

Lead by Example • 1 Peter 5:1-14

You are facing one of the toughest times of your life in terms of relationships, health or job. You are trying your best to live Christianly, to do what is right. You want to do what God wants you to do, but you find it hard to do. Sometimes it seems impossible. Where do you turn? Where do you get the resources?

In the first of his New Testament books, Peter writes twenty principles to guide us through life's greatest difficulties. We have studied and learned fifteen of them. They are:

- 1.) Remember that you are special.
- 2.) Rejoice during troubles.
- 3.) Don't let evil shape you.
- 4.) Live with faith and hope.
- 5.) Love others from your heart.
- 6.) Get milk!
- 7.) Be part of something great.
- 8.) Behave in ways that impress the pagans.
- 9.) Emphasize responsibilities more than rights.
- 10.) Godly behavior changes others.
- 11.) Treat other Christians right.
- 12.) Be ready to suffer for doing what is right.
- 13.) Live to overcome sin and do the will of God.
- 14.) Live as if tomorrow is your last day.
- 15.) Never be surprised by problems.

I Peter 5:1-4 brings a sixteenth principle to the list for living. At first it seems unlike the rest, almost out of place. It is a principle about leadership.

Let me try to explain the rationale that's running through Peter's head. When the circumstances of life get tough we need leaders—good leaders. When everything around us is crumbling we need someone we can see, hear and touch who will be strong and stable and set an example for

us, someone we can depend on for help and for hope.

We understand that from history. When Pearl Harbor was bombed and the United States entered World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt took to the airwaves of the nation and gave this country courage. When London was being bombed and it seemed that the British Empire would collapse under Nazi assaults, Winston Churchill gave the people hope. When terrorists took down the World Trade Center, America looked to President George W. Bush for hope. When neighborhood bullies beat you up in the third grade you ran to your mom and dad for help.

The best of leaders give the best of help in the worst of times. They are a gift from God. But, lousy leaders are one of the worst catastrophes any of us can face. If a political leader is corrupt or a spiritual leader is immoral or the CEO steals from the company the consequences can be far-reaching and disastrous. So recognizing the immense importance of good spiritual leadership, Peter writes in I Peter 5:1-4:

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

...think of yourself as the caregiver for the souls and lives of others whom God has given you to oversee.

glory to be revealed: 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; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the

flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

When Peter begins talking about the kind of leaders who help us through difficult days he starts out with a surprising statement about equality. He says that when it comes to leaders or elders, he is

just a fellow leader and elder along with everyone else.

“Elder” was a common expression in the first century. It refers to leaders. Greeks used it to refer to political leaders. The Hebrews used it to refer to the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community. It often meant older in years but it also meant mature in experience and wisdom. It is possible for someone to be comparatively young and have that skill. It is possible for someone to be old and foolish and not have that skill. Elders were leaders who had a proven track record from the past, so they could be relied on for good leadership in the present and the future.

At Wooddale Church we have elders who are chosen to lead the church because of their proven wisdom, godliness and goodness. They don’t become leaders by being elders; they become elders because they are already recognized as leaders.

What amazes me in Peter’s words is the way he describes himself: *“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.”* Peter talks as if he were no better than any other church leader. He describes himself as a *“fellow elder”*. This was certainly not the way I would describe a man who was a close friend of Jesus, the #1 leader of the Jerusalem Church and an author of the New Testament. I would give him 50 votes in any group of two or more. Yet, that is not the way Peter saw himself. He taught that all Christians are equal before God. All leaders are to be honored and respected. He claimed no more for himself than he expected for others.

Although, Peter proves the point that elders are to be experienced. He was an eyewitness of the sufferings of Jesus. This is actually a rather strange statement if you remember the intermingled biography of Jesus and Peter. Peter denied knowing Jesus the night before Jesus was crucified and Peter was in hiding the day of Jesus’ crucifixion. He didn’t see Jesus crucified. So what suffering did he see?

Peter was there the night before Jesus’ crucifixion when Jesus agonized about the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane and pleaded with the Father to call it off. Peter watched while Jesus was

accused and mistreated during the trials on the eve of his crucifixion. He must have seen the pain and anguish in Jesus’ eyes over what was to come even though he never saw the actual death on the cross. It was Peter’s connection to the suffering of Jesus that qualified him to lead other Christians through their own pain and suffering.

If Peter were here today he would say to every leader that we are all equal. Sunday school teacher, church board member, Bible study hostess, parent of teenagers, student volunteer—wherever and whenever Christians give leadership to other Christians, Peter points to our equality with him and with one another.

Leadership is most about caring for others. As God has blessed us we are to be a blessing. What we have learned in our lives is to be used to bless others as they go through their own difficulties in life. He writes in I Peter 5:2, *“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.”*

The word “shepherd” is the word “pastor”. This must have been a hard analogy for Peter to use because he was a fisherman by training and occupation. But he knew that shepherds are a better comparison to leaders than are fishermen.

We use the word “pastor” in a technical way that would be unfamiliar to Peter. I am called “Pastor Anderson” and am a pastor of Wooddale Church. That means that I have a great responsibility for the lives and souls of other people. I pray for you every day. I think long and work hard to care for others—directly and through delegation. At the end of each day I know that it is a wonderful privilege and a frightening responsibility to be a shepherd of God’s people.

But I am not the only one. Most Christians have shepherding responsibilities. Some shepherd co-workers at the office. Some shepherd neighbors around the block. Some are the shepherds of an extended family. Many are shepherds of young children who are still at home, but that also goes on into adulthood when your children are all grown up. Some may shepherd others at church or someplace else. Wherever, whenever—think

of yourself as the caregiver for the souls and lives of others whom God has given you to oversee.

When God calls you to lead others, respond with willingness. Understand that this is a call from God and an awesome responsibility and privilege. In I Peter 5:2 we are reminded, “*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.*”

It is possible to lead for the wrong reasons. Peter lists only two of the many possibilities of wrong reasons to say “yes” to spiritual leadership. Some do it out of obligation; some do it out of greed. Some people when asked to teach or lead a group or shepherd a friend do so out of sheer duty. Some people say “yes” to a request out of greed. They want to know what they are going to get out of it. Peter tells us to be eager to serve and eager to lead. Say “yes” when asked; volunteer when not asked. Say “yes” because God wants you to shepherd others. Say “yes” because you want to bless others.

When called upon to be leaders, to be helpers, to shepherd others for God’s sake, let us have “yes” already forming on our lips—even before we know all that God is inviting us to do.

Becoming a shepherd doesn’t make someone a good shepherd. Assuming we will all say “yes” to the call to help others, Peter tells us how to do it in I Peter 5:3: “. . . *not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*”

When leading others, don’t be bossy. Don’t arrogantly assume that you know what others should do and just tell them what to do. Peter says don’t take that approach. It is demeaning to the other person. It can come across as a put-down. It doesn’t teach them how to handle life but it keeps them dependent on the leader. Be driven by the needs of the other person, not by your need to show off.

The far better approach is leadership by example. Show others how to live. Especially show others how to live as Christians in every circum-

stance.

Here is a list of possible life circumstances. Mentally check off which ones apply to you:

- Rich—over \$66,000 per year annual income
- Poor—below the national poverty line
- Healthy—no major medical problems
- Ill—serious medical problems
- Employed
- Unemployed
- Bad time of life
- Good time of life

Here is the question: How can you live as an example of Jesus Christ in your current circumstance? So, instead of being proud of wealth or ashamed of poverty, instead of complaining about the bad times or selfishly exploiting the good times, show others how to live Christianly in your situation. Show how a Christian deals with pain and with pleasure, with good children and with prodigal children, with wealth and with poverty, with good job and with bad job, with happy marriage and with unhappy marriage. Be an example to the flock. Every one of us is surrounded by other sheep trying to figure out how to live life and yearning for others to show how to do it. You be an example to others.

Peter finishes his list with expectation and with hope. He says in I Peter 5:4, “. . . *when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*” So Peter anticipated what tomorrow would be like. And he believed Jesus would make it very good.

...show others how to live as Christians in every circumstance.

Charleen and I have a small pillow that sits on our bed. Embroidered on it are the words “The best is yet to come.” At times I come home at the end of the day absolutely exhausted, overwhelmed,

wondering if I will ever be able to face what tomorrow will bring. I see that pillow and read, “The best is yet to come.” Other days I come home as happy as I have ever been. And I see that “The best is yet to come.” There are mornings when I wake up dreading the appointments of the day. And I am reminded that “The best is yet to come.”

Other days I anticipate that this is going to be the best day of my entire life, but I am reminded that there is something better ahead, better than the best day of my entire life. “The best is yet to come.”

I can picture a pillow like this on Peter’s bed. No matter how good or bad things were going he knew that the Chief Shepherd is coming with a crown for Peter that will last forever.

The Chief Shepherd is Jesus Christ. No matter what leadership role any of us may have, we are not the CEO. Jesus is the Shepherd-in-Chief. For me that is a huge personal comfort. When I realize the responsibilities and implications of teaching the Bible, praying for Wooddalers and trying to lead the church it sometimes makes me physically sick. Then I remember that I am not the Boss. I am not in charge. I am not ultimately responsible. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd. The same goes for Sunday school teachers, parents, Christians at work and at school. We say “yes” to God and do what God has called us to do but Jesus has taken the ultimate responsibility for the outcome, not us.

Jesus will give us a final reward for faithfully doing what he has called us to do. In the first century, Peter had in mind the laurels made of leaves that were given to the Greek Olympic champions. You know what happens to them. They quickly turn brown, dry up and die. They don’t last long. But Peter says the Chief Shepherd will some day give to you a crown that will last forever. Better than the Nobel Prize; better than a blue ribbon or an honorary doctorate or a Congressional Medal of Honor.

Whatever you call it, the point is that Jesus will preside over a reward ceremony that will honor those who have honored him. At that mo-

ment, all the experiences of this life will be seen in a different perspective. We will be honored for leading and shepherding others through tough times. We will have blessed others as Jesus blessed us. By comparison, our hard times won’t seem so bad and our prosperity won’t be remembered as all that great. What will really count is what will never fade away. *The best is yet to come!*

None of this is to minimize our own challenges and problems. But all of this is to maximize the good we can do in Jesus’ name for others.

- Be a leader.
- Be an example.
- Be a blessing.

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