

Shepherds like Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 December 2025

Preacher: James Dancer

[0 : 00] Real privilege to be here again. Now, I want to ask you this question. What's your idea of the perfect leader? And that's what I call the superstar CEO leader.

Lots of good things, actually. It's not like they're bad things, but I think the big picture is probably confidence and probably competence, isn't it? What makes your perfect church leader?

Looked at some Church of England job adverts, actually, to see kind of what people want. And I'll read some of the little descriptions in the job description. Have empathy.

Gifted. Inspiring. Someone who will energetically enthuse. Be known in the village. Oh, and have a good sense of humour. I mean, they're good things, aren't they? Some of those are really important things.

The qualities of the superstar CEO kind of make the superstar pastor. Are they the most important qualities?

[1 : 28] That we need? What kind of leaders do we need? We're in the book of 1 Peter, as you'll be, if you've been with us for the last couple of months, actually.

And you'll know that Peter is speaking into a group of believers' situation of subtle suffering. We've been saying this quite a lot. Subtle suffering. Subtle persecution. You know, not a threat to your life, but a threat to an easy life.

You know, in that context, you know, in our context as well. We're sidelined. We're slandered for being a Christian. There, what leaders do we need?

Often we're wooed by the superstar leader. But is that going to be enough?

Is that going to be enough in the trials? Is that going to be enough in the crisis? Is that going to be enough to get your soul to heaven?

[2 : 32] And that maybe you've actually been hurt by leadership, church leadership. I know there are some people here who have been. And maybe you just kind of think, I don't really want any kind of leadership at all.

Actually, Peter's purpose, Peter's purpose is to get us on board. To get us on board with a different kind of leadership that really will be enough for us.

Not necessarily superstars. Verse one. To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ's sufferings, who also will share in the glory to be revealed.

Look at this, verse two. Be superstars. Be shepherds. It says, be shepherds. Shepherds, we'll go on to see, like Jesus.

Shepherds like Jesus. Now, there's going to be three points today. Shepherds who will do shepherding with Jesus' heart, walking his path. Just to set your expectations, we'll be looking a bit more at point. We'll be looking a bit longer at point one.

[3 : 42] So, firstly, shepherding. We need leaders who will do shepherding. To get our bearings, you know, what we just read in verse one, the elders mentioned here are the church leaders.

Now, we have them here. They're the spiritually mature men who lead this church. And they're called to do shepherding. What is that?

Well, at the very least, it's leading. And actually, the word itself, get this, right? The word itself, as it kind of comes through to the Latin, is actually *pastoring*.

Right? That's what it means. But if we sort of take that as our main definition of what it means to shepherds, it's possible that we could have some slightly wrong ideas of what *pastoring* or shepherding is.

Because sometimes we think being pastoral is just the nice bit of leadership. It's the make me feel better bit. Now, those vicar job descriptions, when they say they need strong pastoral care skills, I think what they mean is, after the pastoral visit, you feel like you've been cuddled by your shepherd.

[4 : 48] And you're lamb in his arms. You're being fed with this, gently fed with bottled milk. And there's a little bit of truth now. You know, elders must be gentle.

They must care for the whole person, really. Elders will care for you physically, mentally, emotionally, definitely.

But more central, shepherding is about watchful protection. Look at verse 2 again. Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them.

Literally overseeing them. Now, in the ancient world, shepherds weren't cuddling the lambs like this. That's not the image people had in their heads, right? They were the bouncers, protecting against wolves, feeding the sheep so they don't die. It's a dangerous world out there. And we need shepherds like that in the church.

[5 : 54] This is next week, but verse 7 in the same chapter. There's a lion wandering around, seeking little baby Christians, maybe even slightly more mature Christians, to devour, to gobble up.

There's a subtle suffering in the Christian life, which risks throwing us off course, doesn't it? We might want to give in. Well, who's going to shepherd us through that?

Only Jesus can. Only Jesus can shepherd your soul. And I think this gets to the heart of what watchful shepherding is. It's pointing you to Jesus.

It's pointing you to the chief shepherds. It's helpful to realise that that shepherding activity is first and foremost a Jesus thing.

Jesus is the good shepherd. He's the chief shepherd, verse 4. So if we have that title, if an elder has that title of shepherd, it's saying, do the Jesus thing of shepherding.

[7 : 01] Do it like Jesus. And how did he do that? Well, he pointed people to himself. As Jesus looked on the crowds in Mark 6, with compassion, sheep without a shepherd, it says.

He didn't feed them loaves and fish straight away. He did eventually. The first thing he did, it says, he taught them until late in the day.

And Jesus' last words to Peter, take care of my sheep. How? Feed my lambs. Make them strong. Nourish them. Not with physical food firstly, but with the bread of life.

With Jesus himself. So it gives us a clue what under-shepherds are to do. But with one crucial difference.

Jesus said, look at me. The under-shepherds say, look at him. Shepherding like Jesus is pointing people to Jesus.

[8 : 14] So in practice, I think it will at least look like formal Bible teaching. What I'm doing now. And this is where Jesus' words are found in the Bible.

The Sunday sermon is the meat and potatoes of pastoral care. You don't think of the sermon like that. But shepherding is only about Sundays.

True shepherding happens among the sheep in all of life. Have a look at verse 2. Let's look at it closely. Verse 2 says, shepherd the sheep under your care.

Do you know what that literally means? Shepherd the sheep among you. Shepherd the sheep among you. Do you know what that assumes?

Shepherds are with their sheep. Shepherds are with their sheep. They talk to them. They walk with them. They do life with them. They seek to understand them.

[9 : 15] They enter their world with them. They rejoice with them. They weep with them. A good under shepherd won't just shove a Bible verse in your face in a time of grief.

They'll sit in silence with you. They'll be present with you. They'll understand you. And then they'll actually be able to point to Jesus. Then they will give you the best cure for your soul.

Shepherding is whole of life in the big decisions, in the illnesses, in the breakups, so that you can best point you to Jesus.

Now, I think this is a challenge to pastors and elders. If you're just among your sheep and not feeding them, you're a glorified therapist.

If you're locked in your office, though, all week, you can't shepherd them at all. Can I ask us all a question, though?

[10 : 23] Is this what you want your pastor and your elders to do? I think it's really natural to just kind of want your pastor to be mostly your carer or mostly your guru with all the answers.

Or mostly be your inspirational therapist who will make you feel better. Mostly be your superstar leader. But just have a think about that for a moment, right?

Is that really what we want? Is that really what you want? Is that really what's best for you? And maybe you think, no, I love my pastor. Pastor cares me.

I love that he preaches at the front from a distance. I'm not having him shepherd me in my relationship. I'm not having him shepherd me in my life decisions. Shepherding might not always feel like we're being fed with a warm bottle of milk, like a baby lamb.

Sometimes we get the boiled broccoli. But do you know what? Do you know what? That will nourish us. That will protect us. And that is the best thing for us, isn't it, I think?

[11 : 27] Isn't it? We should let our shepherds lead us in all of our lives. That is what we need. Because we need Jesus.

And the shepherds point us to him. So maybe you're thinking, well, I really want to be an elder. That sounds great. I want to be a shepherd like that. Sounds like a great job. And by the way, you know, we all do a little bit of shepherding. Parents, husbands, fathers, youth leaders. We've all got a little bit of shepherding to do in those situations.

And in that situation, you know, you can still shepherd, but don't be the chief shepherd. Point people to Jesus. That's something that I found really helpful as a parent this week. I want to shepherd my children's hearts.

I want to shepherd them to Jesus. But to be the appointed church leaders who shepherd, well, that is a very noble task, as the Bible says. Because it's a hard task.

[12 : 26] And this really challenged me again. As someone who hopes to be an elder one day, we need shepherds to oversee us. Who can do it when things get really hard.

That's the context we've been looking at in 1 Peter, isn't it? And for that to happen, we need shepherds. With Jesus' heart.

With Jesus' heart. Have a look at verse 2 again. There are three things there.

Firstly, willingly. Firstly, willingly. Not because you must, but because you are willing. As God wants you to be. That we can't have elders who are only there to fill a gap.

No one else has volunteered. Look, it's a good work. It's the best work. But it's hard work. Being ready to be on call in a crisis.

[13 : 37] Writing sermons week after week. Having the courage to challenge and rebuke. Potentially having to suffer for Jesus and us.

Now maybe, you know, if for some reason. I don't think this is going to happen, right? But it could be that the media might write a damaging story on Bethel at some point.

You just don't know. These things kind of do happen. But it wouldn't be your community group on the front page, would it? It would be your elders. And actually, probably, let's be honest.

It's probably going to be Johan, actually. As a senior pastor. I mean, that's just the reality, right? It's not going to be me. Don't want to see my face.

We need shepherds with Jesus' heart who are willing, don't we? Jesus was willing. There's joy beyond the cross, he says. But I'm willing to face it for others.

[14 : 36] My will aligns with your will, Heavenly Father. That's what he says. Willing. Second, eagerly. Not for shameful gain.

Verse 2. Be shepherds. Not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve. Now, let's be clear. It's not that paid pastoral ministry is wrong, okay?

Paul says elsewhere, labourers deserve his wages. Now, if he hasn't got any coming in from elsewhere. But it is saying shameful, dishonest gain is wrong.

You do not want a money-minded man in ministry. Money will define his success.

And people won't. And that's why it's so wrong. Quite evil, actually. You'll end up exploiting sheep.

[15 : 37] You'll sponge off the vulnerable. You'll not feed them, but you'll fatten yourself up. Prosperity gospel pastors, pastors, must be called out.

They're only shepherding themselves. And they're letting vulnerable sheep die. Spiritually. That's shameful. But look at Jesus again.

He didn't have a gold-plated private jet. No 16-bed mansion. Jesus was born in a stable. Took on flesh. Felt our pain. Not for shameful gain.

Eager. Third. Not there for status. But leading by example. Verse 3. Verse 3. Not lording it over those entrusted to you.

But being examples to the flock. Look, there's no place for harsh, bullying, leadership. Pulling rank. Well, I am the elder, so you better go and do it. Not like that, anyway.

[16:40] The lording over others, leadership, is basically self-serving leadership, really, isn't it? You know, in it for the power. In it for the status. How can people serve me? I think what we've been talking about under this point of serving with Jesus' heart is basically just serving yourself versus serving others.

Leadership, really. We need shepherds who are serving by example. Truly serving others.

So I've read this book recently. I actually read a little bit of it. I don't know all of it. But the chapter I read is on leadership by a guy called Simon Sinek.

I had loads of quite helpful things to say, actually. You've probably seen him kind of come up on YouTube. You might not be. But he probably might come up on your feed or whatever. And he does say some really helpful things.

And in this chapter, do you know what the conclusion is to how to be a good leader? He says the best leaders come down and serve others. That sounds quite good, actually. Sounds quite good. But it wasn't Christian.

[17:45] It was still about self-service. Now, let me explain. It's built on what he calls a social contract. I'll serve you. And then you'll be happy to serve me.

It's a deal. Then you'll be loved by your teams. Then your productivity will go up. And studies show, he says, that if you kind of serve like this. And you're a little bit humble. I'm kind of paraphrasing there. If you're a little bit humble, then you're going to get a better dopamine hit when you leave. He's like, you want that, don't you? Is that really serving others? I think that's the best the world has to offer. Look at Jesus again.

He didn't climb down from his pedestal to get a burst of dopamine. He didn't lead for the flock to ultimately serve him. He led by serving the flock.

Listen to what he says. I have not come to be served, just in the context of talking about lording over, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many.

[18:54] He's the example. And this is kind of everything we've been saying, isn't it? We need leaders who will suffer now for Jesus, who are prepared to do that, to die.

Serving others, not self. That's Jesus' hearts. And lastly, briefly, we need leaders then walking that path, but they also get to glory.

Walking Jesus' path. Verse 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.

Peter saw Jesus' sufferings. Peter models that as an elder. And now he says, elders, that's your path too. Okay, we've been seeing that. But then the encouragement comes, who will also share in the glory to be revealed.

Verse 4. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

[20:00] Elders, he says, this is your motivation. This has to be your motivation. It's a hard road. But eternal glory awaits.

And to keep going, you need to remember. I think you've probably all seen these kind of SAS training programs. The recruits kind of ask to slog, climb up a mountain, get really tired in the freezing rain.

Only to be told when you get to the top, now I want you to go back down again and then come back up. And it's really soul-destroying. In that moment, it feels endless. Now, which recruits make it? At that moment in the Christian life, in the hard road of shepherding ministry, which shepherds make it? It's the ones with the end in sight. It's those SAS recruits who know they'll soon be back at base camp.

Hot chocolate in hand, medal ceremony, very soon they'll make it. It's those elders who look to the crown, the well done, the chief shepherd himself.

[21:07] Well, they're the ones who will make it. It's so easy to be driven by visible success. Successful conversations, the numbers on a Sunday, the people say, but none of those can sustain us.

In the times you're so aware of your failings as well, what's going to sustain you? Because we all fail, even leaders, even our elders.

You might not think that. They're going to have the chief shepherds say, come on in. I welcome you with open arms. I've shepherded you here.

That's what's going to be on their minds. And I want to encourage you elders to realise that. I want to encourage you congregation. If you want to encourage your elders, encourage them with that. Glory. So we started with this question. What leaders do we need? And sometimes we think we need the superstar, the brilliant communicators, the problem solvers, but the Holy Spirit wants us to see in a world where the Christian life is genuinely hard, Christian leadership is hard, the leaders can't be mostly superstars.

[22 : 35] They won't cut it. They need to be shepherds like Jesus, walking his path with his heart. So here's a message to all of us then.

We need to get on board with this sort of leadership, not the superstar. The superstar is not going to cut it.

Elders, be encouraged. Be encouraged. I think you're doing this. I think you're on board. But resist the pull to be a superstar.

Your sheep don't need that. Walk among them, point them to Jesus. You don't have to carry the burden. That's Jesus' job. Look to the crown of glory. Future elders.

Might be some here. How does Jesus' model of leadership sit with you? Look, if you do aspire to oversight, it's a noble task, but take seriously the call to shepherd through suffering.

[23 : 47] Willing leaders. Eager, exemplary leaders. The rest of us. Are we on board with this shepherding leadership?

I don't expect anything anytime soon, but at some point, we're going to need new elders. We're going to need new pastors. Years, years time, right? That's just the reality of life.

What are we going to put in the job description? What do you expect of your shepherds here at Bethel?

Do they match what Jesus says you need? The hard times will come. The subtle suffering for Jesus will come. What kind of leadership is going to get you through that?

I pray you'll see shepherd leadership as exactly what you need. Like Jesus, with his heart, walking his path. Are you on board?

[24 : 52] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus himself. Thank you that he shepherds us, all of us, elders as well.

But we thank you for the fact that even when we do shepherding ourselves, when the elders mostly do shepherding, that we don't have to rely on ourselves. We can rely on the chief shepherd.

Lord, we pray that we would get on board with this. Not superstars, but shepherds. And we would love and pray for our elders to be that.

We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.