

Here / There - Leadership

Everyone follows someone. Students in a classroom listen to their teacher. Athletes on the field are instructed by their coach. Soldiers obey the orders of their commanding officers. Employees follow the direction of their bosses.

But even in environments where there is not a designated leader, we still follow someone. There are voices we listen to that influence what we say, what we do, what we wear, what we watch, what we think, what we eat and how we do our hair.

Even those who say they don't follow the herd. They're their own person, march to the beat of their own drum, still follow someone. Have you ever noticed how non-conformists all look the same? If you go to the right concert, you can see 5,000 unique individuals who all look like perfect clones of one another.

There's a mathematics professor at Brandeis University who's studied this phenomenon and he calls it the hipster effect. There are a number of social cues that people follow. Those who reject the mainstream follow the same alternative social cues and end up looking the same.ⁱ

A funny follow-up to this story is that when this story was first published the article featured as stock photo of a "handsome young man in trendy attire." A man reading the article recognized himself in the photo and threatened to sue for using his image without permission. It turns out he wasn't the man in the photo. He only looked and dressed like the man in the photo.ⁱⁱ

Everyone follows someone. That means we have to be very careful who we follow. And if everyone follows someone, that means, at some point, someone is following you. A child. A friend. A coworker. A neighbor. If someone's following you, you have to be very careful where we lead.

Our scripture this morning comes from 1 Peter 5. This is all about what kind of leadership we follow, especially in the church. This is one of the most significant passages on leadership on the Bible. This is right up there with Eph. 20, 1 Tim. 3, and Titus chapter 1.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

I. Who's Peter Writing To

The first thing we need to figure out is who Peter is writing to. When he says, "To the elders among you," who does he mean?

A. To the Elders.

First of all, I know it seems obvious, but he's writing to elders. He's writing to people who serve in the office of elder in the local church. He's writing to guys like Terry and Roy.

We know he's talking about the office of elder, because Peter uses three different terms interchangeably in this passage. First, he calls them *elder*. The Greek word here is *presbyter*. It's where the word Presbyterian comes from. Whatever the Presbyterian Church is or isn't today, the term is based on a style or structure of church leadership.

Originally, though, this was a Jewish term. An elder in the Jewish community was the family patriarch, the oldest male member of the family. As such he was the leader of the family which included his wife, any children still at home, unmarried adult daughters, their adult son's and their spouses, as well as their kids. When there was community decision to be made, all the elders of the community were called upon to make the decision. In the Jewish community, the leadership of the elders was based on age, wisdom, and experience.

This term was brought into the early church to describe the church's leaders. Again wisdom and experience are crucial, but the focus wasn't so much on physical age as it was spiritual maturity. This is why Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:6 that an elder is not to be a new Christian. So, Peter isn't looking so much at the birth date on your driver's license as he is the maturity in your heart.

The second word Peter uses here in verse 2 is *shepherd* or *pastor*. Both are based on the same word. Same concept. This was a farming term. We know what a shepherd is watching over their flock. Jesus uses this same word to describe his love and care for us. It's also the perfect picture of how the church's elders are to care for their flock. You may call me pastor, but I'm not the only shepherd. You see pastor isn't so much a title of a position, but a job description of a role.

Thirdly, Peter uses *overseer*. We find this in verse 2 where it uses the phrase "*watching over them.*" In the Greek, it's one word which means overseer. This comes from the Greek and Roman world. This was a manager or steward entrusted by the owner to oversee one of his enterprises. An overseer wasn't the owner, but they worked for the owner and answered to the owner.

This is Jesus' church. It's not my church, or Terry's church, or Roy's church, or any person's church. We are merely stewards who have been entrusted with leadership, and we will have to answer to him for what we do.

B. To those who are Older

So, Peter is writing to leaders who fill a specific office in the church, but I also think he's painting with a broader brush. I know I'm trying to have my cake and eat it too, but I also think that Peter is including those who are older in what he says here. Elder can be

an office, but it can simply refer to one who is older. Why do I say this, because down in verse 5 he addresses those who are *younger*. He's not talking about an office there. He's talking about age. He could also be talking about spiritual maturity.

But let me define this term *older*. One thing I've realized in recent years is older get older the older you get. Does that make sense? At our men's breakfast Tuesday, I think it was Jim Ray who said he could remember when 35 seemed ancient. Doesn't sound old anymore does it?

When Peter wrote this, the average lifespan was about 45. Certainly, there were those who lived to be in their 70s and 80's, but that was the exception. War, famine, sickness all took their toll. If you reached the age of 35 or 40 you were regarded as an elder. I'm sorry to burst your youthful bubble. But many of us here have reached an age in life, where God expects more of us. He's calling on you to show leadership, to demonstrate leadership qualities in your life. I think Peter would say to some of us, "It's time to grow up."

C. To All of Us

So Peter is talking to elders. He's talking to those who are older, but I also think Peter is talking to all of us. It's not just the church's leaders that need to understand their role and their calling. We all do. We are all called to submit and respond to the spiritual leadership of godly elders. We need to understand what they do.

Also, you may not be a leader now, but you may be some day. We have young men who will one day be shepherding this church, or another flock over which God makes them overseers. Additionally, whether or not you are ever an elder, we are all called to be leaders in our own spheres of influence. You can be a leader at work. You can be a leader in home, in your marriage, with your children. You should be a leader amongst your friends. There's a lot you can learn here about what Godly leadership looks like.

II. Reasons Not to Serve

Okay, now that we know that this subject of Godly leadership is important to all of us, what does Peter want us to understand about leadership? These four verses are a comparison contrast. You may have learned about this in a lit class or a communications course. This is classic comparison contrast. Not that, but this.

So, let's start with the reasons NOT to serve:

A. Not Out of Pressure.

First, a leader shouldn't serve because they feel pressured to serve. In verse 2, Peter says, "not because you must." We need to lead out of a sense of calling, not a sense of compulsion.

I've seen guys become elders for all the wrong reasons— Simply because they've been in the church for a long time. Because they are important in the community. Because they

run a successful business. Believe it or not, I've actually seen church make someone an elder so that they would come to church regularly. That's just messed up.

This needs to something God has placed on their heart. This calling won't always be a light shining down from heaven, but God speaks to your mind and places a burden on your heart for the wellbeing of the church. You see that you have the respect of others in the church. They come to you for advice. They seek out your wisdom. He sense God's hand of blessing on you and your ministry.

Let me say this to those of you in leadership or who have been in leadership. We all have times we don't want to serve. Moses wanted to go back to watching flocks. Elijah wanted to go hide in a cave. There are times we need a break. Even Jesus had to withdraw to a lonely place from time to time. I'm sure in some of those private moments, Jesus cried out to God, "Father, are you sure about these people? They're nuts. I'm not sure I can do this anymore."

There are times we say, "I'm done with leadership. I don't want to do it anymore." I get that. I've been there. I'll be honest with you. I've fought this a few times over the last couple of years.

Earlier this week Bing had this picture on their homepage, and my wife texted, "Is this your dream house?" Because there are times I want to get away from people. I don't want to be responsible for anyone anymore.

In those moments, it can be real easy to use this verse as a cop out. "You see, I'm not willing anymore. You can't pressure me. No arm twisting. I'm tapping out." The problem is if God has called you to be a leader, He's called you to lead. Being willing to serve means that we have willingness to respond to the call of God. It doesn't mean that we don't have a sense of duty. We do. It doesn't mean that we don't feel a certain pressure. Because we do. All of us, no matter how long we've been a Christian, as long as we are still HERE, until we get THERE, there will always be that sinful, selfish, fleshly part of us that wants to run from God's call, that wants to run from responsibility. So we will feel a pressure and a tension between those two sides of our nature.

Sometimes, God uses other people in our lives to give voice to His call, "We need you. What you do matters. What you do makes a difference." And yes, that puts a kind of pressure on you, but that can be a godly pressure, a godly calling. But when you reach point that the only reason you're doing it is merely a pressure to please other people that's a red flag. Serving under those conditions can be bad for both you and the church.

B. Not for Profit

Secondly, leadership is not for profit. Church leadership is no place for someone looking for personal gain. Peter says, "*not pursuing dishonest gain.*" This is a warning against placing greedy people in a place of leadership. No matter what their other qualifications may be, leadership is a position can be abused. Sadly many have over the years, from

money grubbing televangelists all the way down. I've known ministers who bilked church funds, who used church accounts for personal purchases. My dad had a guy who served on staff with him who used their church benevolence fund, money that was earmarked for helping the needy, he used it for years to buy new tires, pay for doctors' visits, to pay for appliances and other things.

C. Not for Power or Prestige.

Thirdly, Peter says leadership shouldn't be about power and prestige. In the beginning of verse 3 he warns against "*lording it over those entrusted to you.*" This is someone who uses leadership as a power trip. They love control. They love getting their way. Beware the person who throws their hat into the ring, so to speak, to push a personal agenda. We already have too much of that in politics; we need to be rid of it in the church.

I had a guy in one church who wanted to be affirmed as an elder, no kidding, so that he could push through a bunch of changes to the kitchen. We had this commercial quality kitchen and he wanted it to be his own personal fiefdom and to run it his way. He came to a couple of us on staff and wanted us to help him get put in on leadership so he could do this. And we said, "No, way." He didn't want the position to serve. He wanted the position to have power. Don't let that person anywhere near leadership.

Peter says we are not serving in leadership for earthly gain, whether its money or power. In verse 4 he says that *when the chief shepherd appears*, he's talking about when Jesus returns, *then we will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away*. Leaders don't serve for the reward HERE, but for the reward THERE.

III. Reasons to Serve

That covers the reasons NOT to be an elder, but what is a godly leader to DO.

A. Feed the Flock

Number one– Feed the flock. Verse 2 begins, *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care*. The word used here literally means to feed the flock. Think of what a shepherd did with sheep, he guided them to green grass and fresh water.

Our job as church leaders is first to feed you. This is why God's word will always be central to what we do as long as I'm pastor – shepherd. If I don't feed you a steady, healthy diet of God's word, it doesn't matter what else I do, I have failed as a shepherd.

Notice that our job is to feed you, not to entertain you, do everything for you, or cater to every whim and desire. It is to feed you and help you grow spiritually.

B. Oversee the Flock

Number two, godly leaders oversee the flock. In the middle of verse 2 Peter uses the phrase "watching over them." Remember, that's the word overseer. As I said before,

overseers were stewards or managers, often they were slaves themselves, entrusted with running the affair of the owner's enterprise while he was gone.

Elders do rule, and they do have authority. They do make decisions and guide the church, but they must do so as men who are under authority themselves. Their authority is a delegated authority. Elders are not dictators. They are not to be loose cannons. And the church is not their sandbox to play in.

I do believe the biblical model is an elder led church – A church led by a plurality of godly men. Let me also say this– I think our current model of an elder-deacon board comes more out of tradition from the 1940s, 50s and 60s, than it does Scripture. Someday we need to reconsider this approach. I do think it holds us back.

C. Be Examples to the Flock

Thirdly, elders are to be examples to the flock. Look at verse 3, “*Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*” Godly leaders provide an example that should be followed. Instead of forcing our will on them, we give them something they can aspire to. Those in leadership, regardless of whom you are leading, whether it's a church, a Sunday School class, and baseball team, a planning team at work, or your own family, those in leadership should leave faithful footsteps for others to follow.

IV. What Should You Do

I hope this gives you a greater understanding of what those in church leadership are called to do. I hope it gives you an appreciation for what they do and what they are dealing with. But what do you need to do. What is your take home from all this. Let me give you three things real quick.

A. Pray

Number one, pray for those in leadership. Pray for Roy. Pray for Terry. Pray for me. We have a high calling. We need your prayers.

B. Be Submissive

Number two, have a submissive attitude toward godly leadership. We aren't always perfect. We won't always make the best decision, but things go better when there is a submissive, responsive heart in the congregation. I'm taking a little bit from next week's sermon, but look at verse 5, “In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders.”

To constantly question, complain, criticize, and second guess everything that those in leadership do doesn't help the church, it doesn't reach lost, it doesn't make us more Christ-like. It just slows everything down and sucks the joy out of serving. Certainly, if there is sin in our life, confront us biblically. If there is something we're overlooking,

bring it up. If there is something that isn't going done, we'd appreciate your help. But this ship with go further faster if we're all rowing in the same direction.

You may not always agree, but that's okay. You can voice your disagreement lovingly and respectfully, but at the end of the day, be submissive. As a church leader, I can tell you that often we are privy to information and details that aren't publicly known. Sometimes we have to make decisions based on private information that we can't we tell you about. We try to be as open and transparent as we possibly can, but we can't always tell you everything. We need you to extend us some trust. I believe that God honors and blesses such a submissive Spirit. That is something He will reward.

C. Follow Their Example

Number three. Follow our example. If the church leader's job is to set an example, that means your job is to follow it. No, we're not perfect and you shouldn't mimic us in every way, but in so far as we follow Jesus, follow us.

I will leave you with these words from Hebrews 13:7:

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

You want Godly leaders who are willing to serve? Make their work a joy, not a burden.

ⁱ <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/613034/the-hipster-effect-why-anti-conformists-always-end-up-looking-the-same/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2019/03/11/hipster-effect-man-mistakes-photo-himself-article-mit-review/3129327002/>