



ELDERS, YOUNGER ONES, EVERYONE

SERIES: 1 PETER: LIVING FAITHFULLY WHILE SUFFERING

1 Peter 5:1–5
17th Message
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My name is Jerry Tu. My wife Carlin and I have attended PBCC for over 25 years. Our kids have grown up in this church, and we've been blessed by the preaching here, by the ministries, and by many of you whom we've known over the years. I work as an engineer in a high tech company in Silicon Valley—admittedly not a unique profession! So why is an engineer preaching from the pulpit today?

Well, the passage we come to today in our series on 1 Peter is an exhortation to the leaders of the church, the elders. Since I've been on the board of elders at PBCC for 15 years, the pastoral staff invited me to teach this passage from the perspective of a lay elder. Of course, there are many leaders at our church: pastors, deacons, missions council, leaders in women's, children's and youth ministries, bible study leaders, and many others. 1 Peter 5 specifically addresses the office of elders, so I will focus on this topic. I will be weaving in examples of what our elder board does in the governance of PBCC; I will also invite the elders to come up so you can get to know them better, then I'll lead us into a time of communion as a family of God.

So let's get started by reading today's passage:

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: 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." (1 Peter 5:1–5 ESV)

Peter, the Elder

The apostle Peter first gives his credentials as a "fellow elder." In fact, he was the most prominent leader in the Jewish church in Jerusalem after Christ's resurrection, and his sermons brought thousands to the faith. Yet, even as Jesus' closest disciple, he does not exert authority in a domineering way, but addresses his readers humbly as a "fellow elder." This is an attitude of humility that church elders ought to aspire to.

Furthermore, Peter states that he was an eyewitness of Christ: His life, ministry, and especially His sufferings. Being a first-hand witness further cements his credibility as a teacher of truth.

And to close his introduction, Peter mentions that he is looking forward to entering into "the glory that will be revealed" when Christ comes again. His identity and values are based on the future hope of glory in Christ. We, too, ought to set our sights heavenward on that hope of glory.

Once Peter establishes his credentials and his authority, he gives exhortations to three groups of people: the elders, the younger ones, then to everyone ("all of you"). What ties all three groups together are the themes of servant-leadership and humility. Let's look at what Peter says to each group, starting with the elders.

To the Elders

In 1 Peter 5, all three commonly used terms for church leaders appear together. These three terms are "elder," "shepherd," and "overseer." They are often used together, even interchangeably, in the New Testament letters.

The first term, "elder," can be considered the *office* of church leadership, like a job title on a business card. The Greek word *presbyteros* means "older in life, mature in years." The emphasis of this term is character, maturity, and proven experience.

The second term appears here as a verb, "shepherd the flock." The noun form of this word is translated as "pastor" in Eph 4:11. In most uses in the New Testament, "shepherd" refers literally to the person who takes care of the sheep in the fields, a dirty and not very glamorous job. However, this is precisely the role elders are to take, following the example of Lord Jesus Christ, who is the "Chief Shepherd" (v. 5:4). Peter knew this exhortation well. After Jesus' resurrection, the Lord asked Peter three times, "do you love me?" And after each response, Jesus exhorted Peter to feed the sheep and care for them. This is the *role* of the shepherd: to be the caregiver of the body, feeding them with the Word and guarding them from false doctrine. In PBCC, the elders feed the body by ministry of the Word, either by teaching in small groups or from the pulpit. We also care for the pastors, who in turn shepherd the body.

The third phrase is "exercising oversight." The root word *episkopos* is translated "bishop" or "overseer." This term describes the *function* of elders: overseeing the church's administration and setting its direction. In conjunction with the pastors, we elders help cast a vision for PBCC, as well as make decisions regarding finances, hiring, facilities, etc. These things are necessary for a church to run smoothly, so it's a function of oversight.

The office of "elder," the role of "shepherd," and the function of "overseer" are three facets of elders in a church. Peter now gives three descriptions of how elders fulfill their duties—not *what* they do, but *how* they do it. Although he addresses elders, I encourage each of you to think of how these apply to you as a leader in the home, work or elsewhere.

Attitude

Elders are to serve "not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you". Elders are not coerced or *guilted* into doing their duty. Nor do they serve under obligation. They are to be moved by

the Holy Spirit, motivated internally from a joyful heart. We are to have a willing attitude.

However, having a willing attitude may sometimes be difficult. Being an elder is (most of the time) a joy-filled calling, but it is a heavy burden, spiritually and emotionally, to care for a church of our size. Recent months and years have been a difficult season for us: financial uncertainty, personnel transitions, and being culturally relevant in a politically charged environment. Often we may need to make difficult decisions, address controversial issues, or perform unpleasant tasks. At times it feels like we'd rather not face some of these tasks. However, we remind ourselves that the Holy Spirit calls us to this role, and it's a high calling which we take seriously in obedience, as God would have us. The elders need your prayers! Pray for a willing and joyful heart attitude within us. Pray for wisdom and obedience to the Spirit to discern God's will for PBCC.

Motivation

Elders are not elders "for shameful gain, but eagerly." This means elders are not motivated by earthly gain, but by a spiritual reward, the "crown of glory when the chief Shepherd appears." Elders are to have an eager and unselfish motivation, not seeking pay or compensation. Most of the PBCC elders have full time jobs, and we do not serve in order to obtain money, prestige, or distinction. Gary Vanderet, former PBCC pastor and now at PBC Willow Glen, liked to say, "the clergy are paid to be good. Elders are good for nothing!"

Behavior

How are elders to exercise leadership? Not by "domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." Not domineering seems counter-cultural in our society. We face leaders or work for bosses who exert their power in visible ways over us. Not so in the church. Elders must lead gently, and by serving as examples. Examples of what? Examples of Christ's humility and servant-leadership. Jesus himself exhorts his disciples, the future church-leaders, during the Last Supper:

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. (Luke 22:25-26)

He even knelt down and washed the feet of the disciples! Elders are to exercise their leadership in a gentle way, as servants first, following Christ's example of servant-leadership.

Though Peter addresses fellow elders in these verses, I believe that this attitude, motivation, and behavior may apply to any one of us who are leaders: in a bible study, as volunteers in ministry, and even in secular roles in our neighborhoods, schools, or secular jobs. When God places us in these leadership positions, we ought to lead willingly, unselfishly, and humbly, as servant-leaders and examples of Christ to a needy world.

To the Younger

Let us change gears now, as Peter turns from elders to the younger ones: "likewise, you who are younger." This may refer to the younger in age, or perhaps new converts to the faith. Or, he may refer to those who are younger in maturity in their Christian walk. If you find yourself fitting any of these descriptions, listen to what Peter is saying to you. He says simply, "be subject to the elders." This is a command, not a polite suggestion! Being subject to or submitting to

others is a repeated command in 1 Peter. In previous passages, Peter encourages submission to civil authority, slaves to masters, wives to husbands, and now in these verses, younger to elder.

In all of these instances, submission is to God first and foremost. "Fear God," Peter says in 1 Peter 2:17. Later on in verse 6, Peter says, "humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God." Out of that submission to the Lord first, then for His sake, we are to submit to others, whether it's to our government, the boss at work, husband, an elder in church or a more mature believer. Submission to God makes the other submissions possible. What does submission to others look like? Let's find out in the next verse.

To Everyone

The final exhortation is to everyone, to "all of you." *All of us* are to clothe ourselves with humility toward one another, to completely cover ourselves with it. To be humble is to consider others more highly than oneself. It is the opposite of arrogance, self-promotion, and pride. Peter quotes Proverbs 3:34, reminding us that God "opposes those who are proud, but gives grace to those who are humble."

Humility is not a highly sought-after virtue in our society, is it? Everywhere we look, we see people trying to push themselves above or ahead of others, climbing the social ladder, and competing in the corporate world. We are immersed in social media, where people promote themselves above others to get followers, friends and likes. Social media is all about creating the perfect digital persona so that you outshine others in your circles. Society has turned humility completely upside down; I've even seen a T-shirt that proudly claims "I'm more humble than you!"

But God wants us to be otherwise: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil 2:3-4)

What does this look like? How do we exhibit humility with others?

Let me suggest the following:

- Be willing to do the humble, menial, thankless tasks wherever you are, at church, home, school, or work. Wash the dishes "just because..." Clean up someone else's spilled coffee.
- Be willing—be *eager*—to hang out with the "invisible" people whom God places in your path. Extend love to the forgotten ones, even if it feels uncomfortable to reach out. *Especially* when it's uncomfortable, be a friend to a "forgotten" someone in a humble, genuine and compassionate way.
- Be willing to be in the background. Do not demand your rights, claim credit, or clamor to be in the spotlight. Rather, serve anonymously, without seeking recognition.

We are *all* called to be this way, not just elders, but also the younger, and everyone. Servant leadership, submission, and humility are what we should all strive for.

Elders

Even though elders are to serve not for recognition, ironically, I now want to recognize the board of elders who serve you at PBCC. I do this not to laud them, but to introduce them to you, so that you can put faces and names to our board.

As the elders come join me, I'll describe how the board functions; we meet two to three times a month, for three to five hour meetings on Thursday nights at church. In these meetings, we pray for the body, the ill or those in need. We pray for discernment and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Then we discuss, deliberate, and make decisions regarding our church. These decisions may involve doctrine, finances, logistics, hiring, facilities, etc. We meet with ministry leaders, allocating resources to help them. Pastors join us at times, and together we talk about the direction and future of our church. Outside the meetings, the elders also care for each of our pastors, keeping them accountable and supporting the ministries that they shepherd.

I'd like to close by re-emphasizing the foundational principle which guides elders at PBCC and ought to be the goal of all of us, and that is **servant leadership and humility** which is exemplified supremely by our Lord Jesus.

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:6–9)

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:8–11)

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