

Excerpts from Life-Study of 1 Peter, Message 32
THE ELDERS' SHEPHERDING AND ITS
REWARD

Bible Verses:

1 Pet. 5:1 Therefore the elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory to be revealed:

1 Pet. 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly;

In 5:1-4 Peter speaks to the elders. Elders are the overseers of the church, those who take the lead among the believers in spiritual things (Heb. 13:17). The apostle entreats them first, expecting that they will take the lead to suffer nobly for Christ.

Peter was the first of the initial apostles (Matt. 10:1-4; Acts 1:13), and, while he was an apostle, he was also one of the elders in the church at Jerusalem, as was the apostle John (2 John 1; 3 John 1; Acts 15:6; 21:17-18).

Here, in exhorting the elders in the other churches, Peter used not his apostleship but his eldership that he might speak with them on their level in an intimate way.

In 1 Peter 5:1 Peter refers to himself as a witness of the sufferings of Christ. Peter and the early apostles were witnesses of Christ (Acts 1:8), not only as eyewitnesses testifying of what they had seen of Christ's suffering (5:32; 10:39) but also as martyrs vindicating their testimony by suffering martyrdom for Him (22:20; 2 Cor. 1:8-9; 4:10-11; 11:23; 1 Cor. 15:31). This is to share in the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 4:13), to participate in the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:10).

Peter also says in 1 Peter 5:1 that he is a partaker of the glory to be revealed. Peter was first a witness, a martyr, a partaker of the sufferings of Christ. Then he was a partaker of His glory (Rom. 8:17). Christ Himself had gone the same way (1 Pet. 1:11; Luke 24:26).

In Greek witness and martyr are the same word. This indicates that we need to bear testimony as a witness even at the risk of being a martyr, of sacrificing our lives. This is what Peter did. On the day of Pentecost Peter gave a strong testimony, witnessing of

the sufferings of Christ. He boldly told the Jews that they had crucified the Lord Jesus. Before the day of Pentecost, however, Peter was not bold. Rather, he was timid. The night the Lord Jesus was betrayed, Peter denied that he was one of His followers. In the presence of the Lord, Peter denied the Lord. Actually, that was not Peter, a stone; it was Simon, a lump of clay. But on the day of Pentecost Peter had the boldness to rebuke the Jews for crucifying the Lord Jesus. After that, Peter began to suffer persecution. He was arrested and put into prison. He was willing to risk his life to be a witness for the Lord Jesus.

Peter, no doubt, remembered the Lord's word in Acts 1 about witnesses. When the disciples asked the Lord about the restoring of the kingdom to Israel, He replied, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (vv. 7-8). Peter was the first to become such a witness. He was a leading witness, a martyr, one who was willing to sacrifice his life to testify of the sufferings of Christ. Eventually, Peter

himself was martyred. He sacrificed his life as part of his witness for Christ. This was the fulfillment of the Lord's word to him in John 21:18, a word concerning "by what kind of death he would glorify God" (v. 19). When Peter wrote his first Epistle, he was quite old. When he wrote his second Epistle, he knew that the time of his martyrdom was near: "Knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle is imminent, even as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me" (1:14). When Peter wrote these Epistles, he was reminded of the words of the Lord's prophecy concerning him. In 1 Peter 5:1 we see that Peter had a threefold status. He was a fellow elder, he was a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and he was a partaker of the glory to be revealed.

Every elder needs to be a witness of the sufferings of Christ. This means that the elders should be ready to sacrifice their lives as part of their testimony. If a brother is not willing to risk his life, he is not qualified to be an elder. Every elder should be a martyr, one who sacrifices his life for Christ. Being a partaker of Christ's glory depends on being such a martyr. If the elders are willing to be martyred, if they are willing to risk their lives, then surely they will be partakers of the glory to

be revealed. But if the elders are not willing to sacrifice their lives, then instead of partaking of glory at the Lord's coming, they will probably be rebuked by Him.

As we have seen, in 4:19 Peter says, "So then let those also who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing to a faithful Creator." Here, well-doing refers to doing right, good, and noble deeds. Committing our souls to a faithful Creator is effective only if we are engaged in well-doing, that is, if we are doing noble deeds. Nothing is more noble than dying as a martyr for the Lord. Polycarp was an example of a noble martyr. One who had learned from the apostle John, Polycarp was martyred when he was more than eighty years of age. Before he died, he was given an opportunity to save himself by denying the Lord. Polycarp refused, saying that he could not deny the One who had always been faithful to him. Surely Polycarp was not only bold and courageous—he was noble. At the cost of his life, he nobly confessed the Lord before his persecutors.

When we act in such a noble way, we have the ground to commit our souls to a faithful Creator. He is altogether faithful. But are we faithful? Are we doing noble deeds? Do we care for His testimony in a noble

way? When the Lord Jesus was being tried before His crucifixion, Peter was not at all noble. But later, in the book of Acts, Peter witnessed for Christ before his persecutors in a noble way. For example, Peter and John said to the persecutors, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you judge; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (4:19-20). Peter and the other apostles committed their souls in well-doing to a faithful Creator. Surely Peter was able to say, “Lord, You are faithful to me. Now I would be faithful to You. I would be faithful to You at the cost of my life.” Certainly, the Lord would honor such a noble commitment.

Not only the elders themselves but the elders’ wives also need to have the concept of sacrifice in relation to the eldership. It is not right for a wife to feel uplifted when her husband is put into the eldership. Actually, it is shameful for a wife to feel that way. To be an elder is not a matter of gain; it is a matter of sacrifice. Any brother who would be a good elder must sacrifice himself. He will have to sacrifice his time and even his family life. Being an elder is not a matter of gaining position or receiving personal honor. The

eldership requires sacrifice. Any elder who is not willing to sacrifice will not be a qualified elder. The elders should always have the willingness to sacrifice themselves. The elders will need to sacrifice not only their time and their energy but even their lives. If the elders are willing to sacrifice in this way, then they will be witnesses of the sufferings of Christ and partakers of the coming glory. First, an elder must participate in Christ's suffering. Only then can he share in Christ's glory. I hope that all the elders will take this word.

I can testify that all the churches in the Lord's recovery have been raised up, established, and built up for the most part due to the faithfulness and sacrifice of the elders. I would say that the establishing and the building up of the churches is perhaps sixty or seventy percent due to the elders' labor and sacrifice and thirty to forty percent due to the ministry. Seeing these percentages will help us to realize the importance of the eldership. Where there is a loyal, faithful, and sacrificing eldership, the church will be strong and established. The same ministry serves all the churches. However, some churches are strong, and others are rather weak. Whether a church is strong or weak depends upon the loyalty, faithfulness, and sacrifice of

the elders. We thank the Lord that in His recovery, for the most part, the elders are loyal, faithful, and willing to sacrifice.

Peter's word to the elders is brief, but it is meaningful and very touching. I hope that all the elders will take adequate time to delve into these verses in order to touch the depths of the truth revealed here.

Read the verses and footnotes online: <https://text.recoveryversion.bible>

Read the complete message online: <https://www.ministrybooks.org/books>

Note: This version is not intended to be printed as material for pursuit during the small group gathering. Instead, it is to be used as additional reference for brothers and sisters who want to prepare in advance for fellowship on the message. We include here notes from the commentaries of the brothers in the life-study radio program. The points from these commentaries can help enrich our understanding and, eventually, our fellowship with the saints on the selected portions of the life-study message. We still recommend that, if possible, the saints still listen to the [audio message](#) in addition to reading the [life-study message](#) for personal pursuit and for preparation for small group gatherings. We also wish to point out that these notes have not been fully polished.

[Commentary]:

Introduction

[CW]: Peter, we all know, was one of the original disciples of the Lord Jesus. He also became an apostle, and was very much used by the Lord to bring the church into being in both the Jewish world and the Gentile world. But in addition, he was an elder of the church in Jerusalem. It was on this basis that he wrote personally to all of the elders of the various local churches in chapter five of his first epistle. His words of exhortation surely were helpful in instructing the elders of various matters concerning how to govern the church. But if you consider his own life and experience, they are also words of tremendous inspiration as well. Matt Miller is here to fellowship this manner of the elder, Peter. Good to have you, Matt.

[MM]: Good to be here, Chris. Today we have a very striking program with a very sobering result.

[CW]: I think what's important to realize, and Witness Lee points out, as we'll hear, but it's not too much to say in advance and then have him say it and maybe say it again after we've listened to him, as we do frequently on this program. Peter's writing not in a void here. He's writing with a backdrop. He had had so much experience of the Lord earlier in his life and all through his walk as a believer, suffered many trials and had a lot of sufferings himself. The theme of suffering is a consistent one throughout this book, and also his second epistle, isn't it?

[MM]: It is Chris. And like you said, there's some landmark verses, some landmark moments in Peter's life. We're going to kind of go through that whole life and see it in what he's saying in these few verses in First Peter chapter five. There's something he says later in the second epistle, but it also goes back to the very beginning word in the Gospel of John chapter 21 where he talks to Peter, specifically about the kind of death Peter will die. And then again in Acts after the Lord dies and resurrects in chapter one, verse eight, he talks about the kind of witnesses they'll be.

[CW]: So the subject generally, of the portion we're going to get in today is being a witness of the suffering of Christ. And that is exactly the language Peter uses in verse one of chapter five. *"Therefore the elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory to be revealed:"* And I think it's really this last part of the verse linked with the matter of being a witness of the sufferings that will have the most impact as we go on today. Don't you agree?

[MM]: I agree, Chris, there's three main statuses Peter mentions here in this verse, and we're going to see that in the program today. First, he's an elder, then he's a witness, and then he's a partaker of the glory. They all go together. They do.

[CW]: Well, we've had a short introduction. I think that's just as well get right to the portion before us and Witness Lee's sharing from First Peter 5.

Part 1

[CW]: Matt, you and I were together a little more than a week ago with the program, and we talked, I think, near the end of the program, about the change in Peter over time. And that is really striking in this portion, isn't it? We see Peter in the Gospel, denying the Lord in this story that I think we all are familiar with. And the contrast between that and what Peter becomes even just not that many days later is remarkable, isn't it?

[MM]: It's a miraculous transformation, the very picture of the transformation he wants to do with every believer. And you know, you look at Peter in the Gospel of John, all the Gospels, I mean, the story is the end of the Lord's life. He was witnessing the Lord's suffering. But as he was witnessing, he was also denying the Lord. This little girl comes and says aren't you one of them? He says, "Oh, no. And eventually curses. And then the Lord looks at him. You know, we have a song that said, it's the look that melted Peter. It says, After Peter caught the eye of the Lord, he went out and he wept bitterly. And the next time you see Peter is after the Lord resurrects. And we all know the story. And then eventually, at the beginning of Acts, speaking boldly, you crucified Him. Denying the Lord to a girl at the end of the gospel, is at the beginning of Acts, now he's ready to die. He's ready to die for the Lord, speaking boldly for the Lord, and ready to be a martyr. In fact, I want to point out Chris, one of the things that Witness Lee said about this word witness, to be a witness for the Lord. Every elder should be a witness for the Lord, and if they're not willing to be a witness, they're not worthy of being an elder. But what does it mean to be a witness? It means you're willing to give up your life, because that word is the same word for martyr. You're willing to be a martyr for the Lord. And I'd like to read a footnote in the Recovery version. It's on this verse. It's Acts, chapter one, verse eight, which says, "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses...*" The footnote on witnesses, literally means martyrs, those who bear a living testimony of the resurrected and ascended Christ in life, differing from preachers who merely preach doctrines in letters. This is really quite a picture of Peter. When you read Peter, he's not there just preaching. He's not teaching doctrine. He's there testifying. He's witnessing. He's laying down his whole life on behalf of this Christ.

[CW]: Now we made reference in the opening today that again, the backdrop not just Peter's failure in the gospel that is so well known, but also the Lord's word to him in John chapter 21 in verse 18. I like to read that and this is the Lord's talking specifically to people. It begins at that point, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, When you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.*" Now this, he said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. When he had said this, He said to him, "Follow me." Well as we will hear and as history records, Peter did follow Him not perfectly and on the first try, but he eventually followed Him faithfully as we've seen, not just his bold speaking in the book of Acts but even to the end of his life when he suffered a very similar kind of martyrdom, didn't he?

[MM]: That's right, Chris, I'm looking forward to the rest of this program.

Part 2

[CW]: Matt, this is very striking, of course, elder in the New Testament usage is the governing office of the church and the elders were the ones that needed to be apt to teach, as Paul says. And you know, in a sense, the function of the pastor was largely that of the elders. And the requirement here that Peter gives to the elders is not that they'd be seminary trained, not that they spend years and years in Bible study, which certainly would be helpful, but all the elders need to be witnesses willing to sacrifice even their lives for the testimony.

[MM]: That's right, Chris and you see Paul mentioned in Timothy that to desire that office is a good thing. It's good to aspire for that. And many young people have a good aspiration. But I hope some of those young people who are listening today would hear the soberness and the gravity of what it means to aspire to that place of

responsibility in the church of the eldership. It means you need to be willing to give up your life for the Lord. You need to be willing to sacrifice your life on His behalf. And this really when you put all these verses together, as the Life-study does here and Witness Lee is doing in this radio program today, from the very beginning of Peter in the gospels to the beginning in Acts, where you know the martyrship. You know in Acts, they were asking the Lord right before the verse we read, "Lord, is this the coming of the kingdom?" Are you coming now to set up Your kingdom? And His response was, "You shall be My martyrs." In other words, oh, it's like a little disconnect there. We thought the kingdom was coming in. Well, kingdom not like you think. In fact, let me read that first, Chris, I read Acts 1:8, and I had intended before I came into the studio today to read the verse before that as well, because they're asking in verse six, "...Lord, are you at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" And He says in verse seven, "But He said to them, It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority, But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses..." This made a deep impression on Peter. Peter was there as the first apostle. Then he became an elder in the church in Jerusalem eventually. And so, he has apostleship status, but he's also an elder in the church in Jerusalem. So, when he's writing in his epistle, in chapter five of First Peter, he says to the fellow elders. He's taking his position as an elder, not coming as an apostle, but I'm an elder. I'm just like you. You need to be willing to give up your life. These are the three statuses Witness Lee just mentioned. First, a fellow elder. The second, a witness, and thirdly, a partaker. If you're really a witness, if you're really willing to give up your life for the Lord, then you will, as Peter said, be a partaker of the glory.

[CW]: Matt, I think, speaking for most of us, we would like to go from status number one, being an elder, to status number three, partaking of the glory of Christ. Both of those are quite attractive to us, and as you said, may even inspire us to have a kind of a holy ambition as a young person. But linking these to in what we see in Peter's life, that doesn't mean we will all be martyred literally, but if we don't come to such an office, such a responsibility, with that kind of heart, that kind of willingness, and that kind of appropriating of Christ who is the One who is absolute then we really don't get to the partaking of His glory part, do we?

[MM]: We don't Chris, and we also don't understand where Peter's coming from. You know, Peter, at the very end of his life. In his Second Epistle, he said in verse 14 of chapter one, "Knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle is imminent, even as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me." He's referring back to the Lord's word to him in John 21 it's it was clear to him, it's imminent. For me, I am going to be martyred. That's the context of Peter's word here to the elders. So, if you skip this matter of martyrdom, you miss Peter's heart and spirit.

[CW]: I want to use that to transition now to this third section. Witness Lee links all of this with a verse at the end of chapter four. And again, I think this gives us insight, both into Peter and also into how Witness Lee came to the Bible and studied the Bible. It's truly tremendous. Chapter four, verse 19, says, "So then let those also who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well doing to a faithful Creator." Here's Witness Lee for our final portion.

Part 3

[CW]: Matt, as you have pointed out this is the word that all the young people and I would say all of us older ones need to hear as well. It is sobering and we ask ourselves the same question he put before us. You know I don't think we have such boldness to give the answer that the Lord would like to hear. I couldn't help thinking about Stephen as he was talking here in Act chapter seven. You know, he was being stoned. There was that time when he looked and he saw the heavens opened and he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand. At that moment, he was really committing his soul in well doing, wasn't he to a faithful Creator?

[MM]: That's a great example, Chris, because that's exactly what Peter was talking about. There's nothing more noble than to become a martyr for the Lord, to commit your soul in well doing to a faithful Creator. And Stephen

did that. He's a picture of it. You know, a picture's worth a thousand words. And that's what he did, you know? He said, I see Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he committed his soul right there to the One he was being martyred for. You know, how many of us have the boldness to say, like Peter did, that he is, I am. He didn't say, I want to be. He didn't say, I hope I will be. He said, I am. It's a real sobering word. I said at the beginning of this program that it's a very striking message with a sobering conclusion. And this, to me, is the sobering conclusion, would we be able to be in this realm of the well doing, the well doing that's worthy of this nobleness that witness Lee is talking to have the noble testimony, the noble committing of the soul through a life of martyrdom.

[CW]: Matt, this is really part one of a two-part program. See this program today and tomorrow come from the same Life-study message and the conclusion of the program tomorrow, I'll just give our listeners a little preview. It makes the point that really none of us have this capacity within ourselves, what it really requires is the laying hold in experiencing of the one who is absolute for God, and that is really where the nobility comes. Peter discovered that after all of the failures, all of the ups and downs of his life. Others seem to get there more quickly. But the destiny for all of us, isn't it, if we desire to follow the Lord to the end.

[MM]: I'm glad you brought that up about Peter, Chris. I was thinking, actually, in the New Testament, the big picture, Peter starts out really well, and we're here with him ending really well, but he does have his failures and sometimes in other Life-study programs, especially in Galatians, we pointed out Peter's failures. And we won't get into that today, but here, there's a real glory and there's a real honor. And even though Peter had his failures, he still was committing himself in well doing to the faithful Creator. And in the printed life study witness Lee uses an example of another one, Polycarp. You know, Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John right. And Polycarp had an opportunity to deny the Lord and be saved from martyrdom. And his response was, how could I deny one who's never denied me? And he again, was martyred. Great picture of a noble committing in well doing to a faithful Creator.

[CW]: Yeah, church history is full of these examples. There's a great book, you know, famous historically, Foxe's Book of Martyrs and so many that have gone after Peter and before us that provided this kind of example to us in church history and Bible itself are full of these accounts, and may they serve as an example, and I would say, as an inspiration and a source of motivation for all of us to pursue the Lord to such a degree. Great to have you with us.

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