

Gospel leadership, gospel relating. 1 Peter 5:1-5

Awkward

Some of you are familiar with the performance reviews that happen in your work place where your manager sits down with you and discusses your job and how well you are going against the key performance indicators, talks about what you might improve, and helps set your personal goals for the coming year.

Now imagine that, instead of talking with you alone all the other staff, including those you were responsible for managing, were invited to listen in as your manager talked about what was required in your role and how you should go about fulfilling it.

Awkward, inviting scrutiny by everyone else of your performance

But that is a little like what Peter is doing here

In a letter to be read to all believers he is talking about how the elders, the congregational leaders responsible for the welfare of the congregation, should be going about their work, their service

Awkward then, and awkward now, this public focus on the work of elders – at least for those of us who are elders

But Peter is not writing to invite the congregations to do a performance review

He is writing to encourage the elders at a time they need encouragement

To encourage them vv. 2-4 to serve and keep serving for love of Jesus and model their service on Jesus,

And to encourage congregations v. 5 to receive this leadership

And he is inviting us all to listen in to what he says of the service of elders

For congregational leadership is necessary and important for the health of congregations, and it is important we all recognise the kind of leadership God says we need and know how to support it

And there is a second reason we are all invited to listen in.

The kind of service he calls elders to model is the kind of service we should all be practicing, out of love for Jesus and modelled on Jesus.

An appeal to leadership under trial v. 1

Peter moves from speaking in 4:12-19 of the trials believers are facing and the need in these trials to entrust ourselves to our God and to show that trust in persevering in doing good

to exhort, to encourage, the elders in the congregations he is writing to.

The appeal of verses 1-4 is closely linked to what has gone before. The CSB does not have it, but in the original there is a therefore.

1 Peter 4: ¹³ Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed.

¹⁹ So then, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good.

5:¹ I [therefore] exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory about to be revealed:

Peter is saying – in the light of what I've been saying about the unsurprising nature of suffering for loyalty to Christ, of your already sharing in the sufferings of Christ,

And in the light of the need to keep on trusting our faithful Creator and showing this in doing good,

I am now giving you elders this encouragement to keep on with the task entrusted to you, and to keep going about it in a certain way, willingly, eagerly, being examples.

In this context of suffering for doing good the move to focus on the work of elders, those entrusted v. 2 with shepherding God's flock, is understandable.

These trials affect them directly, increasing the demands and risks of their work.

Communities under pressure – imagine not just the isolation we have endured but having your property confiscated, or losing your job, or being tossed out of your home, or harassed in the courts – need lots of care and encouragement in their suffering

And communities under pressure can become critical of each other, start to withdraw and love less, even divide or become susceptible to false teachers with promises of quick relief or teaching compromise with the demands of the culture. There is need for constant reminding of the truth, and encouragement to live by it.

And in persecution it can be the leaders of congregations who are targeted first and repeatedly.

In the face of these demands and risks there is a temptation for congregational leaders, for elders and pastors, to withdraw, to distance from the need, to become less active, reluctant to serve

At the very time congregations most need active pastoring

SO Peter gives the elders this encouragement, exhortation

1 Peter 1: I [therefore] exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory about to be revealed:

Peter introduces his encouragement by outlining his qualifications to speak to them about their role.

He is a fellow elder. That's important. It is always easier to receive advice and encouragement from someone who shares the same responsibilities as you, someone you know knows what they are talking about because they have experience of the work. Peter lets them know he is no armchair critic or ivory tower theoretician. He's on the field, playing the game

And then he says he is a

witness to the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory about to be revealed:

Why mention the sufferings and glory of Christ before giving instruction on leadership, which we often think of as a range of pragmatic skills?

It is to put what he is saying in the gospel frame, in the context of the truthfulness of the gospel and the certainty of what it promises.

And Peter knows what he is talking about.

Peter had witnessed the hardship of the Lord Jesus' ministry, the opposition he had faced from the religious authorities, his suffering in the garden, his betrayal and arrest, his mock trials, he had seen the wounds in Jesus' hands and side. [While not recorded as present at the crucifixion – the only apostle recorded as being there is John – he was most likely there, [Luke 23:49]]

He was a witness to the sufferings of the Christ

And He was also convinced of Christ's glory and power, witness as He was of His resurrection and exaltation to the Father's right hand – and so of the coming revelation of His glory

But why does Peter mention these two things specifically as his qualification to give this encouragement to the elders?

It is to bring home not just the truthfulness of the gospel and the certainty of its promises, but the experience of God's grace that is the foundation of all our service.

You see, how can Peter, who denied the Lord Jesus three times despite his boast of faithfulness to the death, call himself a fellow elder? How did he have any role now in Christ's service? How could he be confident of sharing in the glory of the King he had abandoned in need?

Peter's denial of Christ was no secret in the churches. It is an indelible part of the gospel story, recorded in every gospel, known wherever the gospel is told.

So how could Peter the denier now call himself a fellow elder?

It is because, as you heard in the gospel reading from John 21, the Lord graciously restored him by his three fold questioning, graciously assured him of continuing as His follower, gave him that elders role of caring for Jesus' flock by feeding His sheep.

And how was it possible that Peter should be so graciously spared the judgment his denial deserved?

Hearers of the letter have already heard Peter say in chapter 2

*1 Peter 2:24 "He himself bore **our** sins in His body on the tree; so that, having died to sin, we might live for righteousness."*

Peter is pardoned by the sufferings of Christ He witnessed. He knows the Lord Jesus bore His sins on the cross, was suffering for him.

Fallen once, the confidence He has, so great that he can speak of himself here as already a partner, a sharer, in the coming glory, is confidence in God's grace and the effectiveness of Christ's death to deal with all His sin.

Peter makes his exhortation not just on the basis of his knowledge of the role of elder, but also on the basis of the truth of the gospel, not just the truth of the events but the truth, the certainty, of the grace and pardon it brings.

He puts what he is about to say in the gospel frame for the service he calls for is made possible by Christ, motivated by Christ, modelled on Christ. It comes from knowing Christ in the gospel Peter and the other apostles preach and experiencing in believing that gospel the Lord Jesus' forgiving love and grace

To the elders Peter writes

The elders task v. 2

² Shepherd God's flock among you, overseeing not out of compulsion

Peter's focus will be on the manner in which the elders go about their work, but there is here for us a brief reminder of the elder's task.

It is to shepherd the flock of God.

Calling God's people God's flock is a way of speaking about believers that has a rich Old Testament history.

It says God's people belong to Him, and He cares about them and is active to protect and provide for them.

Peter can use this term for believers in Jesus because there is only one people of God, and the Lord Jesus is the good shepherd whom God promised in Ezekiel 34 would gather all God's people.

[Genesis 48:15, 49:24; Psalm 100:3; Psalm 28:9; Isaiah 40:11; Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34, John 10:7-18]

This is a reminder that elders are not owners, but accountable servants, as shepherds appointed by God to tend His flock. As Paul says to the Ephesian elders

Acts 20: ²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.

The chief responsibility of a shepherd is to feed the sheep. The chief responsibility of an elder is to keep God's flock strong and healthy by ensuring a good diet of gospel truth, of the teaching of the word of God, known and applied to our lives.

That was the task entrusted by Jesus to Peter – feed my sheep.

It is the one skill, amidst a whole group of character qualifications looked for from elders in Timothy and Titus

1 Timothy 3: ² An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

Titus 1: ⁹ holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.

That faithful teaching is the key to the health of the flock, and the key to protecting the flock from false teaching, from the fierce wolves who will want to devour and scatter the Jesus' followers [Acts 20:28-29, Titus 1:9].

But the image of shepherd also tells us that this is not one-off teaching. The task of a shepherd is constant. Sheep need to keep on eating, day after day. God's people need to keep hearing God's word all their lives.

Shepherds need to be diligent and persevering in their work, and shepherds must also be vigilant, for they oversee the flock. That is, they must keep an eye both on individuals and the general circumstances of the flock to ensure its ongoing health and safety.

So elders also need to make sure the congregation as a whole is operating as it should, anticipating challenges, dealing with disruptions, giving thought to long term provision of healthy teaching, and also practicing discipline, dealing with behaviour that wounds individuals and the congregation's reputation, Christ's reputation in the community.

Elders are to shepherd and oversee God's flock.

The Manner of their service. Vv. 2-3

But Peter's purpose is not to give a comprehensive list of the elders' responsibilities. He is talking to people already engaged in the task – they know already what is involved.

His emphasis instead is on the way elders are to keep on carrying out the responsibility given to them

not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Not compulsion, but willingly

Not out of compulsion, but willingly.

Elders are not to be reluctant conscripts, people who wish they were doing something else, only doing it because someone else thought it would be a good idea for them to serve in this way.

They are to serve willingly, deliberately, because they have freely chosen to.

Now, when you consider the difficulties and dangers of the job, especially where there is persecution for Christ's sake, why would you, should you, be willing – as God would have you

Think again of that dialogue between our Lord and Peter where Peter was entrusted with the task of feeding Jesus' sheep. What was the one question our Lord asked of Peter?

Source – *John 21:15* When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.”

“Feed my lambs,” he told him. ¹⁶ A second time he asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.”

“Shepherd my sheep,” he told him.

¹⁷ He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

“Feed my sheep,” Jesus said.

Do you love me?

And Peter's answer – ‘you know that I love you’

Love of Jesus was the source of Peter's willingness to serve as an elder, a pastor, source of his willingness for a service our Lord told Him would end in His death

Love of Jesus because we too know His forgiving love should also be the source of every elder's willing service.

This is the way God would have it, for the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, who willingly served us in His death and has graciously forgiven us, deserves to be loved, loved as God is to be loved – with all heart, mind, soul and strength

And where we love Him we will be willing to serve Him

True for all of us

Our Lord who loved us and gave Himself for us is not honoured by grudging, reluctant service

But Willing, freely chosen, service

If we are to keep on serving as God would have us love of Jesus, nurtured by constant remembrance of and thankfulness for His love in His death for us and calling us as the living Lord to Himself, must be daily renewed in us.

We serve Willingly, and

not out of greed for money but eagerly;

Greed for money – elders are not to serve out of self interest, for material, present benefit

Greed for money is a reminder that Peter is not talking about theoretical dangers to an elders service. When he is warning of a dispiriting reluctance, and greed, and abuse of authority, he is warning of real corruptions of Christian leadership.

You probably know that already from your own experience – but if not just watch American Gospel with its exposure of the greed of preachers like Kenneth Copeland and Benny Hinn

Congregations should supply those elders they have set apart for full time preaching with a living, as Scripture makes clear– 1 Cor. 9:7-14, Gal. 6:6

But greed should not motivate their service

Elders can't have a calculated commitment, that measures their commitment to the flock by the return, the benefits, they can get from them.

But there is a danger as the years go by that calculation can creep in, that pastoring, shepherding God's flock becomes routine, just another job, and the rewards are looked for, not in doing the job itself but in externally, the rewards found in other jobs – the prestige, the salary, the holidays, the retirement plan

Instead of being greedy for money elders should be eager to serve, eager to meet the needs of others, not use them

Why?

Again the answer is Jesus. If you love the Lord Jesus, you will love His people.

When you fall in love with someone – a bloke, with a girl – and you realise that she loves her Mum and Dad – don't you work hard to look after them when they visit, to make them comfortable. Not so much to create a good impression with them, but because you love their daughter, and what matters to her now matters to you.

Jesus' sheep, our fellow believers, are dear to Him, people for whom He died [1 Cor. 8:11, Romans 14:15]. We should want their health and growth, their safety and peace, for Jesus' sake.

And in serving them, you know you are serving the Lord Jesus [Matthew 25:40]

Matthew 25:40 "And the King will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

How can the Christian heart, one that knows the wonder of being forgiven, of the love of the Lord Jesus in giving Himself to give us eternal life, not be eager to serve the Lord in serving His people?

And we know He is a faithful Master, for whom no service will be overlooked, even giving a cup of cold water to one of his followers [Matthew 10:42]

Opportunities to serve the Lord Jesus now are opportunities to be like the first two servants in the parable of the talents [Matt. 25:14-30], to be those who hear 'Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master.' Because they seized their opportunities to serve while they could.

We should serve eagerly, because we love Jesus' people for Jesus' sake, and we know our Lord is a faithful Master.

How should elders go about their task? Willingly, eagerly

not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Loving the Lord Jesus, and loving His people for Jesus' sake, elders are to serve like the Lord Jesus, who made Himself an example for us of service.

Lording it over speaks of gaining domination over others, subduing them to serve your will. This is wanting leadership so you can get your own way and satisfy your ego. It can manifest in abusive, bullying leadership.

These leaders think they are a class apart, and different rules apply to them and to those in their care. IT is do as I say, not as I do.

They are less shepherds than CEO's achieving the corporate goals, generals winning victories, star performers bringing in the crowds – and they are in positions of leadership in churches, often wanted in leadership, their behaviour excused on the basis of the results they achieve [cf. The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill]

But the elders who shepherd the Lord's flock are to be examples

Examples firstly of what it is to be one of the Lord Jesus' sheep. We have seen in 1 Peter the life the Lord calls for from His people.

And so they are to be examples in persevering in doing good even if it means suffering

Of love and hospitality [4:7-11]

Of a godly life lived in the fear of the Lord 1:14-17

Of a life that submits to authority 2:13-17

Of disciples who are always willing to give a defence for the hope they have 3:15-16

And they are also to be examples of what it is to serve in serving willingly, eagerly, humbly, examples of following the example of the Lord Jesus.

It is the Lord who gave and set the example of leadership as service. When his disciples were seeking greatness

*Mark 10:*⁴² *Jesus called them over and said to them, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

And on the night before He died, having washed his disciples feet, a sign of his coming death for them, Jesus

*John 13:*¹² *When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer clothing, he reclined again and said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are speaking rightly, since that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you.*

¹⁶ *"Truly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his master, and a messenger is not greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.*

Elders are to be an example to all in their service, an example of being directed by the example of Jesus.

Peter publicly focuses in vv2-3 on the way elders are to serve for

Exhorting elders to serve willingly, eagerly, by being examples, keeps the love of Jesus, the love of Jesus' people, and the authority of the example of the Lord Jesus, right at the heart of congregational life – it keeps us as the people of the Lord Jesus

And these things

Love of Jesus because of His love of us

Love of Jesus' people for Jesus' sake

Following Jesus' example

Should be what motivates and guides your own service, whatever it is.

And all of us, every believer, is called to serve [Gal. 5:13] one another in love

*1 Peter 4:*¹⁰ *Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.*

You can make your own assessment of the eldership here but this is the kind of eldership we should

Recognise and welcome

Motivated by Christ, modelled on Christ, and rewarded by Christ

Rewarded by Christ v. 4

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

The Crown or wreath, whether of gold or celery leaves, was given in those times in recognition of achievement, of victory – in athletics, in war, in civic benefaction

And Peter is in no doubt that those who serve their Lord faithfully in caring for His people

Will receive that crown, the unfading crown – whose honour will never tarnish, whose joy will always be fresh, whose achievements will never be forgotten

Peter's confidence of this is sustained not by the deserving of our service, but by the faithful grace and steadfast love of our Lord that is the basis of His own confidence

And every believer's confidence of being saved at the last day

But we should be zealous for that crown, or to use Paul's illustration in 1 Cor. 3:11-15

We should be zealous to build with costly materials that will survive the testing fire, to not be casual about serving Jesus, giving him what we can afford after we have pursued our own interests, but to give Him our best in willing, eager, service of His people.

Peter is calling in vv. 1-4 for elders to serve

motivated by experience of Christ in the gospel – of His grace

to serve for love of Jesus

and to model our service on the Lord Jesus who did not come to be served but to serve

And this gospel shaped leadership will be most effective in a congregation where it meets gospel shaped relating.

Gospel relating

⁵In the same way, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because

***God resists the proud
but gives grace to the humble.***

The fact that congregations have elders tells you that there is order in congregational life, where some are entrusted with the responsibility to promote the well being of the whole congregation, and so have authority in the congregation to teach and govern, and others are called to voluntarily submit to that teaching and governing for the good of all.

Peter focuses on the younger being subject to their elders, here meaning the elders of the congregation.

The younger may be the part of the congregation that might find it most difficult to submit themselves to the elders, perhaps because of impatience, but they are not the only ones called to voluntarily submit.

Here the part stands for the whole. IF they are to submit, so all are to submit

This call to respect the order in the life of the congregation is at one with his call to recognise authority in other contexts like the state and the family

For us all to submit to the governing authorities [2:13], and for slaves to submit to their masters [2:18], and for wives to submit to their own husbands [3:1]

That idea of order in relationship was accepted and expected in Peter's day. It is more troubling for us. As a society, we are resistant to ordered relationships where the responsibility of one might be to exercise authority, and the other to voluntarily submit. All authority is seen as oppressive and we are very conscious of the reality of abuse of authority.

And we glorify youth as a source of innovation, and often as less corrupted by the conforming pressures of a culture. So we can easily gloss over this teaching – it is very counter cultural

Yet, especially under pressure, and in a culture that is suspicious of Christians, where the actions of one or some can effect the reputation of us all [Jesus is my mask – proud nonsense]

It is good to voluntarily submit to those entrusted with the responsibility for the welfare of the congregation. It allows for considered responses to challenges and helps preserve the unity that makes love easier.

And we submit recognising that what is being asked for in relating to leadership is an expression of the way we should all relate to each other, a way of relating founded in the gospel.

The way we should all relate

All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because

***God resists the proud
but gives grace to the humble.***

Clothe yourself in humility. The idea of putting on humility as a garment is not suggesting that humility is not the real you, just something you put on for show.

It is the idea that when others are relating to you what they encounter is humility, that this is what they experience in their relating with you all the time because this is the way you are, or what you are becoming.

To relate to others with humility is, in Paul's words in Philippians, to

Philippians 2 If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. ⁴ Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

More important means 'higher in status', more deserving of honour and consideration than yourself

For example - If you were at school and the headmistress came into the room – you would offer her the seat.

If your boss is in the meeting, you would let them speak first and not interrupt them

We are to treat all our brothers and sisters with that courtesy

And Consider their interests, what will promote their well being, their discharging their responsibilities – and act to promote those interests

Why – because of the gospel and our experience of the gospel

***God resists the proud
but gives grace to the humble.***

Proverbs 3:34 is a targeted summary of what has been proven true for ever in the gospel of our Lord Jesus

It has been proven true by the events the gospel recounts. The proud who condemned Jesus did not get their own way, but ensured by their actions their judgment

And Jesus, who humbled Himself, was exalted above all. [Phil. 2:5-10]

⁵ *Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,*

⁶ *who, existing in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God
as something to be exploited.*

⁷ *Instead he emptied himself
by assuming the form of a servant,
taking on the likeness of humanity.*

And when he had come as a man,

⁸ *he humbled himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death—
even to death on a cross.*

⁹ *For this reason God highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,*

¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow—
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth—*

Believing the gospel the gospel we confess the Lord Jesus humbled Himself, and was exalted by God through His humiliation

And that God gives grace to the humble has been proven true in our experience of salvation through believing the gospel of the Lord Jesus. This is the foundational experience of every believer, what has brought us together as a congregation of God's people.

In the gospel we see Jesus came to call

Not the well -but the sick

Not the strong – but the weak, the poor in spirit

And In believing the gospel we confessed that we are the sick, we are the weak, we are the blind and deaf and the dead in sin

Confessed we are the poor who had no hope in themselves, that we could not save ourselves, make ourselves whole – and only Jesus can

It was as we humbled ourselves to confess the truth of the verdict of God's word on our lives – that we are sinners who deserve death, to be eternally separated from the life and love of God, and to repent – to turn back, confess Jesus is Lord and cry out to Him for the forgiveness He gives that we

Found grace

The Grace of God that forgives

Adopts us as God's children

Assures us of sharing in His glory

In believing the gospel we know for ourselves that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble

And this Grace does not puff us up as if it these privileges are something we can take credit for. This grace transforms us to be like Christ in giving us the Spirit of the Son to bear His fruit in our lives

Being saved is saved to become like Christ – and so to have the mind of Christ in all our relating with each other

The mindset that relates to all with the humility that reckons others more important than ourselves, that looks to their interests

Peter here tells us that Leadership shaped by the gospel needs to meet relating shaped by the gospel if we are to encourage each other in our life together to keep on entrusting ourselves to our faithful Creator and show that in keeping on doing good, on being faithful to Christ, even if it means suffering.

Pressure

The pressures of the last almost two years – going in and out of lockdown, isolation, anxieties about our children, work, and health

Make us weary – and can make us weary in our leadership responsibilities and our serving, whether that is leading growth groups, youth group, mums and babies ministries, Sunday school, in all our areas of service, and in eldership, board and deacons

And the differences that have been exposed – whether that is in our experience of the pandemic, attitude to vaccination or the actions of government – could create division, and dissatisfaction with leadership

Here God calls us to have our thinking about leadership, our own service, and our relating to be shaped and sustained by the Gospel

Calls us to Welcome, encourage and support gospel shaped leadership – motivated and modelled on Christ

Calls All of us to be willing and eager to serve – because we love Christ who loved us

And to Practice gospel shaped relating – relationships grounded in the humility that seeks the welfare of others

It calls us to this because through the testimony of the apostles, if we are believers,

We know the sufferings of Christ – that they were for us

We are confident of sharing in His glory, the glory of the faithful Saviour

For whom no service will be overlooked

And we have come to know for ourselves the grace God gives to the humble,