

The Life Of A Shepherd

(Commissioning Of Soul and Jeanette Magura)

The first eleven verses of 1 Peter Chapter 5 are addressed to the Elders and to Young men. They are written by Peter, the Apostle who has spent a lifetime following Jesus, and they are written as words of encouragement and exhortation to those who are given the responsibility of leading the church. Soul and Jeanette – you fit the category of young men – and women! Elders, these words are for us, and for anyone else who carries the responsibility of leadership. What's interesting for us at Westlake is that the people in the churches Peter was writing to, were largely made up of those who were temporarily living in a foreign country who were struggling to figure out how they should live as Christians. They were people without citizenship, who sometimes didn't speak the language, and didn't completely understand the culture they were living in. They were strangers and exiles in a strange land. Soul and Jeanette – welcome to Switzerland!

Whatever a normal church looks like, Westlake isn't it. A large proportion of our congregation disappears several times a year during the major holidays. Many of the people carrying responsibility in the church work in jobs where they are required to travel and so it's difficult to organise things because people aren't here. In fact one of the reasons why you two have been appointed is the recognition that we need consistent, stable leadership for our Children's and Youth ministries. Perhaps 20% of our congregation turns over each year, so we always have people leaving and new people coming. We are a people on the move. Sometimes I feel like I'm preaching to a parade!

I came across this little gem last week that is a [comment on Westlake life](#). ***"This is the age of the half-read page; and the quick hash; and the mad dash; and the bright night with the nerves tight; the plane hop and the brief stop. It's the age of the lamp tan and the short span; the big shot in a good spot; and the brain strain and the heart pain; and the cat-naps till the spring snaps – and the funs done."*** We minister to people who have breakfast in Switzerland, lunch in London, dinner in Washington while their bags go to Mexico. I like this comment on modern day society, [which I read last week](#). ***"My great grandfather rode a horse, but was afraid of the train. My grandfather rode on a train, but was afraid of a car. My father rode in a car, but was afraid of an aeroplane. I ride in an aeroplane, but I'm afraid of a horse."***

So how do we help people become lifelong followers of Jesus Christ in a situation like ours? 1 Peter Chapter 5 has some Godly wisdom for us. [Here it is](#).

"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, 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; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen"

(1 Peter 5:1-11 NIV)

Here's some Godly wisdom from the Apostle Peter to Pastors, Elders and to all of us.

1. Lead By Example.

Be an example to those entrusted to your care. Soul and Jeanette, 10 years from now, people probably won't remember much of what you taught them, but they will remember how you behaved as a Christian. Peter describes the people of the church we lead as the flock of God that is under our care. I understand a little about sheep. I come from a nation that has 4 million people and 60 million sheep. In my country, shepherds drive the sheep with a quad bike and several dogs, who bark and snap at the sheep to make them move. But the biblical shepherd was one who walked out front of the sheep, calling them by name. And because they trusted the shepherd, they would follow. Leadership is built on trust. It's the integrity of your life that counts. If you are out front leading but there are no sheep following, then you are simply taking a walk.

2. Act Out Of Pure Motives.

The Apostle Peter says to people like you and me – don't do it for the money. I'm sure you have already got this figured out, but you are in the wrong job if you want to become a millionaire. Be a servant leader. You are not running a company, where you can hire and fire people. You are working with volunteers who already have very busy lives, and who are already giving of their time and finances until it hurts. Peter calls us to be humble. Here are three things to remember to keep you humble. Most people in the church do things on a voluntary basis that you and I get paid to do. Many of those same people pray for us every day. If you ever get tempted to think you are God's gift to mankind, just remind yourself that anything that has been achieved through your life is probably because of someone else's prayers. And here's the third thing to keep you humble. People will hardly remember much of what you teach, but they will remember how you handle difficulty, how you trust the Lord when you're under pressure, and how you live a transparent life before God and your people. That's what it means to be an example to the flock.

3. Cast All Your Anxiety On The Lord.

Living in a foreign land, where you don't speak the language and you don't understand the culture creates anxiety. Working with people from so many different cultural backgrounds creates anxiety. Being in a church with so many different understandings of what it means to be a Christian creates anxiety. Being employed by a church that is full of high powered people who are very good at their job, creates anxiety. Living under the expectation from parents that you are going to solve all the issues their children and teenagers face creates anxiety. Realising that some people expect Westlake to have the brightest and best Youth and Children's ministry when you can't find enough volunteer leaders creates anxiety. What do you do with all this anxiety? I could give you the wisdom of Walt Disney who said *"Don't be afraid of small beginnings, remember this whole thing started with a mouse."* But here's a better solution. These scriptures tell us to put all our anxieties on to the Lord. It means believing that he cares for you. It means praying often, and telling the Lord you don't know what to do, but believing that he does. It means having still times with God, where you open your hands in surrender, and let go all the stuff that weighs you down, receiving his grace and strength for another day.

4. Watch Out For The Roaring Lion.

Peter reminds us that we have an adversary, the devil, who is seeking to destroy everything that the Lord is doing. He has a plan to destroy Westlake Church. He has a plan to wreck Westlake's children's ministry. He has a plan to cripple the Youth ministry at Westlake. He's always looking to ways to set us against one another. If he can break relationships apart, he will do it. If he can cause bitterness or resentment to grow, he will do it. If he can sow seeds of doubt or discouragement, he will do it. If he can get us involved with petty issues that prevent us from helping people become lifelong followers of Jesus Christ, he will do it. If he can prevent one English speaking young person or child living on the coast from finding Christ, he will do it. People, we have been called to be front line soldiers in a spiritual battle that is not going to stop until we get to heaven. We need to be alert. We need to stand firm in what we believe. And we need to pray for

discernment to see what is an attack from the enemy, and that the Lord protects us from this roaring lion.

As I finish, I want to mention three gifts we as a congregation can give to people like Soul and Jeanette.

5. Pray For Them.

In my years of ministry the people I have appreciated most are some of those people who have quietly come up to me and said "I never miss a day when I don't pray for you." How can you go wrong when you have people like that? People talk about William Carey as being a great man of God, and he was, but not a lot of people know that he had an invalid sister who prayed for him every day for 50 years. No wonder he was a great man of God. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a great preacher who led thousands of people to Christ. But through most of his ministry, down in the basement of the church there were more than 50 people who would pray while he was preaching. No wonder he was a great preacher.

6. Pray With Them.

Don't just pray for Soul and Jeanette. Pray with them. It's a precious thing when someone prays with us. In one church where I served I had a couple who had just retired from 40 years in pastoral ministry. When I prayed with them, she began to cry. She told me that in 40 years of ministry, they had never ever had any one come in to their home to pray for them.

7. Encourage Them.

Say it with words and show it with deeds. It takes real skill to be a builder, but no skill at all to be a demolition expert. The devil will give you all help you want in finding fault with someone else's ministry. But it takes a Spirit filled person to see past the faults and find the good in others. Soul and Jeanette will make mistakes just as you and I do. There will be times when you and I need to forgive them. Every time you see them doing something badly, tell the Lord. Every time you see them doing something well, tell them. I've never yet met anyone who was damaged by too much encouragement.

Today is the formal beginning of a new chapter in the life of Westlake church. We don't know how this Chapter will unfold, but we do know that the Lord has his hand on it all. Soul and Jeanette, today I want to give you a verse of scripture - ***"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 1:4 - 6 NIV)

May the Lord bless you and keep you in this ministry at Westlake. May you find joy and satisfaction in serving the Lord Jesus with us.

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