

FOLLOW GODLY ADVICE**1 PETER 5:1-14**

Parting advice. Have you ever given it? Have you ever received it? You send your child off for a week of summer camp or an extended school trip. What do you say? “Remember to take a shower. Change your underwear. Brush your teeth. Watch out for poison ivy. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do. Oh, and have fun.” How about the day the teenager in the family gets his or her driver’s license? “Keep the speed limit. Be sure always to check your blind spot. Don’t text and drive. Remember, it’s my car you’re driving!” Dropping a young person off at college is an irresistible context for parting advice. “Don’t forget to study. Don’t hang out with the wrong crowd. Remember to call home. This is a great opportunity; make the most of it!”

We like to give parting advice. We’re less enthusiastic about receiving parting advice. Parting advice pretty well describes the last chapter of 1 Peter – the New Testament book we’ve spent this Fall reflecting on together. Peter, one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus, and now a key leader among the first Christians, is about to sign off. He wants to get in a few last shots of parting advice to brand new followers of Jesus living in what is now the country of Turkey some 30 years or so after Jesus died and rose again. Let’s read his parting advice. Not only is this parting advice, but it’s godly advice. It stands the test of time. It’s great advice when life is going well for you. But our message series has been about standing strong in the storms of life. Peter’s final words offer even better advice when you’re going through one of life’s many storms. As I thought about these verses, four clear, distinct, and godly pieces of parting advice emerged. Think about them with me. First of all...

BE A GODLY LEADER.

The first four verses are addressed to the leaders of the various churches to whom Peter sent this letter. When you study the New Testament, you discover that the leaders of the first local churches were usually called “elders.” Why was it important to give godly, parting advice to this group? John Maxwell, a Christian leadership expert, has said, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” There’s a lot of truth to that observation and it applies just as much to any and every local church. Remember what was happening to those new Christians. They were beginning to suffer persecution for believing in and following Jesus. Peter knew it was going to get a whole lot worse before it got better. Peter also knew that if the elders – the leaders – in these churches provided courageous, strong, and dedicated leadership, these congregations would survive the storm of persecution headed their way. But if the leaders cut and run, those new churches would falter and fail.

Now, we have leaders in our congregation. We don’t call them elders. Some of our leaders are members of our paid staff. Our Ministry Council is a group of volunteer leaders that have responsibility to supervise various parts of our overall ministry. We have other kinds and types of leaders in our church as well. I want to take a moment to thank each and every person in our church who fills some kind of leadership role. You know who you are! You have the best interests of this church at heart. God bless you!

Obviously, these verses have great relevance and application to any and every leader in our church. But don't make the mistake of tuning out what Peter says here simply because you might not have a leadership role in our congregation at present.

Notice the metaphor Peter uses throughout these verses. He compares Christians to sheep. The local church is like a flock of sheep. Elders or leaders are like shepherds. Jesus is called the Chief Shepherd in v. 4. Now, getting compared to a sheep isn't exactly a great compliment. Human beings are creatures of great value and worth. Sheep are very useful and valuable animals, but they're not noted for their intelligence. Sheep tend to wander off and get lost easily – just like people. Sheep get into trouble quickly – just like people. Sheep lack discernment and are easily led astray – just like people. Sheep require a lot of care – just like people do. That's where shepherds come in. They're the ones who take care of the sheep. That's what leaders in a local church are supposed to do – take care of God's people in that church. What does that look like? It means providing you with good spiritual food to consume. It means praying for you and loving you through life's storms. It even means challenging you when you're going astray and in danger of getting lost spiritually. Please know that if I – or another leader in this church – ever feels the need to say to you in so many words, "You're wrong about that" or "Watch out! You're about to do yourself spiritual harm", we're just doing what God has called us to do. I'd rather get rebuked than have to rebuke someone else, but that's part of what shepherds – church leaders – are called to do.

I like how one commentator broke down these verses to help us understand how to be a godly leader in God's church. It actually applies to any and every member or regular attender in this place, because we're all servants. First of all, analyze your motives continually. Peter says here, "...Watch over it (the church) willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God." (1 Pt 5:2 NLT) Why do you want to be a leader? If you're doing it simply out of a sense of grim duty, that's not a good enough reason. If duty is your motivation, you'll likely be useless to God's people when storms come against this church. God calls certain of His people to be leaders and He gives them the appropriate gifts. There's a kind of an excitement, a kind of joy, a sense of knowing that what you're doing is what God wants you to do. That assurance sustains you through those tough, stormy times that will certainly come.

Second, analyze your ambitions continually. Peter says here, "...Do not care for the flock for money, but do it because you want to." (1 Pt 5:2 NLT) Some church leaders obviously get paid for their time and ministry. Scripture supports such a practice, but the warning here is not to let it just become a business or a profession for you. If you're in ministry just to make a buck or make a living, find something else to do. By the same token, people can seek a position of leadership for other unworthy reasons. You want attention. You want admiration. You want status. Being a godly leader isn't about self; it's about selflessness. Then, analyze your attitudes continually. If you're a leader in any area of life, a subtle air of superiority can creep into your attitudes. That should never happen in a church. Peter says, "Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example." (1 Pt 5:3 NLT) If you enjoy telling other people what to do, don't become a leader in this church. The last thing this or any

church needs are shepherds with a controlling, bossy spirit. In the Kingdom of God, you lead by being a servant, you lead by showing love, and you lead by being a good example. Did you know that you can't drive sheep from the rear like you can drive cattle? You have to get out in front of sheep so they can follow you. That's what godly leaders do for God's people. They get out in front. They lead by example.

The late Dawson Trotman, founder of the Christian ministry The Navigators, was visiting Taiwan on one of his overseas trips. During that visit he and a Taiwanese pastor hiked up into a mountain village to meet with a group of believers. The roads and trails were wet and their shoes got very muddy. Later, someone asked that pastor what he remembered about Dawson Trotman. Without hesitating, he said, "He cleaned my shoes." When he got up in the morning, he realized that this esteemed Christian leader from the United States had gotten up before him and cleaned the mud off his shoes. Even though he was a gifted leader, Dawson Trotman had a reputation for being a servant. He actually gave up his own life rescuing someone else from drowning. Godly leaders know that ultimately we will answer to Jesus Himself for how we led God's people. If you serve the Lord in any place for any reason, you need to keep on asking yourself those questions over and over again. Do I have the right motivation? Do I have the right ambition? Do I have the right attitude? Secondly...

BE A HUMBLE SERVANT.

That's the parting advice Peter offers in v. 5-7. Humility needs to be manifested horizontally. "... And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another...." (1 Pt 5:5 NLT) In other words, look for ways to show humility in all of your interactions with other people. Humility is like motor oil. Every engine has lots of metal parts in it that are constantly rubbing up against other metal parts. If it wasn't for the oil, any engine would disintegrate from the heat and friction. Oil lubricates and reduces friction. In every family, in every workplace, in every church there are all these moving, semi-abrasive entities called human beings! We clang into each other and rub up against one another which creates friction. Humility is like the oil of the Holy Spirit. It allows a family, a workplace, and a church to run smoothly. How does God define humility? The Bible says, "...Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too." (Ph 2:3-4 NLT) Humility is never thinking poorly of yourself or your abilities. Humility is simply the ability to put others before yourself on a regular basis. Being humble demands some intentionality, doesn't it? Peter compares it to putting on your clothes – "dress yourself in humility." You can only ever get dressed with some intentionality and effort involved.

But humility must also be manifested vertically. Peter says here, "... 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor." (1 Pt 5:5-6 NLT) It might seem obvious that we should all be humble before God, but it's actually something we can easily forget about. Pride has a hundred different faces and none of them are pretty! Pride is what keeps you from giving your heart to Jesus in the first place. Pride is what prevents you from trusting God in the midst of life's storms. We prefer to trust in our

own limited, inadequate abilities rather than in God and His unlimited power. Pride makes you impatient with God when you don't understand life's storms. "Where are You, God? Why are you allowing this to happen to me, God? Why haven't you delivered me from this storm I'm in, God?" If you get behind those questions we all ask from time to time, you'll find the ugly face of pride staring back at you.

I love v. 7, don't you? "Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you." (1 Pt 5:7 NLT) That's a wonderful promise! But it's hard to live like that every day. Why is it hard? Because pride tells us that we're competent to handle most of life's problems and concerns without God's help or interference. But humility before God involves handing over all of life's worries and burdens to God. How does God show His care for us when we keep putting all those anxieties back on Him? He gives you courage to face life's storms and not run away. He gives you wisdom when the winds of adversity blow. He gives you strength to do what needs to be done. He gives you faith to trust Him to do what only He can do. Pride is what keeps us from living out v. 7 every day of our lives. Humility is the only answer to pride.

A man by the name of George McClausin was one of the greatest YMCA directors the world has ever known. Some years ago, he was in charge of a YMCA out in western Pennsylvania near Pittsburgh. This place was losing membership, had financial difficulties, and all sorts of staff problems. George found himself working 85 hours a week just trying to put out all the fires. He couldn't sleep and he was filled with worry. A therapist told him he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. George knew he had to learn somehow to let go and let God into his problems and stress, but he didn't quite know how to do that. So George finally took an afternoon off and took a walk in the woods. He could just feel his rigid body and tight neck begin to relax. He sat down under a tree and gave a big sigh. For the first time in months he relaxed. He came to a decision then and there. He got out a pen and some paper and wrote God a letter. He wrote, "Dear God, today I hereby resign as general manager of the universe. Love, George." When he told a friend about this incident in his life, George added with a twinkle in his eye, "And wonder of wonders, God accepted my resignation." Humility is great for your health! Here's a third piece of godly, parting advice...

BE AN ALERT SOLDIER.

Some people give the devil more attention than he deserves. But most people actually don't pay him or his tactics sufficient attention. That's why Peter in v. 8-9 offers some godly, parting advice regarding this spiritual enemy we need to recognize and resist. How can you be on the alert against him? Someone has suggested that we all can learn six things about the devil from just these two verses. First, the devil is real and personal. He's not a myth or a figment of Hollywood's imagination. He's certainly no equal to God, but the devil is powerful and dangerous nonetheless. Second, he's capable of many different kinds of attack. In the Garden of Eden, he was sly and crafty like a snake. The Bible says he can camouflage himself as an angel of light. Here, Peter calls him a roaring lion. The devil is capable of an all-out, wide-open assault like the persecution those first Christians had to endure. Third, he's your greatest enemy.

He hates God and he'll try to hurt God by getting to you. The more you try to devote yourself to God and live life His way, the more the devil will attack you.

Fourth, the devil never stops attacking. Notice here how Peter describes his perpetual motion, his constant attempts to cause trouble, his ability to deceive people and destroy lives. The devil's full time business is spiritual attack – no days off, no vacations! That means you can never lower your guard against him. Fifth, the devil will attack any one and every one. Nobody ever gets beyond being attacked by the devil. Jesus Himself was attacked often by Satan. When it comes to attacking you, it's not a question of if, but when and how. Finally, the devil's goal is my destruction even if he doesn't always succeed. He has no friends. He's just as eager to destroy ungodly people as godly people. There's no such things as fair play or proper rules of engagement with the devil. He will exploit any and every opportunity you give him to infiltrate your life, your family, and your church. You and I need to be alert and aware of the devil at all times.

Back in World War 1 a hundred years ago, a flaw was soon recognized in the design of British war ships when they got into a battle with German ships. First, a heavy cruiser, the *Lion*, was hit by an artillery barrage and quickly sunk. Then, another ship, the *Indefatigable*, got a direct hit in its own powder magazine and was blown to bits and pieces. Then the original *Queen Mary* was sunk taking a crew of 1200 British sailors to the bottom. All of these ships had heavily armored hulls, but each of them still had wooden decks which offered little protection against German artillery shells dropped from above. Only after British ships began to put armor on top as well as on the sides of their ships did they begin to withstand long range German artillery. The point? You've got to have effective spiritual armor when you get into battle with the devil. If you leave any area of your life unprotected, the devil will find the chink in your armor. Here's a fourth and final piece of godly, parting advice that Peter offers God's people.

BE A HOPEFUL DISCIPLE.

Life is hard. And the storms of life make it even harder. But that doesn't mean we're supposed to live life defeated and hopeless. Look again at what Peter says, "In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. All power to him forever! Amen." (1 Pt 5:10-11 NLT) Those are beautiful words, to be sure, but it's the spiritual reality to which they point – not the words themselves – that give you and me real hope today and tomorrow.

You have hope today because of the magnitude of God's grace. Remember that grace is God's gift of His love, His goodness, and His power to meet every need and concern you have today or tomorrow. He's the God of all grace meaning that every kind of grace that exists in the universe finds its source in God. The Bible says, "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." (Heb 4:16 NLT) Notice that Peter also mentions the promise of being with God eternally – "...God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus." (1 Pt 5:10 NLT) Yes, the road to Heaven has

many obstacles, many challenges, and many very hard places as you journey along it. But God promises to get you to your eternal home and that's what matters in the end.

You can have hope today, also, because life's storms have limits. Peter reminds us that difficult times in our lives will not last forever – "... so after you have suffered a little while..." (1 Pt 5:10 NLT) I don't want to minimize any storm in your life. I realize that at times they seem endless and unbearable. I simply want us to keep life's troubles in perspective. Storms are temporary. God is eternal. The suffering you experience in life's storms is temporary. The effect of trusting God through life's storms is eternal. The Bible says, "For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!" (2 Cor 4:17 NLT)

You can have hope today because your character will develop. When you give life's storms to God in trust and endure them by His grace, God will change you for the better. "So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation." (1 Pt 5:10 NLT) Those are significant words. To restore something means to set a fractured bone or mend a fishing net. It means to fix something that's broken or supply something that's missing. God does that by bringing good things out of bad things you endure this side of Heaven. Somehow along the way, He makes you strong. He makes your life sturdy – a life no storm can blow over regardless of how strongly the winds blow. God's people have learned and experienced these great truths in every generation over hundreds and thousands of years. Now, it's your turn to learn them and it's mine. God is worthy of our trust. Because of Him and Him alone, we can live every day filled with hope!

Billy Graham celebrated his 96th birthday just a few weeks ago quietly with his family at his home in North Carolina. Back in January 2000, civic leaders in Charlotte invited Graham to a luncheon in his honor. Billy hesitated at first because he had health issues 14 years ago. But the leaders said, "We don't expect a major speech. Just come and let us honor you." So Graham agreed to attend. After wonderful things were said about him, Graham looked out at the crowd and said, "I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist who has just been honored by TIME magazine as the Man of the Century. Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle punching the tickets of each passenger. When he got to the great scientist, Einstein reached into his vest pocket. No ticket. He reached into his other pocket. No ticket. He checked his briefcase. No ticket. Then he looked in the seat next to him. No ticket. Finally, the conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket, so don't worry about it.' Albert Einstein nodded appreciatively at this kind gesture by the conductor."

"The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. He was ready to move into the next car when he turned around and saw Einstein down on his hands and knees still looking for his ticket under his seat. He rushed back and said, 'Dr. Einstein, don't worry. I know who you are. There's no problem. You don't have to find your ticket. I'm sure you bought one.' Albert Einstein looked at the conductor and said, 'Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going!'"

Billy Graham continued with his comments at the luncheon in his honor. “Do you see the suit I’m wearing? It’s a brand new suit. My wife, my children, and my grandchildren are telling me I’ve gotten a bit slovenly in my old age. I used to be a bit more fastidious. So, I went out and bought a new suit for this luncheon and for one more occasion. Do you know what that occasion is? This is the suit in which I’ll probably be buried. But when you hear I’m dead, I don’t want you to remember the suit I’m wearing. Instead, I want you to remember this: I not only know who I am; I also know where I’m going.”

My friend, do you know where you’re going when this all too brief life draws to its end? Life’s storms will come and they will go, but you can still know who you are and where you are going. It all has to do with Jesus. If you are in Jesus and Jesus is in you, you not only know who you are, but you also know where you are going.

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I love v. 7, don't you? "Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you." (1 Pt 5:7 NLT) That's a wonderful promise! But it's hard to live like that every day. Why is it hard? Because pride tells us that we're competent to handle most of life's problems and concerns without God's help or interference. But humility before God involves handing over all of life's worries and burdens to God. How does God show His care for us when we keep putting all those anxieties back on Him? He gives you courage to face life's storms and not run away. He gives you wisdom when the winds of adversity blow. He gives you strength to do what needs to be done. He gives you faith to trust Him to do what only He can do. Pride is what keeps us from living out v. 7 every day of our lives. Humility is the only answer to pride.

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Some people give the devil more attention than he deserves. But most people actually don't pay him or his tactics sufficient attention. That's why Peter in v. 8-9 offers some godly, parting advice regarding this spiritual enemy we need to recognize and resist. How can you be on the alert against him? Someone has suggested that we all can learn six things about the devil from just these two verses. First, the devil is real and personal. He's not a myth or a figment of Hollywood's imagination. He's certainly no equal to God, but the devil is powerful and dangerous nonetheless. Second, he's capable of many different kinds of attack. In the Garden of Eden, he was sly and crafty like a snake. The Bible says he can camouflage himself as an angel of light. Here, Peter calls him a roaring lion. The devil is capable of an all-out, wide-open assault like the persecution those first Christians had to endure. Third, he's your greatest enemy.

He hates God and he'll try to hurt God by getting to you. The more you try to devote yourself to God and live life His way, the more the devil will attack you.

Fourth, the devil never stops attacking. Notice here how Peter describes his perpetual motion, his constant attempts to cause trouble, his ability to deceive people and destroy lives. The devil's full time business is spiritual attack – no days off, no vacations! That means you can never lower your guard against him. Fifth, the devil will attack any one and every one. Nobody ever gets beyond being attacked by the devil. Jesus Himself was attacked often by Satan. When it comes to attacking you, it's not a question of if, but when and how. Finally, the devil's goal is my destruction even if he doesn't always succeed. He has no friends. He's just as eager to destroy ungodly people as godly people. There's no such things as fair play or proper rules of engagement with the devil. He will exploit any and every opportunity you give him to infiltrate your life, your family, and your church. You and I need to be alert and aware of the devil at all times.

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You have hope today because of the magnitude of God's grace. Remember that grace is God's gift of His love, His goodness, and His power to meet every need and concern you have today or tomorrow. He's the God of all grace meaning that every kind of grace that exists in the universe finds its source in God. The Bible says, "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." (Heb 4:16 NLT) Notice that Peter also mentions the promise of being with God eternally – "...God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus." (1 Pt 5:10 NLT) Yes, the road to Heaven has

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You can have hope today because your character will develop. When you give life's storms to God in trust and endure them by His grace, God will change you for the better. "So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation." (1 Pt 5:10 NLT) Those are significant words. To restore something means to set a fractured bone or mend a fishing net. It means to fix something that's broken or supply something that's missing. God does that by bringing good things out of bad things you endure this side of Heaven. Somehow along the way, He makes you strong. He makes your life sturdy – a life no storm can blow over regardless of how strongly the winds blow. God's people have learned and experienced these great truths in every generation over hundreds and thousands of years. Now, it's your turn to learn them and it's mine. God is worthy of our trust. Because of Him and Him alone, we can live every day filled with hope!

Billy Graham celebrated his 96th birthday just a few weeks ago quietly with his family at his home in North Carolina. Back in January 2000, civic leaders in Charlotte invited Graham to a luncheon in his honor. Billy hesitated at first because he had health issues 14 years ago. But the leaders said, "We don't expect a major speech. Just come and let us honor you." So Graham agreed to attend. After wonderful things were said about him, Graham looked out at the crowd and said, "I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist who has just been honored by TIME magazine as the Man of the Century. Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle punching the tickets of each passenger. When he got to the great scientist, Einstein reached into his vest pocket. No ticket. He reached into his other pocket. No ticket. He checked his briefcase. No ticket. Then he looked in the seat next to him. No ticket. Finally, the conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket, so don't worry about it.' Albert Einstein nodded appreciatively at this kind gesture by the conductor."

"The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. He was ready to move into the next car when he turned around and saw Einstein down on his hands and knees still looking for his ticket under his seat. He rushed back and said, 'Dr. Einstein, don't worry. I know who you are. There's no problem. You don't have to find your ticket. I'm sure you bought one.' Albert Einstein looked at the conductor and said, 'Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going!'"

Billy Graham continued with his comments at the luncheon in his honor. “Do you see the suit I’m wearing? It’s a brand new suit. My wife, my children, and my grandchildren are telling me I’ve gotten a bit slovenly in my old age. I used to be a bit more fastidious. So, I went out and bought a new suit for this luncheon and for one more occasion. Do you know what that occasion is? This is the suit in which I’ll probably be buried. But when you hear I’m dead, I don’t want you to remember the suit I’m wearing. Instead, I want you to remember this: I not only know who I am; I also know where I’m going.”

My friend, do you know where you’re going when this all too brief life draws to its end? Life’s storms will come and they will go, but you can still know who you are and where you are going. It all has to do with Jesus. If you are in Jesus and Jesus is in you, you not only know who you are, but you also know where you are going.

FOLLOW GODLY ADVICE**1 PETER 5:1-14**

Parting advice. Have you ever given it? Have you ever received it? You send your child off for a week of summer camp or an extended school trip. What do you say? “Remember to take a shower. Change your underwear. Brush your teeth. Watch out for poison ivy. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do. Oh, and have fun.” How about the day the teenager in the family gets his or her driver’s license? “Keep the speed limit. Be sure always to check your blind spot. Don’t text and drive. Remember, it’s my car you’re driving!” Dropping a young person off at college is an irresistible context for parting advice. “Don’t forget to study. Don’t hang out with the wrong crowd. Remember to call home. This is a great opportunity; make the most of it!”

We like to give parting advice. We’re less enthusiastic about receiving parting advice. Parting advice pretty well describes the last chapter of 1 Peter – the New Testament book we’ve spent this Fall reflecting on together. Peter, one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus, and now a key leader among the first Christians, is about to sign off. He wants to get in a few last shots of parting advice to brand new followers of Jesus living in what is now the country of Turkey some 30 years or so after Jesus died and rose again. Let’s read his parting advice. Not only is this parting advice, but it’s godly advice. It stands the test of time. It’s great advice when life is going well for you. But our message series has been about standing strong in the storms of life. Peter’s final words offer even better advice when you’re going through one of life’s many storms. As I thought about these verses, four clear, distinct, and godly pieces of parting advice emerged. Think about them with me. First of all...

BE A GODLY LEADER.

The first four verses are addressed to the leaders of the various churches to whom Peter sent this letter. When you study the New Testament, you discover that the leaders of the first local churches were usually called “elders.” Why was it important to give godly, parting advice to this group? John Maxwell, a Christian leadership expert, has said, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” There’s a lot of truth to that observation and it applies just as much to any and every local church. Remember what was happening to those new Christians. They were beginning to suffer persecution for believing in and following Jesus. Peter knew it was going to get a whole lot worse before it got better. Peter also knew that if the elders – the leaders – in these churches provided courageous, strong, and dedicated leadership, these congregations would survive the storm of persecution headed their way. But if the leaders cut and run, those new churches would falter and fail.

Now, we have leaders in our congregation. We don’t call them elders. Some of our leaders are members of our paid staff. Our Ministry Council is a group of volunteer leaders that have responsibility to supervise various parts of our overall ministry. We have other kinds and types of leaders in our church as well. I want to take a moment to thank each and every person in our church who fills some kind of leadership role. You know who you are! You have the best interests of this church at heart. God bless you!

Obviously, these verses have great relevance and application to any and every leader in our church. But don't make the mistake of tuning out what Peter says here simply because you might not have a leadership role in our congregation at present.

Notice the metaphor Peter uses throughout these verses. He compares Christians to sheep. The local church is like a flock of sheep. Elders or leaders are like shepherds. Jesus is called the Chief Shepherd in v. 4. Now, getting compared to a sheep isn't exactly a great compliment. Human beings are creatures of great value and worth. Sheep are very useful and valuable animals, but they're not noted for their intelligence. Sheep tend to wander off and get lost easily – just like people. Sheep get into trouble quickly – just like people. Sheep lack discernment and are easily led astray – just like people. Sheep require a lot of care – just like people do. That's where shepherds come in. They're the ones who take care of the sheep. That's what leaders in a local church are supposed to do – take care of God's people in that church. What does that look like? It means providing you with good spiritual food to consume. It means praying for you and loving you through life's storms. It even means challenging you when you're going astray and in danger of getting lost spiritually. Please know that if I – or another leader in this church – ever feels the need to say to you in so many words, "You're wrong about that" or "Watch out! You're about to do yourself spiritual harm", we're just doing what God has called us to do. I'd rather get rebuked than have to rebuke someone else, but that's part of what shepherds – church leaders – are called to do.

I like how one commentator broke down these verses to help us understand how to be a godly leader in God's church. It actually applies to any and every member or regular attender in this place, because we're all servants. First of all, analyze your motives continually. Peter says here, "...Watch over it (the church) willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God." (1 Pt 5:2 NLT) Why do you want to be a leader? If you're doing it simply out of a sense of grim duty, that's not a good enough reason. If duty is your motivation, you'll likely be useless to God's people when storms come against this church. God calls certain of His people to be leaders and He gives them the appropriate gifts. There's a kind of an excitement, a kind of joy, a sense of knowing that what you're doing is what God wants you to do. That assurance sustains you through those tough, stormy times that will certainly come.

Second, analyze your ambitions continually. Peter says here, "...Do not care for the flock for money, but do it because you want to." (1 Pt 5:2 NLT) Some church leaders obviously get paid for their time and ministry. Scripture supports such a practice, but the warning here is not to let it just become a business or a profession for you. If you're in ministry just to make a buck or make a living, find something else to do. By the same token, people can seek a position of leadership for other unworthy reasons. You want attention. You want admiration. You want status. Being a godly leader isn't about self; it's about selflessness. Then, analyze your attitudes continually. If you're a leader in any area of life, a subtle air of superiority can creep into your attitudes. That should never happen in a church. Peter says, "Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example." (1 Pt 5:3 NLT) If you enjoy telling other people what to do, don't become a leader in this church. The last thing this or any

church needs are shepherds with a controlling, bossy spirit. In the Kingdom of God, you lead by being a servant, you lead by showing love, and you lead by being a good example. Did you know that you can't drive sheep from the rear like you can drive cattle? You have to get out in front of sheep so they can follow you. That's what godly leaders do for God's people. They get out in front. They lead by example.

The late Dawson Trotman, founder of the Christian ministry The Navigators, was visiting Taiwan on one of his overseas trips. During that visit he and a Taiwanese pastor hiked up into a mountain village to meet with a group of believers. The roads and trails were wet and their shoes got very muddy. Later, someone asked that pastor what he remembered about Dawson Trotman. Without hesitating, he said, "He cleaned my shoes." When he got up in the morning, he realized that this esteemed Christian leader from the United States had gotten up before him and cleaned the mud off his shoes. Even though he was a gifted leader, Dawson Trotman had a reputation for being a servant. He actually gave up his own life rescuing someone else from drowning. Godly leaders know that ultimately we will answer to Jesus Himself for how we led God's people. If you serve the Lord in any place for any reason, you need to keep on asking yourself those questions over and over again. Do I have the right motivation? Do I have the right ambition? Do I have the right attitude? Secondly...

BE A HUMBLE SERVANT.

That's the parting advice Peter offers in v. 5-7. Humility needs to be manifested horizontally. "... And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another..." (1 Pt 5:5 NLT) In other words, look for ways to show humility in all of your interactions with other people. Humility is like motor oil. Every engine has lots of metal parts in it that are constantly rubbing up against other metal parts. If it wasn't for the oil, any engine would disintegrate from the heat and friction. Oil lubricates and reduces friction. In every family, in every workplace, in every church there are all these moving, semi-abrasive entities called human beings! We clang into each other and rub up against one another which creates friction. Humility is like the oil of the Holy Spirit. It allows a family, a workplace, and a church to run smoothly. How does God define humility? The Bible says, "...Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too." (Ph 2:3-4 NLT) Humility is never thinking poorly of yourself or your abilities. Humility is simply the ability to put others before yourself on a regular basis. Being humble demands some intentionality, doesn't it? Peter compares it to putting on your clothes – "dress yourself in humility." You can only ever get dressed with some intentionality and effort involved.

But humility must also be manifested vertically. Peter says here, "... 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor." (1 Pt 5:5-6 NLT) It might seem obvious that we should all be humble before God, but it's actually something we can easily forget about. Pride has a hundred different faces and none of them are pretty! Pride is what keeps you from giving your heart to Jesus in the first place. Pride is what prevents you from trusting God in the midst of life's storms. We prefer to trust in our

own limited, inadequate abilities rather than in God and His unlimited power. Pride makes you impatient with God when you don't understand life's storms. "Where are You, God? Why are you allowing this to happen to me, God? Why haven't you delivered me from this storm I'm in, God?" If you get behind those questions we all ask from time to time, you'll find the ugly face of pride staring back at you.

I love v. 7, don't you? "Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you." (1 Pt 5:7 NLT) That's a wonderful promise! But it's hard to live like that every day. Why is it hard? Because pride tells us that we're competent to handle most of life's problems and concerns without God's help or interference. But humility before God involves handing over all of life's worries and burdens to God. How does God show His care for us when we keep putting all those anxieties back on Him? He gives you courage to face life's storms and not run away. He gives you wisdom when the winds of adversity blow. He gives you strength to do what needs to be done. He gives you faith to trust Him to do what only He can do. Pride is what keeps us from living out v. 7 every day of our lives. Humility is the only answer to pride.

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