

SHEPHERDOLOGY
1 PETER 5:1-4

In four verses we get Pastoral Theology 101 through a PhD.

The Bible is full of references to animals. But the most frequently mentioned animal in the Bible is sheep — over 400 ref's. They were central to the economy and to the sacrificial system. The Bible is not only full of animals, but also of sheep. And where there are sheep, there have to be shepherds. If we want to understanding shepherding people, we must understand shepherding sheep.

The sheep were totally dependent on their shepherds, who offered protection and shelter and leadership, and a guide and authority and a constant companion to the sheep. Shepherds were an odd sort; they lived nomadic lives — hard-working, blue-chollar men. At one level they were respected because the provision of the sacrificial system was dependent on them. They were men's men.

It is this image that Peter uses to describe pastoral care. Every dictionary speaks of the stupidity of sheep. Sheep cannot even find their way back to a fold even when it is in sight! It's easy to focus on the dependence of people and the foolishness of the people we lead. But it is also easy to forget something very important — we are sheep too!

God's foundational purpose for pastoral ministry is pictured in the shepherd. Cf. Jer. 3:15ff — God's standard is shepherds who shepherd after His own heart. Faithful shepherds look at God the shepherd and shepherd like He does.

In this passage, Peter shows us what this shepherding is to be like. Pastoral ministry is not for wimps. It's not a social alternative to another job in the world. It is the most crushing endeavor a human being can undertake. It is all about exalting the Great Shepherd and diminishing the under-shepherd.

Three sobering realities of pastoral ministry:

1. It is a serious responsibility (v. 1)

The exhortation is specifically directed toward elders — men who are senior in age and experience. Three terms are used for elder — pastor — overseer; they are synonymous. Elder means maturity, overseer means wisdom, and pastor means a heart to guide — and they come together in one person for ministry. They are not three different kinds of roles. You can function in these ways without possessing the office.

A few of these men are called out and are set aside from the responsibility of providing for themselves — the church is called to provide for them so they could be fully devoted to the task

of caring for the flock.

First Peter is written to a group of people whose lives were being threatened for their faith. This is a reality in some parts of the world today, but not for most of us. Note what he says to the people — there is almost no “comfort” the people. Comfort is coming when you die; for now, be faithful. So why discuss the topic of elders? So that the people are cared for in their suffering so that they are lead to obedience in their suffering. He wants to make sure the elders also do not shrink away from their task in the midst of suffering — that they would not give up though they had a larger target on their backs.

A faithful pastor ought to necessarily attract persecution even in this age.

Peter shows the relationship between suffering and glory. The bottom line in v. 1 is that Peter is not asking the elders to do anything that he is not doing himself. He understands their fears, temptations, and responsibilities and he calls them to continue the task. It’s great being a shepherd, but the sheep bite — and sometimes gnaw!

Peter says that he was a witness of Christ’s sufferings. Peter saw all the opposition throughout the ministry of Christ, saw the arrest and may have made his way later to the cross and certainly saw the outcome of Christ’s suffering. Be very aware that to take on leadership is to make yourself vulnerable to the very same forces that killed Christ — not only the demonic forces, but the same kinds of forces (people) who hated Christ.

2. A delegated responsibility (vv. 2-3)

Peter had a remarkable conversation with Christ after the resurrection (Jn. 21:15-17); Peter must have swallowed his fish at Christ’s questions. Three times Jesus emphasized that if Peter loves Jesus, then he will care for and pastor God’s people. Don’t get lost in the debate about love; get busy about the task of caring for the flock. Spurgeon — “he has an intense love for the souls of men...he was born for this purpose — to care for other people...”

Pastoring is more than something that you do; it is something you *are*.

This is a delegated responsibility because it is *God’s* flock — it is not our church or our people; they are God’s lambs, who He tells us to care for more than anything else in our lives. The sheep are not ours; they are God’s.

Aside: Notice that the ministry is localized — it is *among you*. Don’t try to shepherd the flock that is not among us — shepherd the flock of God that is your church.

There are special temptations that are associated with spiritual leadership, often demonstrated by the Pharisees. Here are three sins and three antidotes —

- ✓ *not forced, but according to the will of God*. We do it not because we have to but because we want to. God does not call people into ministry kicking screaming!
- ✓ *not for sordid gain, but with eagerness*. We do not work for financial benefit and gain.

We don't work for fees and contracts and professional writers. Do you consider the financial gain that you can appropriate because of ministerial associations. Don't be a pastoral freeloader. The key here is that we are not to profit from the ministry. It just adulterizes the ministry.

- ✓ *nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples.* We are to be examples of what we teach, not exceptions of what we teach. Jesus demonstrated this in Mk. 10:42ff — whoever shall be great among you shall be your servant... “Let us be willing to be doormats at our master’s servant hall....Let us who are strong bear their infirmities...he is greatest who makes himself less than the least.” (Spurgeon)

In Peter’s mind and his reader’s minds, Ezk. 34 was probably in their remembrance: the shepherds of Israel were only taking *and were not giving*. This had to be in Peter’s mind. Israel was scattered for lack of a shepherd. [More people leave churches because they were uncared for than because of bad preaching.] To get away from the predators (shepherds) the sheep had to go the high hills (v. 6). The shepherds were in it for themselves! And God was *against them* (v. 10). God actually has to deliver his people from pastors because they are using the people only for their own personal gain.

We are not celebrities. We are servants. It’s easier to stand strong in the pulpit than to stoop low to wash feet. The accent of Ezekiel and Peter is that we pastor because we love God and long to care for His people.

We need to elevate pastoral ministry in our affections! People who come to us with compliments on sermons are often coming because they want to be shepherded — “I want to have a relationship with you...I have a need!”

3. It’s an honorable responsibility (v. 4)

There is an eternal reward for faithful ministry. An elder’s reward is measured by the smile of Christ who says, “well done good and faithful servant...”

Our shepherd leads and is the example of our pastoral ministries — note what He does in Ps. 23. Do that for your people. Cf. also Heb. 13:20. *He* is our Shepherd. Cf. 1 Pt. 2 — He is the guardian of our souls who uses proxies to accomplish His purpose. And Jn. 10 — “I am the good Shepherd.”

Remember what Christ said to Simon Peter — *shepherd My sheep*.

Hebrews 13:17 — we keep watch over their souls as those who give an account. Before we ask God to double our ministry, make sure you are ready to pray for double the amount of people. Accountability for God’s flock is serious. Do you really understand that the people in our ministries are souls that just have bodies, or are you looking at them as bodies (primarily) and souls also? Our goal as shepherds is to grasp the hand of our Savior and the hands of our people, join them together and watch them go together in joy!

