

Encouragement for the Road Ahead

1 Peter 5:5-11

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 5...

“Stay on the trail.” Those aren’t confusing or excruciatingly difficult instructions to follow. You won’t be famous for following these instructions, but you might if you don’t. If you decide to take a “shortcut” over a ridge or across a deceptively calm stream, you might come out unscathed on the other side, but you may wind up becoming a cautionary tale for NOT pulling such a stunt. I’m sure, at some point, we’ve all heard a news story about some hapless hikers who barely survived exposure, dehydration, and starvation, perhaps even injury because they were only prepared for a straightforward “walk through the woods,” but upon stepping off the trail, they made it a harrowing fight for life.

The trail ITSELF will not always be easy. Jesus stayed on the trail of the Father's will, and He endured the worst suffering imaginable. Obstacles can and usually do arise, but you can generally expect the trail to be clearly identifiable. You just have to decide to stay on it. Yes, it might curb your adventurous spirit to obey the twists and turns of the trail, but the suffering of enduring the trail (or trial) as it’s laid out in front of you (WITH the Presence of God) doesn’t compare to the suffering of disaster that awaits the wanderer off trail (WITHOUT His Presence).

Peter’s been equipping us for our sojourn through this world on our way to glory. He’s sugarcoated NOTHING. The instructions for living as faithful followers of Jesus in exile are HARD, but clear. As I read his closing remarks, I envision that sign...



"Please stay on trail." Through Peter, the Lord has called them to the difficult task of subjecting themselves to all human authorities, reckoning themselves dead to their old sinful lives and practices, and living the rest of their days for the will of God. Such a life will invariably incite persecution, but Peter tells them that the Lord is allowing it to discipline them, and WE know that in such times WE draw closer to the Lord and thereby grow in our relationship with Him; the same was happening in the day Peter wrote. Their undaunted, godly response to the persecution they faced would serve as a witness to

the power of God and the reality of Christ's sin-atonement death on the cross, His burial, and subsequent resurrection. Their willingness to suffer in this world not only confirmed these claims, but it also confronted the lost with an eternal reality that would be brought to bear upon them as soon as the temporary reality of life in this world ended.

The cosmic powers of darkness thought they were stamping out God followers and their message in this world, but they were only magnifying their impact (casting a spotlight on the substance of their claims). At the close of his letter, Peter gives a message to the elders who have been tasked by God to shepherd these believers. Pastor Dale taught on "The Heart of a Shepherd" just before Christmas over in the Prayer Chapel, how they mustn't merely be QUALIFIED, but have a HEART or a DESIRE for the work, and DEPEND upon the Lord as HE EQUIPS THEM to LEAD, GUIDE, and GUARD the flock like the CHIEF SHEPHERD. Peter's writings to them laid out the elder's responsibility to God and us, but they aren't the only ones with a responsibility. Previously, Peter has instructed these beloved believers through a string of "BE SUBJECT's," and he's saved one final "BE SUBJECT" for us in tonight's passage. If you've found 1 Peter 5, Peter writes in verse five...

1 Peter 5:5-11

5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Having given the elders their charge, Peter brings out the final "BE SUBJECT" of the letter...

1 Peter 5:5a

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.

Just as elders are tasked with leading the flock with the heart of the Good, Chief Shepherd, the flock is tasked with following in subjection as unto the Lord. Exactly WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO BE SUBJECT TO THE ELDERS. For that, I believe we have to take a look back at the roles and responsibilities of elders. In verses two and three, Peter instructs them to...

SHEPHERD THE FLOCK. A shepherd PROTECTS and PROVIDES for the flock. In the same way that a shepherd protects the flock from wild animals and bandits that would harm and steal away the sheep, elders protect the congregation from false teaching that would lead members astray to destruction. In

the same way that a shepherd leads the flock to green pastures and still waters, elders NOURISH the Body with spiritual sustenance in the form of biblical teaching and preaching.

Subjecting ourselves to our elders in this sense means taking their teaching to heart. Yes, we're still called upon to "be Bereans" and make sure their teaching is indeed scriptural; sincerity isn't a gauge for veracity. However, having found the teaching to be biblical, we should endeavor to digest it and allow it to change us and INOCULATE us against false teaching. This SUBJECTION INVOLVES CULTIVATING A TEACHABLE SPIRIT. Sometimes, and ESPECIALLY when you come to a pastor in crisis, that pastor is going to inquire about your life, probing for the potential, sinful source of the crisis. If the situation is already known to them and it's dire, they may call you out on it without any solicitation from you. That last one usually gets peoples' IRE up. "HOW DARE YOU?! WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!" The vitriol of congregants at the pastor's "AUDACITY," his "UNMITIGATED GALL" of correcting them EVENTUALLY TRAINS pastors to steer clear of those with situations for which their counsel and wisdom are needed. *"You mean to tell me that there are pastors who will withhold their wisdom because they know I'll bite their heads off if they start to offer it?!"* I know! It's a crazy thought, but just as a husband or wife trains the other by their responses on what areas are off limits, we train our elders to either graciously approach us with biblical counsel, or else leave us to our own devices. This is why I believe the writer of Hebrews ended his letter (like Peter), saying...

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Not letting these guys who are called and equipped by God to watch over your souls is of **"no advantage to you!"** This touches on THE NEXT RESPONSIBILITY OF A PASTOR TO EXERCISE OVERSIGHT (verse two). Elders are selected from among the congregation because the congregation TRUSTS them to do the job, not for shameful gain and not because they feel like they have to, but willingly because they LOVE the congregation and CARE about it. However, when people get in the way of pastors as they're attempting to carry out this responsibility of oversight, they're saying, "We DON'T TRUST you. We AREN'T CONVINCED OF YOUR LOVE AND CARE for us and this church," and they hinder them from carrying out the vision the Lord has given to them. Now, I want to be clear. I'm not saying we can't question our leaders or offer any wisdom we may have in a given situation. As we're coming to in a moment, pastors aren't on a higher tier of any hierarchy of believers in the Church because no such hierarchy exists. We're all equal in value and importance, but we are UNIQUE IN GIFTS, and therefore, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES. We aren't an elder-ruled congregation; we're congregationally ruled and ELDER LED, and because of our responsibility to God to submit and our trust in our elders' love for us and concern for the congregation as a whole, we should be able to joyously permit them to LEAD.

That's the last point. Pastors are EXAMPLES to the flock, which means they're meant to LEAD. Leaders take us places we wouldn't go on our own. If a leader's plan of action makes you uncomfortable, chances are, he's doing his job. Now, not every idea a leader has is a good idea, but your discomfort

with it doesn't make it a bad idea. It's his job to make decisions that we wouldn't necessarily make. We have to trust our leaders in order to follow them, trust that they truly have our highest good, the highest good of the congregation, and more than anything, the WILL OF GOD in view as they make decisions. The direction they're about to lead us in shouldn't affect our trust in them as much as our trust in them should affect our willingness to follow. The Lord inspired Peter to make it clear that we are to be subject to our elders, but our submission and humility doesn't end with them. Peter continues...

1 Peter 5:5b

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

Peter's exhortation to MUTUAL HUMILITY for "all of you" highlights the unity among believers. There is no hierarchy of believers, no disparity between us. We're a microcosm of humanity as God intended when He first made us, subject to Him and humble toward one another. As Scripture teaches, there's only a DISTINCTION IN GIFTING AND ROLES among believers (Romans 12:3-8), and that's what we're recognizing as we "**clothe [ourselves], all of [us], with humility toward one another.**" Because of God's Spirit in us and the unique personality He's given us, we all bring something vital to the table. I think the writers of The Chosen streaming series portrayed this wonderfully in this scene...

ISN'T THAT GOOD?! *"Every one of these people, I have called for a reason,"* every one of YOU! *"Each of them bring something unique and important to the whole. I want every voice heard and none silenced. Everyone can learn from each other...If someone is thinking about things you feel slow everyone down, maybe you need to slow down."* That's the heart of Jesus' prayer in the Garden when He prayed...

John 17:20-21

20 I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

It's Romans 12. It's Colossians 3. It's Ephesians 4 where Paul wrote...

Ephesians 4:15-16

15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

We're different. Different in our unique identity. Different in gifting and calling. However, different doesn't mean better or worse, more important or less important, it just means DIFFERENT. We may occasionally struggle with the personality of others, but that's just the residual rough edges of our fallen nature, ours and theirs. The quirks of others—and keep in mind that you're someone else's "other"—don't excuse our less than gracious response toward them. It's been taught here that the "significant

other” of a married person is God’s SANCTIFYING anvil meant to shape us into the image of His Son, and God uses all the other “OTHERS” in our lives, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE CHURCH, the same way! They’re an opportunity to SERVE and GROW, not an OBSTACLE to peace or happiness or advancement. For this, we must cloth ourselves in humility. How? We’ll talk about that in a second, but just remember, to resist that calling is to set yourself against God, which will set Him against you, but for those who are humble, He’s got grace. **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”**

Ponder that statement a moment. Would you rather have God AGAINST you, or GIVING GRACE to you? It’s a NO-BRAINER, but we could be saying something UNTHINKABLE with our actions. I remember listening to Francis Chan teach on this verse and praying over and over again, *“Lord, make me humble. Lord, please make me humble”* because he wanted God’s grace, not His opposition. That’s a wonderful prayer to pray, but as in every area of our lives, God is not going to force Himself upon us, nor is He going to flip a magic switch and make us suddenly humble. The process of sanctification, like salvation, is COOPERATIVE! We have a responsibility, that is, the ABILITY TO RESPOND, which means we also have an ACCOUNTABILITY to respond. That’s the reason Peter follows up with the next verse...

1 Peter 5:6-7

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

HUMBLE YOURSELVES! Again, which is more likely when we ask God to make us humble: that (A) He’s going to open our mind or our heart with a can opener and pour humility into us, or that (B) He’s going to put us in situations that require us to be humble? The second one, RIGHT?! God initiates the opportunity and we must respond. It does NO GOOD when we pray prayers like, *“Lord, make me humble,”* and then when a scenario arises where humility is required, and we BOW UP and say, “NO!”

Peter instructs us to humble ourselves UNDER the mighty hand of God. As I was preparing for this message, we were still in the midst of our 50 Days of Prayer initiative, and as my family and I were approaching the altar to pray, this passage came to mind. My son was in front of me, slowly moving forward until we found a place at the altar or in the aisle to kneel. I was behind him directing him with my hands on his shoulders, but he couldn’t see me, so he didn’t know where to stop UNTIL I put a little DOWNWARD PRESSURE on him, and he knelt. **“Humble yourselves, therefore, UNDER the mighty hand of God.”** We must ALLOW Him to push us down; it’s the difference between Him being able to nudge us down (like I did with Joel) and Him nudging us downward, but us going RIGID and remaining standing. YOU WANT TO GO DOWN! Otherwise, you’ll find GOD AGAINST YOU!

Elsewhere in Scripture we’re told, by Jesus Himself no less, that **“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12)**. Whatever we do, God does the opposite, and the thing to remember is this: the one that God does is more certain and longer-lasting. Which would you rather experience, the exaltation of the Lord, or the humbling of the Lord? They’ll both be done in love, but being exalted feels better.

This “humbling,” though, it isn’t some degraded perception of ourselves or a denial of our God-given value. Believe me, the devil is tickled when you and I view ourselves as worthless just as much as when we look at ourselves and think we’re all that. Both are inaccurate, and when we’re so confused, our lives are rendered ineffective. We’re no threat to the devil and of little service to the Lord. No, humility isn’t practiced by looking at ourselves but by looking at God and looking out for others. The Pauline equivalent tonight’s passage is Philippians 2 where Paul said...

Philippians 2:1-7

1 So if there is any ENCOURAGEMENT in Christ, any comfort from LOVE, any participation in the SPIRIT, any AFFECTION and SYMPATHY, 2 complete my joy by being of the SAME MIND, having the SAME LOVE, being in FULL ACCORD and of ONE MIND. 3 Do nothing from SELFISH ambition or conceit, but in HUMILITY count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

The passage that deals most closely with this particular verse on being humble is verse three. It’s in humility that we count others more significant than ourselves. It’s been said, IT ISN’T THINKING LESS OF OURSELVES, IT’S THINKING OF OURSELVES LESS! It’s LOVING and VALUING OTHERS MORE!

Of course, if anyone had a right to be esteemed higher than He was, it was Jesus, GOD HIMSELF. Yet not even He clamored and clawed for position and prestige, but surrendered to the Father’s plan and subjected Himself to mistreatment and death at the hands of wicked men. There’s never been a more bitter pill swallowed. However, Jesus did it, and Scripture reveals something more of His MIND (that we’re to have in us). John recorded at the last Passover they observed with their Lord that...

John 13:3-5

3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Jesus knew who He was. He knew where He was going. He gave Himself to serving those He loved, which is what Paul wrote to the Philippians and what Peter is encouraging in tonight’s passage. Love and serve one another in humility, knowing that Jesus was a servant, and having humbled Himself, He is now MOST HIGHLY EXALTED by the Father. This is part of that eternal perspective, living for “that day” like the prophets of old. Exaltation comes on THAT day. Today, WE LOVE AND SERVE IN HUMILITY.

This is how we stay on the trail together, and it’s imperative that we do so, because as I said earlier, going off-trail is dangerous. Of course, there's danger to be found on the trail too, but there's definitely danger to be found off of it. Off trail, there be lions...

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Now we take a walk on the wild side. Seriously, when I read this description of the devil, it reminds me of the Ghost and the Darkness. Have you ever heard about this? There was a movie made about it about 20 years ago, though the events it recounts took place closer to 120 years ago in Tsavo during the construction of the Uganda-Mombasa Railway in East Africa in 1898.



Construction was tormented, and almost completely halted because of two MANELESS LIONS that mercilessly preyed upon the railway construction crew nightly. It was truly bizarre. It's uncommon for lions to hunt in pairs, let alone two MALE lions. They took advantage of the size of the camp, never attacking the same location twice, and here's the scary part: it seems they hunted people FOR SPORT. Occasionally they would feast on their victims, but most often they didn't. They just killed to kill. Official records state that they killed 35-40 men, but those in the construction camp, including British Lieutenant John Henry Patterson, who finally killed the lions, claimed it was closer to 135 men. Their killing spree lasted so long because they proved incredibly difficult to kill, causing many in the camp to believe that they were no ordinary lions. This earned them their names, the "Ghost," and the "Darkness." The reason they killed like they did is still debated; personally, I believe they were demon-possessed like the swine outside of the Gerasenes (Luke 8:33). Some of you aren't going to sleep tonight (my wife probably won't, which means I might not), but I give that brief history lesson because...



...it powerfully illustrates the cunning and savage ferocity of the devil as he hunts for you and me. After Jesus successfully resisted the devil's temptations in the wilderness, Luke revealed that "**when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him UNTIL AN OPPORTUNE TIME**" (Luke 4:13). The devil doesn't just give up and walk away when we resist his temptations. HE WAITS just out of sight in the tall grass for a moment of vulnerability. This is why Peter says we must be SOBER-MINDED and ever WATCHFUL for movement in the grass. I'm not talking about blaming every bad thing in our lives on the devil, but I am talking about having the spiritual maturity and discernment to recognize how the devil could be using a fleshly tendency in you—your anger, your hunger, your exhaustion, your depression, your loneliness—to take you down, to take down your testimony, or take down your ministry. Loneliness is particularly debilitating, which is why I believe the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to write...

1 Peter 5:9

Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

RESIST HIM. Stand against what you know to be LIES. Your sinful flesh still sympathizes with the devil; don't give your flesh or the devil the satisfaction of yielding to temptation. Don't let your fear or frustration with your circumstances influence your actions or reactions. RESIST HIM, and know that you're not alone. You're not the only one to be tempted like you are (1 Corinthians 10:13), and you're not going through this suffering alone.

Peter said, "[**Know**] that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." The sense of loneliness is such a weakening condition. Peter has just made mention of shepherds and flocks, and God's flock we are. As such, the description of the devil as a lion and the warning against seeing ourselves as alone and isolated is very appropriate. The devil does some of his most effective work in devouring God's people by separating them from the flock for easy pickings. Peter emphatically states that YOU ARE NOT ALONE. God has NOT forgotten or abandoned you, and what's more, you have brothers and sisters who have gone through or are going through the very same thing. Draw strength from the Lord, from Jesus, and from others. Do you notice how we keep coming back to the UNITY OF THE BRETHREN? Finally, Peter says...

1 Peter 5:10-11

10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This is the "THEN" to the "IF" of the passage. If you humble yourself toward one another and toward God, enduring suffering while remaining faithful, God will **"restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."** Now, the prosperity preachers will connect this to earthly gain, but it's better understood to be in glory. Besides, who wants temporary rewards over eternal ones? Again, in Philippians 2, Paul teaches this through the example of Jesus...

Philippians 2:8-11

8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus HUMBLED HIMSELF **"under the mighty hand of God"** when He robed Himself in flesh and surrendered to the Father's plan of redemption through the cross and the grave. Then, **"at the proper time he [exalted Him]"** bestowing upon Him the name that's above every name and enthroning Him at His mighty right hand in heaven. As we've talked about previously, suffering is the pathway to glory. Jesus has gone through every step of the journey, and He's already arrived at the top of the mountain, and from there He shouts back what He always has: "FOLLOW ME! Stay on the trail."

We sang this on Sunday, but it fits so well here again...

**With every breath, I long to follow Jesus
For He has said that He will bring me home
And day by day I know He will renew me
Until I stand with joy before the throne**

**To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus
All the glory evermore to Him
When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat:
Yet not I, but through Christ in me!**