

## **Humble Leadership**

**2020-06-28 Pastor Sharon Tidd**

Today our thoughts will be focused on 1 Peter 5:1-5, which is a passage dedicated to church leadership. Take some time now to read it through prayerfully. Though addressed to 'elders', it has much for us to consider and embrace whether we hold an official 'leadership' role in the church or not.

At the time that Peter wrote this letter there wasn't a lot of structure to the church. It was an organic system that adapted to meet needs as they arose (see Acts 6). Some leadership positions had been established, but there were no formal organizational charts to guide the church forward. The leadership positions that did exist were necessary because the apostles travelled extensively as evangelists spreading the Good News. The churches they planted needed local leadership to assist them after the apostles moved on. The position of 'elder' or 'overseer', in particular, provided that hands-on spiritual leadership and guidance to house churches in those days.

Similarly, today, most churches have elders who offer this leadership. In The Salvation Army we call them Local Officers. These are people of deep faith, who have been journeying with Jesus for a significant time, and have much to offer in the way of spiritual guidance and mentorship. Some also assist with administrative duties,

offering a breadth of wisdom and knowledge that is needed in these complex times.

We couldn't survive without them!

Southmount Ministries and New Life Church have had great 'elders' through the years, and continue to rely on these spiritual leaders today. I could not lead this ministry well without the dedication, insight, and spiritual care that our Corps Council members bring. And the spiritual needs of our members would not be met well without the leadership offered to our different Bible Study groups by caring and wise hosts and teachers. Similarly, our youth groups, young adults' ministry, Sunday School and varied outreach programs rely heavily on volunteer leaders, along with paid staff. Each contributes significantly to the efficient running of these programs whose purpose is to help this church grow, both numerically and spiritually.

It is to these leaders, primarily, that Peter writes these verses, and he appeals to them as a "fellow elder who has witnessed Christ's suffering and will share in the glory to be revealed" (verse 1). Peter believed that all who serve in leadership in the church must do so out of a deep appreciation for all that Christ has suffered for them, to bring about their salvation, and out of gratitude for the glory that is theirs in Christ Jesus. Christian leaders serve out of the richness of their inheritance in Christ Jesus! That shared inheritance creates unity of purpose and vision for church leadership. Their common ground is Christ, and He is the One who compels them and equips them

through His Spirit to shepherd God's flock, care for the church, and oversee the numerous details involved in serving the people of God (verse 2). This was true of the apostles and was to be true for every 'elder' who led and served and cared for others within the fellowship of the church.

That's an important lesson to take hold of, isn't it? For each of us, Christ's work on our behalf should compel us to serve one another. We all have the capacity to be an 'elder' to someone. An elder is, in the most literal sense of the word, a person who is older and has experience in the journey of life. A spiritual elder is one who has attained some level of maturity in the faith as they have journeyed with Christ. There is always someone newer to the faith looking for elders who can offer them care and shepherding and godly oversight. They may be younger in years ... or older ... that doesn't matter. Newer believers are just looking for someone with spiritual maturity and wisdom; someone who has been on the journey for some time; someone who is available to share life lessons, point them in the right direction, sit with them when they struggle, and pray for them as they grow. We each have the opportunity and capacity to be that elder ... to someone. Are we willing?

As elders, our knowledge of the surpassing greatness of God's gift of salvation has had opportunity to deepen and grow as we've journeyed with Jesus. That knowledge is a gift that we can share and pass on to others who are newer to this

journey. We don't have to hold an official title or position. We don't have to have a Bible College or Seminary degree in hand. We don't even need an extensive knowledge of the Word of God, though a love for it and regular time reading and meditating on it is certainly of benefit! All that's required is a faith journey that is steadily moving forward and growing deeper in our love for God and His Kingdom. Couple that with joy and thankfulness for what Christ has done for us and a desire to pass that along to the next generation of believers, and we have plenty to offer. We simply need to be willing to let that joy and thankfulness spur us on to share His goodness with those who come behind us. Our rich inheritance in Christ Jesus is not for our benefit only; it is given to us to share so that the church can be built up and equipped to "do good". Don't be lulled into inactivity believing that the pastor or the "official" elders are responsible for raising up the next generation, because that is not the full story. We each, together, have an integral part to play in each new believer's journey of faith. As people come to know Jesus through our ministry (and many have in the past 5 years), we each are to take responsibility for them. That's the first key lesson Peter presents in this passage and it is not one to gloss over. We're all in this together!

In verses 2-3 Peter goes on to highlight three things that are not to drive leadership and service in the church. In doing so, he offers us additional key lessons that are not to be missed or glossed over.

Those three things are:

1. A sense of obligation or duty.

Peter speaks of this compulsion to lead and serve not as something we “must” do, but as something we get to do; something that flows naturally from willing and eager hearts (verse 2)! Leadership and service in the church isn’t to be driven by “oughts” or “shoulds”. True leaders serve because they want to; because they feel deeply honoured to serve others in Jesus’ Name. Serving is something of great value and blessing to them. It is not something they grudgingly do. If we serve only out of duty or obligation, our leadership and service will not succeed. Our service must flow out of love that is sincere. Sincere love will, of course, instill a sense of duty (a desire to fulfill the commitments we have made), but duty itself cannot be what drives us to lead and serve. It is love that is to compel us ... love for God and love for His children. When love compels us, service is a pleasure and a privilege that brings great joy.

2. A desire for financial gain.

Leadership and service in the church is never to be about money. Most church leaders are volunteers, receiving little or no compensation. That was true then, and it

is true now. Greed for money is not to drive us. Rather, love for God's people and a sincere heart desire to see them grow in faith is what is to drive those who lead and serve in the church. If your aim is to 'get rich quick', church leadership is not the place to do it according to Peter!

The riches we possess through Christ are of much greater value than dollars and cents. We are rich in love, joy, peace, mercy, grace, compassion, salvation, and glory because of Jesus! These are riches that will last. And church leaders don't hoard these riches. They seek always to share them, often at great sacrifice to themselves, knowing that God's supply will never run dry.

### 3. A need for power.

True servanthood isn't about 'lording it over' others, Peter says. If you're vying for position or power, if you're eager to be noticed and recognized, if you're serving simply to be praised and admired by others and/or if you're leading so that you can push your own agenda at the expense of others, you need to step back and ask God to cleanse you of those desires. They are not from Him. Power-tripping like that is, most certainly, not the example that those "entrusted to" our care need from us as elders and leaders in the church. The example they need to see is humble, sacrificial service ... the willingness to stoop down and wash another's feet, as Jesus did. On that occasion, during His last supper with His disciples, Jesus used this gift of service as an opportunity

to teach His disciples a vital Kingdom principle. After washing their feet, Jesus said to them, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:15-17) He says it to us today as well. Whether we have official titles or not we are all called to be examples to the flock – examples of humble, servant leadership. We are not to pursue power. We are to overcome by the desire to serve.

Three key lessons for elders and leaders – for you and me: never lead out of a sense of obligation, don’t seek monetary gain, and don’t pursue leadership for the power it might bring you. Instead, be loving, sacrificial and humble. Let your leadership reflect the privilege you feel in being able to serve others.

As you think back over church leaders who have served you through the years, have you been blessed with this kind of leader and elder? Have you had people of this kind of character to look up to; to receive spiritual guidance and counsel from? Have you been led by people who served out of the joy and gratitude they have in their hearts because of Christ’s abundant love for them; people who consider serving and giving a pleasure and sacred privilege; people who aren’t looking for what they can “get” in serving, but for what they can give; people who choose to love and serve sacrificially; people who want only to be a godly example in all that they do? I know

I've been blessed to be led and taught and mentored by leaders and elders like this throughout my 50 year journey with Jesus. That kind of leader is rare, though. And all leaders fail us from time to time. They are but human; sinners saved by grace. Only by the power of the Spirit within can any one of us attempt to offer altruistic, sacred service to another. Thanks be to God, the Spirit is available! If you've seen this altruistic, sacred service in leaders/elders of the past, give thanks. If you see it in our leaders/elders today, give thanks. If you have been able to offer this kind of servant leadership/eldership, give thanks. If you have opportunity, in the Spirit's power, to serve others today in this way, give thanks. The church is blessed by people who lead in the way that Peter describes here.

Southmount Ministries and New Life Church needs elders and leaders who are empowered by the Spirit to lead, guide and mentor the next generation. They say it takes a village to raise a child. I believe it takes a church to raise a new believer. We're all in this together!

Peter tells us that the reward for this kind of faithful, godly leadership is a "crown of glory that will never fade away" (verse 4), presented by Christ Jesus Himself, the Chief Shepherd of the flock. We talked about that 'glory' in last Sunday's sermon. Here Peter reminds us that this is our ultimate goal and final reward: Glory! It comes to those who remain faithful in suffering. It comes to those who serve the church and



the world out of love and compassion and grace. It comes to those who know the blessing of helping another pilgrim thrive in their journey, especially someone newer to this path of grace! It comes to those whose lives are marked by humility. We are all elders and that crown of glory is being prepared for each one of us. As we await that reward, the question is, are we loving and serving in a way that honours the Suffering Servant Leader who purchased our salvation, making glory possible for us? Are we overwhelmed with wonder in knowing that we get to partner with Him in helping others run the race?

The founder of The Salvation Army laid out a one-word motto that we often declare: OTHERS! Are we claiming it? As elders in our own church community, are we spending ourselves for OTHERS, making it our priority to help them grow and mature in their faith? Do we want to be that elder for someone coming behind us?

Having addressed elders ... which to me is every one of us who has newer, younger believers looking up to us ... Peter then briefly turns his comments to the 'younger men'. (Younger women should take heed here too, as should all newer believers. The culture at that time would expect him to focus his address on the men. But today he would be addressing all the young people, and all newer Christians too.) He says, "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older" (verse 5a). The mindset of humble, sacrificial service modelled by the 'elders' is to be taken

up by the 'younger' members of the church in the form of submission. They are called to submit out of respect for the wisdom and knowledge those 'elders' have obtained along the way. They are called to submit out of a desire to receive from those 'elders', and then serve in the same gracious way they have witnessed from those elders.

Young people can be a little cocky at times. (I know I can! And yes, I see myself as 'young' most days!) Peter advises against that here. God has given us elders to look up to, learn from, be guided by and cared for. It takes humility to receive those gifts from our 'elders'. Newer Christians need to be submissive and humble to receive the wisdom they need from others.

The church is intended to operate on the basis of mutual accountability and submission. Paul commanded the believers in Ephesus to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). This theme runs all through New Testament Scriptures. To the Romans, Paul presented the metaphor of the church as a Body (Romans 12:8). Christ is the Head and we, each member of the Church, are His Body. We know from basic life experience that body parts have to work together. We can't set off, arrogantly, doing our own thing in our own way without it impacting other parts of the Body. So Peter wisely counsels the young (including newer believers of any age), who might be more inclined to try that, to be submissive. And he then speaks to everyone saying, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another,

because ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” (verse 5b, quoting Proverbs 3:34). This is such wise counsel both for those who are ‘elders’ serving the younger/newer believers in the church and for those who are ‘younger’ and in need of that caring service. We’re all in this together!

If the church is to grow we each have to do our part. We have to get our priorities straight. We have a rich inheritance in Jesus Christ that God wants us to share and to pass on faithfully to the next generation; not out of obligation, but out of sincere love. It will take sacrifice. It will take humility. It will take commitment. We have to work together, making the strengthening of the saints and the building up of God’s Church our number one priority. Let the overwhelming joy and thankfulness that you have come to experience through Jesus Christ flow out to others. Share your journey! Pass along wisdom! Seek the counsel of mature believers. When you see God’s goodness modelled, follow that example! Wash some feet! Let’s be the Body of Christ. Let’s be the village that each new child of God needs!