

Leading by Example by Randy Hartwig

Church leaders are accountable to God for their ministry and how they treat the people they serve. One of the most important portions of Scripture dealing with this is found in 1 Peter 5:1-4:

“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: (2) Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; (3) nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; (4) and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (NKJV)”

Being a leader can be a tough job. It's easy to get discouraged because the people you lead may disappoint you, or even betray you. You may often feel unappreciated. You may even want to quit from time to time. That's why it's good to review Peter's exhortation to leaders from time to time so you can keep it fresh in your mind and apply on the difficult days.

The first thing I notice here is that Peter did not exalt himself as he wrote to the shepherds of the church. He didn't call himself the great apostle or head of the church. He called himself a fellow elder.

Keep Your Position in Proper Perspective

It's an assignment to you from God, it's not a coronation. You are **not** the king of the local church. Jesus is. You are **not** the Chief Shepherd, Jesus is. You are a fellow elder, just like any other elder. It doesn't matter how big your church is or how famous you are or how often you get invited to speak at other churches or conferences. You are nothing more than a fellow elder. You are a partaker of the future glory that will be revealed just like every other believer. Shepherds must have a mindset of humility, like Jesus did (Philippians 2:5-8).

I know a man of God who once said, "You know you're in trouble when you start to believe your own advertising." **Be careful what you say about yourself** and how you project yourself to the people. Act like a servant.

Peter then continues that as you shepherd the flock **of God**, to do so as an overseer. Vine points out in his dictionary that the emphasis on the word "overseer" is on the **function** of the position, not the **assuming** of the position. So it's not about **what we are but what we do!** We are assigned to oversee, manage, and keep watch over God's flock for Him. That's not a place of power but a place of serving! If you always have to remind the people that you are the boss, then you probably have some control issues you need to deal with. More about that later. We like to remind people that God is in control. Do you let Him control His church or have you assumed a position that is not yours?

Lead Willingly and Eagerly – Not for Gain

Peter continues by reminding leaders to lead willingly and eagerly, not by compulsion or dishonest gain. As a leader you must avoid serving because **you have to**. You must do it because you **want to**. God looks for those who are **eager and passionate**. Through your relationship with Him you must find a way to maintain that zeal, because many things will happen that could potentially steal it from you.

I know many of us feel like it's the only thing we know how to do, so we may be tempted to serve because we feel we have to. That's a wrong motive. I was saved and began serving God at a very young age, so ministry is what I have done the most. There were times I served because it was a somewhat steady job, not because I wanted to continue. God actually had to send an apostle to me in 1990 and tell me that it was OK to leave the church I was pastoring at the time because I didn't **have** to be there. I had been afraid to leave because I thought if I did I would displease Him and He would cut me off from His blessing. The church there was becoming a valley of dry bones and I was very unhappy. I did take the apostle's advice and I found out God was with me. He has blessed me abundantly many times over since then.

Leaders are not to serve for dishonest gain either. Right now I can almost hear some of you saying, "I certainly don't do it for the money! There isn't that much money to be a motivation." Well, for one thing, the Scripture is talking about **dishonest** gain. A salary is not dishonest gain. It's the laborer getting paid for his hire. I would venture to say that there are probably some leaders who **do** find ways to **take advantage of their people**, or at least some of them. Again, manipulation is a real problem leaders can fall into and if getting money out of the people is the goal, it is wrong. It's even wrong when the purpose of getting the money is to pay for one of your goals or dreams for the church. I'm not say you can't encourage giving. What I am saying is don't manipulate them emotionally to get their support.

Another type of dishonest gain to consider is not financial, it's personal **emotional gain**. Do the people make you **feel** important? Is being a shepherd of God's people an **ego** trip for you? Has it become a way for you to finally get some **recognition** and **respect** in your life? Do you like telling people what to do? Do you like trying to get people to be **dependent on you** for advice and emotional support?

I've seen some leaders exhibit this type of behavior and it is so wrong. The people are to invest their emotions and dependency **in the Lord, not you**. Of course they need to love you and respect you, but that has to come spontaneously, not because you try to draw it out of them.

Those who seek emotional gain are exhibiting symptoms of deep **insecurities** and **emotional voids** that exist in their own hearts. That's a powerful statement that makes some leaders really angry when they hear it. If that's you, don't get mad at the messenger. Face the truth, receive the correction, humble yourself before God and seek healing. That process will set you free and make you a better leader.

Who is Lord in Your Church?

Peter also tells the shepherds they are not to act like lords over the people. Strong's Concordance defines *lording over* as **dominion** or **control**. There is only one lord in the local church and that is the **Lord Jesus Christ**. There are leaders, but the leaders are servants of God and the people. There should never be any attempt to control or dominate them.

The truth is that God will support His chosen leader. There will be no need for a power struggle. Decisions can be made by leaders and the people can choose to follow or not. But leaders never need to force their authority on the people. God is in control!

One of the most common ways a leader might try to **control the people is by guilt**. It's amazing how many Scriptures a leader can find to try to pressure the people to respond a particular way or perform a desired task. Hey, I've been there, done that, and gotten rebuked by God for it. It requires honesty to admit you have used the guilt trip to manipulate the people. That's not God's way. That's a manifestation of pure human flesh.

A leader might also try to **dominate the people by fear**. It's easy to make the people afraid of God, because after all, He's God. But sometimes leaders try to make the people fear them, too, so they can get people to obey them. I've seen a few leaders try to exalt their authority in the church to the point that the people give them a level of *reverence that should only be given God*. Leaders must direct the people's respect toward God, not themselves. *People will respect you by the way you lead and treat them*, not by what you demand of them. Fear is a form of manipulation that is contrary to what Peter taught.

In verse 3 we are reminded that the people are **entrusted** to their leaders. Remember, they are not your possession but God's. *He trusts you to care for them*. Visualize this: you are a hired shepherd sitting on the side of the hill watching over a flock of sheep that belongs to someone else. That is what you are, a paid undershepherd. You work for **THE** Shepherd. You are nothing more. You get paid to feed them, water them, treat their wounds and keep the wolves from eating them.

Be an Example to the Flock

In his final admonition Peter instructs leaders to be **examples to the flock**. According to Strong's Concordance **an example is a stamp**. Not a postage stamp, but like a rubber stamp. An image is carved on the stamp, then it is immersed in ink, pressed on paper and what you see looks just like the image on the stamp. It's **a duplicate image of the real thing**. That's what leaders are to be, a duplicate image of the real Jesus Christ. When people **see** us, they should see Jesus. When people **hear** us, they should hear Jesus. When we **serve**, people should see Jesus serving them.

It is so easy to preach truth, but it requires much more effort to live it. We are under the constant influence of the world, the flesh and the devil just like the people we serve. However, we must learn to overcome the pull of darkness and exhibit the character of Jesus in our daily life. In this way we will be examples that they can follow.

We can, and should, let the people see our failures. That means we shouldn't hide them or gloss them over. Talk about them in your teaching. Share your struggles with those you are training for leadership. People actually respect a ***genuine*** failure more than someone who ***pretends*** to have it all together. We must be honest about our struggles and work through them, to show them how to do it.

We must **model godly behavior**. We must **model Biblical truth**. We must **exhibit growth and change that is visible to the people**. That will encourage them to follow us into the same victories.

There is a Crown of Glory

Finally, let's reflect on God's promise in verse 4,

"When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive **the crown of glory** that does not fade away."

If you implement these leadership principles in your life, you may not get as big a salary as you deserve, but you will get a crown. Money can fade away. It can be cancelled or devalued by the government overnight. It can be stolen. It can be lost. But the crown of glory God gives does not fade away.

Strong translates the word "glory" as *praise, dignity and honor*. This same word is used for *praise* to God. So you will get your praise in due time from the Lord Himself. You don't have to try to get it from the people you serve through any of the wrong behaviors we examined here. *It is far better to be honored by God than to try to achieve it from men*. People are fickle. They will praise you one minute and yell "Crucify him" the next. That's exactly what the people did to Jesus, isn't it?

Meditate on these principles. Put them into practice. God will honor you when you do and the people will follow you because they see Jesus in you.

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