

Lesson 11

1 Peter 5

Faithful Shepherds and Faithful Followers

One of the benefits of passages like this is that they help us understand the kind of leaders God desires His church to have. Most believers are not elders or pastors, so when Peter gives us a picture of what faithful leadership looks like it helps us know what kinds of people we should desire to follow and what kinds of churches we should desire to be part of. Peter's primary command to the elders is to shepherd the flock of God. A church leader is not merely someone who teaches lessons, manages programs, or oversees ministry activities. He is called to care for God's people the way a shepherd cares for sheep. Peter reminds elders that the church does not ultimately belong to them. It belongs to Christ, and they are stewards of what has been entrusted to them.

Peter then describes several ways shepherding should not be done. Elders are not to serve reluctantly, as though they are being forced into ministry. They are not to lead for selfish gain or personal advancement. One of the pitfalls that can happen and does happen is that the leadership is domineering over those in their care. Unfortunately, there have always been leaders who use authority to control, manipulate, or elevate themselves rather than serve God's people. When that happens, people often walk away with a distorted view of God, the church, and spiritual authority.

Peter wants believers to know that this is not God's design. Christ did not call leaders to dominate His people. He called them to shepherd His people. The leaders we should desire to follow are people who willingly and joyfully serve, whose lives are consistent with their teaching, and who are able to lead by example rather than by force. Peter reminds elders that one day they will stand before the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ Himself. Their motivation for faithful ministry is not earthly recognition but the approval of Christ.

Although Peter is specifically addressing elders, many of the qualities he describes are worth pursuing as believers. Every Christian has opportunities to influence, encourage, disciple, and serve others. In that sense, every believer should desire to live a life that points people toward Christ.

Humility and Anxiety

Beginning in verse 5, Peter shifts his attention from church leadership to the all of the people within the church. The central theme becomes humility. Peter tells believers to clothe themselves with humility because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humility is not thinking poorly of yourself. It is recognizing who God is, who you are, and living

accordingly. Peter then says something fascinating. Immediately after calling believers to humble themselves under God's mighty hand, he tells them to cast all their anxieties on God because He cares for them. At first glance, humility and anxiety may seem like unrelated subjects, but it seems as though Peter thinks otherwise.

It would be easy to assume that anxiety and pride are opposites. After all, anxiety usually appears when we feel weak, uncertain, or out of control. However, Peter seems to recognize that anxiety often grows when we begin carrying burdens that God never intended us to carry. Humility acknowledges that we are not God. We do not control the future. We do not understand everything that is happening. And we do not have the power to manage every outcome in our lives.

Anxiety often whispers that everything depends on us. Humility reminds us that everything depends on God. This is remarkably similar to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6. When Jesus addressed anxiety, He continually pointed His followers back to their God. The birds are fed by God. The flowers are clothed by God. The Father knows what His children need before they even ask. The answer to anxiety is not found in gaining more control over life but in trusting the God who already has control.

Peter is not saying that every struggle with anxiety is simply pride, nor is he ignoring the reality that some people wrestle with anxiety in especially unique and difficult way. Rather, he is teaching believers to respond to anxiety with humility. Instead of carrying every burden themselves, they are invited to place those burdens into God's hands.

What makes this command so comforting is the reason Peter gives. He does not simply tell believers to cast their anxieties on God. He tells them to do so because God cares for them. The God who governs the universe is not distant or uninterested. He genuinely loves His people and invites them to trust Him with the things that trouble them. If the Creator of the universe truly cares for us, then what burden could be too small or too large to bring before Him?

Resist the Devil and Stand Firm

Peter then makes an interesting transition. Right after telling believers to cast their anxieties on God, he warns them that the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Peter is reminding us that the Christian life involves real spiritual opposition. There are real temptations, real dangers, and a real enemy.

Peter calls believers to resist the devil by standing firm in their faith. Notice that he does not tell Christians to fight through their own strength. Everything he has said leading up to this point has emphasized dependence upon God. Believers humble themselves before God. They cast their anxieties upon God. They trust God's care. Now they stand firm in faith because they are relying on God's strength rather than their own. God is asking not for us to fight but that we join

him and loyally cheer on and glorify the great work that he is doing both in our lives and the lives of people around the world.

Peter also reminds us that as suffering believers we are not alone. Christians throughout the world are facing similar struggles and hardships. There are believers overcoming sadness and grief, depression, pornography usage, a hateful heart, and many other life crippling sins around the world right now though standing firm in their faith and confession of the gospel of Jesus Christ. One of Satan's most effective lies is convincing believers that no one understands what they are going through. Peter counters that lie by reminding Christians that they are part of a much larger family of faith.

The God Who Restores

Peter closes the chapter with one of the most encouraging promises in Scripture. He tells believers that after they have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish them.

Notice that Peter assumes suffering. He does not ask whether suffering will come. Throughout the letter he has consistently prepared believers for the reality that following Christ may be costly. Peter repeatedly connects suffering with future glory. Just as Christ suffered before entering glory, believers may suffer while looking forward to the glory that God has promised. This future hope changes the way Christians look at present hardship. Suffering is real, but it is temporary. God's promises are permanent.

The encouragement Peter offers is not that believers will always understand their circumstances. The encouragement is that God does and remains faithful in every circumstance. God called His people into salvation and God will sustain them through trials. Then not only will he see us through the temporary trials we face here on earth but he will also keep his promises with us and redeem our souls to an eternity with him.

Big Idea

Because God cares for His people, believers are called to humbly trust Him, faithfully fulfill the responsibilities He has given them, resist the devil by standing firm in faith, and trust that God will ultimately restore and strengthen them after suffering.

Application Questions

1. What qualities would you look for in a church leader based on this passage?
2. What are some common sources of anxiety for students today?
3. How does our culture encourage pride and self-sufficiency rather than humility?
4. In what way can humility improve your relationships with other people?
5. What are some practical ways Christians can stand firm in faith?
6. When you experience temptation, what does dependence on God actually look like?
7. How can remembering God's future promises help us endure present difficulties?
8. When you become anxious, what are you most afraid of losing?
9. What area of your life do you most want to control?
10. Do you trust God's care as much as you trust your own plans?
11. Are there any burdens you have been carrying that God never asked you to carry?
12. What would change in your daily life if you genuinely believed that God cared for every detail of your life?
13. If someone listened to your worries for a week, what would they conclude you treasure most?
14. Which is easier for you: serving God or trusting God? Why?
15. Do you spend more time thinking about your problems or thinking about God's faithfulness?
16. What burden have you convinced yourself is too large to bring to God?
17. When you think about your future, do you have more confidence in your ability to hold on to God or in God's ability to hold on to you?