

Live As A Flock

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[0 : 0 0] Peter chapter 5 and the section that we read together We're coming to the end of this letter Where Peter has been speaking to Christians persecuted Christians scattered throughout Is your minor and who need to know and hear That God loves them and God is interested in them as believers And I think sometimes for us we can become a little bit snobbish about the truth Maybe particularly in our tradition We can be very keen on exposition of the scripture that is deep and intellectually challenging and stimulating and we can Be a little bit snobbish if we think that isn't happening in our popes or in our churches But can I remind you about the uniqueness of the Bible and of God's word?

Someone has described for example the gospel of John Being like a gospel where a child can paddle and Where an elephant can swim?

So I think we have to be careful about this Longing after depth I think it's right as we want to know God better But I think of us a kind of snobbish longing. We need to be very careful. There's nothing deeper than the gospel and the reality of truth is not to stimulate our intellect merely or to tickle our spiritual fancy But is to change us That's what the gospel is to do and the truth deep or simple is To change us so we find lots of things in the gospel that are simple and are pictorial because Jesus and the Holy Spirit and God wants us to understand the truth so that it will change us and So that we will understand what it is about and So much of Jesus teaching for example the deepest and greatest of all theologians was absolutely simple and clear in pictures because people can understand pictures and

Could relate to the things Jesus was saying because it related to their lives So here we have Peter Under the Holy Spirit using a picture that is often used in scripture this to describe the church and to describe our relationship with God as the relationship between a shepherd and sheep Now that's not maybe a picture many of us are entirely Used to we live in the city. We're not in a rural area We don't pass lots of fields of sheep all the time But it's one we can comprehend and understand with a little bit of insight And it's a picture that most of the people to whom the Bible was written particularly in Jesus time would have seen every single day And they would have known exactly what was being meant when the comparisons were being made between a flock of sheep and the people of God and between a shepherd and

Jesus Christ And I think that's a lesson if you're a preacher of the gospel here today as I am if you're studying to be a preacher If you're a church leader fear an elder you do Bible studies if you want to share the truth with people as a Christian Isn't that a great lesson?

[3 : 4 5] That the gospel is to be put across in such a way That people will understand it and learn from it and take it home and into their hearts What is God here teaching? What is Christ teaching for us here in this picture of God's flock?

He's finally coming to the end of his letter and he's addressing primarily elders and young people in this area in this section but he's speaking about the church and those who are leaders in the church and telling them that they are to be like Shepherds of a flock and he's telling them that they're to be like Jesus Christ who is the chief shepherd of the sheep And I want to spend a little while speaking about that image today And I hope that you will follow with me in applying that image to our own understanding of what the church is and your place in the church and our own relationship with Jesus Christ What are some characteristics of a flock of sheep be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care serving as overseers?

Not because you must because you're willing God's flock so we're part of God's flock today flock of sheep That's the image. It's the picture that we're given here in scripture for ourselves Well, what are some of the characteristics of it being a flock?

Well, one's very obvious, isn't it? It's not singular. It's plural Being together is an important part of Belonging to God. It's not just that he saves individual sheep to wander around in fields on their own He saves us into a community and in Christ We are recreated into society and into family and into church and into a flock of people Into the people of God together that as we know is a reflection of the society and of the community of the Trinity of God's not being a lonely individual in Himself even before creation, but being the living God in fellowship with himself So that people at core who are together We gather together not just to participate as individuals in a church service and leave

Individually with no concern and no interest of those around us and what has happened. We come together as a people We come together as a body We come together as a family and so there is love and there is compassion and cares will go on to see and see and unpack a little bit later on and the reality of course for us as Isaiah 53 verse 6 reminds us we all like sheep have gone astray Everyone goes his own way. That isn't that the great summary of sinful rebellious individual hearts that we are prone to wonder We're prone to walk away from Jesus Christ and From his flock from his people Now that's the easy bit walking away from his people But it probably reflects for us that we have walked we're walking away from him also You know when you say and when I say I just I just need God. Yeah, I don't need his people. These people are just a burden

[7 : 18] That's not what the shepherd says the chief shepherd. He doesn't say that he doesn't say you just need me imagine The solemn reality of the living Consummate God God doesn't say you just need me. He says you need my people You're saved to be a flock and That's a battle It's a battle to remain in God's flock It's a battle to remain focused on the chief shepherd, but it's God's will for us that we're together It's also God's will for us Or his teaching reminds us in terms of the characteristics of a flock of The need for protection We need protected in verse 8 to 11 He speaks about that as he goes on to express some of the realities of being God's people He says be self-controlled and alert your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion

Looking for someone to devour and the reality is that God has chosen the picture of a flock of sheep To reflect the people of God. Isn't that interesting?

That's what he's chosen and if a flock of sheep are generally a group of animals That need protection. They're pretty defenseless animals They're not kind of on their own near growling and strong They've got wee spindly legs and a big fat body. We will in them They're they're pretty defenseless They trot about and if they trip up they end up on their backs and they can die because they can't get back up again They're a bit stupid that way, but they need protection. They need protection my brother-in-law's a shepherd and He speaks about Ravens Now Ravens are just kind of ugly birds as far as I'm concerned, but they're protected But you know Ravens can do great damage to a flock of sheep Ravens will pick out and I apologize to the children here or those of a Sensitive nature, but they will pluck out the eyes of a lamb as it's being born utterly defenseless

Foxes hoody crows will come and attack the flock of sheep Because they're generally defensive now Jesus says I haven't I haven't described the church of God as a pride of lions I've described you as a flock of sheep Because we're defenseless in our lives so often spiritually that's what he wants to get across We're not built to Defend ourselves spiritually. We're not built to Survive the spiritual battle as Christians on our own so often we say it's hard going being a Christian of course That's what he's reminding us because we're defenseless We're prone to be blind we're prone to be easily led We're prone to be attacked Here we have this picture of the evil one who's out to destroy today your faith and my faith Do we recognize that we're defenseless against him in our own?

Abilities we can't just say all the devil's no I don't worry about the devil. I'm a Christian Yes, we are Christians, but we must be Christians who are dependent on the power of God and the protection of God through Jesus Christ In order to remain under God's care Because he sees what he sees be self-controlled and alert resistant standing firm in the faith That is standing firm plugged into Jesus Christ Relationship with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. I can't do it on my own. I Can't resist on my own. I can't maintain faith on my own. I'm a defenseless poor weak Christian I need God And you know what he's saying at the same time because we've always had that picture We have the sheep that wander away on their own prone to wonder who said before They're easily picked out aren't they when they're on their own They're vulnerable when they're away from the flock and away from the shepherd It's not just the shepherd but the flock also and he is giving us the people of God and he says stay with the flock

[11 : 44] The temptation is I know go alone. I know that temptation But he says stay with the flock Stay with the shepherd stay close Because that is where you'll be protected ordinarily we can't be Christians Without other Christians Without the shepherd obviously That's the picture he gives us but we know also in terms of picture not only protection but the shepherd the flock of sheep or sheep generally are slow to learn If you've worked with sheep, which I haven't really I have to say but if you have then you'll know that they're slow to learn they're famously stubborn In the way that they do things or the way they don't do things if you ever watched a trial not Not a legal trial a sheepdog trial If you've watched one of them and you've seen the shepherd with his dog trying to lead the sheep into the pen at the end

And he's done a great run and just at the end the sheep won't go into the pen You have stupid sheep go into the pen. That's where you're supposed to go And they don't seem to know write it down look at them But they won't go and they'll do everything of their stubborn. They're going their own way and They will stamp their feet They will do that slow to learn they will follow blindly The first sheep the strong sheep that's going one way Follow the leader slow to learn and I believe that that is one of the reasons Jesus gives that picture So lots of different reasons isn't there when he speaks about this?

the sheep being Harassed and helpless the people sorry been harassed and helpless like a sheep without a shepherd There's lots of different images of Jesus, but surely one of them is he recognizes that we are also slow to learn We know I've been a Christian for 30 years. I feel that I'm slower to learn today than I was when I first believed spiritually stubborn Selfish not graceful not grateful not worshipful by nature Not willing to learn and listen to the shepherd so easily following the crowd who go a different way Slow to learn heard something a million times slow to learn quick to ignore Quick to close ear and eye to what Jesus Christ has to say thank God for Jesus Christ and For this great picture of the shepherd Who recognizes and knows and who teaches us here from his word about our responsibilities?

and in the last Picture of the flock here that I want to focus on just Primarily Is I hope the focus of this passage also is the great need to be cared for and and it It's part of the other pictures as well is the flock of sheep and the whole pic the whole image right through the Bible is this picture of a Of a people who need care for verse 7 in many ways for me sums up the section on the shepherd She's cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you And that is in the context of speaking to the elders about their need to take care of the flock that's under their care You need to be cared for sheep generally speaking You need to be cared for now and you can you can't take that to its in the Greek Because there's a lot of sheep that are maybe less needful of that

But there's a vulnerability as well as that need for protection. There's a need to be cared for there's a vulnerability In the winter time they need to be fed They need to be led need to be protected. They need to be shorn Sheep need that and There's this whole pictures particularly in the Middle Eastern picture of a flock of sheep would have been cared for Not just left wild but cared for by the shepherd individually named becoming close with he would have Guarded them by night all these different pictures of a people of flock being cared for and Spiritually that is absolutely massive in this section here We recognize that and see how important it is That we need cared for in our spiritual lives and He speaks in verses Five to seven about the need to be humble and speaks to young men maybe young leaders

[16 : 37] I'm not sure but certainly young men in the congregation young people even Be submissive to those who are older and all of you clothe yourselves with humility towards one another because God Opposes opposes the proud because grace of the humble humble yourselves there for under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time cast your anxiety because he cares for you and so in this whole context of being cared for you there's this Atmosphere of humility If you're gonna be cared for by the Lord Jesus or by one another as Christians if we are it Requires great honesty and great humility and great submission You need to submit to Jesus Christ as the chief shepherd and serve under his mighty hand to know his care and That can be the youngest the hardest thing for us to recognize Maybe the hardest thing for young people to recognize as well humbly Knowing and recognizing that you need care for strong young

I'm Independent I'm going my own way in life and he says no no you're not a spiritually You need him This is take your anxiety Take it to him because he cares and I'm gonna speak about that just briefly as I finish with this section on caring because he He speaks about care as one of the pictures of the shepherd caring for the sheep and then he reminds them who he is And he reminds them who the leaders of the church are So in terms of God's model he has for us this model of himself the living sovereign powerful God as a shepherd who cares for us Not a great picture is a picture of the shepherd the chief shepherd of the sheep And what's so amazing about this chief shepherd of the sheep is that the Bible mixes metaphors and pictures and says that this chief shepherd became a sheep

Isaiah 53 verse 7 it's a lamb to the slaughter. It's a sheep before her shears is silent So he uttered not a word so we have this amazing picture of the shepherd who says I care because I know Because I've been in the flock because I have associated with you because I've Substituted in your place when I was nailed to a tree you were due there under God's wrath, but I took your place And the no greater love has any man in this he laid down his life for the sheep The shepherd who become the sheep lays down his life for the sheep Who would come under his care as the shepherd?

There's all these mixed metaphors and pictures to try and grasp and describe how amazing is what Jesus has done for us lays down his life the judge Becomes the one who is judged Who dies and who's raised and who will one day again be the judge and what will he do? He will separate the sheep from the goats those who believe and trust from those who don't Amazing pictures ongoing pictures and illustrations of Jesus Christ as the chief shepherd and as the one who therefore cares for us That's probably my the biggest pastoral Concern people have when they speak to me or others Jesus doesn't care for me It doesn't look like he cares. I don't think he cares. Why doesn't he care?

And that's what people are saying And why is that? Is it because we don't see What he has already done and don't believe in his promises where he says look cast he's not saying don't One level he's honest, isn't he saying?

[20 : 56] Don't be you're not you're not not going to be anxious This is take that anxiety take that worry take that concern take that fear take that vulnerability take that need for protection Cast it on him give it to God give it to Jesus Christ because he cares for you. He listens What's the great mark of an ignorant and arrogant and proud person?

They don't care. They don't listen They're going their own way And that is what the church must never be about Because Jesus is the one who says I care for you trust me Take your anxiety and I'm not saying that you're not going to be anxious but take it to me in relationship Take it because I've been the sheep. I've been silent before the grave I've gone there on your behalf. Will you not take hold of me and trust me as Lord and Savior?

The Christ is our chief shepherd also not only is the one who lays down his life and cares but has this great heart for the lost You know that picture in Luke 15 as well, isn't it? of His love for being among tax collectors and sinners. He's given a hard time And he says well, you know the shepherd of the sheep He's really concerned for the one wonders Not so much at one level, you know for the 99 who are all in the rightful place In the flock, it's the one who wanders the one who drifts That's a great picture, isn't it?

He's got concern for the one that's moved into danger and that in the context of those who weren't believers as he spoke to Publicans and sinners. He had a heart for them. He wanted to see them brought in And I think that applies doubly. I think it applies within the church to those who are wandering Shepherds who are wandering a sheep rather. We're wandering from the flock Do we care when people aren't here? Do you notice if people aren't here?

You want people to notice when you're not here But do we notice when others aren't here? Do we care? Do I care?

[23 : 15] Because it's the great mark when someone wanders And what about those who are in that great spiritual place of danger? Far from God You are not part of the flock of God Do we have the chief shepherd's driven desire to reach them?

To celebrate, to feast with, to converse with, to have meals with, to go to the pub with, those who are lost And seek our salvation Jesus our great shepherd and in that picture of care, he also within the church provides elders and overseers That's his picture Be shepherds of God's flock To the elders among you, he says, be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care serving as overseers That's his picture, that's his model, his model is that there's people who lead the church who are to reflect Jesus Christ's care and leadership and shepherding skills and that we are to come and be led as Leaders themselves are led under Christ and as together that we work towards clothing ourselves with humility and care. This was particularly powerful for Peter, wasn't it?

This image, you know why? Can you think of why this? Just think for a second why this particular image of shepherding was so powerful to Peter's life Do you remember they blasphemed and swore and swore blind that he didn't know Jesus?

Three times he did it No time for Jesus. He was in really bad company. He said no Oh, I would love to just swear just like he did just for the powerful effect of what he was doing We forget that don't we've made it we sanitized and made it all clean Three times but then we see Jesus in restoring him remember after his resurrection Side of the water was he say to him Peter do you love me?

Feed my sheep Feed my lambs Feed my sheep three times he says it Reminding the three times that Peter denied him. How powerful was this picture then for Peter as he wants The church to know this is God's pattern That they are fed with the right nourishment the word of God elders here Leaders we are feeding to feed our people with the word of God with the right food to encourage and challenge We're to counsel our people with the God's word not just with our own Daft ideas or with their own great ideas or with our own counsel or the advice of the world but with The theology of God's word not our own crackpot theology God's word That's our task. We're to feed

[26 : 34] God's people with the right nourishment We're to feed God's people with the right motives Verses two and three not because you must but because you're willing because God wants you to be Here are the leadership of the church and here is a picture for the leaders elders sit up and listen Deacon sit up and listen, but everyone listen and sit up because this is God's model for the church that we are to other right motives for leading and we are to serve not for mere duty But not for position, but because we delight to serve because it's a joy to serve because That's what God wants from us One volunteer is worth a hundred conscripts in that right. Do we use a whip?

And a stick to beat the church To beat our fellow Christian. Are we driven by guilt? Are we leading by guilt? Or is it with these right motives? We're not moralists We're repentant Christians eager and graceful and humble servants serving with the right motives and as he says also in the right manner also Not lording it in verse 3 over those entrusted to you about being examples to the flock So the leadership here are to be examples We are not to drive the flock of God the people of God. We are to lead the people by example. We're not dictators God's people God's people are precious They've been entrusted to us. We will be held accountable on the day of judgment For how we have acted towards them and we're to be examples known loved respected belonging teaching in love and those under our care are to respond also in that way in

Humility towards one another Recognizing this is God's pattern This is not some outdated Victorian old-fashioned way of Governing church, this is God's God's pattern this picture is his picture when you come into membership That's really what you're doing you're at one level other than professing your faith in Jesus. You're you're saying I recognize this eldership that have responsibility to be overseer of my soul and I will come under their leadership and I'll come under their pastoral care and they have a huge responsibility to me And as we read this as elders We should read on our knees What tears in our eyes And as people we should read this With tears in our eyes

Because we're falling so far short of this glory And we go our own way we were wandering she Such a great need for us to be repentant such a great need for us to say Lord sorry Please Lead me as a shepherd You're the great shepherd and the great thing is isn't it maybe we underplay this and maybe I underplay it for which I ask for your forgiveness We're not just weak for the sake of it We don't just stay weak We have God's strength the God of grace he says who called you to his eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered Will himself restore you and make you strong firm and steadfast To him be the plower power and the glory forever. Amen. So let us finish with this praise and adoration Of the one who gives us the power and the strength and the restoration and the grace and the glory

Hold on hold on to him because there is nothing else to hold on to Amen, Amen.