



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 1 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair Wk. 5

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Message Title: Leading in a Culture of Despair Pt. 1

Release Date: Tuesday, 10/1/19

Over the last couple of weeks, we've talked about the contrast and mindset between those on a cruise ship, like The Love Boat, and those on a battleship. So, again, if you're on a cruise ship, who are the most important people to you? The pastry chef?...the entertainment director?...maybe the celebrities that are on the cruise ship?...but when people start shooting bullets, when the missiles start coming in, when the battle rages, you don't need a pastry chef and you don't need an entertainment director. What you need in that moment are leaders. That's what we want to talk about.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Peter, Chapter 5. As you're doing that, I just want to refer to Acts Chapter 20. It's a story about Paul planting churches. He's planted the church in Ephesus; he's been there three years, and now gives this very emotional speech as he is ready to depart. He's appointed elders and tells them it's time for him to leave. This was the pattern of establishing churches. They would appoint elders and move on, and what he says to them is that when he leaves, the wolves are going to move in. They're going to seek to devour the sheep, and it is the responsibility of the elders to protect the sheep from the wolves. He says the wolves are going to come from without and the wolves are going to come from within. The calling of the elder is to protect the sheep from the wolves. It has a very strong sense of urgency and protection, which is exactly the same as what Peter's talking about in 1 Peter Chapter 5.

It starts in verse 1 with the word, therefore. It is really important to connect this conversation with what preceded it—that there are going to be fiery trials. There is going to be persecution—judgment begins with the household of God! It's likely that some of the saints are going to suffer for the cause of Christ. Therefore, in light of what Peter has just said, we're not on a cruise ship. We're on a battleship; the war is raging, and it is the responsibility of the leadership to protect the sheep. It's really important to understand that the role of a pastor or an elder in a church is not to attend meetings. It's not to make some sort of organizational business decisions. It is to be a shepherd, to protect the sheep. That's what he talks about in Chapter 5.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, (NASB, 1 Peter 5:1)

So, Peter identifies himself as a fellow elder. Peter's not a classroom professor telling the pastors how to do their job. He was a pastor/elder in the Jerusalem church. He has walked in their shoes. He knows exactly what they are going through. So elder to elder, he is exhorting them.

Now it gets a little bit confusing, but the terms elder, presbyter, bishop, overseer, shepherd, pastor—those are all terms that are interchangeable in the New Testament. They're not all different offices. Basically, elder is kind of the office and authority, and pastor or shepherd or overseer reflects the responsibility, the job description. So biblically, every pastor is an elder; every elder is a pastor. It doesn't mean all pastors are paid as a vocation, but they're pastors. Elders are not attending meetings; they're not decision makers. They're shepherds, out with the people—overseeing, protecting, leading and guiding. Peter identifies himself as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ. Even though it is true that Peter witnessed the sufferings of Christ, this word witness is not eye-witness. It's like testifying, a proclaimer—a fellow proclaimer of the message of the sufferings of Christ and fellow partaker of the glory when Jesus returns.

We talked about this epic battle on the field for the championship and a desire not to be in the bleachers, not to just wear the uniform on the sideline, but to be in the battle. If it's going to be a battle where we are bruised and bloodied, and we leave everything we have for the cause, the desire to be part of that is to ultimately share in the victory celebration. That's in essence what Peter just said. He is a fellow soldier; he is a fellow battler, and he looks forward to the celebration of victory with them together. Starting then in verse 2 he talks about the commands, the actual exhortation.

Just before we look at that, it's helpful to remind ourselves what we know to be true about Peter. Peter without question will go down as a Hall-of-Fame leader in the New Testament church. Peter shared remarkable moments with Jesus. Peter was called to be one of the twelve apostles. Peter was the guy that walked on water. Peter was there as one of the three in the transfiguration, just a remarkable moment. Peter was there in the great miracles when Jesus calmed the sea, when He fed the five thousand. When Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, Peter was one of only three that was invited in to witness that moment. Peter was one that ran to the tomb and discovered the empty tomb of the resurrected Christ. Peter preached one of the all-time great sermons in Acts Chapter 2 at Pentecost. Peter is a Hall-of-Famer, but we also need to remind ourselves that Peter needed to go through the Wilderness School of Leadership.

Peter was by no means perfect. Peter was the one who walked on water, but he's also the one who took his eyes off Jesus and started to sink, and Jesus said, "Hey, Peter, what's the deal? Where's your faith?" Peter was the one, when Jesus said He was headed to Jerusalem in order to be crucified, Peter wanted to stop Him, and Jesus had to look at him and say, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." Imagine that moment! Peter was the one, that in the upper room, was one of the disciples that was unwilling to wash the feet of Jesus because of their own pride and ego. When Jesus rebuked them and began to wash feet, it was Peter who pulled his feet back and said, "Jesus, never will You wash my feet," and Jesus said, "Peter, if you don't humble yourself and let Me wash your feet, you're off the team." It was Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane who fell asleep when he was supposed to be watching with Jesus in His agony. It was Peter that took a sword and chopped off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest, and Jesus had to put the ear back on. A few hours after that it was Peter who denied that he even knew Jesus, and at one moment he looks up and he sees Jesus. They go eyeball to eyeball, and Jesus knew that Peter had

denied Him. It was Peter that was convinced because of his failures that he was off the team. In John 21 he needs a recall from fishing, back onto the team. And it's Peter that Paul says in the book of Galatians got so caught up with the legalists that Paul had to publicly rebuke him for his legalism. Peter was by no means a perfect leader. It's helpful just to realize that God calls very imperfect people to positions of leadership but needs to take them through a process to refine them, grow them, mold them and to change them. Most of us have spent a significant amount of time in the Wilderness School of Leadership in order to be ready to be useful to the Master. So as Peter exhorts them as a fellow leader, we are reminded that Peter's story was a story of ups and downs and, ultimately, of great triumph.

(Verse 2):

...shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight...

This imagery of shepherding as a description for leadership is very common in both the Old and New Testaments. One of the unique aspects of shepherds in the ancient Near East is they actually lived among the sheep. They didn't get out in front of them. They didn't push them from behind. They got in the mix. Their job was to feed the sheep, to lead them, protect them from the wolves trying to attack them, make sure they had food and water and were healed when they were injured. The idea of overseeing the sheep is a vivid imagery—that every single sheep in the flock was the responsibility of the shepherd, and the shepherd understood that was his responsibility.

Now I have great respect for cowboys. I personally consider myself a cowboy wannabe—so I love cowboys. But get in your mind this image of cowboys moving a herd of cattle across the Plains. A couple of them have whips, and they're cracking the whip; the dust is flying with all the noise and chaos to move the cattle. That is not the image of a shepherd. As a matter of fact, we're going to use that as kind of the contrary image. Shepherding was quiet; it was in the middle of the sheep. The shepherd kind of moved and the sheep followed because the sheep knew him and trusted him. It was a much more relational approach to taking care of the livestock.

It is interesting, twice (once in verse 1 and now early in verse 2) he talks about the sheep among you, the elders among you. There is this idea that using this imagery of a shepherd; the shepherd can only be a shepherd if he's among the sheep. The shepherd can't do this remotely. The shepherd can't do it through the internet or a phone call. The whole idea is the shepherd lives with the sheep, right in the middle of them—among them.

Now while that seems kind of obvious, there is a bit of a problem in our culture. It's built on several layers of problems, but as people become selfish, self-absorbed, individualized and independent, there's this movement that "I'm a Christian; I don't really need the church and basically I can get my teaching online or a podcast or on television—just kind of tune it in and that will work just fine." There are all kinds of problems with that, but it's good to remind we: I

think that your primary teacher should be someone who lives among you. It should not be someone on the internet. It should not be someone on the radio. There is no accountability in that! There are, in my opinion, real concerns with that. I've told you before, I think you should know how your primary teacher treats his wife, how he raises his children, how he spends his money, how he lives his life, who he is in the midst of the sheep. I think there is critical and necessary accountability in that. I'll just suggest to you that if you knew what was going on in the private lives of many of these Christian celebrities, you would be greatly disappointed. The shepherd needs to be among the sheep. There shouldn't be layers of insulation between the pastors and the people. The pastors, the elders, the leaders should live and walk among the people—this whole idea of being a shepherd.

...shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; (Vs. 2b)

Now there are different ideas of what exactly that means. Some think maybe it means the pastors were lazy, and they kind of had to be forced to do their job. That seems unlikely to me. I think the most likely explanation is understanding we are talking about a culture of persecution; we're talking about fiery ordeals; we're talking about people who are eventually, many of them, going to be arrested, imprisoned, put to death. Some suggest that maybe at this point Nero's already started burning Christians at the stake. So, if there is persecution, who are the first ones to be persecuted? Answer: the leaders. That's always the way it works. Of all the apostles, all but one as far as we know were ultimately martyred for the cause of Christ. Maybe John lived into old age, but the rest were all executed for their faith. Who do you persecute if you are going to persecute the church? Answer: you start with the leaders. So, a lot of scholars think that among these churches, as it is in many places in the world today, there was hesitancy for the leaders to step forward because it was almost like a death sentence. So, there was this, "No, I don't want to do it. You do it." "I don't want to do it. You do it," and kind of this arm twisting, and that's what Peter is talking about. It should not be under compulsion where somebody's twisting your arm in order to do it, but rather he says according to the will of God. In other words, there should be a strong sense of call, that God is calling me to be a leader, to be an elder, and I will take the consequences that go with that.

Now around the world today, as we speak, that is still true in many places in the world. There are brave, courageous leaders who feel a sense of call to lead the church of Christ, understanding it's almost guaranteed that they will be persecuted, imprisoned, and possibly executed. These are amazing, brave, courageous people. That is certainly not the climate in which we find ourselves here, but there is a reality to the fact that anyone who has assumed a position of leadership knows that as soon as you do that, you put a target on your chest. That is absolutely true when we're talking about spiritual leadership. This is a battle. There is an enemy that wants to destroy the church, and the enemy starts with the leaders. I have this discussion often with young men who, in their college years get very excited about Jesus, and often they translate that into, "I think God wants me to be a pastor," and I always kind of pursue, "Are you sure that is what God is calling you to?" We need really excited Christians to be architects, to be doctors, lawyers, plumbers, electricians, business owners and teachers. Sometimes it can get confusing between

just being excited about Jesus and thinking that automatically means a call to ministry. One of the things that I have learned myself over the years is: if you don't have a strong sense of call, you're just not going to make it. The responsibility of a spiritual leader is to protect the sheep from the wolves, and I'll tell you this. Oftentimes the wolves fight back. You put a target on your chest, and understand it is: Game On. I can tell you from my heart this was never my dream. I wasn't dreaming as a young man, "Someday I'll get to be a pastor." It was never my dream, but through a series of events that I had no real control over, I ended up preaching in a church and, in the midst of that experience, I had an overwhelming sense of call. This is what God wants from me. For over thirty years I have not doubted that call. It is a deeply fulfilling thing to know there's a sense of call, and obedience in that. But whether you're in the marketplace or whether you're in the church, if you are going to step up as a leader who is a Christian and you're going to represent the values of Christ, you have made yourself a target. That is part of the calling.

Cara: Bryan, few would argue that leadership is important, but being a shepherd leader is a very unique model. Can you talk about why that's so important, especially in today's culture?

Bryan: Yeah, so a couple of things. It's been interesting over the years, different leadership styles, books come out and it's become much more common in recent years for there to be a lot of talk about kind of a relationship based, shepherding type of leadership, even in the corporate world. I think a lot of it's because it works. It's highly effective. When something else works, they'll move on. But this isn't new. This has been something the Bible's talked about for thousands of years. It's hard for us to understand the shepherding model. Most of us don't raise sheep - would have been common for them, maybe not so easy for us. But I think it's about valuing people. It's about leading through relationships. It's about value in the process, not just the outcome. It's about not using people for personal gain, but actually valuing the people in the process. So, there's just so much in the Bible about leadership that we can learn.

Arnie: So Bryan here at Back to the Bible, we've always maintained that church is critical for Christ followers to attend, and we kind of see our role, to help you between Sundays to stay engaged in the Word, but tell us how critical it is to be involved in face to face involvement at your church.

Bryan: Yeah, so I have always appreciated that about Back to the Bible. We're very pro church and it is very important. Back to the Bible isn't meant to be a substitute for the local church. The local church is the body of Christ. We all have a part in that. There's true accountability. It's not enough just to have a podcast that you listen to once a week and call it good. It's a place where we gather, it's a place where we're together, we encourage one another. It's a place where we as leaders are held accountable, as to whether we're being good shepherd leaders or whether there's a wolf among us. So, take me personally, because it does feel a little bit like a tension, because I'm on the radio, but I'm also a local pastor. I live among our people. I live among the sheep. I'm held accountable there and I often tell our people, you need to know how I live. You need to know how I treat my wife, how I've raised my kids, how I spend my money. I think that's an important part of accountability for us as leaders. So together that matters. We can't ever let some sort of internet distance thing become a substitute for the church gathered in a local place as God intended.

Arnie: So, Bryan, you've been a pastor for 38 years. What have been some of the biggest revelations to you about leadership?

Bryan: Yeah, probably lots of them. One would be that leaders come in so many different personality types, so many different leadership styles. I think there's a tendency to kind of box in, this is what a leader looks like, and I've seen just such diversity and variety in the way people lead. Leadership's very messy. That's one of the things we talk about all the time on our church staff is, ministry is messy. Leadership is messy. If you don't like the mess, you probably aren't going to make it as a leader. I probably wouldn't have understood how much I would have been falsely accused, misrepresented, misunderstood, hated, when I signed up to be a leader. Those are things I probably didn't anticipate. I don't remember them talking about that in seminary. The other thing would be, just how important it is to really guard your motive. It's a powerful thing to be able to influence people's lives in a significant way, and that can begin to change your motive and perspective, and the difficulty of constantly guarding your heart, assessing your motive, making sure you're doing the right thing for the right reason. It's a much bigger challenge than I would've anticipated.

So, I'll turn it right back on you. Arnie, you're a leader here at Back to the Bible. So, I'll ask you, kind of the same question, what have you learned about leadership over the years?

Arnie: That ministry is a wonderful and exciting experience. And the two things that probably have been most powerful in my mind, and really, I got this right after I became a Christ follower, is my prayer was for the Lord to always keep me on the front lines of the battlefield. And the reason for that was - I was so afraid I would become comfortable. Just the routine of ministry. As you say, Bryan, it's very messy, but you can also get accustomed to that and be not very empathetic. Or here we go again. So, my goal is, has always been, put me right at the front lines. Don't ever let me burn out, because a burned-out testimony is so strong in this world today. And then probably the second thing I learned in leadership in ministry is, doing God's work is counterintuitive. You think it's got to be one way. You think God's blessing this, and then all of a sudden you see over time that God's ways are so different from your ways, that it's truly counterintuitive. And the big thing is staying really tight in your relationship with Jesus Christ, because sometimes nothing makes a lot of sense, but Jesus.

Bryan: Yeah. That's great.

Cara: So, what do we need to remember then about our leaders and what are some of the ways to support them?

Bryan: You know, I would say as a local pastor, the thing that encourages me the most is for people to get involved. It's easy to stand on the sideline and throw stones and criticize, but jump in, be part of the team, make it better. That's super encouraging for someone like me as a leader. I think just encouraging, honestly encouraging your leaders. They don't need flattery, but like anyone, a little encouragement goes a long way.

I think also being willing to lovingly confront or challenge bad behavior. It frustrates me when people talk about me to everybody else, but they don't talk to me. I'm aware of the fact that I'm flawed, and I have blind spots, so just talk to me, talk to me in a loving, caring way. I want to learn, I want to grow, I want to change. It's part of, that's my job, to create a culture where that's possible, in how I respond and react, but I think that's a great way to help a

leader. And then just care enough to go to them, to talk to them, to help them get better. I think those are ways we grow and encourage the leaders among us.

Cara: One thing about leadership is you know what's going on and you make the decisions based on what's going on. You don't have to divulge everything to everybody. I think a lot of that burden is some of that stuff you shouldn't divulge to other people. We don't have all the story, and so it's easy for us to complain when we only see a portion of the story, so to go to leaders and ask them, hey, what's going on? Why did you make this decision? They can tell you enough information then to say, this is why, and it's so easy. It diffuses so much chatter.

Bryan: Yeah. Usually the first thing that comes out of my mouth when somebody does that is, thank you for asking, because it's an opportunity then to bring some clarity to what has gotten confused.

Cara: That's good stuff.

Arnie: Yeah. I think also praying for people in leadership specifically. I'm pretty convinced I wouldn't be alive today if people hadn't prayed for me. I do think praying for your pastor, praying for leaders specifically is critical.

Bryan: Yeah, I think that's a great reminder and even biblical, pray for your leaders.