

For every true leader

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning. We're back in 1 Peter, chapter 5, in our church Bibles, that's page 1016.

And we're looking this morning, really, at just the first four verses of 1 Peter, chapter 5. But I'm going to read in from verse 12 of chapter 4, which we studied last week, because that sets the context and the immediate connection to what Peter is saying here.

Beloved, don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory, even of God, rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or an evildoer, or even as a meddler.

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.

[1 : 2 3] And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous is with difficulty saved, through a hard road, he means, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. So I exhort elders, or older men, you could translate that, among you as a fellow elder and as a fellow witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly. As God would have you. Not for shameful gain, but eagerly.

Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. Amen. May God bless to us this, his word.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, let's turn, shall we, to 1 Peter chapter 5.

And the first four verses, which are all about the road to glory for every true Christian leader.

[3 : 0 8] We've seen Peter tells us that we are an Easter people. That is, that we are called to be shaped through suffering with Jesus.

And we saw last time that that's true for every true believer in Christ. Chapter 4, verse 13. We share Christ's suffering so that we may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

And indeed, Peter emphasizes that that is also true in every single Christian church the world over.

Look at chapter 5, verse 9. The same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Every believer. Every church. And in verses 1 to 4 of chapter 5, he makes another very important point that Christian leaders, and especially those in positions of prominence in local churches, that they are not somehow exempt from this.

In fact, exactly the reverse, says Peter. Like Peter himself, who was an apostle, and indeed, at least for a time, was the lead apostle among Christian leaders.

[4 : 2 2] All Christian leaders, if they are indeed true leaders, will experience, will witness, says Peter, the sufferings of Christ, just as he had done.

Far from being exempt from such sufferings, leaders will lead the way in suffering as examples to the flock. And so, the message of these verses is very clear.

The road to glory for every true Christian leader is likewise to be a road shaped through suffering for glory. But for them, that will happen as they are shaped through their own shepherding of the flock.

The particular sphere of their sufferings will very often be the very ministry that they are called to among God's people. So, this is a very important message, isn't it, for Christian pastors. Perhaps especially for those in training as pastors, for those who may aspire to this place in Christian service. But, of course, Peter's reference is quite wide.

[5 : 26] In fact, his focus is much more on the tasks and on the responsibilities common to all Christian leadership within the church than it is about talking particularly about some special office in the church.

He's not talking here, as Paul does in the pastorals, about how leaders are to be appointed. But he's talking about what leaders are to do and how they're to do it.

And that means, of course, then, that what he says is really very widely applicable to all who in any way bear responsibility in the church. Who bear responsibility for the care of others, for the nurture of others in the faith.

But, of course, senior leaders are particularly under scrutiny here. I'm very conscious of that. I'm very conscious I myself am preaching to myself this morning as much as to any of you.

But then, so is everybody under scrutiny. Look at verse 5. Don't miss that. We'll look at it next week. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders, the seniors, those in positions of authority.

[6 : 27] So, there's an important word here, isn't there, for absolutely everybody. Those in leadership, those being prepared for leadership, and indeed the whole church. You need to understand what genuine Christian leadership looks like.

And to ensure that their church does, in fact, exhibit it. And when it has that, to encourage it, to cherish it, not to undermine it. So, let's focus this morning, then, just on these four verses and see what Peter tells us about the charge and the character and the crown of true Christian leadership. But first of all, you'll see his focus is on another C. I think we should probably call it the middle C, the center point of all true Christ-like leadership.

The cost. Look at verse 1, where he says, The cost of true leadership is that leaders will be witnesses to the sufferings of Christ.

Verse 1 begins with the word, So, because what Peter says here follows directly on from what he said in the preceding verses about the times of frequent trial that will test the church in a hostile culture, in a culture that will throw insults and reviling at people for the name of Christ.

[7 : 45] And in times of stress like that, it is crucial that the whole church will relate rightly to one another. That there will be godly leadership and godly respect among members.

That is essential if the church is to weather these sorts of storms. So, Peter says, leaders must step up and lead by example.

Well, we've seen that, haven't we? Many of us in recent times, how absolutely necessary that is. We've seen right here in Scotland that where there's been absent leadership or where leadership in a church has been undermined in some congregations, that the whole church has been left at sea. It's been left rudderless. It's been left drifting dangerously in dangerous times. We've seen that, haven't we? So, says Peter, verse 1, there's a responsibility on all, on leaders and on all the rest, verse 5, on the younger.

But the leaders are addressed first. Now, it may be coincidence or it may be deliberate, I don't know. But in chapter 4, verse 17, you see that we looked at last time where Peter speaks about judgment beginning at the house of God.

[8 : 58] His words there reflect almost exactly the words in Ezekiel chapter 9. Don't look it up, but it's where God speaks about judgment beginning at the house of God. And that judgment begins with the elders.

And Peter here first addresses elders, presbyters. Literally, the word just means older men. It's the same word used in verse 5 in contrast to younger men.

But it's clear here he's talking about those who have leadership responsibilities. Now, that was a cultural norm going back to ancient times. You read way back in the Old Testament in Exodus 24, for example, of the elders of ancient Israel.

You read in the Gospels about the Jewish leaders, the elders and the scribes. So, it was quite natural that that term was carried over into the Christian community and the church. Church is, of course, the renewed Israel of God.

And so, we read in Acts 15 of the apostles and the elders in the church in Jerusalem. You read of Paul, wherever they went in their missionary journeys, appointing elders, presbyters.

[10:03] Acts 14, verse 23, for example. And you read that Paul sent Titus to Crete to appoint these presbyters in every town. Now, in these early days, most of these men were probably senior men who were heads of their own households.

Some of them very large households with lots of servants. And therefore, they were naturally able and fitted for leadership in the house churches, which probably met in their homes.

In fact, that's why in 1 Timothy chapter 3, we're told the leader must be able to manage his own household and do that properly. Otherwise, how on earth can he manage the household of God, God's church?

So, he means here senior men. But, of course, it's clear in the New Testament that age alone is not a sufficient qualification. That's why in the pastoral epistles, Paul lays out all sorts of other things that are important.

And, of course, the chief of these, of course, is the ability to be able to teach faithfully the true gospel. And that, of course, is because Christ's church is led not by man's word, however senior he may be, however wise he may be, but by the word of God alone.

[11:17] Peter's clear about that here in chapter 4, verse 11. Do you remember? It's God's oracles, not man's wise words, that serves the church. So, leadership in God's church always comes through ministry of the word of God and that alone.

That's why Hebrews 13, verse 7 says, leaders are those who spoke the word of God to you. But, of course, to do that rightly and in a way that will lead the church truly requires maturity.

John Calvin says that Peter calls them elders here, not necessarily because they're all old in age, but because, he says, they were mainly chosen from the older four, says Calvin.

Age, for the most part, has more prudence, authority, and experience. I know that is not very popular today in our particular culture.

It may not be very impressive to many of the younger people here, but, friends, in fact, that is true. When I was 17, I thought I knew everything. When I was 27, I thought I knew a lot more than I now realize I do not know at the age of 47.

[12:30] Maybe if I lived to 67, I would have learned something. Prudence, authority, and experience comes with maturity.

Now, cultures differ, of course, on what number of years will confer this status of age upon someone. In the ancient world, generally speaking, it was roughly about the age of 40.

But Peter's point isn't about specific age. It's about speaking of men with prudence, authority, and experience. That is, with enough of life's experience and testing as fit people to be mature Christian people of some stature and some stability.

It's notable if you read 1 Timothy 3 and Titus chapter 1 that most of the qualifications, indeed, all of the qualifications, apart from the ability to teach, which is essential, all of the qualifications for leadership in that way concern character and behavior, which is tested by experience.

And again, I can tell you from personal experience how disastrous it is when a church lacks age and experience in their leadership.

[13:44] Pity the church that is led only by young and inexperienced men. There is a reason, is there not, why car insurance is so astronomically expensive for young men.

There is a reason for that. And churches could learn a useful lesson from Sun Alliance or Direct Line. They're not fools. And neither should we be in the church.

Notice verse 1, Peter calls himself a fellow elder. Not only is he showing an example there of not lording it over other leaders in view of his apostleship, but he is showing us that the apostolic authority and the rule in the church became merged with that of the presbyter.

Remember back in John chapter 21, three times Jesus commanded, Peter, feed my sheep, shepherd, pastor, my flock. Exactly the same language as he uses here in verse 2.

Our word pastor, by the way, is just the Latin version of the Greek word here, shepherd. Now, of course, at this stage, of course, there was no fixed structures or patterns of church offices as such.

[14:57] Indeed, if you read the New Testament honestly, you'll find that there's a fair degree of variation. There are different emphases that are there in the church. And that's, of course, why over the years, different churches, different groupings have developed different leadership structures.

That's because the New Testament does not simply lay down absolutely clearly one particular church polity. And that's true, no matter how deeply held some forms of church polity are to some people.

There's a variety. But Peter's point is a simple one. He is simply saying there must be leadership and good leadership. And his focus is on what that entails and how it's carried out, on the charge and the character of that leadership.

But the first focus is on the cost. Peter calls himself a fellow witness of Christ's sufferings. The word fellow there really governs both the word elder and witness.

And he's saying right up front that true Christian leadership is costly because it is Christ-like.

Leaders are not exempt from the stresses and strains of verses 12 to 19 of chapter 4 with all the fiery trials.

[16:11] Indeed, he is saying they will exemplify them. And often they will be in the front line facing the fire the hardest. Peter himself knew that.

Read Acts 5. Read Acts 12. He was put in prison because the authorities wanted to disrupt the church. He was targeted and others very similarly. Paul tells us the same of Epaphroditus and of Timothy and Philippians suffering for the gospel.

Paul himself knew all about it. Read 2 Corinthians chapter 11. And that's still so today. If you read the magazines of Release International or the Barnabas Fund, you'll see it is the leaders who are very often imprisoned and martyred first because they know that if you want to hit the church, hit the leadership.

And in many situations of stress and conflict, whether from without or from within the church, the truth is that the chief burdens of such do inevitably fall upon church leaders.

And sometimes that cost is very great. I've seen good men, dear, dear brothers in Christ, people who I esteem and love, nearly crushed by the personal cost of their faithfulness in leadership.

[17:32] Witnesses, says Peter, of the sufferings of Christ in very painful things, in very disturbing things. As one writer says, the courageous act of leading the church in perilous times rather than renouncing Christ is itself a form of witness.

Peter shares with local church leadership. Because as Peter says, we share already as partakers in the glory of Christ that one day will be revealed, one day will be shown to the whole world.

But for now, do you remember last time? That glory rests upon us. Look at chapter 4, verse 14. As we are insulted, as we are reviled for his name's sake, we are partaking in that.

So Christian leadership is a noble calling, Paul says that to Timothy. But there is cost. And leaders will not be exempt from that suffering.

They will exemplify it often in an exaggerated way. So you need to be clear about that, young men, if you desire to lead. Not only, as James tells us, will those who teach be judged more strictly, there will be witnesses, painfully and truly, of the sufferings of Christ.

[19:00] That is the cost of Christian leadership. As I said, he's not talking here exclusively about one particular pastoral office alone. Alan Stibbs, in his commentary, I think is right when he says that there's a wide reference here to any within local congregations who exercise pastoral care and oversight over others.

Some leaders, of course, have oversight over a whole congregation. That's my charge. That's the calling that I was inducted to here in this congregation. But many others have people in their charge.

That's the phrase used in verse 3. Many of us here have that also, people in our charge, in a host of different ministries. Small group ministries, Release the Word, Tronet 2, area groups, youth team ministries, and on and on it goes.

Every husband and father, according to the New Testament, is a leader in his own home, bears that responsibility. Well, there's a cost to that, always, if it's to be true Christian leadership.

And, of course, don't forget, says Peter, a glory. A glory which will one day be revealed. But what is this charge, then, whether we find ourselves in charge of large numbers of people or small?

[20:22] Well, the first part of verse 2 gives us clearly the charge of all true Christian leadership. And that is that true leaders will lead, not follow the flock of Christ.

The church of Jesus Christ is not a democracy. I'll say that again. The church of Jesus Christ is not a democracy. That may be a surprise to some people.

It may be very uncongenial to some people in our modern day. But Peter is clear. The charge of the presbyter is to lead, to shepherd the flock, pastor it.

As Ephesians 4, verse 11, translates that word a little more familiar for us. To shepherd the flock and to exercise oversight. The word is episcopate. It's where we get our word bishop from.

The shepherd is to oversee with authority. But nevertheless, verse 4, under the authority of the chief shepherd, the arch shepherd, literally.

[21 : 24] It was Jesus Christ and no other, let it be noted. So what he's saying is every Christian leader in charge of others is, in one sense, a bishop. But the only archbishop that there is, is the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And he is in heaven, by the way, not in Canterbury and not in Rome, certainly. Only one archbishop. Now, Peter's already told us, back in chapter 2, verse 25, that Jesus is the pastor bishop.

He is the shepherd, the pastor. He is the overseer of our souls. And so the clear charge of all Christian leadership is to share in that ministry of Jesus.

To do Jesus' work, Jesus' way. But that means, according to Peter, that every Christian leader will be a real shepherd. So we need to know what he means by that word shepherd.

There is nothing sentimental about the Bible's use of that term shepherd. It is not ever a picture of meekly playing with cuddly lambs and all that sort of thing.

[22 : 28] Not at all. We read Psalm 80 at the beginning of the service about God, the shepherd of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, the mighty leader who comes down to save his people.

Psalm 78 speaks likewise of God leading his people like a flock out of Egypt through the wilderness, but driving out enemies like a fierce warrior on their behalf.

In Isaiah chapter 40, yes, indeed, it does speak of God leading his people gently and carrying lambs, but in the same breath, he speaks about God's might and his ruling arm around his people. Even in Psalm 23, as we sang, it's all about God's strength to lead and provide and protect from evil, drive away foes, and with his rod and staff to discipline his people.

And so we could go on. But God the shepherd is God the strong and powerful leader and protector of his people. So it was natural that God designated national leaders of Israel to be called their shepherds, the kings and the prophets and so on.

[23 : 40] Because if you read the Old Testament, you discover that so often they fail to be good and true leaders like that. Read Jeremiah 23. Read Ezekiel 34. Read Jeremiah 24. And so God had to promise that he himself would come down and be the shepherd of his people.

He himself would raise up another David, the great shepherd king, who would come and rescue his people and lead them and rule them truly forever. So, of course, Jesus referred to himself as the good shepherd.

And Hebrews 13 calls him the great shepherd. And Peter here, the chief shepherd. And Jesus himself passes on that role of shepherd, not anymore to the leaders of Israel as a nation, but to the leaders of the church.

First to his apostles, and then to those whom the apostles would choose and appoint and train. And that is the true apostolic succession.

It's in the task of true and godly shepherding. It's in the charge. It's not in some charm that comes through the laying on of hands, in some idea of unbroken physical succession from the first apostles in Jerusalem.

[24 : 54] That idea of the church of Rome was quite rightly refuted and dispensed with by the reformers. It is quite erroneous. We should have nothing to do with it. But the charge of caring for God's people must be passed on.

Paul says that so clearly in 2 Timothy 2 verse 2. You are to find others and entrust to faithful men who are able to teach others also this task that you have. And that is what Peter is saying here. Jesus commanded him to feed the sheep, to shepherd, to pastor his flock. And now he is passing that on to others. And true shepherding means that.

It means pastoring, pasturing with spiritual food, with the truth of the gospel of Christ. The very words that Paul used in Acts chapter 20 where they gathered the Ephesian elders and told them they were to be bishops.

They were to be overseers of the flock. How? By teaching them the whole counsel of God as he had done. By protecting them from the wolves who would come in and pervert the truth.

[26 : 02] And by admonishing them. That is by applying the disciplines of God's word to them even painfully with tears. The shepherd is to oversee by proclaiming the word and by protecting the work of God.

As Dick Lucas has put it, an elder presbyter must be a teacher of the truth. Any other rule will become ungodly and worldly.

Because again, chapter 4 verse 11, it is speaking God's words, his oracles, not man's, that serves the church. That's why in Ephesians 4 verse 11, that word pastor, shepherd, and teacher are joined together almost as one word.

Pastors and teachers. Because it is by speaking God's words that we lead and no other way. Of course, that doesn't necessarily mean that all Christian leaders must be able to teach and preach publicly in front of a whole congregation.

Obviously, anybody who is called to the charge of a congregation must be able to preach and teach with authority like that. Because that is how the church is led. It's quite wrong for someone to be a preacher to say, well, I'm not a leader.

[27 : 19] I just do the teaching. That's a contradiction in terms. Because leadership in the Bible is through the gospel. Through God's word. And you will be doing it, either well or badly.

But all leadership must be able to teach and apply the word of God with authority. And therefore, exercise oversight over those who are, verse 3, in their charge.

Whether that's in a small group or a large group. Whether it's with individuals. Whether it's just one-to-one. Because we lead by the word of God alone.

And because we are all, every one of us, under shepherds of Christ, the chief shepherd, the great shepherd. To lead is to shepherd, to pastor people.

To oversee the people of God in our charge. Those who are our responsibility. And to be to them servants, ministers of the word of God.

[28 : 18] Never masters of a word, but servants of it. And that is Christian leadership. Whether your charge is large, responsible for many people. Or whether it's small, over a few.

Over a home group. A CU group. A Bible study. Your own children at home. If you're a mother. There's nothing wrong, of course, with relative seniority.

Of course, the New Testament recognizes that. It regularly addresses some as more senior leaders. And others as more junior. Most church structures today, of course, do just the same. In fact, even Presbyterian churches use that term bishop sometimes.

Of a senior minister overseeing a more junior one. Or ones that are in training. But however senior or junior, all who bear responsibility over others must lead.

Not following the sheep. Not pandering to the sheep. And sheep can sometimes be very stubborn, can't they? Sometimes very stupid. But exercising godly oversight.

[29 : 24] Teaching and admonishing. Calling to account. Grasping nettles. You would rather not grasp. And applying God's word in the sphere of your responsibility among those who are in your charge.

And it's when Christian leaders, in whatever context, don't do that, that we see the tragedy of sheep without a shepherd. A leadership vacuum that just leads to disaster.

True shepherds must be real leaders, says Peter. But equally, he says, true shepherds must be true servants.

True servants. Look at verse 4 again. Every leader. Every leader, no matter how senior, is serving the chief shepherd. Even the most senior leader will never, ever, ever be the arch shepherd.

Because only Jesus is the ruler of his church. So every leader, however senior, must speak God's word, not his own.

[30 : 28] He serves with God's strength, not his own. It's Jesus' work, Jesus' way. And that leads Peter, in verses 2 and 3, to the character of true Christian leadership.

True leaders, he says, will serve in the pattern of Christ himself, not in that of the world. And he gives three antitheses here that characterize true Christian leadership.

And, of course, it's specially applied to leaders. But again, as he says, verse 3, even the most senior leaders are to be examples to the flock. They're to show the way of godly service to all.

They're to show other leaders how to lead. They're to show junior leaders how to become senior leaders properly. And they're to help others to be led because they will gladly follow such godly leadership and not resent it.

And speaking of these things, you see, he is recognizing that the shepherd is a leader and that he must lead strongly. And that's why he addresses here the particular perils of somebody who will lead clearly and strongly.

[31 : 37] John Calvin says it sums up three common vices for any pastor. Sloth, desire for gain, and lust for power. So first he says in verse 2, exercise oversight not under compulsion but willingly as God would have you.

In other words, he's saying a leader must not be shrinking or shirking but stepping up willingly like Christ himself, the chief shepherd. I don't think here it is so much sloth, actually, or shirking that he's concerned with.

Although there is no room for laziness in Christian ministry. It's hard graft. There's no place in Christian leadership for the work shy. And if you're thinking of Christian leadership yourself, you need to be ready for that.

You need to work doing not just what you're compelled to do, but working hard with self-motivation to do all that you can do for Christ. Of course, it's not only Christian ministry that's hard work. Let's not be silly about this. Most work is hard work, isn't it? One of the problems of people coming into Christian ministry who have never done any other work, when they find the work hard, they just think it's ministry that's hard work.

[32 : 46] Well, it's not. It's life that's hard. That's why it's such a good thing, usually, for most people coming into ministry to experience other work. They learn all these things that everybody else has to put up. It's not just them.

You need to get real about life, not just ministry. But I don't think Peter's focus here is so much on shirking in that sense. Rather, I think he's speaking about shrinking, shrinking back in the face of difficulty, in the face of danger and persecution.

What he's saying is leaders are called to lead under fire. They're called to put their head above the parapet, to face opposition with courage, not with cowardice.

But that will mean being shot at. Being shot at is not nice. It's not easy. It's not pleasant. Someone once said to me that those called to be pioneering leaders get shot at twice, from the front and from the back.

And I think that pretty much is true to life. And Peter knew that. Acts chapter 12, James was martyred. Peter was imprisoned. And in his prison, there wasn't Sky TV and permanent football like there is today.

[33 : 54] And that's hard, isn't it? It's hard in the midst of struggle and conflict. Because the easiest thing in the world is to put your head down to avoid that conflict.

Keep your head down about theological controversy. Avoid opprobrium with the establishment. Yes, be evangelical.

Talk about water down the implications of the gospel just enough. And you will avoid suffering. You will. And very probably you'll gain recognition as well. They'll make you a bishop and give you a seat in the House of Lords.

They'll make you a moderator and put a big chain around your neck. The chain isn't still lost. Or in a congregation, it's very tempting to give people what they want.

And decline to grasp nettles. That way you will remain popular. That way you will burnish your reputation with many as a wonderful preacher.

[34 : 56] While the church, of course, just becomes entrenched in sinful behavior and is never changed truly by the gospel. But you will not suffer. Let me tell you, anyone who has had to face hostile fire from without or faced harmful sin within a church knows how hard that is.

How wounding that is. How scarring. How painfully crushing that can be. To be personally crucified by character assassination.

By gossip. By lies. And all sorts of things. But the road to glory, says Peter, for the Christian leader means not shrinking from that. But stepping up willingly as God would have you.

In the pattern of the Christ himself. Who was not like the hired hand who protect himself at the expense of the sheep. But who laid down his own life for the sheep at great cost.

Not shrinking. But stepping up. And verse 2. Not for shameful gain. But eagerly. That is, not seeking. But sharing worthily.

[36 : 06] Like Christ the good shepherd. Clear, isn't it, in the New Testament. That those who are given over wholly to shepherding the flock of God. Did receive financial compensation.

So that they didn't have to work alongside in order to support themselves. But of course, as soon as you have that, you lay open the door for abuse. Paul speaks in 1 Timothy 6 of the snare that is desire for gain.

And the evil that it leads to. That's why one of the qualifications for leadership in the pastorals is not being a lover of money. It's always such a concerning sign.

When I hear a young minister or someone in training. Or indeed an older one. Who's never off the subject of money. How they might get this grant. Or that extra allowance. Or whatever it might be. My heart sinks.

Because I know where that's going to end up. I've seen it. I've seen ministries ruined. By pastors. Who have self gain.

[37 : 04] Or by pastors' wives. Who are not happy with their lot. And want more. Of course, there's another side. Jesus is plain, isn't he? The laborer deserves his food.

Jesus is clear. And Paul is clear. The church has a responsibility. Not to have its workers in penury. The servants of the church can't serve. If they're worried sick all the time. About how they're going to pay the next bill. But it's an attitude here that Peter's speaking of.

One of not seeing leadership as about gain. But about giving. Not about seeking. But about sharing lives. And sharing substance for Christ and his people. And yet we're all human, aren't we?

And there are many, many temptations. Think of a pastor in a very poor country. Where he is the one with access to the church's funds. What a great temptation that is for him. To help himself.

Or to help his cronies. Or to give way to the many hangers-on. And people who will chase him.

Asking for money. Very, very hard. Or even here. Where some pastors are struggling financially.

[38 : 06] How easy to suck up to those who do have money. Get in with them. For what they can give you. Become beholden to them. And ultimately their puppet.

Oh, that happens so often. I know of an instance where it ended up exactly with that. With a pastor being hamstrung. And unable to deal with problems in his leadership.

Because he was so beholden to them in a financial sense. Or what about the situation of real hostility in some parts of the world today. Where the state is persecuting the church.

And there is great pressure to take bribes in order to cooperate with the church. I read just this week in the latest release international magazine of a pastor in Vietnam. Who said exactly that.

That the government is giving incentives to church leaders for their cooperation. Financial incentives. And I quote him. Unfortunately, this strategy is beginning to work.

[39 : 01] It's bringing division among church leaders. They no longer trust one another. I've been offered, he says. I've been told that the government will open doors for me.

But I would have to close the doors of the Bible college that I run. And so he says the only way for Christianity to survive in Vietnam. Is for every church leader.

To carry his cross. No self-seeking. But sharing. Like the Lord Jesus himself. And thirdly, in verse 3. Not scourging.

But serving winsomely. Like Christ himself. Not domineering over those in your charge. But being examples to the flock. Surely, Jesus' words in Mark 10 are ringing in Peter's ears.

The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. But not so among you. Whoever would be great among you must be your servant. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.

[40 : 00] And to give his life as a ransom for many. See, neither Peter nor Jesus is criticizing strong leadership. Not at all. He is urging real, clear, strong leading.

He tells us leaders are in charge. In the sense that they're responsible for the ones who are in their charge. As verse 3 says. But those who are in their charge.

Verse 2 tells us are the flock of God. They're his sheep. They're to be passed at his way. The way of the good shepherd. As one writer's put it.

The followers of Jesus are to use their authority to serve. Peter knew that so easily with strength can go pride.

As John Calvin says. When the pastor exempts himself from all subjection. And oppresses the church with tyranny. And yes, that can happen. But not so with you, says Jesus.

[41 : 02] To all who lead in his church. Whatever capacity. Great or small. Calvin reminds us that God never cedes to his leaders in the church.

Government of the church. Only the care of the church. The entire dominion, he says, belongs to God alone. And so senior leaders are never to forget this.

But rather to exemplify, says Peter, Christ-like service. Not weakness. Not puny pliability. Not authority. No. But the real strength of the meekness of Christ himself.

Whose authority was absolutely beyond doubt. There to be examples to the more junior leaders. That real authority comes both in the message.

Which is God's word and not ours. But also in the manner of the messenger. From lips and from lives that proclaim God's grace and his truth.

[42 : 02] We exhibit Christ's true authority when we serve his word. And when we serve his people. Real leaders use their authority to serve.

Whatever the sphere. Whatever the particular charge. Large or small. But all leaders do have a charge to keep. And we all need to recognize that. Whether we're leaders or followers.

Verse 5. We'll look at next time. But it's plain, isn't it? Just as leaders are to be held accountable for their actions. So are we all. You who are younger. Be subject. That's Peter's favorite phrase, isn't it? So those of you in release the word. When you go home, read Hebrews 13 verse 17. Your leaders watch over you and your souls as those who will give an account.

So help them. Don't hinder them. Let them do it with joy. Not with groaning. For that would be of no benefit to you. You young folk who are inactivate and trawn youth and Bible calls.

[43 : 02] Read 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 12 later on. Respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord. And admonish you. Sometimes have to tell you off.

Esteem them very highly in love because of their work. And of course these and many other things apply to all of us, don't they?

It's all for our good and for our health. Because where a church is rightly ordered with real Christian leadership in evidence. It's not absent. It will be clear, as Howard Marshall puts it, that leadership does not mean superiority and the right to domineer.

And followership does not mean the right to undermine. That's very well put, isn't it? Leaders, says Peter, must be real shepherds.

Strong, fearless overseers of the flock. But leaders must also be real servants. Humble, under-shepherds for the flock.

[44 : 09] And that's the only road that will lead to what Peter holds out here in verse 4, the crown of true leadership. Whereby the true Christian leader will share in the glory of Christ.

The real key to all Christian leadership and all Christian service of any kind is to remember that there is a chief shepherd. And that we serve him alone and that he alone has dominion over his church.

But because the chief shepherd is also the great shepherd and the good shepherd who loves his sheep, he will appear, says Peter, and he will share his glory with all his faithful ones.

An unfading crown of glory. Not like the crown of any earthly glory of this world. That'll fade just as the grass and the flower of the grass he spoke of in chapter 1. The crown that comes to the faithful steward in Jesus' parable.

Not the wicked servant who abused the household for his own benefit. Could be that the crown of unfading glory here is just the entrance to heaven. It's just the crown of life that Paul speaks of and Revelation speaks of.

[45 : 20] But it may be there's more than that here. Because remember Paul in 1 Corinthians 3 in the context of Christian ministry, he speaks, doesn't he, about building in our ministry on gold and silver and precious stones.

Things that will outlast the fire of judgment. And what survives, he says, will bring reward. And presumably that is the unfading joy of seeing the real fruit of your labors for Christ at last.

Because we don't see that at present, do we? Peter says that the glories that we are partakers of already won't be revealed fully until the Lord appears.

And we'll share often in the meantime in the glory. But that will be insults and opposition and plenty of disappointments. Why do you think Jesus told the parable of the sower to his followers?

It's only at the last day, at the harvest time, that you will see the fruit of what you've been sowing. What you're going to see along the road of your Christian life and service is a lot of great disappointments and painful things.

[46 : 22] And that's so true to life, isn't it? Yes, of course, Christian leadership is rewarding even now in many ways.

But as Dick Lucas has said, the rewards we have in this life will never be enough to keep us in ministry. Certainly not through the hard times.

Because we don't yet see the fruit of our labors. And that is hard. I think that's why so many people I know in ministry have hobbies in things like DIY. Because you make something and you see the end product.

You build a house and you see what you've done. That's why Edward has his chickens to play with. They lay eggs and he hatches them and he grows them up and they win prizes. He gets his reward now.

But the real prize, the real crown of our life's work is not yet revealed. And so instead, as John Calvin says, long and great labors are often in vain.

[47 : 27] Satan sometimes prevails with his wicked devices. So then, to prevent the faithful servant of Christ from being cast down, there is this one and only remedy to turn his eyes to the coming of Christ.

By this it will come about that he who seems to derive no encouragement from men will faithfully go on with his labor, knowing that a great reward is prepared for him by the Lord.

So friends, let every one of us who's been given a charge of shepherding precious people of Christ, old or young, large or small, public or private, let us be faithful to our calling.

And to Christ's character in it, whatever the cost, as we are shaped through our shepherding of others for glory.

Because that's the only road to glory for every true Christian leader. And when the chief shepherd appears, says Peter, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

[48 : 39] Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you call us to serve as under-shepherds of the great shepherd, the Lord Jesus himself.

Help us to be a people doing Jesus' work, Jesus' way, for Jesus' glory alone. And we ask it for his sake and in his name.

Amen.