

Our Shepherds: Servant Leaders

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. 1 Peter 5, 1-14. Follow along with me, please.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's suffering, 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 God called, when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away. In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders.

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

[1 : 32] Cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of suffering.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast, to him be the power forever and ever.

Amen. With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God.

Stand fast in it. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greeting, and so does my son Mark. Greet one another with the kiss of love.

[2 : 34] This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Thanks, Shonsonez. Good morning, everyone. My name is Andrew, one of the pastors here. We're glad to be worshiping with you today.

Why don't we go to the Lord in prayer before we open up his word together. Our Father, would you lift up our eyes to see what an amazing hope we have in Christ.

Would you give us eyes to see you? Would you give us eyes to see your son? Would you give us eyes to see your church as you see it, Lord?

And would the preaching of your word bring honor and glory to your son and confidence to your people? Because we have such a wonderful Savior. It's in his name we pray.

Amen. Amen. All right. So we're wrapping up, finally, our series in 1 Peter. Today we're in chapter 5, the very last chapter. And in case you are new, brand new to Christ Church, or you missed the whole series, all Peter's been doing this whole letter is he's been trying to encourage and testify to like these suffering, persecuted Christian religious minorities scattered all throughout Turkey.

[3 : 44] He's been trying to encourage them that it is still worth it. It is always worth it to follow Christ. Even when it involves suffering as an outsider, as a cultural alien, being persecuted or perceived as a deviant or a weirdo, the message of 1 Peter for us is that even when following Jesus might isolate us from the cool kids at school or from the center of all the fun and attention at their parties, or even when we're disadvantaged economically or in the marketplace because of our commitment to generosity and to lifting up the burdens of our neighbors, or because we just don't elevate profit and production as our highest priority and purpose, or even when we're considered as backwards and bigoted because we are committed to following Jesus' way and holding His holy views on the human body and marriage and sex, Peter wants us to know that it's still worth it.

It's still worth it to not walk in the counsel of evildoers, to not stand in the way of the wicked or to sit in the seat of scoffers. Peter's saying again and again and again throughout this letter, it's worth it, it's worth it to stand in the way of Christ like a tree planted by streams of living water.

And even when it feels like we're wilting in this stream, even when it feels like Jesus' way isn't the way to favor or success or blessing or even justice, Peter wants us to know that our sufferings and our experiences of alienation are not because we're standing in the wrong stream.

That's why he says in verse 12 at the end here, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

He's saying when you're uncomfortable following Jesus, when you feel tied down by your faith and disadvantaged and like an outsider and like your commitment to Christ is costing you so much, he's saying you are actually standing in the true grace and favor of God.

[5 : 35] You are communing with the crucified and risen Christ. So continue to stand in Him. Stand fast in Him because resurrection is coming. Glory is coming.

And this is not merely conceptual to Peter. Peter is writing this, as it says in verse 13, from Babylon. Now Babylon is what many Christians called Rome at the time. Babylon was, Rome was the new Babylon, right?

The new domineering world power. So Peter is writing pretty much from the center of the belly of the beast. And probably fresh on his mind are some of the last words that Jesus spoke to him. In John's Gospel, chapter 21, Jesus has this moment with Peter.

And he says, And John writes that Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death that Peter would glorify God with.

And we know from history that he too was crucified in Rome. So Peter is no stranger to exile. He's in Rome. He's close to his crucifixion. And yet he's still telling his readers, he's still telling us, Yo, it is worth it.

[6 : 42] It is still and always worth it to follow Christ. We can entrust ourselves to him and to his ways. That's how he ended last week in chapter 4. So then those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.

He's pointing us again and again and again to the faithfulness of God and the sureness of God's promises. He's pointing us again and again and again to the example of Jesus who lived a perfect life and suffered for it on a cross.

And yet rose again into imperishable glory. This is the way, he says. This is the way. You're not off track. You're suffering in and with Christ will lead to glory in and with Christ.

Now I just mentioned this final chapter in John's gospel, John chapter 21. But there was something else that Jesus also said in that chapter to Peter that you've got to believe was also on his mind as he's wrapping up this letter in 1 Peter chapter 5.

Maybe you remember the story. Peter is at the Lord's Supper, right? The last meal that Jesus has with his disciples. And Jesus is like, Peter, you're going to deny me three times, right?

[7 : 51] And Peter's like, no, Lord, that's never going to happen. All these busters, they might do that, but not me. I would sooner die than deny you. But of course, he denies him three times, right?

When everything hits the fan. So chapter 21 of John's gospel tells us what happens next. After Jesus rises from the grave, what happens next between Peter and Jesus? And what we read there is that just as Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus asked Peter a question three times on the beach.

He says, Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you love me? And Peter's like, yes, I love you. Yes, I love you. Yes, I love you. And then he's even hurt that Jesus asked him the same question over and over and over again.

But Jesus wants it imprinted on Peter's mind for the rest of his life and for the rest of his ministry. He wants to make sure Peter hears very clearly how he will love Jesus for the rest of his life.

So what Jesus tells Peter when Jesus says, I love you, I love you, I love you, he says, well then feed my lambs. Feed my lambs. Shepherd my sheep. Feed my sheep.

[8 : 52] If you are going to love me, Peter, for the rest of your life, this is the way. Feed my sheep. Shepherd my sheep. So you've got to believe that this is on Peter's mind as he's writing this very last chapter in this letter, 1 Peter chapter 5.

Feed, shepherd, and guide the flock of God. And that's why in this last chapter, Peter's pivoting briefly from his discussion about suffering, and he speaks a very specific and particular word to the elders of the church.

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, 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.

Just as Jesus had commissioned Peter to go and make disciples who would shepherd the flock of God, Peter's now commissioning his own disciples, who will make disciples, who will make disciples, who will make disciples, generation after generation of elders, generation after generation of shepherds of God's people.

And that's what we're here to recognize today. I don't know if you knew that, but we are going to be ordaining two new elders today, Lori Poore and Brian Lee. And I want you to have a biblical understanding of what it means to be an elder.

[10 : 17] See, an elder, if an elder is anything, an elder is a shepherd. Not primarily a decision maker or some spiritual C-suite officer, not some just voting board member on a religious committee.

See, an elder is first and foremost a shepherd. So what we're recognizing today and celebrating with Lori Poore and Brian Lee is the ministry of elders that can be traced all the way back to the ancient people of God.

This commission that Jesus gave to Peter on this beach of redemption, where he entrusted this man who denied him three times, he entrusted him still with an incredibly high and holy calling and role and responsibility in the history, really, of the world.

And this is what Brian and Lori are entering into today. This is what Jonathan St. Clair and Wes Selke and Karen Wastlowski and Tonya Roby, Bill Barnes, Jesus Arciniega, and myself have all stepped into.

It's a really high calling. It's a really loaded responsibility. The writer of Hebrews, in Hebrews chapter 13, says that your elders are responsible for keeping watch over your souls as those who will give an account.

[11 : 29] It is a heavy and terrifying thing, actually, to be an elder. So I hope you're ready, Lori and Brian. You know, last year when I was invited to join our session of elders, I couldn't say yes right away.

I wasn't exactly jumping at the opportunity. Because I kind of liked, you know, blaming all the problems of our church on Jonathan and the rest of the elders. I couldn't say yes right away.

It's not because I don't love this church, but because I realize I understand the heavy responsibility of being a shepherd over this flock. A shepherd after the model and the way of our good shepherd and Lord Jesus Christ is crazy.

Those are the shoes that we're stepping into in one sense. To be a shepherd is to know the flock, to feed the flock, to guide the flock, to protect the flock, like to know each of you by name, to enter into your lives with empathy, to carry the griefs of over 150 plus adult members here.

It's a huge emotional capacity that this entails. And honestly, some of you are not the easiest sheep to guide, all right? But we're committed.

[12 : 37] We're committed to being in communion with our sheep. We will pursue you when you stray, when you go after self-destructing habits and ideologies and patterns and idolatries, just like the good shepherd of Jesus' parable, right?

The one who leaves the 99 and pursues the one. Christ Church East Bay, you need to know, we're not going to be the kind of church where your name is just going to be stuck on some membership role and where we're going to be content to not have you show up, you know, for six months at a time.

No, we're going to come after you. Because that's what a shepherd does. In love. In gentleness. Because that's what a shepherd does. We're committed to feeding you a healthy diet, right?

Making sure you are nourished by the green pastures of the scriptures and the sacraments so that you'll be full with Christ and equipped to serve Him. And, you know, preaching the Bible is hard.

It's hard. I have no idea what I'm doing up here most of the time. But I do it because God has ordained this institution. And He's given us His Word. And these are the words of life.

[13 : 41] And, you know, that's not even the hardest part. To guide you, to lead you towards streams of living water, right? To lead you toward the refreshment of your soul, oftentimes through the valley of the shadow of death.

To make calls and take risks and to discern God's will for this whole body of people when we don't know the outcomes. To live with that kind of faith and humility and confidence all at the same time.

It often feels like a tightrope. And then also to protect you. That's what we're called to do. Whether physically. You know, the elders were the ones really wanting to step up our security presence here. During our Sunday worship, they were the ones who called us to raise up our standards of safety guidelines.

But also spiritually, we are called to defend you from all the wolves and all the bears and all the false voices and spirits that contend with God's Word and God's Spirit. It's our elders who, it's on us elders, to wield the rod and the staff.

Not to harm you, but to comfort you. To protect you against your enemies. To preserve the peace and purity and integrity and unity of this church. I can remember a time when our elders did that before I joined.

[14 : 47] The session. A few years ago, our elders had a super tense meeting with some disgruntled members in our church who wanted to change the church's theological position on something that Jesus is very clear about.

That the whole of Scripture is very clear about. And one of the disgruntled members, he was just arguing, you know, why can't we just get with the times? Why can't we just get with the times?

And you know, honestly, that would be the easy thing to do. And it would probably boost up our reputation here in Berkeley. It would have allowed us to swim in the cultural mainstream of the Bay Area. But I want you to know that that kind of argument is not going to fly at Christ Church East Bay with your elders.

I guess we will always consider our context. We will always seek to be relevant. But we will not just get with the times to get with the times. No, we're here to protect the flock from falsehood.

So all this is to say that being an elder is a heavy responsibility. And I'm not saying this so you'll have more respect for us. I'm not trying to manipulate you into pity toward us or greater appreciation for us.

[15 : 50] But I'm here to teach you how God sees the office of elder that Lori and Brian are stepping into today. I want you to see the fullness of what is happening today as two people take up this super high calling.

And not because they must, verse 2, not because they must, but because they are willing, because they love Christ, because they love His church, and because they love you. Not for dishonest gain. Lori and Brian aren't getting paid for this, all right?

You know, me and Jonathan, we're teaching elders. At least we're on the payroll. But you should trust your ruling elders here, all right? You should trust them. They love you. They're doing this for free because they so believe in the mission of Christ Church East Bay to lead people into deeper relationships with Christ and His church for the good of the city.

Our elders are eager to serve, as it says in verse 2. Eager to serve. And listen, that's the key word, serve. So I think for some people, especially actually where I come from in maybe like the more Asian context, it can be seen to be an elder as some kind of status symbol, right?

Some kind of social, religious status symbol, or you just get lots of power now over this large group of people. But that's not the biblical understanding of what an elder is like.

[17 : 00] An elder is not like just being in the C-suite, just calling all the shots, and then making other people execute your plans. No, an elder is a servant leader. An elder is a servant leader.

The church is such a unique institution and organization, and it's actually quite difficult to run because we're trying to steer this 200-plus person boat, right, into a deeper relationship with Christ, into greater impact on our city.

But our elders, our shepherds, we don't have the hard accountability tools, right, of like wages or of threatening layoffs or anything like that. A church is ultimately powered, in addition to the Holy Spirit, by volunteers, right?

A church operates through the organic eagerness of God's people to serve and give their time and their talent and their treasures in addition to their responsibilities at work and in their homes.

So how does a shepherd elder guide sheep without being able to smack them around with their rods and with their staffs? How do they do it without being able to dangle a nice carrot? Well, elders, elders lead like our good shepherd, right?

[18 : 09] They lead like our good shepherd, not by self-interested, self-preserving, self-glorifying dominance, but through selfless, sacrificial, self-giving love.

Verse 3, Effective elders and shepherds live such beautiful lives that their sheep aren't like, oh man, I had to follow Bill Barnes because they made him an elder at this church.

Oh man. No. If you're an effective elder, then your people will say, oh man, I'm so glad to follow Bill Barnes. Look at the life he's living in his retirement.

Look how he's giving himself to feed our houseless neighbors. Look at how he's spending days in a week, every week, to go visit and make disciples of people in prison.

This is what elders do. Christ Church, your elders are your examples. These are the ones we are setting forth before you and telling you to follow them as they follow Christ.

[19 : 10] These are your examples. And this is how everything links back to everything that Peter was saying about suffering and how suffering leads to glory. See, your elders are your examples. They're meant to live lives that testify that living for Jesus is worth it.

Even when it includes suffering, because it will lead to glory, our elders believe that with all their hearts. These few verses on elders here in 1 Peter are not some random change of topic that Peter's just trying to squeeze in at the end of his letter.

Notice in verse 1 how he says that these elders will share in the glory to be revealed. See, what he's doing is he's saying that not only do you have the example of Jesus, whose selfless and sacrificial suffering for others led to glory, but hey, you have elders.

You have shepherds who are called to do the same, who are called to point you to a suffering way of life that still leads to glory with Christ. Peter is writing to these weary religious minorities who are wondering if it was worth it to follow Jesus, and he's calling upon the elders in these churches to confirm to their wavering flocks by the way they live and by the way they lead that it is worth it to follow Jesus, even through hardship and persecution.

He's calling on these elders to show their congregations by the examples of their lives that in Christ, we always have a living hope, that in Christ, we always have an imperishable inheritance that we did not earn and cannot lose no matter how terrible our suffering.

[20 : 36] See, elders are God's gift to the church to demonstrate with their lives and with their leadership that nothing can strip us of the glory and the joy and the honor and the blessing that are ours in Christ.

And to me, it is so providential and fitting that we've come to this text today as we ordain Lori Poor and Brian Lee specifically. Because man, these elders, specifically Lori and Brian, if anyone believes in the glory that will be revealed, it is them.

You know, we're not ordaining them today just because they're good looking or because they passed our Bible and theology and church government and church history exams or because they're willing to show up to a three-hour meeting once a month.

They're being called as elders because of their faith in and love for Christ. And because of the super evident hope that we've seen them hold on to in the face of terrible tragedies.

For the many of you who are newer to Christ Church, if you're planning to be part of this church, if you want to get to know us better, if you want to know the history of who we are and the events that have shaped us as a family of faith, you need to know the Poor's and the Lee's.

[21 : 55] You need to know the stories of the Poor's and the Lee's. Both families have experienced tremendous loss. The loss of Elizabeth Poor before she even turned a day old in that hospital.

And three years ago, the loss of Isaac Lee. We were just hanging out with him. He was only a junior in high school. We were just hanging out with him the Wednesday before he was taken from us on Sunday from a cancer that none of us even knew that he had.

You need to know these stories. You need to know these families if you want to know who Christ Church East Bay is. So that today, when you watch us lay hands on Lori and Brian, you are watching us as a church family declare that we want to follow these kinds of people.

Men and women who've unreservedly placed all their marbles, all their hopes in the glory that is to be revealed. We're setting before you these people who long, as it says in verse 4, for the reappearance of the chief shepherd.

These people who are coming up here are people who believe by faith in the unfading glory to come. And they don't just believe it personally, but they want it for all of us as well, for the flock of Christ Church East Bay, for the nations, for the world.

[23 : 20] Starting today for Lori and Brian and for every single one of us elders, again, Jonathan, Karen, Wes, Tonya, Bill, and Jesus, and me, our charge is to guide you into glory as shepherds guiding their sheep toward the glory of green pastures and living water even through the valley of the shadow of death.

We're here to show you the way, and it's not just some way that we made up, it's the way of our good shepherd who also walked through the valley of the shadow of death and came out on the other side.

Your elders exist to point you to Christ and His way that leads to life. We're here to point you to the ultimate shepherd who took the rod of God's judgment against sin and evil in our place so that we might know Him as our good shepherd, so that His rod and His staff might comfort us rather than strike us with fear.

that this is what we're about here at Christ Church East Bay. We're about following the ancient traditions of the scriptures, the churchly institution that's laid out in the Bible because we trust that this way is the way of Jesus and it will direct us toward Him and deeper communion with Him, our good shepherd.

And that's why for the members of this church, you will be asked when we ordain them in a couple moments, you'll be asked to submit to these elders as it says in verse 5. In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders.

[24 : 49] All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Listen, this is not a weak kind of unthinking submission to church authority, to some institutional religious figures.

No, it is a humbling of ourselves, not simply under these human elders but under the divine designs of God who as we saw in the life of Jesus will always lift up the humble.

This is why we clothe ourselves with humility, not because Lori and Brian and the rest of us are perfect, no, not even because they deserve our fullest confidence and dependence, no, we clothe ourselves with humility toward one another.

We submit to our elders not by faith in our elders or even in the church but by faith in God's mighty hand. Verse 6, Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that He may lift you up in due time.

Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. And this could be a sermon in and of itself, right, on humility and anxiety. We won't get into that today but ultimately Peter is wrapping up by saying, hey, look to your chief shepherd.

[25 : 57] Look also to your shepherd elders and you will be filled with an anxiety defying confidence as you humbly trust in the mighty hand of God.

And you will also find when you do that that He is not only mighty but He is caring. And friends, this is our only hope in the world if we are going to live the Christian life as elect exiles in this place.

Look away from Christ. Look away from the body of Christ and its leaders and you'll only become more anxious and more vulnerable to the visible and invisible powers of evil that you might not even be aware of.

See, Peter isn't merely interested in giving us some mental health advice here for people struggling with anxiety. He's got a far bigger picture in mind, a far more cosmic view of what we're up against and what afflicts us.

You know, throughout this whole letter, Peter's been giving them reason after reason, right? Truth after truth that they might stand firm in the faith and believe that Jesus is worth it, right? But in order for them to know how much God is for them, they also need a clear picture of what they're up against.

[27 : 05] And this is why he mentions the very personal powers and spirits of evil that love to make God's people suffer and fill us with anxiety in verse 8. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Resist him, standing firm in the faith because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. Peter's saying, your struggle is not merely against flesh and blood.

God. And that is exactly why you need your chief shepherd, Jesus, and his whole flock, the body of Christ and all its elders to resist the devil and stand firm in the faith together as a family.

And maybe this sounds like super superstitious to you and I wish I had more time to comment on that but let me just share with you what one historian and New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, says about this. I love it.

He writes, the thing about recognizing the existence and power of the devil and learning to see him behind not only temptations to sin but also persecution and suffering is that this enables you to take the position which the rest of the letter has been advocating as elect exiles.

[28 : 14] See, many Western countries dismissed both God and the devil over the last two centuries but the danger with that as has been apparent throughout the last two centuries is that once you get rid of God you get rid too of the devil and then you yourself and your friends or your party or your country take the role of God while your enemies take the role of the devil.

But the whole letter has been insisting on the contrary that the way to respond to attacks of whatever sort is with a firm but gentle faith. Treating people who aren't Christians with respect, living within the law, behaving with humility and patience in all circumstances.

The point is this, the actual human opponents, even your fiercest persecutors, are not in fact the real enemy. There is a real enemy and he will be using them but if you resist him staying resolute in faith and remembering that you are holding your bit of the line while your Christian brothers and sisters all across the world are holding theirs, you will find that courteous and civil behavior acting with respect and gentleness will again and again win.

This is what he's calling us to. So to close, this is God's word to us from 1 Peter. That yes, there will be suffering and hardship and persecution and even death when we follow the way of our good shepherd, when we live in his way of love even toward those who mistreat us because evil is not random.

Evil is not merely material. It's real and it's spiritual and it's personal and it's prowling around devising our demise. But when Christian exiles remember our status as the beloved of God, as the elect who are united with the crucified and risen Christ, we need not fear.

[29 : 59] And we can know that we'll win and end in glory. I love verse 10. And the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

See, in Christ there is nothing so broken that God cannot restore it to its proper glory. Your elders believe that. Lori and Brian believe that and so must we as we follow their examples.

We must believe in the power of God which is proclaimed here in verse 11. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen. We must believe this with all our hearts because this is the gospel.

Verse 11 and verse 14. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen. Verse 14. Peace to all you who are in Christ. I love this. To him be the power and to us be the peace. To him be the power and to us be the peace.

This is the good news of 1 Peter. That our peace does not depend on our own power but on Christ. The one who defied every other narrative about power and peace.

[31 : 07] Unlike the counterfeit peace of Rome, right? The Pax Romana that was achieved through violence and power and flattening all their opposition, Jesus showed us a different kind of power and a better kind of peace.

Rather than demonstrating the power of his might and putting his enemies to death to preserve himself, he demonstrated the power of his love and selflessly and sacrificially gave his life for his enemies, for us.

He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our sins. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed and raised to life together with him.

This is the gospel. To him be the power and to us be the peace in Christ forever and ever. Amen. And so we all say blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, and kept in heaven for all of us and in this we must rejoice.

[32 : 24] Let's pray. God we thank you for the chief shepherd to him be the power and we thank you that you said to us to you be the peace in Christ.

Lord let us not forget what this peace cost you how your son emptied himself of his power to demonstrate to the world a greater power, resurrection power, new creation power.

Oh God would we live in and under that kind of power unto your glory and for the good of the world. God would you be lifted up, would you be honored in this moment of ordaining new elders to this church.

we thank you for the institution of the church and we ask that you would help us to faithfully fulfill our callings oh God to lead people into deeper relationships with Christ for the good of the city in Jesus' name.

Amen.