

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

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1 Peter 5:1–14 (NIV)

“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: 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. 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.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

Our Scripture today is 1 Peter 5. Today we're at the end of our series in 1 Peter which I have called "Help for Struggling Christians." In this closing chapter of 1 Peter we see counsel being given to us that we are not to be alone in our struggling. We live in God's community, and we need God's community, the Church. The Christian life was never designed to be lived alone. Right from the beginning, when Jesus began calling disciples, He first called two disciples. He didn't just call one. It was Andrew and John. When Andrew began to follow Jesus he was called to be with Jesus but he was also called to be with John. And John was called to be with Andrew. And every other disciple that the Lord added was not only called to follow Him but called to join the community the Lord had already gathered. Not only that, they didn't have the option of selecting who the Lord had already gathered. They simply had to join the community He had established, which is always the case in the church. We don't decide who gets into the body of Christ. That's decided between the Holy Spirit and their heart. When we follow Christ we link up with God's people.

There are some people who try to live the Christian life alone. They become separated from God's community. When you get separated from the community of God and start living on your own, one of two things will happen. One thing that can happen is you'll get so lonely and discouraged and depressed because you think you're the only one going through struggles and depression and sin, and you can get easily picked off because you're a stray, isolated sheep. The other temptation on the opposite end of the spectrum is to get so puffed up with pride and arrogance because you don't need anyone else that you become not a person who is following Christ's steps at all.

The Lord calls us to community. Peter outlines some of the ingredients of that community in the Scripture today.

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

I. Elders have responsibilities in the community.

First, he puts before us the responsibility of elders in God's community, verses 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 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" (NIV).

The term "elder" in the Greek is the word *presbyter*. In the Jewish synagogues these elders or presbyters were persons from within the synagogue who oversaw its work. The Jewish nation also as an entity had elders which served on the Sanhedrin and governed the religious affairs of the Jewish faith. It pleased the Holy Spirit when the church was formed in much of its governance to model after patterns that had already been laid down within Jewish institutions. We see that there were elders in the Jerusalem church. In fact, in Acts 15, we kind of see a Christian Sanhedrin of elders within Jerusalem discussing and making a decision in a matter which affected the whole church worldwide. Wherever local assemblies came into being, elders were established. A synonymous term to elder began to grow up which was a more Greek term. It was the word from which we get the word "Episcopal." In the New Testament it's translated "bishop." When you see the word "elder" and the word "bishop" and the word "shepherd," which is also the word "pastor" in the New Testament, those three words are interchangeable and synonymous. They are all referring to leadership within the Christian community.

It is likely that the word "elder" referred to in chapter 5:1 are the many pastors of Christian community that Peter is writing to. We saw that in chapter 1:1. Pastors in Pontus, Galatia,

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. We really do not know how many elders each congregation had. It may be that in smaller Christian communities only one elder served. But in larger Christian churches many elders served. Or in large Christian communities such as Antioch or Jerusalem, where they had many congregations within a city, perhaps there was one elder in each congregation. Together the elderships of that town formed a kind of presidium.

We do know that eldership is a role that is established in the New Testament for the spiritual leadership and life of Christian community. I take time on this point of eldership because I think it's important for us in the body of Christ to recognize that the Holy Spirit has appointed more than one elder in God's community. One of the great dangers I see in the body of Christ today is the emergence of fellowships that have an overzealous adherence or an unwholesome attachment to one leader. God has called us not to have simply an attachment to one leader but to recognize that in His body He has called many people to places of spiritual responsibility. And we are not to get into a kind of spiritual syndrome of saying, "I follow Christ, but I also follow George Wood and I take everything he says as gospel." It would please me if everything I said was gospel. I hope it is. But I hope that before you would ever take my word you would take God's Word. And if my word ever errs from God's Word you would take His Word before you would take my word. I would hope, as a church, that there is sufficient spiritual maturity here—which I know there is—to recognize that leadership in the body of Christ when it functions as Christ would design is a leadership not of a dictatorship, not of a person who sits at the top of a pinnacle and demands subservience and submission from all those underneath him or her. But is a leadership which enjoys a certain kind of collegiality, sharing together, a moving together, a recognition that in the body of Christ there must be shared leadership from the standpoint that we need checks and balances to avoid error, either doctrinal or personal.

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

So the Lord would have us to recognize that He has appointed elders in the body.

Peter appeals to his leadership. "I appeal as a fellow elder" (1 Peter 5:1). He has certain instructions to give them. It's fascinating to note that Peter does not command the elders. He appeals. I think insecure leaders bark orders. If they're sufficiently secure in their own judgment and have sufficient confidence in their fellow Christians, that they can appeal. We sometimes see Paul commanding. But when he commanded it was only because all appeals had failed. Peter appeals not from a heavy-handed use of authority. He doesn't say to them, "I expect you to do what I tell you to do because Jesus gave me the keys to the kingdom. And if you don't obey me I'm going to throw away the key to your door." He appeals as a fellow elder. He appeals as one who has witnessed the Lord's suffering. And he appeals as one who will share the Lord's glory. True Christian leadership seeks to appeal rather than to order around.

The work of the leader is described by Peter. The work of the elder.

A. The elder is to shepherd God's flock and to serve as an overseer. Several things should be noted here. One, it is God's flock. It is not the pastor's flock. It is not the elder's flock. I know all of us have the tendency to do this: We know the pastor in a certain area and we'll say, "That's so-and-so's church." I'm glad the church is bigger than something that belongs to me. I try to watch my own language to stay away from personal pronouns because if I begin calling it "my" church I might begin acting like it's mine. It's the Lord's church. We are the Lord's people. The flock of His pasture. While I may be a shepherd, I am only an undershepherd. Any leader is only an undershepherd. The Lord is the Chief Shepherd of the church. He is the true Pastor.

B. another thing we ought to note in this is that Peter sees overseeing as a service. It is a ministry to be given, not a privilege to simply sit back and enjoy without any ministry going forth from it. A shepherd's work includes provision and protection. Protection to the extent of warning against

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

danger and guarding against danger. Provision and protection even to laying down one's life.

The work of a leader involves supervision and discipline and instruction and correction. All these are involved in Christian community. You might have come here today as a stranger or a visitor and I would put this question before us all: Do you have recognizable spiritual leadership? Are you joined to the community of God? Do you see that in your lifestyle you have persons that you look to and give adherence to for leadership and direction rather than simply doing your own thing? Then, when you know you have those persons as elders, do you hold that eldership from a standpoint that your true and final loyalty is to God? And that in the process of serving God do you attempt to faithfully be responsive to and support those in leadership position?

C. Peter gives in his work of eldership also some statements on the attitude of a leader. An elder in the body of Christ must have a right motive. He is not to serve under compulsion, but willingly. That is, there ought to be no pressure laid upon that person that he's got to do it because he's got to do it. But it ought to be freely. This applies, by the way, for any place of ministry through the whole church. That we ought not to do anything in the body of Christ, whether it's ushering or singing in the choir or teaching Sunday school class, or whatever, because we're under compulsion to do it. Because someone expects us to do it and therefore we've got to be there.

We ought to do it out of a service to the Lord. When we serve the Lord, then the times when people forget to thank us or maybe they're not so grateful as we would like them to be, we could somehow let that roll off our back and not get to us because, after all, we did it for the Lord anyway. We're also, in terms of our motive, not to be greedy for money, but eager to serve.

The word "greedy for money" is the term which is used of a man who never sets enough food before his own guests but who gave himself a double portion of the food. Greedy could describe

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

a person who only goes out for entertainment when he has a free ticket. If he had to pay for it he doesn't go out. Greedy could describe a person who never has money for others but always has money for himself. Peter is saying those in places of leadership in the body of Christ are not to be that kind of way, but are to be generous persons.

The attitude of a leader must be one of right manner, not domineering but being an example. Not lording it over the flock. Christian leadership should be exemplified leadership. And as persons who occupy places of leadership in the body of Christ, we ought to take care to be good examples.

The Lord also calls us to right awareness in terms of our attitudes. That we work for the Lord. "When the Chief Shepherd appears, you'll receive the crown of glory" (verse 4). It is wonderful to receive the approval of others. I feel continually sustained and supported by the approval and the prayers of you in this congregation. But beyond and above all these things, leadership seeks the approval of the Lord. Because, in the last analysis, we're living right before God, in whose presence we dwell.

II. We all have responsibilities in the community.

Peter moves on from speaking about the place and the attitude of elders in Christian community to talk to young people. "Young men [and I think this could include young women as well], in the same way be submissive to those who are older" (verse 5). Youth wants to take charge. They want to catch up and undo all the mistakes the elders have made. That's a good quality. Idealism is a wonderful thing. But there is a point at which hurry, in terms of expressing one's attitude or making changes, can be disruptive in Christian community. So Peter gives a cautioning word to youth who are on the edge of coming into places of responsibility. There is still a call for service and proper humility in regard for those who are older.

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

He then goes on to give us some responsibilities that pertain to us all in Christian community.

A. The first responsibility is humility. “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (verses 5-6, NIV).

We’ve all made jokes about humility. I suppose there are a lot of things humility is not. We tend to think that humility is groveling, self-abasement. Where when we’ve done a good job and someone comes up and compliments us we’ve got to dispense with that and say, “I’m nothing.” That’s not necessarily humility. Humility is probably, among the people I know who have humility, something they wear so they don’t even know they have it. It’s not feigned or put on, it’s not an act. The word is, must be “clothed with” humility. The words “be clothed” are a translation of a word which was used in New Testament times to speak of the act of tying or tucking up the long outer garments of a robe, tuck them or tie them together into a roll or a band in order to free oneself for service. Being uncluttered by the flowing robes, to give freedom of movement because they were tied up. We know that Jesus in the Gospel of John girded himself with a towel and served and washed feet. So we’re to take humility as though it were a slave’s apron and wear it on our Christian life. The Lord is looking for people whose hearts are knit with His in humble identity and servanthood.

He calls us to the fact that He opposes the proud. The word “oppose” is from the word which describes an army drawn up in battle against an aggressor. The Lord resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. The Lord, in our Christian service, wants us to have humility. To be clothed with it. To not just be correct in doctrine, which we should strive to be, but to be correct in attitude.

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

Charlotte Perrot said, “So many people say, ‘I’m praying about what ministry the Lord wants me to have. I haven’t found my ministry yet. I want a ministry.’ I’ve never had trouble finding a ministry. I don’t believe you’ll ever have trouble finding a ministry if, instead, you purpose to be a servant. If you will be a servant, if you will find where there’s a need, God will give you a ministry.” Be humble.

B. The second responsibility within Christian community is trust. “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (verse 7). Many of you, perhaps, that’s your favorite verse in the Bible. The word used for “cast” or “casting” is found in only one other place in the New Testament. It’s where in Luke 19:35 the crowd cast their garments on the donkey at Jesus’ triumphal entry. They took them off and cast them. The word “cast” suggests effort. Here, in Peter, it is in a sense the form of the verb which suggests a decisive act of committal and surrender rather than let them go and take them back. It involves casting, leaving go and letting another bear them. Casting our cares upon God, and they’re ceasing to be carried by us.

I know this is not easy to do. I think this is a matter of discipline as we grow in the Lord. There was a time in my Christian experience when I did this very poorly. There are still times when I lapse back to carrying cares that God doesn’t want me carrying. But, by and large, I can say this, that I have learned the Christian discipline of reckoning those matters which are beyond my power and are God’s responsibility and those matters which are mine. And exercising proper care for those things which I know are within my realm of responsibility, but when the day is done leaving those things to God which are only His. This is what is involved in casting your care upon the Lord. For some it happens as an instant miracle. For others it is a discipline of continuing to leave those cares with God.

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

Isn't this the way we sometimes handle our worries and cares: "God, I know my life is in Your care but I want to nurse this worry a little longer. You carry me and I'll carry the worry." Casting all your care on Him.

C. The third responsibility for all in the Christian community is vigilance. "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (verse 8). Here we're called as Christians to sentry duty. We're called not to go to sleep on the post. We're keeping watch. We're to stay awake. The New English Bible translates this, "Awake! Be on the alert." It's the idea of being posted to guard duty in the evening hours. Peter here must be remembering Jesus—"Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation." And Peter went to sleep at his guard post that night. And the enemy crept in. So he's saying, "Stay awake."

A man once said, "I don't believe in a personal devil because I've never met him." A Christian wisely replied, "You've never met him because you're going in the same direction he is, and you never meet another person when you're going in the same direction. You only meet him when you're going in the opposite direction." If you want to meet the devil, go in the opposite direction!

D. The fourth responsibility we're called to is resistance. "Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (verse 9). Resist.

Rather than indulging in self-pity or second thinking or the like, stand there and be in hand-to-hand combat and keep going. None of us are alone in our troubles is what Peter is saying. Don't think that you're somehow being singled out when you're going through adversity. There's not one of us in here that our problem is not somewhere reproduced in the life of another Christian

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

somewhere in the world. We're all in the body of Christ called to stand in there and resist the enemy.

E. The fifth word that Peter would have us focus in on in living in God's community is expectancy, verses 10-11: "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen" (NIV). The God of grace has called us to Christ's eternal glory. But meanwhile we have suffering. What is God accomplishing in suffering while we're waiting for the eternal glory? Peter says suffering is accomplishing four things

The first thing suffering is accomplishing is restoration. "God himself will restore you." The word used for "restore" is interestingly used in another place in the New Testament. You'd never find it because it's translated differently, Mark 1:19. It occurs in the setting where the fishermen are mending their nets. The word "mending" was the same word used here for "restore." To mend the net is to supply what is missing or lacking. To make it complete and help it realize its original intended purpose. Peter says suffering does this. It helps produce in our lives that which makes it complete and restores us to a position of being perfectly fitted for God's work.

The end of suffering, secondly, is strength. He will restore you and make you strong. A nonsuffering Christian is a Christian who may lapse into the flabby life. I'm not saying that all suffering necessarily produces discipline. Some suffering God calls us to never go through at all. Maybe if you use the word "suffering" in terms of just taking hold of things that are bigger than your own power to accomplish and not being willing to simply float down the river. But the end result of that is strength. No longer the flabby life. God fills you with strength. You know the process which Paul describes in Romans 5:3-4. Suffering produces endurance and endurance

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

character and character, hope. That is a divine sequence. When we go through suffering we can expect to endure. And when we endure we can expect that our character is formed out of that.

And out of that hope is produced.

Peter says the end of suffering is establishment. He will make you firm. The idea is to be as firm and solid as granite. It's the kind of thing Paul says when we take seriously the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When it's all said and done, therefore, "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord for you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Suffering produces tenacity and firmness and granite-like character.

The end of suffering fourthly is having foundations. "He will make you steadfast." The word "steadfast" means to lay a foundation. Through suffering we are driven to the bedrock of our faith. We discover what life is really founded upon. When we get all the way to the bedrock we find with Job, "Though he slay me yet I trust him" (Job 13:15). That's the bedrock of the faith, and we become established on that.

III. Peter's at the end of his letter. "To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 5:11). But he's not yet done, although he may be at the end. He has some final words of appreciation and greetings and benedictions to share.

We'll take a moment to look at these.

Appreciation for Silas. Silas helped him write the letter. Silas is the person whom we read about in the Book of Acts who was a prophet from the Jerusalem church. He accompanied Paul in his second missionary journey and was held in prison with him at Philippi and was a loyal follower and disciple of Jesus Christ, a companion of Paul, a Roman citizen and a Jewish Christian. Silas wrote the letter, helped Peter write it. How? Peter was from Galilee. He was a fisherman. His Greek probably wasn't all that good. He might have been sort of a country preacher. Silas was a

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

more literarily refined person. First Peter is among the finest Greek in the New Testament. Peter simply dictated his letter, and Silas wrote it down. Paul often did that. Isn't it great that Peter had the wisdom to use people in an area where they were more competent than he was? It's wonderful to see that humility in Peter that he uses Silas to write the letter.

I think it's wonderful too that God has such a diversity in the ministry in the body of Christ that more than one person can do a task. So appreciation.

Then Peter sends greetings: "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings" (verse 13). Who is "she who is in Babylon"? Some say it's Peter's wife. It may be. Because he traveled with his wife. We know that from Paul. Some say that Babylon was the Jewish community he lived in then. Others say this is the first indication that the Early Church had begun to call the Christians at Rome as persons who lived in Babylon. We know from Revelation 17 and 18 that the Babylon there is Rome. Probably that later rendering is to be preferred. That the Christians at Rome are sending greetings to these Christians that are in the province of Asia and Cappadocia and Pontus and Bithynia.

"Mark also sends greetings." It's wonderful to have Mark associated with Peter. Mark is the guy who comes back after he's had a disaster. He started out as disaster. On the first missionary journey he hadn't gotten past the first island. He'd gotten homesick and gone home. Paul was so frustrated with him that he refused to have anything to do with him in his next missionary journey.

Then greetings to everybody. "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (verse 14). Five times in the Scripture it says this for an admonition. We must do it, but we're uncomfortable with it. I think it's culturally acceptable to substitute a good warm handshake or embrace. But it's important that we greet each other.

LIVING IN GOD'S COMMUNITY

1 Peter 5

The benediction: “Peace to you all who are in Christ.” God’s peace. Which in the Scripture never simply means the cessation of hostility but always means all the fullness of life. Everything that God wants for you. Everything that will make your life put together, whole, integrated, actualized, authentic, complete. That be to you. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.