

Shepherding with Humility

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, church. Happy Mother's Day. Our sermon text today comes from the book of 1 Peter. We've been in 1 Peter for a few months now, and today we're looking together at chapter 5, verses 1 through 7. That's page 955 in the Pew Bible. We'll have it on the screens when I read it here in just a second, but if you want to follow along during the course of the sermon, let me encourage you to turn there. You'll also notice that we have the baptismal set up, and in service at 11 o'clock, we're going to be celebrating baptism. So, you've all missed it.

What can I say? The early bird did not get the worm this Sunday. No, it will be on. We're going to record it, and then we're going to post it and send it out. So, keep an eye out for that so you can hear James Cromer's testimony and celebrate baptism with him, and then if you see him next Sunday, you can just celebrate the public profession of faith that he's made. Let me pray for us then as we come to God's Word together. King of love, our good shepherd, thank you for laying down your life for us sheep. Lord, how often have we gone astray, and yet your goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life, and they will follow us all the days of our life until we see you again in glory. Good shepherd Jesus, thank you for continuing to shepherd us and teach us and guide us through your Word. So, as we come to your Word this morning, would you continue to do that?

Would we see this not merely as the words of the Apostle Peter, but your words, continuing today through your Spirit to comfort us, teach us, and guide us. Open our hearts to your guiding today, Jesus, we pray. Amen. All right, let me read for us 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 1 through 7.

So, I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that's going to be revealed. shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.

clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.

[2 : 5 5] Well, in our text this morning, Peter gives us three exhortations, three exhortations for a church under pressure. Notice that little word, so, at the beginning of verse 1. That word, so, connects our passage that we just read to what Peter said in the previous verses.

And in chapter 4, verses 12 through 19, the church is being encouraged there to stay joyful and to stay resilient in the face of very real trials and persecution. So, the church is under pressure from without. So, Peter says, so, in light of that pressure, here's what I want you to do. And then he gives three exhortations for a church under pressure. Now, Peter has spent a lot of time in this letter instructing the church on how we should interact with those outside the church. The big middle section of this letter that starts in chapter 2, verse 11, and goes all the way to chapter 4, verse 11, was largely concerned with just that, how we relate to those outside the church. But now, Peter turns to how we relate to each other. Because Peter knows that when pressure comes, it's not just our relationships outside the church that get difficult.

It's our relationships inside the church that get difficult, too. When it feels like the world is against us, we can so easily start to turn against each other. Now, many, many churches are experiencing, sadly, tragically, this dynamic right now. Many churches are being torn apart by disagreements and strife about any number of external pressures, whether it be the pressure of how to navigate political life or how to respond to issues of race or gender and sexuality. The pressures are real. And when the pressure comes, we need to be reminded how to do life together. It's easy to lose our way. It's easy to turn against each other rather than toward each other in love. So let's listen, then, to what the Apostle Peter has to say to us as we face our own external pressures. And let's learn together again how we can be the church, a church that isn't against one another but for one another.

So let's look at the first exhortation here. In verses 1 through 4, Peter directs his first exhortation to the elders. And Peter is going to exhort the elders what to do, how to do it, and why to do it. But first, let's take a quick step back and ask who? Who exactly are these elders that Peter is talking about? Well, as we think about that question, consider this passage from Acts 14, verses 21 through 23. Luke in Acts 14 is describing the end of Paul's first missionary journey.

And then Luke writes, when Paul and Barnabas had preached the gospel to that city, that is Derbe, one of the cities in that first journey. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. So here's a little snippet from the early days of the church. Now, who are the elders? Well, they aren't simply the kind of older members of the congregation, right? Rather, what we see in this passage is that in each local church, the apostles appointed a handful of godly men who would take responsibility for the spiritual health of the congregation. The New Testament uses a number of terms for this role or this office of elder. In Acts 20, for example, Paul gathers the elders from the church in Ephesus. But in that passage,

[7 : 06] Paul calls them not just elders, but he mentions that they're overseers, and he tells them to shepherd or to pastor the church. We see those same three terms used in our passage as well. Speaking to the elders, Peter says that they should shepherd, that is, pastor the church, and they should exercise oversight. So the words elder, overseer, and pastor are all used interchangeably in the New Testament to describe the same office, the same role. Now, we see the qualifications for this office, for this role in 1 Timothy and Titus. Above all, godly, Christ-like character is paramount.

And elders must also have a deep grasp of the faith, once for all delivered to the saints, as well as an ability to teach and to protect the doctrine and life of the church. So these are the elders, the overseers, the pastors. Now, here at Trinity, we currently have six elders, two of whom are me and Pastor Matt. But that title, pastor, for me and for Matt, that doesn't mean that we're any different biblically or theologically from the other elders. Matt and I do the work of eldering, as it were. We do the work of eldering as our full-time vocation. And here at Trinity, we happen to give the title of pastor to our full-time elders. But you know, Jeff Stevens and Tom Schmidt and John Hinkson and Tyler Dueno are equally elders, overseers, pastors. We occupy the same office with the same call and the same responsibility. Now, what is the exhortation to elders here in 1 Peter?

Well, we see it in verse 2. Peter says, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight. I think that's really important because the call of an elder in a local church is not to serve sort of as the executive board of an organization, right, to maybe just sort of be the kind of decision makers far off who kind of, you know, kind of run the organization in that level. No. The call of an elder is to shepherd, to come alongside people, to love them, to get to know them, to care for them, to encourage them, to teach them, to equip them for the work of ministry, and yes, even to correct at times. In other words, if elders are serving as they should, if they are shepherding, then a godly elder should smell like sheep. This is especially important when a church is facing pressure.

In those moments, what the church needs is the loving care and leadership of the shepherds. Shepherds, elders, overseers who understand that the church doesn't belong to them, but it belongs to God.

As Peter says, this is the flock of God. It doesn't belong to any of us. It is God's church. Now, in light of that, how should they go about this work, according to Peter?

[10:20] Well, Peter gives three contrasts in verses 2 through 3 about how elders should go about this work. First, he says, not under compulsion, but willingly. In other words, elders should not serve only because of external pressure, of external sort of obligation. They should have an internal desire to want to love God's people and serve them and lead them. God doesn't want reluctant shepherds.

The pressures are too hard and the stakes are too high. He wants willing shepherds. But they need to want it for the right reasons. Notice Peter's second contrast. He says, not for shameful gain, but eagerly. Now, when Peter says not for shameful gain, the kind of immediate referent there is that elders shouldn't want to serve because they'll get a financial reward for doing so. You can't serve God and money, Jesus said.

But, you know, money isn't the only gain a potential elder might wrongfully desire. Maybe there's a motivation to be seen as godly, or the motivation to have more control in the life of the church, or the motivation to put one's learning on display. All of these and more are selfish reasons to aspire to this office. Instead, elders should be eager to serve, eager to do it not for any kind of worldly gain or reputation, but eager to do it for Christ's sake and for others' sake.

Out of love for the church, the church that Christ shed His own blood to redeem, so elders should shepherd willingly, and elders should shepherd eagerly. Third, how should elders shepherd? In verse 3, Peter says, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. Now, here Peter strikes at the heart of our faulty and worldly notions of authority and leadership. Authority, after all, is a good thing if used in the right way. But how are we to use it?

Peter strikes at the heart of our kind of broken and fallen notions of authority and leadership, and in doing so, He's doing so alive. And Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you.

[13 : 00] But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. So, in the kingdom of God, how is rank or authority or position meant to be expressed and used?

It's meant to be used to serve, and not just serve, but serve sacrificially. You see, leaders in God's church are first and foremost followers of Jesus.

They're worthy of imitation because of how they follow the Lord Jesus. And so, how do elders lead? How do they shepherd? Not by domineering. No, but by being examples to the flock.

And that's why character, Christ-like character, tops the list of qualifications for the office of elder. Yes, they need to be able to teach, but ultimately, it's not great preaching gifts or eloquence or organizational skills that the church needs. God can use all of those things, yes. But first and foremost, elders lead by being examples to the flock, examples of compassion, examples of speaking the truth in love, examples of hospitality, examples of courage, examples of gentleness. So, as a congregation, who are we looking for to serve us as elders? When we nominate people to serve in this way, what are we looking for? We want leaders who are exemplary followers of Jesus.

Now, of course, in the body of Christ, the elders are not the only ones who exercise gifts of speaking and serving, right? Far from it. Part of the elders' job as they shepherd the flock and exercise oversight is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. That is, the elders pour themselves out in service, teaching and equipping, so that the gifts of others might be raised up and flourish. So that when every part is working properly, the whole body builds itself up in love. The ministry of the elders is meant to make the ministry of the congregation thrive and flourish. Remember what Peter said in chapter 4, verses 10 and 11. He says, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace. Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through

[15 : 45] Jesus Christ. So there is a call here for all of us. In the body of Christ, those who lead, whether in the office of elder or in any other position, deacon, small group leader, Sunday school teacher, youth group leader, children's ministry worker, there's a call to all of us to lead by example. In fact, you don't have to have any formal title to lead in Christ's church. Follow Christ. Be an example to the flock. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor and your fellow church member as yourself. And if you do that, you are leading. That's the kind of leaders Jesus is looking for. Not the sort who domineer over others, but the sort who set an exam. And isn't that what Peter is reminding them of in verse 1? You know, in verse 1, Peter could have said, look, I'm an apostle.

Christ has given me authority to preach and teach in his name, so just do what I say. Right? He could have done that, but he doesn't do that. Instead, Peter comes to them and says, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that's going to be revealed.

In other words, the one who gives this exhortation knows what it's like to be in their shoes. Peter comes and exhorts all of us, not just as one over us, but as one alongside of us.

As an apostle, he certainly is over us, but as a fellow elder, a fellow sufferer, a fellow partaker of hope, he's also alongside of us. And is this not how we should exhort one another?

Coming to our brothers and sisters, not just because we know better, but because we know beside, as it were. And ultimately, is not this what Christ has done?

[17 : 49] Christ came and told us to love one another, to lay down our lives for one another, to take up our cross and follow him. But Christ didn't just exhort us to do these things. He did them himself.

He truly loved us to the end. He took up his cross and laid down his life for us. Christ is our king, yes, but he's also our companion.

He's above us, and he's also beside us. Of course, he does what no one else can do. He offers the once-for-all sacrifice for sins, so that all who trust in him might be forgiven and reconciled to God. But he also sets an example for us. He laid down his life for us. Now we lay down our lives for each other. And in following his example, we in turn set an example for others. That's real leadership in the family of Christ, and it's an example for all of us.

And by way of encouragement, Peter says in verse 4, and when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. The work of shepherding is hard work, whether you're an elder or whether you're shepherding and setting the example in any other way. It's hard work, right? But the reward, Peter says, is better than anything this world has to give. Now in the ancient world, they would honor victorious athletes, or they would honor conquering military generals with a crown made out of leaves.

And this kind of leafy crown would sort of be a sign that would celebrate their honor and their glory. But of course, the irony is, is that a crown made of leaves would eventually fade.

[19 : 40] The leaves would turn brown. The crown would become brittle and dry. And isn't that true of so many of our earthly achievements?

We labor hard for success at work or at school and on the sports field, and those are good pursuits. But soon the years pass, and any crowns or achievements that we gained, they fade.

But here, Peter says, is one crown that will never fade. Here's the one labor that will take everything we have to give, but in the end, the reward will come from Jesus himself.

And this reward, this honor from the hand of our chief shepherd will never grow old. So elders, let this be an encouragement to you. And former elders, let this be an encouragement to you as well.

And not just those who serve as elders, but all of us who labor hard, setting the example of Christ's likeness. Men and women, young and old, there will be a crown for you as well.

[20 : 46] This isn't the only passage that speaks of unfading glory and a crown of glory for faithful servants. Again and again, Jesus holds out for us the promise that our labor is not in vain.

And any sacrifice we make for his sake will ultimately be seen to be no sacrifice at all in comparison to what we gain. So this is Peter's first exhortation to the elders.

Shepherd the flock of God. The second exhortation comes in the first half of verse 5. Likewise, you who are younger be subject to the elders.

Now, when Peter says, you who are younger here, some people think he might be referring to just the rest of the church. After all, usually the elders of the church are somewhat older than the rest of the church.

But I actually think he's literally referring to young people in the congregation. Because in the rest of our passage, he'll turn and say, now all of you do this.

[21 : 48] He says, he's talking to elders, then to those who are younger, and then to everyone. So I think Peter here is giving a special word for those who are younger in the church family.

And his word is this. Be subject to the elders. In other words, receive their teaching. Follow their example.

Heed their corrections. Imitate their lifestyle. Now, when you think about it, right, we all kind of put ourselves under someone's influence, don't we?

I mean, think about all the kind of so-called influencers on social media. How many of your friends, young people, watch and follow these influencers so that they can dress or dance or talk or think or cook or sing or wear makeup?

Just like they do. Whatever it is, right? That's sort of what Peter means when he says, be subject to. Put yourself under someone's influence.

[22 : 52] Follow their lead. Style yourself after them. And who should you style yourself after? Who should be the main influencer in your life?

Who should you desire to emulate? Peter says, start with the elders. Now, look, I know the elders of the church are not cool.

Right? Most of us don't even have social media accounts. Like, on the cool factor, we're like a negative seven. I get it. But, you know, we're not trying to be cool, which sort of makes us cool, right?

Maybe not. Maybe not. But, you know, the elders and the other godly saints around this place, they're trying to be like the coolest person ever to walk the face of the earth.

Jesus Christ. Do you consider that Jesus has more followers right now than any celebrity ever? The last time I checked, he had a little under two and a half billion followers.

[23 : 57] That's a lot more than most people on social media. But how do you know what it means to follow Jesus? How do you know what it means to live like him?

To be like him? To become your truest self in him? To take what he says in his word and start living it out here and now? Peter says, start by looking to the elders.

And of course, to other godly men and women in the church who are leading by example. Put yourself under their influence. And that is especially true and needful when you face external pressure.

When it seems like you're swimming against the tide of your friends and your peers. It will be easy to dismiss the church and to look down on the older people in the church. But don't be fooled.

If you can see Jesus in them and learn to follow Jesus through them, then you'll be on the cutting edge of history.

[24 : 55] Because the Lord Jesus and his kingdom is ultimately where history is heading. You were created to find your life in him and through him to live life to the full.

This world makes promises it cannot keep. It promises joy and life and belonging. But at the end of the day, it leaves us empty. Jesus, on the other hand, never breaks a promise.

He's faithful to the end. He proved it by going to the cross and rising again. And he will come again to make all things new. So look to the elders and look to the godly saints around you and imitate them.

That's the real path to life. So we've seen Peter's exhortation to the elders. Shepherd the flock. And to those who are younger, be subject to them.

Peter's last exhortation to a church under pressure is to all of us. He says, When you woke up this morning, you went to your closet or your dresser or maybe just a pile of clothes on the floor or whatever it was.

[26 : 21] You know? And you pulled out a pair of clothes and you shook them off and you put them on. But what's the key piece of clothing that we need to live together as the church when we're under pressure?

Peter says, humility. Humility toward one another and humility toward God. Put that on every morning, Peter says.

And what does humility look like? Well, according to verses 6 and 7, humility looks like a deep conviction in both God's might and God's care.

In verse 6, we're to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. That is God's active power to save like his mighty hand that liberated his people from slavery in Egypt.

We humble ourselves under God's supreme sovereignty and power. We stop trying to be our own lords. We stop trying to be our own saviors. We stop looking to the idols of acceptance or success or power to rescue us.

[27 : 27] And we look to God, the mighty one. And we put ourselves beneath him. But this God, Peter says, also cares for us.

He's not just mighty. He's tender and merciful. So we can cast all our anxieties on him. Every fear that we have, even the ones that don't easily go away, we cast on him again and again.

And when we put ourselves in this place of humble reliance on God's power and on God's care, then we can be humble toward one another. Humble because we don't need to protect our pride anymore or sort of our way of doing things.

We're more concerned about God's way. Humble because we're not driven by our fears anymore. We know that God is the one who cares for us. So no longer kind of driven by our pride or our fears.

We can be humble towards one another and we can accept one another. And we can defer to one another. And we can admit when we're wrong to one another. We don't live anymore to kind of make ourselves look great.

[28 : 40] We're much more interested in making God look great and building others up. We're not so obsessed with looking to our own needs, but we're just as concerned as looking to the needs of others.

In a time of pressure, Peter exhorts all of us to be humble. And he says it's in humility that we find the deep wells of God's grace.

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Do you want more of God's grace in your life, friend? Grace to become holy?

Grace to become more fruitful in ministry? Grace to be more like Jesus? Grace to be more like Jesus. Do we as a church body want to see more of God's grace at work?

Grace bringing more people to saving faith. Grace bringing deeper unity and love. Grace bringing fresh experiences of God's spirit. light our heart.

[29 : 45] Great. Grace bringing better faith. Grace bringing more comfort in ministry in ministry. Grace bringing safer with compassion. Grace bringing more comfort in ministry. Grace bringing new experts to secure life's free. Grace bringing more respect of power. Grace bringing your faith when bridges giving more joy to death. Grace bringing more of God with christ consumption like Jesus.

Grace bringing more hands on a king to seine power and make sure to run by Jesus. Grace bringing forth experience of opportunity, grace bringing more comfort in the infinitenekelling please the kiss of Spirit. In other words, grace bringing us up the peace of wiederum and to the nature of lundas nmi■ting questions. Grace making more grace principles of Christ NORlette. Or achievement, learn from the heart that the Father. Get there for us to come from America.