

“Serving Under Pressure”

1 Peter 5:1-5

February 11, 2007

Dr. Jerry Nelson

Knowing something of the complexity of the situations in the world today, who of you would want to be President of the United States or a member of his cabinet?

When you think of the legal and financial pressures on boards of directors of major corporations today, you have to wonder who would want to be part of that.

Now consider the temptation to get out of the fire if you are not even compensated for taking on such difficulties.

Most of us have heard what has happened to Rev. Ted Haggard and New Life Church in Colorado Springs and to Paul Barnes of Grace Chapel here in Denver.

Can you imagine how difficult it would be to be an elder in those churches right now?

Last week I spoke of my nephew and his wife working with underground churches in China.

Communist authorities are harassing them and some of the church leaders have actually been abducted and beaten.

Can you imagine who would agree to be a leader in one of those churches?

In the Apostle Peter's letter to the churches of Asia Minor, called 1 Peter, he has been addressing the very real issue of how to live as Christians in a world that is hostile to Christianity.

In the text before us today, Peter is going to principally address the leaders of those churches.

It appears that individually and collectively these Christians have been slandered, ostracized, and even abused because of their commitment to Jesus.

In the paragraph immediately before the one we are looking at today, Peter said, 1 Peter 4:12-19 “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the

painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you... If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed... So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."

Clearly they were undergoing persecution of some kind.

Peter has made it clear there is no quick fix to the suffering these Christians are experiencing.

He points instead to an unspecified time in the future when it will have been worth it to persevere.

But how does the church, the people of God, manage in the meantime?

Addressing the issue of persevering under pressure, Peter has some very practical advice.

The New International Version of the Greek NT has left a word out of the English translation that though not necessary does help connect the previous words, which we just read, with our text for today in chapter 5.

That word is "therefore."

Peter writes, "Therefore" or "because of" what I have written to you already about persevering even amidst opposition to your faith) I now want to challenge you to some very important attitudes you must have to live successfully through these hard times.

By God's grace the church in America is not now in such a hard time.

But wise is the church that fixes the roof before the rains come.

And there is much in our text that we can put into practice immediately even if we are not suffering for our faith.

And so to our text for today: 1 Peter 5:1-5

Therefore, "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: (To you elders,) "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for

money, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. ⁵ Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Pray

The structure of this paragraph is fairly straightforward:

- Peter begins in verses 1-4 with instructions to the elders, the leaders.
- Then in the first part of verse 5 he gives a word to the younger ones in the church.
- Finally in the last part of verse 5 he has a word of instruction for everyone regardless of age or station.

Very practically speaking, for the church to function and minister to itself and the world around, even in the midst of opposition, it must have leaders and followers who know how to act toward one another.

This is not a topical message on leadership and “followership” in the church and so this will not be the whole counsel of God on the subject.

Instead this is an expository message, attempting to expose what Peter says on the subject of leadership/followership in this text.

And so Peter writes, “To the elders among you...”

The term “elder” has a long history dating back to the OT and nearly all other cultures.

And in the NT we are told that when churches were started elders were appointed. (E.g. Acts 14:21-23)

The very term “elder” suggests age – an older person.

It is not that age alone qualifies someone to be an elder but that it is difficult to attain the kind of knowledge and wisdom needed apart from years in the Word and in the experiences of life lived as a Christ-follower.

One man wrote, "Nothing can give a man the sort of wisdom that is necessary to lead the people of God apart from long experience of walking with God, of reading God's Word and putting it into practice in his own life, of observing his own heart and the lives of others, of witnessing the Lord's works of grace and judgment in the world." <http://www.faihtacoma.org/sermons/Peter/1peter25.htm> Dr.

Robert S. Rayburn

Another said in answer to the question, "What kind of minister would you like as your minister?"

"For myself I would like that minister who had been scorched by the law, melted by the Gospel, and much sifted by the temptations of Satan." John Tallach (ed),

I Shall Arise, 14. <http://www.faihtacoma.org/sermons/Peter/1peter25.htm> Dr. Robert S. Rayburn

The emphasis in the word "elder" is on mature faith.

In the first three verses there are three different words used of these leaders in the church: V1 elder (presbuteros), V2 shepherd (poimante) the Latin of which is Pastor meaning shepherd and finally, also in V2, overseer (episcopantes). (The word "bishop" is an old English transliteration from the Latin which is based on the Greek "episcopantes")

You will recognize that all three of those words have been transliterated into English from which we get the words presbyter or Presbyterian, pastor, and Episcopal or Episcopalian.

It is not in the purview of this sermon to discuss this in detail but simply to point out that all three words are used to describe the same office in the church.

It is one office of elder, pastor, and overseer.

The very words used to describe this office denote the roles they are to have in the church.

The word "elder" speaks of maturity and seniority.

The word "overseer" speaks of responsibility and authority.

The word "shepherd" speaks of protecting, feeding, and guiding.

In our church, we too have elders/pastors.

I think the organizational structure of our church is very biblical and very effective.

The Lord
 Congregation as authority
 Elders/Pastor
 Staff and Volunteer servant leaders
 Congregation as parishioners & the World

The congregation is the highest human authority under the Lord.
 The congregation here is defined as those Christ-followers who have committed themselves to each other by declaring their Partnership in this church.

The Elders are answerable to the congregation; they also serve the congregation by leading.

I, as the Senior Pastor, am one of the Elders and am also answerable to the Elders.

The staff and volunteers lead and serve the congregation and others and answer to the elders and the congregation.

The service flows downward and the accountability flows upward.

While Peter's next words are directed specifically at those in the role of elder in the church, by implication they can apply to all who have a servant/leadership role.

So I think it applies to the parent in relationship to his/her children, to the Sunday school teacher, to the small group leader, to a mentor or to anyone with spiritual responsibility for another.

So Peter says if you are going to be in the position of leadership there are three things you must bear in mind.

What Peter then gives are three pairs of contrasting attitudes.

Not this but this.

- Shepherd God's people under your care, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be;
- not greedy for money, but eager to serve;

- not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

To say it more succinctly: Not obligated, greedy dictators but willing, serving examples.

Peter describes two kinds of leaders.

In doing so he challenges every one of us who has any kind of spiritual leadership responsibility for others, but especially he challenges the elders/pastors of a church.

The first kind of leader is the obligated, greedy dictator.

He leads first of all because he feels required to.

He is serving reluctantly mainly out of a sense of obligation.

Not obligation to the Lord but obligation to his family or obligation to the expectations of others.

He wishes he could get out of doing it.

He might wish he were not doing it because being a leader may be hazardous.

One, you become a target for criticism from within the church.

Leaders too often lose friends – long-time acquaintances who get angry and leave because of leadership decisions

Secondly leadership is hazardous because you become a target for opposition from outside the church – The enemy goes after leaders first.

Through the years, several elders have commented that they experienced many more difficulties once they became elders.

The third hazard of leadership is that the judgment of God begins with the household of God; God will discipline and purify leaders first.

And while such discipline is healthy it is not pleasant.

This “obligated” leader may be in the position of leadership in the church or in the home, but he or she doesn’t want the responsibility.

They begrudge what it costs them in time and effort.

This leader then becomes the one of whom Jesus spoke in John 10:12-13 “The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”

How about it pastor, elder, teacher, father; do you have the role but you are in it only out of obligation?

Peter says not only is this leader acting only out of obligation but also he is also greedy; what he is doing is mainly for his own benefit.

Greed is not just about money.

It's the leader who serves for the prestige it might bring.

It's the ego that is stroked by being the leader or the teacher.

One evidence of such greed is that the leader feels threatened when he hears about someone else being more effective.

But the greed is also about money.

Here is where it applies mostly to those elders who are provided an income, which allows them to give more of their time to ministry; in our context they are called pastors.

I know of pastors who are slackers, doing only enough to get by. They have gone into ministry because it was simply, as they say it, “a way to make a living.”

One missionary, when asked if they were going to return to the States when their children completed high school, said, “We could never live like this in the States.”

Doing ministry for money shows itself:

- When a pastor's schedule gets busier around salary setting time;
- When he pays special attention to those who appear to have more money;

- When he curries favor to increase honoraria.
- When ministry has become a career rather than a calling; as evidenced by climbing the ecclesiastical ladder.

That is why for our paid elders/pastors we have salaries that are established by the board.

- We don't allow staff to solicit extra funds.
- We ask staff to refuse larger gifts of any kind.
- It's why pastors and other leaders in the church have no knowledge of how much any one gives to the church or even if someone gives to the church.

We don't want to fall prey to serving for financial gain.

But Peter is describing the leader who has the office out of obligation, for self-interest and thirdly, who tends to "lord" it over those entrusted to his/her care.

This is the leader who uses manipulation and intimidation to force his way on others.

He refuses to delegate authority and hoards decision-making.

One man wrote, "Lording it over" implies that the elder-shepherd is driven by the love of power. He gets an ego high from flaunting his authority and prestige and dominance. He needs to be up front. He likes the best seats in the synagogue, as Jesus said. He likes to be addressed with titles. He craves the praise and the dependence of men. He may be a boisterous domineering sort. Or he may manipulate with the feigned pain of a wounded hero. Or he may be a consummate politician who measures his words so as to curry the favor of the powerful and enhance his security in office. (From John Piper Nov 13, 1994 sermon)

This leader is not a shepherd but a cowboy driving his flock like cattle. Bryn MacPhail at <http://www.reformedtheology.ca/1peter5aa.htm>

Peter likely has Jesus' words in mind from Mark 10:42

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them."

But in contrast to the obligated, greedy dictator, Peter describes a 2nd kind of leader who is a willing, serving example.

This is the one who is called of God and willingly serves the Lord by serving the Lord's people.

The Apostle Paul said the Lord loves a **cheerful** giver.
That's the attitude here toward service.

This is the leader who understands that God has called him or her to this place of leadership in the church (or home) and there is no better place to be.

This is the leader who is eager to serve.

His main desire is to do his Master's bidding and serve his Master's people.

We have such elders in our own church but so as not to embarrass them I use an example from another time.

I read recently of John Mathewson who was a businessman and elder in his church.

He was a man of prayer keeping about 30 names on a prayer list.

The man who wrote of John Mathewson said he was on the list and Mathewson said to him, there is not a day but I remember you.

His well-thumbed Bible was a sight to see reflecting his love for the Word especially Hosea and the Gospel of John.

Those who knew him best knew how well he knew the Bible and how naturally he spoke of spiritual things.

On his deathbed, his Christian doctor, seeing the approach of the end, told him "You will soon get the palm of victory."

"I've got it already," was his reply.

He died, an old man and full of years, with all the blessings of Christian old age -- "honor, love, obedience, troops of friends" -- while folk around his bed were singing a hymn.

The man who told of Mathhewson, wrote, “**There** was an elder, a shepherd. And it is to the everlasting honor of the Christian church that she has produced multitudes of such men through the ages. It is our calling to be like them if we have leadership in the church and to settle for nothing less. It is the church's calling to think it of capital importance that it should be led by men such as that and by no other. To expect such lives, such godliness in her sons, and to cultivate it in them while they are young.

<http://www.faihtacoma.org/sermons/Peter/1peter25.htm> Dr. Robert S. Rayburn

In verse 2 Peter said to remember this is God’s “flock.”

The individuals in our church as a whole, in our Sunday School class or small group; even those individuals in our family do not belong to us – they belong to God and are entrusted to our service.

Robert Rayburn wrote, “If a shepherd doesn't understand himself a servant, a man under orders, whose life work it is to serve God and others, a stewardship for which he will be held to account, he does not belong in this work.”

<http://www.faihtacoma.org/sermons/Peter/1peter25.htm> Dr. Robert S. Rayburn

Though God calls us to be willing and eager servants, there are seasons when it is just obedience that keeps us going.

I speak from experience.

Through a great struggle about going into the ministry in the first place and through many struggles since it is the call of God on my life that has kept me in ministry.

And so pastor, elder, Sunday schoolteacher, father/mother in the home when you struggle with your responsibility, seek to be revived in spirit.

Change your schedule, feed your own soul and allow God to do his work in you that you may be able to do it in others.

Then imagine the results:

To have the privilege of caring for the souls of others in the church or home is the highest task to which any leader can be called.

- To stand before or sit with others who look to you for spiritual food and help and share God’s word and your own life with

- them;
- To be with them in the times of greatest joy and deepest sorrow;
 - To know their darkest secrets and blush with them over their sins and be excited with them when victory comes;
 - To know their private lives and their highest ideals;
- What could possibly be a greater privilege or bring more lasting joy?
- Paraphrased from W. E. Sangster, in *The Approach to Preaching*

How about it pastor, elder, teacher, father; do you lead willingly, eager to serve?

**Peter adds a third description of this 2nd kind of leader.
He said we are to be examples to the flock.**

The Apostle Paul said it this way in 1 Timothy 4:12 “set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”

What about your finances, your family, your reputation with others, your private life – are you an example of what others are to be?

Paul said, follow me as I follow the Lord; emulate my life.
Pastor, elder, SS teacher, and father/mother: Can we say that?

And what is the motivation behind this willing, serving example of a leader?

It’s in verse 4 “And when the **Chief** Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

I can’t know all that means, but it is obvious that it is good.

Everything I know about God and his plan for the future says all else will pale in comparison to finally hearing those words from the God of all glory, “Well done, good and faithful servant... Come and share your master's happiness!” (Matthew 25:23)

But Peter’s instructions are not only to leaders but also to followers.

1 Peter 5:5a “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older...”

This is not just a rephrasing of “show respect for your elders,” though that would certainly be included.

These “young men” are the non-elders in the church who have the responsibility to follow the lead of the elders.

The word “submissive” is the same word used earlier in the book and means a willingness to be led.

The natural tendency of most people, especially young people, is to resist authority.

But Peter says don’t do that.

Now this is not a blanket endorsement of everything elders might ask of their followers but it does mean a disposition to follow.

And if the leaders are actually serving rather than greedily lording it over others, it is much easier to follow.

Maybe it can be summed up this way: Leadership doesn’t convey the right to domineer nor does ‘followership’ convey the right to complain and undermine. (I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, 165)

This instruction to the **followers** in the congregation is also stated in Hebrews 13:17 “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

It has been an amazing privilege for all of us pastors and elders to serve this congregation through the years.

Certainly there have been difficult times, but overwhelmingly this congregation has shown that it knows how to follow, care for and hold its leaders accountable **with grace**.

But Peter concludes with instruction to EVERYONE– leaders and followers alike:

1 Peter 5:5b “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Arrogance, whether by domineering elders or by contemptuous rebels will always bring God's displeasure!

How does a church survive and even thrive through the hard times of opposition from outside or dissention within?

A crisis tends to draw people together but prolonged pressure tends to wear a people down and they even begin fighting with each other.

Peter says you can survive the opposition you face; you can keep from caving in; you can keep from internal sniping and disintegration if you will humbly submit to each other.

So in summary:

Leaders are willing, eager to serve examples.

Followers have a willingness to yield, to accept leadership.

I believe Peter is saying if we all do so with a genuine humility that puts the welfare of others ahead of our own, we can persevere even through the hardest times.

1 Peter 5:1-5

Therefore, "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: (To you elders,) "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. ⁵ Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Other Notes:

"The Hebrew word for "elder" is formed from the word for "beard." But the idea is not that of chronological age, per se, as if anyone over 50 or 60 should be an elder. Generally, in the nature of the case, elders will be older men, at least it is hoped. But the reason for that is that it takes time to grow up into Christian maturity. The Christian life is a fruit that takes time to ripen. Nothing can give a man the sort of wisdom that is necessary to lead the people of God apart from long experience of walking with God, of reading God's Word and putting it into practice in his own life, of observing his own heart and the lives of others, of witnessing the Lord's works of grace and judgment in the world." "What kind of minister would you like as your minister?" The answer he gave to his own question was: "For myself I would like that minister who had been scorched by the law, melted by the Gospel, and much sifted by the temptations of Satan." [John Tallach (ed), *I Shall Arise*, 14.] <http://www.faithtacoma.org/sermons/Peter/1peter25.htm> Dr. Robert S. Rayburn

The New Testament only refers to the office of pastor one time (Ephesians 4:11). It is a functional description of the role of elder stressing the care and feeding of the church as God's flock, just as "bishop/overseer" is a functional description of the role of elder stressing the governing or oversight of the church. We may conclude therefore that "pastor" and "elder" and "bishop/overseer" refer in the New Testament to the same office. This office stands alongside "deacon" in Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:1-13 in such a way as to show that the two abiding officers instituted by the New Testament are elder and deacon. We will treat the function of these two offices in turn.

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByTopic/71/1491_Rethinking_the_Governance_Structure_at_Bethlehem_Baptist_Church/

Given the agrarian society of Israel and the rest of the world it was likely that farm metaphors would be used to describe aspects of life. Sheep and shepherds were common. It seems also true that the relationship of a shepherd to the sheep is more intimate than in the care of most other animals - feeding, protecting, guiding. The OT uses the shepherd metaphor also to describe God's relationship with his people.