

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, November 6, 2019 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

1 PETER & 2 PETER FULL of Hope FULL HOW TO MAKE THE BEST OF TIMES OUT OF YOUR WORST OF TIMES

PRESCRIPTION FOR A HEALTHY CHURCH 1 Peter 5:1-5

¹The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ²Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but ^[a]willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; ⁴and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. ⁵Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"-1 Peter 5:1-5 (NKJV)

Our study, "Full of Hope-full: How to Make the Best of Time Out of Your Worst of Times," of the book (or letter) of 1 Peter has covered quite a bit of territory so far. The question, "How do I develop that kind of life and faith that enable me to be full of "hope-fullness" even in the midst of the "worst of time"... in times of hardship, suffering, and the struggles of this life or as in the case of those in Peter's day, extreme persecution? Has been at the forefront of our study, and perhaps nowhere in the book is that more pronounced than in the last few verses of the 4th chapter.

¹² Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. ¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. ¹⁶Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. ¹⁷For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first,

what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ Now “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. –1 Peter 4:12-19 (NKJV)

The Christian life is an overcoming life. Even though we will definitely have problems and personal struggles in this life (trials of many kinds), we will be able to overcome because of Jesus. Because of Him, we have victory over the world, including sinful habits, bitterness, loneliness, guilt, fear, and discouragement. God desires for you to live an overcoming life! Jesus, Himself, said in 1 John 5:4-5, *“For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”* Christians are overcomers and truly are to live hope-filled Christian lives every day, but let’s be honest, there are many trial and struggles, heartaches and difficulties along... times of suffering that can daily rob us of our joy and paralyze our faith, steal our hope, and destroy our relationship and weaken our walk... times of suffering can embitter and defeat us if we let it. This letter was written to help believer’s believe and grow even in times of suffering... to be “Full of Hope-full.”

Let’s be reminded, once again, of some of the rich background of this great letter written by perhaps Jesus’ closest disciple, Peter:

5 Important Background Information for the Book of 1 Peter:

- 1. The book of 1 Peter is written by **PETER**** - The New Testament had four different names for Peter: Simeon (the Hebrew for Peter’s original name, Acts 15:14, 2 Peter 1:1), Simon (the Greek name for Simeon applied 49 times in the New Testament), Cephas (a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word for rock [ܣܦܝܪܟܗܩܦܐܨ]; this is used to play off of πέτρα), Peter (Πέτρος) the leader and spokesman for the early disciples. This is how he is addressed in the greeting emphasizing his authority to speak. The early New Testament Church almost exclusively regarded Peter as the author of the letter. And of course there is the internal evidence supporting Peter’s authorship, the letter claims to be from “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1), the writer claims to be the readers “fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1), the writer identifies “Silas” (Silvanus) as one who helped him to write the letter (1 Peter 5:12; see also Acts 15:22 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1), the writer also sends greetings from Mark (1 Peter 5:13; see Acts 12:12).
- 2. The book of 1 Peter is actually a **LETTER** written by Peter** - Peter is a letter written in normal epistle form and style. The rhetorical and didactic nature of the letter may mean that it was intended to be read aloud to the congregations. It is best to see this letter as a circular type of letter in its present form which was directed to all the churches in the areas mentioned in northern Asia minor.
- 3. The book of 1 Peter was written around **A.D. 64**** - We are able to date the letter with fair accuracy because of recorded world/historical events. We know that the letter corresponds to the Neronian persecution, which helps to date the writing. Tradition holds that both Paul and Peter were victims of persecution under Nero at Rome after the disastrous fire in the city of Rome on July 19 of AD 64. The death of Paul is considered to be before Peter’s. The timing of Paul’s death does not really affect the date of 1 Peter. The letter was written from

“Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13) which was probably a cryptic title for Rome... the head of the then pagan, anti-God world (see Rev. 14:8, 17:5&18).

4. **The book of 1 Peter is written to CHRISTIANS recipient scattered throughout the five Roman provinces of ASIA MINOR** - This would be the area of present day Turkey. The letter actually identifies its recipients. The letter is addressed to those who are from places in northern Asia Minor or modern Turkey (1:1): Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia.
5. **The book of 1 Peter is written to encourage Christians facing suffering through PERSECUTION** - Although 1 Peter does bare the form of a letter, the tone is that of a homiletical, teaching, instructional sermon designed to provide direction for believers under persecution; at times it also includes theological considerations which support the ethical exhortations, and to exhort his readers under persecution to follow the example of Christ whose life was characterized by patient suffering

The role of the church in the midst of suffering couldn't be more important. The mutual comfort, support and encouragement that comes from fellow believers when we are faced with the struggles of this life, the help... sometimes even financial and certainly moral in not only appreciated in tough times, it often get us through these times. This doesn't even take into account the spiritual elements of having brothers and sisters in Christ to walk with through the difficulties of life. It is often said, “I couldn't get through this without the Lord,” of course that is a veiled way of saying all that the Lord provides through His church and other Christians who come along side us and pray for us in times of heartache and struggle. All of that to say, the health of the church is vitally important for any number of reasons, not the least of which is the important part the church plays in the lives of believers being able to navigate life's challenges. I've notice many who profess Christ, who struggle greatly along in their Christian life and walks, who are disconnected from a local body of believer, they never connect their life to a group of Christian in church life, they fail to see the important of church membership and connection, they drift along (sometimes aimlessly and confused) without any connection to the body of Christ, the church.

What is wrong with the church today? Take a few minute to gather your thoughts and offer your response to the question in the space provided below. Then place a check beside all that you feel may a part of what may be wrong with the church today. _____

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hypocritical members | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship styles | <input type="checkbox"/> Legalism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Unbiblical preaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Dissensions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pettiness of members | <input type="checkbox"/> Coldness in worship | <input type="checkbox"/> Worldliness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unfriendly atmosphere | <input type="checkbox"/> Judgmental attitude | <input type="checkbox"/> Liberalism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not people centered | <input type="checkbox"/> To much talk about money | <input type="checkbox"/> Old fashioned |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Program driven | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctrinally ungrounded | <input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant |

Everyone seems to know something is wrong with the church today, and there are varied and reasoned analogies on what that might be. I printed off three articles that state the obvious:

“The American Church in Crisis” by David T. Olson – Based on a book by the same title “The American Church in Crisis.” The book is based on groundbreaking research of more than 200,000 churches in over a 20 year period that shows the problems as well as the potential of the American church. Essentially Olson’s findings affirm the reality that the American church is indeed in crisis and losing ground.

“Crisis on the Churches” by Rod Dreher – Rod Dreher wrote an interesting book entitled, “The Benedictine Option.” Dreher essentially says the church today is in crisis as confidence and trust in religion and religious institutions is at an all-time low. He speaks of the “leadership crisis” in the church today, where the word of God is not preached, but rather a watered-down and more tolerant and user/seeker-friendly gospel of inclusion is preferred. As we water down the truth we water down our relevance and the truth of the gospel.

“Confronting the Current Church Leadership Crisis” by Tim Challies – Tim Challies is a gifted author, pastor, and Christian thinker. R. Albert Mohler calls Challies “one of the finest young evangelical thinkers of our day.” He has written numerous Christian books on the Christian life, spiritual growth, the church including “The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment,” and “The Character of a Christian,” “Set an Example,” “Do More Better: A Practical Guide to Productivity.” In this particular article he addresses what he calls the crisis of leadership among pastors, preachers, and spiritual leaders in the church today... something, he considered one of the great threats to the American church, poor leadership.

And what we hear over and over again today is that good churches are hard to find! I often hear from people, who say how much trouble they’ve had finding a good and healthy church. Sometimes the church lacks vital worship. Often, they could not find a pastor who faithfully preaches God’s Word. Sometimes the church is racked by dissension over petty issues or is shot through with legalism. This is not to say that our church was trouble-free, but perhaps by comparison to many other churches, they felt that it was the healthiest church they had ever been in.

What makes for a healthy church? Many scriptural elements could be listed. Especially important is a strong commitment to God’s Word, our only authority for faith and practice. But what makes a commitment to God’s Word happen? The answer is, strong leadership. Most churches rise and fall with the quality of leadership. But, of course, leaders can’t lead without supportive followers. And, even with strong leaders and supportive followers, that ubiquitous sin, human pride, often gets in the way and causes problems. With those factors in mind, Peter here gives us a prescription for a healthy church:

In a healthy church, the elders will shepherd and the flock will submit, all in a spirit of mutual humility.

The churches to which Peter wrote were facing intense persecution (“fiery ordeal,” 4:12). Such trials test the cohesiveness and strength of a church. To survive, they needed a prescription for spiritual health. Sandwiched between two sections dealing with trials (4:12-19 & 5:6-11), Peter gives this Rx (“Therefore” [5:1], in light of the trials). It focuses primarily on the elders, since

strong pastoral leadership is essential. But there is also a word to the rest of the flock. And, the whole process must be wrapped in what is arguably the chief Christian virtue, humility.

PRESCRIPTION FOR A HEALTHY CHURCH

3 Ingredients in the Prescription for a Healthy Church:

1. **In a healthy church, the elders will shepherd the flock (5:1-4)** - In the New Testament there are three terms used to describe the same office of leadership in the church, each from a slightly different perspective.

3 Terms for Same Office of Leadership in the Church:

- (1) **Elder** - focuses on the character qualities of the man, that he is a mature man of God. As 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 make clear, the main qualification for elders is not that they have impressive spiritual gifts. Rather, it is that they be godly men.
- (2) **Overseer** - (or, “Bishop”; Greek, “episkopos”) is used interchangeably with elder (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7) and looks at the primary function of the office, to superintend matters in the local church.
- (3) **Pastor** - The third term, Pastor (which means “Shepherd”) looks at the function of the elder/overseer from the metaphor of the church as God’s flock. It focuses on the tasks of providing leadership, care, feeding, and protection for God’s people.

In the New Testament, there is always a plurality of elders (overseers, pastors) over the church in a given location. Acts 14:23 reports how Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (plural) in every church (singular). Acts 20:17 tells how Paul called to him “the elders of the church” in Ephesus. In Titus 1:5, Paul reminds Titus how he left him to appoint elders (plural) in every city.

In the New Testament, the church in a city was viewed as a unit. Thus you have the church in Jerusalem, Ephesus, Antioch, etc. Each church may have been broken down into house churches that met all over the city on any given Lord’s Day. But over each church there was a plurality of elders or pastors. Paul says that *“the elders who rule well [should] be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching”* (1 Tim. 5:17). “Honor” (in Greek) meant both “respect” and “price.” As 1 Timothy 5:18 makes clear, elders who labor at preaching and teaching should not only be respected, they also should be paid.

By virtue of their full-time commitment to the work, such elders usually take on the role of leader among leaders in a local church. But they share the task of pastoring or oversight with other qualified men. *It is beyond the scope of this sermon, but I believe Scripture is clear that the position of elder in the local church is reserved for men.* Many are arguing that women can serve in any capacity, even as the teaching pastor of a church. In passing I will just say that such an interpretation of the New Testament never occurred to Christians until the women’s movement became prominent in the world. To me, the arguments for feminism are reading the world into the Word.

Peter points out the requirement, the responsibility and the reward of shepherding God's flock:

3 “R’s” of Serving in Shepherding God’s Flock:

(1) The requirement for shepherding is a close personal experience with Christ (5:1) -

Peter models what he is exhorting: He does not lord it over these men, although as an apostle, he could have asserted his authority. “Apostle” referred to men entrusted with authority from Christ to establish churches. As an apostle (1:1), Peter had authority over these churches. “Elder” relates to a local church. But here he doesn’t flex his apostolic muscle, but exhorts them humbly as a fellow elder. Peter begins by relating his own experiences with Christ as the basis for his exhortation. He had been a witness of Christ’s sufferings and he also was a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed. Some say that Peter did not witness the crucifixion, since he denied Christ and fled. But it is quite possible that Peter crept to the outskirts of the crowd and saw Jesus hanging on the cross. Even if he did not, Peter had witnessed the sufferings of Christ throughout His earthly ministry, including His agony in the Garden, His arrest and mistreatment at His trial. He had seen the scars in the risen Savior’s hands and side. He had personally witnessed the sufferings of Christ. Also, Peter had seen a glimpse of the Savior’s future glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Warren Wiersbe (*Be Hopeful* [Victor Books], pp. 124-125) points out the parallels between Peter’s experiences with Christ and what he writes in chapter 5. Verse 1 takes us to the cross and the transfiguration, as noted. Verse 2 recalls Jesus’ teaching on being the Good Shepherd (John 10), as well as His charge to the restored Peter to shepherd His sheep (John 21:15-17). “Lording it over” the flock (5:3) recalls the silly debates the twelve had about who was the greatest, and the Lord’s teaching about the greatest being the servant of all. “Be clothed with humility” recalls Jesus taking a towel and girding Himself as He washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17). The word about Satan (5:8) recalls Jesus’ warning that Satan would “sift” Peter like wheat (Luke 22:31). The verb, “to perfect” (5:10) is the same word translated “mending their nets” (Matt. 4:21) when the Lord called Peter to follow Him.

So Peter wrote out of his own experiences with Jesus Christ. He was a witness (5:1). A witness doesn’t speculate about religion. A witness relates what he has seen and heard. We have the apostolic witness recorded in the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. An elder who wants to shepherd the flock conscientiously must be a student of the apostolic witness in Scripture, especially as it relates to the cross (“the sufferings of Christ”) and the coming kingdom of Christ (“the glory that is to be revealed”). The cross is at the center of the Christian life and an elder must live by the cross daily and be able to help others to do so. Focusing on the suffering of Christ is the motivation for dealing with sin and for loving Christ more. Focusing on the glory that is to be revealed in Christ’s coming kingdom makes an elder live in holiness and hope in light of Christ’s coming. It is out of an overflowing personal experience of the cross of Christ and His coming kingdom that a man can minister Christ to His flock, the church. An elder must be a man who walks closely with the crucified, risen, and coming Savior.

(2) The responsibility of shepherding is to exercise oversight with the right attitude (5:2-3) - The command, “Shepherd the flock of God,” calls to mind a familiar biblical picture, that God is the Shepherd and His people are His flock (Ps. 23; Ps. 100:3; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:1-24). He has appointed under-shepherds to tend His flock. For us, it is unusual to see a flock of sheep, let alone to know what is involved in caring for them. But shepherding was a familiar, everyday illustration in the biblical world. The shepherd knew his sheep. Jesus, in talking of Himself as the Good Shepherd, said that He called His own sheep by name and they followed Him because they knew His voice (John 10:3-4, 14). At the very least, the task of shepherding involves getting to know people by name, and letting them get to know you. The larger a church, the less likely it is that one pastor can know all the people by name. But, as I said, there should always be a plurality of pastors (elders) per church. Between them, they should know every person. You cannot give adequate pastoral care to a person you do not know. Jesus also said that He led His sheep out to pasture (John 10:3, 9). Shepherding means leading God’s people in the ways of God. Sheep cannot be driven like cattle. They must be led by example (3:3). Shepherding means taking the sheep to the rich pastures of God’s Word, where they can feed and be nourished. The shepherd binds up the wounded and corrects the sheep who cause trouble. He goes after strays and brings them back into the fold. The shepherd is always alert for and guards and defends the flock from enemies that prey upon them. Often such work involves great personal sacrifice and effort. The supreme example is Jesus, who laid down His own life for His sheep. Peter here sums up the shepherding task with the term, “exercising oversight” (5:2; some manuscripts omit this phrase, but there is good evidence for retaining it as original). Oversight does not mean being overlords. The fact that it is “the flock of God” reminds shepherds that they are not the owners and that they must give an account to the Owner. But they must give oversight to the flock under God. The key to giving proper oversight is having the right attitude. Peter here describes this attitude with a series of three contrasts:

3 Contrasts:

1. **“Not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God” (5:2)** A man should not be in leadership out of duty, but out of delight. Paul says that an overseer should “aspire to the office” (1 Tim. 3:1). Yet serving as an overseer is not a matter of self-willed ambition, but rather of the calling of God, as seen in the phrase, “according to God,” which probably means, “according to God’s will.” During times of persecution, an elder and his family would be the first targets. The rest of the time, pastoral leadership is more often the grind of mucking out the stalls rather than the glory of recognition. So an overseer must serve gladly because God has called him to the task, not grudgingly because he was forced into it.
2. **“Not for sordid gain, but with eagerness” (5:2)** The opposite of serving under compulsion is serving eagerly. But some serve eagerly for the wrong reasons, either financial gain (here) or power (next phrase). As I mentioned, Paul taught that it is proper for some elders to be supported financially for their work, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching, which takes a lot of time (1 Tim. 5:17-18). But a man’s motive must not be to make money through the ministry, but rather to serve God with eagerness.

3. **“Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” (5:3)** Some go into ministry because they like the power or status of leadership. I heard a well-known pastor say that he thought that most men in pastoral ministry were insecure and that they were after the affirmation they received from their people. I thought, “If he’s right, we’re in big trouble!” A man who goes into the pastorate or who serves as an elder because he wants power or strokes is not qualified to serve. The word translated “allotted to your charge” meant “apportioned by lot,” and thus came to refer to anything portioned out. It underscores the fact that the flock belongs to God and is entrusted to overseers as those who will answer to God. Rather than leading by lording, they are to lead by example. This does not mean that elders can never exercise authority (Titus 1:11; 2:15). There are times when they must take a stand and say, “We are not going to allow this practice or this false teaching to go on in this church.” Sometimes they must enforce church discipline or confront spiritual bullies. But their normal mode of leadership should be their example of godly living. We need to remember that leadership is more a responsibility than a privilege. If a man is into leadership for the perks, whether status, money, or power, he is abusing a sacred trust. Leadership, whether in the church, the home, or the government, means that you’re the one whom God holds accountable for the direction of things under your care. If that thought doesn’t cause you to break out in a cold sweat, then you’ve got wrong ideas about leadership! Thus, the requirement for shepherding is a close personal experience with Christ. The responsibility of shepherding is to exercise oversight with the right attitude.

Notice **verses 2 and 3** again. Here is what Peter tells us concerning the characteristics of an elder, overseer, pastor who does it well... we may also say that these same characteristics should be seen in the lives of believers who follow the examples of both Christ and the servant leaders He provides. Here is **verse 2-3**, *“²Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”*

After the motivation (v.1) comes the exhortation in verses 2-3 (and 4). Since the primary objective of shepherding is feeding... that is teaching, every elders (pastor) must be able to teach (see John 21:15-17). Involved with the feeding of the flock is also protecting the flock. In both duties, it must be remembered that the flock belongs to God, not to the pastor. God entrusts some of His flock to the pastor of a church to lead, care for, and feed (v.3). Peter, really lays out some temptations that must be avoided by pastor, church leaders, in so doing is giving us a picture of what their leadership ought to look like.

3 Warning Signs of Poor Leadership:

1. **The characteristic of laziness - “not by compulsion but willingly”** Specifically, Peter may be warning the elders against the first danger – laziness. The divine calling, along with the urgency of the task, should prevent laziness and indifference.
2. **The inclination toward dishonest finances - “not for dishonest gain, but eagerly”** False teachers are always motivated by a second danger, money, and use their power and position to rob people of their own wealth. Scripture is clear that churches should

pay their shepherds well (1 Cor. 9:7-14), 1 Tim. 5:17,18), but a desire for undeserved money or dishonest wages must never be a motive for ministers to serve.

3. **The signs of demagoguery (*manipulator, agitator, firebrand, inciter, instigator, pushy authoritarian 'have to have my way' style of leadership*) - “not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples”** This is the third major temptation for a pastor. In this context, “lords,” means to dominate someone or some situation. It implies leadership by manipulation and intimidation. Rather, true spiritual leadership is by example.

Here is how I would say it... a good pastor is one who:

Signs of a good pastor/leader:

1. **Works hard at his calling**
2. **Trusts for the Lord to provide for his needs**
3. **And leads by example**

Anything obviously outside of that should be cause for caution, a sort of “red flag” of warning that something may not be all right. Church can easily fall prey to those today who would take advantage rather than provide Christ-like leadership and ministry to the body of Christ.

- (3) **The reward for shepherding is the unfading crown of glory (5:4) - The rewards for the work don't come until the Chief Shepherd returns.** That Christ is the “Chief Shepherd” again reminds us that we are only under-shepherds, accountable to the Chief. The word “appears” is literally, “made visible.” We presently do not see the Chief Shepherd, although He is present. But soon He will be made visible, when He comes again in power and glory, to shepherd the nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). Thus our motivation for serving as pastors must never be to receive the praise of men, but only the desire to hear on that great day, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” Then we will share in His glory! Unlike earthly rewards which fade, that crown will last forever. Much more could be said. But, in a healthy church, the elders will actively shepherd the flock, which is an awesome responsibility! But the flock must willingly follow:

2. **In a healthy church, the flock will submit to the leadership of elders (5:5a) -** There is some debate over why Peter singles out “young men.” My understanding is that he assumed that the women would be in submission to the elders; but young men are more prone to resent their authority. Younger men are often more impatient and idealistic than the more mature men in leadership. They may not understand why the elders don't move more quickly. So he singles them out as representing all in the church who are not elders and tells them to submit. Submission does not mean mute acceptance of decisions. There is a place for expressing disagreement and voicing concerns. But submission is primarily an attitude of respect and a recognition of rank. If the elders go against a clear principle of Scripture, then the flock is responsible to appeal to them based upon the Word. If an elder is violating Scripture, he should be removed from office, since no human authority transcends God's authority. But normally, the flock needs to submit to and cooperate with the elders as they

seek to follow the Lord's will for His church (Heb. 13:17). I fear that we, in democratic America, have gotten away from this important biblical principle of proper authority and submission in the local church.

3. **In a healthy church, everyone will relate to one another in a spirit of humility (5:5b)** - "Clothe" is a unique word that referred to an apron which a servant would put on before doing his tasks. No doubt Peter was recalling Jesus taking the towel and girding Himself as He washed the disciples' feet. Humility (lit., "lowliness of mind") is the robe with which we all must gird ourselves. So far as I know, the Bible never exhorts us to think more highly of ourselves than we do or to improve our self-esteem, as we're being told to do by many Christian writers. But it often tells us that we need to humble ourselves. I disagree with the comment often made that humility is elusive because, just when you think you're humble, you've lost it. Both Jesus and Paul called themselves humble (Matt. 11:29; Acts 20:19). The best biblical definition of humility is 2 Cor. 3:5: "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God." Humility is being aware of our own insufficiency, but trusting in Christ's all-sufficiency. I suppose that Moses had "low self-esteem" when he told the Lord that he couldn't speak well enough to lead Israel out of Egypt (Exod. 4:10-12). God didn't say, "Moses, you need to work on your self-esteem. You're really terrific! You can do it!" Instead, God confronted Moses with his lack of trust in God's ability. God didn't correct Moses' low view of himself; He challenged Moses' inadequate view of God. People with so-called "low self-esteem" are too self-focused. They need to focus on God's adequacy. Christian leaders have always recognized this. Chrysostom called humility "the foundation of our philosophy." Augustine said, "If you ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, first, second, third, and always I would answer, Humility." Calvin, who regarded pride as the chief vice and humility as the preeminent virtue, said, "But I require only that, laying aside the disease of self-love and ambition, by which he is blinded and thinks more highly of himself than he ought [cf. Gal. 6:3], he rightly recognize himself in the faithful mirror of Scripture [cf. James 1:22-25]" (the above quotes are in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* II:II:11; see also, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* [Baker], p. 537). Jonathan Edwards says that the whole gospel and all of God's dealings with us are calculated to bring about in us a lowly attitude toward ourselves and that those who lack this attitude are destitute of true religion, whatever profession they may make (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [Banner of Truth], 1:294). If you think these men too strong, go back to 1 Peter 5:5b: He quotes Proverbs 3:34 which (bringing out the nuance of the Greek text) says that "God sets Himself in battle against those who lift themselves up, but He gives grace to those who see themselves as lowly." Nothing could be worse than to have God set Himself against you! Nothing is more essential than receiving His grace! The way to be the object of His grace is to humble yourself before Him and before others. It also is the chief virtue for harmonious relationships in the church.

CONCLUSION

Thus I exhort myself and my fellow elders: Shepherd God's flock! I exhort the church: Be subject to your elders! I exhort us all: Put on the servant's apron of humility! That's the prescription for a healthy church.

Discussion Questions

1. When does shepherding cross the line into authoritarianism? Is this a danger?
2. Agree/disagree: American Christians do not understand the concept of submitting to spiritual authority.
3. Do some people need to “improve their self-esteem”? Cite biblical evidence. What does true humility involve?

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