

Get Up and Grow: Humility

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[0 : 0 0] If you'd like to keep your Bibles open or your iPhones turned on at 1 Peter chapter 5, and let's pray.

Father God, we thank you for your word, and as we come to the end of this series on 1 Peter and Peter's final words here, Lord, we ask that they would bear fruit in the life of us as a church.

We thank you for that in your wisdom you have ordained some to be elders and shepherds. Lord, we pray that they would pursue your glory as they minister under the chief shepherd, and I pray that you would move the hearts of your flock to submission.

And Father, we pray that in all this we'd be prepared for the coming of the chief shepherd with him and the eternal reward that comes with him, and so we ask it for your glory. Amen.

Today we come to the end of our look in 1 Peter. Peter ends his letter by addressing the elders amongst God's people.

[1 : 0 6] Not just the elders amongst God's people, but it's obviously a clear aspect of 1 Peter 5. In chapter 4, which is what you looked at last week, the overall thrust was about suffering.

It appears as Peter moves into chapter 5 that he shifts gear to finish on a completely different topic. And so to help us to understand 1 Peter 5, we need to put it in context.

This section in which chapter 5 sits actually started back in chapter 4, verse 12. Remember, Peter addresses the churches with, Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering.

Or quite literally, do not be surprised by the fiery ordeal that you are currently going through. Then in verse 17 of chapter 4, the suffering he refers to in verse 12 is explained as the beginning of the judgment of God, which starts with the church and then moves out to the unbelieving world.

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And then Peter jumps into chapter 5 with, To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder.

[2 : 3 6] What is missing at the very beginning of the NIV translation that was just read out to us and that we're using this morning is the word therefore.

It's in the original language and for some reason it's left out of the NIV, but it is the link between chapter 5 and chapter 4.

That is, chapter 5 is an application of these last verses of chapter 4 from verse 12 onwards. Therefore, in the light of the suffering in the church and in the light of the judgment of God that is purifying the church before it punishes the world, in the light of that, here is how to shepherd the suffering flock and how the suffering flock respond to the shepherding.

Elders are the normal way churches were led in the New Testament. Peter begins without hesitation or qualification by addressing the elders. He refers to the elders as shepherds.

Verse 2 says, be shepherds of God's flock. Notice too that these elder shepherds are charged with oversight. In verse 2, Peter calls the elders to serve as overseers.

[3 : 52] Oversight is not the only duty of shepherding, but it is the one that Peter mentions here. Elder shepherds exercise oversight. They look out over the flock and God holds them accountable for seeing the big picture and acting for the good of the whole flock.

Of course, the elder shepherds are just sheep themselves, like every other Christian, with Christ as the chief shepherd. But by virtue of their calling and their gifting and their affirmation by the church, they have a responsibility that is different from the rest of the flock.

And responsibility is the key word here. It means accountability. The chief shepherd, when he comes, will hold them accountable. He will call them to give an account for the exercising of their oversight.

The rest of the sheep will not be called to give an account for oversight. And the rest of the sheep will not stand with the shepherds as they are being held accountable for their oversight.

They will not gather around for support. There won't be letters of encouragement. They won't even accuse. It is only the chief shepherd. And so they'll be held accountable.

[5 : 17] Did they see the big picture? Did they act accordingly? Did they exercise oversight? And so as he addresses this situation of the suffering church, Peter gives three charges to the elders.

And each of these three charges is both a negative and a positive. Firstly, the second half of verse two, serve as overseers, not because you must, but because you are willing.

You see, I think there's a threat that these elders in these churches are feeling like the work is not something that they really would want to do. They're feeling forced to do it when they would rather really be doing something else.

It's very simple, I think, really, that the elder shepherds have less desire to be elders and shepherds if it's dangerous and it's difficult. And I think here that Peter has two dangers in mind, the two difficulties in mind, if you like.

One is that when persecution comes, the leaders of the flock are the most visible and the most vulnerable. If you are the shepherd of the suffering flock, you will be among the first to fall.

[6 : 26] It is a dangerous duty to be a leader when the church is under persecution. And we know from chapter four, verse two, that these churches were going through a fiery ordeal. And it is understandable that the elder shepherds might be looking for another vocation in the midst of that.

A second reason that the elder shepherds might shrink back from their duty is not only are they vulnerable to the normal antagonism of people, but they are also vulnerable to God's judgment in a peculiar way.

Recall that chapter four, verse 17, says God's judgment had begun with the house of God. And in that there is a very scary reference to Ezekiel chapter nine.

Ezekiel chapter nine is a description of the way that God brought judgment on his people once before. And he not only begun at the house of God, but he began with the elders.

Chapter four, verse nine, sorry, chapter Ezekiel nine, verse four says, And God said to him, go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.

[7 : 47] As I listened, he said to the others, follow him through the city and kill without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark.

Begin at my sanctuary. And so they began with the elders who were in front of the temple. In other words, it has been God's way to bring judgment on his own people, beginning with the house of God, as chapter four, 17 refers to, and in the house of God, beginning with the elder shepherds.

The fiery trial that chapter four, verse 12 refers to is the refining fire of God's disciplining judgment upon his people.

It is the same refining fire that Peter refers to back in chapter one, verse 17. Fiery trials are not easily endured, but the testing does not destroy us.

These fiery trials are not the destruction fiery trials, but they are the refining, the purging fiery trials. They are the firing trials that we must go through in order to be saved.

[9 : 08] The trials are designed by God to purge us of all sinful self-reliance on the flesh. These fiery trials shape us, if you like, for eternity.

As James says, Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

The role of the elder shepherd is to lead God's flock into the fiery trial in humble submission of God.

They open the doors and they walk into the furnace of God's purifying trials and they call the flock to follow them as they follow Christ.

They don't open the doors and get their stick and whack the sheep in there. How's it going in there, guys? Odd enough for you? Tell me what you're learning.

[10 : 21] They open the doors and they walk in. They call the flock to join them and as they struggle themselves in their own hearts and lives through the fiery trials of God's purification of them as sheep and as shepherds, in the process of their own struggle in the fiery trials, they assist the sheep who have come with them to endure it by teaching them and modelling patient endurance in the midst of the fiery trials.

They call the flock to endure it and rejoice in it and to seek it from the hand of a gracious and merciful and sovereign God. And what this means is the danger and difficulty is one test of a true elder shepherd.

And for whatever you want in a pastor and we all have a view of what one should be like, you need one who's courageous enough not to walk away from that fiery trial but to walk into the furnace in front of you.

And so it's not surprising that the elders might be reluctant to exercise oversight. And so Peter says exercise your oversight not because you must but because you are willing.

As you, the elder shepherd, walk into that fiery furnace, do it with pure joy on behalf of the people. But Peter warns that there are a couple of strong worldly motives for being an elder shepherd even when your heart's not in it and they are money and power.

[11 : 58] At the end of verse 2, serving as overseers, not greedy for money but eager to serve. Greedy for money means making the ministry a means to get rich.

It means being motivated by money in the ministry. It means being motivated by your own comfort. It means the bad shepherds of Ezekiel 34 devouring the flock for your own gain.

It also 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.

And then in verse 3, Peter warns against the other worldly motive. He says that they should serve as overseers, not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock.

Lording it over here is not a reference to personality types but it does imply that the elder shepherd here is driven by power, by the love of power. He gets an ego high from flaunting his authority and prestige and dominance.

- [13 : 12] He needs to be up front. He likes to be addressed with titles. He craves the praise and the dependence of people. The elder does have authority.

They are called to exercise oversight over the flock. Christ the chief shepherd has called them for the task of this oversight but the under shepherd is not a standing for the Lord.

The shepherd presents the word of the Lord, the chief shepherd, not their own decrees. The shepherd enforces the revealed will of the Lord, not their own wishes.

And for that reason, any undermining of the authority of the scripture turns church government into spiritual tyranny.

If shepherds add to or subtract from the word of God, they make themselves lords over the consciences of others. And it says here, far from being a lord and master, the shepherd is an example.

- [14 : 19] That is, they are to lead others in humble obedience to God by themselves being humbly obedient to God as they put into practice the word of God in their lives.

The word of God is their rule and they pursue it in obedience. And so Peter says the test of an elder shepherd is their life, their whole life.

Are they examples for the flock? Is their public oversight a show or does their whole life prove their authenticity? Is there a public shepherd and a private shepherd? What about their family and their finances and their hospitality and their discernment and their reputation among spiritual people and those outside?

are they bringing the word of God to bear in their lives and walking forward in humble submission no matter what the cost of that obedience?

Oh how discerning the church needs to be. Oh how we elder shepherds need to take heed to ourselves as well as all the flock as Acts 2 says to search ourselves and to test ourselves and see if there is any wicked way in us because if we don't God will.

- [15 : 46] These are but just a couple of verses and the rest of scripture set a very high standard for shepherds. The shepherd serves the flock.

They love the flock. They tend the flock. They lead the flock. He's accountable for the flock. They sacrifice for the flock. They protect their flock. They pour their lives out in service of the flock.

And the high calling of their vocation makes the shepherd vulnerable to the judgment of the sheep. It is not an easy thing for a pastor to stand up in front of the flock.

He leads to preach a message about the high calling and nature of his vocation. Because it's easy to point an accusatory finger and just say we're just not that.

You just fall so far short. You're defective. You're substandard. You may even be false. In that place of vulnerability it is comforting to know that the Peter who calls the elders to be shepherds of God's flock is the Peter who had an unforgettable breakfast with Jesus.

- [17 : 12] This is the Peter who through his three years of ministry with Jesus basically stuffed it up every time. This is the Peter who consistently failed, consistently suffered from foot-in-mouth disease.

Peter and he's the only one who Jesus referred to as Satan get behind me as he tried to hinder Jesus going to the cross.

He's the one who for all of history has gone down as the one who ran from Jesus in his greatest hour of need. In the greatest hour of fiery trial trial, Peter denied Jesus three times and ran.

What a coward. there was the self-assured bravado that he would never turn his back on Jesus but in that fiery trial he thought only of himself and his safety.

And then just a matter of weeks later on the shore of Lake Galilee days later even the shore of Lake Galilee the risen Lord Jesus restores the failed Peter.

[18 : 31] restores the failed Peter to his apostolic office and he charges him to be a shepherd to Christ's little ones.

And so when calling others to be elders and shepherds of his sheep of the flock Peter was well aware of his own failings and shortcomings. There was plenty of room for people to point a finger at Peter and say Peter weren't you the one who ran how dare you give such a high standard of the elder shepherd.

But this Peter loved the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Peter and all the elders are under shepherds serving the good shepherd and Peter like all the elder shepherds are firstly sheep themselves who have come to the good shepherd who is the overseer of their souls.

But for this gathered flock he has promised to raise up faithful shepherds faithful shepherds who can stand and shepherd because the good shepherd is their love their hope their forgiveness their enabling and their comfort even when they don't feel worthy even when they fail faithful shepherds look to the good shepherd for their affirmation and for their rebuke not the changing whims of the flock.

So what sustains a good shepherd? What sustains a faithful shepherd? How might a good shepherd exercise oversight willingly and eager to serve?

[20 : 28] That is what makes the good shepherd want to serve? To love to serve? To delight to shepherd? Not motivated by money not motivated by power verse 4 and when the chief shepherd appears you receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

What's the motivation? The good shepherd the chief shepherd a shepherd who loves the good shepherd will have a strong sense of his accountability before God for the souls of his flock even when they don't want him to.

A good shepherd will look to the end they will take the long view they will walk into the fiery furnace and prepare God's people for eternity.

What keeps true shepherds going is that when the chief shepherd comes with him will come his everlasting reward the unfading crown of glory glory and that in itself is enough not money not power but there is a message here for the flock in all this verse 5 young men in the same way be submissive to those who are older all of you clothe yourselves with humility towards one another because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble the reference to younger men here being submissive to older is linked to this issue of eldership it's not a complete change of gear into something else the reference to older is a reference to spiritual eldership it was normally the case that the older members of the community were the elders but it's not always the case Timothy according to church tradition was anywhere from between the age of 18 and Peter particularly identifies the younger men probably because they most likely typified the rejection of authority but the point here is that there is to be church wide submission to spiritual eldership and my friends our culture doesn't help us with this right from our convict beginnings we have rejected authority our national heroes are the underdogs and those who stand against authority we live in a time when we are very quick to know our rights and to stand on them we even have bumper stickers which say question authority but in case you think that you have left that culture behind another issue for us is our evangelical church history our origin my friends is in the reformation and its reaction to ecclesiastical abuses as one person has noted

Catholics preach contraception but don't practice it and evangelicals preach submission but don't practice it we have been taught for centuries that we have direct access to the good shepherd to God through the good shepherd the Lord Jesus Christ we have been taught for centuries to believe as the scriptures say the priesthood of all believers scriptures we have the Bible as I have the Bible and we have the indwelling presence of the spirit to bring out the richness of the scriptures and so submission is hard when you're not even sure you need the people that you're meant to submit to people and yet God in his wisdom has appointed shepherds for his flock and he says that they are absolutely crucial for the flock the flock need the shepherd they need feeding they need tending and they need protecting because the devil is on the prowl and he's waiting to pounce and he wants to devour and what makes the difference is the shepherd the shepherd working under the good shepherd and so let me finish by considering the words of one of the all time great shepherds in my view

[24 : 59] Charles Simeon his church at Cambridge didn't want him to be their shepherd and he suffered terribly for at least the first 12 years he was there in his first year there he preached a sermon on the nature of his office a very bold thing to do in the face of the enormous opposition he was facing from his congregation he said the pastor is like the keeper of a lighthouse and he painted a vivid picture in this sermon of the rocky coast just strewn with dead and mangled bodies with the wailing of the widows and the orphans on the shore with the big question ringing out why how did this happen and then he pictured the delinquent keeper being brought out and finally the answer as to why this tragedy happened was given asleep asleep and he went on to say remember the nature of my office and the care incumbent on me for the welfare of your immortal souls consider whatever may appear in my discourse as harsh earnest or alarming not as the effects of enthusiasm but as the rational dictates of a heart impressed with a sense both of the value of the soul and the importance of eternity by recollecting the awful consequences of my neglect you'll be more inclined to receive favorably any well-meant admonitions pray for your elders pray that we would not neglect our charge that we would not go to sleep pray that we would not take our eyes off the appearing of the great shepherd pray that we would grow in humility and submit to him and to see the nature of our office with such clarity and pray that the sheep would grow in humility and submit to the shepherds and the grace of

God working those things together the grace of God who called you to his eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while will himself restore you and make you strong firm and steadfast to him be the power forever and ever Amen You name