As we continue with our series of messages from the BOOK OF I PETER, I would like for you to please turn with me in your Bibles to I Peter chapter five.

I PETER 5:1-5

PRAYER

I N T R O D U C T I O N

ILLUSTRATION

It was JOHN MAXWELL who said, “Everything rises or falls on leadership.”

That is true in GOVERNMENT.....in BUSINESS......in EDUCATION......and in SPORTS. And it is especially true when it comes to THE CHURCH!

Leaders “set the pace” for the rest of the Church!
Leaders model what the Church is to be.

-There has never been a STRONG Church without STRONG leaders!
-There has never been a PRAYING Church without PRAYING leaders!
-There has never been a VISIONARY Church without VISIONARY leaders!
-There has never been a GROWING Church without GROWING leaders

“Everything rises or falls on leadership.”
One of the **highest and holiest** of all privileges any Christian man can have in this life is to be an **ELDER** in the **LORD’S CHURCH**.

Listen to what Paul said to Timothy regarding elders in **I Timothy 3:1**…

> “Here is a trustworthy saying; If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer (elder), he desires a noble task.”

Let me give you a quick lesson on what the New Testament teaches us about **ELDERS** before we get into our study of these first five verses.

(A) **First of all,** The New Testament teaches us that only **MEN** can serve as elders in the Lord’s Church. You will not find a scriptural basis for “women elders” anywhere in the New Testament.

Do some Churches have “women elders?” Yes they do! But NO Church, I repeat, NO Church that abides by the authority of God’s word has women elders!

(B) **Secondly,** the New Testament teaches us that while only men can be elders, not every man can be an elder.

- An **unwilling** man should never be an elder.

When you study the qualifications for elders in **I Timothy 3** you will notice the very first qualification is that the man must **truly desire to be an elder**….or “**must have his heart set on being an elder.**”

One of the biggest mistakes a Church can make is to “arm-wrestle” some man into becoming an elder who truly does not desire to be an elder.

- Neither should an **ungodly** man ever be an elder.

**Now the overseer (ELDER) must be above reproach.**

---I Timothy 3:2

When a man is “above reproach” it doesn’t mean he’s perfect, but it does mean he is a man of such godly character and integrity his is held in the highest respect in the neighborhood, the community and the work place.
**-Neither should an unfaithful man ever be an elder.**

An elder must be “the husband of but one wife.”

*I Timothy 3:2*

That literally means “a one woman kind of man.” It is speaking about one’s self-control around members of the opposite sex not one’s marital status. A man who has a reputation for being a womanizer or a “skirt chaser” should never be an elder in a Church.

Many have self-righteously pounced on this verse as prohibiting a man who has been divorced or is married to a woman who has been divorced from being an elder. That is gross misinterpretation of this verse.

**-Neither should an undisciplined man ever be an elder.**

That list of qualifications in *I Timothy 3* lists all the critical areas a man must exercise discipline before being considered to become an elder. He has to be disciplined in his habits. He has to be disciplined in his study of God’s word so he can teach others. He has to be disciplined in his emotions and not have an explosive temper. He has to exercise discipline when it comes to how he earns his money and how he spends it. And he must exercise discipline in his own home, especially with regards to his children.

(C) Thirdly, the New Testament teaches us there can’t be just ONE elder in a Church.

*Acts 14:23* Paul and Barnabas appoint ELDERS (plural) in every Church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the LORD, in whom they had put their trust.

There must always be a plurality of elders. Not just one.

With these things in mind, let’s turn our thoughts now to our scripture text.

Up to this point in his letter, Peter has given “general instructions” to all Christians. But now in the first few verses of this fifth chapter, Peter gives specific instructions to the ELDERS of the various Churches who would be receiving this letter.
Because of the intense persecution those early Christians were experiencing at that time, Peter knew how important it was for the Churches to stick together so they could give strength and encouragement to one another.

And Peter understood that the primary responsibility of holding these Churches together fell squarely upon the shoulders of the ELDERS.

Let’s see what Peter has to say about this.

First of all notice………..

I. The Responsibilities of An Elder (vs. 1-3)

1. Before addressing the elders about their responsibilities, notice the three ways Peter identifies himself in verse 1.

   (A) First of all, Peter identifies himself as “a fellow ELDER.”

   This is the only time this term is used in the New Testament.

   The apostle Paul used similar terms such as fellow worker, fellow soldier, fellow slave and fellow-prisoner to show “partnership” with other ministers and co-workers in the gospel.

   By referring to himself as “a fellow elder” Peter is not exalting himself to a position of authority over the elders of these Churches but rather he’s identifying himself as a fellow leadership partner.

   (B) Secondly, Peter identifies himself as “a witness of Christ’s sufferings.”

   While there is some dispute over the exact meaning of this phrase, in all likelihood Peter is simply identifying himself as an eyewitness to the sufferings Christ endured from the cross, though likely he witnessed Christ’s sufferings from a distance, because the gospels tell us John was the only apostle near the cross that day.
(C) Thirdly, Peter identifies himself as “one who will share in the glory to be revealed.

Peter is talking about the day Christ returns when he and all Christians will share in the glory of Christ by resurrecting from the dead or rising to meet the Lord in the air.

2. As we move on to VERSES 2, 3 Peter now addresses three areas of responsibility for those who serve as ELDERS in the LORD’S CHURCH.

(A) First of all an ELDER has the responsibility to SHEPHERD the SHEEP (v. 2a)

v. 2a   Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care.

What a shepherd is to sheep, an elder is to a Church.

You notice in verse 4 Peter refers to Jesus Christ as the “Chief Shepherd.” That means Christ is the Shepherd of the whole Church, the world-wide Church.

Every local Church represents a certain number of sheep in the Lord’s total flock. And who is it the Lord has entrusted to take care of each local flock? The ELDERS or SHEPHERDS of those Churches.

This means……..

-As a shepherd, THE ELDER must “feed” the sheep by teaching them the word of God.

-As a shepherd, THE ELDER must lead the sheep by his own godly example.

-As a shepherd, THE ELDER must selflessly put the needs of the sheep ahead of his own needs.
(B) Secondly, an ELDER has the responsibility to **SUPERVISE** the SHEEP.

_v. 2 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, (now listen carefully) serving as OVERSEERS---not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve._

OVERSEER = “one who supervises others.”
ELDERS “oversee” or “supervise” the “sheep” the Lord has entrusted to their care.

SHEEP are very vulnerable in three critical areas. This is why the SHEPHERD must constantly SUPERVISE them.

a. **For one thing, SHEEP are vulnerable when it comes to their DIET**

   Sheep spend most of their lives eating and drinking. And sheep are not very discriminate about what they consume. They don’t know the difference between **poisonous** and **non-poisonous plants**. That’s why the **shepherd** must keep a constant ‘watchful eye’ on the sheep and steer them away from anything **poisonous**.

   Just like sheep, some Church members aren’t very discriminate when it comes to their spiritual diet. They read **religious books** or **listen to TV or radio preachers** who teach things that don’t line up with the word of God. And the unsuspecting Church member can’t distinguish between **poisonous** and **non-poisonous doctrine**.

   **ILLUSTRATION:** Just this week I received a phone call from a brother-in-Christ in one of our Churches over in Hyde County (NC) who told me about a woman in their congregation who had really gotten mixed up in her beliefs after listening to a TV preacher. This “preacher” or “false prophet” teaches there was a “Pre-Adamic Race of people” who existed before Adam and Eve. And these people were so evil God destroyed them and this explains why scientists have found human fossils millions and millions of years old.

   Here’s a case where the **Elders of the Church** must be “well-versed” enough in the scriptures to **gently steer this woman away from these poisonous teachings she’s been feeding on and lead her back to the truth.”
b. SHEEP are also vulnerable to DISEASE.

Have you ever noticed the difference between a lamb and an older sheep? Young lambs are cuddly...soft...clean....white....wooly animals that are fun to hold and feed from a bottle.

Older sheep are rarely white or clean. Their wool contains large amounts of lanolin which attracts and holds dirt, weeds, and even the sheep's own droppings. All of this attracts a number of parasitic insects which lay their eggs in the sheep’s wool making the sheep very vulnerable to deadly diseases. And if the disease spreads it could potentially wipe out the whole flock.

Like sheep, Christians can be very susceptible to “spiritual diseases.” The Elders of the Church have the responsibility to keep a “watchful eye” on the congregation for spiritual diseases such as “apathy,” “lukewarmness,” “disunity,” “dissension,” “jealousy,” “immorality” and “self-righteousness” because these diseases can spread and infect the whole flock, the whole church!

(C) SHEEP are also very vulnerable to DANGER.

Sheep are one of the most defenseless animals God created. They can’t kick, scratch, bite, climb trees, or run fast enough to get away. In fact, when sheep are attacked by wild animals they huddle together which makes them even more vulnerable.

The shepherd loves his sheep so much he is willing to lay down his own life to protect his sheep if needs be.

When a Church is in danger, either from “troublemakers” within the Church or from “attackers” outside the Church, the GODLY ELDER will lovingly and sacrificially lay down his own life for the sheep rather than see the Church destroy.

ELDERS have the responsibility to SHEPHERD THE SHEEP.
ELDERS have the responsibility to SUPERVISE THE SHEEP.
(C) And thirdly, ELDERS have a responsibility TO BE SENSITIVE TO THE SHEEP.

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

A godly elder understands he’s not a “cowboy driving cattle, but rather a shepherd leading sheep.”

A godly elder leads the flock, the Church, with the same sensitive love, tenderness, gentleness, care and compassion as JESUS CHRIST, the “Chief Shepherd.”

You notice in VERSE 2 Peter uses the word “serving” and “serve.” Now what’s significant about that? Peter wants every ELDER to understand his responsibility entails more than simply serving at the Lord’s Table on Sunday. It takes a lot of hard work......time....energy and sacrifice to “shepherd” and “supervise” a Church flock! This is why a man must give a lot of “prayerful” consideration before taking on this responsibility!

Well Peter has told us about THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ELDER. Next Peter tells us about......

II. The Reward of An Elder

READ: VERSE 4

1. When one is an OVERSEER in a huge company or corporation, he is heavily rewarded with huge income and lots of perks and benefits.

2. But what is true in the corporate world is not true in the Church.

   -Being an ELDER or an OVERSEER in the Lord’s Church is often a “thankless” job. When things are going RIGHT in the Church the ELDERS seldom, if ever get any credit. But when things go WRONG the ELDERS are usually the first to receive blame and criticism.

3. So why would any man desire to be an ELDER? What reward is there. Peter says, “When the Chief Shepherd appears, you (ELDERS) will receive the “crown of glory” that will never fade away.
4. The “crown of glory” will be the reward for all those who faithfully preached and taught the word of God by word and example.

When Christ comes again He will give “the crown of glory” to every FAITHFUL ELDER who led and taught others by his GODLY EXAMPLE.

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After talking about THE RESPONSIBILITIES and REWARDS OF AN ELDER, Peter now turns his thoughts toward........

III. The Church’s Responsibility To The Elder

READ: VERSE 5

1. Peter uses the term “young men” here to represent the whole Church, because often “young men” are the first to rebel against authority.

   - Young men are idealistic and impatient.
   - Young men tend to think they “know more” than those who are older and more mature.

   So while Peter is speaking to the Church as a whole, he specifically addresses the young men in the Church.

2. According to God’s scriptural “pattern” of Church government, THE ELDERS have the responsibility of LEADING the Lord’s Church and THE CONGREGATION has the responsibility to FOLLOW or “submit to the authority of the elders.”

3. Does submission mean “blind allegiance?” Does this mean the congregation must never question any decision made by the elders of the Church? NO! Not at all.

   When elders make decisions that clearly violate the Word of God, the congregation has the responsibility to hold them accountable to the scriptures.

   Or if an elder is engaging in immorality or living a life contradictory to the word of God, the congregation has the responsibility to remove that man from the office of elder.
4. But when the ELDERS leadership of the Church remains within the bounds of God’s word, the CONGREGATION has the responsibility to give the ELDERS their full support and cooperation by submitting to their authority.

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION: Several years ago I was holding a Revival meeting up in Culpepper, Virginia, about 75 miles from Washington D.C.

During the Revival I stayed in the home of Linda and Lowell Ingram. Lowell is an elder in the Church at Culpepper.

As I was eating breakfast on Sunday morning, I asked Linda, “Where’s Lowell?” She told me “Lowell always goes down to the Church building an hour or so before anybody gets there to read his Bible, pray and play the piano.

When I arrived at the Church building a short time later, I stood at the back of the auditorium and observed Lowell Ingram without his knowledge. How it touched my heart to see this humble servant of God, this godly elder, worshiping God in private to prepare his mind, heart and spirit to worship with his “flock.”

How blessed all Churches would be to have elders like Lowell Ingram.

Currently we do not have any elders here at Christian Hope Church. While these circumstances do arise in Churches from time to time, it is not scriptural or in the best interest of the Church to go without elders permanently or even for a lengthy period of time.

Before Christ chose His apostles He spent all night in prayer. Before Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the Churches they established they spent much time in prayer and fasting.

I want to challenge this Church to spend a great deal of time in earnest prayer and ask God to raise up a new generation of ELDERS to lead Christian Hope Church of Christ!