

A Job Description for Shepherds

Framing the Flock, Part 1

1 Peter 5:1-2

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Peter has wrapped up a section about how Christians ought to live in light of the end drawing near. Now, he is addressing how the leaders of the church are to encourage and grow the flock that they are shepherding. The shepherding comparison is a strong one because of the duties of the pastor to lead, guide, and protect those who have been entrusted to him. Beyond that, people act like sheep in that they really do need guidance for everything because they are helpless without the shepherd.

Discussion Points:

Peter has the authority to tell his listeners how things ought to be. He knows the plan that God had for the layout of the leadership in the church. Yet he opens here humbly and not boasting of his position.

- How does Peter identify himself in 1 Peter 5:1?
- How does Peter's identification show his humility?
- What does it mean for Peter to be more like an equal than a domineering figure in the church?
- What does Peter's attitude say about the setup of a local church assembly?

Peter talks about how he is a fellow witness of the sufferings of Christ.

- How does being a witness of the sufferings of Christ affect Peter?
- Does Peter's closeness with Jesus give him a higher status in the church?
- Why does Peter go through so much effort to show that he is on equal footing with his audience and not above them?

Discussion Guide cont.

Verse 2 starts with an imperative verb urging the elders to whom Peter is talking to shepherd the flock.

- The flock is not the flock of an individual pastor, so who does the flock really belong to?
- What is the difference between a flock belonging to God and a flock belonging to a pastor?
- How is the church like a flock of sheep?
- Where in the Bible are people spoken of as being like sheep with God as their shepherd?

Being a shepherd demands some intimacy. One of the reasons Peter puts himself on the same level as other shepherds of God's people is this fact. He could not be an effective shepherd over people he didn't know because he wouldn't be able to take care of their needs and lead them properly from afar.

- What kind of relationship is needed between the pastor and people in the same local body?
- Why is there a need for multiple pastors in one assembly?
- Jesus talked about the dangers of a bad shepherd watching the flock, what does it look like for a pastor to poorly watch the sheep?
- How can a pastor exert himself too much and fail in his duties as shepherd?
- Have you ever experienced a supposed shepherding pastor come up short to Peter's job description? How?

Being compared to sheep is not necessarily a flattering one, but it really is pretty accurate.

- In what ways are people like sheep?
- How does the doctrine of the futility of man support the idea of people being like sheep?
- What is the responsibility of the flock to a pastor?

Discussion Guide cont.

Gospel Connection:

The theme of shepherding and serving is common in the Bible. These characterizations are seen in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the picture is painted of God shepherding His people, Israel. In the New Testament, Jesus is called the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. In both cases, the Shepherd is perfect and has endless love and patience for those under his control. Jesus proved that He would do anything to help His flock. He humbled Himself beyond what anyone else would ever be capable of to lay down His life on the behalf of all mankind that they might have life. Jesus came to die on the cross to take the punishment that the foolish, lost sheep deserved. He paid the price so that they wouldn't have to. But Jesus didn't leave the sheep helpless. He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven proving His power of sin and death and sent the Holy Spirit as the Helper for His flock. He is the only perfect example of shepherding and has shown over and over again what it means to love and serve. And He alone can save.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** How do you act like a sheep? How well do you listen to the voice of your shepherd in the local church? How well do you follow your ultimate shepherd, Jesus Christ?
- Pray:** Thank God for His care for you. Thank Him for always working for your benefit. Ask Him to give you the strength and the will to follow Him wherever He leads.
- Do:** How do you fit into the picture of the sheep and the shepherd? If you are a shepherd, figure out how you can best care for the sheep under your watch. If you are a sheep, think about who your shepherd is and how you can submit to and trust in them to guide you.

A Job Description for Shepherds

Framing the Flock, Part 1

1 Peter 5:1-2

The Apostle Peter is beginning to wrap up his letter to the scattered believers and their local churches. And as he does, his words become even more deeply personal as he expresses words of encouragement and, at the same time, he delivers several more warnings.

Peter was well aware of the difficulties of suffering and hardship the believers were facing. He was also aware of the danger of drifting and division and distraction from becoming all that God intended a local church to become.

With that in mind, Peter makes a strong appeal, beginning with the leadership of the church. Notice how *Peter begins chapter 5 and verse 1* by writing, ***Therefore, I exhort the elders among you 1 Peter 5:1a***

If you're new in the faith, it will be helpful for you to understand that the New Testament church was organized under the leadership and practical ministry of elders and deacons.

Paul spelled out their qualifications and ministry objectives as he wrote to a young pastor named Timothy. (*1 Timothy 3*)

As early as in *Acts chapter 14* we read that elders were being appointed in every church. This was a commonly understood title for leaders.

In fact, much of the pattern for church leadership of the *elders* came from the Jewish synagogue into the church.ⁱ The term was even used for members of the Sanhedrin – the Jewish Supreme Court. (*Mark 8:31*)

Even outside the synagogue and the early church, the term *elder* was used in the secular world for men who were members of the political ruling body over a city.ⁱⁱ

So it wasn't any kind of stretch for the early church to understand the idea of one or more men exercising authority and leadership in the church, known as elders.

However, what the New Testament church did was add entirely new elements to the concept of an elder. It would now include elements of spiritual maturity and biblical understanding along with moral integrity.

Now if you combine your research on this leadership office in the church, you discover that there are three words actually, which are used interchangeably for this one office.

The terms elder, pastor and bishop are used in the New Testament church for this same office of leadership. (*Acts 20*) And each word carries a different nuance regarding the role these men occupy in the church.

- Elder: relates to his maturity in leading
- Pastor: relates to his priority of feeding
- Bishop: relates to his authority in ruling

In fact, The Apostle Paul warned Pastor Timothy not to place a new believer in this position in the church, lest he become conceited and fall. Or as we would put it today – lest it go to his head and ruin him. (*1 Timothy 3:6*)

So the issue wasn't so much about physical age or business success as it was spiritual maturity and humility along with the ability to handle the word of God along with the pressures and responsibilities and temptations that come with the office.

So as chapter 5 opens with Peter's comments to the church, it isn't surprising that Peter begins by addressing these key leaders in the church.

Notice *1 Peter 5:1* again . . . ***Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed . . . 1 Peter 5:1***

Before we go any further, notice here that Peter isn't assuming any kind of hierarchical power over the elders of each local church. He

isn't commanding the elders; he isn't speaking *ex cathedra*. Peter isn't imposing on them some kind of higher authority – he's simply encouraging them. In fact, you could translate this, "***I appeal to the elders among you.***"

Notice how he identifies himself here simply as, ***a fellow elder*** – a term found only here in the New Testament, which effectively places every elder on the same level as Peter.ⁱⁱⁱ

But even though this isn't a command from an Apostle, but an appeal from a brother/elder, it is a passionate appeal. And before Peter gets into the specifics of his appeal, it's as if he reminds the elders here through his own eyewitness account that they are leading and guiding and feeding a church which was purchased by the suffering and bloodshed of Jesus Christ.

Paul used similar passionate words when he exhorted the elders of the church in Ephesus with the same language. He said to them, ***Shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28***

Neither Paul nor Peter ever got over the fact that the church existed because Jesus had suffered and died.

By the way, if I can pull over for a moment – don't miss the stunning declaration here where Paul refers to Jesus as God – ***shepherd the church of God which He*** (God) ***purchased with His own blood.*** The one who shed His blood – was God. God the Son literally purchases the church – buys her for Himself – and the payment is His own lifeblood.

Peter doesn't want the elders to forget they are leading the Bride of Christ who was purchased at such an incredibly high price as the blood of God the Son.

As if to say, "How serious about this should you be? How important do you think this stewardship really is then?" You are guarding and guiding God's precious possession which cost the life of His Son.

And then Peter adds to that: ***Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ,***

and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed . . . 1 Peter 5:1

The church is not only purchased by Christ's blood, but the church is now awaiting Christ's return and the glory of His coming which is ***to be revealed***. As if to suggest, He is coming back for His bride – you elders are simply keeping her; taking care of her; protecting her until He comes back for her.

Now with all of that as background – that's the backstory – Peter has essentially given us ***verse 1*** to lay the groundwork for his passionate appeal in ***verse 2***.

In other words, because of these eternally significant truths about the value of the church to Christ, what Peter does next is remind true shepherds what they're supposed to do.

In fact, Peter will begin to unveil a true shepherd's calling.

1. A True Shepherds Calling

I'm using the term *shepherd* here – which is akin to pastor – simply because this is the metaphor to which Peter draws his definition. ***Notice verse 2*** as Peter begins his appeal. ***Shepherd the flock of God among you. 1 Peter 5:2a***

He calls the elders shepherds and he calls the church a flock of sheep. The verb ***to shepherd the flock*** refers to more than feeding. In fact, it implies everything that is involved in the work of shepherding – guiding, guarding, feeding, tending, counseling, rescuing, reproofing, and encouraging the flock. Don't slack off; embrace this calling to shepherd the flock.

Keep in mind that for centuries – and even in the days of Christ – shepherding wasn't at the top of anybody's career path. Nobody's kid in Israel was saying, "I really want to be a shepherd when I grow up." Guidance counselors weren't suggesting shepherding to High School graduates.

In Israel, as in other ancient cultures, a shepherd's work was considered the lowest rung on the ladder.

Shepherds basically lived with their sheep twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Their task was unending. Every day, every night; summertime, wintertime; fair weather, foul weather; during lightning storms caught out in the open; shivering through freezing nights; shepherds fed, guided, and protected their sheep.

One evangelical scholar summarized it well when he wrote, “Who in their right mind would ever choose to be a shepherd?”^{iv}

Add to this the problem that shepherds in Israel were considered perpetually, ceremonially unclean. According to the Mishnah – the Jewish writings that codified scribal law – shepherds were under the ban. That is, they were considered unclean and banned from the Temple.

That’s because shepherds weren’t able to keep all the regulations such as washing their hands at certain times, praying at certain times, or attending festivals and feast days. With prohibitions about touching blood or a dead animal – well, these were things shepherds did as they tended sheep and delivered lambs and fought off wolves.

In addition, they worked on the Sabbath. For some odd reason the sheep didn’t take Saturday off, so neither could the shepherds.

So shepherds couldn’t enter the temple precinct; they were spiritually unclean. In fact, during the days of Christ, the only people considered lower than shepherds on the social ladder were lepers.

So when you read in Luke’s Gospel about that evening sky over Bethlehem, suddenly filled with a brilliant angelic host, to whom were the angels chanting their glory to God in the highest? To shepherds *keeping watch over their flock by night. (Luke 2:8)*

The shepherds, who were disqualified from worship, will be the first ones to be invited to officially worship the newborn Messiah.

Imagine, shepherds were the first ones to meet and to worship the Good Shepherd. And after the shepherds left the manger scene, they went and told everyone what they had just

heard and seen – which means shepherds were the first messengers.

And to this day, true shepherds are telling the good news about Jesus Christ – including this one.

You see, it’s fascinating to me that this lowly occupation of shepherding became the metaphor; the illustration; the character of a true shepherd’s calling in the church. Peter is essentially calling the elders to faithfully, and with careful devotion, guard and guide and feed and protect the flock.

And the tense of the verb Peter uses here in his passionate appeal to shepherd the flock indicates a sense of urgency.^v

Shepherd the flock of God with the same dedication, the same passion, and the same affection.

a. The first principle which Peter addresses here in a true shepherd’s calling is his affection.

The term for *flock* here is in a diminutive form which can be translated, ‘little flock’. It’s a term of endearment.^{vi} You are the beloved flock of God.

So the shepherd mirrors the affection of Christ for the church. The church is to be shepherded out of love for the flock and out of love for the Good Shepherd.

I imagine that Peter remembered, nearly every day, that signature moment when he met the risen Lord on the seashore. And there Peter was recommissioned by the Lord who gave him what one author called his ordination exam.

And perhaps to the surprise of Peter – and for the instruction of every pastor/elder and every Christian in fact, today – the Lord recommissions Peter based on the same question, repeated three times.

Peter . . . do you love Me?

Peter . . . do you love Me?

Peter . . . do you love Me?

Feed . . . shepherd my sheep. *(John 21)*

One fifth century church leader named Hilary connected the dots and wrote that Peter is telling the leaders of the church exactly what the Lord told him – “Feed my sheep!”^{vii}

And this is instructive for everyone of us in the church. Jesus didn’t ask Peter

- “Have you learned your lesson?”
- “Will you promise never to deny me or be embarrassed about me or fail me again?”
- “Are you really, really sorry?”

No, “do you love Me?” Love for Christ is the paramount motive for everything we do. And for the elder especially – do you love Jesus Christ? Then shepherd His sheep! This must be the true shepherd’s affection: for Christ and His church.

b. Secondly, Peter not only addresses a shepherd’s affection, but a shepherd’s administration.

Notice again – *Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight . . . 1 Peter 5:2*

This term is akin to bishop – and it expands on the idea of authority within the office whereby the elder/pastor/bishop provides spiritual oversight and direction to the flock.^{viii}

But lest it go to your head, Peter reminds every elder in this phrase – look again – it happens to be *the flock of God*. The flock belongs to God. And God has simply delegated to His under-shepherds the responsibilities of managing and leading and overseeing and directing the flock.

So what does that administration look like? Again, go back to the illustration of a shepherd tending a flock. We are a lot like sheep. And it isn’t necessarily a compliment. ☺

Really, has it ever occurred to you that the biblical expression for straying is acting like sheep? Isaiah the prophet wrote, *All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way. Isaiah 53:6*

David himself would later write, *I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Psalm 119:176*

Jeremiah quotes God saying; *My people have become lost sheep . . . they have gone along from mountain to hill and have forgotten their resting place. Jeremiah 50:6*

Every man considering the office of pastor/elder/bishop ought to study the rigor and effort and commitment of shepherds toward their flock of sheep.

Other animals have a sense of smell to find food or water, but sheep depend entirely upon their shepherd. Without him they will be lost. Green pastures are not a coincidence; still water is the result of hard work and on and on.^{ix}

Providing oversight is no small undertaking. In fact, this appeal to provide oversight has more to do with revealing the character of the shepherd than the character of the Flock.

Peter isn’t saying,

- shepherd the flock if they don’t create any trouble;
- shepherd the flock if they stay in line
- shepherd the flock if they love you back
- shepherd the flock if they reimburse you
- shepherd the flock if they applaud you
- shepherd the flock if they don’t bite you
- shepherd the flock if they don’t make demands of you beyond normal business hours.

There are many shepherds today who will shepherd like that – and Jesus called them hirelings, not shepherds. They are interested in fleecing the flock and not feeding the flock. They are not interested in investing; they are only interested in withdrawing. And when times get tough, they withdraw completely.

In fact, Jesus made this kind of comparison in overseeing the flock when He said; *He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of 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 is not concerned about the sheep. John 10:12-13

In other words, a hireling is in it for whatever he can get out of it.

But here's your example – the Lord also said here, ***I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:11-13***

Peter imagines a true shepherd showing vigilance, even in the face of danger and difficulty.

In many ways, this is the life of a parent, lived over and over and over again as you shepherd your children.

The responsibilities never go away and they never lessen up, do they? And you might not be all that appreciated at times either as you make the hard decisions that are best for the family.

I couldn't help but laugh when I received an email about one mother named Sharon who wrote, "I was trying to corral my daughter Emily . . . it was bedtime. Emily was four years old – and she complained that she wasn't ready to go to sleep.

"I explained that when she was born, God gave me the job of taking care of her, which included making sure she ate right and got enough sleep at night."

"Now, I'm not trying to be a mean mother," Sharon explained, "but this is the job God gave me." To which little Emily responded, "Well, then you're fired."

I don't know why I was sent this email.

Peter passionately appeals for true shepherds to accept their calling –

- a calling that is founded upon affection for Christ and the Flock;
- a calling that is demonstrated by faithful, diligent, persevering oversight of the precious flock of God.

As members of the Body of Christ, by faith in Jesus Christ, it is wonderful to know that, as our Shepherd, the Lord is never off duty; He is never asleep or out of touch or unconcerned. He is vigilant and alert and faithful and gracious and loving. He gave His life for us to make us members of this beloved little flock of God.

I couldn't help but think of the refrain to that great hymn:

Amazing love, how can it be
That Thou my God, shouldst die for me.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 03/04/2018 by Stephen Davey.

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i D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH, 1984), p. 300

ii Adapted from Richard W. DeHaan, 1 Peter: Good News for Bad Times (Victor Books, 1975), p. 132

iii Ibid

iv James Montgomery Boice, Psalms: Volume 1 (Baker Books, 1994), p. 208

v Adapted from Hiebert, p. 302

vi Hiebert, p. 302

vii Ancient Christian Commentary, Volume 11 (Intervarsity Press, 2000), p. 122

viii Adapted from Hiebert, p. 303

ix Expanded from Charles R. Swindoll, Living Beyond the Daily Grind, Volume 1 (Word Publishing, 1988), p. 69