

HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

STUDY FOURTEEN

Hope Beyond Religion: A Job Description for Shepherds

1 Peter 5:1–4

No textbook, no course can make you a shepherd. It is a calling. If you do not have that calling, do not pursue the pastorate because it requires the heart of a shepherd.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE role of the pastor is unlike any other. So it can be difficult to determine what kind of qualities make someone a *good* pastor.

Many view the pastor as a CEO who manages the administrative side of the church, grows the congregation, and never loses sight of the bottom line. For some, the ideal pastor has the polished looks and smooth speech of a politician—one who casts a bright vision for the future and campaigns for a few key causes. Others prefer pastors to have the iron will of a commanding officer who offers weekly marching orders that keep the church in line.

While any pastor would benefit from having skills in management, administration, and leadership, the picture that Scripture paints of the ideal pastor spotlights a different set of qualities. In fact, a great Christian leader must have the qualities of a *shepherd*.

While a worldly leader may be forceful, a shepherd is *gracious*. While a worldly leader may be obstinate, a shepherd is *patient*. While a worldly leader may be callous, a shepherd is *understanding*. While a worldly leader may be narcissistic, a shepherd is *loving*.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will explore these Christlike qualities of shepherds to demonstrate how Christian leaders can faithfully tend to those whom God put under their care.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

No minister of the gospel can shepherd God’s sheep without looking to the *true* Shepherd for guidance, nourishment, and protection. As you prepare to explore Peter’s vital direction, pray the words of *Psalms 23*:

*“The LORD is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.
He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.
He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.
Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.
Your rod and your staff
protect and comfort me.
You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.
You honor me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings.
Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the LORD
forever.”*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The first four chapters of 1 Peter contain teachings that would challenge even the most seasoned believer. Peter called his readers to endure the most unjust kinds of suffering by clinging to their hope in Jesus Christ. Yet Peter wasn’t a fool, and he knew that this was easier said than done. He recognized that these struggling believers needed someone who could lead by example.



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So, in *1 Peter 5:1–4*, Peter addressed the Christian elders—those mature believers whom the community held in highest regard. Yet, instead of calling them to step up and take command, he exhorted them to bow down to Christ and to follow Him as their Chief Shepherd.



Observation: Guidelines for Shepherds

Begin your study by reading *1 Peter 5:1–4*. Read it slowly. Read it carefully. Read it deliberately. As you read, observe the words. Examine the details. Notice the exhortations. Doing so will help you understand the passage's meaning and apply its message later on.

According to *1 Peter 5:1*, what group of individuals within the Christian community did Peter specifically address? _____

Notice how Peter includes himself in this group. What hopeful experience will Peter and this group of struggling believers share in the future?

In light of this future hope, what central command did Peter extend to this group in *5:2a*?



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In *1 Peter 5:2a*, Peter offered a command, and in *5:2b–3*, he explained *how* to do it. What steps did Peter give to obey his central command?

According to *5:4*, what awaits those who heed Peter's commands upon the return of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd?

We pastors must watch our tendency of wanting to gain dominion over others—of wanting to think of them as underlings. No, think of yourself as a servant, not as sovereign. This wonderful section of Scripture is a good reminder that, as important as it is to be in authority, it is never appropriate for us to lord it over others. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: The Role and Attitudes of Shepherds

Peter wrote *1 Peter 5:1–4* specifically for “elders” of Christian communities. This term may feel unfamiliar to you, but Peter’s readers were closely familiar with the roles and responsibilities of elders.

Using your Bible-study tools, look up the term *elder*. (For a free online resource, check out *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* available at biblestudytools.com.) Look up some New Testament passages that discuss elders and write down some key takeaways. What kinds of things did elders do? What is the modern-day equivalent of an elder?

Some Christian leaders might feel a sense of pride in their position, but the call to act like a shepherd is a call to abandon any illusion of self-importance.

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, shepherds lived on the furthest fringes of society—both literally and metaphorically. They settled down in fields alone, separated from the comforts and excitement of city life. They worked with hard-headed and soft-witted animals, and the foul stench of mud, feed, and dung followed them and their woolly companions everywhere.

For these reasons, people usually only worked as shepherds when they had no other choice. Though there was little honor in living the lowly life of a shepherd, God used this occupation to illustrate the high honor of serving in ministry.



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In light of this background and the context of the passage, what kinds of attitudes and character traits should Christian leaders cultivate in their lives?

The central goal of interpretation is to develop theological truths that remain valuable for all believers across time.¹ Write two or three timeless principles based on *1 Peter 5:1–4* by completing the following phrase:
Christian leaders can shepherd God's flock by . . .

Shepherd the flock of God with these three attitudes: willingness, eagerness, and meekness.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Following the Good Shepherd

In a paradoxical twist, Peter acknowledged that these shepherds of the church are *still sheep* because they follow the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ (*1 Peter 5:4*). This reality was deeply personal for Peter because he spent three years of his life walking closely with his Shepherd. As he penned these words, the memory of one particular conversation with Jesus likely stood out.



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In *John 10:11*, Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd. What does the Good Shepherd do? According to *10:12–13*, how is the behavior of the owner of the sheep different from the behavior of one hired to help manage the sheep?

According to *John 10:27*, what kind of relationship do sheep have with their Good Shepherd? According to *10:28*, what is the Good Shepherd's ultimate goal for His sheep?

In what way is Jesus' example instructive for those He has called to steward a portion of His flock? What does it look like to follow the model of the Good Shepherd rather than a hired hand?



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Though God calls some to help shepherd His flock, He remains the Chief Shepherd. Everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord is like a sheep dependent upon Him for divine protection, spiritual nourishment, and eternal comfort. So what does it look like practically to be a shepherding sheep?



Application: Shepherding and Being Shepherded

Whether you're a shepherd serving in vocational ministry or whether you're a faithful member of a local church community, this passage has valuable application for everyone. Pastor Chuck Swindoll identifies two key applications.

First, *to those who are shepherds, keep a healthy balance*. Teach truth, but never stop learning. Counsel well, but never without listening. Lead your allotted portion of God's flock, but never forget that every believer—including *you*—follows the Good Shepherd.

What flock has the Chief Shepherd given you to steward? It could be your congregation, your employees, your neighborhood, or your family. What practical steps can you take to display the self-giving heart of Jesus as you shepherd others?

Second, *to those who are being shepherded, be a reason for rejoicing*. Encourage your pastor. Pray for your church. Model gratitude and love with everyone in the community.



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In what way can you be a tangible encouragement to your pastor or another ministry leader this week? Write down three or four ideas and commit to one. Making a sacrifice will show your gratitude for all the sacrifice this person has made for you!

The life of a shepherd is not a glamorous one. It is a life often characterized by messy service and unrequited sacrifice. Yet such a life is pleasing to God, and He will one day bestow that lowly shepherd with “a crown of never-ending glory and honor.”

So, when ministry gets hard, take heart. God sees you. Continue to serve Him and His flock faithfully. Your special reward lies ahead.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for shepherding me throughout my life—for protecting me from evil, for nourishing my soul, for caring for me despite my stubbornness. Cultivate these shepherd-like qualities within me so that I might serve You and meet the needs of Your flock. I pray these things in Jesus’ gracious, patient, understanding, and loving name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”

