

1 Peter 5:1-4

“Being Examples To The Flock”
(Lessons For Leaders)

I believe that higher education is for the most part a good thing. It's never bad to want to improve yourself *educationally* or be stimulated *intellectually* however there's simply no better teacher than real life experience *personally*. You can learn a great deal academically and in so doing you might land a job that makes you better money but I think that all would agree that learning something experientially equips you in a much better way than simply reading about it in a book. Even with all the study that one does academically it's simply to better prepare you for what you'll encounter practically when in the field. We take the time here to examine the *principles* found in God's word so that when something hits your life in a way that's *practical* you're equipped to walk in the will of God (according to the word of God) for your life. But when something hits you're in a real time situation and you begin to make *application* of God's word that's when often times the lights really come on and it's like “Oh, this is what that meant...” Because even though we can often times connect the dots intellectually it's not until we've gone through a situation experientially that we really learn how to integrate God's word practically.

Now we try to make practical application throughout our time of study to act as a “catalyst” of sorts in the learning curve, could be that there are some things that God will deal with us on immediately and want us to repent of (or turn from) right there in that moment as His word is being taught. The application is made, we go “oh, that's for me” and God (by the power of His Spirit) begins to make changes in our lives. That's awesome, be open to the Lord, let Him speak *to* you, make changes *in* you so that you leave here having decreased and He's increased in your life.

But my point concerning this context is simple, practical experience can teach you invaluable life lessons. In 1st Peter Ch 5 Peter shares some of *his* life lessons with us, we can just see the fingerprints of his personal experiences sorta woven throughout this chapter. As he looks back and draws from his time spent walking *with* and learning *from* the Lord he imparts to us some of the insight that he's gleaned, been blessed by and benefited from as a believer. Tradition holds that by the time Peter writes this epistle he's but a couple of years from the laying down of his life for the Lord. He's now an older man and the way that he writes it's reminiscent of the way Paul approached Philemon when he said, “...*though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you — being such a one as Paul, the aged,*” Philem 8-9 Being an apostle of Jesus Christ Peter has every right to be bold in Christ commanding us what is fitting, however he chooses to for loves sake to appeal to us, to exhort us in the Lord.

Now don't get me wrong, when I say that he *appeals* to us it's not as though he gives a *choice* to us, what he says is the word of God and should be received accordingly. But rather than standing above us and preaching down at us, he simply takes his place among us and says, "Listen guys, this is what I've learned, save yourself years of heartache, and heartbreak and incorporate, integrate these principles in your fellowship. It will benefit and bless you tremendously."

Which is obviously the approach that we want to take with all of the word of God isn't it? If we would simply take it and assimilate it into our innermost being, we would be spared untold amounts of grief, stress, struggles, problems and pain be it personally, in our family, in the church body, even many times in society, it will just benefit and bless us tremendously. So may the Lord help us that we not resist His word, but that we have hearts ready to receive His word.

Concerning the current context, whether being *persecuted* or simply seeking to *persevere* it's essential; God's people need good/godly leadership. After all if judgment is to begin at the house of God (which 1 Pet 4:14 clearly states) then it's imperative; that house had better be in order. It's with that that Peter now speaks to the leaders in the body of Christ exhorting them unto faithfulness and diligence in their service and "stick-to-itiveness" concerning God's call upon their lives.

Vs1-4

A number of months ago I developed a little handout that I passed out to our leadership at one of our meetings based upon this passage. This is what it says, "As leaders in the Body of Christ it seems only appropriate that we be constantly evaluating and *re-evaluating* our role *in* the body and our relationship *to* the body. As Paul the apostle said, "*For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.*" 1 Cor 11:31 I believe that as elders, deacons and/or leadership in general it's vital that we play an active role *in* the body serving as examples *before* the body. That having been said, the following questions are simply designed to help us evaluate personally how, or in what way we're serving the body presently." Then I asked a short series of questions to help them evaluate how they're performing personally in relationship to their role as a leader in this body.

That's the essence of what Peter is doing here in this passage; he's issuing a heart check. Making sure that their motivation inwardly (as leaders) and their demonstration of service practically are where they need to be. The exhortation initially is to the elders.

Who are “elders” in the body of Christ? The word *can* lend itself to the aged physically, but more readily this would speak of those who are mature spiritually. You can be 70 yrs old physically and be a babe in Christ spiritually. You can be a young man physically and be advanced in wisdom and incredibly mature spiritually. As you survey the scriptures it’s not uncommon at all for God to grab a hold of young people’s lives and use them tremendously, so we’re open either way. What we’re looking for is God’s call upon people’s lives as evidenced by the biblical criteria found in the Pastoral Epistles, 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus.

What’s the role, or responsibility of the elders? Well, we’ll see some of that when we consider Vs 2 here in just a moment but primarily they’re to tend to the spiritual needs of the body, they’re to be able to teach, (that is to communicate the truths of the scriptures adequately) not always in a public/pulpit format but also personally, conversationally to those who may need direction or correction. They’re men raised up by God to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph 4:12).

Peter says, “The elders who are among you I exhort” that is “I urge you; I implore you or encourage you unto a particular action.” That’s what an exhortation is right? It’s a call to action, it leads to some sort of change or at the very least undergirds a pre-established resolve, “this is what you need to be doing, or the attitude you need to be cultivating.”

He says, “I who am a fellow elder.” This is what I was referring to a moment ago in our time of introduction. He speaks on their level humbling himself and simply identifying with the local church leaders. In essence saying, “From one elder to another here’s the proper protocol for leadership.” Now Peter was clearly the most prominent disciple among the 12 yet he claims no special privilege, no special position such as the “Pope” of the early church (as our catholic friends purport), just a fellow elder. He could’ve easily (and appropriately) called upon his authority as an apostle, but he chose rather to say, “I’m with you, I’m one *of* you, I identify with where you’re at.”

Isn’t that what we want out of our leaders? It’s great if they’ve been to seminary, or some theological university. But when push comes to shove I need to know that you identify with me *personally*, that you don’t lead an untouchable life that really isn’t even remotely acquainted with where I’m at. It’s true that God has ordained structure, authority and order in the church; we do well to respect that and be sensitive *to* that (Peter will touch on that beginning in Vs 5). Yet simultaneously we’re all the sheep of *His* hand, we’re the people of *His* pasture and we’re all in this thing together.

He calls himself a “witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed.” These words begin to take us back into Peter’s personal experiences as He walked *with the* Lord and learned *from* the Lord. He was a *witness* of the sufferings of Christ. In his 2nd epistle (where we’ll be [Lord willing] in a couple of weeks) he says, “*For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*” 2 Peter 1:16

Which is to say, “Hey, I’m not just making this stuff up, these are things I heard with my own ears and saw with my own eyes.” He witnessed the sufferings of Christ, he was there in the Garden when Jesus was falling on His face and sweating as it were great drops of blood, crying out to God concerning what was to come. He saw the mock trial and initial beating that Christ endured, whether or not he specifically witnessed the crucifixion we don’t know; it’s entirely plausible.

When he references the glory that’s to be revealed, that he’s a partaker of that; many believe that he’s speaking specifically in regards to the Mt of Transfiguration when he saw Jesus glorified conversating with Moses and Elijah concerning the cross. He’s a witness of His sufferings and a partaker of the glory, the point being (and we’ll see it more clearly in a moment) that he’s speaking from a vital growing experience of a life live in close communion with Jesus Christ and *that’s* what’s so *essential* in leaders in the body of Christ. That’s what makes them *effective* in ministering to God’s people.

The Pastor of the local assembly (and the leaders that serve under/alongside him) needs to be a man who *walks* with God and is growing in his spiritual life as the result of his *relationship* with God. Paul told Timothy, “*Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.*” 1 Tim 4:15 That word “progress” speaks of a “pioneer advance.” The elders need to be constantly moving forward into new territories of study, prayerfully considering how to be more effective in ministry, why? Because if the leaders aren’t moving forward then the church won’t move forward, a church will generally reflect the demeanor of its leadership, so the exhortation begins in Vs 2...

Vs2

The exhortation is really 2 fold, then Peter begins to expound through a series of comparison/contrasting statements so as to clarify or qualify what it means to fulfill it. The exhortation? #1 Feed the sheep, #2 Lead the sheep...#1 Feed the sheep. He says, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you.” It’s not uncommon at all for the people of God to be referred to in the scriptures as sheep, it’s a good analogy (obviously because it’s God’s) in that like sheep people have a tendency to stray if we’re not following our Shepherd, (that is Jesus Christ) Sheep tend to flock together and as the body we need to assemble together, it’s healthy for us.

Sheep are for the most part defenseless and need their shepherd's protection, but they're useful to the shepherd in providing wool, milk and lambs. As God's people we should be useful to the Lord, fruitful in our service to Him, sheep that are healthy will multiply. We ought to be instrumental in increasing the kingdom of God through leading others to Christ. Think about this; when was the last time someone came to church because you personally invited them, or when was the last time the body of Christ grew numerically because you led someone to Christ? He's the Good Shepherd, we're His sheep...

Peter tells the local leaders of the church, "Shepherd the flock" more literally it's "Feed the flock." "Supply the requisites for their souls need." Of course we can't hear the exhortation to feed the sheep coming from Peter's mouth with out being taken back to that scene on the sea shores of Galilee in John Ch 21 can we? It was there that Jesus Himself spilled into Peter in this manner, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" Peter said, "Lord, You know that love You like a brother." Jesus said, "Feed My lambs" "Do you love Me?" "You know that I have affection for You." "Tend My sheep." Again a 3rd time, "Feed My sheep." There Peter learned that a heart that overflows with love *for* God will so often demonstrate itself in ministering, tending to and nurturing the inner needs of the people *of* God. Those whom God has called to graze in the portion of the pasture He's entrusted to you, shepherd them, feed them, provide for and protect them.

But it doesn't stop with feeding; it also involves *leading*, "Serving as *overseers*." Now I have discovered that as sheep we don't mind the *feeding* so much but we don't really care a whole lot for the *leading* that is the *overseeing*. Because that involves an inspection, it involves direction and at times correction or discipline, we don't like that. We'd rather lash out with a "who do you think you are?" or a "too bad we can't all be as perfect as you" and we like to turn the tables and the attention off of us so that we somehow justify our own position and put the focus in another place. It's amazing how fast people point out other people's faults when they're on the receiving end of a bit of correction or perhaps some difficult direction. Listen, at that point it's not about someone else, it's about you, or it's about me, let's stay focused. You've got to allow your leaders to lead...

Having said that Peter is quick to create balance for the leaders, making sure that they know that they've been called to *lead* people, not *lord over* people. We're sheep that need to be lead, not cattle that need to be driven.

The single most important "tool" that you can be equipped with as it pertains to leadership in the body of Christ is the *heart of Jesus* for the *people of Jesus*. What kind of heart is that? It's one that's willing to give one's life for the sheep, who will genuinely care *for* them, is interested *in* them and is willing to spend and be spent for them. Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.*" John 10:11

He went on to say that the hireling, one who doesn't really have a heart for the sheep won't stick around when there's troubles, pressure or problems, he won't really protect the sheep, and he sure won't lay down his life *for* the sheep but rather he'll flee when potential danger is on the horizon. The good shepherd will stand between trouble and his sheep, he'll pour out his life for the sheep.

Not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly. You see it's a check on both the manner *and* the motive of ministry.

Though Peter applies it to leadership, the principle reaches into every arena of ministry. We should never do what we do in the body of Christ out of compulsion, that is out of a sense of guilty obligation. You know, you got into something, now you feel obligated to it though truth be told you'd rather not be a part of it. If that's the case you need to get out of it, "Well if no one else will, I guess count me in" how about we count you out? You see God's not interested only in your manner of service, but the motive *behind* your service.

"Not for dishonest gain, but eagerly." How should we serve? Both willingly, and eagerly (or with a ready mind), we're ready to go, if God's in it I'm for it. Not begrudgingly, or "another event, give me a break will it ever end?" Well, if that's your attitude *you need* a break, you're not willing, you're not eager, it's not a blessing to serve God, it's a burden, you need refocused, recalibrated, renewed in the heart of God. Now, the key aspect of the phrase there is the word "dishonest" it's not a problem to be compensated for ministry, Paul said the laborer is worthy of his wage and let the elder who rules well be counted worthy of *double* honor, or twice the pay scale is literally what that means. The problem comes in when he serves for *dishonest* gain, not because he wants to bless the body, but because of the platform that's extended to him personally, how much will it profit me specifically, how can this situation be manipulated to my benefit, you see? What's the motive of my ministry, that's the key.

Vs3

Another one of Peter's life lessons isn't it? The disciples always debating and bantering back and forth as to who it was who would be the greatest in the kingdom. One day Jesus calls them to Himself and says, "*You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" Mark 10:42-45

Leadership in the body of Christ isn't about *lording over* one another but rather it's about being an *example to* one another in service and sacrifice. I'm not here to boss you around (unless you're on staff then you become an exception ☺) but rather I'm to be an example (willingly and eagerly) to those who've been entrusted *to* me.

By the way that word “entrusted” is an interesting word, it speaks of an “allotted portion.” It points to the fact that God assigns various portions of His precious possession (the sheep of His hand) to their personal care. In other words God has entrusted the responsibility and spiritual care of certain individuals to particular shepherds, that can be both overwhelming and mind blowing to try and absorb, what a heavy/serious responsibility that is...

Peter is saying, “They’ve been entrusted to you, you be an example to them.” An example in what? In what it means to lead a life that’s set apart to Jesus Christ what does that life look like, how does that person behave? Your pastor, your leaders should be modeling that for you. As Paul said, “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*” 1 Cor 11:1 He told Timothy, “...be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” 1 Tim 4:12 Be a person of prayer, of compassion, of purity, be a person of the word, a person of worship, let people see it in you 1st, have a priority that’s set on eternity, lead the way in that. Doesn’t mean you can’t make a good living or have nice things, the proverbs speak of leaving an inheritance to your children’s children. Well you can’t do that if you’re not approaching life strategically, using wisdom financially, but here’s the deal, whether you abound or are abased you’re content because you’re not pursuing the things of this world as though that’s all there is to live for.

It should be very clear to your family and ideally in your church body that your priority is to seek 1st the kingdom of God and His righteousness and trust the Lord to add to or bless your life in whatever way that He sees fit.

We’ve been talking about church leadership, let me make the personal for all of us. If everyone here at CC Joplin was exactly like you, what kind of church would we have? If we all prayed for this fellowship to the same degree you do how much prayer would we have? If everyone gave the same percentage financially that you do how much would we be able to invest into the kingdom? Would we be reaching out through a radio station, would we be in this facility, or would we be meeting at a park somewhere where there was no cost involved because we couldn’t swing the payment? If we all came to church with the same regularity that you come, how often would we be here? If everyone served in the fellowship to the degree that you serve, would our fellowship be stronger, bigger and healthier, overflowing with people in line to meet needs? Or would we all be sitting together because there would be no children’s ministry, no worship team, no ushers or greeters, none of us really doing anything except showing up waiting to be served rather than to serve? Pretty sobering isn’t it? Now that’s not to hurl any form of condemnation, but it should serve as a healthy exhortation to consider what Peter is saying here. “Be examples to the flock.” Well, we are, the question is merely what kind of example? We need leaders who serve and servants who lead, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly, not as lording *over* one another but rather being examples *to* one another.

Vs4

Translation, “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*” 1 Cor 15:58

Once again we have the reminder that we as elders are merely under shepherds, stewards of that which the Chief Shepherd has entrusted to us until He returns; and when He appears His reward will be with Him and we will be crowned with glory that does not fade away. God knows your labor of love and He pays huge dividends; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom, do you believe it? Truly? Don't just say so, allow your life to show so...

Prayer Points:

Father we thank You for Your word today. May it reach deeply into us and change something in us, our manner of ministry, the motive behind our ministry, whatever it is that You might want to do in each of us individually and as a church family. May we serve as examples one to another of what it means to serve You and lead lives that are set apart *to* You not in lip service, but in life service, with the wholeness of our heart...

If your heart doesn't belong to the Lord, you've come to church, you've heard the message, but having not given your heart to Christ there's something different resonating in you...God is dealing with you and you know that you need to be made right with Him. Here's how that happens, Jesus was crucified, He shed His blood, died upon the cross, was buried in a tomb and 3 days later He rose from the dead. What that equals is that He did for us what we could never do for ourselves, He paid the penalty price in full for our sins. God will give you His (Christ's) righteousness if you will but look *to* the Lord, and trust *in* the Lord by faith. You don't have to understand it, you just have to believe Him for it. If you'll believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you'll be saved, you'll receive His righteousness, age abiding life and enter into a relationship with Him that will change you forever...