

Today is a special day because we're placing before you, for your consideration, Dan Reid as a new elder here at CPC. This is the culmination of a year long process where Dan has met with our elders and watched us, and we've watched him, and we believe Dan is called and qualified to serve as an elder here. Many of you know Dan and Julie became a part of our community about five years ago. Dan serves as our Community Life Pastor and often preaches on all three campuses.

The way we do this here is before we appoint Dan to this role we announce this for two consecutive weeks and ask for your input. We take this appointment seriously and we want to hear any feedback you have about Dan becoming an elder. You can send your feedback to the email address on the screen or call one of our elders and talk in person; our phone numbers are on our website.

Now this may raise some questions in your mind such as: What is this thing called eldership? What is the role of an elder in a local church? How are you, a part of this congregation, supposed to relate to the elders here?

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: 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; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders (1 Peter 5:1-5a).

We've been looking at the first letter of the apostle Peter, written to the churches of Asia Minor. As we come to chapter five, Peter addresses this topic of eldership in the local church. And just so you don't check out on me for the next half hour, let me say this is relevant to you even if you aren't an elder. It's relevant because as part of this church you have a responsibility to your elders, as they do to you. This is vital information for you to support and pray for us in this role. It's also relevant because many of the principles we learn here about eldership apply to other areas where God has called you to lead. Many of you are parents, or leaders of a business, or leaders of a team, or leaders of a ministry, and there's a lot we can learn from this as it pertains to leadership in

general. It's safe to say we have something of a crisis of leadership in our nation, and we desperately need to understand what true leadership is all about.

One thing not to forget in this discussion of eldership is Peter has already addressed every believer about the ministry they're to have. He said in 4:7-11 every believer is to use their spiritual gifts to serve others. The fact there are elders in the church called to lead in no way takes away from the ministry every person has in the body of Christ. You can't just sit back and say, "I don't have to do anything because we have elders; that's their job." While it's true elders have a unique role to play as leaders, it's also true each of us has a vitally important contribution to make.

The Humble Role Model of Peter

Peter starts by addressing the elders in these churches. He says, "To the elders among you..." The assumption is there are several elders in each of these churches he's addressing. In the book of Acts, when Paul planted a church he also appointed elders to lead there. It was never just one man, but rather a team of mature men to lead the church.

This term "elder" is the Greek word *presbuteros* from which we get the word Presbyterian. The word really just means "older man" but it came to be used for leaders in the local church because "older" came to mean "wiser." There is wisdom that comes from age and experience.

I heard a story about a young man who was appointed president of a bank. He was intimidated by his new responsibilities, so he nervously sought the advice of his gray-haired predecessor: "Sir, what's been the secret of your success?"

The older man replied, "The secret, young man, is two words: right decisions!"

"But how do you make right decisions?"

"One word," the older man answered, "experience."

"But how do you get experience?"

The old man smiled. "Two words: wrong decisions."

There's some truth in that! But it's also true that just because you're old doesn't mean you're wise. I've seen many older men who haven't grown wise at all; they just keep making the same wrong decisions. I've seen many young men who are wise beyond their years. The idea here isn't so much about age but that

certain men within the church are called to lead because of their maturity, character and wisdom.

Here, Peter addresses these elders of local churches and he starts by identifying with them. He says, "I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed." Notice he calls himself "a fellow elder." This is remarkable! This is like Tim Cook addressing his Apple employees as co-workers! Peter is an apostle. He was the first one to recognize Jesus as God's Son. He saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain. He sat with him on the shores of Galilee after the resurrection. But Peter says, "I'm one of you—just a fellow elder." There's great humility in this. Peter had made a few wrong decisions; true leaders have an awareness of their own brokenness and vulnerability. They stand in the trenches with others. They're not full of themselves, and it's not all about them.

Next he says he's "a witness of Christ's sufferings who will also share in the glory to be revealed." When he says he's "a witness of Christ's sufferings" he's not saying he was an eyewitness of the crucifixion, although he did witness many of the sufferings of Christ from the first day he met him. The word "witness" really means one who testifies about something he's seen and heard. In a sense we're all witnesses of Christ's suffering, and we're all called to suffer. If there's one theme that dominates this letter it's suffering. And there's no doubt one of the reasons Peter addresses these elders is they'll be the first ones to suffer when persecution comes. They have to be ready to be an example of courage and faith in that day. The good news is they'll also share in the glory to be revealed. Throughout this letter we've seen that suffering and glory go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other.

The Call to Elders to Shepherd God's Flock

After he identifies with them, Peter gives the main command in these verses. He says, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them..." This is what an elder is to do. He's called to be a shepherd. He's called to watch over the flock.

This comes right out of the OT where God was pictured as the shepherd of his people. Psalm 23 says, "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*" Isaiah 40:11 says of God, "*He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.*"

The OT leaders who God appointed over his people were also called as shepherds. Ezekiel wrote, "*This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?'"*" (Ez. 34:2).

Then Jesus came along and he was different. He said, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*" (Jn 10:11).

So it was natural for leaders of the NT church to also be called shepherds. Jesus told Peter to "*Take care of my sheep*" (Jn 21:16). Paul called the Ephesian elders to "*Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood*" (Acts 20:28). That's exactly what Peter calls these elders to do here.

By the way, don't miss one important thing: **Whose** flock is it? It is **God's** flock. These shepherds are really under-shepherds who serve under the Great Shepherd—Jesus. He's entrusted his sheep to us and it's our responsibility to care for them. There are a lot of pastors out there who talk about "my church" and "my flock." I hope you never hear me or any other of our pastors or elders say that. It's not **our** flock, it's **his** flock!

What do shepherds do? It says, "watching over them." The idea behind those words is one of oversight and supervision. And sheep need supervision! You should know it's really not a very flattering metaphor to be called a sheep. Why? Because sheep are dirty, dumb, directionless and defenseless. A news story described how one sheep wandered off a cliff and 1,499 others just followed along. Can you picture it? Fifteen hundred sheep, each walking off a cliff, one after the other. Soon they were piled so deep the ones at the bottom were crushed to death and the ones on top were lying on a big downy-soft pillow! That's why sheep need a shepherd! Of course, the negative characteristics of sheep need to be balanced out by the fact that God's sheep are dearly loved, redeemed, cleansed and filled with the Holy Spirit.

But what does a shepherd do? Sheep need to be protected from the dangers of wild animals and thieves. They need to be guided and led, otherwise they'll wander away. When they're lost the shepherd needs to go after them and bring them back to the flock. Sheep sometimes get hurt so the shepherd has to tend to their wounds. And most of all sheep need to be fed or they'll starve.

All these things carry over to the call on elders to shepherd God's flock. Elders need to protect God's flock from false teachers who look impressive on the outside but really want to fleece them. Elders need to chase after sheep who've wandered away. People wander away from the faith, you know. They don't mean to, but like a sheep they just lower their heads and follow the grass and pretty soon they look up and they're all alone. People do that too and they need a shepherd to chase them down. Elders also need to feed the flock. It's our job to make sure you regularly get fed from God's Word and that you know how to feed yourself. If you don't eat, you'll starve spiritually and die.

That is the work of shepherding. It's hard work; dirty work. There are many so-called leaders who are doing it for the wrong reasons. And let's not forget that elders are sheep too! That's why the next thing Peter does is tell us how to do it right. He gets down to the heart level and says there's a right way to do it and a wrong way to do it.

The Way to Shepherd/Oversee God's Flock

Elders must serve in the right spirit

That's what he means when he says, "not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be." Another translation says, "not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God." Elders have to be careful they don't serve purely out of duty or obligation.

It's like the mom who went to wake her son up for church one Sunday morning. When she knocked on his door, he said, "I'm not going to church today!"

"Why not?" asked his mother.

"I'll give you two good reasons," he said. "One, they don't like me. Two, I don't like them. So why should I go?"

His mother replied, "I'll give you two good reasons why YOU WILL go to church. One, you're 47 years old. Two, you're the pastor of the church!"

That's serving not because you're willing, but because you must! And this can happen because the work of an elder can be grueling and thankless. An elder can get to a place where there's no more passion or desire. Sometimes duty is a good thing, but if that's all there is; if there's no desire, no heart behind it, then something is wrong. The last thing you want is a grouchy elder!

An elder or leader has to occasionally ask themselves a question: "Am I doing this because I want to or because I'm expected to? Do I still believe in what we're doing here? Do I still feel called? Am I still passionate about this?"

To serve willingly over the long haul, an elder has to cultivate his own relationship with Jesus. We all go through times of spiritual dryness, where the Lord seems distant and prayer is a chore. Sure, sometimes you just have to be faithful in serving the Lord, putting one foot in front of the other, but you can't run on fumes forever. We need the Lord to refresh us and encourage us and fill us.

This is why leaders must learn to abide in Christ, to depend on him, to rest in him. If we're doing it all in our own strength, we'll soon run out of gas. This was true even of Jesus. He said, "***It is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work***" (Jn 14:10). In other words, "I'm not doing this; the Father who dwells in me is doing it. I'm just available to Him. I'm counting on Him every minute to be at work and to do these things, and He does them."

This is one of the reasons we have a policy that an elder has the freedom to take a leave of absence when he needs it. We've had guys do that for a variety of reasons, but sometimes they just need time to reconnect with the Lord and stoke the fires of desire in their own heart.

Elders must serve with the right motive

He says, "not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve." This is talking about money. For most of our elders this isn't an issue because they don't get paid a cent for their work. I don't think everyone realizes being an elder at CPC is a part-time job, for which there are no earthly benefits. But there are also elders like me who are set aside and paid for their pastoral ministry. Paul wrote, "***The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages'***" (1 Tim. 5:18-20).

But this a warning to people like me against taking advantage of people like you. We all know there are pastors who leverage their spiritual authority to milk people for millions. They fly around in private jets and live in luxury. None of us at CPC are getting rich as pastors, but this church takes good care of us, and we have to check our motives.

I realized several years ago that I've been in full-time ministry for so long I probably couldn't get a decent paying job doing anything else. So I constantly have to ask myself the question: Am I doing this for the money? Am I so eager to serve that I'd try to do this even if I wasn't paid?

Elders must serve in the right manner

He says, "not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." There are two ways to lead. You can lead by the authority of your office, or you can lead by the authority of your example. The authority of an elder comes by the life he lives, not the office he holds.

I heard a story about a judge in Michigan who has a policy in his courtroom that electronic devices causing a disturbance during court sessions will result in the owner being cited with contempt of court and fined \$25. But on a Friday afternoon in 2013 during the prosecutor's closing argument, the judge's new smartphone went off. His face got as red as a beet as he tried to turn it off, but the phone kept creating a disturbance. How did he handle that? Well, at the next recess, he held himself in contempt of court and fined himself \$25. Later on he said, "Judges are humans. They're not above the rules. I broke the rule and I have to live by it." He paid the fine immediately.

That is great leadership. I challenge every leader here to lead those entrusted to you by example. Don't demand from them a greater price than you're willing to pay. Don't demand more time than you're willing to invest. Don't demand a standard of excellence you haven't achieved. If you can't say, "Do as I do"—or, at the very least, "Do as I am trying to do"—then don't offer leadership in that area.

And by the way, if a leader leads like this, what Peter tells younger believers in the church to do in verse 5 will come easily. Down in v. 5 he says, "In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders." If an elder leads in the right spirit, with the right motive, and in the right manner, that won't be a problem...most of the time.

There are people who will make it difficult, even if you do everything right. So here's an important question: What will keep an elder going in the midst of the battle? What is the one thing they must set their sights on if they're going to endure through it all?

The Motivation to Shepherd God's Flock

The answer comes in v. 4, "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." I love how Peter calls Jesus the Chief Shepherd. That's why at CPC we prefer not to call any person the Senior Pastor. We believe Jesus is the Senior Pastor. That's what it means to be the Chief Shepherd.

The Greek word for shepherd is *poimen*, but here Peter uses the word *archpoimenos*. That word was used back then to describe a shepherd who had such a large flock that he appointed under-shepherds to help him. You know how we talk about an archbishop? Well, Jesus is the arch-shepherd. He's really the One in charge of all of us.

It's the appearance of the Chief Shepherd that motivates elders to serve well. Remember, earlier in 4:7 Peter said, "The end of all things is near." Well, here he alludes to the same event when Jesus appears in his Second Coming. And one of the things he'll do is present to faithful elders a crown of glory that will never fade away.

What is it that motivates an athlete to endure demanding workouts, injury, and having to say no to all the fun their friends are having? It's the desire to take the victory stand and receive the award. That's what will keep an elder in the trenches for the long

haul. There will be an award ceremony at the end of the age, and every elder who serves faithfully will stand as his name is called and be personally decorated by the Chief Shepherd himself.

When he first became a Christian, the man we know as Augustine wanted to live the rest of his life in private, focusing on prayer and contemplation. But church leaders noticed the depth of his spiritual life and called him to be a bishop. From then on, Augustine would have to relinquish his desire for a quiet, private life and focus on overseeing a number of churches.

In 427, the Arian Vandals advanced into North Africa, where Augustine lived. Refugees poured into Hippo, the city where Augustine was serving. The refugees not only brought danger, but also disease. With so many people packed into so tight a space, the disease spread rapidly. At that point, Augustine had three choices: He could flee, he could preserve his own health by staying holed up in his monastery, ignoring the needs of his people, or he could get his hands dirty, and risk becoming ill himself.

Augustine didn't know how to be a bishop from afar, so he continued to be present with the people—and paid dearly for it. During the third month of the crisis, Augustine developed a high fever from which he never recovered. This powerful man of God, whose books Christians we still read, gave his last hours ministering to the most basic needs of a frightened flock.

But don't feel bad for Augustine, and don't feel bad for any elder who shepherds God's flock faithfully. When an elder faithfully shepherds the flock of God, he'll receive a crown of glory from the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.