

Sermon Brief

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July 3, 2022

Text: 1 Peter 5:1-4

Title: “The Under-Shepherds”

Subject: Elders are to lead God’s people humbly.

Complement: Believers are to humbly follow their elders.

Textual Idea: Elders are to lead God’s people humbly and believers should humbly follow them.

Sermon Idea: Follow the lead of a Jesus-following under-shepherd.

Interrogative: Are you walking in humility?

Key Points:

Elders are to faithfully under-shepherd God’s people by being...

1. Enthusiastic about the privilege of shepherding.
2. More concerned for the flock than themselves.
3. Good examples of full devotion to Jesus.
4. Motivated by eternal, not earthly, glory.

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that elders are appointed by God to lead God’s people in humility and for the joy of serving Jesus. Believers are to submit to godly elders and support them.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) check their motives for serving, (2) support their elders, (3) honor those who serve well.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need for the church to remain strong by having humble leadership.

“The Under-Shepherds”

1 Peter 5:1-4

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There is a movie called (LCD) “**The Undershepherd**” which tells the story of two young ministers who are climbing the ranks at a Baptist church led by an elderly pastor. The old man won’t step down and the two friends become competitors. Russ Parr, the writer and producer comments, (LCD) “**The Undershepherd deals with money, power and infidelity. This movie is not an indictment of the Black Church. It’s an indictment of man, of who we place on that pedestal sometimes, just an ordinary human being with flaws. You can’t let them get to the point where they are so powerful that they think for you.**” Money, power and infidelity aren’t limited to just black churches. They’re found in all churches: black, white, urban, rural, etc... As Parr says, at the end of the day pastors and leaders are just humans, and we have to be really careful who we place in these positions of leadership. What we need are people who understand they are not power brokers but shepherds – namely, under-shepherds.

We’re in a sermon series on the book of 1 Peter which I’ve entitled, (LCD) **Alien Living in a Chaotic World**. The people Peter wrote to were struggling to live faithfully for Jesus in a pagan society. Last week, we looked at the end of 1 Peter 4 where Peter encouraged the people to expect and endure persecution. He said that God’s judgment is beginning and it’s beginning with the church itself. In light of this, Peter now turns to how the church of God can maintain unity in this painful environment – starting with the leaders. 1 Peter 5:1, *“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 5 In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.””*

Peter writes specifically to “the elders.” The word here is “presbuteros” from which we get “presbytery” or “presbyterian.” It referred to the pastoral leaders of the congregations – which in Peter’s time were largely house churches. These were spiritually mature men who were appointed to this position as we see in First Timothy, (LCD) “**The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.**” In this case, Paul is talking to a young elder, Timothy, but they tended to be older men which is why they were called “presbuteros,” “old men.”

These elders also came from “among you.” A number of commentators mentioned that the early Christian community followed the Jewish synagogue model of having a group of elders leading in each individual gathering. Elders were promoted from within, not from without...which is one reason I’ve always wanted to hire our staff from within too.

They know these people. These leaders are personally invested and known. Eventually as the church grew, bishops over entire regions developed and paid local pastors did as well. Even in Paul's day there is evidence in his letters that "the worker is worth his wage" – that local lead elders were paid. So this became a respected and important position.

Peter is writing them because the church is suffering. If the church is going to get through the rough patch well, it will take good leadership which will require great humility. He models that himself with how he describes himself in verse 1. He says, "I appeal as a fellow elder." In the very first verse of the letter, he had called himself an "apostle." Yet here he identifies with these struggling elders by calling himself an elder too. He adds that he's "*a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed.*" Though he ran during Christ's sufferings, he did see his nail scarred hands when he rose from the grave. And, in spite of his total failure when he denied Jesus, he's going to share in the glory to be revealed. He's been forgiven. He serves out of that gratitude. He essentially says, "I'm a regular guy like you who gets to serve the One who has had mercy on me!"

His humility comes from his encounter with Jesus after the resurrection. Recall that after he ran away and denied Jesus, Peter went back to fishing. Persecution came and Peter ran. Surely, he could no longer serve Jesus. And then one day, as he was fishing, Jesus shows up for breakfast! At some point over hash browns and fish, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him – matching Peter's three-fold denial. Each time Peter says yes and Jesus responds similarly, **(LCD) "Feed my lambs." "Take care of my sheep." "Feed my sheep."** He then reinstates Peter into ministry. From then on, this act of mercy on Jesus' part is reflected in the humility that pours out of Peter. He is a grateful servant.

And he understands what true leadership is based on how Jesus led him...it's shepherding. "Feed my sheep." Verse 2, "*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them...*" There are two key verbs in our five verses this morning and the first one is this one – shepherd. Jesus uses the same verb when He says to Peter, "Take care of my sheep." Peter never forgot that and he's passing that on to these suffering leaders. Take care of the suffering sheep!

What does a shepherd do? He watches over. The word for "watches over" is another familiar one, "episkopeo," from which we get "episcopal." It means to watch something very carefully just like a shepherd does. **(LCD) A shepherd protects, guides, leads, and feeds his flock.** But remember the title of this sermon, "The Under-Shepherds." An under-shepherd does all this too...but with one big difference. It's not his sheep! Notice Peter says to be shepherds of whose flock? God's! I hate when someone refers to Wintonbury as "your church" or "Andre's church." No it's not! It's God's church! I'm just an under-shepherd. I hear leaders say sometime, "Those are my people." No they're not! They're God's people! We just under-shepherds. We've been given a stewardship to take care of what's God's. We can't ever forget that!

Peter then gives three contrasts of how an elder should shepherd, "*not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but*

eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” Let me summarize these three motivations with **(LCD) this chart**. An elder or church leader should not serve reluctantly, “I have to go to church today,” or for money like in the movie I mentioned earlier, or in a domineering fashion bossing people around. Unfortunately, all three of these occur all the time. Instead, an elder or leader is to shepherd willingly in order to please God, eagerly to serve the church, and in the same way Jesus did – with a servant’s heart. Let’s look at these three contrasts.

Instead of reluctantly, the elder should be willing. Chuck Swindoll told this great story: “A young man was sound asleep one Sunday morning when his mother burst in and said, ‘Wake up, son. You need to get out of bed right now!’ With his face buried in his pillow he responded with a muffled voice, ‘Give me three good reasons why I should get out of this bed.’ She said, ‘One: because it’s Sunday and as Christians we always go to church on Sundays.’ The man moaned. ‘Two: because we only have forty minutes until church starts and you haven’t even showered!’ The man tried to ignore his mother. ‘Three: because you’re the pastor and you need to be there!’” I’d be lying if I said I never wanted to sleep in on a Sunday when I was preaching! Lord forgive us!

Any of you leaders feel this way? I’m sure you do! If you do, maybe you’re burned out and need a break from ministry. We all do. Maybe you’ve lost your spiritual connection with Jesus and are serving out of your own strength. Maybe it’s time to move on. A lot of pastors have been feeling this way during the pandemic. Look at this recent survey of Evangelical pastors by George Barna. **(LCD) “Have you given real, serious consideration to quitting being in full-time ministry within the last year?** In January 2021, it was 29%. In March of this year, it’s 42%! 4 out of 10 pastors want to quit ministry! Why? **(LCD) here’s a list of reasons:** the immense stress of the job – 56% felt that. I feel lonely and isolated – 43%. Current political divisions – 38%. I am not optimistic about the future of my church – 29%. I am not satisfied with my job – 22%. I don’t feel respected by the congregants – 21%. I’m happy to say that Dave, Brian and I are all okay...now! I know I’ve felt some of these things and wanted to quit too.

Why don’t I? One, you. Wintonbury has always done a great job of supporting, praying for and loving on its pastors. Thank you! I got an encouragement card this week from one woman that made me cry. It just bolstered my entire week. Good job Wintonbury! Another reason? Same as Peter. When I remember the mercy God has shown to me, how undeserving I am to serve, all I can do is thank God and it helps me to see ministry as the privilege that it is. Keep your eyes on Jesus leaders! Three, time off. Wintonbury has been gracious with giving us vacation time and we use it! You also do well to not call or disturb us when we’re off so well done there too!

The second contrast was **(LCD) not for money**, but eager to serve the church. Believe it or not, some people go into ministry just for money. Just a quick Google search revealed **(LCD) these headlines: Chicago Pastor Steals \$1M to Buy Bentley, Former Harrison, Ark. pastor arrested for stealing \$500,000 from church, Large Florida Church Removes Pastor for Stealing from Offerings, Retired Pittsburgh Pastor Accused of Stealing \$357K From Former Church**. What the heck?! Lord have mercy!

The third contrast was **(LCD) not bossing people around** but serving as an example...serving like Jesus. The Greek here reads “*not lording it over those entrusted to you.*” The word for **(LCD) “those entrusted to you” is “kleros”** which means “lot; portion; share,” and it’s where we get the word “clergy” from. Peter is saying that as under-shepherds, we are to be faithful to care for the lot assigned to us. I and the elders have been assigned this lot, Wintonbury Church. Our job then, as under-shepherds, is not to domineer, bossing around with threats and intimidation but to guide like a shepherd does. It’s interesting that in the Ancient Near East, **(LCD) shepherds walked in front** of their flocks and their sheep followed them because they knew them. In some parts of the world, shepherds go behind their flocks and try to drive them but that doesn’t work. Doesn’t work with God’s flock either.

Several years ago, a local pastor came into a great church here in Greater Hartford. One of the first things he did was install an elder board of guys who agreed with him on everything. Yes men. Once they were in place, he then began placing on church discipline anyone and everyone who disagreed with him on anything. Eventually, there were dozens of people on it...including some highly respected, long-standing members of the church. Eventually, after some other local shepherds intervened, the pastor and his elders left that church, but only after taking over the half the people and planting a church nearby. This is exactly what Peter was warning about.

Driving sheep is not what Jesus did. He guided them to follow Him. **(LCD) “Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first 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.”** Godly leadership is servant leadership. If we or any other church you’re a part of ever exhibits a toxic culture where dissent is squashed, you have to agree with the pastor on everything, people are threaten and intimidated, I suggest **(LCD) this book to you, “A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture that Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing.”** Peter would have loved this book!

Next, Peter gives a promise to encourage faithful shepherds to stay the course of servant leadership, verse 4, “*And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*” Throughout the Old Testament, God is called our Shepherd as in the great Psalm 23, **(LCD) “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.”** And in the New Testament, Jesus takes on this title too as in John 10:10, “I am the Good Shepherd.” The writer of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as “that great Shepherd of the sheep.” God is our ultimate shepherd, and it is an honor to serve as His under-shepherd. As the ultimate shepherd, He’ll be appearing, coming back to receive His flock. Imagine what that’s going to be like?! You all know that Diane and I saw **(LCD) Paul McCartney** in concert last month. It was amazing! What surprised me is that I started crying when he came out on stage! I’m not sure why but as I’ve thought about it, I realized that it’s because he’s had such an impact on my life for 50 years and here he was in the flesh

before me. Now magnify that automatic response of tears by infinity and that's how I think we'll respond when we see Jesus in His fullness! It's going to be awesome, and it inspires us to stay faithful until He returns.

But even better than that, when does, He's going to give a crown of glory that will never fade away! The **(LCD) Greek victor's crown** made of laurel leaves would literally fade and disintegrate, but the crown of glory won't! What is this crown of glory? We don't know but one commentator pointed out a very interesting verse from Isaiah, **(LCD) "In that day the Lord Almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people."** What a picture. Jesus Himself, His character, His person, His beauty, His goodness, will be poured upon us and we'll bear His glory! How awesome! But we have to remember something...the context. Suffering. Persecution. If we want to bear Jesus as our crown in eternity, we must be willing to share in His sufferings now. Another way to put it: **(LCD) which crown will you wear?** The crown of gold or the crown of thorns. If you choose the crown of gold, your reward is in this world now. If you choose the crown of thorns, the crown of glory awaits. What will it be?

We've been very fortunate here at Wintonbury to have had many godly elders over the years. **(LCD) Here are our current elders.** I can say with a clear conscience that every one of these men have chosen the crown of thorns instead of the crown of gold. They seek to serve Jesus out of love for Him like Peter did, as under-shepherds, not as power brokers. They are good men, and we should praise God for them. Let's do that!

In summary, here are our points for today, **(LCD) Elders are to faithfully under-shepherd God's people by being...**

1. **Enthusiastic about the privilege of shepherding.**
2. **More concerned for the flock than themselves.**
3. **Good examples of full devotion to Jesus.**
4. **Motivated by eternal, not earthly, glory.**

Finally, we're encouraged in scripture to honor those who serve well, **(LCD) "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."** And in that regard, no one deserves more honor than the man who preached and taught us faithfully for 40 years, our patriarch, **(LCD) Rich Ainsworth.** This past Friday, July 1st, marked 50 years since God sent Rich and Kathy to under-shepherd us. For a variety of reasons, we'll honor them more specifically on August 28th. But we'd be remiss to not acknowledge such a huge milestone. And, frankly, I can't think of a better way to honor Rich than to close this sermon with a Peanuts illustration: **(LCD) Be the Leader You Would Follow.** Guiding, not driving the sheep. Serving enthusiastically out of great gratitude to Jesus. Being fully devoted to Jesus – the kind of leader people will want to follow. Amen!