

Bible Byte - #6

Read: 1 Peter 5

Pray for God's wisdom as we seek understanding.

*Spend a few minutes reviewing what you have discovered so far.
What spoke most deeply to you in the first 4 chapters of 1 Peter?*

What have you struggled to understand or to take in?

1 Peter 5:1-5

The final part of the letter is addressed to the “elders”. The Greek word here means “senior” both in terms of age and in terms of status in the community. The writer encourages the elders to be a witness to the suffering of Christ, sharing in the glory to be revealed (5:1).

- *Are you an “elder” in either sense? If so, how do you understand your role with your family and community?*
- *How is your life reflecting / witnessing to the suffering of Christ?*

The writer compares the role of an elder to that of a shepherd, instructing them to tend the flock and exercise oversight, “willingly”, he adds (5:2); and to not be overbearing, but to be examples (5:3). A shepherd, indeed any farmer of animals, is concerned first and foremost for the well-being of his/her sheep. They are thinking about what their animals need for nurture and safety, and they will do their utmost to ensure the animals have what they need. Further, the shepherd knows that he/she is a caretaker of the flock who belong to another, to God. In caring for the flock, a mutual trust develops so that the sheep will follow the shepherd as he/she leads them.

- *In caring for others, how do you balance the need to offer practical care, and sometimes to “exercise oversight” without being “overbearing”?*

In caring for the people in your area of reach, the writer says, you will earn the reward, “a crown of glory that never fades away” (5:4).

- *This image may seem a little strange to the 21st century world. What does the “crown of glory” mean to you?*

Younger folk are not left out of the advice given. To the younger ones in the community, the writer instructs them to “accept the authority of the elders” and then moves immediately to address the whole community in asking that they all “clothe yourselves with humility” (5:5) and quotes from Proverbs 3:34 to remind them that God does not want us to be proud.

- *How do you practice humility?*

The Lectionary: Easter 7: 1 Peter 5:6-11

The lectionary reading for Easter 7 splits verses 5 and 6, but these verses are connected. They are both about humility – humility with each other (5:5) and humility before God (5:6). “Humble yourselves... before God” and let God lift you up (5:6). There is a great level of trust required for us to “humble ourselves” before each other and before God.

- *Are we able to offer the same humility that we bring to God, to the people around us? What makes that hard to do?*

The writer continues encouragement towards a deep trust in God by inviting the new disciples to give their anxiety to God (5:7). The verb in Greek is a strong one, pick up everything that is bothering you, and fling it on God's back.

- *What makes you anxious? Spend a moment now giving all that bothers you to God.*
- *Being humble and handing our anxiety over to God is an invitation to trust God to hold us – when we think we are not good enough, or when we think we are too good, or when we worry about what is happening in the world around us – how can you learn to trust God more fully, more deeply?*

The writer then returns to the subject of discipline instructing the followers of Jesus to be alert to the temptations of the devil who lurks everywhere. “The devil” here is described as being like a roaring lion, prowling, looking for someone to eat, a description that is vivid, and violent. The people who received this letter would have known the brutality of the Roman “entertainment” that involved putting people into a confined space with a half-starved wild beast. In thinking about who or what this “devil” is, we can find ourselves with two extremes: trivialising to the point of ridicule that we can ignore (for example, the little red creature with horns and a trident); and spending a great deal of time wondering what the devil is up to or blaming everything on the work of the devil. We also tend to personify the devil (that is, try to make it more like us). How we deal with this concept is important as it impacts the way in which we deal with our own brokenness and with the brokenness we experience in others. It is about how we accept or allocate blame and/or responsibility. Regardless of how we understand the working of “the devil”, the writer here urges vigilance and a response of respect and gentleness that comes from faith.

- *What image helps you to understand “the devil”?*

Resist, says the writer, be steadfast in faith for you know the followers of Jesus around the world are suffering similarly (5:8-9). The writer then reassures them that, after suffering for a time, God will “restore, support, strengthen and establish you” (5:10).

This letter includes two “doxologies” that are very similar: “to him be[long] the power [and the glory] forever and ever. Amen” (see 4:11b, 5:11). These are affirmations of, or songs of praise for, God’s authority over all of creation. The writer points us again to the God who is over all.

- *What does it mean to you to pray, “Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.”?*

1 Peter 5:12-14 – the final greetings

The writer then closes the letter, first indicating that the letter is being carried by Silvanus (5:12) and passing on a greeting from a sister church, Babylon, and another follower, Mark (5:13). The writer also restates his purpose in writing, “to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God” (5:12). Scholars debate who and where these references point to, however, perhaps it is enough to be reminded that as the early church grew, faithful men and women travelled the known world sharing not only the stories of Jesus, but encouragement and hope and the assurance that no community was alone in its struggle.

The writer closes with his own greeting,

“Greet one another with a kiss of love.
Peace to all of you who are in Christ.” (5:14)

- *Peace to you! Take a moment to seek and rest in the peace that God gives to you.*

Spend some time, looking back over 1 Peter. What do you most want to hold and carry with you from this letter? Perhaps you could keep a diary or journal, or notes on your phone/device to remind yourself of what you have discovered?

*If you were to write to your fellow disciples, what would you want to say? How would you encourage them? What would you want to teach them?
Perhaps you could write to them now.*

Acknowledgements

Tom Wright, *Early Christian Letters for Everyone*, 2011, SPCK, London
The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol XII, 1998, Abingdon Press, Nashville