

Leadership in Exile (5:1-5)

Hey church family, hope everyone's doing well. If we haven't met, my name is Kent and I'm one of our pastors. If you have a bible, turn with me to 1 Peter, chapter 5. This will be our next-to-last week in the book of 1 Peter. We started this series back in February, and since then we've been walking through this ancient letter, week-by-week, and discovering what it has to teach us in the here and now. And next week we'll be wrapping it up.

Today, we're going to jump forward a handful of verses to chapter 5. Which means we'll be skipping v. 12-19 from chapter 4. Now, let me just really briefly mention that that *isn't* because v. 12-19 isn't *important*, and it isn't because those verses have hard things in them that I don't want to teach on (trust me, if there was a passage I'd skip for *that* reason, it would've been the one a couple weeks ago on Noah and imprisoned spirits—that was a doozy). So that's not why we're skipping them.

Rather, here's the reason. If you go and read chapter 4, verses 12-19, you'll find that they talk, once again about responding to evil with good, responding to cursing with blessing. And if you've been with us throughout this series, you know that we've already taught on that idea several times in the series. So the only reason we're skipping over those verses is that I simply didn't have anything *new* to say on the subject. So I'd encourage you sometime this week to go back and read v. 12-19 on your own—it's a great passage. But for today's teaching, we're moving on to chapter 5.

And at the *beginning* of chapter 5, Peter is going to address those in *leadership positions* within the church, among these followers of Jesus. *His* name for these leaders in the church is the term "elders." We today might be more likely to use the term "pastors." So today, for the sake of simplicity, we'll use those two terms interchangeably: *pastors* and *elders*. So **this is a passage written to leaders of the church about how they should lead the church**. Four out of the five verses we're covering today are addressed directly to these elders or pastors.

Which means that if I were just to teach it exactly as it is written, I would just tell the rest of you to turn off this teaching, and just ask our pastors to listen to it, since it's really only talking to them. But I'm not going to do that, 1) because if I were going to do that, I could've just had a conversation with them about it. And 2) because that's not even what Peter does in this passage. Right here at the end of a letter written to *all* of the believers in exile, he addresses part of it to church leaders specifically. Most likely because he

wanted the rest of these followers of Jesus to hold these leaders accountable to what he's telling them.

So here's how I want to approach it today. I want us to work through this passage, and **use it to help identify *healthy and unhealthy spiritual leadership***. How to discern whether a church leader or spiritual leader is a healthy authority, or an unhealthy one. I for one feel like that is a needed conversation in today's world. It almost seems like every other week there's a story in the news about another pastor or church leader who is guilty of spiritual abuse, or embezzlement, or sexual impropriety of some sort, or any number of other awful things.

And to add *to* that, I know many of you *personally* have stories of how you and your relationship with Jesus have been negatively impacted unhealthy spiritual leadership of some sort. And I realize for you, that likely creates an added layer of difficulty to your relationships with pastors. And if that's you, we want you to know that there is room to struggle with that here at City Church—there's room for you to be *in process* in regards to all that. But to me, that makes it all the *more important* that we all hear from Peter on what he's about to discuss. So as we work through this passage, I want us to all take note of what he says defines healthy and unhealthy leadership, and we as your pastors want you to even evaluate *us* based on these parameters.

So with all that said, let's just see what Peter has to say. Starting in 1 Peter 5, v. 1:

*[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...*

So first, Peter wants to remind them that these instructions *to elders*, are coming from a "*fellow elder*." That's the label he uses for himself. Now, here's what's interesting about that: Peter wasn't *just* an *elder*—he was actually an *apostle*. And apostles were big deals. He was one of the twelve *hand-picked* by Jesus to be catalysts for starting the early church across the ancient world. So it's worth asking: why doesn't he throw that authority around a little more here? It seems like he could if he wanted to.

Those of you that work at a large corporation, imagine with me that one day the CEO of the company walks into your office or workstation, pulls up a seat beside you and says "hey I want to share with you something I've learned as a fellow employee of this company." That'd be a little surprising, right? Because yeah, they're technically an employee, but that's probably not where we'd expect them to start the conversation.

When someone holds a position of authority, you often expect them to use that to their advantage.

So why doesn't *Peter* say "alright jokers, listen up. I'm an *apostle* which means you have to listen to me, and here's what I have to say"? Well I would argue it's because **Peter himself is trying to *model* the type of humility that he is about to encourage *them* to have.** In just a second, he's going to tell them "not to be domineering" over others, but to be an "example." So in a way, that's what Peter starts off doing. He doesn't say "do what I say," but rather, "follow my *example*."

He's going to continue on that trajectory in v. 2. Take a look...

[2] *shepherd the flock of God that is **among** you....*

So I don't know if you caught this, but twice already in this passage, Peter has used this word "*among*." In v. 1 he described the elders as being "among" the rest of the believers, and here he says that the rest of the believers are "among" the elders. Now don't think that's just a throwaway word; Peter is trying to highlight something. The picture he paints is of the leaders of the church, and the people of the church doing life *among one another*.

In other words, the way it *should* work is that the leaders of a church would live and go about everyday life *alongside* the rest of the people in the church. The goal is that we would intersect our lives with you on a regular basis, in the same arenas of life. That we would *live* in the same neighborhoods (or bare minimum, the same *types* of neighborhoods). That we would shop at the same stores. That we would go to the same restaurants. That's what it looks like to live *among* each other.

By contrast, if you ever find yourself in a church where the *leaders* of that church live in a quasi-mansion in the hills somewhere, an hour and a half outside of town, in a neighborhood that is leaps and bounds fancier than anyone else's in their church, something's not as it should be. If the pastor is going on elaborate vacations to Fiji while half the people in their church are struggling to pay their bills, something's off.

One pastor I know says it like this: "shepherds should smell like the sheep."¹ Here's what he means: the word "pastor" is literally the word "shepherd" in the bible. As in, a person

¹ The fantastic article this comes from can be found [here](#).

who tends to the sheep and lives among the sheep. So if a pastor is doing that well, this guy says, they should “smell” like the sheep. They should “stink.” Which I personally think is a crazy-insulting metaphor to *you guys*—I think you all smell *great*. But you get the point. Shepherds should smell like the sheep, because we do life *among* each other.

Put another way, people in a church should be able to be *friends* with their pastor. Now, that doesn't mean a pastor can be *best friends* with everybody in their church. It doesn't mean that they can be *equally close* with everybody in their church—a pastor is, after all, still a human being. There's a limit to how many *close* relationships they can feasibly keep up with. But that being said, if everybody just looks *up* to their pastor and nobody just has a *peer-type* friendship with them, that's concerning. Something isn't right there.

Now to fight against this in *our* church, all our pastors are in LifeGroups. Pastors confess sin like everyone else does. Pastors get *called out* on their sin just like everybody else does. Another way we fight against it is that I don't ask that you refer to me as “*Pastor Kent*,” because I don't refer to you as “*Member* whatever your name is.” That would be weird. I just have one name and it's Kent. All of these things are just different practical ways of reinforcing that we aren't *superior to you*, but rather *among you*.

Next he continues to talking about *how* these shepherds should lead, in the second half of v. 2:

[he says that they should be] *exercising oversight, not under **compulsion**, but **willingly**, as God would have you; not for **shameful gain**, but **eagerly**; [3] not **domineering** over those in your charge, but **being examples** to the flock.*

So here, Peter lays out three contrasts that describe how healthy pastors lead. He says they 1) shouldn't lead compulsively, but willingly, 2) that they shouldn't lead for shameful gain, but eagerly, and 3) that they shouldn't be domineering, but rather live as examples. Those are the three contrasts Peter lays out. I want us to spend a few moments on each of these. First...

Not Compulsively, but Willingly

Simply put, **your pastor should want to pastor** people. Maybe that feels like it goes without saying, but I'll let you guys in on a little secret: some pastors *complain* about their churches. *Some* of them complain, like, *a lot*. And to be fair, some of them do have things to complain about. Some churches have quite a few people in them that do their

best to make those pastors' jobs really, really difficult. But that said, **if a pastor dreads their job every single day and has no real desire to keep doing it, it's hard to imagine that that pastor is going to be a good pastor.** If I'm only doing what I'm doing to collect a paycheck, or because I don't have any other marketable skills to make money, that's not a good look. Because that means I'm doing it *compulsively*: I'm doing it because I *have* to, rather than because I *want* to. Instead, your pastor should *want* to be a pastor, even if there are days where it's difficult for him to do. Second, Peter says they should lead...

Not for Shameful Gain, but Eagerly

I'll let you guys in on *another* secret from pastor world: **some pastors want a platform more than they want to pastor.** Some pastors lead because they like standing on a stage in front of people. Some pastors lead because they *need* people to respect them or look up to them or think they're smart. Some pastors lead because they want to sell books, or become social media famous. And an awful lot of the time, those pastors, *shockingly*, don't end up being very good pastors. Because **they're using their church to their own ends, rather than serving their church, for the good of their church.**

There's a reason that Paul, when he writes to Timothy about appointing leaders in the church says "let them be tested first, *then* let them serve."² So you need some *time* to determine if someone just wants a platform, or whether they actually want to shepherd people. Because those are actually very different things. And the third contrast Peter lays out is...

Not Domineering, but Living as Examples

So in Peter's mind here, evidently, there are two ways to lead people. One is by trying to *control* them—trying to force them to do what you think they should do. The other is by living an exemplary life consistent with what you're calling *them* to. A question I try to ask myself any time I am teaching or correcting someone else is this: have I *modeled* for them the character trait I'm trying to get them to embody? And I'll be honest, the answer to that question is sometimes quite convicting.

This is another reason that we insist on examining a person's character *thoroughly* before we ever consider them as a leader in our church family. For someone to lead our church, they don't just need to be *talented* and *gifted*. **There are plenty of talented**

² See 1 Timothy 3:10. This is actually only referring to deacons, not even pastors. Imagine the standards for *pastors!*

people who have no business being pastors. In fact, what's interesting is that if you go over to 1 Timothy and Titus where it lays out the qualifications for elders, you'll notice that in both of those lists, there are about 15-20 total qualifications for a pastor. Would you like to know how many of those qualifications are based on *skill or talent*? *One*. One out of *all* of them is a *skill*. The rest are about their *character*. They are all different ways of essentially asking the question, "is this person's life something you would want other people to model?" Because that's what elders are called to do: model the life of a follower of Jesus for others to observe and follow. They need to be able to say like Paul does, "follow me as I follow Jesus." And if they *can't* say that in good conscience, they shouldn't be a pastor. Beware of anyone who *claims* spiritual authority over you, while having *glaring* character issues in their life that go unaddressed.

Now, obviously, that doesn't mean pastors won't have *flaws*. We as your pastors aren't perfect, and we will often be the first to tell you that. But **there is a difference between imperfect leadership and unhealthy leadership.** *Imperfect* leadership makes mistakes; *unhealthy* leadership refuses to own their mistakes. *Imperfect leadership* sins; *unhealthy* leadership refuses to repent of those sins when they're brought up. So we are certainly *imperfect* leaders, but our goal is to never be *unhealthy* leaders. Because **if there are glaring character issues in our lives, and we have no interest in repenting of those things, we should not be your pastors.** And nor should anybody else, if that's their posture.

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So those are the three parameters Peter lays out: that pastors should serve willingly, eagerly, and as examples. **My hope is that that gives you some practical lenses to see through when it comes to us as your leaders, but also any future leaders you may find yourself serving with.** If your leaders embody the *first half* of those descriptions—if they're leading compulsively, for shameful gain, or in a domineering way, all the red lights on your dashboard should be going off. And depending on how severe it is, you should either be sounding the alarm with that pastor and those close to them, or you should go and find a different church to be a part of. But **if they embody the second half of those descriptions—if they are leading willingly, eagerly, and by living as examples—chances are you've got healthy leaders in place.**

And in the *latter* scenario, if the leaders are *healthy*, Peter then wants to help everybody else know how to *operate* under the guidance of that leadership. So in v. 5, Peter pivots and begins to address the *rest* of the church. Assuming that your leaders are the right kind of leaders, here's how you should relate to those leaders. So let's skip over what he says in v. 4 for now (we're going to come back to that part at the end), and look together

at what he says in v. 5. First, he talks to those in the church who are “younger.” Take a look:

[5] *Likewise, you who are younger, **be subject to the elders.***

Now, we’ve mentioned already in this series how we as Americans tend not to like that language, “be *subject to*.” It just feels wrong, feels *restrictive* to us. So first, let’s establish that by “be subject to,” Peter doesn’t mean “show unquestioning loyalty and blind allegiance to.” There *are* words that mean that in the bible, and Peter chooses not to use those words here. But here’s what he *does* mean. I think he means at least “when you can, give your pastors the benefit of the doubt.” **Start from the assumption that, even when you don’t particularly like a decision they made, that they’re trying to make those decisions in *your best interest and the church’s best interest.***

And let me just say from the start, **you guys by and large do a *fantastic job of taking that posture.*** So none of this is meant as a rebuke to you personally, it’s just to make sure we’re tracking with what he’s saying. So let me try and give some examples of what *not* “being subject to” your pastors might look like. If one of these days when we can finally get together in person at a Gathering, let’s say we make an announcement on a Sunday where we encourage people to sign up to serve in City Kids. If you serve on the *Parking Team*, don’t do the thing where you go “well we need volunteers on the Parking Team too! I guess they don’t even *care* about Parking Team! All they care about is City Kids!” Another one: let’s say the next teaching series we do is a *topical* teaching series, and *you* prefer teaching series where we just walk through a book of the *bible*. If that’s you, don’t do the thing where you go “well I guess they don’t even care about books of the bible anymore!” One last one: if your LifeGroup multiplies, and the multiplication doesn’t go down the way you wanted, don’t say “well they apparently don’t even care about me staying with *my* friends.” The idea is that we should *avoid* setting ourselves immediately *against* every decision we don’t personally like.

I don’t know if you’ve ever thought about it this way, but a lot of times, **humility is shown in how you honor the decisions of people you don’t agree with.** Anybody can honor the decisions of someone who thinks the same way they do, makes the same decisions that *they* would make. That’s easy. I can honor people all day long who think just like me. **Humility, though, is your willingness to live with decisions that *affect you, but you don’t necessarily agree with.*** Can you still follow that leadership? Can you still love, can you still serve? That, in many ways, is what humility looks like.

Now that being said, if something seems off about decisions we make, by *all means* bring it to our attention. If you notice us pushing for City Kids volunteers *every Sunday*, and building our entire ministry philosophy around families with kids, come talk to us about it. If you notice us start to go “you know what, I don’t think we need to use the bible at all anymore on Sundays. Let’s just talk generically about life and how we can be better people.” If you see something *off*, come and talk to us about it. Benefit of the doubt doesn't mean turning a blind eye to really obviously suspect things. But it does mean you don't go around *looking* for opportunities to be frustrated.

Peter says to those who are younger, “be subject to” those shepherding you. **If you have healthy leadership, look for opportunities to trust them, not for opportunities to *dis*trust them. Look for opportunities to assume the best, not the worst. That’s good advice for how you relate people in *general*, but certainly for how you relate to those responsible for your spiritual well-being within the church.**

And then he follows that up with an instruction to *everyone* in the church: leaders, younger people, older people—everyone there. We find it in the second half of v. 5. He says:

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

So the key to this relationship on *all* sides, Peter says, is *humility*. Whether you’re a pastor, an older church member, a younger church member—*whoever* you are, whatever your position, what you need to make this relationship work is *humility*. Now that word “humility” in the Greek most literally means “to have a low opinion of oneself.” Being *humble* means having a low opinion of yourself, especially as it relates to your regard and your posture towards *others*.

Now, I want to be clear: humility is not the same thing as not *valuing* yourself at all. Humility is not thinking that you’re worthless, or somehow unworthy of people’s time or energy or affection. Jesus *has* made you worthy of those things, and anything that communicates otherwise is a lie. But at the same time, **there’s a difference between *knowing* you are important and valuable as a human being, and operating as if you are *more* important and *more* valuable than everyone else.** Hopefully that makes sense. C.S. Lewis famously said that humility isn’t thinking *less of yourself*, but rather *thinking of yourself, less*. Thinking *less of yourself* is self-loathing, while *thinking of*

yourself less is humility. Peter here is not pushing for self-hatred or self-loathing—he’s pushing for *humility*.

Now when we meet someone with true humility, I think it’s easy to think “well that’s just their personality.” “Oh, that’s just because they’re a 2 or a 9 on the Enneagram.” It’s easy to think that some people were just born with a naturally selfless inclination in them. And while personality may play a *factor*, Peter seems to think a little differently about where humility comes from. In this passage he says, and I quote, “*clothe yourselves with humility.*” *Clothe yourselves* with it. So **Peter talks about humility, not like it’s just some innate, built-in part of your persona, not like it’s a gene that some people have and some people don’t—but like it’s an article of clothing that you put on each morning.** So the people that you most admire humility in, chances are, weren’t just born thinking of themselves that way. They *learned over the years* to think of themselves in that way. They practiced it, and therefore became good at it. And if you want that kind of humility to characterize *your* life, you’ll need to practice it too.

Some of us spend time *praying* for God to *give us* things like humility, and I’m all for that. But at some point, you have to accompany *praying* for it with *practicing* it. Can you imagine praying for God to put your shirt on in the morning? What if you woke up every morning and just immediately started praying, “God, I just ask that you would please give me a shirt to put on. I pray that you would just cover me, *saturate* me in a shirt for today. God I know ultimately you’re the only one who can provide shirts, so I just ask you for one right now to wear.” Sounds a little silly, doesn’t it? Because I think at some point God would just say “okay thanks for seeking me first in all of this, but there are literally *multiple* shirts in your closet right now—you should probably go and *put one on*. I love providing things for you, and also I already have, so why don’t you go and put it on?”

Okay well in similar way, God has given us the ability as followers of Jesus to *clothe ourselves* with humility. He has given us the resources we need to practice and grow in humility. It might be that we need to, in Peter’s language, *put that humility on*. And *one* of the ways to do that, it seems from the passage, is to learn how to follow the leadership and direction of the pastors who are shepherding you. **When those pastors (or anyone else in your life) makes a decision that is a fine decision, it’s just not what you’d prefer, that right there is an opportunity to put on—to clothe yourself—with humility.** By thinking to yourself: “other people are not required to make decisions that I personally agree with. I personally am not the standard for good decisions.”

And you know what I bet you'll find? If you create a habit of *putting on* humility, eventually it will become more and more *instinctive* for you over time. Sin will always incline us towards pride, but as we choose to put on humility time and time again, the path of resistance towards it will become less and less. **God has given us, in his grace and through the Spirit, the ability to *put on* humility. Whether we are pastors or church members, whether we are younger or older, we have all been given the means and the *invitation* to humility.**

But even more importantly, we have been given the perfect *model* for humility. Let me try and show you what I mean. Look back at v. 4 of our passage with me:

[4] *And when the **chief Shepherd** appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

So here, Peter calls our attention to the “chief Shepherd,” which obviously refers to Jesus. But why use *that title* for Jesus, specifically? Well on one level, Peter talks to pastors or shepherds in this passage, so he wants to remind them that Jesus is the *chief Shepherd*. But you've got to also think that **in Peter's mind when he uses this title is the time that he personally heard Jesus use that title for himself.**

John's gospel captures this story where Jesus is explaining to his disciples and others who he is. Peter in all likelihood would've been physically present for this conversation. And Jesus says this:

*I am the good **shepherd**. The good **shepherd** lays down his life for the sheep.*

Jesus says that he *is the good shepherd*. And that the good shepherd is characterized by his desire to *lay down his life* for the sheep. Now, just for context, this would've been a pretty unusual statement for Jesus to make. A shepherd would do a lot of things to care for the sheep he was in charge of. He might even *risk* his life by defending them from a wolf or predator of some sort. But it was strange to talk of a shepherd *willingly laying down* his life for the sheep. After all, we're talking about a *human* life versus that of a *sheep*. But Jesus says he *is that kind* of shepherd: **one whose status and power is above all others, and yet descends and regards himself lower than all others.** Philippians 2, which we tend to mention a lot around City Church, puts it like this:

*...though he [Jesus] was **in the form of God**, [he] did not count **equality** with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by **taking the form of a servant**,*

*being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he **humbled himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death, **even death on a cross**. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the **name that is above every name**, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

So by calling Jesus the “shepherd” in our passage, Peter isn’t just calling our attention to Jesus’ *position*, he is calling our attention to Jesus’ *sacrifice*: the fact that Jesus’ humility descended all the way to a cross, where he laid down his life for us. *That’s humility*. Jesus knew his value, he knew his importance, he knew his worth—and yet he took the *posture* of a servant. That’s is what humility *looks like* in flesh and blood.

And Philippians says that because he did that, God then exalted him. God gave him the name that is above every name. And the promise *Peter* offers us in this passage is that if we clothe *ourselves* in humility, God will also give *us* the unfading crown of glory. You and I don’t need to wear the “crowns” offered to us in this world, because we’ve got one waiting for us in eternity. If that’s not a motivator for humility, I don’t know what is.

So to conclude, there’s a *lot* of things I hope you can say about us as your leaders here at City Church. I hope you’d say that we are competent, talented, gifted, filled with the Spirit—I hope you can say any and all of those things about us. But I hope that more than anything, you see us as those who are willing to lay down our lives and our preferences for your good. I hope you see us as small, imperfect reflections of the good Shepherd we all serve. And I also hope *all of us* embody that posture towards one another, in order to reflect to the world what Jesus himself is like.

Let’s pray together and ask for his help with that.