

Be Shepherds

1 Peter 5:1-4

Elder Ordination for Shane Foster and Garnet Harrison

INTRODUCTION

The world watched in stunned silence as the building went up in flames. The F.B.I. had surrounded the building for several days. Those inside defied the authorities and refused to come out. Their leader, David Koresh, brainwashed them into thinking that he was the second coming of Jesus. The Branch Davidian compound went up in flames. David Koresh and all his followers perished together.

You've probably heard the saying, "Don't drink the Kool-Aid." It's a popular phrase that has its beginnings with Jim Jones and the Jonestown cult, where Jim Jones led hundreds of his followers to commit suicide by drinking poison punch.

Abuses of leadership sometimes have tragic consequences. We can understand why many people are hesitant to follow others, why they are skeptical of authority and leadership. With so many abuses—some with deadly consequences—resistance to leadership seems like the right thing to do.

But is that the way leadership really is? Is abuse and tyranny intrinsic—a necessary part—of the very idea of leadership?

Before you answer remember that Jesus was a leader. And He has decided that his people should follow and honor leaders. In fact, Jesus gives gifted men to the church as a practical extension of His love and care for the church. In God's economy, leadership and authority are meant to be married to love and care. Leadership is meant to be a blessing to God's people.

And so this morning, we have the great privilege of receiving and celebrating the Lord's blessing in the ordination of two new elders, Shane Foster and Garnet Harrison.

Outline

I. The Audience (1.25 pages)

- II. The Appeal (6.75 pages)
 - a. The Basis of the Appeal
 - b. The Substance of the Appeal
- III. The Attitude (3.5 pages)

Read 1 Peter 5:1-4

I. The Audience

Verse 1 begins, “To the elders among you.” That’s the intended audience—the elders among us... Thabiti, Shane, Garnet, Duncan, William and Dave.

The elders are not the older people of the congregation. The title and office of elder is the same as the title and office of pastor or bishop or overseer. Those words all refer to the same people in the church, her leaders. When we say Elder Shane or Elder Garnet... it is the same thing as saying Pastor Thabiti or Pastor Dave. We may have different gifts... and some may serve full-time in this capacity... but it is the same office with the same general responsibilities... which we’ll come to in a moment.

Now remember... what we are reading is the inspired... inerrant... authoritative... sufficient word of God.

When the text addresses the elders directly... it is as though God stops for a moment and says directly to us, “Hey Shane! Hey Garnet! Hey Thabiti, Dave, William and Duncan! Listen up!”

The words that follow are specifically for you and for all elders. Heaven is calling out to you. So we are to turn our ear to the page and give our full attention.

What a remarkable thing to be addressed directly by God through His word.

Shane and Garnet, my fellow elders, we must not listen to the Scripture as other men sometimes do. Others may treat the word as a novelty... a light whimsy... a quaint fairy tale... one philosophy among many. Other men may listen that way. But we must listen to the Scripture as ones called out by God—because we are. We are addressed here like personal servants to the King of Heaven—for that’s what the Lord has made us to be as elders.

Treat the word of God as your life—because it is! Didn't our Lord say, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*" The tempter tried to seduce the Lord with slight twisting and misuses of the word of God. He tried to seduce the Savior with the appearance of godliness. The Devil handled the word of God... but He did not heed and obey the word of God. He listened to the word... but not as one who was *under* the word.

But we must not play word games. We must not be clever. We must not get too smart... or give in to unbelief pretending to honor the word.

God addresses us by title. He calls us right out. We must listen to all He sets out before us. And we listen not only for ourselves but we listen knowing that the message God entrusts us with is the message that saves souls and strengthens the sheep He purchased with His Son's own blood.

Men... Heaven calls you. Be *sure* to listen.

Because in our text, Heaven makes...

II. An Appeal

There is a plea that goes out... an urgent request. God through Peter is asking and calling men in the office of elders to a particular way of life. Peter says, "I appeal...." There then follows the basis for the appeal and the substance of the appeal.

First, notice the three-fold basis of the appeal. God appeals to us through Peter based on three things:

1. Peter's own experience as an elder *like* us (a fellow elder);
2. Jesus' suffering on the cross *for* us (a fellow witness); and
3. Glory of the Son of God coming *to* us (a fellow heir of glory).

Number 1, Peter says, "*I appeal... as a fellow elder....*" Now that's really interesting. When we read this, we know Peter is not talking to us based on some theory. He's not sharing with us some homemade ideas... some pet philosophy. He speaks from experience, from what he knows personally through the cold hard facts of life.

And he is not speaking from some far off or exalted place that we can't identify with. See Peter's humility. He is telling us that he is like us—a fellow elder. Peter, the apostle, regards himself a “fellow elder.” He knows what it means to have responsibility to watch over God's people. And he identifies with every elder.

Number 2, we read “*I appeal... as a witness of Christ's sufferings....*” Peter not only knows what it means to serve as an elder... he also knows what it means to have seen the most unimaginable suffering in the history of the world... when the Son of God suffered the wrath of the Father... to atone for sin.

That term witness takes on two meanings. He's not someone who just heard about these events. He was there. Peter says, “Now look, I was there when they crucified my Lord.” He saw the arrest in the garden... the trial by night... the mocking and the beatings... the long march to Golgotha... the nails pounded through the wrists and feet... the Son of God raised up on that cross to die... and the blood. He was a witness. He had that unique experience that every apostle must have.

And as a witness, Peter would stake his life on these very sufferings of Christ. He would be a martyr for what he saw, believed, and taught. That's what a witness is... a martyr for the cause of Christ.

The fact that Peter appeals to the sufferings of Jesus means that this appeal is no light thing. It's serious... solemn... and sober.

This man who stood by and watched as the Son of God was arrested, tried, beaten, and crucified... would not say such a thing lightly. So we sit up and take notice when Peter appeals to us on this basis.

Number three, Peter makes his appeal as “*one who also will share in the glory to be revealed.*” What is this glory to be revealed? And who does Peter share it with?

He shares this glory with other elders and with all other Christians. But he also shares this glory with Christ... because the glory to be revealed is Peter's favorite way of referring to the Second Coming of Jesus. Peter is not only a witness to Christ's sufferings... but also to the glory of Christ.

What an astounding appeal. It's not a begging, weak request. It's not a small favor that asked. We're addressed as elders in the name of all that's holy.

Why does Peter refer to the sufferings of Christ and the glory of Christ when describing pastoral leadership?

1. This church was suffering.
2. Suffering is not unique. First comes suffering, then comes glory.
3. Elders are called to continue the work of Christ... which includes suffering.

This call to be an elder has its roots in the suffering of Christ and its hopes in the coming of Christ. Root your ministry in those things. When you suffer as an elder, it's because Christ's sufferings are being filled up in you. And when you suffer and feel discouragement, look to the coming glory when you shall be joined with Christ and participate in His glory. The elder must wear spiritual bifocals... with one lens looking back to Calvary and the other forward to the New Jerusalem. It's the only way to endure and thrive in the ministry.

On these three bases... comes the substance of Peter's appeal.

“Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers.”

Shane and Garnet, this is what you're called to do. “Be shepherds.” “Serve as overseers.” You're called to be a kind of person (a shepherd/overseer) as much as you're called to a kind of task (“take care of God's flock”). Consider those two things... the kind of person you are to be... and the task you're called to.

You're called to be a shepherd and overseer. The image of the Shepherd of God's people is centuries old.

✠ We're very familiar with **Psalm 23**, which begins, *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”*

✠ **Isaiah 40:11** beautifully describes the Sovereign Lord as one who *“tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart....”*

‡ **Ezekiel 34** is reading later this afternoon... because there God contrasts himself as the faithful shepherd with those unfaithful shepherds in Israel during Ezekiel's day. The unfaithful shepherds will be punished along with those sheep who willingly followed their error. But God promises to be their shepherd and says, "*I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.*"

Almost all of the OT shepherd imagery points forward to the day when God would himself shepherd His people.

‡ And when Jesus steps on the scene, He fulfills all the shepherd promises of God. So he says of himself in **John 10:11-15**—

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Shane and Garnet, my fellow elders, Jesus is the Chief Shepherd. And Rev. 7:15-17 tells us that He shall forever be our Chief Shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd who carries His sheep and lays down His life for the sheep.

As elders, we are called to be like Him. We are His under-shepherds. Caring and trusting, loving and tender, sacrificial and generous, full of compassion and protective of His sheep—that's the kind of Shepherd Jesus is. That's the kind of shepherds we are to be.

GOSPEL

My non-Christian friend... that's what God is like... a shepherd. And not just any kind of shepherd... but he is the kind of shepherd that would die for His sheep. Indeed, those are not empty symbolic words. That's just what Jesus Christ did. He laid down His life for the sheep... to save them from their sin.

The sin of man leaves him helpless and harassed, without a shepherd. Man in his sin is like a rebellious goat... that leaps over the fence of God's corral to buck and kick and play in foreign pastures... on rocky cliffs. That's what all men are naturally... rebellious goats kicking against the fence of God's law and will. We're rebels. And for our sins, God, the Holiest Shepherd, will surely finally and eternally remove us from His sheepfold in judgment... leaving us in judgment to the wolves of our own making.

That's what hell is... to be kicked out of the loving sheepfold of God and suffer the consuming attack of God's judgment. And that's where every sinful rebel will end up... unless they repent and turn to Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

When Jesus gave His life on the cross... He was stretching forth His Shepherd's arms... and bringing lost sheep near to His heart. He was ending the Father's anger against the sins of His people... satisfying His justice. And opening a door for rebellious sheep to turn from their rebellion and enter the fold of God. And He is the only One who opens this way.

My non-Christian friend... that's why it's essential for you to repent of your sins and to turn in faith to Jesus Christ, trusting that He took your judgment on the cross... and depending upon Him as your Great Shepherd. To turn from sin and turn to Jesus Christ... trusting that He took your place on Calvary's cross and suffered your punishment... is to enter into eternal life and the forgiveness and unending love of God. The Great Shepherd will hold near to His heart... everyone who trusts in Him.

If you'd like to know more about Jesus, why He gave His life for sinners, and repentance and faith leading to forgiveness and eternal life...

4. See one of the elders after the service...
5. Talk with the Christian friend who brought you to church this morning...
6. Come to our Sunday school classes where we explain the gospel...
7. Fill out one of the visitor cards and check the box for someone from the church to follow up with you...
8. Most importantly, cry out to God in the depths of your soul for him to change you from a sinful, rebellious goat into one of His lambs through faith in Jesus. Trust that He can and He will.

Take Care of the Flock

Shane and Garnet, you're to be shepherds like Jesus. But also consider the task we're called to.

The work of shepherding and overseeing is His work. Just as this flock is God's flock. Notice verse 2: it's "*God's flock that is under your care.*"

It's "God's flock that is under your care." Understanding this is what will free you to serve and direct your energies.

1. It's God's flock, not ours. We care for it as stewards not owners. And the flock is under our care, not our car. We don't drive over it, but we tend to it as a precious possession.
 - a. The entire flock is under your care, not just a few favored or well-known sheep here or there.
 - b. The entire flock, then, must be known to you. Know every sheep personally... their health, needs, hopes and so on. We can't shepherd and care for and oversee those we don't know.
2. You are shepherds:
 - a. Not of the entire world or society...
 - b. Not of this or that civic club or organization...
 - c. Not even of other churches or all Christians in general.
 - d. But of the flock "under your care."

The surest way to be burned out, distracted, and ineffective as a shepherd and overseer is to take your eye off your particular flock. The first and most basic part of shepherding is to know the flock under your care.

1. Pray daily through the church directory.
2. Be hospitable.
3. Set a goal of having at least one meaningful spiritual conversation with every sheep in an 18 month period.
4. Meet the sheep as they come in by participating in the new members' class.

These are some possible applications. There are many others. But basically, know the sheep and care for them.

Congregation: Trusting in the Lord's working, we have called these men to be shepherds over us. This means each of us who are members of this flock... must happily put ourselves *under* their care.

Sheep are notoriously skittish and wandering animals. Each of us must vow not to let that be us, or at least to know that about ourselves. We must fight against those wondering tendencies by happily and humbly accepting their pastoral oversight.

If you're a member of the flock called FBC... submit to these men and all your pastors as God calls you to. **Heb. 13:17**—“*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*” Your spiritual advantage or profit lies in your submitting to and obeying your spiritual leaders. In calling these men to be elders, you're not only saying that you think they're qualified to lead but that you also will submit to their leadership.

If you're here and you're a Christian but you're not a member of a church... we welcome you to join with the flock called FBC. I trust you see that it's God's will that you place yourself in the care of His shepherds. God does not intend for any single sheep He purchased with His Son's blood... to wander through life without a shepherd. He intends to protect His investment by placing you in the flock and giving you shepherds to watch over you. So consider joining the church as submission to the will of the Chief Shepherd for your life. For the flock and the shepherds are His ideas for caring for you. If you have questions about church membership, consider attending our next new members' meeting Oct. 11-12... or see one of the elders or church staff after the service. We'd be happy to

III. The Attitude

Finally, Peter instructs us in terms of our attitudes as shepherds. First take note of the word “serving” in verse 2. Shepherds are servants. It's a strange coupling of words, “serving” and “overseer.” We don't think of serving as consistent with leadership. We don't think of overseeing or ruling or leading as serving. But that's how it is in God's economy.

Serving without overseeing is neglect and confusion. Overseeing without service is abuse and tyranny.

Your oversight of the flock is your primary service. Taking the reigns of leadership is not inconsistent with true humility. So, don't shrink back from the mantle of leadership, from oversight, because you think that it's more humble or more gentle. Lead like Christ's men. Be servant leaders.

There are four things here for keeping service and leadership joined at the hip like Siamese twins as an elder.

First, take the reign of oversight willingly. Look at the middle of verse 2—“*not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.*” Don't enter this labor because you feel forced or coerced. Don't do it because someone has convinced you with some pressure or promises. Don't do it because you fear no one else will.

Do it because you want to. That's the first qualification for the office of elder listed in 1 Tim. 3. “If a man desires to be an overseer, he desires a noble or good thing.” Notice that divine approval is expressed over that desire. First Timothy 3:1 says, “*he desires a noble or good task.*” And right here in 1 Peter 5, we're told that God wants you to be willing shepherds. It is God's desire or will for you to serve willingly, joyfully, and He approves of his elders serving that way. So take the reigns willingly.

Remember: A reluctant servant is a contradiction in terms. It's kinda like a “dating nun.” That's not the way it's supposed to be.

Second, serve the sheep eagerly and selflessly—“not greedy for money, but eager to serve.”

There are men in the world who see the church and God's flock with dollar signs in their eyes. They drive Bentleys and Rolls Royces and live in mansions off the offerings of God's people... while God's people scrape by from paycheck to paycheck and worse. As the Bible says, “their god is their belly.”

We know this is not your heart or your motive. You are men who time and again demonstrate your selfless, sacrificial love, and eagerness to give. Your lives are reflections of the Bible's teaching—“It's better to give than to receive.”

So as you come into the office of elder... come eager to serve. Continue to shepherd God's people by giving yourself to Christ and to them in eager service. Cast off all reluctance. And stir your fellow elders up to greater eagerness and selflessness in service.

Third, set an example for the flock. Peter repeats here what he learned from Jesus. Servant leaders do not "lord it over" others like unbelievers. They remember: He who would be greatest of all must be servant of all.

The way to defeat the temptation to rule like a tyrant... is to dedicate yourselves to setting an example for the believers. Setting an example means:

- You must be visible to the flock so they can see and copy your life. Don't hide your light under a basket. As our leaders, come out, shine, and be seen.
- You must be accessible. A shepherd should smell like the sheep. He should be among the people... walking in their midst. Ed Clowney: "Sheep cannot be managed by telecommunication." We can't phone or text this in on the Blackberry.
- You must live the way, as Christ's under-shepherds, you want and hope God's people would live. Make Paul's words your motto: "Follow me as I follow Christ." We are calling you as elders because your lives are more eloquent than your words.

If I had to think of one way of summing up your role as an elder... a good candidate would be "set an example." It's the quality most needed by God's people from God's shepherds.

Book mark illustration.

- **1 Timothy 4:12**—Regarding older members... *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity."*
- **Titus 2:7-8**—Regarding young men... *"In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned...."*
- **Phil. 3:17**—*"Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."*

- **2 Thess. 3:7-9**—Hard work... *“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.”*
- **Hebrews 13:7**—Written directly to members... *“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”*

Be the kind of shepherds who watch over the flock and lead the sheep willingly, eagerly wanting to serve, and as examples to follow.

Does that sound hard or difficult? It is.

Do you feel like you’re not sufficient for these things?

The Apostle Paul didn’t feel sufficient for them either. And we’re not sufficient. But it’s God at work in and through you. He called you to the task and He will supply all the grace necessary.

And more than that.

Fourth, do this work knowing the great reward that is coming to you. Did you know that the elder’s life is a rewarded life?

There is the joy that comes in this life as we see the sheep grow and blossom. But there is also the promise of verse 4. “When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

Serve the Lord with gladness. Shepherd the sheep eagerly and willingly. Work to be an example. Because in the end, you will be rewarded among God’s people and share in the Jesus’ glory when He appears.

What other job promises such a reward? Is there a greater calling to give your life to? Look to Jesus’ coming and your reward.

In that day the Lord himself will be your reward and crown. **Isaiah 28:5**—
*“In that day the Lord Almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath
for the remnant of his people.”*

Rev. 22:12—*“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will
give to everyone according to what he has done.”* For you, it will be a
crown of glory... because you have done the work of the Chief Shepherd.
Rejoice and serve.

LET’S PRAY.