

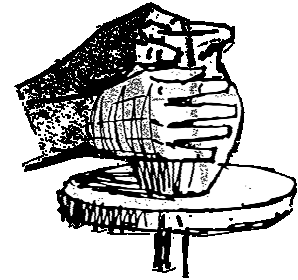
His Workmanship: Westside

*"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works."
—Ephesians 2:10*

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Isaiah 64:8

Who Will Shepherd the Flock? by John Piper

"...shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight..." 1 Pet 5:2. **The Seriousness of Elder Accountability for the Flock.** Probably no issue has occupied more of the elders' time over the past several years than how to provide care and oversight to this church. One day the "Chief Shepherd" will appear, and there will be a reckoning with the shepherds, the elders. That is a sobering thing to those in leadership. *"Your leaders [the elders] keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account [namely, to God]. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you,"* Heb 13:17. Paul said to the elders of the church in Ephesus: *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God which He has purchased with His own blood,"* Ax 20:28. We can hear the earnestness and the seriousness in those words: you elders shepherd the people "whom God purchased with His own blood." In other words, don't take this work lightly. Don't be casual and cavalier about this responsibility. Their aim is to build a people, through the Word of God and prayer and all kinds of practical

caring service, who in their hearts have a vision of a great, glorious, sovereign, gracious, wise, all-sufficient, all-satisfying God; and who savor that vision of God in worship, strengthen that vision of God in mutual encouragement and care, and spread that vision of God in works of love and in local and world evangelism. Peter gives the vision in 1 Pet 5 that proves to be extremely relevant to us. **Why Does Peter Exhort Here?** Why did Peter feel the need to exhort the elders here at the end of his letter? We get a clue to the answer in the word "therefore." Elder-shepherds might have less desire to be elders and shepherds if the work is dangerous and difficult. There are at least two reasons that it might be dangerous to be the shepherds of suffering flocks. One is that when persecution comes, the leaders of the flock are the most visible and sometimes the most vulnerable. A shepherd of a suffering flock would be among the first to fall. That's the way it was with Stephen, Peter, and James in the early church. Stephen was probably the most eloquent spokesman of the Hellenistic wing. James and Peter were clearly

leaders. Stephen was killed in Ax 7; James was killed in Ax 12; and Peter barely escaped the sword of Herod by a miracle. So it's dangerous to be a leader when the church is under persecution. These churches were about to endure a *fiery ordeal*, and it is understandable that the elder-shepherds might look for another job.

A second reason the elders might shrink back from their duty is that not only are they vulnerable to man's normal antagonisms, but they are also vulnerable to God's judgment in a peculiar way. It has been God's way bring judgment on His own people, beginning with the house of God (as 4:17 says), and in the house of God beginning with the elder-shepherds (see Ezek 9 and Mal 3 below). So it's not surprising that the elders in the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia might have been reluctant to exercise oversight. Thus, Peter says to exercise oversight *"not under compulsion, but willingly."*

Warnings of the Coming "Fiery Ordeal" of Judgment. Peter had been warning the church about the *"fiery ordeal that is coming upon them for their testing,"* 4:12. He says in 4:13 that Christians may share the sufferings of Christ for a season and then exult in the glory of Christ when He returns.
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“Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God which He has purchased with His own blood.” —

Peter calls himself a fellow elder with the elders he's writing to and says he is a witness to Christ's sufferings and a sharer in the coming glory. This alerts us that this "fiery ordeal" probably has something to do with elders. This gets even clearer in 4:17. He explains why this "fiery trial" is coming to the church. "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?" 4:17-18. These verses have to do with the whole church. The "fiery ordeal" that comes as punishing condemnation on unbelievers hits the church first as fires of purification and refining (cf. 1:7).

The Background of Ezekiel 9. But what about elders? Is there anything special for them in this? There are two Old Testament background texts that suggest there is. One is Ezekiel 9. God's own people had committed abominations, and God resolved to judge His own city. "And the Lord said to [His angel], 'Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men [like blood on the doorpost at the Passover] who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.' But to the others He said in my hearing, 'Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity, and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary [same idea and words as here in 1 Pet 4:17].' So they started with the elders who were before the temple," Ezek 9:4-6. If Peter has in mind the way God once

began His judgment from the house of God—especially from the elders—he may well see a special need to exhort the elders in view of the fiery ordeal that is coming.

The Background of Malachi 3:1–3. The other background text is Malachi 3:1–3, where God said that His messenger would come to His temple—to His house or His people as Peter says (in 2:5): "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap... He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness," Mal 3:2-3. The "sons of Levi" are the priests. In the New Testament, particularly 1 Pet 2:5, 9, all believers are priests. But it is not easy for anyone to read this and fail to see that the refining fire of judgment has a special reference to leaders. The fire purifies leaders first.

The Judgment of God Begins with Elders. So when Peter says in 4:17, "It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God," it is easy to see why he would say in 5:1, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you..." Thus, in answer to the question, "Why does Peter feel the need to exhort the elders?"—this "fiery ordeal" is a judgment from God that begins with the house of God—and in the house of God it begins with the elders, the leaders.

It is a fearful and wonderful thing to be an elder in the house of God. If the elders lead the church into strength and glory, they will also lead the church into the refiner's fire of God's purifying judgment. They will not stand above the church or outside the church giving suggestions for how to cope with fire; they will lead the church into

the fire. "Therefore"—in view of this suffering in the church, and in view of God's judgment that is purifying the church before it judges the world—in view of that, here is how to shepherd the suffering flock. By virtue of their calling, their gifts, and their affirmation by the church, elders have a responsibility that is different from the rest of the sheep. Responsibility, or accountability, is the key idea. The Chief Shepherd will hold them responsible—He will call them to give an account for exercising oversight. The rest of the sheep will not be called to give an account for oversight—only the elders, the shepherds. Did they see the big picture? Did they seek lost sheep? Did they act accordingly? Did they "exercise oversight"?

Peter Practices What He Preaches.

Thus, when Peter calls himself a "fellow elder," it's not that he is laying claim to an exalted title (he could have called himself an apostle!); he's expressing a willingness to suffer in the refiner's fire along with the rest of the elders. In fact, when he calls himself "a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed," probably "witness" means more than, "I was there and I saw them." He likely means, "I bear witness to them by my words and by my life. I am with you in the struggle. I am with you in the fire that purifies and refines the elders of God's people." In other words, he is practicing what he preaches in v. 3—that elders lead by example, not by lording it over the flock. So Peter believes that the elders need a special exhortation here at the end of his letter. Fire is painful; judgment is serious. It is coming on the house of God, and on the elders first. In these trials elders need warning, and they

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God makes my heart clean in 2015 "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." —Ps 51:10

Shepherd the Flock, from p. 2 need hope. Peter gives both.

Three Warnings for Elders. Peter warns against three typical failures in the eldership: against laziness (or fear); against greed; and against pride—the lust for ease, the lust for money, and the lust for power and prestige.

1. Against Laziness. First, he warns against laziness—the lust for leisure and comfort and ease. "Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God," 1 Pet 5:2. He warns them against drifting into a lazy or distracted pattern of ministry that requires some kind of external "compulsion" or force to overcome. Don't be sluggish and unconcerned. Don't be like the mule that must have a bit and bridle. Be willing. Or it may be fear, and not laziness, that he is warning against. It might be fear that makes elders unwilling to serve. Do not be fearful of doing what you are called to do. Do it willingly. This is why we do not pressure anyone into the eldership. God wants men who want the ministry, not those who act out of external compulsion. Danger and difficulty are tests of the true elder-shepherd. Jesus said: "He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and is not concerned about the sheep,"

Discipleship Here At Home

Jn 10:12-13. In other words, the presence of danger and difficulty tend to separate the hirelings from the shepherds.

They tend to. Peter warns of two more strong worldly motives for being an elder-shepherd even when your heart is not in it—money and power. A man might even risk danger for a while if it meant a comfort boost of financial gain, or an ego boost of power.

2. Against Greed. So Peter warns the elders against greed—the lust for money. "Feed the flock...not for sordid gain, but with eagerness," v. 2. "Sordid gain" means making the work a means to get rich, being motivated by money. It means thinking constantly about vacations and days off and retirement benefits instead of thinking about the value of the human soul and the preciousness of truth and the power of the Holy Spirit and the coming glory of the Chief Shepherd. This applies especially to those who are paid for their ministry. Do not begin to look on your eldership merely as a means of making a living. Watch out for the temptation to make "godliness a means of gain," 1 Tim 6:5. Remember, as Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Ax 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Remember Heb 13:17: "Let [the elders minister] with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." Rather, serve with "eagerness." That is, love your work. Find joy in your work. What then can sustain the love expressed in the words "exercise oversight...with eagerness"? Want to! Love to! Delight in! Here is real love for the flock—eagerness to shepherd, not motivated by money or power. What can sustain that kind of love? Peter tells us in v. 4: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

3. Against Pride. Third, Peter warns the

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PRAY FOR healing, protection, help

- **Ed Fink**—prostate cancer; treatment for brain tumors
- **Judy Strand**—recovering from heart valve surgery at home
- **Kaylee Chavez**—age 10, PRAISE—spinal fluid no cancer cells; MRI clear; treatment continues
- **Rod Green**—recovering from severed thumb
- **Pat Wilkes**—surgery recovery for torn shoulder tendon
- **Bill Dennis**—home following rehab on infected knee drainage; pseudo-gout
- **Sandra Perry**—possible kidney failure, may need dialysis or transplant; heart valve issues recently diagnosed; neuropathy from diabetes
- **Sylvia Chapman, Brett's grandmother**—third stage pancreatic cancer; chemo
- **Brittany Tope's mother**—breast cancer; broken ribs healed; doing better
- **grandmother**—on dialysis
- **Kim Howell's niece Tonya Robison**—delivered 32-week, 2 lb, 5 oz **Malachi Taylor Robison** several wks ago; in NICU in Louisville, KY
- **Kenny Boyd's coworker Kim Phillips**—asks our prayers for heart problems
- **Rick Robbins**, friend of Howells—brain surgery

CHRONIC CONDITIONS

- **Logan Corray; Addison Tope; Christian Harrod; Rocco Jr.; Pat Wilkes**—asthma
- **Autumn Hadders**—epilepsy; celiac disease; her medication is being changed over the next few months, so she is home in early evenings with one of her parents
- **Jonathan Hadders**—RA
- **Kirk Johnson**—MS
- **Menards**—aging; **Lloyd**, diabetes, weak; **Virginia**, macular degeneration; high bp
- **Cheryl Reames**—diverticulitis; fibromyalgia
- **Judy Sartin**—rotator cuff injury; spinal stenosis; arthritis
- **Lynda Szymanski**—COPD, lung weakness

Travel a number are in Moab this weekend: the **Topes**; the **Hadderses**; **Patricia Ward**; **Gregg** and **Necie Geis** and friends; **DeWayne** and **Ethan Howell**; **Brett** and **Kaysha Witherington**; **Westin, Forest**, and **River Cox**; the **Lucases**; the **Walkers**; **Sarah McMurray** and **Nate**

Departing Today is **Michelle Franke's** last Sunday with us; she returns to TN

Bereaved Cheryl Reames's father, **Buford Wrather**, passed away last Wednesday; his memorial service will be at the Northeast Church of Christ building in CO Springs this Saturday, 5/9, at 10:30 am. Ask God to comfort

"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." —1 Tim 5:17

the family.

Who Will Shepherd the Flock? from p. 3

elders against pride—the lust for power and prestige. "Shepherd the flock...not yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock," v. 3. Pride is the failure to realize deeply that without Christ we can do nothing. The proud heart starts to feel that it can be self-reliant. Then it begins to feel that it is indispensable. And then it starts to exalt itself and seek the praise of men. It gets an ego high from flaunting authority and prestige and dominance. It needs to be up front. It likes the best seats in the synagogue, as Jesus said. It likes to be addressed with titles. It craves the praise and the dependence of men. This man may be a boisterous domineering sort. Or he may manipulate with the feigned pain of a wounded hero. Or he may be a consummate politician who measures his words so as to curry the favor of the powerful and enhance his security in office. But Peter says to the elders, "Don't exalt yourselves; lead—you must lead (as v. 5 implies)—but lead with servant lowliness; lead by example." Peter says: the test of shepherds is their lives—are they examples for the flock? Is their public oversight a show, or do their lives prove their authenticity? Is there a public shepherd and a different private shepherd? What about family and finances and hospitality and discernment and reputation among spiritual people and those outside? When the fiery trial comes to elders first, lead by example. Don't escape it or run from it. Walk through it with the sheep.

Those are the warnings we need: against living for ease; against living for money; and against living for power and prestige and praise. O how discerning the church needs to be! O how elder-shepherds need to "take heed to yourselves" as well as to all the flock, Ax 20:28!

Hope for Elders. But in this fiery situation elders also need hope. This is what Peter gives: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory," v. 4. Jesus held out the same hope Peter does here: "When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous," Lk 14:13-14. In other words, there are ministries that may be thankless in this world. If we need a lot of strokes, we will probably not do what Jesus calls us to do. It's too hard; there aren't enough rewards here and now. But if we truly believe we will receive a reward at the resurrection of the righteous, if elders believe that "when the Chief Shepherd appears, He will give us the unfading crown of glory," then we will have motivation and strength to do what He calls us to do. There may be times when elders feel like the refining fire is too hot. They may feel that, if it takes this much fire to burn away our sloth and greed and pride, then it's not worth it. But that discouragement occurs because we take our eyes off eternity and off the all-satisfying Chief Shepherd, our Lord Jesus. What keeps us going is knowing that when the Chief Shepherd comes He will call us to account and say, "Did you feed my sheep? Were you vigilant over the souls of my sheep? Did you guard the deposit of my truth? Did you stand watch against the wolves? Did you love my flock?" There is a great work to do, a great fiery battle to fight, and a great reward beyond all measure to receive.



meets at
13789 W. 8th Avenue
Golden, Colorado 80401
720-295-4530

Pastors

Larry Campbell (303) 246-8810
DeWayne Howell (303) 973-7283

Preacher

Jim Reingrover (303) 973-5102

info@thechurchingolden.com

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Westside-Church-of-Christ/276475819148309>

Assembly Schedule

Sunday

| | |
|--------------------|----------|
| Bible classes | 9:00 am |
| Morning assembly | 10:00 am |
| Afternoon assembly | 1:30 pm |

Wednesday

| | |
|---------------|---------|
| Bible classes | 7:30 pm |
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Sunday morning

• **adult Bible class, "Marriage Boot Camp: Basic Training in Communication,"** Jim Reingrover

• **Sermon, 1 Peter—Letter to Westside,** Jim Reingrover

Sunday afternoon

• **Lessons from the Life of Christ,** "Jesus and Zacchaeus, Lk 19:1-10," Jim Reingrover

Wednesday night adult class: Islam—Night and Day

Beginning Wed, 5/27, through 7/31, Payton Miller will work with Westside teaching/preaching for us. Jim will mentor Payton.