

Leading & Following God's Way
1 Peter 5:1-15
Mercy Hill Church | April 26, 2026

Big Idea: Biblically healthy churches exist when leaders serve selflessly and people follow willingly – all with humility under Christ's authority.

1. Elders (Leaders): Shepherds Serve Selflessly (with Humility) (vv.1-4)

- v.17 "...household of God..." => leaders of the household of God = elders
- Peter instructs his readers about the type of leadership that is needed to assure the survival of the church in trying times of persecution...
- **Peter's Exhortation to Fellow Elders (v.1)**
 - Elders = not "elderly" but rather the position/role (or office) of "elders"
 - Term adapted from the OT/Jewish language
 - Elders, overseers and shepherds (pastors) were used interchangeably (cf. Acts 20:17, 28) – here in vv.1-4, we see "elders," "exercising oversight" (overseeing), and "shepherd"
 - Elders were appointed (cf. Acts 14:23), had to meet certain qualifications (cf. 1 Tim 3, Titus 1).
 - Early on in the formation of local churches in the 1st century (cf. Acts 14:23) – establishing elders (and deacons)
 - Schreiner quote: "Every piece of evidence we have shows that elders were widespread in the early church. They are mentioned by different authors (Luke, Paul, Peter and James). They stretch over a wide region of the Greco-Roman world: from Jerusalem, Palestine, and the whole of Asia Minor, and Crete."
 - End of the 1st century, Clement of Rome refers to the (only) two church offices of elders and deacons
 - Peter's exhortation as a *fellow* elder (role)
 - Peter's exhortation as a *witness of Christ's sufferings*
 - Interesting to note Peter could have said as a witness of Christ's transfiguration, Christ's miracles, Christ's resurrection, or even Christ's ascension
 - Focus on suffering – theme of 1 Peter
- **To Shepherd The Flock (vv.2-3)**
- **(cf. Ezek 34:1-10, 2 Cor 9:7, Matt 20:25-27)**
 - What is the role of elders? To shepherd
 - To lead (and guide) the flock, to feed and provide, to protect, to care for, to seek the lost
 - When Jesus asked Peter if he loved him, and Peter said yes I love you – Jesus asked Peter to tend or care for the sheep (cf. John 21:6)
 - "Flock among you" – those that God has placed you with
 - A specific, identifiable group of people – not vague, universal group, not random Christians floating between communities.
 - Elders are responsible for a specific flock – who is under this church's care, who are the elders accountable for?
 - Church membership - "These are the people I am committed to, and these are the leaders I am under."

- **How?** 3 ways to not shepherd and 3 ways to shepherd
 - 1) “not under compulsion but willingly...”
 - Not being forced to, unwillingly, begrudgingly – “Fine, I guess I have to...”
 - Willingly – desire and heart to lead and serve
 - “as God would have you” – not according to one’s preference or according to the ways of the world – but according to God’s purposes and ways
 - 2) “not for shameful gain, but eagerly”
 - Early on we know that elders were often supported by churches financially (cf. 1 Cor 9:7, Gal 6:6)
 - Presumably, some leaders might have been tempted to or did take advantage of their position and leadership for their selfish financial gain
 - Modern day equivalent: televangelists or even seeing ministry as a job just to make money
 - Salary vs Compensation – the pastor isn’t an “employee” of the church but rather is being “compensated” by the church so the needs of the pastor (and his family) is met while he faithfully shepherds the church.
 - But this “shameful gain” could also be influence, prestige, popularity, power
 - Modern day equivalent: pastors or leaders using their churches to build up their own online platform, their own fame, their own influence vs faithfully shepherding the church God has called them to
 - “Eagerly” – eager to shepherd, to serve, to lead to guide, “willingly”
 - 3) “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock”
 - Bully pastors/leaders – their way or the highway
 - Mercy Hill Church is part of the Acts 29 network – part of the shameful history of Acts 29 is one of its founders, Mark Driscoll was very much a “domineering” pastor/leader
 - Accused of a "dictatorial" leadership style at his church, characterized by quick-tempered, harsh, and arrogant behavior toward staff and elders. Members who questioned him were allegedly shunned – in one instance a family was kicked out of the church. Often used inflammatory and violent language
 - Eventually called out on his domineering behavior and forced out.
 - Just yesterday, during the baseball game I was coaching, was interrupted by another manager coming to seek my and my opposing manager’s input. Shared how the assistant coach of the team he was playing against (on a nearby field) basically started swearing (in front of 6-7 year old kids!) during the game and got angry over a call & basically “rage quit” the game...what kind of example is that?
 - Seen and heard plenty of leaders and pastors
 - Friend’s senior pastor: “This church is so blessed to have me...where would this church be without me?”

- Friend's church – (lay) elder embezzled hundreds of thousands from the church...
- Previous church - one of the pastors had an affair
- Rather be a (good) example...
 - In my first couple of years of pastoral ministry in the mid 200s -- KFAQ (Christian radio station) had a pastors appreciation breakfast where RC Sproul spoke. Sat at a table with a quiet, unassuming older African-American man. Pastor of 30+ years at a church in Oakland. Church didn't even have a website (this was around 2005 or 2006) – faithfully serving, leading, pastoring...
 - Majority of pastors/leaders love Jesus, love the church
 - Negative press
 - Seminary group of guys – all serving and leading in different contexts 20+ years
 - Asian-american pastors
 - Serving and leading in 20+ years in various contexts
- John Calvin summarizes this verse by saying: “In exhorting pastors (elders) to their duty, he points out three vices especially which are often to be found, *namely sloth, desire for gain, and lust for power.*”
 - Isn't it true that may a leader has fallen due to one of these temptations or sins?
 - Pray for your pastors, elders, leaders...and also keep a guard and watch on your heart in these areas!
- **To Keep Eternity in Mind (v.4)**
 - Eternity, Jesus' promised (“when” – not “if”) return, God's coming judgment, our inheritance in heaven (our salvation) is continually mentioned throughout the entire book of 1 Peter (cf. 1 Pet 1:4-5, 13, 2:12, 4:17)
 - Peter's exhortation as a fellow partaker in future glory earlier in v.1
 - 1) “When the Chief Shepherd appears...”
 - Remember, elders/pastors/leaders, you might be a shepherd, but you're “under-shepherds” – Jesus is the Chief Shepherd. The flock belongs to Him – not you.
 - You will be held accountable for how you have led, guided, served and cared for the people in your church (cf. James 3:1 – teachers of God's Word will be judged with greater strictness)
 - Ezekiel 34:1-10
 - 2) “You will receive the unfading crown of glory...”
 - Crown = wreath – often given to winners of athletic competitions – instead of a trophy or a medal, one receives a crown (of wreath).
 - “unfading” = ἀμαράντινον =< Amaranth flower, a red blossom whose color was unfading
 - Crown = eternal life or some form of eternal reward?
 - In the context of the passage in addressing elders seems to imply some form of eternal reward
 - 1 Cor 3:8-14 - while all believers are saved through Christ alone, their works will be tested, and faithful, God-honoring service will be rewarded, while unfaithful work will result in loss of reward—not loss of salvation.

- Apostle Peter reminds these elders, leaders, as they serve selflessly – not selfishly – as they shepherd and care for and guide and lead – to keep eternity in mind as they persevere in serving selflessly and lead faithfully.

2. **Church (Members): Sheep Follow Willingly (with Humility) (v.5a)**

- **(cf. Isaiah 53:6, 1 Pet 2:25; 1 Pet 2:13, 18, 3:1; Eph 5:21)**
- While the Apostle spends 4 verses addressing the elders/pastors/leaders of the church, he writes just one short, but significant verse (sentence) addressing the rest of the church
 - “Younger” = in context doesn’t necessarily refer to literally “young people” – though can include them -- but rather those that are not “elders” (i.e. younger in faith, younger in maturity)
 - If Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, elders are the under-shepherds, what does that make us? Sheep!
 - Isaiah 53:6 - All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way...
 - 1 Peter 2:25 - For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.
 - Be subject = submit, follow willingly
 - Christian virtue or value of submission is something the Apostle Peter has written about previously:
 - 1 Peter 2:13 – “Be subject...to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor...or to governors...”
 - 1 Peter 2:18 – “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect...”
 - 1 Peter 3:1 – “Likewise, wives be subject to your own husbands...”
 - Check out previous sermons on these passages to hear what means – and doesn’t mean – for us today...
 - The “S” word = submission or be subject to...
 - Some reasons why it’s hard to submit or follow willingly:
 - Radical individualism - modern western culture treats the self as the highest authority - “follow your heart,” “you do you”
 - So submission can feel like losing your freedom or giving up your identity
 - In reality, we’re just submitting to our feelings and self – a compass which spins and points in every direction based on our mood and ultimately has us spinning in circles, leading nowhere
 - Deep distrust of authority
 - Church, political, corporate scandals and corruption – if I submit or follow, I’ll be taken advantage of or exploited
 - Been hurt, betrayed
 - Rejection of all authority – even good, healthy, godly authority
 - Confusing submission with oppression
 - Submission is equated with weakness, passivity, being controlled
 - Rather biblical submission is voluntary – not coerced or forced, ultimately to the Lord, compatible with dignity and strength (Christ Himself submits to the Father)
 - Plug for “The Reason for Church: Why the Body of Christ Still Matters in an Age of Anxiety, Division and Radical Individualism” by Brad Edwards

- Biblical submission is not blind obedience, endorsing abuse or sin, losing one's dignity or silence in the face of wrongdoing
 - Biblical submission is the willing, humble ordering of oneself under God-given authority – ultimately as an act of trust and obedience to God.

3. **Everyone: Persevere in Life Together (with Humility) (v.5b)**

- **(cf. Prov 3:34, James 4:6; Eph 4:2, Phil 2:3, Col 3:12)**
- Elders to lead and serve selflessly in humility || The church (members) to follow willingly in humility
- **Quote:** "Smooth relations in the church can be persevered if the entire congregation adorns itself with humility. When believers recognize that they are creatures and sinners, they are less apt to be offended by others. ***Humility is the oil that allows relationships in the church to run smoothly and lovingly.***" Humility is the moisturizer which makes the skin of the church be soft and smooth instead of rough and wrinkly.
- Apostle Paul constantly mentions humility when it comes to the church and relationships with one another:
 - Ephesians 4:2 - with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
 - Philippians 2:3 - ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.
 - Colossians 3:12 - ¹²Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,
- **Quote:** "True humility, as opposed to contrived, self-degrading humiliation, flows from recognizing one's complete dependence on God and is expressed by the acceptance of one's role and position in God's economy. With such humility one is freed from attempts to gain more power or prestige. Instead, humility expresses itself in the willingness to serve others even beyond one's self-interest."
- Quotation of Proverbs 3:34 (cf. James 4:6)
 - Not just God is displeased or dislikes the proud – God is opposed to – anti – the proud, the arrogant, the selfish, the self-righteous...
- True humility is the way to the cross, to Jesus
 - Thomas a Kempis wrote, "God walks with the humble; He reveals himself to the lowly; He gives understanding to the little ones; He discloses His meaning to pure minds, but hides His grace from the proud."

Christ Connection

- Jesus is the example and foundation for how to lead and follow
 - Elders are called to shepherd in a way that reflects Christ's selfless, sacrificial love which led Him ultimately to die on the cross for our sins...
 - Just as Jesus submitted and followed God's will – not His – we as the church can follow willingly those that God has placed over us to lead us...
- As leaders we serve under Christ, as members we submit under Christ, and we all live in humility before Christ
- This morning's passage points to Christ as the suffering Savior, the Chief Shepherd, and the humble King, whose life, authority, and return shape how leaders serve and how the whole church lives in humility under Him.
- Jesus is the key which unlock all this and makes it possible!

Reflection Questions

- **Who are some good (and bad) examples of leaders in your life? In what specific ways were they a good (or bad) leader?**
- **In what ways do you see selfless, servant leadership in our church?**
- **In what ways do I need to grow in greater trust that Jesus is the “chief Shepherd” of His (our) church – and that church leaders are ultimately accountable to God?**
- **Do I tend to resist leadership or do I tend to follow with humility and trust? Why?**
- **How are we as a church when it comes to humility – whether in leadership or as a whole? In what areas of your life are you more tempted towards pride (focus on self)?**
- **How does Jesus’ life and example of humble, sacrificial leadership reshape how you view leadership, servanthood, submission, power and authority?**
- **Parent Corner: Do your children have an understanding of what humility & pride are? In what ways are you being an example of humility and servant leadership to your children?**