

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

How People Change – Part XI

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1 Peter 5:1-4

March 13, 2016

Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 5. We are continuing our topical series and planning to end next week, on Palm Sunday. The topic we've been considering is 'How People Change', and asking the question: *Why is it that we don't change as Christians?* Why are we not making the progress that we ought to make? And we've been looking at a number of passages in the New Testament that address that issue. One of the things that we've seen consistently, as we've looked at passage after passage, is that if we are really going to grow in grace the way that the Lord wants us to, if we're going to make maximum progress in the Christian life, it is very important, it is essential that we are engaged in redemptive relationships. The New Testament pictures people growing to be like Jesus in community. That it really is a community project, our sanctification. All the 'one anothers', and we've seen that in Ephesians, and the other passages, Colossians, we've looked at.

So last week we turned to a slightly different emphasis, continuing that same thought process that we need to be involved in redemptive relationships. Remember redemptive relationships are relationships with other Christians in which we are intentional in wanting to help one another to be more like Jesus. Be prayerful, ready to receive encouragement and instruction, and also ready to offer that when the Lord makes it clear we have something to give. As Ted read earlier, before the service started, to consider how to provoke one another to love and good works. We are supposed to do that, and that is what redemptive relationships are. We are trying to provoke one another, to stimulate one another to love and good works.

Well, last time we started looking at a particular redemptive relationship in the life of the Church that is essential for us, and that is the redemptive relationship of the Christian with the Elders in his church. And so the theme of the sermon this morning is in order to change, that is to grow in Christ's likeness, to make the maximum progress, we all need to be shepherded, we all need spiritual oversight and encouragement from godly leaders. This is the clear and consistent teaching of the Bible. This is the clear and consistent teaching of the New Testament.

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Last week we looked at Acts 20, where we saw the urgency that the apostle Paul felt for the Ephesian church, to exhort their Elders to shepherd them well. When you read Acts 20:17-38, you see the life and death urgency on the part of the apostle Paul. This idea of spiritual oversight of the Church is something that is essential. It may not be something we see commonly in practice, but that doesn't mean that it is not biblical. We constantly see things that we need to change, and how we need to reform, and this concept has been something that has been working on us, the Scripture's teaching, working on us particularly as Elders in this church. So the teaching is, to be what the Lord wants us to be, we need to be shepherded. Look with me at 1 Peter 5, another passage that points out the essential nature of spiritual oversight for the Christian. There the apostle Peter writes in Verse 1:

1 Peter 5:1-4 ~ 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, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we ask that You, by Your Spirit, might work in our hearts, in our minds, and in our lives, that which is pleasing to You. For the glory of Your Son, we pray in His name, Amen.

To be what the Lord wants me to be, I need to be shepherded, I need spiritual oversight in my life. It shows why church membership, and church involvement, is so important. We need that relationship. Now this shepherd and sheep image is the paradigmatic, or the paradigm relationship, of all of Scripture for God's relationship with His people, and I want to walk you through that. I want you to turn with me back, we see it way back in Genesis, in Genesis 48:15, where Jacob, nearing the end of his life, blessing Joseph and his two sons, begins his blessing in Verse 15. He says this:

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Genesis 48:15 ~

He blessed Joseph, and said,

“The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,

The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,

And then he continues to bless the two boys. God has been his shepherd all his life. That is his testimony. “All of the meandering paths that my life has taken, God has been my shepherd.” We could go a number of places, but for the sake of time, let’s go to the Psalms. Psalm 23, of course, one of the most often cited, favorite passages in all of Scripture.

Psalm 23:1-3 ~

1 The LORD is my shepherd,

I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

3 He restores my soul;

He guides me in the paths of righteousness

For His name’s sake.

“The Lord is my shepherd. Yahweh is my shepherd.” God had David pen those words. Psalm 78, just turn over to Psalm 78:52-53. Here the psalmist writes about what the Lord did in the nation of Israel, when He led them out of Egyptian bondage. Verse 52:

Psalm 78:52 ~

But He led forth His own people like sheep

And guided them in the wilderness like a flock;

Psalm 80:1, the psalmist prays to the Lord:

Psalm 80:1 ~

Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel,

You who lead Joseph like a flock;

Psalm 95:7, after Verse 6, a familiar verse:

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Psalm 95:6-7 ~

***6 Come, let us worship and bow down,
Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.***

***7 For He is our God,
And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.***

Turn a page over to Psalm 100:3.

Psalm 100:3 ~

***Know that the LORD Himself is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.***

The theme of shepherding is one that runs also through the narrative history of Israel. Jacob and his sons were shepherds, remember? That's why the Egyptians didn't want them to be with them. Shepherds were detestable to the Egyptians and so Joseph said, "Be sure, Dad, when you go in to talk to Pharaoh that you remind him that you are a shepherd, because basically he is going to want you to live far away from him up in the land of Goshen. That is a better place spiritually for you to be."

What about Moses? Where did God find His leaders, His great leaders of the people? Moses was tending sheep in the land of Midian, shepherding, when God called him to shepherd His people. What was David doing? David was a shepherd boy when God called him to be the king. God loves the image of shepherding, and I would submit to you that He created sheep for the particular purpose of illustrating what He wants His relationship with His people to be. I don't think it was an afterthought. He is not like you and me. I often do my best puns by accident. Do any of you have that gift? You say something and you go, "That was a pun. That was really clever. I wish I had thought of that." It just comes out accidentally. The Lord never has a moment like that. He didn't create sheep and say, "Wow, that was really great. I wish I had thought of that. They are just like people." He created sheep to say, "This is what My people are like," and sheep need to be shepherded, and it never changes. They don't get to a certain age and no longer need a shepherd. They always need a shepherd. And the smarter a sheep gets, and that is not very smart, the more he knows how much he needs a shepherd. Complete dependence.

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It is a beautiful image and yet it is a very humbling image. It is humbling in that it tells us that we are helpless like sheep, that we are not that bright spiritually, as we ought to be. But it is a beautiful image in that it shows us that God wants a relationship with us in which He wants us to be continually dependent upon Him. He is not telling us how to live and we just go off and do it. He wants us to live moment-by-moment in communion with Him. And Jesus illustrated that God was His shepherd, the amazingness of this, that the eternal Son of God, living as man, lived with the Father as His shepherd, in dependence upon the Father. That is why He was praying all the time, because He wasn't using His own power, and His own glory. Those things were veiled. He was depending on the Holy Spirit, given to Him by the Father, to do the miracles. He was living as true man and so this image of shepherd, God says, "This is the relationship I want with you."

This is what changes the way we see our adversities. You know we would really like, at least I think this is true of all of us, I know it's true of me, I'd like everything to go well every day. You know sometimes I don't plan my day out, but I have in mind what I want to have happen. I want that light to stay green until I get there. Isn't it amazing how sometimes when you are not in a hurry they are all green, green, green, green, green? And when you are in a hurry, red, red, red, red. Well, the Lord is sovereign over that, and one of the things I think He's doing, well He's always doing this, in all of our moments, is teaching us that if everything was green all of the time, and everything was working all of the time, we would not remember how much we need Him. So our adversities are His loving reminder to look to the shepherd. They are Him inviting relationship. He loves us so much He'd rather have us in relationship to Him in difficulty than everything going well, missing relationship with Him. And He is so kind because He knows, because He made us, and not we ourselves, He knows He made us to need Him more than anything. So the most loving thing He can do is remind us of how much we need Him.

This is His relationship with His people and we see that, as the Old Testament continues to move on, I'm going to mention some passages that you can look at later—Isaiah 40:10-11, Ezekiel 34:11-15, Micah 5:2-5. What happens is the Old Testament continues to move on, basically God has said, "I am the shepherd of My people, but My people, to have a real relationship with Me, something has got to happen. I've got to send a Messiah, I've got to send a shepherd to shepherd My people, to bring them into relationship, a true shepherd/sheep relationship." So the Messianic hope, the hope of the King to come, is that He will be the shepherd, and

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you see that in those passages I just mentioned—Isaiah 40, Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 23, Micah 5:2. That is one of the verses we often hear at Christmas time.

Micah 5:2 ~

***“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.”***

And in Verse 4 it says, “He will shepherd My people. The one who comes will be the one who finally brings Yahweh’s shepherding love relationship to the sheep that need a shepherd.” And that is the refrain throughout the prophets, “A Messiah is coming. The shepherd is coming.”

And so then we get into the Gospels, and we read Matthew 9:36. Jesus, with the disciples, looks out upon the crowds of people, and He sees them, and He felt compassion because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. The shepherd heart beating for these helpless sheep. And then that wonderful announcement of the arrival of the shepherd. When Jesus says in John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd. I lay down My life for the sheep.” So this relationship of shepherd with sheep, this is foundational to who we are, and we all need Jesus as our shepherd. And then Jesus, in His wisdom of how to maintain that relationship with us as our true shepherd, as we read in our passage in 1 Peter 5, the chief shepherd has appointed under-shepherds. He prophesied this in Jeremiah 23:4, 600 years before the birth of Christ, Jeremiah writes:

Jeremiah 23:4 ~ I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the LORD.

God will raise up shepherds under the good shepherd. And so Peter, in 1 Peter 5, our passage which was basically our launching point. We are not really going to exposit that passage, it is our point of departure for a thematic study of shepherding. Peter says, “I’m your fellow under-shepherd.” Peter says, “I’m an Elder, you’re an Elder, this is your responsibility—shepherd.” The one imperative in that passage we read, there is one, and it is—shepherd. Shepherd the flock. Do the work of a shepherd. So what does it mean to shepherd sheep? That is the

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question we want to consider today. What we see is that there are really four things that shepherds are called to do. So for me and you to be all that God wants us to be, we need shepherds in our lives that will do these four things for us. What is the first thing? The first thing is we need shepherds to *Feed* us. Four words, the first word, *Feed*.

1) Feed:

John 21:15-17, after the resurrection of Jesus. Do you remember when the disciples see Him on the seashore, they are out in the fishing boat, and He has a conversation with Peter. In Verse 15:

John 21:15 ~ So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus *said to Simon Peter,...

Remember Simon had denied Him three times and here the loving shepherd recalls Peter three times. He says:

John 21:15-17 ~ “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He *said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He *said to him, “Tend My lambs.” 16 He *said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He *said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He *said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” 17 He *said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus *said to him, “Tend My sheep.

The first and last phrases translated ‘*tend*’ really would be better translated ‘*feed*’. Feed my lambs, the verb is ‘*bosco*’, it means ‘*to feed*’. What you do as a shepherd, when you are tending your sheep, is you make sure they eat. You lead them to pasture. And so He begins with, “Feed My lambs,” and He ends with, “Feed My sheep,” and in the middle is, “Shepherd My sheep,” a more general term for all of these other things that we’re talking about. The shepherd is called to feed the sheep. To feed the sheep means to feed them the word of God, because that is what sheep live on, that’s what human beings live on.

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I mentioned earlier that Jesus lived as a true man, a perfect life. He didn't use His divinity to sort of jump over the hurdles of temptation. He fought the battles and won every single one. When Satan came to Him after He had been fasting for 40 days, He was at His weakest point physically, most vulnerable. Satan said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, make these stones turn into bread." And Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." He said, "Listen, I am true man, and what I live on is not so much My physical food. Man lives on the word of God." So that is why feeding the sheep is so important. Titus 1:9, where the apostle Paul counsels Titus, the young pastor, how to build the church. He says, "You must raise up Elders who are able to exhort in sound doctrine."

In fact, that phrase '*sound*' is an interesting word to study particularly in the three epistles that are called 'The Pastoral Epistles'—1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. They are called '*pastoral epistles*' because they, unlike the other epistles, these epistles were written to individual pastors, not the church they pastor. Timothy 1 and 2, Titus. So when you read those pastoral epistles, you find this word '*sound*'. It occurs nine different times, it is '*sound teaching*', '*sound words*', '*sound doctrine*'. The emphasis is to teach sound doctrine, speak the things that are fitting for sound words. '*Sound*' over, and over, and over again. Teaching, preaching, speaking. The word '*sound*' actually is from the Greek verb '*hygiainō*'. We transliterate this word '*hygiainō*' into English as '*hygiene*'. So '*hygiainō*' meant '*to be healthy*'. And so sound doctrine really means healthy doctrine, sound words, healthy words. The same way we use the word '*hygiene*' is '*that which promotes health and wellness*'. So Paul is saying, "What you've got to do to keep the sheep on the right track is feed them, and make sure they are healthy, feed them healthy doctrine." So many of the problems that we see in our own lives is because we become emaciated. We are sick because we are not eating. And so God takes very seriously a failure to feed the sheep, and the Elders are called to feed the sheep. That is the first thing. We need people who will feed us. But there are four things, I've said, the first is *Feed*.

2) Know:

The second is, the Elders are called to *Know* the sheep. John 10:14, this is 'The Good Shepherd' passage. Jesus twice says, "I am the good shepherd." Verse 11:

John 10:11 ~ "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

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Verse 14.

John 10:14 ~ I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,

One of the most beautiful things about being a sheep of God's is He knows you. And look what He says in Verse 3, as He introduces this topic of the good shepherd. He says in Verse 3 in John 10, speaking of the shepherd of the sheep.

John 10:3 ~ To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name...

The characteristic of Jesus is He knows His sheep. He calls you by name, it is not a general sense that He knows you. He knows you individually. And so the implication is that the under-shepherds are called in the same way, to be like Jesus. They are called to feed like Jesus fed and they are called to try to know in the same way, not to the same level of course, only Christ can do that, but to know. To be a shepherd means to know your sheep. Elders need to work at the relationship with their sheep.

Now let me tell you, as we've considered these things in the last year at Providence, we've been praying over this. We had a retreat in the fall, spent a lot of time talking, and praying through these things, reading materials that help us get into the Scriptures. We decided that what we needed to do is to divide the sheep, the members, among the seven Elders that we have. And so actually the way we've done it is we divide all the people in the church among the six Elders, except for myself, and my responsibility is to shepherd the six Elders and to help them in shepherding all the other sheep. But that the six Elders then, each of the families, each member in the church, their family is assigned to a shepherd, and that way that shepherd knows these are the people that I'm to know, to get to know, I'm to pray for, I'm to try to watch over and look after. And what that's going to look like, we're working that out. It means there will be a system of regular shepherding contacts. It probably will involve phone calls since we live in an age when you can use the phone. In days where we all walked everywhere, where you lived in the same village, it was different. House visitations were easier. There'll be some of that, I'm sure, but it's probably going to be a lot of telephone calls. So what will happen is if you're a member of the church, your Elder may have already contacted you, or he will be, and then he'll be making some regular contact with you.

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Now, when that happens, you need to realize it doesn't mean that you've done something bad. "You've been reported." No, it just means that this is part of what we feel like we're called to do is to check in and see how things are going. And a lot of times it'll be, "I'm calling just to make a regular shepherding call. How are you doing? How are the family members doing? What can I pray for? How can I help? Is there anything I can help with?" That's what will be happening. And we need that, and we all need to be looked after. In fact, even though I'm looking after the six, a couple of them will be looking after me too, because we all need to be shepherded.

Now, I remember reading some years back a study of the University of Tennessee. I was getting ready to do a series on Elders maybe seven or eight years ago, and this shepherding image, I was thinking about it, and I pulled up some stuff online at the University of Tennessee in the School of Agriculture about shepherds, about caring for sheep. I think they were doing it a little differently. In America you don't see people walking in front of a flock of sheep. They're usually in a fence or whatever, but so many of the principles still apply. And one of the things that I was reading, and there was no Christian thing about this, but they were saying that if you have a flock of sheep, what you're going to have to do is periodically you need to just kind of wrap your arms around the sheep and feel underneath the fur. This is the University of Tennessee saying sheep have not fur but wool, and so they're fluffy, and so you can't tell how thin that sheep is unless you feel of it. And this is what they went on to say.

You're going to often find that the sheep will be really thin, and what's happened is the sheep has forgotten to eat. You put all the food out there, but it's just a common fact that sometimes sheep will just forget to eat. I wish I had that problem. Physical food I'm really good at remembering. Spiritual food though, that's true of us. We forget to eat. And so we need someone that'll just be there kind of checking on us. "How are you doing?" In 1 Peter 5:3, he says that we're to prove examples to the flock. He says, "Not lording it over those allotted to your charge." The idea is that I think you see in that phrase even, the idea that the Elders of a congregation would allot the sheep and give charge over certain sheep to certain Elders. So shepherds feed and shepherds know. Thirdly, shepherds are called to protect the sheep.

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3) Protect:

Not just to feed, not just to know, but to protect. We spend a lot of time on this last week, so I'm going to be kind of brief on this. This is what Acts 20:28 was all about. In fact, let's turn to that passage just for a moment to refresh our memories. This is where Paul is talking to the Ephesian Elders, the Elders of the church of Ephesus, and he's showing even in a church like Ephesus where he had spent three full years of faithful ministry, the apostle Paul, that they needed Elders who were going to be vigorous to guard them spiritually.

Acts 20:28 ~ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

The apostle Paul's urgent call to the Ephesian Elders to watch over themselves and the flock. The idea is false teaching is deadly, and false teaching is something that has always plagued the church. If you read church history, you read the history of false teaching assaulting the church. In fact, you read in the New Testament and you see it already happening in the New Testament. I mean how many of the epistles you will hear them saying, "Don't listen to those who are saying this." John in 1 John says, "I tell you that many antichrists have already gone out into the world." Jesus has risen and ascended 40 or 50 years before this, and he says already antichrists are coming.

Paul in 2 Corinthians says that Satan is disguising himself as the angel of light through the false apostles and false teachers. The urgency of sound doctrine is just underscored, and that's why I mentioned Titus 1:9 that an Elder is to be someone who's able to exhort in sound doctrine. The next thing Paul says is he's to be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. The Elder is to protect the sheep.

I remember reading in another one of the books on shepherding, a theologian writing this in a hundred-year-old book, and he was talking about the testimony of shepherds in Palestine, that shepherding involves making sure the sheep are eating

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the right thing. That's where you're walking around, they're following you to pasture, and you've got to make sure when you get them in an area, that there's nothing poisonous around, because sheep will eat, get sick, and die, and other sheep will walk up, and start eating, and get sick, and die. And other sheep will like step over the dead bodies to eat, to get sick, and die. So that's why you have to have them in a fence or you've got to be constantly vigilant. That's what we're like, and so we need to be protected. And the fact is he said to the Ephesian Elders, "Some of you, even the leaders, the danger is that *you* will turn away." We all need to be shepherded. So shepherds feed the sheep, they know the sheep, they protect the sheep, and fourthly, they're called to lead the sheep.

4) Lead:

Turn back over to John 10. We saw this in 1 Peter when he says, "Be examples to the flock," but I want to show you in John 10 where we see how Jesus leads the sheep. Verse 27:

John 10:27 ~ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

Jesus' call was always, "Come follow Me." In fact, in Verse 3 He said:

John 10:3 ~ To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

The sheep know the voice of the shepherd and they follow him. And so the idea is that sheep are led, not driven. The shepherd walks in front of the sheep. That's different than cows, different than horses. The sheep follow the shepherd. That's really something that's fascinating. Given that they're not the brightest animals, that's pretty impressive. They follow. In fact, another account that I read about, a man was observing some sheep in Palestine. He sees two shepherds with their flocks walking behind them, and the two shepherds go up, "Hey, how are you doing?" They hadn't seen each other in a while and they're asking, "What's going on? How's the family?" It's that kind of conversation happening, and as that's happening, the sheep mingle together. So you've got two flocks joined together, and you're like, "How in the world are they going to tell which belongs to who? You're going to count afterwards?" "I've got all I'm supposed to have. Have you got all you're supposed to have?" There was no counting. All they did was basically made their call and walked in separate directions, and the flocks followed

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the shepherds. That's the beauty of how God has made a sheep. Sheep are led, not driven. They're not to be chased. People have found out you can raise sheep with sheepdogs, but sheep really are meant to be led by a shepherd.

In fact, an interesting account of this is in Timothy Witmer's book *The Shepherd Leader*. He said: *The story is told about a group of tourists in Israel who had been informed by their Israeli tour guide. Now, get the picture. They're on a tour bus and their Israeli tour guide has told them after observing a flock and its shepherd, that shepherds always lead their flocks from the front. He told his attentive listeners that they never drive the sheep from behind. A short time later they drove past a flock along the road where the shepherd was walking behind them. The tourist quickly called his attention to this and he stopped the bus to step out and have a word with the shepherd.*

You've got the picture. This shepherd is walking behind the sheep. *As he boarded the bus he had a sheepish grin on his face and announced to his eager listeners, "That wasn't the shepherd. That was the butcher."* The sheep aren't going to follow the butcher. He better drive. They don't have a relationship with the butcher, but they have a relationship with the shepherd, and so they follow. And so Jesus leads us that way, and that's why Paul as an under shepherd would say to the Corinthian Church in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Follow me as I follow Christ." That's how leadership is to happen in the body of Christ. In a sense, we're all to shepherd one another, aren't we? Aren't we all called to say that to everyone that we know? "Follow me as I follow Christ. I'll follow you as you follow Christ. Let's follow Christ together."

This is why the primary requirements for shepherds, Elders, Deacons as well, are spiritual character qualities. It's not a matter of how many years in business or what degree you have. That's not it at all. When you look at 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, what you see are godly character qualities. This is what the shepherds are to be. The sense is they are men who are making progress in following Jesus, and others can follow them as they follow Jesus. They're to be examples to the flock, 1 Peter 5:3, not lording it over, but being examples. That is that in our personal walk with Christ, and our church involvement, and the shepherding of our families, we are called to be leading the way.

Now, this idea of leadership though, also entails this issue of authority, and this is something again where we have to look at the New Testament and what the Bible teaches rather than what seems natural to us, because we live in a very anti-

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authoritarian culture. And sometimes when you've got really bad authority, it seems to make sense, but God works through authority. I mean, He's the one who instituted the family and made the husband the head of the wife. He's the one who instituted the family and tells children to obey their parents in the Lord. He makes that the fifth Commandment. It's the first Commandment on the horizontal table. Remember there are Ten Commandments. Aren't you glad you came today? You now know that. But it doesn't break down into five and five. It breaks down into four and six. The first four Commandments are about our relationship with God. *You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol. You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain. You shall remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.* Those are the first four, and then the second six are going to govern all of our relationships with other people. And I would have started with, "You shall not murder," but the Lord starts with, "Honor your father and your mother." That's where He starts, and then He comes up with, "You shall not murder." There's something powerful about our understanding of authority.

This is why Hebrews 13:17 is kind of a striking verse. We're told there in Hebrews 13:17 that we are to obey our leaders and submit to them. There are two imperatives, obey and submit to our leaders, as those who watch over our souls and must give an account for us. So there is this element of authority, that we're to have a disposition to submit to one another, which really we're to have the disposition to submit to other Christians in general, Ephesians 5:21 says, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. That's part of being filled with the Spirit. But this idea of authority is something that we really need to consider, and this is one of the reasons we need to be members of a church too, because we all need to be under authority. When you're out from under authority, you're exposed. And when you're under authority, you're in authority.

There's something that's really powerful in one of the accounts of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Matthew. A centurion comes up to Jesus and asks Him to heal his servant. The centurion is a Gentile and he's asking Jesus to come heal his servant, and Jesus says, "Okay, I'll come with you," and the centurion says, "No, please don't come with me. I don't want to trouble You that much. Just say the word and he'll be healed, because I too am a man under authority." You would expect him to say, "I too am a man in authority," because what he says right after that is, "I say to this man, 'Go,' and he goes. I say to this man, 'Come,' and he comes." But he didn't say *in authority*, he said *under authority*. Why? Because when you're under authority, you're in authority.

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When the Roman centurion says to one man, “Go,” if that man doesn’t obey the Roman centurion, it’s as if he’s not obeying Caesar himself if the centurion is under authority. And he realized that Jesus the Messiah was under the authority of the Father, and therefore had all of the access to do whatever He wanted to do. So authority is important. We need to be under authority.

Now, authority is balanced and it’s checked, and we’re supposed to test authority. Test everything and hold to that which is good, 1 Thessalonians 5. We’re also told in Acts 17:11 that the Bereans were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true. Well, if Paul needed to be checked out by the word of God, certainly everybody in authority needs to be checked out by the word of God.

So there is this balance, but for us, we need to understand there’s this call to be under authority. We all need to be under authority. That’s why for me one of the great liberating moments in my life was when we were able to establish Elder leadership in this church, and I was able to then be under authority, the authority of the other Elders. It was freeing for me, and I know Patti, part of her testimony and just the joy of being a pastor’s wife is when that happened, how freeing it was for her. “My husband’s under authority.” Everybody underneath your authority is blessed when you’re under authority.

Now, how do we exercise authority? We’re supposed to be like Jesus. We’re supposed to shepherd like Jesus. How did Jesus exercise authority? In Matthew 20:25-28, He says to His disciples, He’s telling them how to shepherd, and He says:

Matthew 20:25 ~ “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.

The idea is a reigning over them.

Matthew 20:26 ~ It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become first among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be great among you shall be servant of all; 28 for the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

The one who is the greatest is the one who served everyone, so that the essence of leadership, the essence of shepherding leadership, is to be the servant of everyone.

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I was talking with my dad about this not too long ago, about the things that he learned in leading a company and working with people. The people that make the biggest difference in people's lives in leadership in business are people who serve their employees, who want to see their employees become successful. And when you have someone that you know cares about you and wants you to be a success, what do you do? It's easy to follow them, isn't it? And so it's a high calling for an Elder to realize that hey, it's not about meeting and having a board meeting, and making decisions, and then telling everybody, "Hey, you've just got to do what we said." No, that's not it at all. It's learning to serve Christ and be like Jesus, and serve everyone allotted to our charge, to be like Jesus in John 13. He washed His disciples' feet.

And that really brings us back, when you realize that shepherds are called to feed the sheep, they're called to know the sheep, they're called to protect the sheep, they're called to lead the sheep, that really the goal of all four of those aspects of shepherding is to see each sheep become more intimately and joyfully connected to the True Shepherd. That's the goal is that every believer would come to see the glory and sufficiency of Jesus Himself more wonderfully, more clearly. So all of our calling as Christians, in our families, what are we? We're shepherds. The dad's a shepherd of a flock. A mother is shepherding her children. We're all under-shepherds under Jesus. Older brothers ought to be shepherds over their younger brothers. That would honor Jesus.

So that means serve like Jesus. Be humble like Jesus, knowing that God is going to give you the grace. And the more you do that, the more impact you're going to make, and the more you're going to be like Christ, and the more you're going to make the Gospel visible and real. Because the essence of our message is that the God of glory who dwells in light inaccessible, holiness that we cannot imagine, the God of glory, He came all the way down into this sin-sick world and He was willing to serve to such a level that He came to the very bottom. That's the picture you see. Being made in the likeness of sinful flesh as an offering for sin, and He died a death, even the death of the cross, became cursed for us. That's the kind of God that we serve. That's the message that we have. That's the good news that we have, that God can take you and me from the mess that we're in, and He can save us because He's willing to do whatever was necessary, and His blood is sufficient payment for every sin that you ever have committed or ever will commit. So great a Savior is Jesus. So the Lord has called us to follow Him, and that means He wants us to do it every day, and that's the most wonderful thing in the world. There's no better place than to be following Jesus.

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Let's go to the Lord in prayer...

Father, we thank You for the wonder of how You have made us to be a people who need a relationship with You that is living moment by moment. We need to abide in Christ. For if we're on our own for a moment, Lord, we mess things up. And there are some here today who have not yet come to know You as their Shepherd. We ask that You would open the eyes of their hearts and grant them repentance and faith to trust that Jesus is worthy of their full surrender. There's no sweeter place to be in the world than submitted to Christ, because He is the Good Shepherd who loves His sheep, who knows His sheep, who cares for His sheep. And Father, help all of us who know Him and have heard His voice to be more attentive, more faithful, more trusting, and more joyful. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

"How People Change – Part XI"

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