

“Leaders are Learners”
1 Peter 5:1-11
Series: Hope Rising May 30, 2021
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Despite all the progress, all the experience and all we have learned, we still have so many people struggling. Exhaustion and irritability. A drastic change in your sense of smell. Nausea and sickness. Of course, we all know what I’m referring to “New Parent Disease.” Whether you are the mother or the father, you must get used to the fact you aren’t going to get as much sleep as you are used to. Your sense of smell either becomes over sensitive, or it is completely deadened as a protective reaction.

It is usually more difficult with the first child, but there are no guarantees the cycle won’t repeat with subsequent children. So, what do we do? How do we handle it? How do we cope with the stress? There are books and magazines with tips. We can speak with doctors and other experts to help us through it. Some things we learn as we go. We try different things – we make it up as we go along – we just deal with it.

I remember one time I was getting ready to take Lizz to daycare. I was in my dress shirt when she threw up on me. I cleaned her up, put her in her crib, went to wash and change my shirt. I picked her back up, and she threw up on me again. So, I cleaned her up, put her in her crib, went to wash and change my shirt. An experienced parent would have had a towel on the shoulder to begin with. An intelligent one would have grabbed the towel before the second incident. After I changed for the third time, I felt a little more experienced. I’m still working on the intelligent part.

Most of us end up relying on people we know who have been through the struggles themselves: Friends, siblings, and yes – parents. We try the suggestions these “experts” make. Sleep when the baby sleeps. Take cat naps. Tag team with your spouse. Accept help from grandma. It makes sense to seek help from somebody that has already been through the same struggles and suffering you are going through. The same can be said of our walk of faith.

Today we are finishing our sermon series titled, “Hope Rising”, looking at chapter 5, verses 1 to 11. It would be easy as we dive into this chapter to decide this doesn’t apply – because Peter is addressing the Elders. When using an aging concept, many of us would think an Elder is somebody 10 or 20 years older. “I’m not an “Elder”. My dad is.” If we are looking at it as a member of Woodside, our thoughts might go to those who are ordained – Elders, of course, plus Pastors or Deacons. But it could also be a church director, a growth group leader, or a recurring mission or ministry participant. It also describes the person who is just a little further along in their walk. Sure, the person that has been active here for 15 or 20 years is looked at as an elder. But the person attending their first growth group meeting probably looks at the rest of the group as elders. It can be relative.

⁵ To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed:

In chapter 4 Peter talks about suffering for being a Christian. In 5 he writes how we can handle it. Peter is reaching out to the elders in the church. But notice he is not raising himself up as anybody special. He is saying, "I'm like you."

² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them -

First and foremost, understand these are God's people we are talking about – his flock. They are not servants to be ordered about. A shepherd's job is to take care of the sheep he is assigned to, to watch over and care for them. To protect the sheep from danger. But as elders it is more than that. The verb "shepherd" means to guide, or to direct.

Elders are the shepherds of the church. Promoting growth – in our relationship with God and in our walk with Christ. That doesn't come from attending service for an hour every week. It's not about joining a growth group to become a bible scholar and show people how much we know. We attend services and bible studies to learn more about our faith, and then take it out there to live and share it. Our elders help with our choices and decisions. One of the things I have always appreciated about Woodside, is that when I've approached Doug, or other leaders, about a new idea or mission the red tape is almost non-existent. The two primary questions I have been asked are, "Is it about Christ?", and "How can Woodside help?"

² not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock.

These are three of the things that get in the way of leadership – the barriers. Being excited about what we are doing. "not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be."

We do our deeds because we want to, not because we must or are paid to do so. In John 10:11-13 Jesus says,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep."

Not grudgingly, but willingly. Don't get me wrong. It isn't always easy. Most of the time I'm excited to go into the prison for worship. But there have been occasions where I've had long tough days at work and questioned if I have the energy to go into the prison that particular night. And almost every time that has happened the Holy Spirit lights a fire at the service and reminds me why I continue.

Are we Eager – “not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;”

Those who serve understand. There is a joy from serving that changes you. These past 15 months or so have been difficult for so many of us. And while there have been health and financial issues as well as isolation to deal with, it’s been more than that. I’ve missed having the opportunity to serve. No prison services, no Frankford/Kensington Recovery Café and no Recovery Worship Services for a year. Two weeks ago, here in this parking lot, we had a return of the Recovery Worship Service and Luncheon. It can be a long and tiring day. There is a lot of preparation leading up to it. The day itself usually has some emotional moments that can be draining. And who actually enjoys clean-up time? And yet I am already looking forward to our next one on August 22nd. Am I crazy? Maybe. But the joy I get from it makes it worth it.

Examples:

³ not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock.

One of the reasons people reject Christianity is the hypocrisy they see in people who claim to be Christians. Some of it is hard and clear hypocrisy. Church leaders who preach on Sundays yet are cheating on their spouses. Preachers asking for money from their congregations to help the less fortunate, while their personal bank accounts rival those on Wall Street. But it is just as prevalent, if not more, in the rank and file. Do you go to church Sunday morning, and then spend the afternoon cursing your favorite Philadelphia team for disappointing again? Perhaps you serve at a soup kitchen, and then flip off the guy in front of you as you drive home. Or do you write a check out to your church but keep the \$10 change at the drive-through – you know, the change that should have been only \$5. Those are the bad examples.

Peter is telling us to live as good examples. How we live is much more important, and telling, than what we say. If our parents warn us of the dangers of smoking as they light up a cigarette, the lesson is lost. For good or bad, the young follow the example of those they look up to. As church elders, we have the same effect on people. Our lives reflect our faith. The true believer has God at the center of everything they do. Though it is just a novel, I love the way Paul Young has Jesus explain it in, “The Shack.”

“I don't want to be first among a list of values; I want to be at the center of everything. When I live in you, then together we can live through everything that happens to you. Rather than the top of a pyramid, I want to be the center of a mobile, where everything in your life - your friends, family, occupation, thoughts, activities - is connected to me but moves with the wind, in and out and back and forth, in an incredible dance of being.”

⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

There is a reward promised us. It’s not money, or fame. It isn’t a perfect life, free from pain. Earlier chapters made that clear. It is the truth and knowledge that when Jesus returns, we have a place reserved for us. As Jesus promised in John 14:2

² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

But Peter isn't laying all the responsibility on the elders.

⁵ In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders.

There is that word again: submit. We've seen it a few times in recent sermons.

Submitting means, we are agreeing to listening and learning from others. We submit to our elders because they probably have more knowledge, experience, or both.

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Humility – the act of being humble. We all fall short of this at times. We think our name, station, position makes us more important than others. Sometimes we don't even recognize it.

A few years ago, Michelle and I were greeting at the welcome desk on a Sunday morning. A couple I didn't recognize came up with their children. The father, addressing me by name, asked me where the children were supposed to go during the service. I explained where the Sunday school classes were and the timing. After a few pleasantries, they moved on and went into the Vineyard. After they walked away, I turned to Michelle and shared it makes me feel bad when other people obviously know who I am, and yet I don't know their names. Michelle gave me “that look” and then pointed at my chest stating, “You're wearing a name tag. Get over yourself.”

We too often think we know it all. But if we humble ourselves so we can be helped by others with more experience – our parents and church elders. The more we allow others to help us, the more likely we will submit ourselves to God's help.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

It is never too early to begin that discipline. The first step is to be aware. There will always be temptations to pull you away from your walk. Sometimes it is obvious, and we can make a clear decision – yes or no; towards God or away from him. Other times it is deceptive. The whisper that doesn't seem so bad. And yet suddenly you find yourself further and further away from God. In both cases, if you are not alert and on the lookout for the enemy you are in no position to resist him. And the way to resist him, is by way of your faith and knowing you are not alone. We have brothers and sisters on the same journey. God is looking over you; Jesus is walking beside you, and the Holy Spirit resides in you.

We cannot grow in our faith without the help of others. That is why it is impossible to be a “Do it yourself” Christian. We all need the help and support around us, and who can help more

with the growth of our faith than those walking the path in front of us? Realize this as well – no matter how far along you are in your walk, there are elders in front of you who can help you. And no matter how new you are to your faith, there is probably somebody who looks up to you as an elder. Recognize your limits, but don't use them as an excuse to not be of service to somebody else.

Look for people in your life who can help you, and who you can help.

1. Find a prayer partner, or partners. This could be a spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend. Somebody you are working with in other aspects of your life. Growing in your faith together grows your relationship together, and with God. But it could be somebody else. A member of your growth group is always a good choice. Learning to trust that person and know you can be there to help, or to be helped. Somebody to share your struggles with, and your successes.
2. Do you have a Timothy? Timothy was a companion of Paul's who traveled with him and was taught by him. We usually reference "a Timothy" as somebody we are grooming to take over a ministry or mission position we perform. And that is something we strive to do. But that person is also somebody you are helping to grow in their faith. You are, or at least can be a teacher; a guide; and example.
3. A mentor, a Barnabas. In the same way we help those who are farther behind in their walk, we also reach out to our elders for our own growth. In this, it is not necessary if your elder is older than you. I came back to my faith at the age of 47. There were plenty of people at Woodside younger than me who helped me to grow. Look for somebody to lead you, to encourage you in your faith.

At various times in our lives we will be all three of these

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.