

Session 11

LIVING FIRM IN GRACE

1 Peter 5:1-14

Memory Verse

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.

– 1 PETER 5:6-7, CSB



Living Firm in Grace

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God calls His people to walk in humility, mimicking Christ.

CALL TO ACTION: We walk in humility, knowing we have been freely given everything we need in Christ.

Recent history has known many amazing leaders. One example is Franklin D. Roosevelt, who led the United States through not one, but two great crises (first the Great Depression, and then World War II).

Or take Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela. He led the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa (apartheid meaning segregation or discrimination on grounds of race). He was willing to go to jail for the cause, and he paved the way for the country's transition to democracy, later becoming South Africa's first black president.¹

Consider Lottie Moon, the courageous missionary who broke the mold by entering the mission field as a single woman. She did not lead a country but rather led the charge to challenge Southern Baptists to take an active role in the spread of the gospel. Her impact was so great we still collect a missions offering in her name today.²

History recognizes many inspiring leaders of countries, organizations, missions, teams, and more, but what makes a good leader? If you Google this, you'll find plenty of books to add to your "to be read" shelf, but today we are going to study characteristics Peter outlined for this role in the church (which at times looks different than human standards for this role).

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What would you say makes a good leader?

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Who are some good leaders you know? What makes you think of them that way?

Session Summary

Peter called church leaders (and not just pastors!) to a Christlike standard, urging them to care for those God has entrusted to them, serving willingly and with a genuine heart, and acting as good examples. This attitude mirrors the Good Shepherd.

Leaders are called to a high standard, and so are the younger church members under them. Peter wrote that they should “be subject to” the “shepherds” leading them, with respect and deference.

Peter said to “clothe” themselves with humility, putting on a humble attitude when dealing with one another. He also urged his readers to humble themselves before God, who cares for His people and desires to take the weight of their burdens. Peter closed this letter with a variety of additional exhortations and personal remarks to those he wrote, always pointing them further to Christ.

1. Shepherd God’s Flock (1 Peter 5:1-4)

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What did Peter call the leaders of the church to in these verses?
What does it mean to shepherd a flock?

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What characteristics of godly leaders did Peter highlight?

Peter began this section by addressing the church elders, appealing to them as a fellow elder with some experience. Peter specifically addressed the leaders (or overseers) within the house churches.³ Today, this instruction applies to those serving in pastoral roles vocationally, but also other leaders within the church.

Peter gave guidelines for leading the people God placed in their care (note, God is the owner of the flock, not the elders).

The metaphor of shepherd and sheep is one we see throughout Scripture, commonly used to describe God's relationship with His people. In Psalm 23, we get a beautiful picture of a sheep in God's flock. When the Lord is our shepherd, He provides what we need. He gives us rest from our burdens and leads us on the right paths when human nature would take us astray. He walks with us and comforts us, even in the hurt and fear of the darkest valley. He provides for our needs, even when our enemies surround us, to the point of overflowing. His goodness and faithfulness continually pursue us. Jesus is our Good Shepherd (John 10), who literally laid His life down for us. He knows us, seeks us out, and protects us.

Church leaders act as shepherds serving under Jesus (the “chief Shepherd” v. 4), imitating Him and His style of leadership. Peter wrote that elders should serve willingly, not out of obligation, or a desire for money or power, but because they are eager to serve in the work God is doing. Leaders aren't to lord their authority over the flock, but to lead in humility as good examples.

② How does Peter's description of godly leaders conflict with the world's definition of greatness?

This is counter to our culture that often asks, what's in it for me? Elders shouldn't be motivated by power or money, but are primarily to live as servants, like Jesus. Leaders are to set an example by seeking to live the way the Bible teaches, continually striving—though imperfectly—for righteousness. And when elders serve faithfully in this way, an “unfading crown of glory” is promised to them (v. 4).

2. Clothe Yourselves with Humility (1 Peter 5:5)

What does it mean to be clothed with humility?

Peter said God resists the proud but gives grace to those who are humble. How have you seen this to be true?

Peter next offered a message to the “younger” members of the church body (not necessarily a reference to age). Those under godly leadership should “subject” themselves to the elders. Those in the church should show respect for the leadership and their decisions. We may hesitate at this thought for fear of being taken advantage of by bad leaders. But Peter wrote this in the context of exhorting leaders toward godly leadership that serves in humility and models Jesus. It is a joy to follow these types of leaders.

Peter ended this section by bidding all church members to be humble. He said we are to clothe ourselves in humility. Humility is an attitude you put on as you serve others. Charles Spurgeon once wrote, “humility is to make a right estimate of one’s self.”⁴

A humble person understands their gifts come from God and is thankful for them, recognizing they don’t have it all figured out but God is still working through them. A humble heart puts others first. Paul, too, understood the importance of this and advised similarly in his letter to the Philippians:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. —Philippians 2:3

How is God calling you to pursue humility in the body of Christ? How will you respond?

Christian community is made beautiful when everyone in the body adopts this attitude! Peter ended this section by alluding to the wisdom of Proverbs 3:34.

3. Concluding Remarks (1 Peter 5:6-14)

① What stands out to you in Peter's conclusion here?

② How did Peter portray the enemy in this passage?

③ What does that tell us about the need for sober-mindedness and alertness for God's people?

Peter packed a lot into this conclusion!

Again, he gave the exhortation toward humility. This time, he wrote on the need for humility in our relationship with the Lord. If humility is us seeing ourselves rightly, there is no greater need for humility than before God. God knows more than us. His ways are better, and He can be trusted. He cares about us! We can (and should!) trust Him with our concerns. Peter's original audience had some pretty heavy "cares," but God cares about worries of all sizes. None are too small. He cares about you and wants you to bring everything to Him. Jesus likewise made this clear in passages like Matthew 11:28-30.

Peter also gave a warning regarding the devil. Picture a hungry lion prowling around for his next meal in the African savanna, ready to attack. If you were walking in the same area, knowing this threat, how would you respond?

This is how the devil moves in our lives. He seeks to feed us lies, and waits for the perfect moment to attack, feeding into natural insecurities. We are wise to take Peter's advice and constantly watch out enemy. Peter was direct and urgent. Be alert. Stand firm in your faith.

Peter also encouraged his audience that they were not alone in their suffering. When we suffer, we can trust that God will bring justice on our behalf. He will "restore, establish, strengthen, and support" us. Peter also noted the length of suffering—"a

little while” (v.10). Whatever we suffer for our faith in this life, we can be sure it won’t last forever, and in the meantime, we are to stand firm in our faith.

Peter ended his letter with customary final remarks.

“Silvanus” was the “Silas” we know from Acts. He may have helped Peter write this letter, or, more likely, he carried the letter on Peter’s behalf, physically delivering the letter and teaching its contents to the recipients.⁵ Mark also sent his greetings as Peter’s spiritual son.

Peter reiterated his goal: encouragement. This letter was meant to spread hope to people in a hard place and testify to God’s grace. Babylon was a notoriously wicked place, and scholars believe that Peter’s mention of “She who is in Babylon” (v.13) refers to a hotbed of sin, Rome (where Peter was believed to have written this letter from).⁶

The “kiss of love” (v.14) was a familiar greeting in Peter’s day (a modern-day equivalent might be a friendly handshake, or hug among friends). Peter recommended an affectionate greeting for those meant to be recognized by their love (John 13:34-35) and ended his letter with a final encouragement: “Peace to all of you who are in Christ.” (v.14)

Conclusion

Peter urged the church elders (those entrusted with spiritual leadership in God’s flock) to shepherd God’s people with the same heart and posture modeled by Jesus Himself. The shepherd and sheep metaphor is rich in Scripture, painting a picture of sacrificial leadership and care. Peter called leaders to serve willingly, out of Christlike love for others, not lording authority over anyone, but with a genuine heart for those God has placed in their care.

Peter urged younger believers to submit to the authority of the “shepherds” leading them. To the entire church body, Peter wrote that they should “clothe” themselves with humility. Like a raincoat we might put on before going out in a rain shower, humility is a heart posture we should “put on” when serving others. Through humility, we see ourselves rightly (as imperfect humans seeking to live like our Holy Savior, the “chief Shepherd” v. 4). This leads us to put others before ourselves.

Peter closed his letter by urging believers to humble themselves before God and His plan, casting their cares on Jesus. He warned of the workings of the devil, who seeks to derail our faith, pitting us against each other, ourselves, and the purpose God has for us. Because the enemy prowls like a lion, waiting for someone to devour, we must be alert, watching out, and ready for this danger.

Peter's final remarks included words of praise, encouragement, shared greetings, and a parting blessing of peace.

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Where has God entrusted you with leadership of His flock? How are you stewarding this responsibility? Think beyond just formal roles to other places you have been given natural influence for Christ.

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What would it look like for you to “clothe” yourself with humility today? How would that affect the relationships in your life?

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How would living as Peter exhorted in this passage give us opportunity for gospel conversations with others?

Memorize

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.

- 1 Peter 5:6-7, CSB

References

¹Encyclopaedia Britannica, “What is Nelson Mandela known for?,” accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/question/What-is-Nelson-Mandela-known-for>.

²International Mission Board, “Lottie’s Urgency,” published June 13, 2018, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.imb.org/2018/06/13/lotties-urgency/>.

³Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible*, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 1261.

⁴David Walls and Max Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, vol. 11, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 91.

⁵Beetham and Erickson, 1262.

⁶Ibid.