

## “Hope of Humble Hearts”

1 Peter 5:1-14,

I like to tell people that my *first* “international” move was not to Korea, or to Switzerland. It was from Ohio to South Carolina. Technically not different countries. But *definitely* different countries.

We were Rust-Belt folks. We joined a church in the aristocratic deep South. Before long, I was being discipled by a couple elders. Southern, wealthy gentlemen. I was none of those things.

Around that big, southern, wealthy church I did experience some heartbreaking hypocrisy. Every church has it. But you know what? In these elders, who took the time to shepherd me, I found not just men who were strange because of culture and class. I found men to whom I could submit myself safely. Because they were in submission to Jesus, the true Shepherd.

Since Sam has had us in 1 Peter for Advent, and since there was just one chapter of this letter leftover after Christmas, and since, in fact, we have an election of elders coming up next month, I want us to conclude our Advent series on hope by asking this question:

What does it look like when leaders and followers, especially in the church, have the advent hope of humble hearts? Let’s look first at the humble-hearted leader, and then at the humble-hearted learner.

### **The Humble-Hearted Leader**

First, Peter addresses the elders in the church. And he calls them to lead with humble hearts. What’s his message?

Notice first how Peter addresses them. Peter doesn’t say “Look, you better listen to me, because I’m the rock on whom Christ is building his church. Jesus said so himself.” He doesn’t say “I was in the Lord’s inner circle.”

Instead he says to the elders “I’m a fellow elder.” Wait. Peter is an *elder*? *Peter*? Alongside the others?

Peter says, look: “The only real difference between us is that I have seen Christ’s sufferings in person.” He’s not bragging. Part of Christ’s suffering was because of Peter’s own failure. Then Peter says that he and the elders both will experience the advent of Christ’s glory on the last day, and *share* in it together.

If you’re a leader in the church, the most fundamental thing about you is that your heart was made for the same glory that every person made in God’s image longs for: for the advent return of your Lord.

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Leaders: When you and I find ourselves puffed up with pride, or find our egos too easily bruised, then the first thing we need to ask ourselves is: on what is my heart set? If our hearts are ultimately set on anything less glorious than the advent of King Jesus, we're in trouble. Why are our egos so vulnerable? We're looking for glory here and now. But the glory we want can only be ours at the Lord's second advent.

And if our hearts are not set on this hope, then everything about our leadership falls apart. Like what?

Verse 2: we start leading with a fundamental dishonesty. We can't even be honest with ourselves about why we're leading. Because, it turns out, it's about *us* and not about the people we serve. Before we ever embezzle money or act like a tyrant, we have already lied about the goal of our leadership. If it's about us, then it's not about Jesus and his beloved people.

And then (3) we start leading in order to lord it over people. Peter has been through all that phony stuff before. He's led in order to be a lord. But he's been rebuked, he's been restored and forgiven, and he's leading from love alone. He calls you and me to lead from love alone as well.

And his favorite word to describe this kind of leadership is *shepherding*. Elders are shepherds. Pastor literally *means* shepherd. All leaders shepherd. And “shepherd” has several aspects to it:

- 1) Shepherding means feeding. Giving nutrition with God's Word—speaking truth and grace in love. Mother's milk and solid food.
- 2) Shepherding means giving safety. It entails pulling sheep back from danger when they wander off—and that can feel a little, shall we say, interventionist, at times.
- 3) Shepherding means first aid. To be a leader means you are a first-responder. It means bandaging up the wounds of the sheep who are hurt—whether because they've wandered or they've been wounded; whether it's their own fault, or they've been harmed by someone else inside or outside the flock.
- 4) Shepherding means welcoming—helping sheep sense that they *belong* in the sheepfold. It means helping people *want* to stay rather than wander.
- 5) Shepherding means all this personal, touchy-feely stuff. But it's also business. It means counting sheep, moving sheep, communicating to sheep, planning for the well-being of sheep. What we call, a little awkwardly, vision and administration.

So many times, “shepherding” ends up being bureaucratic. In our capitalist economy, it's so easy to abandon the work of the shepherd for the role of the manager. If we leaders merely manage,

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you sheep will be malnourished, more prone to wander, lacking a sense of belonging, wounded but not bandaged, and without guidance and a sense of purpose.

And actually, becoming managers makes it too easy for elders and pastors and others to become lords instead of leaders. But if we're imitating the Good Shepherd, then the shape of our leadership will look like our Lord's own loving leadership. Can you imagine the Lord Jesus becoming a modern managerial bureaucratic, detached overseer and calling it “shepherding”? You come to a ministry manager to work out a technical problem, and with any luck you'll arrive at a technical solution. But you come to a shepherd of your soul in order to learn alongside a humble leader how to live and love and lead like the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the great Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

For those who are elected or re-elected elders next month, for your pastors, the calling of Peter is to have the advent hope of humble hearts; to be a little shepherd under the Chief Shepherd. To seek the crown of glory from him alone. You'll receive it—Lord willing, I will receive it—because you and I have become more and more familiar with the shepherding ways—the toughness and tenderness—of the Good Shepherd. People will be able to say, as we grow in humble courage, “you remind me more and more of the Lord Jesus every year.”

### **The Humble-Hearted Learner**

Then Peter addresses the “younger” folks (5). Let's call this person the humble-hearted learner. Peter says to us learners: you must clothe yourself in humility—all of you. He simply says “submit to your elders.”

We aren't called to agree with everything our elders say and do. In fact, we are called to submit to them *insofar as* they have followed Peter's lead. If they've renounced the lust for lordship. If they've learned from their own chief Shepherd, Jesus.

Again, there have been so many times in my life, especially as a twenty-something, when I've looked at a handful of elders in my church, who had begun discipling me, and I thought: “you are *really* different than me.” I was from the post-industrial midwest, the Rust-Belt, Ohio. I was being disciplined by elders who were from the deep south, who talked funny, who were *really wealthy*, and who were generationally as well as culturally foreign to me. But the ones worth following, the ones I submitted to at a deep level, were the ones who—however different and odd they were—nevertheless reminded me of Jesus. Christlikeness can show up in a person of any generation, any culture, any temperament, any personality, and any level of wealth or status. When we pick our elders and pastors, this is what we're longing for; when we submit to them, it's the Jesus that has gotten inside of them to whom we are submitting.

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And in fact, whether you’re overseeing or being overseen; whether you’re shepherding or being shepherded—one important truth applies (5): “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” And so Peter calls us to humble ourselves (6) under God’s mighty right hand, with a humble heart full of hope that he will exalt us in due time.

### Conclusion

“In due time.” This is the key to having hope with a humble heart.

When is Jesus going to turn our sorrow and suffering to rejoicing and glory? In due time.

When will every leader be a humble servant and not a domineering lord? In due time.

When will you be exalted from your humble estate to a place of privilege, and entrusted with great things? In due time.

When will you and everyone else in your life be so utterly secure in their identity and their position in Christ that they are delighted to lead without ever lording it over others? In due time.

When will we be able to fully submit without any bitterness? In due time.

When will our days of anxiety—both because of the burden of leading in a fallen world and our reservations to follow fallen leaders be behind us forever? In due time.

When will our days of struggling to resist the evil one (8-9), who *wants us to be puffed up with pride* be over? In due time.

When will our family ties with the whole household of faith be evident to us and to all, causing us all to care for one another like flesh and blood? In due time.

When will we each be firm and steadfast, not wandering off like lost sheep, but confident in Christ? In due time.

Soon. So soon that we can live now as if it were already on its way. In due time.

But in the mean time, we practice being the family—not the corporation or the firm but the *family* of God — with the hope of humble Advent hearts. We learn, as Peter learned to call Silas— who, let’s face it, was not nearly as significant a figure in the early church as he was— (12) *brother*. But we also learn to accept the fact that some people are fathers and mothers, while others are daughters and sons, and to even call them such, like Peter does here with Mark (13).

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Under the banner of family, pride goes out the window and what matters is that everyone gets a chance to thrive. When all of us, old and young, mature and maturing, elders and pastors and leaders and those who follow can see one another as sisters and brothers and mothers and fathers, under the great Elder Brother and the Chief Overseer, the Lord Jesus, then, without any hint of superiority or inferiority, we can (14) greet one another with the kiss of love.

What could possibly please the one who gave himself for us, who suffered for our sakes, and whose Advent will put an end to all our suffering, like living as those who kiss one another with the kiss of love, in true humility? Jesus the Lord has kissed us with the Father's kiss of love. Have you felt that kiss of love from the Lord's lips?

Then you're ready to lead and to learn with humble, hopeful hearts.