John 14:1-3 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.”

In Psalm 22 we read about the Messiah as the Good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep.

In Psalm 23 we read about the Messiah as the Great Shepherd who watches over His sheep.

In Psalm 24 we read about the Messiah as the Chief Shepherd who is coming again for His sheep.

To be Chief means He is the head, the ruler, the owner and some day He is going to appear. When He returns He will approve of those who have faithfully cared for His flock with an award, an unfading crown of glory.

#### B. The Approval Of Our Unfading Crown Of Glory – v. 4b

The crown spoken of here was the kind given out to athletes who were victorious in the games. It was crown made of garland or flowers or leaves. The Greek word for unfading is *amarantos* from which we get the name of a flower called the amaranth. It was so called because it was believed that the flower never faded. But like all flowers, it too does not last. The crown however, that is given to shepherds for their faithful service would never fade because it is a crown of glory, the glory of the Lord that will be given to them.

For a brief time Peter, James and John witnessed the glory of Christ when He was transfigured. After His ascension Jesus was crowned with glory. Hebrews 2:9 “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory

and honor because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”

Because what He did on the cross was approved by God as the payment for our sin, Jesus was exalted to His place of glory. That glory is what faithful shepherds will receive when Christ appears. They will enter for eternity into His glory.

The phrase literally reads “the unfading crown that is glory.”

Peter is speaking metaphorically about a crown that is glory itself and not speaking of a physical crown. His glory is our eternal reward, which should motivate the faithful shepherd to remain committed to leading God’s flock entrusted to his care and especially so during times of great testing.

So, when it comes to shepherding this flock, how am I doing?

Am I shepherding in the right manner and with the right motive – willingly, eagerly and as a godly example?

Am I keeping you on the right path, setting the correct direction?

I want to say that it is a joy to shepherd you. My prayer is that I am setting an example for you to follow as we grow together in Christ.

The rest of the chapter is about your response.