

A Charge to Elders

I Peter 5:1-4

Main Idea: Because they serve under the Chief Shepherd, elders should eagerly shepherd from pure motives.

John 21 tells us that six of Jesus' disciples were together by themselves one evening after the resurrection, evidently with nothing to do. The disciple Peter said, "I'm going fishing." The others said, "We'll go with you." So they got into the boat and fished all night catching nothing. In the morning they saw a stranger standing on the shore who called to them, "Did you catch anything?" When they admitted that they hadn't, this stranger told them to throw their net out once more on the right-hand side of the boat and they would get some fish. They threw the net in and weren't able to bring it back into the boat because it had so many fish.

Peter immediately knew who the stranger was. It had to be Jesus! Peter threw off his outer garments and swam to shore to be with Jesus! Jesus fed the disciples breakfast and then turned His attention specifically to Simon Peter. "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Peter said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." Jesus said to Him, "Tend my lambs."

A second time Jesus asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter responded, "Yes Lord; You know that I love You." Jesus replied, "Shepherd my sheep."

A third time Jesus asked Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved that Jesus would ask him that question three times. He said to Jesus, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus answered him, "Tend my sheep."

As we come to the fifth chapter of I Peter, we see Peter as an old man who is no longer a fisherman, because Jesus changed him into a shepherd. From a lifetime of experience, this old shepherd gives an exhortation to other shepherds. Let's read I Peter 5:1-4 together.

"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 sordid 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." I Peter 5:1-4 NASB

In a letter addressed to the suffering church of Jesus Christ, scattered among many nations, Peter here turns his instruction to the leaders in that church. So this morning, the message from the Lord has special significance to those whom He has called into leadership here at Emmanuel. But notice that Peter didn't put I Peter 5:1-4 in a separate epistle to a select few leaders; rather he included it in the general epistle. So the instruction is not just for the leaders; there is also instruction for the congregation, the flock of God, in these verses.

As God addressed spiritual leaders throughout history, God's people could read those words and know which leaders were worthy of their confidence. For instance in Jeremiah 23, God says, "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture." God then condemns those who shepherded the Israelites by giving visions of their own imaginations from their dreams, saying that they had received a word from the Lord. God says about them, "I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit." So the people of Judah were warned to watch out for a prophet claiming to speak from the Lord, but who was speaking from a dream rather than from God's own Word.

In Ezekiel 34:2 we read, *“Thus says the Lord God, ‘Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?’*” God goes on to describe the ways that the shepherds in Israel were getting fat at the expense of the flock. So the people were wary of those leaders who got ahead by putting additional burdens on those whom they were purportedly leading.

In John 10, Jesus distinguished between the good shepherd who would give his life for the sheep and the hireling, the one who was in it for his own gain. The hireling would run when things got tough! So Jesus’ followers were able to understand who the True Shepherd was when Jesus gave His life for them.

So as we look at I Peter 5 this morning, I’d like to suggest to you that even if God has not called you into eldership, He would have you pay attention to understand His Word. Besides being able to recognize a shepherd in whom you can put your confidence, you should be able to apply the principles of service in this passage to yourself as you serve the Lord and His people. In this passage, the character of the shepherd, the elder is the focus. Let’s examine these verses a little more closely.

“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...” Peter didn’t exalt himself over the other elders by claiming his apostleship or his special relationship to Jesus Christ. He was a humble old man, identifying himself only as a *“fellow elder”* yet one who was confident that he too would partake in the glory of Christ.

His exhortation to his fellow elders was to *“...shepherd the flock of God.”* What does this metaphor mean in the church? What is it to shepherd the flock of God? I’m sure that his experience with Jesus by the side of the Sea of Galilee was in Peter’s mind as he wrote these words.

Two things are apparent from the encounter Peter had with Jesus at the Sea of Galilee. First of all, remember Jesus’ words, *“Feed my sheep.”* *“Feed MY sheep.”* Peter was to feed the sheep. But the sheep belonged to Jesus! Emmanuel Bible Church is a flock made up of Jesus’ sheep so the elders need to remember that, in the words of I Peter 5:2, they are to shepherd God’s flock.

Then the words Jesus chose to use in John 21 spoke about shepherding both lambs and full grown sheep. And the imperatives Jesus chose covered a variety of shepherding tasks. So here, certainly Peter was speaking about feeding the flock from the Word of God, of pasturing them, of leading them to drink, of giving them fodder. The shepherd is to promote the spiritual welfare of the flock of God, cherishing the flock and nourishing it, providing for the church’s needs.

Yet scriptural shepherding also includes protection of the sheep. The shepherd goes before the flock to meet the dangers himself rather than to allow the flock to be endangered. The flock will hear the voice of the true shepherd and follow him as he leads them. And the true shepherd will seek out those who have wandered astray.

But here Peter uses a curious description of the elder’s role. *“Shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight...”* The Bible speaks about the oversight role of the elder in governance terms, for instance, in Hebrews 13:17 and also in I Timothy 5:17. It is the job of the elder to *“rule”* or to *“govern”* in the church as they exercise oversight over the souls under their care. After all is said and done, they have to give an account to God for each soul under their care.

But note in our text that shepherding is the imperative. To give oversight in the church is a part of the job description that is secondary in the grammatical construction of the text. Shepherding is primarily about relationship, the relationship of the shepherd with the sheep. Remember again what Jesus said in John 10. The Good Shepherd loves the sheep so much that He gives His life for the sheep. His sheep hear His voice, and He knows them, they know Him, and they follow Him because they know His voice.

Rather than focusing on relationship, exercising oversight is predominantly about tasks. So Peter's words show that the relationship of the elder with the flock is what comes first. The elder is effective in exercising oversight only if the relationship component in shepherding is firmly in place.

As the elders exercise oversight, spiritual power in their ministry does not consist of the authority to pontificate or even to make important decisions. In fact, elders who haven't heard from the Chief Shepherd, yet render a decision or insist on their own opinions or agendas, are not serving as under-shepherds. They exalt themselves before others, diminishing in the flock's eyes the role of the Chief Shepherd.

This is one of the reasons that the Apostle Paul warns against appointing elders who are new converts (1 Tim. 3:6). If he is appointed to give oversight to the church, the immature believer easily becomes proud. It can easily go to his head and he falls to sin just as Satan himself did.

If Peter were standing here today, he would assure us that the Elder Board meeting is not where the priority ministry of shepherding is done at Emmanuel Bible Church. Rather, spiritual power in ministry is seen as the Spirit of God works through the elders to lovingly shepherd His flock.

For just a minute, let me directly address you whom God has called to eldership at Emmanuel. What kind of shepherd are you to those entrusted to your care? Are you careful what you feed them? Do you let them become prey to the wild beasts that would devour them? Do you bind the wounded? Do you lead them to pasture where they can rest? Do you lead them to the Living Water to quench their thirst? Or has exercising oversight gone to your head?

As the Apostle Peter tells the elders to shepherd, giving oversight to the flock, he speaks to character traits that the elders were to exhibit. Starting in the middle of verse 2, Peter gives three contrasts that define God's design for shepherding.

First he says that the elders are to shepherd *"not under compulsion but voluntarily according to the will of God."* There are some who have felt compelled to serve because they have been told, "It's expected of you. You are gifted to do it and you were elected to do it." There are also some who feel a compulsion to serve as elders because of a desire to have others think well of them. And one of the saddest things to see is a shepherd who feels compelled to serve because he is paid for his work and he is unsure of how he might make a living in some other way; he is really afraid to trust the Lord to supply for him.

Then there are those elders who serve voluntarily. They want to shepherd the flock, serving the Lord in the way that He has gifted them to serve. They choose to be obedient to His calling. And yet note that the text says, "...according to the will of God." Peter uses those words because there are some Christians who want to shepherd, but it's not God's will that they serve in this way. Their ministry would be ineffective because God has neither called them nor gifted them to shepherd, exercising oversight. So it is important that the elders at EBC shepherd *"...voluntarily according to the will of God."*

The next contrast is found at the end of verse 2, *"...not for sordid gain but with eagerness."* A synonym for "sordid gain" or "filthy lucre" in the KJV could be "dirty money." Often the world will caricature the Christian minister as a sleazy con artist, sticking his hand into the back pocket of the congregation by means of the church offerings. It's sad that because so many have gone into the ministry with base motives to take advantage of the flock, many Americans consider church leadership a pretty good racket to be in. It is not wrong to be paid for doing ministry, but payment should not be the elder's motivation. And certainly, how much he is paid should not motivate him in his ministry.

And then it is possible to be in the ministry for sordid gain without being paid in hard, cold cash. The elder might get

paid through the ego trip of exercising “spiritual authority” and receiving public attention and respect. He might get paid in being able to manipulate people and events to his liking or to his advantage. Just as are so many politicians in politics, the elder might be in the ministry for sordid gain because he gets paid in the power to push his agenda or his program. All of these are sordid gain! We are not to serve for sordid gain but with eagerness.

Let me again speak directly to those whom the Lord has called to eldership in this local body of believers. Are you eager to serve the Lord? A great picture of eagerness is the golden retriever, trembling in all its limbs as it waits for the ball or stick to be thrown. What is his motivation? What’s in it for him? Not sordid gain for sure! No, it is just that he can hardly wait, just for the joy of chasing down the stick you throw! Do you fit that picture of eagerness when you see an opportunity to shepherd? Or are you done with shepherding when there is no longer any gain in it for you?

Here are some good questions to consider. Do you feel underappreciated because you feel entitled to some form of gain, financial or otherwise, that you are not presently receiving? Does the flock see you as a giving shepherd or a taking shepherd? How does God see your heart? God sees clearly what motivates you. If you have no eagerness for shepherding when there is no longer any gain for you in that ministry, then face it, you are motivated by sordid gain.

The third contrast Peter gives is found in verse 3. **“...nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge but proving to be examples of the flock.”** Again, the office of elder is not a power office. You can’t lord it over sheep. I’ve tried to lord it over the sheep I had at our house to keep the pasture grass down, and it doesn’t work! Sheep just will not listen to you! Sheep will never march to the orders of even the most capable general. In fact the prophet Isaiah (53:6) says clearly that we all like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one of us to his own way. That is the nature of sheep.

The only way that a flock of sheep will move together safely is if the shepherd will walk ahead of them, by his example showing them the way. He shows them the safe path through the rocks and beside the cliffs. He is the one who leads them to quiet waters.

And so Peter tells the elders not to lord it over the flock but rather to lead by example. The elder should show by example what it is to submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ. He should show by example what it is to walk in the light. He should lead by example in a walk of faith. He should teach by example what the obedience of faith is. His life should show the good works that prove true repentance and faith toward God. He should show what love and forgiveness look like. He should be the one to show by example what faithful selfless service is all about. He should show what it is to be a living sacrifice by climbing off of the throne of His own life and climbing back on the altar. He should show what it is to worship God alone as Jesus is on the throne in all His life.

From the time I was a little child, I loved to watch my dad drive a stick shift car through the mountains of Venezuela. Using the clutch, the gears, the brake, and the gas pedal to control the power and speed of the car, and the steering wheel to control its direction, he would smoothly travel the mountain roads. I used to sit beside him trying to imitate all his movements as if I myself were driving the car. As I listened to the sound of the engine and saw the incline of the road and the tightness of the curve ahead, I would try to anticipate what Dad would do next to approach the curve at a safe speed and then power out of it.

One night when Dad and Mom were out, another missionary returned Dad’s car to the driveway in front of our house and handed me the keys. I thought, “It’d be fun to put this car into the garage!” So I balanced myself on the front of the bench seat so that I could reach the pedals, firmly holding myself there with the steering wheel. I pushed the clutch in with my tiptoes, started the car, put the car in first gear, and let the clutch out as I softly pressed the gas. The car safely entered the garage. That was fun!

So I decided to back it out and do it again. I did this several times until over my shoulder as I was backing out, I saw my

grandfather silhouetted in his window facing our house across the field. I quickly put the car back into the garage for the last time, climbing out the car window so that the inside light wouldn't show who had been driving. Then I went around the house climbing in the back window so he wouldn't see me going in.

Grandpa came over to our front door and asked, "Dan, was that you driving the car?" "Yes sir!" My grandfather walked back home and that's the last I ever heard about it! You see, Dad never explained driving to me but Grandpa could see that by example, Dad really had taught me how to drive. But notice that it took hours and hours and days of traveling together over the years with Dad faithfully giving me a good model to follow.

That is how an elder teaches the flock to follow Jesus Christ. The sheep watch his walk, day after day and year after year as he faithfully follows the Chief Shepherd! An elder shepherding at Emmanuel can explain over and over how to follow Jesus, but the way the flock will learn to walk in the light, following Jesus, is when the shepherd walks with the sheep, spending time with them, faithfully leading them by always pointing them to the Chief Shepherd.

Verse 5 says that when the Chief Shepherd appears, the elders will receive the unfading crown of glory. I don't know if it is a literal crown that the elders will put on their head, but I do know that God will crown them with His glory. Remember, Peter said in verse 1 that he was going to be a partaker of the glory that would be revealed.

The word translated crown here might be better understood as a wreath, like those who were winners in the Greek games would wear. Wearing the wreath was a glorious thing for the fastest runners or for the best fighters. But it was temporary glory at best. The wreath would always dry up and someone else might win the next time the victor was competing in the games. Of the thousands who were given the glorious wreaths of the victor, which one is still partaking in that glory today? Which one do we even remember? But the faithful under-shepherd is promised the unfading crown of glory!

Often shepherding in Jesus' flock is messy. Shepherds who love the sheep rarely come out unscathed. There is always a cost to serving Jesus. But those of you whom God has called to shepherding should take heart. "*When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*" That is God's promise to His faithful under-shepherds.

As we read the Scriptures we should always be looking at the "So what?" factor. So as we conclude this morning, we should ask, "So what? What difference does this message make?" What practical application can we draw?" Let's look at application for both the under-shepherds and for the flock.

First I want to speak to those who are elders or are aspiring elders to make sure of your calling:

- 1) Do you see yourself as a shepherd in the flock, or do you see yourself as an under-shepherd serving Jesus, the Chief Shepherd? How you view your role makes a tremendous difference in the way you will exercise oversight in God's flock at Emmanuel. Never forget that Jesus is the Chief Shepherd. He is the one who calls the shots and the buck stops with Him! All we elders do is take our orders from Him and let His life and His love flow through us to His sheep day after day and year after year!
- 2) Would you take some time to examine your motives for service? Ask God to reveal the motives of your heart to you. And look for objective evidences of your motives.
 - a. Are you serving because you feel compelled in some way other than by God, to serve? Or are you happily choosing to serve because you love the God who has called and gifted you to shepherd?
 - b. Are you serving for sordid gain, that is, what you get out of it, or is it because you are eager to serve? Or are you so uneager, that is, so reluctant that you resist even the compelling encouragement of others who see God's call and gifting in you?
 - c. Has your ministry been effective because as you relate to the sheep, the flock is following your walk? Or have you been content to specialize in fulfilling tasks or being perceived as an effective board member, contributing to good decisions? Remember, God has called you to be an example first of all!

- 3) Does your ministry measure up to Peter's standard? If you see failure in your shepherding, and every one of us fails, there is forgiveness in Jesus. Peter would encourage us in that because he experienced such forgiveness from Jesus.

Now for all the rest of God's flock at Emmanuel Bible Church, I have two main areas of application to point out to you.

- 1) Even if God has not called you specifically to shepherding as an elder at EBC, it is important to note that these same principles of service that Peter applies to elders hold true for any servant of the Lord. They apply to you in your service to the Lord and to His people.
- 2) The second point of application is that you would take note of your leaders. Recognize God's hand in appointing under-shepherds to lead you. That is His plan, His pattern for leaders. Jesus' life and His love for the sheep is shown through the under-shepherds. But when you see shepherds who serve unwillingly, that is, under compulsion; or when you see them in ministry for their own gain; or when you see that their ministry revolves around them, when it's all about them; then take heed.

But when you see leaders who eagerly choose to serve the Lord as under-shepherds of His flock, recognize that they serve according to the will of God. Then take note of their lives and follow them as they follow the Chief Shepherd. Learn from their example. Welcome them into your lives and walk with them in the light.

A Charge to Elders

I Peter 5:1-4

Main Idea: Because they serve under the Chief Shepherd, elders should eagerly shepherd from pure motives.

➤ V 1-2 – What does the shepherding metaphor speak about? How is exercising oversight part of shepherding well?

➤ V 2-3 – *Contrasts:*

- *“Not under compulsion but voluntarily according to the will of God.”*

- *“Not for sordid gain but with eagerness.”*

- *“Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples.”*

➤ V 4 – The reward from the Chief Shepherd

Application:

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

I Peter 5:1-4

Though this passage's emphasis is the charge to elders to shepherd for the right motives, the principles Peter teaches are great for anyone serving the Lord.

- *"Not under compulsion but voluntarily according to the will of God."*
 - What are some examples of "pressure" in ministry or towards ministry that don't come from God? How might you deal with them?

 - How does God want me to sense His call to serve Him? How is this related to the submission of my will to His?

 - What is guaranteed if we serve "according to the will of God"?

- *"Not for sordid gain but with eagerness."*
 - Give examples of what it might look like to do ministry for "sordid gain."

 - What characterizes good motivation toward service?

- *"Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples."* We all have some area of life in which God calls us to lead.
 - What is your leadership style in the areas of leadership into which God has put you?

 - How could you better focus on being the example instead of telling others what to do or how to do it?

- In what way does the "crown of glory" reward apply to you?