

FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS

1 PETER 5:5-14

Once upon a time, a man built a pond in the middle of his pasture.

On a cold wintry day, a shepherd, grazing his sheep, decided to take a short cut across the pasture. He wanted to lead his sheep over the icy pond, but the sheep wouldn't follow. The owner of the pasture saw what was happening... He pointed to the shepherd and his sheep, and then said to his wife, "Let's be careful, that guy is trying to pull the wool over our ice."

You know what kind of a joke that was... A really baaaaaad joke!

Last week we talked about shepherds. This week we'll talk about sheep. In 5:2 Peter calls the Church "the flock of God." As followers of Jesus we're sheep in God's pasture. And God has set "shepherds" or "pastors" over the sheep. God's flock is made up of both sheep and shepherds.

The sheep need good shepherds. The shepherds need good sheep.

Last week we learned how to spot a good shepherd.

Don't let anyone *pull the wool over your eyes* a faithful shepherd serves willingly. He *feeds* the sheep - he doesn't *beat* the sheep. He isn't in it for the money – he loves God and people. A true shepherd is an *example*, not an *exception*. He *leads* - he doesn't *lord* - or boss the sheep around.

And the shepherd isn't looking for a reward from the flock. He's not expecting the sheep to take up a collection for him. His eyes are on the Chief Shepherd. He knows when Jesus appears he'll receive his crown.

But if you're a sheep and you want to do something nice for your shepherd here's what you can do... be a good sheep, not a baaaad sheep.

Don't try to *pull the wool over his eyes* either. Don't just schmooze him on Sundays - then get together with other sheep to take bite out of him.

Be submissive. Be humble. Be vigilant. Be steady even in tough times. In the flock of God we need *sincere shepherds* and *willing sheep*.

Last week we discussed the shepherds - **faithful leaders**. This morning we'll close 1 Peter with how to be a good sheep - **faithful followers**.

And Peter begins his advice to the sheep – his sheep talk - in verse 5, **“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders.”**

The job of a sheep is to let the shepherd lead. In a word, **“submit”**

In verse 5 Peter puts this whole matter in the context of kids and elders.

And doesn't life itself teach us that we all should respect the wisdom of people older than us? Gray hair and wrinkles doesn't mean out-dated and obsolete. It means the owner has been around the block a time or two.

He or she has learned a few lessons that could be important to me.

Here's the problem though, "*younger people*" are notorious know-it-alls.

Once, a parent hung a poster on his teenager's bedroom door, "TEENAGERS! Tired of being hassled by your stupid parents? ACT NOW, move out, get a job, pay your own bills... while you still know everything."

It's been said, "Insanity is hereditary - you get it from your teenagers."

A younger person *talks a lot and listens a little*.

One teenage girl was always on the phone. Every conversation lasted over an hour. One night her dad reprimanded her, "Honey, limit your calls to 20 minutes!" The next night the phone rang and the daughter answered.

The father immediately put her on the timer. And he was surprised when she hung up in only 20 minutes. The shocked dad asked his daughter, which of her friends called? The girl replied, "Oh, that wasn't a friend, it was a wrong number!" Young people *talk a lot and listen a little*.

Or probably more accurate for today - they *text a ton and listen a little*.

And this is true of both *chronological teenagers* and *spiritual teenagers*. Maybe you didn't know it, but there's such a thing as a spiritual teenager.

These are the believers who may be older age-wise, but they've got the "*know-it-all*" attitude of a teen. They're quick to

criticize the pastor. They cop an attitude when things don't go their way. They lack the big picture, and evaluate every church decision from a *"me-centered perspective."*

When these folks were first saved their church could do no wrong. Now that they've been around awhile their church leaders can do nothing right.

Understand, I know a lot about spiritual teenagers because I was one for a long time. Even after becoming a pastor I thought I knew it all.

But being a pastor can be humbling at times. Quite frankly, it can knock the stuffing out of you. And after a few years I realized there were a few gaps in my understandings. I needed to listen up and start taking notes.

I decided I'd try to learn *as much as I could* from *as many people as I could*. That's still my attitude. Why reinvent the wheel every time you do something new? Why not avail yourself to other people's experiences?

In fact, everybody learns through experience – either *your experiences* or *the experience of other people*. A wise person avoids some lumps and learns from someone else's experience. He or she doesn't have to learn everything the hard way. The School of Hard Knocks has expensive tuition.

And this is why God places shepherds over sheep. Elders come in two varieties - *age-wise and sage-wise*. *"Elder"* doesn't just mean older.

An elder can also be a church leader. *"Elder"* is a function in the church. A young man can serve as an elder if he has a measure of godly wisdom.

And here's a sheep's responsibility to the shepherd, "submit yourself to your elders." In short, **Let the shepherd lead.** Get behind your leader's initiatives. Support his ventures of faith. Trust that he's heard from God.

As kids we grew up playing follow the leader, yet along the way from youth to adult we grew cynical of leadership – especially church leadership.

I'm sure, part of it are the scandals and charlatans we've seen. But part of the problem lies in our own heart... *You have to be humble to be led...*

Once I was talking to Jon Courson just after Pastor Jon resigned his very successful church in Oregon to move to Southern California to serve as an assistant to Pastor Chuck. I asked Jon, "Will you have a tough time submitting to another pastor after you've been the leader for so long?"

I'll never forget his answer, **It's not submission until you disagree.**

It's easy to talk about humility and submission and loyalty – as long as there's no conflict or difference of opinion. The test comes when there's a disagreement. This is true in a church... on a team... in a marriage.

Will I humble myself, trust God, get on board - or will I buck the decision, assert my own independence, and derail the greater good? Peter knows what we ought to do. *Younger people, submit yourselves to your elders.*

Then he says, **Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility...** Younger folks need to submit

to the gray hairs and church leaders, but elders should also submit to the people under them.

If you're an older person don't just sit back and expect younger folks to bow to your whims. The older set should want to cater to younger tastes.

I hate to say it, but in the church I see more of the unbending, me-first, "teenager mindset" among older folks than among younger members.

Older people can get stuck in their routine. They like it their way. They resist change. And their refusal to submit can hinder a church's growth.

I believe every church should be deliberate about reaching young people. They're the lifeblood of the church. Remember, **The Church is always one generation from extinction.** Its imperative we pass on our faith.

Chances are, in 30 years, I'll be pushing up daisies. That's why I need to be cultivating a few replacements to carry on God's work in this church.

I hope you know, not everything we've done over the years has been a style I liked. I'm getting older and my tastes are not always cutting edge, but I know the bigger picture, and I'm willing to be flexible to reach people.

Humility understands it's **not just about me**. There's more at stake.

Sheep need to submit to shepherds, and at times spiritual shepherds need to submit to their sheep. We all need to be humble and submissive to one another. We have different roles, but none of us are above another.

I want you to know my door is always open to your feedback or rebuke.

I don't live in an ivory tower. I'm not untouchable. Leave me a message and I'll call you. Send an email - I'll reply. Hang around on Sunday nights after the study, and we'll sit down and talk. I care about your thoughts.

I hope you can learn a lot from me, but I also can learn a lot from you.

Peter goes on to encourage us, *"be clothed with humility..."* and then he tells us why... *"For 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"*

And understand the word *"resist"* means *"oppose."* God opposes the proud. It's not just that He works around them. He's outright against them.

If you're a little puffed-up, and stuck on yourself - don't be surprised, when you line up for life, that you look across the line of scrimmage, and see God on the other side of the ball growling at you! Yo! I want to be on God's team – not the other team. No one fights against God and wins.

And God's team colors are humility. Peter passes out the uniforms. He hands us our jersey. If we want to play for God, *"be clothed with humility."*

Here's your choice... *humility or humiliation.* You can *humble yourself* or *God will humble you.* In Matthew 23:12, Jesus put it, *"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

In High School I was one more stuck-up, self-righteous, prideful jerk.

And I can remember God's numerous attempts to humble me. When I played basketball I always liked to show off that I was a starter on the team, so during lay-ups I'd head to the bench and take off my warm-up pants first.

I'll never forget one game going to the bench, and ripping off my warm-up pants, only to discover I'd forgotten to put my gym shorts on underneath. There I was standing in front of the crowd in nothing but my jockeys. I was so humiliated and embarrassed I scored just two points. I was slam dunked.

And over and over, God tried to get my attention. His attempts became *more severe and less humorous*. Like a wild colt, God had to break my stubbornness. But He was faithful... *after battering my dreams, and letting me run off people I loved, and letting me make a mess of my life...* I broke.

It was springtime 1980, I was driving down 5 Forks, and I pulled into a gravel parking lot. I knelt at a concrete picnic table, and surrendered what was left of my life to Jesus... There were no sparks or fireworks, but I experienced *the blessing of brokenness*. And I've never been the same!

I only wish I hadn't been so stubborn. I could've spared myself a lot of pain. If you harden your heart our loving God will become a sledgehammer.

In Matthew 21:44 Jesus spoke of Himself, when He told a group of stubborn, self-righteous, hard-hearted Pharisees, "Whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

Again here's your choice: **broke to pieces**, or **ground to powder**? The Bible refers to God's people as clay in the Potter's hand, but if the clay is hard and unworkable it's worthless. It has to be broken, softened.

You've been praying to know God's will, but perhaps an unpleasant work has to be done *on you* - and *in you* - before you're ready for His plan.

Let me answer the question, "*broken to pieces or grinded to powder?*"

Pieces are better than *powder*. It's been said, "**Jesus can fix a broken heart if you give Him all the pieces.**" Humble yourself before God. Don't make Jesus humble you. *There may be nothing left when He's finished.*

Peter says in verse 6, "**Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,**" If you humble yourself under God's mighty hand, He'll see to it you get exalted... maybe not the next day, or the next month, or the next year... but "*in due time.*"

Here's the key to humility – **living in the shadow of God's mighty hand.**

At high noon when the heat is on, and the sun is hot, and the pressure of our circumstances is rising; the shadows all but disappear... We forget about God's mighty hand, and foolishly take matters into our own hands.

But humility is remembering the hand above us – God's mighty hand.

If it's all about my hands – and what they can hold, and what they can do – I'll want to grab what I can. I'll grab while the grabbing is good.

But when I factor God's mighty hands into the equation I can humble myself. I can rest. I can put others first, and consider the bigger picture.

I'm assured that God's hands are *big enough* and *mighty enough* to get me what I need, when I need it - "*in due time.*" In the meantime, I can serve God's higher interests. Exaltation is in His hands. That brings me peace.

This is why Peter tells us in verse 7, "*Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you...*" Here's the key to happiness – and some folks waste their whole life trying to find this simple key - *turn your worries over to God.*

Some people try to find happiness by *eliminating troubles and worries.*

According to Psychology Today, in 2008, 4000 books were published on the subject of obtaining happiness – that's up from 50 in the year 2000.

In a Newsweek article Julie Baird commented that despite our Oprah cheeriness, and positive thinking, and visualizing greatness, and life coaches, and prosperity theology - Americans as a whole are gloomier.

She concludes, "*We're urging positivity... while our circumstances are rotten.*" Here's the truth our culture – even some Christians - have been conditioned to ignore... *just wishing your troubles away won't make them go away.* Julie's article suggests "*mass delusion*" has taken over America.

Remember Peter was writing to people with real problems. He doesn't write glibly, and tell his readers to look on the sunny side. It's hard to deny the confiscation of property, and outright discrimination, and persecution.

No, Peter tells the battered believers reading his letter to *own* their cares and problems - but then *cast them* on a God who cares for them.

You need to take your cares and put them into that mighty hand of God under which you've bowed. And you keep putting them there... because they have a way of crawling out and coming back. They're like a stray cat.

Have you ever tried to get rid of a cat, yet the critter kept finding its way back to your house? *Know why?* It's because you fed it, and milked it, and nurtured the cat, before you decided to let it go. That's why it came back.

And that's why your cares come back after you've supposedly turned them over to God. You've got to stop feeding them, and milking them.

Live under the shadow of God's mighty hand – not in the light of what you've put in His hand. *Take your cares and turn them into prayers.*

Once, a friend gave me great advice. "Sandy, *always turn your cares over to God before you go to bed. He's going to be up all night anyway.*"

And speaking of cats... Peter also had a problem with stray cats...

He tells us in verse 8 “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

It reminds of the female lion tamer. She was a drop-dead, beautiful blonde who had a way with animals. With a flick of the whip she made wild lions lay their head in her lap, and gently nuzzle and cuddle up next to her.

Once when her show was over, a heckler shouted, “Ah, that’s nothing! I can do that!” The ringmaster challenged him, “OK, if you can do that, step into the ring.” The man answered “Sure, Just get the lion out of there first!”

I can relate. When I get home I like to cuddle up with my lion tamer.

I’ve got a drop-dead gorgeous blonde with whom I love to snuggle – but there’s no snuggling and cuddling in my home, until I get the lion out. And likewise, there’s no peace in the church until we deal with the mangy lion.

Satan is “the roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” And he roams into our homes and church trying to wreak havoc and stop the snuggling.

The devil hates snuggling – marital snuggling and Christian snuggling. This is why maintaining happiness requires us being sober and vigilant.

This world is not a playground, it’s a battleground. And we have an “adversary” who wants to do us harm. Satan *distracts* and *discourages*.

Jungle experts say the roaring lion is not the one you worry about. He's just the decoy. When innocent little Bambi comes strolling down the path the roaring lion jumps out – he snarls and growls – makes fierce noises.

But that's all he can do is roar. He's old and toothless. He still remembers how to look menacing, but he's as harmless as a kitty cat.

Yet the old roaring lion strikes fear into the heart of little Bambi. When she sees him standing in the path, she spins around and flees in the opposite direction - right into the jaws of the young lions waiting for the kill.

Christians need to understand, Satan is a roaring lion! He's toothless.

Jesus has de-clawed the lion. He's now more like an alley cat. By the power of Jesus, on Calvary's cross, Satan was rendered harmless.

The only way he can defeat you now is through fear and intimidation.

Satan still knows how to muster a good roar... And if you succumb to your fears or doubts – he'll have his way. He'll distract you from the path your own. The devil will discourage you in your walk with God. You'll spin around in the opposite direction, and run straight into the teeth of trouble.

This is why we need to **“Resist him, steadfast in the faith...”** – verse 9. Don't *run*, **“resist!”** Stand strong. Refuse to back down or turn around.

Be steadfast in your faith. Dig into the batter's box. Expect some opposition. Find some sure footing. Brace yourself for the long haul.

James 4:7 teaches us, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." This is a promise, if we put up a strong resistance, Satan will be forced to flee.

I love Ephesians 6. Paul describes the spiritual armor God supplies us - the *belt of truth, helmet of salvation, sandals of peace, sword of the Spirit...*

God's protective armor covers our head, chest, feet, guts, legs – every part of our anatomy except... *the back*. That's why if we tuck tail and retreat we make ourselves vulnerable. Resist the devil – never, ever retreat.

Verse 9 adds "knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." Here's some encouragement, as a Christian you're not alone. Believers in all ages, and in every culture, have had to fight the same three enemies – *the world, the flesh, and the devil*.

Similar prayers have been offered in *struggles similar* to yours – and those who prayed them have received help and strength from God.

Peter starts winding down his letter in verse 10, "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." Notice, the four ways Peter asks prays for his readers... Here's how I pray for us...

“Perfect” or *“complete.”* God, finish what You have started in our lives.

“Establish,” make us *“unmovable.”* God, put an end to our shaky faith.

“Strengthen,” add muscle to our faith so we can do great works of God.

And *“Settle”* us, Lord! Help us get comfortable in our new skin. As believers now, help us embrace all that our identity in Christ involves.

“And God, help us look to the future...” Do you see it - what your future holds? I can see your ultimate end... and it's not a *foreclosure, or a lay-off, or a downsizing, or a sickness, or a spate of trouble...* In Christ Jesus, God has called you and I - and all true believers - to join in *“His eternal glory.”*

That means *heaven* - and *new bodies*, and *new capacities*, and *new environments*, and *new appetites*. It means *the breath of God, the likeness of God, the love of God, the pleasures of God.* *“Glory”* means *“heaviness.”*

One day, all the blessings God's mighty hand can hold will be ours.

But, *“when,”* - our concern is always *“when.”* We want it now - right now. Yet Peter says, *“after you have suffered a while...”* - *in just a little while...*

And compared to God's *“eternal glory,”* our remaining suffering is just a short while... You say, *“Wait a minute! A bankruptcy will scar my credit for seven long years... my baby will live with this rest of his life... this sickness can never be cured. How can you say the time remaining is just a while?”*

Your time of hardship may not be “*a little while*” on any earthly timeline, but compared to eternity whatever suffering is required lasts just “**a while.**”

This is what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:17, “**For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.**” In Paul’s 30 year ministry he was stoned, and robbed, and shipwrecked, and beaten multiple times, and imprisoned.

Oftentimes, he went without sleep, and shelter, and food, and warmth, and respect... but in looking back it was all just a blip on the screen compared to the glory, and beauty, and blessing that awaited him.

You need to realize your first full second of heaven will be so grand, so glorious, so far beyond what you could dare imagine or possibly describe – that it’ll more than make up for ten lifetimes of suffering and persecution.

If you’re full of anxiety today, kick back, chill out - **in a while you’ll see...**

Peter closes with a few personal remarks. Which means **Peter was a pastor with pals.** Peter had friends and he cared about his friends, so much so, that He used up a little space in the sacred text to give them a mention.

He writes in verse 12, “**By Silvanus (or Silas), our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.**” Silas was also Paul’s friend. He was Paul’s traveling companion on his last two missionary journeys.

But here he's with Peter. He may've been Peter's stenographer. He penned the letter as Peter dictated it to him. This letter was *"by Silvanus."*

Verse 13, *"She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you..."*

Its possible Peter wrote this letter from the literal city of Babylon. Yet there's no record or tradition that Peter ever traveled as far east as Babel.

A better interpretation would be to take his reference as *"spiritual Babylon."* Rome, a city Peter did visit, became a later capitol of Babylonian paganism... *"She who is in Babylon"* would be the church at Rome.

Then Peter writes, the Church *"greet you; and so does Mark my son."*

Peter had the same mentoring relationship with Mark that Paul had with Timothy. John Mark was Peter's protégé. He was Peter's son in the faith.

Notice, Peter was an elder cultivating younger people to replace him.

The early church fathers, **Ireneaus and Eusebius**, tell us that Mark's Gospel was actually the *reflections of Peter that were recorded by Mark*.

The letter closes, *"Greet one another with a kiss of love."* Not a *kiss of lust*, but a *kiss of love*... Four times in the NT we're told, **"Greet one another with a holy kiss."** And you can tell the difference in kisses...

A holy kiss is pure. It's compassionate, not passionate. It's caring, not craving. And a holy kisser doesn't just target the cute girls, but everybody.

Of course, customs differ over time and culture. In the Middle East you'll see men pecking on the cheek. Any of you guys kiss me on the cheek, and I'll probably pop you in the nose. I'll take a handshake from the dudes.

But here's the point for us today, in the NT church it wasn't enough just to say you loved one another - you expressed that love in a tangible way.

In America, Christians think we're going out of the way to shake hands. *And a hug...* that's over-the-top. We save hugs for weddings and funerals.

But I think if Peter were among us he'd expect more... maybe a high-5, or fist pump, or a chest butt... at the very least, a hearty handshake.

Peter signs off. "Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen."

Here's 1 Peter in a nutshell... Don't let Satan pull the wool you're your eyes. When the fiery trial comes - and it will - don't think some strange thing has happened to you... Remember, **Life is a test. It's only a test.**