

Humble Shepherds and Their Sheep

March 1, 2015

Good morning. It is great to have you at CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. Like all the pastors at CrossWinds, I count it a privilege to serve you. In a moment, you will see why that is important.

As a church, we are studying the book of 1 Peter. In this letter, Peter spent a great deal of time talking about suffering. Last week, we looked at a particular kind of suffering, suffering for being a Christian. In those times when we suffer for our faith, God promises unique blessing upon us in this life and the next because we have suffered for Jesus. This hit home when we saw the beheading of 21 Coptic Christians by ISIS. If you missed the message, I encourage you to listen to it online at www.CrossWinds.tv. It will completely reframe your understanding of suffering in Christian life.

This morning, it appears Peter made a sudden change of subject. He was talking about entrusting our lives into God's care and continuing to do good while we suffer, but in the next verse, Peter started talking about elders — church leaders, and their relationship to the people they pastor. Why the sudden change? Maybe there wasn't a change.

Without getting into the details, Peter built his understanding of God's purifying judgment on the church from the book of Ezekiel. In the book of Ezekiel, God's purifying judgment began with a special group in the church. Can anybody guess what group God has a special focus on purifying and maturing?

Church leaders. Ezekiel 9 talks about God using purifying judgment on the leaders of his people. Look what it says.

“Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.” So they began with the elders who were before the house. Ezekiel 9:6 (ESV)

The purifying judgment of God’s people began with the leaders of God’s people. Peter was not switching subjects. God’s people will face trials to purify their faith but the leaders of God’s people are the first in line to face those trials. If you are a spiritual leader in the church, you need to be prepared to be matured through suffering.

You and I know that whenever a church leader faces problems there is a temptation for him or her to become harsh and overbearing on the people. There is also a temptation for the people of the church to undermine the leadership of a church when they are suffering. Peter addressed both of these situations. How should spiritual leaders lead a church and how should the people of the church follow the leaders of the church, especially when times are hard? These are very important questions.

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 going to be revealed: 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. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:1–5 (ESV)

The first thing pastors must remember is their job description.

The Pastor's Job — Shepherd the flock like Jesus shepherds us.

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Who are the elders?

Many people think of elders as old men. Was Peter addressing an age group? Elders are not necessarily older men. Elders are the spiritual leaders of the local church. Many spiritual leaders are older men, but chronological age does not necessarily equal spiritual maturity. We see this when Paul wrote to Timothy, in the books of 1 and 2 Timothy. Timothy was a young man but he pastored churches. He was one of the elders. Paul even told Timothy to make sure people did not look down on him because of his age. Elders are the spiritual leaders of a church. They are not necessarily older men.

What are the qualifications of an elder?

The Bible gives these qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. I encourage you to read those qualifications tonight in your Life Group. The qualifications pertain to someone's life, character, reputation, gifting and spiritual maturity. It isn't just who wins a Bible trivia contest. Spiritual leadership is not just knowledge, it is character.

I should note there are different terms in the New Testament used to describe the spiritual leaders in the church. The terms elder, pastor and overseer are used interchangeably. The terms talk about the different aspects of the same office.

- The term elder talks about spiritual maturity.

- Overseer refers to oversight and guidance.
- Pastor talks about the role of care.

While there are at least three different areas of spiritual leaders involving spiritual maturity, oversight and care, Peter focused on how leaders in the church lead. That is described as shepherding. Leaders should shepherd. The problem is that under pressure from the world around us, church leaders have started using different metaphors to guide their leadership. As a result church can become a terrible place because the leaders of the church are not thinking of leadership the way God tells them to lead.

How have we misunderstood spiritual leadership?

Pastor as entertainer — Some people see the pastor's job as entertaining the people. His job is telling funny stories. His job is to be Jay Leno and Jesus rolled together. He is to amuse people with funny stories trying to make the feel good. Many churches buy into this pastoral style of leadership. That is the wrong metaphor. You don't want pastors and spiritual leaders who see themselves as entertainers. Entertainers draw crowds but unless they shepherd the church they won't grow the church. You want pastors that are shepherds.

Pastor as CEO — Some people see the pastor's job as a CEO. This is the business pastor. This is the pastor that has the ability to get things done, to organize people and build structures. This leadership style usually filters into the rest of the church's leadership as the church is run like a corporation. While there are business aspects to the church, the church is not a business. It is a

church. The bottom line is not ultimately about a spreadsheet and budget numbers. It is about shepherding individual people. If you adopt the wrong metaphor, you are asking for disaster.

Pastor as spiritual butler — Some people view their pastor as a spiritual butler. His job is to marry, bury, baptize and visit in the hospital. He is at your service. The problem with this metaphor is the pastor is seen as your servant, not your spiritual leader. That is the wrong metaphor. The Bible tells us pastors and elders are shepherds. Shepherds lead. We have to stick with the shepherding metaphor or church leadership will cause disaster.

Why is spiritual leadership called shepherding?

I didn't know much about sheep and shepherding. I assume most of us are in the same position. This week I did a little research on sheep and shepherds to better understand this leadership metaphor.

Sheep get lost. They need a shepherd to look for them. Did you know sheep are one of the few animals in the world to have absolutely no homing instinct? They can become totally lost even if they are only a few miles from their home. If you take sheep into unfamiliar territory, they will walk in circles until they collapse. They have no idea how to find home. That is why they need a shepherd. They need a shepherd that will search for them when they are lost because *they can't find their way home.*

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. Luke 15:4–5 (ESV)

The Bible describes each one of us as sheep. We get lost much easier than we realize. The pastors, the spiritual leaders have the job of looking for us when we are missing and bringing us home. Shepherds don't just care about large crowds of sheep, they care about individual sheep. You need to have that metaphor in your mind if you want to be a leader in the church. Church leadership is not about the numbers. It is about caring for individual people who get left behind and need a shepherd to look for them.

Sheep are easily lead astray. They need a shepherd so they are not deceived. Sheep are easily led astray. In New Zealand, the way they lead the sheep to the slaughter house is by putting a trained male sheep in the flock. He bleats and calls for the other sheep to follow him. They follow him into the slaughter house because sheep are easily led astray. Interestingly, the trained sheep that leads the others into the slaughter house is called the Judas sheep. I think it is an appropriate name.

Since sheep are easily led astray, the shepherd's job is to protect them from getting fooled and being destroyed.

[All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6 \(ESV\)](#)

The sheep metaphor reminds us we are easily led astray. We need spiritual leaders who look out for us so we don't go our own way, and even to our own death, because we are following the crowd.

This past week I was in California for meetings. On one of my connecting flights to Sioux Falls, I sat next to this huge guy who was friendly as a teddy bear. We had a great conversation. He lost his mom recently from cancer. I recently

lost my mom from cancer. It turns out he attends Christ Community Church in Omaha. They are in a sermon series on Exodus. As a newer Christian, he finds it hard to understand. He then told me he is beginning to listen to Joel Olstein instead of church. In my mind red lights are flashing. I am thinking, "He is following the Judas sheep." My job as his new pastor for the last 36 minutes, was to keep him from being led astray. He has no idea that Joel Olstein's teaching is not biblical teaching. It is a counterfeit. The job of a shepherd is to keep his people from being led astray.

Sheep need good food and water. The shepherd provides good food.

Sheep are one of the few animals that cannot sense water. Most animals can smell water in the wind and lead themselves to a watering hole. Sheep cannot. If left on the open range they will literally die of thirst when a watering hole is only a quarter mile away. The only way they can find a new watering hole is if the shepherd leads them. Not just any watering hole will work. Sheep are not smart enough to avoid stagnant water. They drink it and get sick. Sheep are afraid of rushing water. They won't drink from fast-moving water, even if they are thirsty. A shepherd needs to lead them to gentle-flowing, clean water.

Food is also a problem. If sheep eat grass that is too wet they develop a problem called food rot which results in diarrhea and sickness. If sheep run out of grass, they eat dirt, which has no nutrition and gets them sick.

The sheep need a shepherd to get them the right food and water so they stay healthy and grow strong. In the same way the spiritual leaders of the church have a responsibility to feed the people good spiritual food.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. Psalm 23:2 (ESV)

Sheep are defenseless. They need a shepherd for protection. Sheep are a defenseless animal. They can't kick. They can't scratch. They can't bite. They can't jump. They can't run. When attacked they just die. They have absolutely no defense mechanism, except for their shepherd.

Sheep can even die of flies. Flies lay their eggs in the dense wool of the sheep and when they hatch, the flies swarm around the sheep's face until the sheep is literally driven mad. Some sheep even die of fly frustration.

Enter the shepherd. He cares for his sheep. He cleans out the wool and scatters the flies. When a wolf or a lion attacks the sheep, he defends them. He is even willing to lay down his life for them.

But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. 1 Samuel 17:34–35 (ESV)

Put yourself in a church facing trials. As a spiritual leader in the church, your job is to protect your sheep. You are not willing for even one of your sheep to perish. You feed your sheep. You protect them from being led astray or falling away. You lay down your life for individual sheep. Your job is not to entertain. It is not to run a corporation. It is not to be a spiritual butler. It is to be a good loving shepherd. If you miss this metaphor, things won't go well under your leadership.

Who created the shepherd model of church leadership?

The reason the spiritual leaders in the church are called to think of themselves as shepherds caring for sheep is because that is the way God cares for us. David describes this in Psalm 23.

[The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1 \(ESV\)](#)

Jesus said I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:11 (ESV)

You can't understand how church leaders should lead until you understand that human leadership in the church is connected to the way God leads us. Pastors can't shepherd the flock until they understand they are to care for the people of God like God cares for them. They are to be patient with people and love them, like God is patient with us and loves us. If you miss this, you will miss the job of spiritual leadership.

The shepherding of leaders in the church is an extension of God's shepherding in our lives.

[You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. Psalm 77:20 \(ESV\)](#)

The way God shepherded his people in the wilderness was by the hand of Moses and Aaron. God shepherds his people not just through the Holy Spirit and Bible study but he also shepherds his people through human leaders. Moses and Aaron were imperfect leaders but God shepherded his people through them. The same is true today. God's people still need shepherding. God ordained that part of care of his people comes through shepherding leaders in the church.

This is why church leaders must think of their jobs by the right metaphor. They are an extension of God's shepherding in the congregation's life.

The Pastor's Pitfalls

I told you Peter was building his thoughts from the book of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, we find God taking the leaders of the people to the wood shed because they were no longer shepherding the people. Let me show you.

The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. Ezekiel 34:4 (ESV)

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. Ezekiel 34:7-10 (ESV)

We could make a whole sermon on leadership pitfalls from those verses. Let's summarize them all by saying the failure of spiritual leaders usually come from a failure of the leaders to shepherd the people. They don't help the discouraged. Those who are lost or led astray, they don't hunt down. Instead of dealing gently with the sheep, they deal with them by force and harshness. Instead of giving their lives for the sheep, they are making the sheep give their lives for them.

Peter gave us three examples of what it looks like when spiritual leaders go bad.

Attitude — Leading because I have to not because I get to.

...not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you... 1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)

In some churches, church leadership is thought of as a necessary evil. Somebody needs to be on the board to oversee the budget and finances. The church leaders would rather be on the golf course but they reluctantly agree to serve on the board. Somebody needs to visit the hospital. The church leaders would rather have all their time to themselves but they reluctantly agree to make visits.

God doesn't want men leading the church who view church leadership as a joyless duty. He wants men filled with excitement for the opportunity to serve Jesus by shepherding God's flock. Pray that God would raise up more of these kind of men at CrossWinds. Men who lead not because they have to but because they understand it is a privilege. They want to lead. Leaders in the church should not feel it is a duty or inconvenience to serve but it is an honor.

Why is this important? If you don't see shepherding as a privilege, you won't be a good shepherd. Your poor attitude will come out in everything you do. If you are a pastor or if you are an AWANA teacher or if you serve as a leader in the youth group or you lead on the worship team and you view your service in the church as a grudging job not a privilege and a joy, you are in a very dangerous place. Your attitude will leak. It will hurt the sheep. Does that mean spiritual leadership is always easy? Of course not. We must always keep the mindset that it is a privilege to serve God by serving his people.

Motive — Serving to get from people instead of give to people.

...not for shameful gain, but eagerly... 1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)

If you are a spiritual leader, you must serve for what you can give to people not for what you can get from them. God doesn't want spiritual leaders who think of the church as a way to stroke their ego or enrich their pockets. Some pastors grow rich from their church. They have book deals, speaking deals and large salaries. A church can boost the ego if you become a Christian celebrity.

Shameful gain means a church leader uses the church for riches and self-promotion. That is a pitfall. The only name we are promoting and the only name we want people remembering is the name of Jesus, not our own. Serving eagerly means serving people because you want to give to them, not because you want to gain from them.

Let me tell you the way things usually work in the Christian speaking world. If you are someone of notoriety, you get an agent. The agent handles your bookings for churches, conferences and events. It is common for Christian celebrities to charge \$7,000-\$14,000 or much more to arrange for a Christian celebrity to speak at an event for 30-45 minutes. Christian celebrities use their fees for financial gain.

Other Christians of notoriety don't use an agent. They schedule things themselves to stay cheap. They charge for their mileage and ask for a love offering or a modest honorarium. They may be worth more but they don't want to miss an opportunity to serve the church because large fees cut off many

opportunities. Some Christian celebrities use the church as a way to wealth, others use it as a way to serve.

...and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. 1 Timothy 6:5 (ESV)

This doesn't mean that Christians shouldn't use an agent. It doesn't mean Christians can't charge a fee. It means you have to look at your motivation. Are you about serving people or using people to serve you.

Some people read this and believe pastors shouldn't be paid. It says the church is not a place for shameful gain. It doesn't say the church is not a place for honest gain. From the very beginning of the church we find pastors and church leaders were paid so they could devote more of their time to shepherding the church.

Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. Galatians 6:6 (ESV)

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? 1 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV)

Churches have a responsibility to care for their shepherds, that includes paying them for their work. I can tell you CrossWinds is very kind in paying their pastors. I am very thankful to serve such a good church. Pastors are to serve for honest gain to enable them to serve people.

Authority — Leading by authority instead of example.

...not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:3 (ESV)

Domineering is asserting your will over others by throwing your weight around. Domineering is acting as a spiritual bully. There is no room for this in

the church. If you are around the evangelical church for any length of time you discover many churches have spiritual bullies in positions of leadership. That is not good.

Church leaders are not to lead by their position of authority but by the Word of God and the example of their lives. The goal is that spiritual leaders say, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

[I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 1 Corinthians 4:16 \(ESV\)](#)

[Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. Philippians 3:17 \(ESV\)](#)

My desire is that all the pastors, elders, Leadership Board members, greeters, ushers, and CrossWinds University teachers all lead by example. We never ask people to do things we are not willing to do or are not already doing ourselves.

A few years ago we had the problem of a leaking roof and a flooding basement. It was a serious situation that would put CrossWinds in debt. As I prayed about how to deal with the situation, I knew the church needed to give sacrificially. I felt God calling myself and the church's leadership to lead by example.

The board gave sacrificially to that project before we shared it with the congregation. We needed to lead by example. As your pastor, I also needed to lead by example. I told the board I gave my next two paychecks to help eliminate the roof and basement debt. It was only after the leaders gave sacrificially that we came to the congregation and offered you the opportunity to give. That is because God calls leaders to lead by example.

The Pastor's Reward - The Unfading Crown of Glory.

And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 1 Peter 5:4 (ESV)

Shepherding God's people can be a tiring job. It can involve evenings away from home. It involves ugly messes like trying to reconcile a divorce. Spiritual leadership usually means lots of earthly work with little earthly reward. Peter wanted those who shepherd the people of God to realize that when Jesus, the chief shepherd, returns, he will reward those who shepherd his people. He will reward us with the unfading crown of glory. We don't know exactly what that looks like but it looks pretty good.

While spiritual leadership doesn't have much earthly pay, the retirement package is out of this world.

The Congregation's Job - Submit to their Spiritual Leaders.

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders... 1 Peter 5:5 (ESV)

Most commentators believe Peter was not speaking with reference to age. He was simply speaking to those who are not elders in the church. If the younger folks in the church are supposed to be subject to their spiritual leaders, that certainly means everyone else in the church should be subject to the spiritual leaders.

This point feels awkward. It feels almost self-serving. Before I talk about this I want to remind you I am just teaching the text. The job of the congregation is to submit to the spiritual leaders of the church. Incidentally, that even applies to me. I do not lead unilaterally. I submit to the Leadership Board. I report to that board. We are all under authority.

What does submitting to spiritual leaders look like?

Being subject means affirming and supporting the need for local pastoral leadership in my life.

It means realizing God describes us as sheep. We need God to shepherd us through others. We need pastoral leadership our life. That means being a part of Sunday morning teaching, CrossWind University Classes, Life Groups, CrossWinds Academy and AWANA. The local church is not just a bunch of programs but the programs of the church are all part of God's intended care for your soul.

It means being willing to admit you need to be part of a local church. It means admitting you need pastoring and shepherding in your life. Many Christians today don't believe they need shepherding. They love Jesus but they avoid the church.

If you think all you need is your Bible and a cup of coffee, when you come to a local church like CrossWinds, you will be cynical of the leadership and the teaching. You will never get involved or serve others. You will be unwilling to have a shepherd in your life.

You need to believe that no matter how good your life is, being part of a local church and having a shepherd that watches over your soul is part of God's plan for you. You need it. You need to be under the local teaching of God's word. You need to be involved in relationships where people care about you and where you care for and serve others. You need to be involved using your gifts. You need to believe this.

It means seeking your pastor's teaching and counsel.

Thank you for showing up. I know there are plenty of things to do on Sunday morning besides study God's Word. Thank you for showing up. Thank you for connecting on the Internet if you can't be here and making it a priority to be fed spiritually. Part of a congregation's job is being willing to receive teaching.

Your pastors and leaders are also here to provide you with counsel. We are committed to your spiritual care. It breaks my heart when I see some of you going through a divorce or you are out of a job or life is falling apart. We want to counsel and encourage you through those times. God gives you shepherds to help you. Take advantage of those who are trying to care for your soul.

It means becoming a member of my local church.

There are many people who love to attend church but they don't want to join a church and make a formal association with a church body. I know some of you came from a poor church experience. I encourage you to take a step of growth. Become a member and get involved with both feet. You need to be shepherded. You need the relationships. Your leadership is needed in your own church. Many of you have been here forever and you love Jesus but you could never serve your church in any official capacity because you are not a member. Become a member and admit we need spiritual leaders who will care for your soul.

It means participating in the structures and programs designed to care for your soul.

Pastoral care and leadership can't always be expressed through one on one meetings and the pulpit. Just as Moses appointed leaders to care for

smaller groups of people, we do the same. We have Life Groups that do meals together and spend time together. We have women's ministry on Tuesday morning. We have AWANA for kids on Wednesday morning. We have CrossWinds Academy for kids on Sunday morning. Ask Jesus to give you a good view of this and to receive church programs into your life not as intrusions into your schedule but as gifts from God to care for your soul. Your soul needs more care than 45 Sunday morning sermons can provide.

When you join a group, don't dive in with an attitude of cynicism but believe God has something for you and that God has you there to encourage someone. Befriend people. Be open to people. The good shepherd is behind all this. Programs are not just another event. They are expressions of God's shepherding care for your soul through your local church.

The Church's Attitude — Clothe Yourself With Humility

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 1 Peter 5:5 (ESV)

What keeps the church together in good times and hard times is the attitude of the leaders and of the people. That attitude can be described in one word. Humility. Leaders should not be proud, instead their job is to shepherd and serve. Members of the church should not be rebellious but are to humble themselves and put themselves under their leader's care. Humility is to think about others instead of themselves. It is embodied in Jesus.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)

While we covered the job of the leaders and the job of the people. The job of everyone is humility. We are not to look out for others before ourselves that any church can thrive.

Conclusion

Where do we go from here?

Humble Sheep — Every one of us needs to humble ourselves and admit our need to not just have God as our shepherd but our need of the shepherding of spiritual leaders in our lives. Humble yourself and see the teaching and programs of your church as part of God’s shepherding care for your soul. If you are uninvolved, I encourage you to repent. See the people, teaching and programs of CrossWinds as part of the way God cares for your soul. Become a member. Get involved and serve others.

Humble Shepherds — If you are in any form of leadership at CrossWinds, humble yourself. Don’t make people serve you, serve them. Lead by the example of your life before the words of your mouth. Care for individual people not just numbers. Keep the right metaphor. You are a shepherd. This week care for individual people.



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