

Sermon on 1 Peter 5:1-5 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Intro to series... For the month of May we are going to have a short series on some of the elements of what it means for those that are rescued by Christ, from our sin and the way of death, to be formed into a family living the way of life together. We are calling it “Body Life.” It won’t be exhaustive but hopefully give us a routine in Spring to remind each other what we are supposed to look like according to God’s word. And today we begin with the Body is Led.

By the grace of God the church is led by those that are here, happy, and humble.

1 Peter 5:1–5 “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 is going to be revealed: [2] 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; [3] not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. [5] 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.” (ESV)

By the grace of God the church is led by those that are here, happy, and humble.

Okay, trigger warning, parents you may want to cover your kids ears for a moment because I want to begin the sermon with a swear word.... Authority.

Our cultural moment is one of widespread disdain for authority. We are always suspect, and at times appropriately. We find it easiest to only trust ourselves and not those in places of power or authority. And while I would like to think it is a uniquely American pioneering instinct, it is a human issue from the first moments a crowd is gathered and someone has to lead.

Perhaps it has ramped up in our age.

“Our modern world has shifted us from a stance under authority to one of preference. Or, expressed more carefully, our modern world tends to undermine

all forms of authority other than its own and replaces them with the sense that all responses are merely a matter of preference.” Os Guinness

Name the thing that makes you most unsettled, education, healthcare, tax policy!.. or whatever it may be and chances are you have wrestled with the prevailing authority.

Meant to be unique, but very much part of this same culture of distrust, the church finds itself facing the trickle down of disdain for authority. And to be honest the church has had more than its share of bad leadership that should make us cautious.

But as we study Scripture, our highest authority as the revelation of God, we come to recognize a Christianity that has not only tenets that are counter-cultural, but a lifestyle that is meant to be different from the prevailing way of our day. What we honor and submit to is countercultural.

1 Peter presents a progression that I think is helpful for our purposes in this series on the church. It is a handy letter that would by itself carry the church pretty far in what we are to believe and how we are to live.

The Apostle Peter penned this letter from Rome writing to the dispersed churches in Asia (modern Turkey). They were exiled people, Gentile believers run out of their old homes because they believed in and worship Jesus. They faced constant persecution, economic, physical, and psychological. 62-64 AD, Nero is emperor of the Roman empire.

Peter commends them to “faithfulness under opposition.” As individuals, as a body formed by Christ, and as Citizens of his kingdom.

1 Peter 1:3–5 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (ESV)

As individuals, saved, born again. And now called to something more...

1 Peter 1:13–14 “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,” (ESV)

Peter also makes clear we are not to go it alone.

1 Peter 2:4–5 “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

Given purpose and belonging.

1 Peter 2:9–10 “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (ESV)

Then as a body formed, a spiritual house, we live as citizens, prioritizing the kingdom of Christ, but good citizens of our current place as well. And authority enters the picture.

1 Peter 2:13–17 “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, [14] or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. [15] For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. [16] Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. [17] Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” (ESV)

We might want to discard Peter here, how dare he! But this subjection, this interplay with authority as those ultimately under the authority of King Jesus extends to our families, as people suffering opposition, and as Peter says, being stewards of God’s grace.

His letter then ends with an exhortation to the shepherds, to the leaders of the church. It's where we find our text, and the clues for who is meant to lead the body.

"Elders" called by the name of the office/role. It's the typical form of leadership in the NT. And shepherding is what they do. They feed and watch over the "flock." They nurture, lead, and protect.

I have to let you know it is a tad strange to preach about the work I am supposed to do and how I am supposed to do it! But it is for our flourishing and benefit that we understand the design and function of the church.

By the grace of God the church is led by those that are here, happy, and humble.

Here

When Peter references the "elders among you" he is highlighting that elders (pastors from the Latin), are sheep, part of the local body of believers.

"Good pastors are first and foremost sheep, and they know it and embrace it. Pastors do not comprise a fundamentally different category of Christian. They need not be world-class in their intellect, oratory, and executive skills. They are average, normal, healthy Christians, serving as examples for the flock, while among the flock, as they lead through teaching of God's word and making wise collective decisions. Their hearts swell to Jesus's charge in Luke 10:20: "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Their first and most fundamental joy is not what God does through them as pastors but what Christ has done (and does) for them as Christians." David Mathis

Being sheep ourselves, pastors are present, here, with the congregation, the body of believers. Proximity matters. While there is benefit and some expectation of teaching and leadership from afar (Peter, Paul, etc) elders are "among" the body.

Shepherds are present with the flock.

The word “among” is often glanced over in older commentaries but I think it is becoming vital again in our day. The pull of accessible content online is real and it is good stuff, refined, the best the church global has to offer. But it is not “among.”

I have had conversations where I encouraged participation in the life of the church and the response is “I get enough preaching online.” Which tells me we need to do a better job of teaching and modeling that shepherding is not merely filling the pulpit!

The NT gives us a life lived together seeking Jesus and living as citizens of his kingdom. It is done in the gathered Sundays together but “among” also means it happens over the dinner tables, the workplaces, the hangout spots of the flock.

Elders are here to **see the sheep**. To see the work of the Spirit in your lives, the things you trust in, the way you love your neighbors.

The family was at Bates Nut Farm last week for a car show, but they also have this small petting zoo where you can feed barn animals (goats, donkeys, pigs, and sheep). As we were feeding the sheep and seeing some brand new kids, I noticed the sheep needed shearing. Their coats were uneven and looked unhealthy. I don't think I would have noticed even from across the field, I had to be next to them. This is pastoring.

Elders are here to **hear the sheep**. There is something profound in the way the sheep learn the voice of their shepherd, and Jesus will use that image for us with him. But I think it is also important for the shepherd to learn the voice of the sheep. The cries they make when they are in danger or afraid. The noises they make when they are rejoicing and excited.

(Jones whining upon return - if we hadn't learned it was joy, you would think it was pain!)

We can only see so much, even up close, so we need the conversation. That we would know how to care for the body, how we need to protect it, how we need to celebrate it.

Elders are here to **feed the sheep**. Now feeding is preaching, but it is so much more than that. This is the shared meal but other servings come in different ways. It is opening Scripture together. It is praying with the flock. It is listening and responding with the grace of Christ.

It might be helpful to think of far away sources of “feed,” the famous internet preachers, as fast food. Highly processed and consistent. There is a flavor to it that we might even enjoy, but if that’s all we eat we could end up unhealthy.

A good shepherd sees the results of the diet and adds the needed ingredients with the Spirit’s help. Not enough fiber, feed them some of the foundational truths. Not enough energy, feed them some sugar (recounting Christ’s heart toward them) to carry them through. Not enough iron, hit them over the head with a cast iron pan!

Honestly being “among” the flocks is one of the key reasons we prioritize smaller congregations, beyond a few hundred it gets too hard to be present, to see, hear, and feed well.

So, elders are here.

As the body then we respond to their presence by gladly being seen (inviting them into our lives), heard (moving beyond the pleasantries into our real experience over coffee or smoked meat), and fed (coming hungry, looking for the local diet the Lord desires for his body.)

Happy

Did you notice this one?

1 Peter 5:2 “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;” (ESV)

Elders are willing. So many serve out of “duty” or perceived need, but when it’s not willingly done, we are in danger.

Giving oversight, watching, directing, guiding the body, is all to be done willingly as God would have you.

I chose to call this one Happy on purpose (more than needed in H word!) Eagerness, willingness; there is a fervor/hunger to these words. There is a desire that I think is rooted in joy.

It doesn't mean the elders are always smiling or giddy, working with sheep is not easy, but it means we recognize the privilege and honor it is to care for those that belong to Jesus.

“How remarkable that pastoring from aspiration and delight, not obligation and duty, would be “as God would have you.” This is the kind of God we have — the desiring (not dutiful) God, who wants pastors who are desiring (not dutiful) pastors. Such a happy God means for the leaders of his church to do their work “with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage” to the people (Hebrews 13:17).”

It must be a joy that is found in our justification in Christ. Our anchored life.

Peter also gives us great clues for the health of the body - that elders would lead not by “domineering,” controlling, harsh, lording over people, but instead as examples to the flock.

Now we are not so naive to turn a blind eye to the ways this exhortation has gone unheeded. We all know a pastor or two who got too big for their britches and thought they were pretty cool. They become the hard-nosed coach willing to cut those who can't perform or grow tired of sheep that need more attention than their golf schedule permits.

Or those that cover up abuse or harm in the church in order to protect their own little kingdom.

I get it, I am wired in such a way that I think I have the best strategy, the right opinions and if people would just do what I say things would be better! So I understand the slope that leads to domineering. And this is why we have structure in place that is to help protect against it.

But that way isn't happy. Elders lead as examples, meant to show what it looks like to follow Jesus as we lead and live.

As we watch the sheep, so the sheep watch us. Our way of life, what we value, our priorities. How we love and serve our family, our neighbors and our enemies.

The happy elder is eager to be exposed/seen, living life in reliance on Christ. It doesn't mean we are sinless or sure of ourselves or our theology all the time, but it does mean we know where to go, who has the words of life.

Even in the context of suffering, there is supposed to be a Christ-modeled willingness. As he took on the cross for us, we take up our crosses and follow him.

Elders are happy as they shepherd. We as the body then see them as they live, we hear them as they reveal their hearts and invite us to follow Jesus together, and we eat the food they prepare for us, we enter into the same joy they find in Christ.

Humble

Before we have to add "long-winded" to the description of elders, let's close it out with humility.

1 Peter 5:4–5 "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. [5] 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." (ESV)

To be humble is a call to all of us in the body of Christ, but first to elders.

Peter puts himself in the company of pastors and I am thankful because he hasn't been perfect. He has denied the Lord, he has been wrapped up in bad theology, but the Lord has used him. He has a learned humility that he models for those called by Christ.

We see that elders are under shepherds under Jesus as our chief, keeping us from establishing our own empires; we serve the true king with eyes to a future crown of glory, humbled that he would save us and use us to care for his prized possession.

"When we humble ourselves, we operate from a position of strength. We know that other people are loved by God and therefore objects of our concern. When we become leaders, then, it is simply to lead people to Jesus and to share his love with them." Eugene Peterson

Elders as the Bellwether.

It's not meant to be glamorous or plastic, it is ordinary and earthy. Life as sheep leading sheep. Rescued by Jesus, empowered by his Spirit, and commissioned to disciple others into the same things. Elders humble and immovable from the goodness of God in Christ. And it frees us to take people seriously just the way they are.

"Good pastors, therefore, are secure in soul and not blown left and right by the need to impress or to prove themselves. They are happy to be as normal a Christian as possible, modeling mature, healthy Christianity, not a cut above the congregation." DM

And that should be the way for all of us. Humility for the whole church. Those younger in years and spiritual maturity subjecting ourselves to the elders, their care, nurturing and direction. All of us clothed in humility toward one another. Because we have been saved, called to something more, built into a spiritual house and waiting on the Lord.

1 Peter 5:10–11 “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. [11] To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (ESV)

So flock, live with all humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. And given grace he has! Rejoice in it.

By the grace of God the church is led by those that are here, happy, and humble.

The way we approach authority reveals how we submit to the highest authority. The beginning of wisdom, the beginning of life, is fear of the Lord. Awe under

him, submission to his authority. To the authority of his word, and the authority he has put in place to lead those he has rescued. For his glory and our good.

This is who our elders are committed to be, and this is the church we are committed to be.

May we model it well that the world will see where our hope truly lies.