

By God's design, the local church is to be led by elders. Other names for that role are pastor, shepherd, or overseer (see Acts 20:28). In 1 Peter 5:1-5, Peter provides instructions and exhortation to the elders of the church; we can all learn from these leadership lessons.

### **The Role of the Elder**

Jesus bought the church with his own blood. Although we like to identify our community as "*my church*", in truth, it is "*his church*".

The primary role of the elder is to tend to the sheep, feeding, leading, and protecting them. The challenge is that elders are also sheep, and as such they need accountability and shepherding themselves.

The Bible teaches that healthy church leadership should have more than one elder. This strengthens the church and guards against strong personalities that might slowly introduce false teaching.

A healthy church will only grow from healthy leaders. A church will never grow in an area of ministry if the leaders are not leading the way by example.

### **The Proximity of the Elder.**

Peter writes in verse 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.*"

Peter is exhorting the elders who are among the people, implying that these elders were directly engaged with the community. Pastors who are not in the trenches are not shepherding. YouTube "pastors" are not shepherding.

In times of persecution, the leadership of the church is crucial (see 1 Peter 4:17). Humble local shepherds play a critical role in helping the church withstand the temptation to swim along with the stream of the world's culture, especially during times of trial. Sadly, leaders who run away during persecution are hirelings and not true shepherds as Jesus said in John 10. John Maxwell said, "*A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way.*" Peter identifies himself as a co-elder, but he had some extra credibility: he witnessed the crucifixion as Jesus died in our place on the cross. He also saw the empty tomb as Jesus victoriously conquered sin and death. Peter knew that even though there is suffering now, there is glory coming later. Glory always follows suffering, and this coming glory should motivate the elders in their shepherding. Peter had a healthy eternal perspective, and we should too. How often do you think about Jesus coming again, and how does it affect your leadership of others?

### **The Leadership of the Elder**

Peter goes on to encourage the elders in verses 2 and 3, "*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;<sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*"

To exercise oversight is to care for others, not dominate or dictate. Oversight is providing care for the church family; it is a high calling and a serious responsibility.

Peter then compares three styles of leadership.

### ***Compulsion v. Willingness***

*“People ask the difference between a leader and a boss. The leader leads, and the boss drives.”* — Theodore Roosevelt.

The Lord wants elders to lead willingly, not from compulsion or some type of guilt and shame. When the Lord asks us to lead, we must respond willingly with a ready “yes” in our hearts.

### ***Shameful Gain v. Eagerness***

Then Peter compares, “shameful gain vs eagerness”

This contrast is the difference between a true shepherd and a hireling; a hireling works because he is paid, but a shepherd works because he loves and is devoted to caring for the sheep (see also John 10:12-13; Titus 1:7).

### ***Domineering v. Servanthood***

Different positions require different leadership styles. For example, in the military, the leadership is domineering. When a battle decision has been made and lives are at stake, you cannot have a subordinate wanting to discuss the decision. Obedience needs to be unquestioned. However, in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus models servant leadership for us, and he wants us to lead like he led (see John 13).

### **The Reward of the Elder.**

In verse 4 Peter writes, *“And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”*

This is our hope: Jesus is coming again, and we will all be judged and receive rewards for our faithfulness.

Faithful shepherds will receive an eternal crown of glory. The “crown” here is the Greek victory garland, given as a prize during the ancient Grecian games. It was woven from ivy or something similar. But those victor crowns faded and eventually were thrown away. The crown Peter describes is incorruptible and does not fade. Many people go into ministry looking for rewards, seeking fame, an audience of thousands, perhaps a best seller book, or rising rank within their denomination. Such rewards are fading greenery; they will never satisfy.

The only reward we should be striving for is to hear the words of the master in Matthew 25: *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”* When we see Jesus, we won’t desire anything else. We will forget any personal goals or glory; we will simply take our crowns and place them at his feet – that will be the ultimate prize.

### **The Example of the Elder**

Finally, verse 5 reads, *“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.”*

Peter is referring to younger people in the church, but this also applies to all church members who submit to the leadership of the elders. It is possible that Peter was remembering how Jesus clothed himself in humility as he washed his disciples' feet. Pride is the root of all sin, but God favors and gives grace to the humble.

Even though these verses are primarily directed towards the church elders, the principles apply to all church leadership roles. The way of leadership is humble servant leadership.

***Is God calling you to leadership?***