December 2/3, 2017

# Leading in a Culture of Despair

*Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair*

**1 Peter 5:1-5**

Pastor Bryan Clark

Over the last couple of weeks we've talked about the contrast and mindset between those on a cruise ship, like the love boat, and those on a battleship. So, again, if you're on a cruise ship, who are the most important people to you? The pastry chef?...the entertainment director?...maybe the celebrities that are on the cruise ship?...but when people start shooting bullets, when the missiles start coming in, when the battle rages, you don't need a pastry chef and you don't need an entertainment director. What you need in that moment are leaders. That's what we want to talk about this morning.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Peter, Chapter 5. As you're doing that, I just want to refer to Acts chapter 20. It's a story about Paul planting churches. He's planted the church in Ephesus; he's been there three years, and now gives this very emotional speech as he is ready to depart. He's appointed elders and tells them it's time for him to leave. This was the pattern of establishing churches. They would appoint elders and move on, and what he says to them is that when he leaves, the wolves are going to move in. They're going to seek to devour the sheep, and it is the responsibility of the elders to protect the sheep from the wolves. He says the wolves are going to come from without and the wolves are going to come from within. The calling of the elder is to protect the sheep from the wolves. It has a very strong sense of urgency and protection, which is exactly the same as what Peter's talking about in 1 Peter chapter 5.

It starts in verse 1 with the word ***therefore***. It is really important to connect this conversation with what preceded it—that there are going to be *fiery trials*. There is going to be persecution—*judgment begins with the household of God*! It's likely that some of the saints are going to *suffer for the cause of Christ*. **Therefore**, in light of what Peter has just said, we're not on a cruise ship. We're on a battleship; the war is raging, and it is the responsibility of the leadership to protect the sheep. It's really important to understand that the role of a pastor or an elder in a church is not to attend meetings. It's not to make some sort of organizational business decisions. It is to be a shepherd, to protect the sheep. That's what he talks about in chapter 5.

> **Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,**
>
> (NASB, 1 Peter 5:1)

So Peter identifies himself as a **fellow elder**. Peter's not a classroom professor telling the pastors how to do their job. He was a pastor/elder in the Jerusalem church. He has walked in their shoes. He knows exactly what they are going through. So elder to elder, he is exhorting them.

Now it gets a little bit confusing, but the terms elder, presbyter, bishop, overseer, shepherd, pastor—those are all terms that are interchangeable in the New Testament. They're not all different offices. Basically elder is kind of the office and authority, and pastor or shepherd or overseer reflects the responsibility, the job description. So biblically, every pastor is an elder; every elder is a pastor. It doesn't mean all pastors are paid as a vocation, but they're pastors. Elders are not attending meetings; they're not decision makers. They're shepherds, out with the people—overseeing, protecting, leading and guiding. Peter identifies himself as a **fellow elder and witness**

**of the sufferings of Christ**. Even though it is true that Peter witnessed **the sufferings of Christ,** this word **witness** is not eye-witness. It's like testifying, a *proclaimer*—a fellow proclaimer of the message of the sufferings of Christ and fe*llow partaker of the glory when Jesus returns*.

We talked last week about this epic battle on the field for the championship and a desire not to be in the bleachers, not to just wear the uniform on the sideline, but to be *in the battle.* If it's going to be a battle where we are bruised and bloodied, and we leave everything we have for the cause, the desire to be part of that is to ultimately share in the victory celebration. That's in essence what Peter just said. He is a fellow soldier; he is a fellow battler, and he looks forward to the celebration of victory with them together. Starting then in verse 2 he talks about the commands, the actual exhortation.

Just before we look at that, it's helpful to remind ourselves what we know to be true about Peter. Peter without question will go down as a Hall-of-Fame leader in the New Testament church. Peter shared remarkable moments with Jesus. Peter was called to be one of the twelve apostles. Peter was the guy that walked on water. Peter was there as one of the three in the transfiguration, just a remarkable moment. Peter was there in the great miracles when Jesus calmed the sea, when He fed the five thousand. When Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, Peter was one of only three that was invited in to witness that moment. Peter was one that ran to the tomb and discovered the empty tomb of the resurrected Christ. Peter preached one of the all-time great sermons in Acts chapter 2 at Pentecost. Peter is in the Hall-of-Fame, but we also need to remind ourselves that Peter needed to go through the *Wilderness School of Leadership.*

Peter was by no means perfect. Peter was the one who walked on water, but he's also the one who took his eyes off Jesus and started to sink, and Jesus said, "Hey, Peter, what's the deal? Where's your faith?" Peter was the one, when Jesus said He was headed to Jerusalem in order to be crucified, Peter wanted to stop Him, and Jesus had to look at him and say, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." Imagine that moment! It was Peter in the upper room who pulled his feet back and said, "Jesus, never will You wash my feet," and Jesus said, "Peter, if you don't humble yourself and let Me wash your feet, you're off the team." It was Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane who fell asleep when he was supposed to be watching with Jesus in His agony. It was Peter that took a sword and chopped off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest, and Jesus had to put the ear back on. A few hours after that it was Peter who denied that he even knew Jesus, and at one moment he looks up and he sees Jesus. They go eyeball to eyeball, and Jesus knew that Peter had denied Him. It was Peter that was convinced because of his failures that he was off the team. In John 21 he needs a recall from fishing, back onto the team. And it's Peter that Paul says in the book of Galatians got so caught up with the legalists that Paul had to publicly rebuke him for his legalism. Peter was by no means a perfect leader. It's helpful just to realize that God calls very imperfect people to positions of leadership but needs to take them through a process to refine them, grow them, mold them and to change them. Most of us have spent a significant amount of time in the *Wilderness School of Leadership* in order to be ready to be useful to the Master. So as Peter exhorts them as a fellow leader, we are reminded that Peter's story was a story of ups and downs and, ultimately, of great triumph.

Verse 2 then the commands, exhortations:

**...shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight...**

This imagery of *shepherding* as a description for leadership is very common in both the Old and New Testaments. It would have been something that the people in the ancient world would be very familiar with. They saw it every day. It would have been powerful imagery but not as familiar to us.

One of the unique aspects of shepherds in the ancient Near East is they actually lived among the sheep. They didn't get out in front of them. They didn't push them from behind. They got in the mix. Their job was to feed and protect the sheep, to lead them, protect them from the wolves trying to attack them, make sure they had food and water and were healed when they were injured. The idea of *overseeing the sheep* is a vivid imagery—that every single sheep in the flock was the responsibility of the shepherd, and the shepherd understood that was his responsibility.

Now I have great respect for cowboys. I personally consider myself a cowboy wannabe—so I love cowboys. But get in your mind this image of cowboys moving a herd of cattle across the plains. A couple of them have whips, and they're cracking the whip; the dust is flying with all the noise and chaos to move the cattle. That is not the image of a shepherd. As a matter of fact, we're going to use that as kind of the contrary image. Shepherding was quiet; it was in the middle of the sheep. The shepherd kind of moved and the sheep followed because the sheep knew him and trusted him. It was a much more relational approach to taking care of the livestock.

It is interesting, twice (once in verse 1 and now early in verse 2) he talks about the sheep **among you**, the **elders among you.** There is this idea that using this imagery of a shepherd can only be a shepherd if he's among the sheep. The shepherd can't do this remotely. The shepherd can't do it through the internet or a phone call. The whole idea is the shepherd lives with the sheep, right in the middle of them—**among them**.

Now while that seems kind of obvious, there is a bit of a problem in our culture. It's built on several layers of problems, but as people become selfish, self-absorbed, individualized and independent, there's this moment in American church culture that, "I'm a Christian; I don't really need the church and basically I can get my teaching online or a podcast or on television—just kind of tune it in and that will work just fine." There are all kinds of problems with that, but it's good to remind ourselves that your primary teacher should be someone who lives among you. It should not be someone on the internet. It should not be someone on the radio or in a podcast. It should be someone who lives among you. There's a movement now where there are these satellite churches. You have a celebrity preacher, and he's beamed to all these different campuses. People literally show up and watch the preacher on a screen like they're watching television, and their primary teacher doesn't live anywhere around them. There is no accountability in that! There are, in my opinion, real concerns with that. I've told you before, I think you should know how your primary teacher treats his wife, how he raises his children, how he spends his money, how he lives his life, who he is in the midst of the sheep. I think there is critical and necessary accountability in that. I'll just suggest to you that if you knew what was going on in the private lives of many of these Christian celebrities, you would be greatly disappointed. The shepherd needs to be among the sheep. There shouldn't be layers of insulation between the pastors and the people. The pastors, the elders, the leaders should live and walk among the people—this whole idea of being a shepherd.

> **...shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God;** (Vs. 2b)

Now there are different ideas of what exactly that means. Some think maybe it means the pastors were lazy, and they kind of had to be forced to do their job. That seems unlikely to me. I think the most likely explanation is understanding we are talking about a culture of persecution; we're talking about *fiery ordeals*; we're talking about people who are eventually, many of them going to be arrested, imprisoned, put to death. Some suggest that maybe at this point Nero's already started burning Christians at the stake. So if there is persecution, who are the first ones to be persecuted? Answer: the leaders. That's always the way it works. Of all the apostles, all but one as far as we

know were ultimately martyred for the cause of Christ. Maybe John lived into old age, but the rest were all executed for their faith. Who do you persecute if you are going to persecute the church? Answer: you start with the leaders. So a lot of scholars think that among these churches, as it is in many places in the world today, there was hesitancy for the leaders to step forward because it was almost like a death sentence. So there was this, "No, I don't want to do it. You do it." "I don't want to do it. You do it," and kind of this arm twisting, and that's what Peter is talking about. It should not be **under compulsion** where somebody's twisting your arm in order to do it, but rather he says **according to *the will of* God.** In other words, there should be a strong sense of call that God is calling me to be a leader, to be an elder, and I will take the consequences that go with that.

Now around the world today, as we speak, that is still true in many places in the world. There are brave, courageous leaders who feel a sense of call to lead the church of Christ, understanding it's almost guaranteed that they will be persecuted, imprisoned, and possibly executed. These are amazing, brave, courageous people. That is certainly not the climate in which we find ourselves here in America, but there is a reality to the fact that anyone who has assumed a position of leadership knows that as soon as you do that, you put a target on your chest. That is absolutely true when we're talking about spiritual leadership. This is a battle. There is an enemy that wants to destroy the church, and the enemy starts with the leaders. I have this discussion often with young men who, in their college years get very excited about Jesus, and often they translate that into, "I think God wants me to be a pastor," and I always kind of pursue, "Are you sure that is what God is calling you to?" We need really excited Christians to be architects, to be doctors, lawyers, plumbers, electricians, business owners and teachers. Sometimes it can get confusing between just being excited about Jesus, and thinking that automatically means a call to ministry. One of the things that I have learned myself over the years is: if you don't have a strong sense of call, you're just not going to make it. The responsibility of a spiritual leader is to protect the sheep from the wolves, and I'll tell you this. Oftentimes the wolves fight back. You put a target on your chest, and understand it is: *Game On*. I can tell you from my heart this was never my dream. I wasn't dreaming as a young man, "Someday I'll get to be a pastor. Someday I want to be a preacher in a big church." It was never my dream, but through a series of events that I had no real control over, I ended up preaching in a church and, in the midst of that experience, I had an overwhelming sense of call. This is what God wants from me. For over thirty years I have not doubted that call. It is a deeply fulfilling thing to know there's a sense of call, and obedience in that. But I am telling you this: you need to understand if you accept that call, you're putting a target on your chest; that's part of what you are signing up for. If you don't want that, then be a greeter at Walmart. But whether you're in the marketplace or whether you're in the church, if you are going to step up as a leader who is a Christian and you're going to represent the values of Christ, you have made yourself a target. That is part of the calling.

Next he says,

> **...but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;** (Vs. 2c)

This idea of **sordid gain** is the idea of *money* and *stuff*. Religion has always been big business. It was big business in the first century; it's big business today. There have always been people who, in the religious world, have been able to accumulate a lot of wealth and stuff. It was a problem then; it's a problem today. But when we think about this concept of elders and pastors and spiritual leaders, there are multiple layers to this. For those of us that are elders and pastors and leaders, the application seems fairly obvious. For those of you in the congregation, there's also awareness that this is what you should expect from your leaders. But I think anyone as a Christian who's called to a

position of leadership—in the marketplace, on an athletic team, in a school, in a neighborhood, in a family—the principles still apply. What is it that motivates your call, your leadership? I think we would all agree in 21st century America, this allure of money and stuff is a problem.

So in the church culture, which is specifically what Peter is talking about, he's not talking about lay elders out in the marketplace that are pursuing money. He's talking about making money by being a pastor—basically who is at risk to go down that path. I would suggest to you it's not like associate pastors. Nobody decides to be a youth pastor for the money. Nobody decides to be an associate pastor for the money. It's not the lay elders. They don't get paid anything. It's people like me. We are the ones that are at risk of getting sidetracked to kind of, to put it crudely, cash in on our position in order to make more money. I guess that's kind of crude and straight up, but here is what happens. In the Christian subculture we have all kinds of pastors, musicians, and writers who make millions and millions of dollars. They live in mansions. They're on TV, on radio, and have jets. They jet-set around, kind of cash in, and what I have watched over the years as a pastor is: you kind of reach a point (seems like in your fifties) where there's a little bit of restlessness. You've established yourself, and there is a temptation to cash in on that—to write books, speak at conferences, get on the preaching circuit, radio and television, because there are millions and millions and millions of dollars that are available to do that. I think there is a long list of preachers and Christians that started off very sincere for the sake of the gospel. God used them and as they became more established, the allure of cashing in became greater and greater, and eventually they lose their way. It happens again and again. Ultimately, who suffers? Answer is: the sheep. The wolves are moving in, are attacking, and the shepherd is nowhere to be found. The shepherd is cashing in, is seeking significance, trying to build up a bank account. The shepherd is jet-setting here and there while the sheep are vulnerable and the church suffers the consequences.

I by nature am a people watcher, and one of the things I've watched over the years are my fellow preachers—kind of my peers and those older than me—those that finish well and those that have lost their way, and I've kind of tried to understand what makes the difference. One of the things that I have seen, as a pattern, is often preachers like me get in their 50's, and for whatever reason they get restless; they start to think about cashing it in and kind of getting a payday. One of the things I wanted to be true of me is to stay true to the fact that my call is to be a pastor; it's to be a shepherd and live among the sheep. Part of this *Decade on Purpose* plan, for me was a one hundred percent commitment to Lincoln Berean. I pulled myself off all boards; I rarely speak anywhere outside the context of Lincoln Berean. My calling is to be the pastor and shepherd of Lincoln Berean Church, and that's where I have dedicated my time and effort.

As we move forward, and there will be a transition, one of the things that the elders have discussed is: we want to be very diligent to weed out those candidates that see this as a platform, as a platform to advance their career, to write their books, to get on the preaching circuit. One of the things that grieves my heart is I think a lot of students today are going to seminary with this dream. They dream about being the next author, about being the next conference speaker, about being the next Christian celebrity, and it's a very bad mindset when God has called you to shepherd the sheep. And so as we look at the transition to come, one of the things we are going to be very diligent about is we want someone who feels a strong sense of call to be a pastor and shepherd the sheep, not someone who is interested in using this as a platform to advance a career. I think all of that is what Peter is talking about. The concern is cashing in on a position for personal gain. Verse 3:

> **...nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.**

In the Greco-Roman culture, leadership was very heavy-handed. There was a strong sense of authority. "Do what you're told or else." I think that's what he's talking about **lording it over those allotted to your charge**. That's not what a shepherd does. That's not how a shepherd leads. If we go back to our imagery, that's more the cowboy with the bullwhip and all the hooting and hollering and driving the cattle. That's not what God calls us to as shepherds and elders and leaders. But I would say for any of us that are in positions of leadership anywhere in the community, really think about what he just said because what he said is not to use your position to somehow lord it over someone else, but rather the alternative is to be an example, a pattern. Basically what he's saying is you should be able to say to whomever it is that you lead, "If you want to know how to live a *hope filled life in a culture of despair,* just follow me." It's a very sobering thought, but that is the call of every leader. It's not about making money. It's not about your significance. It's not about advancing your career. It's not about trying to be somebody. It's about understanding God has given you sheep, and your responsibility is to shepherd these sheep—to care for them, to love them, to protect them, to be part of the healing of their wounds, and simply stated to say to them, "If you want to know how to live *a hope filled life in a culture full of despair*, follow me." That's in essence what Peter just said. Verse 4:

> **And when the Chief Shepherd** (that would be Jesus) **appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.**

So when Jesus returns, there will be this **crown of glory**. Some people interpret this as if the pastors and elders get their own special crown. I think that's off; as a matter of fact I think it's way off. I think there is a consistent biblical theology that all of us have a calling, and all of us are equally responsible to be faithful to our calling. Nobody's *more than*; nobody's *less then*. Nobody ends up with a special crown. The *elders* is plural, but when he says *the crown,* it's singular, so what I think he's saying is that when we do our job correctly, then we all join in the celebration—this grand victory celebration when Jesus returns. So I have my responsibility; you have your responsibility. Part of my responsibility as your pastor is to help you fulfill your responsibility, and we all join in the victory celebration when Jesus returns. I think that's what he is referring to. Verse 5:

> **You younger men** (and I think that is kind of a cultural reflection: younger people—men and women)**, likewise, be subject to *your* elders;**

You know in every generation throughout history there's always been a bit of a struggle with younger generations submitting to the older generation. That's part of how we're wired. That's always going to be true. I do think though in 21st century American Christian culture there are some problems with this. I think we've become so individualized, selfish and self-centered that everything is about *me*, and we've kind of reduced a lot of our Christianity down to, "This is just between me and Jesus, and nobody can tell me what to do." A lot of those people have dismissed the idea of church. "I am the church; I don't need all of that," and they find their favorite preacher online and they've convinced themselves that is what God wants for them. In essence they're unwilling to submit to the leadership of the church. I always find it ironic that these same people that are unwilling to submit to leadership in a church go right out into the marketplace and expect the people under them to submit to their leadership. They expect to be respected as authority, but they themselves do not want to respect authority.

But here's the deal: This morning those people aren't here. They aren't here because they don't need to be here, so what's the point of going on with that conversation? So I want to flip it over a little bit because the reality is: I think that is true, and I think it is a problem. But I think there's always been a remnant that seeks to be faithful to what God has called them to. If you go to a lot of

churches in Lincoln today, you see either a lot of old people or a lot of young people. One of the things that is distinctive of Lincoln Berean Church is you see a lot of people of all ages mixing together. One of the things that really excites me is we have great younger generation people—people in their 30's, people in their 20's, people in their teens, and these are people who love Jesus. These are people that love this church. These are people that give of their time, their talents and treasure. These are people that live with a sense of calling and they would say, "Count me in." These are people who have been wonderfully honoring and respectful to people like me and the other elders and pastors and people on staff, so rather than kind of rebuking the people that are not here—which makes no sense—it makes more sense to me to celebrate the awesome people that *are* here. This younger generation that is going to take up the baton are going to lead, and they're going to lead the generations under them to what I believe are the best days of Lincoln Berean still out in front of us. I am super excited about this younger generation. I think we're in great hands, and I think that is something that we celebrate together because there's always a remnant that says, "I want to be obedient; I want to follow Jesus," and God is going to use them to be world changers! We are blessed to have so many of them among us as part of our family at Lincoln Berean, so that's, to me, the better way to turn that. *(clapping)* The last thing he says then is

> **...be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**

So everyone, together, all of us, the idea of **clothe** is a Greek word that referred to a slave putting on his or her apron. It's the idea of putting on the clothing of a servant and we all come together. We serve one another in humility, ultimately for the cause of Christ. There is a reminder from a verse in Proverbs that if you are proud, God has His way of humbling you. He will oppose you. He will refine you. He will take you through the *Wilderness School of Leadership* until that pride is gone. For those that are humble, God favors that; He celebrates that, and He blesses that. But at the end of the day, we all come together as the people of God, humbly serving one another for the cause of Christ. Peter has talked about that several times.

So to bring this to a close, it is not really complicated. If God has called you to be a leader, whether it's a leader at church, in the marketplace, your family, your school, your athletic team—wherever God has you, He has called you to be a shepherd. He's not given you that position just to make money. He's not given you that position to cash in. He's not given you that position in order to find significance or advance your career or try to be somebody or to take advantage of the people that you've been called to lead. God has called you as a Christian leader to be a shepherd, to live among the sheep, to love the sheep, to guide the sheep, to lead the sheep, to feed the sheep, to water the sheep, to protect the sheep, to genuinely oversee and care about those sheep and, ultimately, it's the responsibility of all of us as leaders to say to the people who we lead, "If you want to understand how to live as a *hope filled person in a culture of despair*, just follow me."

> *Our Father, we're sobered by the reality of our calling as leaders. Whether it's within the context of this church or out in the marketplace, at school or at home, it's a sober calling, not for personal advancement, not for personal gain, but to rightly represent the message of Jesus. Lord, may we be faithful as leaders to our calling in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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December 2/3, 2017

# Leading in a Culture of Despair

*Hope-filled Living in a Culture of Despair*

1 Peter 5:1-5

Pastor Bryan Clark

## Opening Discussion

1. When does leadership matter most to you and why? What has been your experience with those in positions of spiritual leadership?

2. What do you want from a leader? Are you that kind of person? How hard is it to follow a leader who genuinely cares and is doing the right things for the right reasons?

## Bible Study

1. Read Acts 20:26-32. Why does Paul put leaders (elders) in place in Ephesus? Why does leadership matter? What if the "wolves" were coming after you and your family?

2. Read I Peter 5:1-5. The "Therefore" of verse 1 refers back to the previous discussion. Why does leadership matter in times of trials and persecution? In times of persecution, who will likely be targeted first?

3. What are the differences between leaders who live among you and those who are far removed from you? Do you want spiritual leaders who live among you and why?

4. What does it mean to "shepherd the flock of God?" See also John 10:1-18; Psalm 100:3; Psalm 23.

5. How does Peter describe the Shepherd? What motivates the Shepherd? What does this look like for you in very practical terms?

6. If you are a leader in any area of life you should prove to be an example to others of how to live as a hope-filled person in a culture of despair. What does that look like for you in the areas where you lead?

7. The only way for a church to be successful in accomplishing her mission is to have biblically qualified leaders and people who willingly follow them. How are both leaders and followers to treat one another according to verse 5? What then will we experience together?

## Application

1. If you are called to lead in any environment, how are you doing based on I Peter 5:1-5? What are some areas where you can improve based on this text?

2. What would it look like for you to be an example to others of how to live with hope in a culture of despair? When is your example going to be most needed?


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