

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter

Lesson 9: Shepherds, Humility, and the Adversary -- 1 Peter 5:1-14

Peter is an old man now, and he knows it. The fisherman who once swore he would never deny his Lord, who then denied Him three times before a charcoal fire, has lived a long obedience since that bitter night. As he comes to the end of his letter, he does not pull rank. He could call himself an apostle, an eyewitness, a pillar. Instead he writes, "I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder." A fellow elder. The man who walked on water, who saw the Transfiguration, who preached at Pentecost, sits down beside the local shepherds as one of them and speaks heart to heart about the hardest and most tender work in the church: caring for the people of God.

And what he says about that work turns the world's idea of leadership upside down. Shepherd the flock, he says, but not under compulsion, not for shameful gain, not by domineering over those in your charge. The shepherds of God's people are not to be little bosses lording it over the sheep; they are to be examples, leading from the front by the quality of their lives. Peter knows the temptation, because he had felt the pull toward greatness himself, until the risen Christ asked him by another charcoal fire, do you love me, then feed my sheep. Real leadership in the church smells like a shepherd, not like a throne.

Then Peter widens his arms to include everyone. Younger ones, submit to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. And here comes one of the most quoted and most needed sentences in all of Scripture: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." Humility and anxiety, it turns out, are deeply connected. We grasp and grip and worry because we have not yet laid ourselves and our cares in the hands of a God who actually cares.

But Peter will not let his readers grow drowsy, because the war is real. "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." There is an enemy, and he is hunting. Yet even here the tone is not panic but confidence, for the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us after we have suffered a little while. Read this final chapter as a charge from a battle-scarred saint who is almost home: be humble, stay awake, resist the lion, and rest in the God who cares. To Him belongs the dominion forever.

Group Discussion: Peter tells the elders to shepherd God's flock "not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (v. 3). What is the difference between leading by example and leading by domination, and why is the temptation to control or lord it over others so strong, even in the church?

Personal Reflection: Peter says to cast “all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (v. 7). What is the anxiety you are gripping most tightly right now? What would it actually look like to cast it on God this week rather than carrying it yourself?

Read 1 Peter 5:1–14

Study Questions

1. Peter, “a fellow elder,” charges the elders to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight... not under compulsion, but willingly... not for shameful gain, but eagerly... not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples” (vv. 1–3). What does this teach about the work and character of elders in the Lord’s church, and what kind of leadership does God want over His people?
2. Whether or not you are a leader, Peter’s vision of leading by example rather than by control applies to all of us, as parents, workers, and members. Where are you tempted to control or domineer rather than to serve and set an example, and what would change if you led the way Peter describes?
3. Peter promises that when “the chief Shepherd appears,” faithful shepherds “will receive the unfading crown of glory” (v. 4). What does it teach us that Christ is called the “chief Shepherd,” and how does serving with an eye on His appearing and reward shape the way we serve now?
4. Peter calls everyone to “clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another” (v. 5). Humility is something we put on deliberately, like a garment. Where in your relationships do you most need to deliberately “put on” humility this week, and what would that look like in practice?
5. Peter quotes Scripture: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (v. 5). What does it mean that God actively “opposes” the proud, and why is humility the doorway to receiving God’s grace? How have you seen pride shut a person off from grace?
6. Peter says to “humble yourselves... under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time he may exalt you” (v. 6). Where are you tempted to exalt or promote yourself rather than to humble yourself and trust God’s timing? What makes waiting for God to lift you up so difficult?
7. Peter commands, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith” (vv. 8–9). What does this teach about the reality of the devil, the nature of the spiritual battle, and how a Christian is to resist him?
8. Peter says to resist the devil “firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (v. 9). How does remembering that other believers are facing the same battle help you stand firm? Who could you stand alongside, or draw strength from, in your own struggles?
9. Peter promises, “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” (v. 10). What does this verse teach about God’s purpose in our suffering, the certainty of our final restoration, and the relationship between suffering “a little while” now and “eternal glory” in Christ?

10. Look back across the whole letter, which Peter closes here. From a living hope, through holiness, suffering, and submission, to humble shepherding and resistance to the adversary, name one specific way Jesus has been forming you through 1 Peter. What single truth from this letter do you most need to carry forward, and how will you let the God of all grace establish you in it?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 21:15–17, the risen Christ charging Peter to feed His sheep; Ezekiel 34:1–16, God against false shepherds and Himself the true Shepherd; Philippians 2:3–11, the humility and exaltation of Christ as our pattern; James 4:6–10, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble; Ephesians 6:10–18, standing firm against the devil in the armor of God