

## "The Role of Elders" 1 Peter 5 Shane Hatfield 8/14/22

If everybody would turn to 1 Peter 5, we're going to start a new sermon series there, called "Elders: The Shepherd Leaders." Whenever people ask me where we go to church, or they ask me where I pastor, I say, "Grace & Peace Presbyterian Church" and they look like they're following me through the "Grace & Peace," and then you say 'presbyterian' and it turns into gobbledy goo, so the first question they always ask is, 'What does it mean to be presbyterian?' Well, probably the simplest, most straightforward, boring answer is to say, the word presbyterian, let's start with that, what does it mean? It comes from the Greek word which means 'presbyter,' and a presbyter is an elder! So, we are a church that is governed by elders! We have two different types of elders in the presbyterian church. We have teaching elders, like myself, who are seminary trained, vocational ministers who have been ordained and sent here to pastor the local congregation, those are teaching elders. Then we have what we call ruling elders. Ruling elders are laymen, they are not in vocational ministry. They are equipped and called and trained to care for the congregation as well. They work alongside the teaching elder to care for the flock, right? So, you have teaching elders and ruling elders who work together to care for the church. Well, our current active ruling elders we have right now are Mike Hayes and Daniel Duncan, and we've been talking and praying for several months now about when is the right time for us to train more ruling elders, and so, now we're at the time, did I say something wrong? No? Okay. I got a look like I said something wrong. We feel like there is a need and the timing is right to train more ruling elders. So, we're going to go through a short sermon series called "Elders: The Shepherd Leaders." This week I'm going to talk about the role of elders, next week we'll talk about the responsibilities of elders, and after that we'll talk about the requirements for elders. Then we'll open up nominations and you can nominate men that you think are qualified for those positions. We'll take those nominations and we'll go through a training process where we'll train them, and examine them, we'll talk about theology, ministry skills, we'll look at their personal piety and their character. After we go through that process, we'll bring the men to you that we think are called and qualified at this time to serve as your ruling elders, and then you'll be able to vote on them. If they pass, we'll install them as your elders. That's the process! If you're here and you're a visitor, I know we have several visitors this week, you're probably thinking, 'Great. I showed up, there's just going to be this intramural conversation about elders and I'm not a part of this so what can I get out of this?' Well, I will tell you, as we go through the sermon series, what I'm going to try to do as much as possible is ground these sermons in the nature and character of God and who He is. So, you're going to learn about God and His character. We're going to talk about spiritual leadership and what it looks like to be a spiritual leader in the church, and we're also going to talk about salvation and how these spiritual leaders that God is raising up in the church, help point us to the person and work of Jesus. So, hopefully there will be something in these sermons for everyone. So, with that as a long introduction, let's read 1 Peter 5:1-5. Hear the word of the Lord:

**"1** 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: **2** 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; **3** not domineering over those in your charge, but being

examples to the flock. **4** And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. **5** 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.”

All men are like grass, and their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers, and the flowers fade, but not God’s word. It stands forever.

About four years ago, we made a very big addition to our family. We added Hatfield number six. His name is Ike Hatfield. He is a miniature goldendoodle. We love Ike most of the time. Having Ike has brought on some added responsibilities that we don’t always remember. One time Shari and I were getting ready for a trip. We had all the usual packing to do. At this point, the kids are pretty young, we’ve got to pack the kids. We’ve got to pack ourselves. We’ve got to pack everything else for the trip. And of course, we did all of that the night before we left for the trip because of course you wait until the last minute to do all of your packing for everything, that’s the wisest and most efficient way to do it. So, it’s late in the evening, we finally get all of the packing done, we sit down on the couch, we finally rest and relax, and then Ike comes up to us. The lightbulb goes on. We forgot about Ike! What are we going to do with Ike when we’re gone on this week-long trip? We can’t take him with us! So, we thought to ourselves, ‘Okay, we’ve got to find people who love dogs, and who can care for dogs, and who are faithful and responsible people that we know who will care for our dog the way that we would care for our dog, maybe better.’ And so, we thought, ‘Well, Faith and Taylor, they like dogs! They have a dog! Maybe we could call them at the last minute and they would take our dog for a week for us.’ So, we called Faith and Taylor who are here today, they were our college students at the time. We said, ‘Can you please take Ike for the week for us, and take care of him?’ And they said, ‘Yes! We would love to have Ike.’ So, we left Ike with Faith and Taylor and they took great care of him and when we came home, there was Ike ready for us when we came to get him. He only escaped one time and it wasn’t their fault, I don’t think anyway.

This morning, and throughout this series, as we study this calling of being an elder, a shepherd leader, what I want you to see is that God calls elders to shepherd the flock in His absence, until He returns. It is a high calling, and it is a good calling. What He is doing is He is raising up men who care about the church the way He cares about it, who love the church the way He loves it, that are going to take care of it the way He would take care of it the way He would if He were physically in its presence. They will do that until the Lord returns, or until they go to see Him, and then He will shepherd His flock again, personally, physically, they will be in His presence. That’s what elders are doing, that’s their role: to care for the flock until Jesus returns.

Now, this is hard for us. Why? Well, it’s hard for us for a lot of reasons which we’ll go through as we go through this sermon series, but two that I thought about today are these. It’s hard for us, one because Oklahomans are stoic, hard-working people. We don’t want a shepherd. We don’t want someone to care for us. We want to care for ourselves! So, what I hope that you’re going to see is that we can’t care for ourselves, that we need a good shepherd to care for us, and we need our good shepherd to raise up undershepherds that will care for us graciously and lovingly. Another reason it’s hard for us is because shepherds are sinful and broken people, and sometimes the office of elder has been abused. They have hurt people,

made unwise or unbiblical decisions. It's my hope that during this process, if that's you, if you have been hurt by the church, or hurt by elders, that through this process maybe we could begin to restore some of that trust again, and maybe you'd consider what it would look like to trust us as your elders. Hopefully in the whole process the sheep and the shepherds will become holier, more humble people. We're going to look at three things this morning. We're going to look at the role of elders, the attitude of the elders, and the reward of the elders. The role, the attitude, and the reward of the elders. Kids, in this section I'm going to give three characteristics of elders, I'd love for you to jot those down and maybe after the service you can talk to mom and dad and think about who are some people who embody this? Who are some people who already have this type of attitude?

The first thing we're going to look at is the role of the elder. So, context here in 1 Peter, Peter the apostle wrote this letter to Christians who were confused and discouraged by persecution and suffering that was going on all around them, so he encouraged them to imitate Jesus, to stand firm in their faith, and to live obediently and trust the promises of God in the gospel. He said this is the hope that you need to suffer well during this time. Notice our passage here in 1 Peter 5, toward the end of the letter, starts out, 'So.' That word 'so,' means therefore. He's saying, because all of this is true, because all the promises of God are true, and the gospel is true, and you can believe these in times of persecution and suffering, because all that is true, therefore, this is what I want to happen. Then the therefore is, 'Elders shepherd the flock of God among you.' In times of persecution and suffering, what does the church need? The church needs elders to shepherd the flock.

This has been the role of elders throughout redemptive history. As you look at the Old Testament and the New Testament, what you see first and foremost is that God describes Himself as a shepherd. Jacob who's one of the fathers of Israel, as he's blessing his sons before he passes away, calls God 'the God who has been my shepherd all my life.' Probably the most famous passage in the Bible that alludes to this is Psalm 23. It describes God as the good shepherd who protects, provides, and provides for His sheep. Psalms 80, 95, 100 which we read last week, describe the people of God as God's flock, and Him as their shepherd. The Old Testament even goes so far as to describe salvation in this context. Psalm 70 and 78 say that God used Moses and Aaron to lead His people by the hand like a flock out of Egypt. Isaiah 40 describes how God gathers His flock, that when a sheep is wandering away, God pursues that sheep and brings it back to the fold. God is a shepherd who has always been shepherding His people throughout redemptive history. We have to ask ourselves, when we think about God, how do we think about Him? What is your image of God? Is He the stoic Father who is aloof and uninterested in your life? Is He the police officer who is following you and waiting to catch you doing something bad? Is He the Santa Claus that is there just to give you good gifts based on your performance? Or, like the Scriptures say, is He a shepherd who protects you, provides for you, and cares for you?

Now, we probably don't have many images of a shepherd in our day. We don't live in an agrarian society, there aren't shepherds walking up and down the street, so I'm going to try to share some images that might help you to think about what it's like to be a shepherd. One time I heard a seminary professor describe what a modern day shepherd might look like. He said he was in Israel, he was walking down the street, and he saw a man, rough, and tough, and dirty, and he had a sheep draped over his back. He was carrying the sheep! He also had his

sidearms, one on each side, there to protect the sheep. He said this man looked like a cowboy, like the type of guy who if you tried to touch his sheep, he would say, 'Touch my sheep, I dare you.' He was a shepherd who was there to protect his sheep at all costs, because he loved his sheep, because he was strong, and powerful, and tough, but also kind, and tender. That's one of the images our God wants us to have of Him, that He is a shepherd who will do whatever it takes to protect us and provide for us.

So, what He has done throughout church history is raise up undershepherds to care for His sheep in His place. Again, we see this all through the Old Testament. Moses is described as a shepherd leader who guides God's flock out of Egypt. Probably the most famous shepherd leader is David, who was described as the shepherd that cared for God's flock. When God called him, He said, "You will shepherd my people, Israel." You will become their leader. The Psalmist said that David shepherded them with integrity of heart, and with skillful hands he led them. 2 Samuel describes all of Israel's leaders as shepherds.

When we get to the New Testament? The same pattern continues. Jesus comes on the scene and in John 10, what does He say? He says, "I am the good shepherd," and He assumes all the characteristics of God. When He calls His disciples, He says, "Follow me," the way a shepherd would call to his sheep. Matthew tells us that when He saw the crowds, He says they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus was the true and greater shepherd that came in the flesh to care for God's people. He raised up people after Him to care for God's sheep. He sent out His disciples to minister to the lost sheep of Israel. After His death and resurrection, we see Jesus shepherding the apostles, and telling them to go out and shepherd His church. What did Jesus tell Peter to do in John 21, when He recommissioned him? He said, 'Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep.' What is Peter telling the elders here? He's saying, 'Shepherd God's sheep.' What did Paul do when he planted churches in the book of Acts? He placed elders over each one of those churches. He left the elders there to care for the flock in his absence. So, throughout church history, we see elders shepherding the flock of God. So, that is the role of elders. God is the good shepherd, and what He does in His goodness is He raises up godly men to shepherd His flock as undershepherds. That's the role of an elder. To shepherd God's flock as undershepherds.

Now, some of you may be asking, what about women? Where are women involved in all this eldering? You're only talking about men here! Well, what we believe to be true in scripture, and what we see is that all people are created in God's image, all people, and they have equal dignity, and glory, and honor. All Christians are given spiritual gifts to serve Christ and the church, throughout the Old Testament and New Testament, we see God raising up godly women as co-heirs in the kingdom, as co-laborers in the ministry, but not as elders. The apostles were all men. The elders were all men. So, what we believe is that God has put in place something beautiful that actually mirrors the Trinity. In the Trinity, you have unity and diversity. God the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in glory, dignity, and power, but they all have different jobs. The Father planned salvation, the Son executed salvation, and the Holy Spirit applies salvation. So, what we see in the church, and what we see in the family, is that same unity and plurality. Right? There's unity between men and women in their dignity and honor as image bearers and brothers and sisters in Christ, but there's diversity in their gifting, that God has called and equipped men to be the shepherd leaders of the church, and He's called and equipped women to work alongside of them, to be their strong helpers, to support them in the work and worship of the

church. Now, that may be foreign to you, you may dislike that, that's okay. I understand, okay? I'd be more than willing to sit down and have a cup of coffee with you, and talk a out what it looks like for you to serve and participate in our church within that framework, and within that structure, and as we go along I hope to be able to do more teaching about what it looks like for the women in our church to use their gifts as a part of the body, though not in the role of elder.

So, we're going to continue on with what Peter talks about next, which is the attitude of the elder. Look back at verses 2 and 3. Peter says, "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." So, Peter exhorts these elders here to have three different characteristics, three different attitudes. He says to shepherd the flock willingly, eagerly, and humbly.

First, he says, "not under compulsion, but willingly," so the main motivation for a shepherd is genuine love and care for the flock. Yes, there are duties of being an elder, and yes, sometimes those duties are very challenging, but the main motivation for the elder is a genuine and sincere love for the flock. His arm doesn't have to be twisted to go shepherd the sheep, because he loves them. I was talking with a friend recently and we were talking about spiritual leadership in the church, and we were talking about how he wanted to serve in the church, and he kind of sheepishly said, 'You know, I'd really like to be an elder, and I know saying that might disqualify me from being an elder, just because I want to be an elder!' You know, it kind of puts you in a position of wanting some power and prestige, that sort of thing. And I said, 'No, look friend, Paul says, whoever desires to be an overseer, desires a good thing!' Peter says right here, he wants someone who is serving the church willingly, so the desire to be an elder is a good thing. You want elders that want to be elders, right?

So here's what you look for, you look for men who are already fulfilling the role of elder without the title. They don't need the title. They don't need the prestige. They don't need the position, but they already have the heart of the shepherd. Look for those types of men. Look for willing elders. Look for eager elders! Paul says, "not for shameful gain, but eagerly"! Paul could be talking about money, or he could be talking about prestige, those are both temptations for being an elder, but the primary motivation for an elder is not what he can get, but what he can give. You want to look for men who are not seeking out money, power, and prestige, but again, they love the church. They want to be generous and they want to care for the church.

One of my elders in Stillwater was a great example of this, he was a really wealthy man, but he was incredibly generous. He loaned his houses. He loaned his boat. He loaned his vehicles. He would, in one week's time, teach Sunday school, serve communion, and mow the grass at the church. He would do all those things! He gave of his time, his energy, and his money, and his goods, and I'll tell you what, his houses and boats and trucks got nicked up and banged up and his house got dirty and it got used, and he never cared! I was the one who did that sometimes, all those things! But he was eager to give. He gave himself eagerly because he loved the flock, he loved the church. That's what you look for in an elder, someone who wants to give, not get.

So, someone serving willingly, eagerly, and lastly, humbly. Peter says, "not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." So, being an elder is a position that has some power and authority, but it's not a power and authority that the shepherds use to stand over people and bark commands, or to stand behind them and force them, or compel

them by force to do things. It's something they use to love and serve. It's something they use to humbly serve and lead. Right?

So, here's the contrast I'm going to draw for you. In the book, "The Shepherd Leader," the writer tells a story about a group of people who are in the middle east, they are taking a tour, they're on a tour bus, and their tour guide says, 'The shepherd always leads the sheep from the front of the flock.' So, you've got the shepherd in front, and the flock behind, so the flock always follows the shepherd. So, the tour bus is going down the street and they come up on a flock of sheep, and the shepherd is behind the flock of sheep. And so, one of them looks at the tour guide and says, 'Hey, what's going on? That shepherd is behind the sheep!' And the tour guide in a total Karen move goes, hey I'm going to figure out what's going on here, so they stop the bus, he gets out, he goes over, he talks to the shepherd. He comes back and he gets on the bus, and the people say, 'What happened?' He says, 'Well, that wasn't the shepherd, that was the butcher.' The idea is that the butcher is someone behind the sheep being domineering and forceful in his leadership. A shepherd leader is someone who is in front of the sheep saying, 'Follow me as I follow Jesus.' They're laying down their lives for the sheep.

That's the kind of leadership that Jesus told the disciples to emulate. James and John came to Jesus at one point and they said, 'Hey Jesus, when you ascend to your throne we want to sit at your right and your left!' And Jesus didn't actually tell them no. He said, 'That's not mine to give you.' But what He did is He redefined power and authority for them. He said, 'You know that those who consider the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them, but it shall not be so among you. Whoever would be great among you, must be your servant. Whoever would be first among you, must be slave of all. For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.' An elder comes not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life for the sheep. So, we look for willing, eager, and humble shepherd leaders. Aren't those the true characteristics of all true Christian leadership? From young, old, men, women, if you're a willing, eager, humble servant, you are going to care for the flock of God in a way that glorifies Jesus. So, that's the role of the elder, and the attitude of the elder.

Peter exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock willingly, eagerly, and humbly, and then he gives them some motivation. He talks about rewards. Now, if you read all of 1 Peter, you see that Peter is Christ-centered, he is gospel-centered in everything he does, and yet, he is not afraid to promise rewards to the elders. In verse 4, he says, "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." Now what is Peter talking about? One day, some day, Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, will return. When He returns, the Scriptures tell us that we will give an account for every word and deed we have done in the body, good or bad. Thankfully, because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, all of those who are in Him, their sins will be remembered no more. By grace through faith in Jesus, we will be saved and we will welcome the appearance of Jesus, and the Shepherd will reward our good deeds. That's what Peter says here, right?

So, what is he doing? He's probably contrasting a true, good, godly motivation and reward which is the reward of the Chief Shepherd, with earthly and greedy rewards that he was mentioning earlier. So, he's saying, elders I want you to know and desire this great reward, which is Jesus returning! He's going to give you an unfading reward. He's going to give you a crown! What is the crown? I don't know! What's funny is I was reading this passage, and it just

dawned on me that I've been to seminary, I've been to church for a long time, I've never really had a lot of teaching on rewards. Have you, Steve? Probably not. Probably in our tradition, we err on the side of, let's just not talk about rewards. So, I had to go to somebody older and wiser, much older and much wiser than me, a theologian named Sinclair Ferguson. He made this really clear. He said it really well. He's talking about this crown of glory, and this is what he says: "The reward Christ gives us is directly and intimately connected to the grace Christ produced in us."

So, the elder that desires to see Christ glorified, and the church built up and glorified, that will be their reward! That will be their crown! That will be their reward. That will be the crown of glory. That's what they're going to see in heaven. They're going to finally see Christ, the Chief Shepherd, glorified in all of His glory and they will see the church, the flock of God, built up, strengthened, nourished and glorified in heaven and they will rejoice! They will get to enjoy that reward into eternity. That's not just their reward, that is the reward of every Christian servant that the grace that God is producing in you, the desire to see the children in the nursery cared for, the desire to see the chairs set out straight so people can worship Jesus well, the desire to see women growing in their faith, strengthened and godly, those desires will be rewarded in heaven because that's what you'll see! You'll get to see Jesus and He'll say, "Well done my good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master." Jesus even says every cup of water given in my name will be rewarded. There's no servant of Christ that is too small to be rewarded. Children, everything you do in this body in the name of Jesus will be rewarded in heaven. Isn't that awesome? Praise the Lord! You're just thinking, 'Land the plane, Shane. Wrap it up.' I will.

Well, how do we receive this teaching? We receive it with humility. Peter closes with humility. He says, 'Younger people, submit to your elders in humility.' I would interpret in this passage that the younger people would be everyone who is not an elder. So, it would be most of the people in the congregation. He would say, receive this teaching humbly. Admit that you're a sheep that needs a shepherd, and that God, your Good Shepherd, has loved you enough to provide a shepherd for you. But then, you think, well, what about the elders? Well then Peter says, 'Everyone humble yourselves. Clothe yourselves with humility.' He's telling the church that everyone, elder, younger, men, women, all ages and stages, clothe yourselves with humility.

What is he thinking of? He may be thinking of the shepherd's cloth. The shepherd had a cloth that they would use to care for the sheep. He may be thinking about the cloth that Jesus took off whenever He washed the feet of His disciples on the night before He was betrayed. He may have in mind the righteous cloth that Christ gives us, His righteousness, by faith in Him. He most certainly has in mind that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gave His life for His sheep, that He clothed Himself with humility. He did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, He suffered to the point of death, even death on a cross. Isaiah says, "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." Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, became a sacrificial lamb to save all of us, to bring us back into the flock. So then, He gives us that mind and that heart and that desire and He sends us out to love and serve His church.

I'm going to give you one more story. Let me close with this, I think it's a great picture of the type of people we want to be, and the type of elders we want. Billy Graham's father-in-law was a man named Dr. Nelson Bell, and he lived as a medical missionary in China for years and

years. Well, after he retired, he and his wife came back to the states and they lived with Billy and Ruth Graham. One day they were all getting ready to go someplace fancy, I don't know if it was church or a dinner or whatever, but Ruth Graham walked into her parents bedroom, and when she came in, her father was on a knee helping his wife get dressed, and Ruth was kind of embarrassed. She said, 'Dad, get away, don't do that. I'll do that. You don't worry about mom, I'll take care of her.' Dr. Bell looked at her and with that stern voice that she had heard a thousand times, said, 'Young lady, you turn around and you walk out of this room right now. It is my honor to serve your mother, and I will share that with no one.'

It was Christ's honor to love and sacrifice Himself for the church. It is our honor to love and serve the church. The Lord is raising up elders who are willing to bow the knee to serve Christ's church. Those are the elders we want. The Lord is raising up Christian servants that love the church and want to bow the knee to Jesus and serve His church. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit would make us that type of people. Let's pray together.