

BE SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK

1 Peter 5:1-14

Key Verse: 5:2a

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care...”

As Peter finished his letter, he gave general instructions to all members of the church. These reflect Peter’s great shepherd’s heart for God’s church. First of all, he urges leaders to do what God really wants them to do, which is to be shepherds of God’s flock. Though we are not all church leaders in the same sense, we do all have a sphere of influence in which we can care for people around us. People really need shepherds. At first glance, people may look self-sufficient, as though they lack nothing. But each person has many agonies that they cannot overcome by themselves. Some people don’t know why they are living, or what their life goal should be. Though they wrestle with symptoms of their problem, they don’t know what their root problem is. They really need a shepherd who will listen to them, understand them, guide them, and serve them with genuine love. This is true for all of us without exception. These days the problem of mistrust is very serious. People do not trust each other. This prevents people from opening their hearts. But if they find someone they trust, they are willing to listen and learn from them. There are so many people who need shepherds. But we tend to think that there are not many good Bible students. The real problem is not with the Bible students, but shepherds. If we are genuinely shepherds, we will have so many people to take care of. Let’s learn what kind of shepherd God wants us to be.

First, be examples to God’s flock (1-4). Verses 1-4 are mainly directed to the elders. Peter begins by saying, **“To the elders among you...”** (1a). In the New Testament, the words **“elder,” “overseer,”** and **“pastor”** are used interchangeably (Ac 20:17,28; Tit 1:5-7). Historically, the role of elders may go back to the time of Moses. He felt that the burden of shepherding the Israelites was too heavy, and he almost died. So he cried out to God. Then God directed him to choose seventy elders to share with him the burden of taking care of the people (Num 11:10-17). **An elder’s job was to take care of God’s flock. In the New Testament also, it was common for a team of elders to be appointed to take care of God’s flock** (Ac 14:23). Paul told the Ephesian elders: **“Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood”** (Ac 20:28b). An elder’s main job was not

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administrative, but shepherding God's flock. Although Peter was a great apostle, he identified himself with the elders and humbly appealed to them (1a). He mentioned being a witness of Christ's sufferings to encourage them that participating in Christ's sufferings leads to sharing in his glory (1b).

Peter's main exhortation is: **"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care..."** (2a). Why is being a shepherd of God's flock so important? It is because this is what God really wants from leaders in his church. Ezekiel 34 well describes it: **"This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? ...You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd"** (Eze 34:1-5). God also said, **"I myself will search for my sheep and look after them...I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak..."** (Eze 34:11,16). That is why God sent Jesus as the good shepherd for his people. God purchased his people by shedding the precious blood of Christ for them and each one is absolutely valuable to him. They are "God's flock," not ours. God really wants leaders to be shepherds of his people one by one. Jesus said, **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost"** (Lk 19:10). The parable of the lost sheep reveals Jesus' heart to search for one lost soul until he found him (Lk 15:3-6). When one sinner repents, there is great rejoicing in heaven (Lk 15:7). This pleases God most. Shepherds have the great privilege and glory to cowork with God for the salvation of souls. This is why Paul confessed that God's flock under his care was his joy, glory and crown (Php 4:1; 1 Th 2:19-20). Such a glorious reward has great appeal. But there is a danger to pursue it with a wrong motive. So Peter exhorted them to have a right motive and attitude as shepherds of God's flock.

Let's read verses 2-3. **"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."** The words, **"watching over them"** come from the verb form of the noun **"overseer."** This tells us what a shepherd does. He **"watches over"** God's flock. He observes carefully, understands what is

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going on in their lives and figures out what they need to grow. Knowing these things, he can protect them from harm, "feed" them at the right time, and serve them according to their need. In serving God's people as a shepherd, motive and attitude are vital. Peter makes three contrasts to explain this.

First of all, shepherding should be done willingly, not because one "must." The word "must" signifies a sense of obligation as a leader, without love or joy. Such people feel burdened and burden others. After making a Bible study appointment, they hope the Bible student does not come. If the Bible student cancels with some excuse, they say, "Oh, okay," then secretly dance around happily. When Bible students realize this, they stop coming to Bible study. To such people, shepherd life is tiresome, lonely and miserable. They often confess, "Shepherd life is really hard." The main problem is that they are trying to be a shepherd without God's heart. So Peter urged them to be willing, as God wants them to be. God wants us to do his work voluntarily. This comes from knowing God's heart. God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love (Ex 34:6). God cares for the needy. Once, a man with leprosy, covered with ugly sores came and said to Jesus, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man: "I am willing," he said, "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed, not only in his body, but in his heart as well (Mk 1:40-42). To serve God voluntarily, like Jesus did, makes a big difference. When we are willing to serve joyfully, the result is good, and God blesses us.

Shepherds also should not pursue dishonest gain, but be eager to serve. From time to time, after a one-to-one Bible study, someone will ask, "How much do I owe you?" Then we say, "Nothing. We do not charge for Bible study. Freely we have received and we freely give" (Mt 10:8b). Yet even though we do not seek material gain, we can seek gain through our Bible students in other ways, such as recognition or honor. When Bible students feel that they are being used for the welfare of the shepherd, they are offended. A genuine love relationship does not develop, and sooner or later they part ways. On the other hand, when we serve them eagerly with genuine love, a beautiful love relationship can develop. It is possible to serve when we follow in Jesus' footsteps. Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..." (Mk 10:45). We should serve Bible

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students purely for their spiritual welfare. In this way we can learn the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, who became the servant of all.

Shepherds, furthermore, should not lord it over those entrusted to them, but be examples to God's flock. Jesus used the words **“lord it over”** to describe the way worldly leaders rule people (Mk 10:42). From a position of power, they exercise authority oppressively. They manipulate people for their own benefit. Jesus said to his disciples, **“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant”** (Mk 10:43). Jesus never exercised authority for his own benefit, but to serve those in need. Jesus' miracles were done to meet people's needs. Instead of leading others by use of authority, Jesus set a good example. At the last supper, Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power. Yet Jesus did not command his disciples to serve him. Rather, he served them by washing their dirty feet one by one (Jn 13:4-5). Afterward, he said, **“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you”** (Jn 13:15). Like Jesus, leaders should set good examples, going on ahead of God's flock with a humble, servant attitude. They should not push them from behind. It is not easy to lead by example. How can we be a good example? When we follow Jesus, we can naturally become a good example. But our example is not the point. Learning of Jesus and knowing him personally is the point. Our example should help others follow Jesus, not steal their attention for ourselves. The goal of shepherding is to help others have a personal relationship with Jesus so they may listen to Jesus' voice and follow him. In order to shepherd with integrity, one needs to remember that our reward does not come from God's flock, but from Jesus himself. If we seek rewards from human beings, we receive our reward in full during this lifetime and have no reward from God (Mt 6:5,16). Verse 4 says, **“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away.”** Jesus' reward is eternal and glorious. It far surpasses any reward that people can give. We should seek this reward.

The words **“Be shepherds of God's flock”** reflect God's shepherd heart for his people. God began his salvation work mainly because of his shepherd heart. When God chose Abraham, and gave him the promise of salvation, he said, **“I will...I will...I will...I will...I will”** (Gen 12:2-3). God wanted Abraham to trust in him to keep this promise. Because of his shepherd heart for the lost people of the world, God bore with Abraham in his

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weaknesses and laid a foundation for his world salvation work. Ever since, God has carried out his salvation work, only by his grace.

God raised King David to be a shepherd for his people. God trained David for many years to know God's heart for his people. When David was in political exile, running for his life, God sent to David 400 troublemakers who were in distress or in debt (1 Sam 22:2). It was a great test of David to see if he would shepherd them. David accepted them and began to serve them in order to raise them as God's people. David cared for them one by one in the midst of his own great anguish. In the course of shepherding people, David learned that God was his Shepherd. So he wrote: **"The Lord is my Shepherd"** (Ps 23:1). David grew as a man after God's own heart (Ac 13:22). Moreover, the men under his care grew to become the key members of his kingdom. God was pleased with David and established him as the shepherd king of his people (2 Sam 5:2). Furthermore, God promised David that he would send the Messiah through his line (2 Sam 7:11-16).

Based on his promises to Abraham and David, God sent Jesus into the world as the Messiah. Jesus identified himself as the good shepherd (Jn 10:11). Jesus cared for all kinds of people with a compassionate heart. Finally, he died for our sins, shedding his blood, in order to free us from the power of sin and death and make us God's children. Jesus rose and ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to be with us to counsel and guide us into all truth, to comfort and encourage us, and eventually bring us to the kingdom of God (Jn 14:16, 16:13). God is our Shepherd. When we shepherd God's flock we can grow in knowing God's shepherd heart.

Second, clothe yourselves with humility (5-14). In verse 5, Peter shifts his attention to a different group of people with the phrase, **"In the same way..."** He briefly instructs younger people, **"...submit yourselves to your elders."** In times past and present, young people tend to be rebellious toward authority. But they need to change this tendency as members of God's church. When young people submit to elders, they are actually submitting to God's authority. As they do this, they can grow spiritually and may even become elders in the future.

Beginning in verse 5b, Peter gives general instructions to all believers. **First of all, he exhorted them to be humble:** **"All of you, clothe yourselves**

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with humility toward one another.” Suppose we are proud toward one another. What will happen? We will engage in mutual criticism and condemnation and experience something like hell. But when we clothe ourselves with humility toward one another, we can practice genuine acceptance, understanding, forgiveness, love, and encouragement, and be mutually edified. Then we experience the kingdom of God. Just as we take off dirty clothes and put on clean ones every day, so we need to throw our pride away, and put on humility. There is an even more important reason to be humble. It is because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” God takes offense at pride or arrogance. God loves a humble and repentant person. If God opposes us, there is no escape and no relief. However, if God shows his favor to us, blessing, happiness and joy follow. So Peter said, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (6). This does not mean that in order to be lifted up, we try to be humble. But when we genuinely grow in Christ’s humility, God lifts us up. In the Greek, verse 7 is not a new sentence, but a continuation of verse 6 by means of the participle “casting.” Proper humility is attained by casting all of our anxieties on God because he cares for us. When a humble person becomes anxious, they come to God in prayer. God relieves their anxiety by assuring them of his love.

Finally, Peter exhorted the believers to be alert and of sober mind (8a). It is because our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (8b). The devil does not sleep or take a vacation. He works hard 24 hours a day, seven days a week, never keeping the Sabbath day. He diligently looks for someone to devour, such as a proud person, a fearful person, a doubting person, a lazy person, a complaining person, or the one who always thinks negatively about everything. The devil’s temptation is sweet and strong to anyone. We cannot overcome it by our own willpower and wisdom. We need faith in Jesus, who is stronger than the devil. So Peter exhorted, **“Resist him, standing firm in the faith...”** (9a). If we are friendly with the devil and talk with him, he will devour us like a gourmet meal. But if we resist the devil, he will flee from us (Jas 4:7). Our brothers and sisters throughout the world are fighting the same battle. When we realize this, we can be encouraged to fight against the devil (9b).

In closing his letter, Peter gives a final blessing and doxology. In his words we find that after giving many teachings and admonitions and practical

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directives to God's flock, he ultimately trusted in God, the Sovereign Ruler of all, as the Shepherd of his people. He knew that God would protect and defend and guide his people safely to his heavenly kingdom. He said, **“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast”** (10). Then he concluded: **“To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen”** (11). In verses 12-14 he gives final greetings. He acknowledges the help of Silas in writing the letter. He shares greetings from “She who is in Babylon,” which seems to refer to the church in Rome. He also sends greetings on behalf of his spiritual son, Mark, the writer of the gospel bearing that name. Finally, he encouraged them to greet one another with a kiss of love and said, **“Peace to all of you who are in Christ”** (14).

In this world, everyone suffers in many ways, including us Christians. When we suffer, it is easy to become self-absorbed and lose concern for others. But when we remember how God cares for us as our Shepherd, in many ways, and through many of his servants, and consider what God really wants us to be, we can overcome ourselves. We can be concerned for others and care for them as shepherds. Many people around us really need a shepherd. They cry for help. Let's be shepherds of God's flock. When we do so, God will be pleased with us. He will surely bless us and reward us with eternal glory.