

# 1 P E T E R

## A VERSE BY VERSE STUDY THROUGH PETER'S EPISTLE

### SESSION OBJECTIVE: 1 PETER 5:1-5

To understand the role of elders in a church.

## Coaching Produces Results

There is no secret to the success of top level athletes in virtually any sport. Skill and talent obviously play a role, but at the top level, great coaching typically equates to great results. High-end performance on the field doesn't come easy. To be among the elite, you have to commit yourself to rigorous training and intense discipline from someone who can continuously steer you towards your goals. In other words, behind every winning athlete is a winning coach.

1 Peter 5 introduces to us the term, "elder," and the role of the elder is to, "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight" (1 Pet. 5:2). Peter has spoken about the need for submission to governing authorities and within social and even intimate relationships (1 Pet. 2:13-3:12), the need for righteous living in light of evil times (1 Pet. 4:7-11), and the reality of suffering that a Christian will experience at some level in his/her walk (1 Pet. 4:12-19). One gets the sense that the Christian walk is not exactly easy, and some may even be tempted to walk away from it in light of the difficulty that lies ahead. So, Peter says, we need someone to shepherd us. We need someone to oversee us, correct us, and encourage us. Behind every faithful Christian is a faithful elder. You could think of it this way: *we need a coach*.

## Who Peter Is

Verse 1 contains a lot to unpack with regard to how Peter identifies himself. He writes, "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). He is clearly turning his attention at this point to the elders, not in one specific place, but in all of the places where this letter will be read. Below is a brief breakdown of each of the descriptors of himself that he includes in this verse.

#### **A FELLOW ELDER**

The term elder does not mean, “elderly,” but rather is an identifier for the leadership in the church. It is the Greek term πρεσβύτερος (presbyteros), from which we get our English word *Presbyterian*. Interestingly, it is used interchangeably with the term, “overseer,” from the Greek word ἐπίσκοπος (episkopē). The word elder, however, carries a more Jewish connotation to it which is consistent with Peter’s heritage as well as his themes throughout this letter. He addresses the Christians who have been dispersed into other places as *exiles* (1 Pet. 1:1), a clear nod to the exiled people of God in the Old Testament. Elder is a term used to refer to the Jewish leadership of Jesus’ day in the Gospels (Matt. 16:21; 21:23; Mk. 14:43, 53; Lk. 20:1; Acts 4:5, 8). It is not surprising, then, that the Christian faith adapted some of the same terminology, albeit with slightly different meaning, being that its leadership was overwhelmingly Jewish.

Peter’s identification as a fellow elder is both authoritative, and yet also humble. It is true that he is a fellow elder, and that by definition should be listened to. However, it is also true that he was much more than a fellow elder, but an apostle. However, you see this kind of humility being carried out not only here with Peter, but also by James, the leader of the New Testament church and half-brother of Jesus, and Jude (Jas. 1:1; Jude 1). Peter’s identification is enough to warrant listening to what he has to say, but also builds a sense of solidarity with those who are clearly less in stature than him.

#### **A WITNESS OF THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST**

This phrase is a bit more challenging to understand. What did Peter mean by, “a witness to the sufferings of Christ?” There are two ways to understand the word *witness*.

1. One who visibly saw something - In this understanding, Peter is saying that he actually witnessed the suffering of Jesus on the cross. This would indeed give him a massive amount of credibility, but there are some issues with it. While the text doesn’t explicitly say Peter was not there, it does seem unlikely that he was in the presence of the Lord while He died. Some scholars point to Jesus’ words in Mark 14:27, “You will all fall away, because it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED.’” However, this passage could also be understood that the sheep will scatter after the actual death of Jesus, not the beginning stages of the crucifixion process. However, just after this, Jesus is arrested and verse 50 says, “And they all left Him and fled.” Shortly after this, Peter weeps after he denies Jesus 3 times before the rooster crows twice (Mk. 14:72). There are simply too many objections in the text to Peter being present at the crucifixion.
2. One who attests to the truth - The more consistent way to understand *witness* is someone who can attest to the true or veracity of something. This is what all elders are called to do, and beyond that, all Christians (Acts 1:8). This is also more consistent with the theme of suffering as well. Given Peter’s faithful witness to Christ, he shares in Christ’s sufferings by actually suffering as a result proclaiming the Gospel in a hostile environment (1 Pet. 4:13).

#### **A PARTAKER IN THE GLORY THAT IS GOING TO BE REVEALED**

It makes sense that if Peter is a faithful witness to the sufferings of Christ, and even identifies in them as a fellow elder, that he too sees himself as a future partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed when Christ comes back to collect His saints to Himself. Given the emphasis on the future hope that we have in Christ last session, it is not surprising to see Peter reiterate here as well.

## The Role of the Elder

Verses 2 and 3 give more clarity into the role of the elder, and how the elder is to exercise his call. Peter writes, "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" (1 Pet. 5:2-3). The main idea of this command is summarized in them first five words: "Shepherd the flock of God." That is the call of the elder. To be an under-shepherd that awaits, "the Chief Shepherd to appear" (1 Pet. 5:4). The question is, how does he carry this task out? Below is an outline of the keywords and important phrases in these two verses that explain what shepherding the flock of God looks like.

### **OVERSIGHT**

Elders are to provide general oversight to the church body. This means being watchful, discerning, relational, connected, and participatory in the day-to-day and week-to-week functions. Pastors and elders who are not actually present with the body will have a difficult time carrying out this task. However, this kind of oversight is not, in and of itself, sufficient. It is not a job, but a call. Peter says that the oversight provided should be done willingly, not under compulsion. The Greek word for *willingly* is *ἐκουσίως* (hekousiōs) and it means, "voluntarily or spontaneously." In other words, this is not a planned out and rigid task, but an organic one that is ready and willing in the moment to do what is necessary. It is also a nod to the hired hands who flee when the enemy comes that Jesus speaks of in contrast to Himself, the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:12-15). Because the elders are to provide oversight, it is no wonder they are also referred to as overseers (1 Tim. 3:1).

### **NOT FOR COMPENSATION**

Secondly, they are to provide their shepherding eagerly and, "not for shameful gain." This does not mean, however, that elders should not be compensated. 1 Timothy 5:17-18 reads, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" It is well-known and established fact that the church was to compensate its leadership. What Peter is suggesting here, however, is that the leadership should never work for the sole purpose of getting paid. The motivation for the elder ought to be out of the cheerful desire to serve the Lord through the call He has placed on their life. The compensation is in order that he can do so and actually survive, and support his family if applicable.

### **AS AN EXAMPLE**

Last, the elder is to not just tell the people what to do, but live it out. He should be above reproach and revered positively by the community, including non-believers (1 Tim. 3:1-7). He should be involved in the same activities as the church at large. Pastors and elders who are detached from the outworking of the church are in direct disobedience to the Scripture. It does not mean that they must be involved in every single activity (that leads to burn out and is unrealistic), but they should be active.

## What About Everyone Else?

Peter, after addressing the elders, addresses everyone else: "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders." The translations here can be a little tricky and lead one to think that perhaps elders really are elderly, given that Peter addresses those under the elders as, "you who are younger." However, the word *younger* in Greek can also simply mean *new*. Given that elders are not to be new believers (1 Tim. 3:6), this makes a lot of sense.



He goes on to say in the rest of verse 5, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Whether you are an elder or being led by the elders, everyone is to cover themselves in humility. Why? God despises pride, but gives grace to those who humble themselves before Him.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read 1 Peter 5:1. Who is Peter addressing in this verse? What kind of address is he giving?

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2. Read 1 Peter 5:1. How does Peter identify himself in this passage, and what is significant about it? (Hint: see above notes)

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### Day Two

1. Read 1 Peter 5:2. What is the primary command given to the elders in this verse?

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2. Read 1 Peter 5:2. What does it mean that elders ought to shepherd the flock voluntarily and not under compulsion? (Hint: See above notes)

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### Day Three

1. Read 1 Peter 5:2. What does it mean that elders are to be motivated by their call by God, and not by compensation? (Hint: See above notes)

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2. Read 1 Peter 5:3. What does it mean that elders are to be an example to the church, not domineering over them? (Hint: See above notes)

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### Day Four

1. Read 1 Peter 5:4. Who is the Chief Shepherd that Peter speaks of? What will each of the elders receive when He appears if they have lived out their call in obedience?

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2. Read 1 Peter 5:5. How are the newer Christians to relate to the elders? What is the command for all Christians regardless of leadership status in this verse? What does God oppose? Who does He give grace to?
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## Week 20 Discussion: Submission to Leadership

The indication by Peter that elders are leaders to be respected and followed implies that there is a hierarchy of sorts in the church. God has structured such that the vision and teaching/equipping ministries are carried about by the pastors and elders, and that the body is therefore to be in submission to and under the leadership of these men. This is a formal arrangement. In other words, by simply attending a church, that does not necessarily entail that you have placed yourself in submission under the leadership of the pastor and elders there. That requires a formal declaration that notifies the church of your intention to submit, and to be subject to church discipline if necessary. This is why *church membership* matters. Not for the numbers or bragging rights, but so that the pastors are aware that they are responsible for your well-being. Talk as a group about the importance of church membership, and why you have or have not joined the church you are attending.

1. Icebreaker: Are you a member of the church you attend? Why or why not?
2. How can the church leadership know that you intend to submit to their leadership? What are ways that you can notify them?
3. Though painful, how much do you value correction in your life? Who is providing this kind of correction for you? If you are a member at a church, the church leadership should be providing that. If not, who is?
4. What are some Scriptural reasons that you should not join a church formally?
5. What is the biblical model (if there is one) for leaving a church? Provide Scripture to support your answers.
6. Spend some time encouraging those in your group who are not members of your church to consider doing so immediately. Ask how you can hold them accountable to get it done.

## Takeaways:

1. Elders serve as overseers of the body of Christ to shepherd the flock with humility.
2. Peter identifies with them as an elder, both to establish authority and also exercise humility.

### PRAYER REQUESTS: