

1 Peter
Part Eight: Shepherds and Sheep
Pastor Rick Henderson **March 25-26, 2023**

This is it. This is the final installment of the 1 Peter series. I'm just going to dive in.

1 PETER 5:1-4 *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.*

When I read this, I've got a question that jumps off the page at me. I don't know if you've ever thought of this question. This question might seem boring at first. But I think you'll discover that it deserves your attention and it's worth your time.

QUESTION: If Peter was an apostle, why did he refer to himself as an elder?

We think in titles. That's not exactly how it was in the early church or in the New Testament. They thought in and often communicated with descriptive terms. And they used those terms fluidly. They used terms related to church leadership in a way that would be very confusing in our culture today. Frankly, it was countercultural in their day as well.

Do you know how many people in the New Testament are specifically named elders? Just one. It's right here when Peter referred to himself as a fellow elder. No other person is ever identified as an elder in the New Testament. There are plenty of deacons who are specifically named. Stephen was a deacon. Phoebe was a deacon too. The Apostle Paul even labeled himself as a deacon.

Their fluid way of describing leaders and leadership positions messes with our perceptions and experiences with fixed and rigid church leadership structures. If you read Romans 16, the Apostle Paul lists and honors many people who are leaders in ministry and leaders in churches. Both men and women are listed and honored equally. If you and I were going to talk about and introduce highly respected church leaders, we would start with their title and then say their name. And there is nothing wrong with that.

But that's not what was done in the New Testament. In Romans 16, the Apostle Paul simply used the same descriptive term for the men and women he wanted to honor. He called them co-workers with himself. I'm asking you to lean in. This might be a big deal! They didn't use titles for positions the way we use titles for positions.

In the New Testament, **MULTIPLE** terms are used to describe a **SINGULAR** position.

- **πρεσβυτερος** (Elder/Priest)
- **επισκοπος** (Overseer/Bishop)

- ποιμην (Shepherd/Pastor)

When we all say pastor, that's just us using one word to communicate the exact same thing New Testament writers communicated with three words. The Apostle Paul used these three words interchangeably to describe everything we mean by the word pastor. The Apostle Peter used these three words interchangeably to describe everything we mean by the word pastor. There were not three different positions of local church leadership being described by these words. There was just one, singular position of local church leadership that was described by these three words.

Multiple people in a local church held this position at the same time. Pastoral leadership was done in partnership. But you didn't have different kinds of pastoral or elder positions. There was no distinction between elders and pastors. Elder, pastor, and overseer were three words to describe one role or office in church leadership.

Believe it or not, all three terms show up in this passage we just read. The word for elder only has a noun form. It's a person. The words for overseer and pastor have noun forms and verb forms. Because they're not just describing people, they're also describing actions. In verse 2, the words for overseer and pastor are both used as verbs.

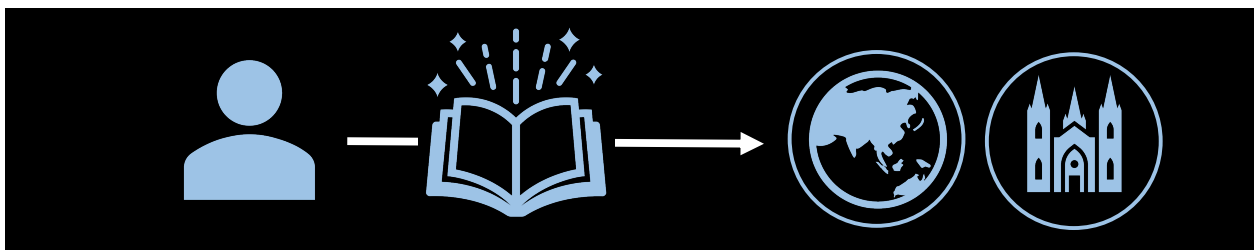
1 PETER 5:2a *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, **watching over** them...*

If you want, you can think about it this way, "Elders, you are pastors, so PASTOR your congregation that is under your care. Elders, you are overseers, so OVERSEE the people in your congregation."

Those of us who grew up in church, especially if we have a background with churches that have a clearly defined governance structure, might feel confused by this. Hang with me. I don't want anyone to feel confused, upset, or like you've been lied to. If this is putting a dent in your brain, I think I can illustrate why.



It's natural and normal for us to read what the New Testament says about church leadership through the lens of our culture and experiences with churches and church leadership. Small problem. That's the wrong way to do it. It's understandable. But it's also unhelpful.



Instead, it should be like this. We have to understand what the writer meant. And we use that to evaluate our culture, experiences with churches, and church leadership. That's what we are doing together right now.

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- **ποιμην** (Shepherd/Pastor)

A lot of us grew up thinking that elder and bishop and pastor were all distinct leadership roles in the New Testament. They were not. Those are three different words used to describe one position of leadership.

QUESTION: Why did these interchangeable terms become titles for different positions?

When a church grows, it needs organizational clarity. If you don't provide organizational clarity, if roles and responsibilities aren't clear, it will devolve into chaos and confusion 100% of the time. So, as churches grew, they developed structures of leadership to support the growth and fulfill ever-expanding responsibilities to the people.

Adding urgency to the need for organizational clarity was the fact that multiple churches in a region were growing, and they wanted to continue to work together. That required organizational clarity and leadership between churches. This is how early churches responded to that leadership need. They took these words from the New Testament and used them as distinct titles to identify different roles in their organizational structure.

Developing that organizational structure and clarity was not wrong—that was wise. And there's nothing wrong at all with our church using words from the New Testament as titles for different leadership roles at Autumn Ridge. It just means that we need to be informed. We would be mistaken if we assumed that the different terms meant different titles and different positions in the New Testament. This is why this is massively important. If we don't understand what I just explained, we are going to misunderstand what we read in the New Testament. And you might miss out on how this passage applies to you personally.

Who were these people? Remember that churches in the first century predominantly met in homes. They were on the small side. They were more unstructured than structured. They were more informal than formal. But they were organized and they had leadership. The early churches looked more like a large, small group than what we experience today.

1 PETER 5:2-3 *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.*

Every single one of you who leads a group of any kind should see yourselves in this passage. You may not be a pastor of Autumn Ridge Church, but you do pastor. You may not be on the Elder Board at Autumn Ridge Church, and yet you may be the person that others see as experienced, wise, and a trusted influence. You may not be a paid staff member, but you are managing and coordinating and leading. There is something significant that you oversee.

For those of you who are in a group, let's be grateful for these men and women. They are doing this because they want to. They are doing it for money. They don't get kickbacks from the offerings for being leaders. How blessed are we to have these people in our lives who are eager to serve? How blessed are we to have people in our lives who are examples? Their examples give us clarity and encouragement.

This is something that we've started to say a lot in the past year:

Leadership is a **DESTINATION** of discipleship.

Following Jesus always leads to leadership. Not everyone will have a position of leadership. All followers of Jesus should have a disposition of leadership. Peter took time to honor and encourage leaders in the church. I want to take time to honor and encourage your leadership in our church. We are privileged to be blessed by men and women who are choosing to serve humbly, to be examples, and partners in ministry.

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

The word pastor comes evolved from the word for shepherd. Throughout the Old Testament and New Testament, shepherding is the dominant leadership model. What animal are Christians described as _____(Sheep)? The Lord is my _____(Shepherd)?

Shepherdless sheep are **SCATTERED** sheep. And scattered sheep are **VULNERABLE** sheep.

This is a big deal. And we are missing out if we think of this as just the handful of people with titles. You are missing out if you don't see yourself now, or maybe your future self, in this passage.

I know exactly what some of you are thinking right now. I know it because many, many people have told me over the years. "I don't feel qualified for this." I love that response! John Chrysostom wasn't the first megachurch pastor, but he was one of the first. He might be the very first person to be both a megachurch pastor and celebrity preacher. And yet, he was a guy who put people on blast for greed and abusing power. He lived humbly and was a friend to the poor.

The first qualities that a priest or bishop ought to possess is that he must purify his soul entirely of ambition for the office...It is indeed a terrible temptation to covet this honor. And in saying this, I do not contradict St. Paul but entirely agree with what he says. What are his words? "If a man seeks the office of a bishop, he desires a good work." What is terrible is to desire the absolute authority and power of the bishop but not the work itself. –John Chrysostom

There's nothing about this perspective that comes naturally. It comes supernaturally. This is the way that Jesus thought and taught about positions of power and authority.

MARK 10:42-45 *Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and **whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

I hope that you remember that before Jesus came along, humility was a vice. It was the attribute of people who lost at life. Before Jesus, aspiring to humility and admiring humility in those who had positions of power and authority was utter nonsense.

THE WORLD'S WAY: Leaders take **POWER** and serve **THEMSELVES**.

We are not passing judgment on all leaders who don't follow Jesus. Let's be real. What do you observe? Do people tend to become more humble and more selfless as their power increases? This is Jesus' way.

JESUS' WAY: Leaders take **RESPONSIBILITY** and serve **OTHERS**.

This is what it should look like with us.

We don't **ASCEND** to leadership in the church; we **DESCEND** into it.

Everyone one of us who has a position of leadership should be gripped by this. We should be challenged, motivated, and inspired to this. All of us should be on the lookout for this in those who have positions of leadership and those who are being considered for positions of leadership. I don't normally do this, but I'm going to put the spotlight on me. I should only be tolerated and trusted as a pastor at Autumn Ridge to the extent that I'm an example of this in my life and leadership. In the church, leadership is a big deal. Leaders aren't. No leader is a big deal, but leadership is.

Everyone is included in what Peter is talking about. Look at what he says next.

1 PETER 1:5-7 *In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward 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. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Let's read these sentences backward. Sometimes, our relationship to leadership and our relationship to those who have authority or power we don't have creates anxiety. This has nothing to do with any modern or historical social/political movements. The relational dynamic between us and those who have authority can spark anxiety and insecurity. What is the encouraging, gospel response to that universal human experience?

If you are a believer—trust in God. This is primarily and fundamentally about our willingness to trust him. Second, this should be wrapped in humility. Humility from those who lead and humility from those being led. Third, as followers of Jesus, we should all have a disposition of submission.

If you were here a few weeks ago we put a big ole spotlight on submission. In the same way that we are all supposed to submit to government authorities, in the same way that slaves are to submit to masters, in the same way that wives are to submit to husbands, in the same way that husbands are to submit to wives, in the same way, those who are younger are to submit to those who are older. Humility and submission are the clothing that all of us wear all the time, in all situations.

This is how we're trying to live this out in Autumn Ridge Church.



Apostles' Teaching (Scripture)



Ultimately, we are under the authority of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, or you could say the Chief Pastor. He gave the Apostles the authority to teach authoritatively. That's what the New Testament is. So, we happily place ourselves underneath the authority of Scripture.

We have a Board of Elders who have the responsibility to ensure that we stay aligned with our Mission, Vision and Values, and Statement of Faith. They are responsible to ensure that we are managing money and all resources with wisdom and integrity.

Our pastors and staff are responsible for all the operations, functions, and strategies for ministry. Maybe the biggest job we have is equipping and empowering the congregation to partner in the work of the ministry.

Then we have all hundreds of volunteers who serve and lead in all of our ministry efforts.

The congregation includes everyone who attends, it includes everyone in leadership, and it includes those of you who aren't sure if you're ready to take that step yet.

If this feels too hierarchical. We can flip it upside down.

Congregation of ARC



We don't ascend into ministry; we descend into it. And yet, hierarchies aren't inherently bad. People having authority or power isn't good or bad. What matters is what you do with it.

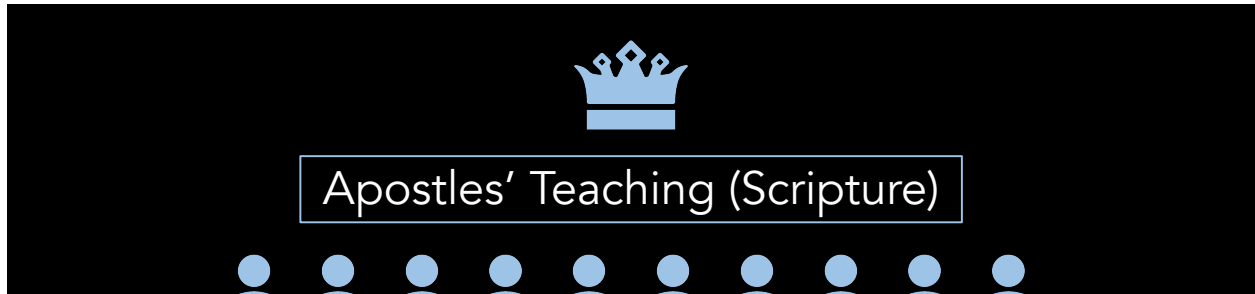


Apostles' Teaching (Scripture)



- Who gives the elders permission to lead in our church? They are empowered by the congregation.
- Who gives the pastors and staff permission to lead in our church? My authority to lead comes from the elders. Pastors are empowered to hire and staff.
- Who gives our group and ministry leaders permission to lead? They are empowered by pastors and staff.
- Who gives our congregation permission to lead? Jesus!

Leadership is a **DESTINATION** of discipleship.



Our intent is to carefully and faithfully follow Scripture and be a church that is permeated by mutual submission and humility in every aspect of our church. I don't know if you've ever thought of it before, but these are the literal meanings of the words that the New Testament uses to describe local church leaders.

Old Man
 Old Woman
 Servant
 Slave
 Manager
 Shepherd

The leadership that we should aspire to and the leadership that is experienced in Autumn Ridge Church should be radically humble. It should be refreshing. And it should be a million miles away from the way that power and authority are commonly used in the world. That's the leadership story we should tell ourselves about ourselves.

If that isn't radical enough for you. Buckle up. Some of us don't have a category for what Peter is going to say next.

1 PETER 5:8-11 *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. 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 for ever and ever. Amen.*

Is this metaphorical or literal?

1 PETER 5:8b-9a *Your enemy **the devil prowls around** like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...*

It's both a metaphor and literal. Satan is not walking around as an actual lion. And yet, he literally is a real figure who is on the hunt for vulnerable sheep. If that sounds like something that serious-minded people can't take seriously, would you consider this?

We can't take **JESUS** seriously and not take **SATAN** seriously.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this right now. If you listen to the podcast, I will tell the full version in the next episode. Evil spiritual forces and figures are real. Satan and demons are real. I've experienced it firsthand.

Some of us went to Guinea in January. That's a West African country. Some of our group facilitated a medical conference. I gave a sermon each day at the conference. Pastor Otis and I, and a couple of others, also provided prayer and counseling for any person who wanted it. On the last day, a woman named CiCi came to talk with us.

I'll tell the unedited version on the podcast. The short version is that when we asked her to trust in Jesus and pray to Jesus—something flipped. She was there, but she wasn't there. She looked at me with hollow eyes and it scared me. This is a professional woman who wore a lovely dress and a matching hat. She began to thrash around on the dirt-covered floor. She said things like, "This is my wife. This is my body. You can't have her."

We were doing our best to keep her from hurting herself or banging her head on the ground. She grunted and snarled. Then that changed to defiant laughter. The whole time Pastor Oits, two other men, and I were praying hard. We asked Jesus to free this woman from the demon that was inside her. This went on for a while. Then she stopped.

We helped her back to her seat. She had no idea how she got there. She was grateful. For the first time in a long time, she felt like she had her body back. She didn't need her glasses anymore. This is a country where it's common for Christians to hide that they are Christians. This woman, CiCi, owned a Bible that she kept hidden under her mattress. People don't do things to get attention. Because persecution is very real there.

You cannot convince me that this wasn't a real encounter with a woman who was possessed by a demon. Jesus freed her. Hear me on this. I have never felt so small and so confident at the same time. One of the reasons that all believers should be humble, and all church leaders should be humble is that we are all sheep. We depend on the power and protection of the Chief Shepherd.

We have no reason for pride. We have every reason for confidence and courage.

1 PETER 5:12-14 *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 greetings, and so does my son Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.*

I'm all about taking scripture seriously, but I'm not kissing any of you, and don't you kiss me.

1 PETER 5:12 *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.***

Do any of you know what happened with these churches that received this letter from Peter? Do you have any idea how their legacy of faith has impacted you and me?

To this remote and underdeveloped region, the apostle Peter writes his letters to Christians who he addresses as “visiting foreigners and resident aliens”, scattered across the vast reaches of Asia Minor. We may surmise that, in no small part because of this letter and the faithfulness of those who received it, well-established churches flourished in all five of these regions by AD 180. Their bishops attended the great councils of the second through the fourth centuries, where the doctrines were forged that Christians hold dear today. –Karen H. Jobes

We don't have any historical evidence that any apostle spent any meaningful time in this region. And yet, giants of the faith emerged from the churches. People like:

- Basil the Great
- Gregory of Nyssa
- Macrina
- Gregory of Nazianus

It's OK if you've never heard any of these names before. What you should know is the example and the writings of these men and women continue to influence Jesus followers today. They have influenced countless millions. And it all started with these early believers who Peter's letter to heart. They accepted the encouragement. They remembered who they were in Jesus. It shaped the activity of their lives. They withstood abuse and they stood fast in the faith. There is no way that they could ever have known the global and historic impact they would have.

And you know what? Neither do you.

You can't know who will **STAND WITH** Christ tomorrow because you resolved to **STAND FAST** today.

Remember who you are in Christ. Let that shape, frame and drive all you do. If you'll do that, Jesus will use it in ways you don't even know how to imagine. We live in a city that needs good news. We live in a world that is desperate for good news. You can't know who will stand with Christ tomorrow because you resolved to stand fast today. **May we stand fast together.**