

1 PETER 5:1-4 – A LEADERSHIP GUT-CHECK

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Good morning, everyone. Open your Bibles to 1 Peter, chapter 5. While you're doing that, I want to give you a primer for what we are going to look at today. When you think of a leader, who do you think of? Take a second and share with the person next to you who the first person was that came to your mind when I asked that question.

Ok, a show of hands: who thought of someone in politics? How about someone in business? How about someone in the military? How about a historical figure? How about a sports figure? Who thought of someone in your family?

Ok, now think for a second. How did that person lead? What characterized his or her leadership? Did he bark orders that everyone followed? Did her passion ooze out of her every where she went? Did she manipulate people? Did he work to make every one better, more effective, more successful?

The passage we're going to look at this morning is a leadership gut-check. I'm unashamedly going to talk directly to leaders: ministry leaders, small group leaders, elders, and staff. I understand that not everyone here is gifted in that way. That's not an excuse to check out and day dream. It's my belief that every Christ-follower will be called to lead at some point in their lives. They will need to lead as parents. They will need to lead in their relationships. They may not suit up to lead the next 25,000-person mega church, but even one-on-one, they will still be called to lead. So pay attention. Who knows? You may be on the next search committee trying to evaluate a potential leader, and today's passage will give you great insight into finding the right kind of leader.

Before we dig in, there are some things you need to know. First, the writer of this book is the Apostle Peter. Peter is an interesting character. He often suffered from foot-in-mouth disease. In Matthew 16:16, Peter makes a beautiful profession of faith, recognizing Jesus as the

Messiah, the Son of God. Then six verses later, Matthew says that Peter pulls Jesus aside and begins to rebuke Him. The fisherman is lecturing the One he just called the Christ. He thinks he has more insight, wisdom, and understanding than the Son of God.

But this is Peter 30-plus years later. This is an older man, a wiser man, one who had walked with God for many years, one who had seen the crucified and resurrected Jesus, one who had suffered for the One whose name he bears. In Acts 4, he's arrested and threatened for preaching Jesus in Jerusalem. Acts 5, he's arrested again and flogged. Acts 12, he's arrested again. Keep in mind that these jails are not in modern-day prisons. There was little concern for a prisoner's welfare. At the time of writing this letter, Peter was in Rome, probably just before Nero launched his campaign against Christians. So I suspect that Peter was taking heat for following Christ.

Peter is writing to believers in the same situation he's in: strangers in a hostile land. In his introduction, Peter calls them part of the 'diaspora', a term used of the Jews scattered during the exile. In 5:13, He claims to be writing himself from 'Babylon'. While that term was Christian code for Rome, symbolically it represented the source and cause of the Jewish exile and diaspora.

The five churches are all located in what we, today, we know as Asia Minor or Turkey. These churches overlap geographically with portions of Paul's missionary journeys recorded in Acts. Here's a sample of how Christians were treated there: In Iconium, Jews and Gentiles (and their rulers) collaborated to mistreat and stone Paul and Barnabas; in Lystra, they actually stoned Paul; and in Philippi, Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned in the stockade.

Peter's letter to these churches revolved around the theme trusting God and obeying Him, especially in the midst of suffering and persecution. These believers are being tested, ridiculed, slandered, and even criminal accusations, and Peter wants them to persevere as Christ did in His martyrdom.

All that said, let's read 1 Peter 5:1.

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. (1 Pet 5:1, ESV)

In the Greek, Peter starts the verse with “Elders” to grab their attention. The Greek word for elder has two possible meanings: a recognition of age or a recognition of an office.¹ In this case, I think Peter is using the office sense of the word. He’s getting in someone’s face, and that’s typically how leaders need to be treated. But notice how, rather than getting all bossy and tyrannical, Peter gets the elders’ attention and then softens up. He doesn’t say, “I command you.” He doesn’t say, “I decree.” But he doesn’t go totally soft either—“Pretty please with sugar on top.” Instead it’s “I exhort you.”

The Greek word for exhorting carries the connotation of both confronting and comforting.² That’s why some translations render it “I urge you” or “I encourage you”. Peter’s trying to communicate and admonish the elders from a position of strength yet in a language of love. He’s not about to beat them over the head with a rebuke. He’s trying to influence them as one of them. To gain the trust of his readers, he uses three phrases—in grammatical terms: appositions—to describe himself in order to establish a connection and common ground with them.

First, Peter calls himself a fellow elder. Why? To show that he knows the burdens and responsibilities of leading. He knows that it’s a hard calling, and he’s right there on the frontlines of ministry just like these elders, not aloofly pontificating from some cozy, corner office. He understands how difficult it is to confront and rebuke people you care about. He gets the pain when someone rejects your message or walks away from the faith. He feels the yearning and

¹ Günther Bornkamm, “πρέσβυς, πρεσβύτερος, πρεσβύτερος, συμπρεσβύτερος, πρεσβυτέριον, πρεσβεύω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 6:654.

² Otto Schmitz, “παρακαλέω, παράκλησις,” in Kittel, 5:779-80.

aching for people to grow into fully devoted followers of Christ. He cares about the testimony of the people around him.

Second, Peter calls himself a ‘witness’. The Greek word for witness is where we get our word ‘martyr’.³ How do you think our word martyr came from the Greek word for witness? One’s refusal to renounce religious beliefs has landed many in torturers’ and executioners’ hands throughout history. First century Roman Empire was no exception to that persecution, especially in the time of Nero. Peter’s neck was on the line for his faith. So too were these elders’.

Scholars disagree as to what Peter meant when he said he was a witness to the sufferings of Christ. It seems to me that what Peter saw was the martyr-Messiah agonizing over dying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then from a distance, he saw the initial harassment of Jesus before the authorities. He did not witness the crucifixion itself, but he did see a resurrected Messiah with nail-scarred hands and feet. However Peter’s assertion is not that he saw the resurrection or ascension. In fact, his attention is on the sufferings. Hence, I think he’s alluding to his own failures during Christ’s suffering. He couldn’t stay awake and pray for his friend. He denied their relationship three times after boldly professing that he would stand by Jesus through thick and thin. He makes this inference to show the grace he needed and the grace he received in his next apposition.

Third, Peter calls himself a partaker. This one is a bit more complicated. The Greek word for ‘partaker’ means “one who participates with another in some enterprise or matter of joint concern.”⁴ So Peter knows how hard leadership is. He knows how hard suffering and persecution are. He knows how easy it is to fail and how much grace is needed. And now he’s asserting that he is vested in the same hope, the same future, the same revelation that these elders are. The glory to be revealed is simply and magnificently the second advent of Christ. When

³ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:446.

Christ returns, it will be as a conquering King. All His enemies will be defeated. All the wrongs and injustices will be made right, and justice will roll like a river. The whole leading and suffering bit is all for not if Jesus doesn't return, prevail, and establish His kingdom.

There's a leadership lesson here which I'm not certain Peter intended for people to get from his letter, but I think it's worth pointing out as a sidebar. Peter demonstrates a keen insight to the psyche of leaders. When times are tough, it's easy to lose sight of the goal. It's easy to get down-trodden and focus on the complaints, and leaders are not immune to such wavering. One of the primary symptoms of a leader falling prey to this trap is losing the vision and passion which launched them into ministry and service in the first place. It's focusing on the negative, having tunnel-vision on the hardships. So what does Peter do? He acknowledges the difficulties and the pain faced by these leaders, but then he reminds them of the vision, of the goal, of the hope: the return of the King. Essentially Peter is saying, "We have the same burden, the same pain, and the same need for grace. Remember our shared hope and step up."

And do what exactly? Verse two begins:

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you... (1 Pet 5:2a)

Shepherd there at the start of verse 2 is an imperative, second person, plural verb. What that means is Peter is issuing a command. He may not initiate this admonition with the full weight of his authority, but now he's not mincing words. Because it is second person plural, the command is "Y'all shepherd!"

What's interesting about imperative verbs is that time is irrelevant to them.⁵ In other words, Peter cuts through the wishy-washy-ness of procrastination and regret. He's disregarding the past and the future as if to say, "Shepherd now. Not tomorrow. Not yesterday. Now."

So let me pause here to start the real gut-check, and ask you leaders: Are you engaged in your ministry? Are you just letting things happen? Are you putting off taking action until next

⁵ William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, third ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 310.

week, next month, or next year? Are you lost in hindsight, wishing you had started earlier or regretting something you did?

If you are being passive or inactive, you're not leading. Get off the bench, and get in the game. The kingdom of God needs you out on the field, calling shots, taking risks, and climbing to new heights. If it didn't need you, the Holy Spirit wouldn't have given you the gifts you've got. In Romans 12, Paul puts it this way:

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom 12:6-8, ESV)

For the sake of the church, leaders, you need to lead!

So what does this leading, this shepherding, entail? Well, think about sheep herding. The herdsman protects the sheep from predators. He knows where the sheep need to go for food and water, and he takes them there. He keeps the sheep together and heading in the right direction. He takes care of them when they're hurt. He sees to their needs.

Peter's not very particular about who should shepherd whom. It's fairly simple: God put the people around you whom you're to shepherd because they are all part of God's flock—and that's the important part. The people are God's, not yours. You're a steward, a manager, a shepherd, not the owner.

Now Peter has some specifics in how they shepherd:

...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. (1 Pet 5:2b-3, ESV)

Peter uses three contrasts to depict the type of shepherding Peter has in mind. The first is under compulsion versus willingly.

Ever watch someone lead a business meeting and be distracted the whole time? How about see a coach at a sporting event always checking his or her watch. You could tell they didn't really want to be there. No heart. No enthusiasm. Just obligation and apathy. That's

someone who's leading under compulsion. How did that meeting go? Boring? De-motivating? How about the sporting event? Did the team win or lose?

Leaders, the kingdom of God is not going to be advanced by passionless, disinterested leaders. The work is too hard. The climb is too steep. The price is too high. This cause takes heart and courage, zeal and diligence—even more so to rally others to the challenge. So let me ask you leaders another question: how are you doing on this one? Are you leading willingly or under compulsion? Heart can't be manufactured. For a short time, sure, you may be able to make yourself lead willingly. But it's only a façade, and a momentary one at that. No, to have a heart that leads willingly takes divine heart surgery.

Some of you may think you are leading willingly. That's great. Now tell your face! I look at some of you, and all I see is despair, anxiety, boredom... Talking with some of you is like the nightly news with the top ten things wrong in the world, or in your case, ministry and life. Leaders, every time you open your mouth, you cast vision. Whether you're standing up in front of a large group or standing next to someone while getting your coffee, you're casting vision. What type of vision are you casting if all people hear is what's wrong and all people see is a grumpy or down-trodden man or woman?

The second contrast Peter makes is between shepherding for shameful gain and shepherding eagerly. There's something about religious leaders wanting to profit from their teaching. We seek fame, glory, and riches like they're going out of style. It was no different in Peter's day. While the guru with the latest insight or spiritual epiphany couldn't write a New York Times bestseller back then, they certainly could, and did, collect donations and charge their disciples and followers.

So what is it about gain that would make it shameful? A preacher has to eat, doesn't he? What about feeding and clothing his family? What about wheels? Domestic or import? How about putting a roof over his head? In what zip code? And you can't forget that spiritual retreat better known as a beach house on the coast. Where do you draw the line?

Here's the thing: if we simply draw lines—saying, “this level of income for our pastors is ok, but that amount, well, that's just sinful”—then we're headed down on the wrong road. Monetary gain is not a bad thing. In 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Paul says:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

In too many churches, the governing idea is that a pastor should live below the poverty level. Somehow it's supposed to be a good thing as his need makes him more spiritual because he has to depend on God. The truth is that it often makes him bitter and ready to find a new church sooner, if not check out of the ministry all together. I would challenge those of you who hold the purse strings and budget and everyone giving to this church to practice generosity, see the pastor's paycheck as a blessing God has entrusted you to bestow upon the pastor, and watch how he flourishes when he's not distracted by the stress of making ends meet.

So if it's not a specific amount, then what is it about gain that would make it shameful? The contrast Peter gives to shameful gain is eagerly. It's the idea of giving of oneself as opposed to gaining for oneself. So shameful gain is gain sought out of greed and self-interest.

While monetary gain was probably Peter's focus when he penned this, gain for you volunteer leaders can come in many forms: prestige, influence, association, insider knowledge, praise and accolades, glory, control... So, are you shepherding for shameful gain? Are you leading for personal benefit? Are you leading to seek the praises of others? Are you leading to acquire status? Are you leading to use your influence to manipulate others? Are you leading to be in control and call the shots?

The last contrast Peter makes is there in verse 3: “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” What picture comes to mind when you hear about someone domineering? I envision a drill sergeant tearing into some poor, green recruit, telling him when to eat, sleep, and breathe, what to think and say... [SHOW VIDEO CLIP FROM G.I. JANE].

The Greek word for domineering consists of two root words. The first means “to be lord of, to rule.”⁶ Let’s be clear: Peter, here, is not an anarchist. He’s not saying that there should be no exercise of authority or ruling when it comes to shepherding. If he were, he’d contradict Paul. He’d also be rejecting both the title given Jesus at His ascension in Mark 16:19 and name used of God Himself in Luke 1:25, both of which are the noun form of this Greek verb ‘to rule’.

No, the key is the second word *κατά*, whose meaning in this case is “down or against.”⁷ Combining these two words, you get the idea of subjection by force, the strong dominating the weak, taking advantage of them, using the weak for the stronger one’s gain.⁸ And by stronger, I’m not meaning just physical size, but also smarter, or more influential, or greater authority. Wayne Grudem put it this way: “Here Peter forbids the use of arbitrary, arrogant, selfish, or excessively restrictive rule.”⁹

We see this in our world all the time. The manager who threatens to fire his employees if they don’t come in to work on the weekend while he spends the day on the lake. Sadly, we see this in the church too. The leader who assigns a volunteer a task that the leader is unwilling to do it him- or herself. The leader who dictates the minutia of behavior as if he or she has the exclusive insight into Christian living.

Grudem continues, saying “[Peter] implies that elders should govern not by the use of threats, emotional intimidation, or flaunting of power, nor generally by the use of ‘political’ force within the church, but rather by power of example whenever possible.”¹⁰

⁶ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998), G2961.

⁷ Thomas, *NAS Dictionaries*, G2596.

⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 196.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Being an example to the flock is Peter's flipside to domineering. Let me make three observations about what this looks like. First from this passage, notice how Peter exerts his influence and shepherds the readers. He doesn't power up and verbally blast the readers into submission. No, he leads with grace. More specifically, he leads recognizing his own need for grace. Remember in verse 1, he says to the elders essentially: I am one of you, fallible and restored by grace. Recognizing our need for grace is a powerful antidote against the notion of superiority over others when we lead. You and I need grace, and so do those we lead. So lead with grace, extend kindness, love those working for you.

Second, let's look at what Jesus said in Matthew 20. The mother of John and James Zebedee has just hit Jesus up for the most prestigious roles in Jesus' kingdom. She wants them to have the most glory and power in all the Kingdom, second only to the King Himself. Think of what that would have meant for her too. Not only would her boys get special treatment and be calling the shots, but, as their mother, she stood to gain a great deal from their station in the kingdom. I mean, who doesn't take care of their mother. And can you see Mrs. Zebedee at the bridge club gatherings, basking in the praises sung by the other ladies about her sons? This is no unbiased, disinterested recommendation or petition.

The other disciples heard her and were none too pleased. What made James and John so deserving of the good life? They wanted in too. They didn't seem to care too much when being in the inner circle meant hiking up the mount of transfiguration or when it meant staying up all night with their stressed out Messiah at Gethsemane. But now that we're talking about a life of fame, riches, glory, and honor, hey, it's a whole new deal.

Now see what Jesus said to them. Matthew 20, starting at verse 25:

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,

That 'lord it over' is the same Greek word as our 'domineering' in 1 Peter 5.

and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first

among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matt 20:25-28, ESV)

Sorry, gang. No glory and riches. Just humiliation and death. In fact, let me spell ‘leader’ for you: S – E – R – V – A – N – T.

Jesus was reshaping the disciples’ entire paradigm and inverting the pyramid of status. Leaders, instead of being on top, are now on the bottom. They serve, instead of being served. Blessings, honor, power, money—they all may come to those who lead, but it’s God who brings them about. They are not the pursuit of the leader—serving others, lifting others up is.

The third observation is one from my experience studying leaders and leadership. The gifting of a leader is unique. Its purpose is to unleash the rest of the spiritual gifts for the benefit of the bride of Christ, the church, and the glory of Christ, the groom. No other gift is going to release her potential. Can you imagine the gift of mercy saying, “Pull it together, we’ve got to take the next hill?” The gift of administration is not going to communicate a compelling picture of the future, one worth giving your life for. It will help you get there in an organized manner, but it’s not known for passion and foresight. No, it’s leaders’ jobs to see where God is moving and motivate us to follow Him, and doing that in the power of the Spirit and with the values of God is being an example to those in our charge.

Self examination time again. Leaders, whose benefit are you leading for? Are you setting a good example or just bossing people around? Are you using your intellect or authority to intimidate people into doing your will? Are you manipulating people to make your life easier?

Verse 4:

And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Pet 5:4)

Why? Why should I shepherd? Why should I go through all the hardship? Why not milk it for all its worth? Because the day will come where we stand accountable to the chief shepherd. All the glory, all the wealth, all the perks and privileges—they are all crowns, make no mistake, and attractive crowns at that. But they will not last. Their shine will fade. Maybe in this life, but certainly in the next, they will be worthless.

So Peter says, “When Christ returns, he’ll make it worth your while.” He’s going to settle the accounts and honor those who led well. The crowns Peter speaks of were given to victors, valiant soldiers, conquering generals, and kings.¹¹ Other crowns talked about in Scripture refer to eternal, heavenly life, but these are outwardly visible evidences of honor.¹²

Before we wrap up, I need to say something that’s hard to say. It may sting. It may convict. I’m gonna trust the Spirit to carry the message as He intends, so here goes.

If, while you were listening to me describe the three no-no’s of shepherding: under compulsion, shameful gain, and domineering, you said to yourself, “Hey, that’s me...I do that,” then I want you to consider stepping out of your leadership role here in the church. I love you. You are still wanted here at our church, but the gift and calling of leadership is a sacred issue of stewardship. We need passionate, self-giving role models in leadership to represent our King and lead His people. If that’s not you right now, then the message you send to the rest of us and the watching world is that the kingdom of God is not that important, that leading for God is just a cover story for satisfying my own greed and desire, or that the people of God are not different in how they treat people than those outside the church. All these are unacceptable messages here at Austin Ridge.

If you’re under compulsion, you may just need a break, a time of renewal for God to rekindle your flame. If you’re leading for shameful gain, then you may need a time to let God work on your heart and retune your motivation. If you’re domineering, then you may need time to be a student of humility and simply serve others for a season.

If you feel convicted to step out, know that doing so is not a permanent expulsion from leadership. It’s not stitching a large, red “A” on your back. There is grace and mercy. Your current role may not be waiting for you when you decide to lead again. But if you’ve repented

¹¹ Ibid., 197.

¹² Ibid., 198.

and been renewed in your passion, then I commit to you that we will make every effort to find a way for you to redeploy your gifts in a Christ-honoring, bride-building way.

If you're worried about leaving your ministry in a lurch, let us know your intention so that we can walk with you through the transition. Our God is not so small as to have His plan derailed by anyone of us. He has been at work since long before you and I were born, and He will be long after we die should He tarry in Christ's return. From the beginning, He has raised up new leaders in to accomplish His purposes, and He will continue to do so until He returns.

To close, I want to ask all of our leaders to stand. If you exercise oversight in any of the ministries here, I want to pray specifically for you.

Father, see these brothers and sisters of mine standing before you. Theirs is a difficult task—to lead the rest of us. Only You can reignite a cold, passionless heart, and for those that are leading under compulsion, I pray that Your Spirit would do just that. Remind them of who You are and why they stepped up to lead in the first place. Stoke the embers of holy passion inside them. Renew their spirit. Recommit them to using the gifts You gave them to the zenith of their potential.

O King, the work you've called us to is great...hard, but great...and the rewards here on earth can be very lucrative and distracting. We confess that we easily fall into the trap of leading for our own personal gain, our own glory. Forgive us, Lord, and give us a new heart for ministry, one that seeks your fame, glory, and honor above all else.

Chief Shepherd, we confess as well that how we lead looks too often like how this world operates. You call us to be salt and light, a preservation and an illumination of that which is right and good. Moreover, as leaders, we are to set the pace and model the way of that which is right and good. By Your strength and Your power, enable them to live and lead with such a servant's heart that You are represented well and that the rest of us are compelled to follow, imitating their example.

Lastly, loving Father, for those You are convicting to step out of their leadership roles, I lift up a special prayer. Give them the courage and peace to obey Your conviction. Show

them Your love and mercy. Lead them on a restorative journey. Open their eyes to their sin and need for You. And show us how to love on them well in the midst of Your work in their lives.

I pray all this in the name of the Son and in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

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