

1Peter 5:1-4

## Caring for the Church Under Fire

In **1Timothy 4:1-2**, Paul gave a prophecy concerning the days in which we are living saying, “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup> speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.*”

The concern this should motivate in the hearts of everyone who has responsibility for leading or influencing the lives of others should be, “Lord, how can I help prepare my people to not be among those who are deceived and depart from the faith?”

Parents should be asking this question about their children. Pastors should be asking this question about their congregations.

Christian mentors should be asking this question about those they are discipling in the faith. “Lord, how can I use my leadership to make a difference?”

In today’s passage, the Lord instructs churches about the type of leadership that is needed to assure the survival of the church (and of the family) in difficult times of persecution.

***1Peter 5:1, “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:”***

The term, *elders*, is the title that the Bible uses to describe the spiritual leaders in the church. Another name for elder is the word pastor. An elder and a pastor are exactly the same thing in the Bible.

In the Old Testament the elders were the heads, or the authority figures of families. A father was the elder of his family, so every family had an elder—the dad.

And where there were multiple generations in a family, the elders of extended families were often the grandfathers, or one of the older sons.

And the family clans would appoint one of their elders to represent them in meetings of the elders where issues would be discussed and decisions would be made that would affect the direction of the nation.

This family-based pattern of leadership was chosen by God as the pattern of leadership for His church—a plurality of father figures in the church are called to lead the family of God.

Look at one of the Bible's descriptions of a church leader, *1 Timothy 3:4-5*, “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence <sup>5</sup> (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)”

Because church leadership is patterned after family leadership, what the Bible teaches about church elders can be applied to fathers in the leadership of their home.

The church/home needs strong and spiritually mature leadership, especially in times of crisis. Let's look at the description God gives, through Peter, of the kind of leadership that is needed to care for the church under fire.

Notice first of all, “*The elders who are among you I exhort...*” **The kind of spiritual leadership needed in the church is leaders who live among the people, like a father lives among his family.**

This speaks of an elder's close relationship with the people that he is leading.

In the context of the early church, the members of the congregation tended to live close together, in walking distance of each other.

They would shop in the same market place, get their water from the same well, often, in the smaller communities, they would work together, and as Acts 2:44-47 describes, they borrowed from one another throughout the week those things that were needed.

They met frequently throughout the week for Bible studies, for prayer, or to share meals together in their homes.

And the church elders would have been part of this daily interaction, living among the people.

We are all aware of the very difficult challenges facing an absent father who is trying to give leadership to his family when he doesn't see them very often.

Likewise, this is the difficult challenge facing the majority of North American church leaders, we live so scattered and spread apart from each other, that most elders only see the members of their church family once a week.

And the enemy has very effectively used the Covid restrictions to exacerbate this already difficult problem.

We need to find ways to bring the members of our church and the elders closer together, and together more often.

***1 Peter 5:1, “The elders who are among you I exhort [he is directing this part of his letter to the church's spiritual leaders], I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:”***

The Lord did not structure His church with a political or corporate organizational hierarchy, but the Bible teaches that the church is organized to function like a family.

Peter is writing this near the end of his life, and like a grandfather, he is addressing his adult sons in the faith, who each have their own spiritual families. He is a father writing to fathers—fellow elders.

And, writing to church elders who will soon be called on to lead their churches through many trials, he encourages them that he too has shared in Christ's suffering's, but when facing those trials, remember that those who share in His suffering will also partake in His glory.

***1Peter 4:13***, “*but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*”

We are always being pointed toward keeping our hope and focus on the return of Jesus, and the great glory and exceeding joy that we will experience forever at that time.

***1Peter 5:2***, “***Shepherd [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;***”

The word, “elder” describes the status of a church leader, one who is mature and respected.

The word, “shepherd” or “pastor” describes the function of a church leader. An elder is to function as a shepherd/pastor, and the church is described as a flock of sheep.

Sheep and shepherds are a common metaphor used in the Bible to describe the people of God and their spiritual leaders.

The most well-known is the **23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm**, “*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, He makes me lay down in green pastures...*”

***Acts 20:28***, *Paul instructing elders, says, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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.”*

Sheep are not solitary animals; they like to flock together and they find comfort in being with the flock. This illustrates God's intent for the church to be together.

Sheep are also prone to wander and get lost if they don't have a shepherd to lead them. Also, sheep are defenseless against their predators, and they need a shepherd to protect them. (*Wiersbe, p. 126*)

The Lord is our Shepherd, but much of the way He ministers to His sheep is through human shepherds—also known as elders.

In Bible days shepherds spent most of their lives with the sheep, even sleeping out in the fields with their sheep at night.

To “shepherd the flock of God” means to feed them the word of God—this is done through teaching the Bible, and encouraging the congregation to read the scriptures on their own.

To shepherd the flock also means to love them, and minister oil to their wounds for healing, and to encourage them. Whenever someone in the church was sick, they were to call on their elders to anoint them with oil and pray.

The shepherd would always be watchful to protect the sheep from dangerous animals, poisonous snakes, pits the sheep might fall into, or poisonous plants they might eat.

In the family of God, it is the role of elders to be watching out for spiritual danger and to protect God’s flock from false teaching, and from predators who come in to a church to hurt the church.

***1Peter 5:2, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you...”***

Here again we have the same phrase we saw in verse one, “among you,” describing people who are living in community together with each other.

The elders were given responsibility for leading those believers who lived among them—those who lived geographically close to them—those whom they shared community with.

The enemy knows how important community and fellowship is to a church, and he seeks to scatter us and isolate us, keeping us apart from one another.

But we must work intentionally against this. We need to work at building communities of believers who have a shepherd/elder in close relationship, serving among each group.

Pastor James Coates, and the other elders at Grace Life Church understand the importance of the church family being together and in fellowship with each other and they are fighting hard to keep their church together.

However, they are finding that a large congregation is very difficult to keep all together in one place when they come under opposition.

The elders of our congregation believe that it is essential for us to establish smaller groups that are able to much more easily meet together undetected, because the day may come soon when we cannot continue to meet in this building.

If that crisis comes to us, it will be important for everyone to have the support of a group that they are already in close fellowship with, with an actively involved elder serving them, who knows each of those under his care, so that you can all be a great source of familiar support and encouragement.

You don't want to be scrambling in the midst of a crisis to pull together a group of people you don't know very well.

***1Peter 5:2, “Shepherd [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers;...”***

Now Peter begins describing the style of ministry that the elders are to perform.

They are to serve (meaning we elders/dads are servants to the sheep), and we serve as overseers—an overseer is a guardian, one who looks after the well-being of those they are called to serve.

Another word for overseer, is the word, bishop. In the Bible, the titles, elder, shepherd, pastor, overseer and bishop were all different names for exactly the same ministry role.

***1Peter 5:2, “Shepherd [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly [according to God], not for dishonest gain [no self-serving motives] but eagerly;”***

Not by compulsion, means that you are not doing it out of obligation—because it is your job, or maybe because you are getting paid for it.

To do that is to be a hireling—such an elder will flee in times of great hardship or opposition. That's not who you want in leadership in times of opposition.

***John 10:11-16, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.***

Instead, an elder shepherd must take on their role willingly, even eagerly, according to a desire God has put into their heart.

“Even if there is no pay; even if I have to work full-time on the side; even if I risk going to prison, I will eagerly serve these people, because God has put His call upon my heart and I could never be happy doing anything else.”

This applies to us as Fathers in our homes. Pray that God would give you that desire and sense of calling that could never find greater fulfillment being anywhere else, or doing anything else.

Our sense of calling needs to be like that of Jeremiah, ***Jeremiah 20:9 ESV, “If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”***

***1Peter 5:3, “nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;”***

The Lord gives authority to elders/dads, but the authority He gives is not to be asserted or imposed to exert your will over another's, or to intimidate those under your authority into compliance.

It is an authority that is to be used against demons and other enemies, for the protection of the flock.

In preparing His disciples to serve as elders, Jesus described for them the role of an elder:

*Matthew 20:25-27*, “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.<sup>26</sup> Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.<sup>27</sup> And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—<sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

1Peter 5:3 concludes saying that elders are to lead by **“being examples to the flock.”**

In order to lead by being an example, an elder/dad must spend time with those he is leading, sharing life together with them, so that they can see the example of his faith in action in his everyday life.

This is called discipleship. Our concept of discipleship is having Bible studies with a new believer. That is part of discipleship, but a big part of it is modelling, by living life experiences together with others so they can learn from your own example, letting them watch you and see how you do it.

This is a big part of parenting also—most of what your kids learn from you they learn from watching your example. The Christian life is caught by watching more than it is taught in a Bible study.

Elders cannot effectively shepherd the sheep without living among them.

The way we function, with one large congregation that is really only together once a week in this building, is a flawed way of trying to be a church.

Most of you are not able to learn very much about practical Christian living from the example of my life.

You don't learn how I interact with my wife or kids; you don't learn how I respond when someone cuts me off in traffic; you don't learn how I spend my free time; you don't learn how I steward my money; you don't learn how I practice hospitality; or how I handle stress; or how I respond when I sin.

This is a major weakness that we need to correct if we are going to be equipped to face the coming fiery trials.

The church needs to learn how to share much more of our lives together—and this can best happen in the context of small groups who are in each other's homes and sharing life experiences together outside of the worship service.

***1 Peter 5:4, "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."***

Again, the Bible turns our focus toward the return of Christ when He comes at the rapture for His church.

This seems to be the coming event that is precipitating all of the unrest we are seeing around the world.

Our focus is to be very much on keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus while we run this race, while we fight this battle, while we carry out our mission to rescue the perishing before the Lord returns.

We believe that it is vital for us to resume encouraging as many of you as possible to begin prayerfully considering connecting regularly with a small group and learning to function with that group as your church.

You will be hearing more from the elders about home churches in the next few weeks.

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