

# Servant Leadership



## SABBATH—MAY 6

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** 1 Peter 5:1–10; Acts 6:1–6; Jeremiah 10:21; Matthew 20:24–28; Proverbs 3:34; Revelation 12:7–9.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Turn all your worries over to him. He cares about you” (1 Peter 5:7, NIRV).



**Good leadership receives its plan from God and the Bible.**

**STUDIES OF GROWING CHURCHES** show how important good leadership is. Good leadership is based on God and the Bible. It gives opportunities to all members in the church to use their spiritual gifts to finish the work of the gospel.

But church leadership can be challenging. One challenge leaders face is that churches are run mostly by volunteers, who often are already very busy. Another challenge leaders face is that members can “vote with their feet.” That means they can refuse to come to church if something happens that they do not like. And often churches face persecution, as in Peter’s day. The church leader is very open to attack at these times. A leader must be deeply spiritual to deal with such challenges. So then, we may ask, who has what it takes to be a good leader?

In 1 Peter 5:1–10, Peter writes on the subject of Christian leadership in the local church. He discusses the need for excellent local leaders. This excellence is also needed in members. Peter’s words have as much meaning for us today as they did for believers back then.

**ELDERS (CHURCH LEADERS) IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CHURCH (Acts 6:1–6)**

**Read the following verses: Acts 6:1–6; Acts 14:23; Acts 15:6; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:2. What do these verses teach us about the challenges the church faces during its early years? What do its leaders do in these situations?**

A large number of people become believers and join the church during its early years. What a great blessing from God! But the experience of the first Christians shows that fast growth can bring problems.

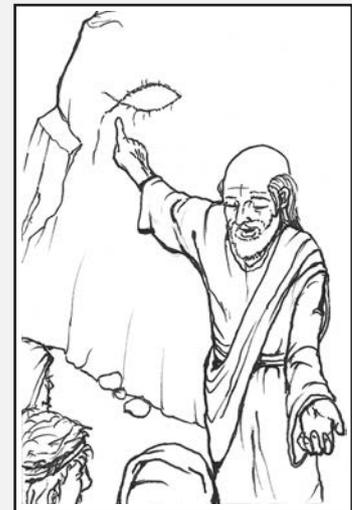
For example, Acts 1–5 records how the Holy Spirit leads many people to become Christians. Acts 6:1–6 shows the result: the group becomes too big for its leadership. So the leaders need to reorganize how things are done in the day-to-day work of the church.

One special situation makes it clear that there is a problem with how the church is organized at the time. There is a Greek-speaking group in the church. This group complains that its widows are neglected each day when the church gives out food. So, to correct this problem, the church chooses a group of people to help the 12 apostles (leaders; teachers) to manage the church's resources. This group of people is known as deacons.

It is true that the Holy Spirit leads the church in a special way when it first begins. But, even then, there is a need for order. One important group of leaders that the church needs is the elders. Elders are chosen for each local church group. So Paul and Barnabas choose elders to lead new groups of Christians. This means that they choose elders as they travel to places that have not heard about Jesus (Acts 14:23).

Elders are given many different responsibilities in the early years of the church. They serve as leaders of their local community. Sometimes they work as instructors. They teach new believers. They also preach. And they make sure that things are taken care of and done for the well-being of the community (Acts 15:6; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:2).

**What are ways that you can learn to work better with the leaders in your local church, even when you do not always agree on things?**



**Elders taught new believers. They also preached. They made sure that things were taken care of in the church and done for the well-being of the community.**

## THE ELDERS (1 Peter 5:1–4)

**Read 1 Peter 5:1–4. According to (as stated in) these verses, how should leaders think and feel about the work they do in the church? How can the important rules found in these verses help us to be better workers in the church?**

Peter instructs the elders in 1 Peter 5:1–4. He begins by saying that he also is an elder. He then notes two things about himself. (1) He is a witness of the suffering of Christ. (2) He expects to share in the glory to be shown in us at Christ's return. By saying these things, Peter points to the first thing that should be found within an elder. And that is, an understanding of what Christ has suffered for us and what great hope He offers us.

Peter also says that the work of an elder is very much like the work of a shepherd. A shepherd takes care of a flock of sheep. In the same way, an elder tends the flock of God. Peter's comparison of a church to a flock suggests that members can sometimes go off on their own just like sheep do. So the sheep (members) need the shepherd (elder) to guide them back to the flock (church). The shepherd (elder) helps the sheep (members) to work in harmony with the flock (church). The elder also should not be proud. He should be a humble example of how a Christian needs to act.



**A shepherd takes care of a flock of sheep. In the same way, an elder tends the flock of God.**

**Read Jeremiah 10:21; Ezekiel 34:8–10; and Zechariah 11:17. What warning do these verses give to shepherds?**

Christian leaders must be very patient with the people they work with in the church. They must be as patient as shepherds are with their sheep. This work is very important. Elders must gently bring people together for worship. They must gently bring them together to share the message of Jesus with others and the salvation found in Him.

Peter also notes that elders should be willing, but not forced, to lead. It is not always easy to find people who will lead out in church. Yet, for a church to be successful, a number of leadership jobs need to be filled. But there are reasons that many people are unwilling to be leaders. Some of these jobs require a lot of time. People who could do such jobs may have other work to do. Others may feel unprepared to take on the job. But Peter says that if we are asked, we should accept leadership if it is possible to do so.

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP (1 Peter 5:3)

**Read 1 Peter 5:3 and Matthew 20:24–28. What important standards of Christian leadership are found in these verses?**

One of the most important words in 1 Peter 5:3 is “ruler.” In Greek, this word is *katakurieuontes*. The same word also is found in Matthew 20:25. It means to rule “over” or to “act proud or bossy” toward someone. Peter’s instruction to elders in 1 Peter 5:3 might be translated as, “[Do not] act as if you were a ruler over those under your care” (NIRV). His words agree with Jesus in Matthew 20:25.

Matthew 20:20–23 gives us information to help us understand the sayings of Jesus in Matthew 20:24–28. The mother of James and John approaches Jesus with a request. She wants Jesus to honor her sons above all others when He comes into His kingdom. She asks Jesus to let one son sit at His right side and the other at His left.

“Jesus is loving and gentle with James and John. Jesus does not scold their selfishness. He does not find fault with them for wanting to be first. He reads their hearts. He knows how deeply they love Him. Their love for Him is more than human love. True, their love for Jesus is not perfect. It is damaged by the fact that they are sinful, fallen humans. But their love flows out from the fountain of Jesus’ own saving love. So He will not scold them. Instead, He will deepen their love and make it pure.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 548.

Jesus explains that the honor of sitting at His left or right side is not His to give. Instead, the Father alone has that power. Then Jesus goes on to explain an important difference between His kingdom and the kingdoms of the world. Those who wish to lead in the kingdom where Jesus is King must become servants. They will be like Jesus. “ ‘Be like the Son of Man. He did not come to be served. Instead, he came to serve others. He came to give his life as the price for setting many people free’ ” (Matthew 20:28, NIRV).

Peter calls church leaders to be like Jesus. The surrender and death to self seen in Jesus must be seen in the elders, as well.

**Read Philippians 2:4–8. How do Paul’s words here agree with Peter’s words in 1 Peter 5:3? More important, how can we do the things in these verses that we are called to do?**



**Those who wish to lead in the kingdom where Jesus is King must become servants. They will be like Jesus.**

**CLOTHED IN A HUMBLE SPIRIT (1 Peter 5:5–7)**

**Before the Cross, we should feel no pride.**

Society was divided into many different groups or classes in the ancient world in which Peter lived. The ruling class had a lot of power. Around them were people of lower rank. And the lowest rank of all belonged to slaves. In the world outside of the Jewish and Christian religions, the word *humble* was linked with people of low rank. We can see this in the Greek word for being humble. It can mean “free from pride” but also “unimportant,” “weak,” and “poor.” It describes people who do not have rank or power in society. So being humble was the proper way for those of lower rank to behave toward those of a higher one. And to act humbly would not have been praised as the proper way for free people to behave.

**Read 1 Peter 5:5–7. Think about the situation and time when Peter was alive. With this knowledge in mind, what is so remarkable about what Peter writes here?**

In the Bible, being humble is thought very well of and prized. But the way the Bible looks at being humble is far different from the way people viewed being humble when Peter was alive. Peter quotes Proverbs 3:34 to show what God thinks of pride. Indeed, the Old Testament shows that part of God’s work throughout history has been to lay low the proud (Isaiah 13:11; Isaiah 23:9; Job 40:11).

What is the right thought or feeling we should have toward God? The answer is that we should feel humble toward Him (1 Peter 5:6). Christians are aware they are sinners saved by God’s mercy. And because all are sinners, all are equals. So, before the Cross, we should feel no pride. Sure, it is easy to feel humble before God. After all, He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. And it is easy to be humble before those who are above us, who have power over us, and who are “higher” in rank than we are. But the true test comes when we show a humble spirit toward those “under” us, who have no power over us.

So a Christian should be known for being humble. A humble heart should be seen in all his or her relationships, not only with God but with others (1 Peter 5:5). We must be humble toward those who work for us or are under our care. That is the kind of humble spirit Peter says we should have.

**What is it about the Cross and what it stands for that should always help keep us humble?**

## LIKE A ROARING LION (1 Peter 5:8–10)

As we already know, Peter writes his letters in a setting of persecution. The great war between Christ and Satan was not just a distant theme or teaching to his readers. Instead, they experienced this war in a way that many of us have not, at least for now.

**Read 1 Peter 5:8–10 and Revelation 12:7–9. What do these verses teach us about how evil begins and about the work of Satan in our world?**

The book of Revelation shows that Christians take part in the very large and spiritual battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. In Revelation, the forces of good are led by Jesus. Jesus is the Word of God. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:13, 16). The forces of evil are led by the devil. The devil is also called Satan. He is pictured as a dragon (Revelation 12:7–9; Revelation 20:7, 8). Radio and TV broadcasts and even some Christians declare that the devil is not real. But the fact is that the devil is a powerful being. His only wish is to destroy us. But the good news is that the devil will be destroyed in the end (Revelation 20:9, 10).

Peter does not lessen the danger the devil represents. “The devil is like a roaring lion.” He wants to “swallow up” everyone he can (1 Peter 5:8, NIV). Peter also points out that his readers can see the power of the devil in the suffering they are going through now. But this suffering will end in eternal glory (1 Peter 5:10).

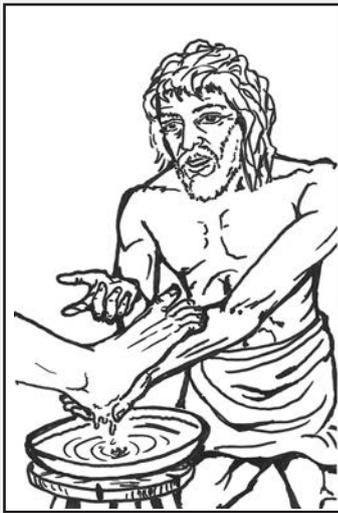
**Read 1 Peter 5:10 again. What is Peter saying to us in this verse?**

We do not know what trials Peter’s readers were going through. But what we can see is the hope that Peter expresses. Yes, the devil is real. The battle is real. And our sufferings are real. But the God of all mercy and forgiveness has defeated the devil. So we may suffer. But we must remain faithful—even if necessary, until death (read Hebrews 11:13–16). Then victory will be ours, thanks to Jesus.

**How can we learn to hold on in faith? And how do we stay strong until the end, whatever may come our way?**



“The devil is like a roaring lion.” He wants to “swallow up” everyone he can.



Each time the followers of Jesus wash one another's feet, they remind one another that if you want to be a leader in Jesus' kingdom you must become like a servant.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** A great example of the servant leadership of Jesus is found in what He does at the Last Supper. Jesus is fully aware that He is the Son of God. After the meal, He washes the feet of the disciples (John 13:14, 15). Each time the followers of Jesus wash one another's feet, they act out this scene again. And they remind one another that if you want to be a leader in Jesus' kingdom you must become like a servant. No doubt, Peter is thinking about Jesus' humble act when he calls on church elders not to lord it over others (1 Peter 5:5).

"Christ agreed to become man. In doing so, He showed a humble spirit that caused all heaven to marvel. Christ was God before He was Man. So He had to lower Himself to become one of us. We must open our minds to what this fact truly means. We must realize that Christ took off His royal robe and His kingly crown. He gave up His right to rule. He clothed His divine self with human flesh. He became a Man so that He might meet man where he was. Christ wanted to bring to the human family the power to overcome sin. And He wanted us to become the sons and daughters of God."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, page 81.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Jesus begins His work for God on earth by boldly facing the devil. When He does, He is weak from fasting for 40 days. But He resists the devil's temptations by quoting the Bible (Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1–13). What does this fact tell us about how we also can resist the devil?
- ② Give examples of what a humble spirit looks like. What can you learn from those examples?
- ③ In class, answer this question: What makes a good Christian leader? How might a good political leader look like a good Christian leader? How might they be different?
- ④ Suppose someone claims that Satan is not real. Instead, he or she says Satan is just a symbol, or word picture, of the evil found in humans. What would you say to that person?