

THIS WEEK ENVISION...

God giving grace to you, to help you in your needs. What are some things you need His help in right now? Hold these before Him and watch what answers He gives you as you read the words of His book and take the following steps to process them more.

Work through these questions 1 Peter 5:1-5 raises.

(Kyle's sermon and Pastor Bob's commentary below will help you.)

1. God has called all of us to model the faith well for others. As a Christian what are some things about Jesus that you model well? What are some things you can hold before God and ask Him to help you to change so you model Him better?
2. Peter names some things that should NOT be part of your leadership style. What are some of these? How prevalent are these in our culture?
3. Some people need to lead and look to be in the leadership mix. Others seek to avoid leading. Who are you in this regard? What are the dangers associated with either of these two ends of the pendulum? Why should both extremes be corrected?
4. What is a key idea about humility that the sermon made you aware of or reminded you about?
5. Church is largely an extra-curricular activity in our culture. It gets our leftover time. That changed in Peter. Why did it? How has this changed in you as you have read Peter's teaching and advice on the roles we fill in life?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

It is said of Moses that there was not a more humble person in all the earth (Numbers 12:3). Read the story about him you'll find in Numbers 12. It is about a time when his own brother and sister were sharply critical of his leadership. Think about what may have been driving them. How did Moses show humility in responding to them? What are some of the things you notice about God's defense of Moses? What impressions and lessons are you left with about leadership after reading Numbers 12?

1 PETER COMMENTARY

5:1—"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,"

Peter turns now to give special instruction to the leaders of the Churches. The instructions are linked to the previous thoughts by the word "therefore." That is appropriate because to be a leader in the movement would mark out such ones for special persecution. Having spoken of the persecution that they were experiencing and exhorting them to persist in it by faith, Peter now singles out the Elders as those who would need to lead the way.

To assume the title of elder was not in those times a means of gaining status. It was marking oneself out for persecution. Peter knew the Scripture, "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (Matt. 26:30-35). He had experienced the feeling of being scattered first-hand. He knew that the leaders needed to stand firm to provide an anchor for the churches. The leaders are privileged to set a pace and the people who are obedient will rise to it.

Peter's actual instructions are preceded by his statement of his own position, establishing a kind of rapport with them so that he could influence and lead them rather than push them. This was always the style of the apostles which they learned from the Lord Himself. This statement by Peter embraces Elders as his peers and yet reminds them of his uniqueness. In choosing these words Peter models his instructions to them very well. He is a fellow elder. Now he was an apostle as well, but here he chooses to call himself an elder.

We do not know for certain what particular local church he was an Elder in. He was likely considered one in Jerusalem. In the last few verses of the letter he refers to "Babylon," and this could be a symbolic reference to a church in Jerusalem, Rome, or one literally located in the city of Babylon. Whatever this refers to it could be the church he was currently serving as an elder in. He was of course, considered elite even among the apostles, by all the Churches. He was a "pillar in the Church" (Galatians 2:9). But he chooses here a more compelling personal approach to the leaders, approaching them as a loving peer.

He notes his uniqueness by also referring to himself as a witness of the sufferings of Christ. This adds a very transparent touch to his words, because he references a time which was certainly not one of his greatest moments as a leader or even as a follower. Yet his firsthand experience with Jesus, even though marked by blunders and failures, made him unique. Elders need to understand that. Even with their imperfections and failures, their calling makes them unique. Peter's words are well chosen and inspire the leaders to follow his instructions.

Before giving these instructions Peter speaks of himself in one more way, as a partaker "of the glory that is to be revealed." There had been a very pointed moment that occurred between Jesus, Peter, and the other disciples that has largely been overlooked by many who shape our theology. It is recorded by Luke (Luke 22:24-38), and involved a dispute among the eleven at the last supper over who was the greatest among them. They had to learn that titles and position were not to be pursued in this life. Faithfulness was to be pursued as well as dedicated service through trial and hardship. These were and are a means of gaining reward that actually matters, eternal reward.

The statement Jesus makes to the eleven rebukes their concern for greatness and status. He challenges them with a new model, that of serving. He then affirms their faithfulness, noting that they had stood by Him in His trials. Finally He says to them that they will be part of His kingdom and that they "will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." This is a reference to His earthly reign mentioned in Revelation 20, the messianic age that is to be experienced on earth before God's final judgment of the earth. These men would have a trusted role in that kingdom conferred on them for a specific reason that involved more than their faith. It involved their faithfulness. It was because they had stood by Him in His trials, they had persevered in that to which they had been called. Peter had been given by Christ this precise vision of the glory that was to be revealed.

His instructions to the Elders were to be followed because they came from a man who had proved faithful and had been affirmed in this way by the appointed judge of the earth. So three things are cited by Peter about himself as he begins his instructions to the leaders. First, that he is one of them. He is experienced at the work they do and empathetic in terms of what it requires. Second, that he himself is an eyewitness of the events that are central to the faith. He is unique among men in this way and in possession of certain authority in the matters of faith that exceeds their authority as Elders. Third, that he is a partaker of a coming glory. He has proven faithful and been affirmed as such by the head of the Church. In these three things Peter shows that he had learned the lessons taught by Jesus at that last supper. He had unquestionable spiritual authority, but he was not lording it over them. He was appealing to them as a peer though he was certainly more than their peer.

5:2—"shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness."

It is the charge of Elders to exercise oversight. This idea carries with it the idea of seeing the whole picture and condition of the work, and applying special effort to areas which are noticeably in need in some way. It assumes that there is a prescribed state of things that is understood by the one watching. So a prerequisite of giving oversight is that one have a clear understanding of when an individual, a ministry, and a Church is healthy. Such a person must know what is supposed to be happening so that they can know when it is not happening. Elders then know Christ and His heart in their local situation specifically enough so that they can see quickly and clearly when He is being followed.

This verse is about how elders are to carry out this work of watching, affirming, steering, warning, and rebuking. It involves the motivation and spirit that leads them to persist in and continue in this work. They are to do this work because it is the will of God for them—their calling. This is the plain and simple reason for assuming the responsibility of oversight. It is to be done voluntarily, that is in willing submission to the desire of Christ as opposed to one whose heart is in something else. It involves keeping oneself free of idols (1 John 5:21).

It shows itself in a willingness to give above and beyond, not the bare minimum. It is the imparting of one's heart and soul not just one's hands. It is not to be entered into as one would a hobby or other special interest. It is to be embraced eagerly, wholeheartedly, because of a desire to do what one's mentor, Christ, is asking them to do.

It is not to be done in order to gain that which is sordid. This term relates to all motives that are fleshly, that involve self-gratification. Elders in the early church often received pay or support of some kind, but this is not to be the reason for involving oneself in spiritual leadership. But because money is not an issue one should not assume that sordid gain is not an issue. The world is full of individuals who sacrifice financial gain for certain kinds of recognition, personal comfort, or inner satisfaction. All of these can be realized in spiritual leadership, but they are not to be the motive that drives us.

If we exercise oversight for any reason other than the call of God, it will in time cause us to be unfaithful in discharging our responsibilities. In that case we will not oversee His work in a way that guides it toward His glory and purpose. It will at some point be shaped so that it serves us and at that point we have exercised headship not oversight. The process and mission are set in motion by Him and for Him. We are to watch over it to be sure that is happening.

Because an Elder's primary task is to discern between the work of the Spirit and that of the flesh, he must be able to clearly discern that in his own life and rule his own life well. A spiritual man is equipped by having successfully led himself to answer God's call to watch over a spiritual work. A fleshly man will lead the church as he does his own life.

5:3—"nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."

It is common among leaders of all things to do what this verse is warning against, to institute practices that constantly subjugate those being led to the whims of the leader or leaders. The flesh loves to be served and seeks to make us the center of attention. The responsibility of giving oversight involves making sure the things being done are of the Spirit. When those giving oversight become occupied with originating every idea, or being at the head of every movement of God, when they are threatened by what God is doing in another they are on dangerous ground. They should rather be thrilled when the rank and file are becoming greater vessels of the Holy Spirit and when some rise to do spiritual work that has greater than their own. When the leaders are not themselves being led by the Spirit, and therefore imitating Christ, you no longer have Christianity. You have a mixture of things that will not mix. In such a case you have a human organization.

Now such organizations are used by God. But this is not our objective in the purest sense. Even Satan has been allowed to exist because somehow evil will be used by God to bring about His grand purpose. So our goal is not simply to be "used of God," and when we speak of that we don't really mean it. Our goal is to be a living organism that is being controlled by Him, and is a reflection of who He is. We want to be more than tools in His hands. We want to be His hands.

Therefore the organized local church must be headed by men who have become such in their own life. They are then examples to others and provide a real life pattern of the “not my will but thine be done” lifestyle. Having fought the personal battles so as to arrive at that point personally, they are equipped to aid those battles in the lives and ministries of others. They can then oversee the work of the Spirit and help foster it in the individual and collective life of the Church. So leaders in the church don’t simply push it in a direction. They have followed in the direction Christ is going and they are looking back to make sure “those allotted to their charge” are walking the same path. That describes the work of an Elder.

Now what is meant by the little phrase, “those allotted to their charge”? It is a key one in this verse. It is the NASB rendering of two words meaning “of the heritage” or “of the inheritance.” The idea is that Elders have the opportunity to impact that which is beyond them and beyond the scope of the present world. They are dealing with that which is larger than them and lives beyond them. A portion of this great inheritance that God is preparing has been allotted to them and committed to their care.

We believe that God’s family is well-ordered, known to Him and well structured by Him. He watches out for His own whether obedient or disobedient. His actions through His own are orchestrated for the spiritual welfare of His own. Ultimately then, He has a design whereby each member of His family is under the oversight of people He has called to be overseers. This does not mean they are in proper relationship to those He has provided as overseers. But He has Himself made that provision and it is always there for His family wherever they go or wherever His family springs up. So each overseer has those allotted to his charge. His responsibility is not to those under someone else’s charge. Those allotted to an overseer are not always known to Him. Some allotted to him are not responsive to him. They will bear that responsibility. Some may appear to be allotted to him but in time prove not even to be in the family of God.

An Elder need only worry about being an example of Christ. If he is this, he will be so to all who come within his sphere of influence. Whether they prove to be friend or foe he will have fulfilled God’s purpose in the relationship.

5:4—“And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

Peter and all the apostles lived for the day Jesus appeared, and they believed it could happen at any time. We do not see in this verse the expectation that the elders in these churches would live, die, be raised and then enter into glory. That is certainly a doctrine and teaching the apostles embraced of those who had died. But they expected Christ to be “revealed” on earth (1:7), and to “appear” on earth. Whatever idea we embrace about future things (eschatology), our position must harmonize with this expectation of theirs that they would see Jesus re-appear on earth in their lifetime.

As to the “crown” they would receive, it could be that Peter is simply referencing the “glory” that all God’s children will experience when Christ judges the earth and sets things right. If that is true, then he is saying to the elders, “My command to you is to hang in there and be faithful, because our time is coming. When the boss comes He’ll fix everything.” It seems more likely that his particular instructions to elders would include a particular possibility of reward attached to their work that would motivate them. In this case Peter is saying to the elders, “My command is to hang in there and be faithful because there is a particular reward for your work that the chief elder will give to those who have been faithful in eldering.”

The “crown of glory” is most likely to be understood as “a crown characterized by glory” not as “a crown called glory.” It is a reference to a glorious reward not simply an object symbolizing achievement.

The primary work of elders is to be shepherds of God’s sheep. Here Christ is referred to as the chief shepherd. He models and directs our work. He is both our pattern and the one to whom we are responsible. When He returns to earth He will reward those who have been faithful to their charge as shepherds, even as He will reward all faithfulness.

This will happen when He sets up His earthly kingdom in Jerusalem, the next event the apostles were expecting (Acts 1:6-11). The work of eldering is one that is near and dear to Christ’s heart. He will reward Elders who do it faithfully in a particular way. This is a great comfort and encouragement to those who are called to it. Their motive is not “sordid” gain, that which in some way gratifies sinful and fleshly desires. It is eternal gain, that desire to have our master say “Well done!” and so to lay hold of what really matters.

5:5—“You younger men likewise be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”

Earlier in his letter after words on Christ subjecting Himself to all that God’s plan for Him entailed, particular instructions are given to particular groups within the church that require submission on their part (see 2:21-3:12). The words in this verse relate back to the last words of chapter 4 as well as to the words addressed to Elders. This is how young men can model Christ’s behavior in the church. They can submit themselves to the rule of the elders.

This submission is not easy for anyone. It is learned behavior. For young men in particular it is difficult. God has wired them to conquer, to take initiative, and to make things happen. They are not yet ready to set the direction. They need experience and they need to prove themselves to be good followers. One cannot lead in spiritual matters without being first and foremost a good follower.

Spiritual leadership is different from other things in this way in that Christ is the head and is actively directing spiritual affairs. He has not delegated the headship of the Church to the Elders. They must be men who are followers of Him. A man becomes this. He is not this at the moment of conversion. So young men must submit to the Elders and in this they will become older men who can lead.

From addressing the younger men in particular, Peter turns to “all of you,” and gives instructions to all church members. We are to be clothed in humility. This imagery of clothing ourselves is such that we must ponder it and allow it to sink in. It shows that humility is not natural but must be intentionally embraced on our part. Humility is embracing fully what Scripture says about yourself and your ways and publicly and privately agreeing with that. It is an intentional setting aside of impulse and a continual embrace of truth. It involves both biblical and practical understanding of who I am. It is what should be immediately recognized about us by others. They should not have to search for it. Our humility should not take special circumstances to be demonstrated. It should be the thing others notice in us very early, even by casual and passing observation.

Put your humility right out there! That is the force of Peter's words. He quotes Scripture as the reason for this. He quotes from Isaiah 57:15. This verse contrasts the response of God to the humble as opposed to His response to the proud. His special favor, grace, comes to the humble. If there is one thing we should long for it is more grace. Whenever God's grace flows it is great news for us. Humility fosters the flow of grace. Where there is repentance and dependence there is power from God.

Where there is stubbornness and independence there is opposition from God. There could be no worse thing in life than to have God opposing what we are doing. There could be no deeper feeling of frustration and being cursed than when God is continually blocking that which we set our hands to. It is not God's will that any in His family have to live like this, but we can experience it when we become willful in our dealings with Him, with each other, and with life. It is a particularly awful path to tread. We should very intentionally embrace each moment with humility to avoid it.