

## Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

### How to Shepherd the Flock of God

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:1-4

Code: 80-297

First Peter chapter 5 verses 1 through 4, let me read this text for you. "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, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion but voluntarily according to the will of God, and not for sorted gain but with eagerness. Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

Here is the beloved Apostle Peter instructing elders, pastors, shepherds. These are those responsible for the churches in Pontus, chapter 1 verse 1, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. So this was written to numerous elders and pastors who had responsibility for large portions of the church in that part of the world. And Peter's primary command is in verse 2, "Shepherd the flock of God...shepherd the flock of God." The word shepherd is the word *poimen*, *poimeno*, which means to shepherd, or to pastor, as we most often translate it. It's the verb...the noun form, *poimen*, is the word we translate shepherd and often translate pastor. Pastoral ministry comes then from shepherding as a model. We have a conference here every year we call The Shepherds Conference." Everybody calls their conference Pastors Conference, so we borrowed the term Shepherds Conference because it's a biblical term. But when we talk about shepherding or when Peter writes to us about shepherding, we're a little bit at a loss to understand what that means, since I daresay there's not one shepherd sitting out here in this congregation today. You have not had any experience about shepherding so when somebody uses the word sheep for the church and for believers, you really don't know what's involved in that. The closest we ever get to sheep is to stuff little animals that we bring home for our kids or grandkids or some cute little sheep that show up in some kid's book or cartoon, or maybe we've been to a zoo or an animal petting environment where we've actually seen some sheep. But the whole process of shepherding we know very little about. And because of that, we need to sort of reconstruct that or we're not going to know what it means to shepherd the flock of God.

I had my experience with shepherding on two occasions, really. One when I was in high school and had a friend whose family was in the business of taking care of animals, both pigs and sheep. And I spent a few days one summer trying to chase some sheep around the desert. That was a minimal experience at shepherding, I might add. But my understanding of shepherding grew immensely when, along with my family, we had the opportunity to visit New Zealand. We visited various farms

there and even went to a sheep farm in Australia. I purchased a book written by a man named Bowen, in fact we bought a lot of them because he is a championship producer of sheep, amazing man, also a Christian man who has written extensively about this whole matter of how to care for sheep. And I have read through what he has written. And this is what I basically gleaned, just so we kind of get an idea of why the metaphor of shepherding is applied to the church. You might ask yourself, "In what way am I like a sheep?" Well if you don't know what sheep are like, you might not be able to answer the question.

So, as I talk about sheep, just think in your mind this is how the Bible describes us. Okay? Sheep are the only animal in the world, or a sheep is the only animal in the world that can be totally lost when it's only a few miles from home. They have no instinct to get back to where they came from. Even the dog you're trying to get rid of and you dropped it off in several neighborhoods finally finds its way home. That dumb dog can get home, but a sheep can't. Sheep have no ability to find their way back. Within its closed range it has adequate skills. It knows its own pasture, it knows the place where it was born. It knows the place where it was suckled by its mother. It will rest in the same shade. It will sleep in the same fold. It will stay in the same home range, more than any other grazing animal in existence. But if that sheep is taken away or wanders away from the familiar territory, it becomes completely lost. It has no sense of direction whatsoever. It has no spacial orientation. It cannot find its way back.. It will inevitably walk around in circles, around and around continuing in confusion and unrest, even panic.

Now sheep are intelligent to some degree. They are perhaps more intelligent than we give them credit for. But to some degree they are intelligent, however, they have no factor in their intelligence to get them back to where they started. They go astray and they get lost and they become helpless and unable to find food or water. In fact, the over one billion sheep in the world would be very soon starved to death or die of thirst if it were not for thousands and thousands, tens of thousands of caring shepherds who make sure they protect them by keeping them in their pasture, by leading them to the place where they can eat and the water that they can drink.

When Jesus, you'll remember, saw the disoriented, confused spiritually hungry, lost crowd, He said of them in Matthew 9:36, "They are like sheep without a shepherd." And everybody understood what that meant because sheep without a shepherd are hopeless and helpless and lost. The prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 53 described lost people as sheep gone astray, everyone turning to his own way, wandering aimlessly astray. They are especially vulnerable when they go astray, or when they are purposely led astray. It is very, very easy to lead sheep astray.

When our family was at the sheep farm in Australia, the shepherd took us out and showed us many, many fascinating things about caring for sheep. But he introduced us to one particular sheep who is known as the Judas sheep...the Judas sheep. All sheep that are led to slaughter are basically led to

slaughter by a Judas sheep. There are millions of sheep, of course, being slaughtered all the time every year and they are typically led to slaughter by a sheep called a Judas sheep. It is especially selected castrated male sheep who leads the unwitting sheep to the killing floor. It goes out first and it starts down a shoot and all the sheep follow and follow and follow. Sheep do have a capacity to follow and they follow to their own death. When they reach the killing place, a trap door opens and the Judas sheep is led away and the rest go in to be slaughtered. The Judas sheep goes around to get the next group. Unaware of what's happening, of course, the sheep blindly follow to their death. They need someone then to follow who leads them to life and not to death because they tend to follow anybody. They need to be protected. They need to be sheltered in their safe place. They need to be provided for. They have to be given pasture and led to water. They spend virtually their whole life eating and drinking, and they are thirsty and hungry often and cannot sustain themselves unless they have shepherds.

And by the way, I found out that sheep have to have clean, pure water, and it can't be too cold and it can't be too hot. They're picky about that. It cannot be moving water, rapidly moving water knocks them off balance and frightens them. And so they need still waters but not stagnant waters. The water must be close by so it's easily found and returned to since if they go very far they get lost. Furthermore, most animals are able to smell water on the wind at a great distance, not sheep. They know where they go for water but if there were another place nearby that was a water supply, they would never know it. If they wander more than a brief walk from their water hole, they will die of thirst even if there's water nearby. They have no capacity to sense that water.

Once they have devoured their grazing range where they feel comfortable, they will continue to eat the stubble and they'll just keep on eating until they're eating dirt before they'll find on their own a new pasture. They have to be led to water. They have to be led to pasture.

And by the way, they're not selective in what they eat. They don't distinguish between oats and hay and alfalfa and grass and noxious toxic weeds.

All of this points to the fact that sheep needs shepherds, shepherds who are careful and thoughtful and protective and who provide the guidance and the knowledge and the wisdom and the planning and the providing and the pasturing that sheep need. Left alone, they will die. The shepherd is the key to their life.

We also imagine sheep, I think, to be soft wooly little white things like we depict a new lamb might be. But I will tell you this, and this might be bad news for you, sheep are basically filthy. That's the word. In fact, they may be the dirtiest animal on the planet in some respects. They are rarely white. They are stained with all kinds of things. But the thing that makes them so dirty is that their wool and their skin produces lanolin and lanolin comes out everywhere. And you know what lanolin is, a sticky

greasy substance. And because of that, everything sticks to them, everything sticks to them, even sticks stick to them. Dirt, weeds, vegetation, seeds, anything blowing in the wind, anything they rub up against sticks to them. And they are dirty unless the shepherd cleans them. Even worse, what often sticks to them becomes deadly because it sticks to them at their rear in the opening where they eliminate their food and closes it so that they literally will die because they cannot get rid of what is in their bodies. Periodically every month or so, we watched the shepherd do this, they have to literally be shaved at that point or they will die because they become so embedded from the collection of dirt. They have no capacity to clean themselves. You never saw a sheep turn his head back and lick himself, he doesn't go there. They don't do that. They are dirty unless the shepherd cleans them. They will die unless they are shaved at the appropriate place.

Furthermore, they can't feed well in soft wet grass or they become sick. It creates a condition that can even bring them to death. Flies kill sheep by laying eggs anywhere and everywhere they can in sheep. Wet ground produces foot rot. I mean, being a shepherd is a very, very challenging thing and it is a messy, dirty job. That's why the lowest people on the social ladder in Bible times were shepherds. That's what made the angels appearing to the shepherds in the field so remarkable that the angels would come and announce to the shepherds the birth of the Messiah, rather than to the elite of the society, was really an amazing thing because the shepherds were the lowest of the low, because they were generally so dirty and filthy dealing with these animals.

No animal in the world, furthermore, is as defenseless as a sheep. Ever hear of a sheep fight? I don't think so. Sheep don't fight. They can't fight. They have no defense against predators. They can't scratch. They can't kick. They can't bite. They're helpless and defenseless. Sheep define the term "dead meat." Am I getting through? Okay. Without a shepherd, sheep don't survive. They're most vulnerable to injury. And when injured, they are easily prone to give up. They are easily crushed when they have pain or injury. They lack a self-preservation instinct. They lack a will to fight and struggle for life. It is even true that a sheep with a full fleece can fall on its back and not ever get up, just stay that way until it dies. The shepherd has to come along, find a sheep, turn it over, pick it up. If it's been down for a long time, the sheep must be treated with great care because its circulation has been affected.

This business of shepherding is a messy and a very challenging business. This wonderful imagery is behind the usage of these pictures and metaphors in the New Testament. And again and again we read them, the Lord talked about us being His sheep and talked about what it is for Him to be the shepherd of His own sheep. It is wonderful imagery and if we're going to understand what Peter is saying here about the duty of being a pastor, we have to understand a little bit about the picture itself. We need to recapture what it means to be a sheep, or what it means to be a shepherd. It's in that context we come then to chapter 5 verse 2, and Peter says, "Shepherd the flock of God." This is a full-time relentless responsibility. Sheep have great needs. They can't protect themselves. They can't feed themselves. They can't get water by themselves. They can't even do things to heal

themselves, they become so very discouraged over pain and injury. They are helpless, hopeless, easily led astray, they are dirty, they need us to be there to give attention to all these issues.

And I think, too, in hard times, in difficult times, in times of persecution, it becomes even more important that the shepherds take care of the sheep. And Peter is writing in just such times. He is writing to believers who are being persecuted, who are going through very difficult times. Chapter 3 verse 14 he talks about those who suffer for the sake of righteousness. Chapter 2 verse 21, "You have been called to suffer since Christ also suffered for you." It was a time of persecution. It was a time of suffering. It was a time of difficulty. Chapter 4 verse 1, "Christ suffered, arm yourselves with the same purpose." In other words, you're going to be facing the same issues of suffering and persecution that our Lord suffered. Chapter 4 verse 13 he talks about sharing the sufferings of Christ. Verse 14, being reviled for the name of Christ. Verse 15, suffering not as a murderer or thief or evildoer, troublesome meddler, but verse 16, suffering as a Christian. In verse 19, suffering according to the will of God and entrusting your soul to a faithful Creator. So, to make matters worse, it's a tough enough deal just to shepherd sheep, but if you add the fact that predators are everywhere and persecutors are everywhere trying to take the life of the sheep, trying to lead them astray, Judas sheep all around, the responsibility of shepherding becomes even more important. When the church is experiencing persecution, when the church is experiencing attack, when the church is experiencing deception, as it is even in our day, it becomes the toughest of times that demand the best shepherds. As you well know, this is one of the things that concerns me greatly at a time when the true sheep are under massive attack, the shepherds are irresponsible, have lost their vigilance, have given up their duty. And so, here comes Peter to remind us to shepherd the flock of God.

And by the way, it's not your church and it's not your flock, it's the flock of God. I view my own ministry as all of us should as having been given a group of people, a part of the flock of God, who belong to God as a stewardship. I discharge a responsibility not over my people or my church, but God's people, Christ's church. This is the highest stewardship possible. It is as if God said, "Here, these belong to Me, protect them, feed them, water them, purify them and you'll give an account some day for what you do." This is no lark. This is no walk in the park. This is immensely challenging.

Well let's look at that command a little bit there in verse 2, "Shepherd the flock of God." And there are just some basic elements of this text that I want to unfold. First is the exhortation, the exhortation. What is the command? Well the command is shepherd the flock of God....shepherd the flock of God. We've already looked at that. But behind that exhortation we go to verse 1, "Therefore I exhort the elders among you," therefore connects into the suffering, those who are suffering according to the will of God. It's a time of persecution. It's a time of difficulty. It's a time of challenge. It's a time that calls for the best shepherds to be the most faithful because this is a difficult time. Sheep are vulnerable. They're under assault. They're under attack. Therefore this is a time to step up and shepherd the

way God wants you to shepherd. And so he exhorts the elders, or if you will, the shepherds. The elders are simply the overseers, the shepherds, the pastors. The word elder, overseer, shepherd, pastor all refer to the same persons, those who are responsible to lead the church, those who are the shepherds and pastors of God's people. They are called elders, which speaks of their age and maturity. They are called overseers which speaks of their leadership. They are called pastor or shepherd which speaks of their responsibility to feed.

This is really borrowed from an Old Testament pattern. In the Old Testament in Israel, elders ruled in the synagogues, the mature men, the men who knew the Scripture and who had experience in it. Each local congregation, each local synagogue had elders that led. In the New Testament, it's the same. The Lord has appointed in the churches those who are to feed and lead the flock of God. They are the shepherds, the overseers, the mature and godly men.

Qualifications for these men are given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, very specific qualifications are laid out. You will notice the word is plural here, the elders among you. Plural because in the church it is ideal, and it was the pursuit of the New Testament apostles to realize this, that there be a plurality of elders. It was important that there not just be one, but there be many who led in the church because that protected against one man going off into some doctrinal aberration. He was held accountable to the rest. It protected against imbalance. It provided a variety of gifts and ministries. A plurality of elders preserves against the undo elevation of one man which is so dangerous. It also protects against the dominance of one man and it provides continuity instead of discontinuity. One of the difficulties in a congregation with only one elder, one pastor is when he goes, there's no continuity, there's nobody to shepherd the sheep and they wander around a sheep without a shepherd and they very often don't know what to do. I've often said that churches that lose their pastor and have no remaining pastors or elders are in a horrible position, they are sheep without a shepherd and the sheep are wandering around trying to pick a shepherd. That is very difficult.

So we are called as elders, as a collection of pastors, to the serious task of shepherding the flock of God for which we have to give an account, according to Hebrews 13:17, we have to give an account. That's why James 3:1 says, "Stop being so many teachers, don't rush into this, theirs is a greater condemnation." The reward is great, and the potential discipline is great as well if we fail. So the primary task is to shepherd. And if you ask the question...what is the role that shepherd plays? The role that a shepherd plays is to make sure that sheep are fed and watered, to make sure that the sheep are fed and watered. He has to find the place, the ground the water, protect them from the predators, protect them from eating something that's noxious to them. This is what he does, but it all builds around the responsibility, the main responsibility, making sure they continue to be fed and watered so their life can be nourished and they can grow to maturity. That's the idea.

So the primary task is feeding. We protect them in order that they may continue to be fed the truth. We guide them into the truth so that they don't go astray into something that's harmful and bad for them. We insulate them from predators that would do harm to them in order that they might feed only on the truth and not by...not be deceived and led astray. And that's why when you look at a list of the qualifications for an elder or a shepherd or an overseer, there's only one skill, only one skill and that is *didaktikos*, skilled in teaching. Because we're called to feed, in John 21:15 to 17, Peter confronted with the Lord that day when he was in Galilee after the resurrection and Jesus remembering Peter's three denials says to Peter three times, "Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" giving an opportunity to Peter to restore himself for each denial. And at the response of Peter, "Yes, I love You," Peter (meant to say Jesus) said, "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep, feed My sheep." Shepherd them. And shepherding and feeding are synonymous. The shepherd has the responsibility to feed the sheep, provide the green pastures, protect them from what harms them, protect them from predators who would harm them, protect them from Judas sheep who would lead them into devastation, provide for them not light meals of milk, but provide for them the nourishing truths, solid food so that they can grow.

So the command to shepherd, the exhortation to shepherd is a calling to the humblest of men, the lowliest of men, the not many noble, not many mighty. As Paul says it, the scum and the off scouring of the world, the lowest of the low to do the greatest task of all tasks in the world, and that is to shepherd the flock of God. If somebody asked me to be the king of a nation, nobody has, by the way, if somebody asked me to be the president of a great American institution, if somebody asked me to be the president of a great corporation, if somebody asked me to be the President of the United States, or anything else, I would not stoop to a lower task than the highest calling there is, and that is to shepherd the flock of God. That is the greatest task given to the humblest of servants who are unworthy but called and enabled and gifted and empowered to that duty. The sin of the shepherds in Israel, according to Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34, is that they did not feed the sheep. Ministry is not about administration, it's not about programming, it's not about creativity and ideas and entrepreneurship, it's about feeding the sheep. There are all kinds of mega-churches exploding all over the place everywhere that are being run by now the new approach is to run all these churches by CEOs with Harvard MBAs. It has nothing to do with the flock of God. These are non-churches, in many cases run by non-shepherds. It's a big deception. It's not to say there aren't true sheep in those environments, those places probably have true sheep wandering around trying to find a true shepherd, easily led astray, easily led into eating weeds, starving for green pastures, thirsty for still waters and vulnerable to any predator that comes along. Our responsibility is to shepherd and we can shepherd only one way, and that is to make sure the sheep are nourished on the food and the water of life. Take up the task of shepherding and discharge it, Peter says, that's the exhortation.

And then he moves to what I'll call the authorization. Somebody might say, "Well who are you to tell us? Where did you come from?" And he says this, "I exhort the elders among you as your fellow

elder." And first..the first aspect of his authority or authorization is common experience...common experience. I'm a fellow elder. I know what it's like. I'm with you in this. I understand what you're called to do. In some ways there's nothing worse than somebody who has never been a pastor telling pastors how to pastor, somebody who has never poured his life into a flock, somebody who has never gone down there to get messy with all the sheep, somebody who has never done that standing up and telling pastors how to pastor. Peter doesn't do that. He's not an out-of-town expert. He says, "Look, I'm exhorting you as a fellow elder." And that's a humble posture, it really is. I'm a fellow elder. He doesn't elevate himself at this particular point, very humbly he recognizes that he is one of them. There's modesty in this. There's a sense of sympathy in this.

And I've always said that. You know, I...I love to speak to people in any kind of environment. I've spoken to the fire chiefs of Los Angeles. I've spoken to groups of the policemen. I have spoken in my educational responsibility at the college, to congressmen for the United States Government. I've spoken before accreditation commissions. I've spoken in all kinds of environments in all kinds of places. But never am I as comfortable speaking to any group as I am speaking to pastors because I know what they do, I understand. I not only understand it from the standpoint of revelation in Scripture, but I understand it from the experience side. I come along as a fellow pastor, a fellow shepherd. I know what it is to do this. I know what it takes. I know the price to pay. I understand the challenges. I know the pain and the suffering as well as the joy and exhilaration.

So that's how Peter comes. He comes on the basis of his experience. And then he comes also, let's ratchet it up a little bit, as a witness of the sufferings of Christ. Now it starts to be a little more heavy, this authority. He's coming as a witness of the sufferings of Christ which puts him in the category of an Apostle. And it was very important to him that he was an eyewitness of the suffering of Christ. He was there when they arrested Christ. We don't need to go into all the details. You know the account of how he took out his sword ready to defend the Lord. He was there at the trial, though hiding in the background and denying Christ. He had fled at the cross but he was close enough to know exactly what was going on. He was regathered after that in the upper room and saw Him in resurrection glory, re-commissioned in Galilee, as I noted in John chapter 21, and told to feed the sheep. He was there. This is not secondhand stuff with him. And this...this aspect of the suffering of Christ was really important to Peter. He was a witness to Christ's suffering, to Christ's death and I'm sure included in that is the idea, of course, of His resurrection. You can put it this way, he was an eyewitness to the passion of Christ, which, of course, has to culminate in the glory of the resurrection. In fact, he talks about it a lot. In his epistle in chapter 1 verse 11, he talks about the suffering of Christ. In chapter 1 verse 19, he talks about Christ's suffering, giving His precious blood as a lamb unblemished and spotless. In chapter 2 verse 21 he talks about Christ's suffering for us. In verse 24, bearing our sins in His body on the cross. In chapter 3 and verse 18, Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust. Again emphasizing the suffering, the substitutionary death and atonement of Christ. Chapter 4 verse 1, Christ has suffered in the flesh. Verse 13, as we noted earlier, we share the sufferings of Christ. He was an eyewitness to the sufferings of Christ by which our salvation was



accomplished, including His resurrection.

So he comes as one having authority as an Apostle and an eyewitness of Jesus Christ. No one could be an Apostle of Christ's unless he was called by Christ and was a witness to the passion, including the resurrection. So Peter says, "Yes, I speak to you as a fellow pastor, I speak to you from the standpoint of common experience, but I also speak to you from the standpoint of apostolic authority. He's exhorting not only from a humble sympathetic perspective, but a position of authority as a representative of Jesus Christ, the risen one.

A third component is he speaks as one not only with common experience and apostolic authority, but personal revelation...personal revelation. The end of verse 1, "A partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed." Now this puts Peter a notch above the rest because not all twelve apostles, or eleven, leaving Judas out, not all eleven apostles experience this. What is he referring to? The glory that is to be revealed, we know what that is, Second Coming glory, the glory when the Lord returns, when as the writer of Revelation says, "Everything goes black, everything goes out, all the lights in the universe go out and then the blazing glory of the Son of Man fills the universe and He comes in blazing glory to judge the wicked and to bring the righteous into His Kingdom in the glorious return of Christ, in the glorious manifestation of the children of God, in the glory of the Second Coming, Christ will reveal Himself." Peter says I was, I am a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed. It is yet to be revealed, how could he partake of it? If it's something future, how could he partake of that?

You could say, "Well, he's a partaker of it in the sense that he will be there in that day." That's true, we'll all be there. When He comes in glory He'll come with His saints. We'll all partake in that sense, but that's probably not what he's referring to. When he says a partaker of the glory to be revealed, he is talking about the transfiguration. He's talking about that day when along with Peter...along with James and John he was taken up to the mount and there the Lord pulled back the veil of His *Shekinah* glory of God was manifest and they fell over as dead men under the power of that shining holy brilliance. He's not just saying I am one who is going to be there in the Second Coming, he is one who says, "I have seen the glory that is to be revealed, I have partaken of it." In 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 16, he says it another way. "We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." He says, "Look, when I talk about the coming of Christ, when I talk about the future glory of Christ, this isn't something I made up...verse 16...we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." We meaning himself and Peter and John. "For when He received honor and glory from God the Father and an utterance such as this was made to Him by the majestic glory, a name for God, 'This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,' and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mount." We were there when the glory shone. We were there when the majestic glory, God Himself, spoke out of heaven and said, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. We were there when Moses and Elijah showed up. We were there, we saw a preview of coming glory."

Peter is saying, "Look, I'm telling you, shepherd the flock of God. I'm telling you that from the standpoint of common experience. I'm telling you that from the standpoint of apostolic authority. But I'm telling you that also from the standpoint of personal revelation." Christ is the one who died, He's the one who rose, but He's also the one who is coming again and in His coming again He's going to reward those who are faithful. Here is the promise then of that eternal reward. He said, "I saw it, I saw it, I was a partaker of that glory. I saw some of it, before he was obviously knocked into some kind of a coma by it, I saw a preview of Second Coming glory. I speak to you as one of you. I speak to you as one above you. And I speak to you as one who has seen the glory to come. And I'm telling you, shepherd the flock of God."

Motivated by sympathy, common responsibility...motivated by apostolic authority...and motivated by future hope. So the exhortation is followed by the authorization, and then comes the identification. He gets very specific about this flock. Verse 2, "Shepherd the flock of God among you...among you." This narrows it down. I mean, you can't shepherd all the flock of God. By the way, there's only one flock of God, right? Just one. God only has one flock, there's only one body of Christ, there's only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, there's only one church, one flock. And the Greek word is a diminutive word, little flock, precious flock. It has inherent in it the kind of an endearing element, the precious flock. And God has only one flock and you are to shepherd the flock among you, the flock that God gives to you. In fact, you can go down to verse 3 and you will see the phrase, "Allotted to your charge...allotted to your charge." It's as if God has taken the whole of the flock, broken it into parts and allotted the flock to us as shepherds. The flock of God for which I have responsibility is here. A flock of God that others have responsibility for is elsewhere. My responsibility is not to be responsible for the whole flock, but to be responsible for the one flock God has given to me. No matter what else I may do, you know, I mean sometimes I think I have way too much responsibility trying to be all things to all people, but everything could go away. I know I could be uninvolved at the college. I could give up responsibility at the seminary. I could give up responsibility for radio, or any of those things, tapes, or whatever else that consume me so much. And I would still not give up my calling because my calling is to take care of the flock of God allotted to me. Like it or not, that's you. As long as you're here, that's you. Now my responsibility is for you. I'm more concerned, beloved, with the occupied seats than I am with the empty ones, okay? I'm not driven by empty seats. My goal, you know, I was saying to somebody this week that self-styled Messiahs are always megalomaniacs. There's no limit to that. They want to win the world and win it now. And if you get in their way, they want to trample you. I just want the responsibility for those whom God gives me.

One young man came to Moody one time and he said, "My congregation's too small." And Moody said, "Well maybe they're as large as you'd like to give account for in the day of judgment." That's the right answer. "Please, Lord, no more." I'm not sure that I am going to be faithful to what I've got, let alone more. God has one beloved, precious little flock in this world. And I grieve that many people in

that little flock are lost in these massive kind of new institutional groups of people who are quasi-Christian and they're wandering around trying to find food, trying to find pasture. We hear from them a lot as they want tapes or books, as they listen to Grace To You because it's their pasture and it's their water, they can't find it elsewhere. Every shepherd is called to his charge, his allotted portion and we will give an account to God for how we cared for that flock, that part of the flock.

So, we have seen an exhortation and an authorization and an identification of just exactly who it is that we are to shepherd. How about some regulation? How do we do this? How do we discharge this shepherding responsibility?

There are a couple of positive statements. Verse 2, "Exercising oversight." Exercising oversight, pretty simple, *episkopeo*, from which we get episcopal which is taken from that word, of course. It means to have scope over. You would think *skiopeo* would be the word scope, and it is, to have scope over, *epi*, to get the scope. Part of shepherding is to get the big picture, isn't it? Part of shepherding is to understand the threats, the opportunities, the strengths, the weaknesses. And that's the oversight. That's part of it. But there's another part of it as well. The first positive is exercising oversight in verse 2. The second positive is at the end of verse 3, "Proving to be examples to the flock." So on the one hand, you are responsible to get the scope, get a grasp on your area of responsibility, your realm of responsibility. That's the bird's-eye view, but on the other hand, you are to come down and mingle in and among the sheep in that you might provide your life as an example. Shepherding is not just the overview. It's not just studying statistics and moving people in groups here and there. It's getting down with the sheep so they can see your life and they can feel your touch and they can participate and see your example. The single truest quality of leadership is the power of exemplary life. I've said that in so many different places to so many different groups of people when I talk about leadership. The single truest quality of leadership is the power of an exemplary life. I don't care where you are, it's the power of example that in the end is what leadership is all about. It's not about a bunch of lists of these fourteen, and that thirteen. I said so many times on radio interviews recently in talking about my book on leadership, if you're in a crisis and you're leading people, you can't say, "Oh, what was number eleven, I can't remember number six...oh what do I do?" It's the power of your life that is essentially what leadership is. You can step back and see what it is, but it has to come naturally out of the flow of your personal living.

So as an overseer, as a shepherd, I have to get the big picture, and then I have to go down and get the small picture and move among the sheep and set an example. They need to be close enough to me to see my life. That's the positive.

The negative, three perils in this regulation of our shepherding. First peril, verse 2, exercising oversight...first peril, "Not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God." You shouldn't be forced into this. Forced into it by a desire for pride, forced into it by peer pressure, forced

into it by intimidation, forced into it for fear of failure or whatever, forced into doing what you do because of some professional duty, or because you have ambition and you want to succeed at one level so you can go to another level. It can't be under compulsion. In one sense you're under compulsion to preach the gospel, 1 Corinthians 9:16 and 17, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel," but that's a compulsion that comes from the will of God. If you ask what drives a man to be a true shepherd? It is the will of God, so you're not under compulsion, you do it voluntarily because you know it's the will of God. I often say to young pastors, would-be pastors, or people considering it when they say, "Well how do you know if you're called?" And I will often say to them, "Well if you can't do anything else, you're probably called. If you can do anything else, do it because if you don't there are going to be a lot of days when you wish you had." This is something you do when you can't do anything else. People ask me, "You know, if you weren't a preacher what would you have been?" And my answer is, "I don't know." There is no second choice. I didn't make a list. Okay, I could be a preacher, or I could be this, or I could be that. No. There was only one thing I could be and that was a shepherd of God's flock. That was the will of God revealed to me. That was clearly indicated to me. It's been the will of God that's driven me. I'm not under compulsion by the...by any group of men. I'm not under compulsion by some ambition. I'm not under compulsion by some people are holding my feet to the fire. This isn't about building yourself up, building an empire. This is about an internal Holy Spirit-given motivation. I can't do anything else. There isn't anything else that interests me or compels me or drives me. This is how it should be, it should be willing, it should be spontaneous, it should be exuberant. Whether it succeeds or fails from a human viewpoint, it's just something you have to do.

Some of our people, Grace people, are down in South Africa this week and one of the groups down there is led by Rick Weimer who is leading the construction people who did our plaza out here and Rick's got a group of people in a section of Joberg, Johannesburg down there and they're building a house for a pastor, a Zulu pastor who has a congregation. But he's lived in a storage bin because he has no home...faithful pastor. Now what do you think compels him? What do you think makes him volunteer to do this? It's the drive of his heart. And so our people are down there this week building him a house that he can live in.

I received a letter on my desk this morning and I was just going through it from a California Highway patrolman up in the north part of the state. His wife actually was writing the letter telling me about him. He works for the state as a Highway Patrolman but he's just taken the responsibility to pastor a church of a hundred people. And in order to prepare himself to do that, he went to school and was trained on the side, taking some Bible classes at the same time sending his children to the Master's College that they might be trained as well. And now he has his responsibilities going in every direction, supporting kids, working for the state, taking classes, pastoring a church of a hundred...why would anybody do that? A church of a hundred, why would you do that? Because that's the will of God. That's the internal compulsion and it's voluntarily driven spontaneously and willingly produced

by the Holy Spirit.

So he says negatively, not under compulsion. Secondly, not for sordid gain, the end of verse 2, "Not for sordid gain but with eagerness." Not for shameful gain, not for money. You're not in it to become rich. It's okay to pay the pastor, I want to affirm that. It's okay. Those that preach the gospel should live by the gospel. Those that are faithful in the Word and doctrine should be worthy of double pay, double honor, Paul says to Timothy. But this is not the motive. This is the motive of false teachers who do what they do. Peter says in 2 Peter 2, he says, "They teach destructive heresies, verse 1, and verse 3, in their greed they will exploit you." False teachers always do it for money. They always do it for personal aggrandizement. Jude 12 says, "They care only for themselves." But there's no desire for money in the heart of a true pastor. Even if you receive more than you need, this then becomes a stewardship responsibility and who can say? Some pastors live at a bare minimum. Some do much better than that. That's in the purposes of God, a stewardship that each of us has to discharge with faithfulness. Not in the ministry financially for financial profit or benefit, but with eagerness. Words like voluntarily and eagerness really do characterize the truly called shepherd. Even though it gets difficult and hard and challenging, you still do it and you do it with joy and eagerness and gratitude.

There's a third negative prohibition and it's in verse 3, "Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge." Lording, *katakuriontes*(?), to completely dominate. *Kurioo* is to be lord, *katai* is to be lord down, it's to come down on people. Autocratical impression, intimidation, domineering, dominating, this is a term that is used of people who are harsh and hard. They don't want to hear from you, they don't want your opinion, they just want you to get in line and do what they tell you. That's not how you shepherd the flock of God. The authority comes from the Word. And when you speak the Word, that's your authority. The rest of the time you don't have any authority. As soon as you stop talking the Word of God, you don't have any authority, then you become a servant. Your authority comes from the Word, all the rest of the time you come under and you serve the sheep. You can't dominate them. You have to treat them with tenderness and care.

It's so easy to push people around, intimidate people, create fear. That's not what a true shepherd does. There's none of that. In Matthew 20 Jesus said, "That's what the Gentiles do," Matthew 20:25, "they lord it over. But if anyone among you would be great or a leader...He said...let him be your servant." There's no place for petty tyrants, although a lot of them exist and always have in the church.

So how do you shepherd? You shepherd by spiritual leadership. You shepherd by example. You shepherd by a life of service, free from compulsion or greed or abusive domination. Peter wraps up his words with motivation in verse 4, "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." Ministry has its rewards, I promise you it does. It's really been unceasing

joy for me. And maybe I've certainly gotten more than my share of what joy any man should have. But ministry has had its immense joys, and also its great challenges and even heartbreaks but immense joys. But still the best of the reward for the faithful shepherd is deferred. It's all deferred until the chief shepherd appears and we receive the unfading crown, literally in the Greek the unfading crown which is glory, until we receive eternal glory, until every man receives praise from God as 1 Corinthians 4 says it, until every one of us has our stewardship evaluated. The Chief Shepherd, or as He's called in John, the Good Shepherd, or as He is called in Hebrews, the Great Shepherd. He's going to appear. He's going to appear as the glorious shepherd and He's going to reward all His faithful shepherds in glory.

I've had my share of awards, you know, in my erstwhile and long past athletic days and even a few academic things thrown along. And I remember those things faintly, stepping up on a platform to get a medal, hearing some hollers from a crowd when you received an honor or a reward, being at a banquet and being given a plaque no one could find, and if they could they couldn't care about now. And, you know, all those things pass so rapidly, we can't remember last year's winners, we can't remember last year's champions. Who won what championship last year? It's a moment and it's gone and that's what it is. Can you imagine, however, being honored with an honor that lasts forever...forever? That is what an unfading crown of glory is, it is an award ceremony that never ends. It is an award event that never ceases. It is a crown that never loses its luster. It goes on forever and ever. It is the crown which is eternal glory. And this is that to which the faithful shepherd looks. Crowns in ancient times, as they are today, were marks of victorious achievement, but they diminish. Some of them were made out of plants and they died, and some were made out of tarnishing metal and they faded. But you could look at heaven this way, for faithful shepherds, heaven will be an eternal award ceremony at which the one receiving the award will give all the honor to...whom?...to the Chief Shepherd, to Christ. Shepherd the flock of God, shepherd the flock given to you, allotted to you. Feed them, lead them, protect them, purify them, set an example for them and some day when Jesus appears the Chief Shepherd will reward His faithful shepherds with eternal glory. What a calling. Let's pray together.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your grace to us that we like shepherds in ancient times are nothing and no one, insignificant, in some ways, as Paul said, scum, the off-scouring, the lowest of the low. But You have called us to the highest duty to shepherd Your flock, the flock which You purchased with Your own blood. We thank You for this calling. We thank You for the instruction as to how to discharge it faithfully. We thank You for making us willing and eager. We thank You for protecting us from selfish ambition, love of money, or dominating and abusive authority. Continue, Lord, to make Your faithful shepherds servants who will live as examples among the sheep, some day receiving a true and divine assessment of their faithfulness. We look not for what this world may give us, it means nothing. We wait for the day when we hear praise from You and will return it to You forever, for whatever we are we are by Your grace. We are like Paul, the chief of sinners who have been made into shepherds by grace and grace alone. We give You gratitude in Christ's name.

Amen.

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