

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Encouraging Elders

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore, elders among y’all, I exhort (come-alongside-to-help), ...I, the fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of the Messiah, and also a participant (sharer) of the about-to-be-revealed glory...; ² shepherd God's flock among you, ...overseeing, not out of compulsion but willingly, according to God; and not for shameful-gain but eagerly; ³ not lording it down upon the ones entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you younger men, be subject (ordered-under) to the elders. And all of you clothe yourselves with humble-thinking toward one another, because God resists (orders-Himself-against) the proud (ostentatious), but gives grace to the humble (‘undistinguished’, lowly). ⁶ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, in order that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

1 Peter 5:1-7

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Acts 20:28

It is unfortunate that there is a chapter division here, because we lose sight of the context. **The context leading up to this paragraph is about being responsible to serve one another, according to the giftings and calling God has placed in our lives. Furthermore, we are to be willing to embrace difficulty, suffering and hardship for Christ.** With this in mind, it is quite evident that the same themes are involved in this passage, as well.

Whereas the focus in chapter four was on using our spiritual gifts in service to one another, here **Peter brings up another area of responsibility and service: being an elder in the family of believers. Being an elder is not a spiritual gift. It is a functional responsibility of care for others.** In the lists of spiritual gifts, “elder” is conspicuously absent. When Paul established new churches, he would get things started, and then would leave. When he returned, he would identify those who had the established maturity, character and ability to oversee and care for others (e.g., Acts 14:21-23). **The term “elder” implies that they were older individuals, seasoned by life experience. What was most important, however, was that they were living spiritually healthy, productive lives. Their lives were to exemplify what a godly person should look like, ...and they were to be people who had a heart to serve and help others in their walk.**

In the pastoral letters, Paul gave Timothy and Titus a list of qualities to look for in the lives of those who should be considered for this role (1 Tim. 1:5; 3:1-7; Tit. 3:5-9). **They are to be people of good character and reputation, emotionally and spiritually stable and sound, and ones who can both teach healthy doctrine and refute what is erroneous. The responsibility they are entrusted with is to shepherd the flock of God,** overseeing or keeping watch over the health and safety of the people and the relationships within the group. **Their service of leadership is based upon relationship and example.** They embody the characteristics and habits of a good follower of Jesus Christ. Notice that “shepherd” and “oversee” are both verbal forms here.

Everyone in the first century communities would have been familiar with what shepherds did. **The responsibility of a shepherd was to watch over (oversee) the sheep in order to keep them safe, see that they receive proper nutrition and care, so that they could grow, prosper and reproduce.** A shepherd had to address what was happening with the sheep he or she was caring for. He or she had to watch for dangers, cuts, sickness, and parasites, among other things. People understood that **shepherding was a role of protection and service. It was not a position of control, dominance or power over the sheep.** It was a role that brought skill, care and strength *to benefit the sheep, ...the shepherd served the sheep, not vice versa.*

The word, “therefore”, in verse one strongly ties this section to the teaching of the previous chapter. In 4:7, Peter had written that “the fulfillment of all things has come near, therefore be sound-minded and clear-headed toward prayers.” **God has made available to us now the possibility and empowerment that He had been preparing for through the centuries. In Christ, our sins have been paid for, access to God Himself has been made available to us,** and now **all the possibilities of the new covenant have been placed within us through the indwelling Holy Spirit.** Therefore, we are to embrace the opportunities God has given to us. **Having agapē-love that is active, healthy and reaching out is to be our first concern, ...then warm hospitality to one another. This is to be followed up by each one of us using our unique Spirit-enabled giftings to serve one another,** as responsible stewards of God’s varied grace. We are to take seriously our role, serving according to His empowerment, so that God would get the glory. **But, in 4:12, Peter warns us not to be surprised at the fiery trials that will also be coming upon us to test us. Instead, according as we share in the sufferings of the Christ, we are to rejoice.** Judgment will begin from the house of God, and if even the righteous are saved with difficulty, what will happen to those who do not acknowledge God? **So, in**

chapter 4, we have *possibility* and *opportunity* followed by *suffering* and *difficulty*. What matters is that we entrust ourselves to God by doing what is good.

Note how Peter introduces the next section: “Therefore, elders, I come-alongside-to-help (exhort, encourage, comfort), ...I, the fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a sharer of the being-about-to-be-revealed-glory...” Peter is saying, “I, too, am an elder. I know what you are dealing with. I have seen the sufferings of Christ, but I am also a participant in the glory that will soon be fully-uncovered...” Suffering, ...and glory, ...experienced *now*, ...but also more to be revealed. Both aspects are present realities. Both must be embraced, if we are to do what we are called to do. **There is suffering, ...but there is also glory, ...the present empowerment of the Holy Spirit expressed and made visible through our lives..., as we faithfully obey in the face of difficulty.**

Peter then charges the elders to “Shepherd the flock of God”. The word for “shepherd” is the same word that Jesus had spoken to Peter Himself in John 21:16, ...and it is the same word used in Acts 20:28. It can refer to both feeding and tending. Both are aspects of what a shepherd does. **Note here that Peter charges the elders to “shepherd the flock” by “overseeing”, ...while in Acts 20:28, Paul charges the elders in that passage to “pay attention to themselves and all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God.” Elders are to shepherd by paying attention and overseeing.** The noun form of “to shepherd” was later rendered through Latin as “pastor”, and the noun form of “to oversee” is an “episkopos”, which was mispronounced and glossed over time to eventually become our word “bishop”. **Pastors are ones who “shepherd” and bishops are ones who “oversee”. Neither was a “religious office”.** The word “office” does not occur in conjunction with either of these words. These are functions, not offices or positions. **There were no “pastors” or “bishops” in the NT church. There were shepherds and overseers. It was the responsibility of elders to “shepherd” and to “oversee” the people under their care.** This implied that they needed to be personally familiar with the people they were to care for.

Peter uses three couplets of contrasting ideas to describe how elders are to do their work of “overseeing”. Overseeing... “*not* out of compulsion *but* voluntarily according to God”; ...”*not* for money (‘shameful-gain’) *but* with cheerful-readiness; ...*neither* as lording-it-down-upon those entrusted to you, *but* becoming examples to the flock.” **Elders are not to oversee when their heart is not in it, as though it were a duty** that they begrudgingly performed. **Nor are they to do it for money, but out of eager, willing hearts.** (This statement would not make sense unless at least *some* of the elders were receiving a stipend or some support to enable them to fulfill their responsibilities. 1 Timothy 5:17,18 certainly refers to this, and Galatians 6:6-8; 1 Corinthians 9:1-14 may also have application, as well. The point of Peter here is that elders should not be serving to get money. It is not a *job*; it is a *calling*. If people want to support them so that they can be freed up from other concerns to more effectively serve, that is up to them.) **Finally, they are not to be domineering or bossy. Their influence should come from their example.** Those who serve the Lord well, from the proper heart and example, will receive an unfading crown of glory from Jesus, our Chief Shepherd, when He returns.

Then Peter turns to another group, “younger men”. **The word “likewise” or “in this same way” draws our attention to both the preceding group, the older men, as well as to the two other times this word had been used in this letter.** It really goes back to 2:13, “be subject to every human institution”. In 2:18, domestic servants are to be subjecting themselves to their masters, as an application of this same mindset. Then in 3:1, we have “likewise, wives be subjecting yourselves to your own husbands”, then in 3:8, “likewise the husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, ...paying your wives honor as co-heirs of the grace of life”. So, in 5:5, in a similar way, these younger men are to arrange themselves under these elders, who have been placed in their lives as examples and caregivers. Quickly, Peter moves on to the entire community, ...”and all of you clothe yourselves with humble-thinking toward one another”. Why? “...because God sets Himself against the proud, the ostentatious (or ‘hyper-inflated’), but He gives grace to the humble.” (This is a quote from Proverbs 3:34.) Therefore, Peter concludes, we are to “humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, in order that He may exalt us at the right moment. **This theme of humbling ourselves, and subordinating ourselves to others as a sign of that humility, is a recurring theme throughout the letter.** What would the opposite of this be? It would be to disregard others, devalue them, and even set ourselves above them. God sets Himself against the proud, but He helps the humble. **God wants us to show respect and give honor to all people, ...whether we agree with them or not** (1 Pet. 2:17). **How much more should we be showing honor to those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ, ...and especially those who are choosing to invest their time and effort to watch out for us, pray for us, and attend to our spiritual care?**

Part of humbling ourselves under God’s mighty hand is trusting in His care. When we humble ourselves, we open our minds and hearts to allow God to direct our steps. When we are hyper-inflated, we think we have everything under our control. When we acknowledge that we do not, ...and we give our lives over to the care of God..., we give Him room to work. **Anxiety may still come, ...but when it does, we choose to give our cares and concerns to God. This does not mean that we do nothing.** It means that we believe that God *does* in fact care for us, and we are looking and expecting Him to meet our daily needs. **As we trust Him, He will exalt us in due time.**