

# GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

September 6, 2015



# Discussion Guide

## Cultivating a Humble Heart

### Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they state they have held back.)

### Getting Started:

10 minutes

- Are you a person who typically gets something on the first try, or do you need lots of practice?

### Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Consider describing the background and context of Peter's letter and the church governance structure he addresses.
- Read 1 Peter 5.1-7 aloud, slowly. Read the text once more, seeking to hear the text as a congregant to whom Peter is writing.
- Peter addresses the way relationships within the church are to function. In what ways do the relationships within the church become a means for practicing humility?
- What impact, if any, do Peter's instructions have upon the structure and purpose of the church gathered?
- Is the church which Peter describes like or unlike churches today? In what ways? Could you elaborate?
- What might being the church look like during a typical Sunday gathering if we

followed Peter's instructions?

- What, if anything, keeps us from relating to one another in this way?
- In what ways might we begin to relate in these ways as a group? How might our group practice humility in our relationships with the larger church body?
- Conclude in prayer, asking for the grace to practice humility with intentionality as you gather as a group and with the larger community of Christ.

### Context and Background

#### Elders

In the New Testament, elders are a form of church governance. Unlike deacons (Acts 6), the role of elder is rooted in the practice of Jewish community leadership. In the Old Testament, an older man who led his family was considered an elder (Exodus 3.16, 18). These men were respected because they were repositories of collected wisdom and guided their respective extended families. Over time, certain elders began to extend their leadership by representing cities or groups (Exodus 19.7-8; Deuteronomy 21.1-9; Judges 11.4-11), serving as judges (Deuteronomy 21.18-21; Ruth 4.1-12) and serving as governing authorities (Joshua 20.4; 2 Kings 10.1, 5; Ezra 6.7-8). At times those who filled this later role served as a collective group with the Sanhedrin being the highest and most powerful such group.

Some early churches, probably because these churches were made up of Jews who decided to follow Jesus, chose to maintain this form of governance within their churches. This form of governance appears as early as the book of Acts (Acts 14.23) and could take the form of a single elder (2 John and 3 John) or a group of elders (Acts 20.17; 1 Timothy 4.14; James 5.14). The elders in the early church took on various roles such as ordaining ministers (1 Timothy 4.14), leading the church (1 Timothy 5.17, 19) and engaging in liturgical practices (James 5.14). In the earliest congregations, the elders were most likely those who had witnessed the ministry of Jesus (1 Peter 5.1) or were directly connected to an apostle (Acts 14.23) but later elders were appointed based upon the maturity of their faith (1 Timothy 3.1-7). This form of

church governance still exists today, but in various forms, each form using the guidelines of the New Testament as their template.

## The Text

### 1 Peter 5.1-7: Cultivating a humble heart

The letter of 1 Peter is a circular letter written by Peter to the churches of Asia Minor. These churches were enduring an intense form of local persecution. In order to follow Jesus, ties had been broken with family and friends and these were seeking to “rehabilitate” these followers of Jesus, using pressure if necessary (1 Peter 1.6; 3.14-17; 4.1-4, 12-16). Peter has heard of the struggle which these churches are enduring and writes an encouraging letter to help these early believers understand how to be the church in difficult and hostile times. His words remind modern readers that the people of God are responsible for how they live within their context and that they will be held accountable for their actions (1 Peter 4.7). More importantly, his words are instructive of how the church is counter-cultural when it truly seeks to be the church.

Peter concludes his letter by dealing with how the members of specific congregations are to relate to one another. In some ways, this is similar to the household codes Paul provides families (Ephesians 5.21-6.9; Colossians 3.18-4.1), but with the church rather than the family in mind. Peter begins by addressing the elders or leaders of these churches. Elders were an early form of church governance based upon Jewish practice. Though Peter is an apostle (1 Peter 1.1) and can speak with authority, he chooses not to wield his authority but to approach these church leaders on common ground as a fellow elder. Unlike some of them, he has seen the ministry (sufferings) of Jesus, but he views himself as an equal participant in the coming glory to be given to the people of God with the return of Christ. (The return of Christ figures prominently in Peter’s thought throughout this letter. For example, see 1 Peter 4.7.) Therefore, Peter chooses to appeal to rather than command these church leaders to lead in a specific manner.

Peter encourages these leaders to shepherd the people of God who are under their charge. The imagery of a leader as a shepherd and God as the ultimate shepherd is rooted both in the ministry of Jesus and in the Old Testament (Psalm 23; John

10.1-18). The imagery implies that leaders have a unique role for caring for God’s people, carrying out the duties God himself would accomplish among them as faithful under-shepherds (John 21.15-19). However, Peter is aware that the issue of leaders carries baggage in his culture. Therefore, he seeks to contrast godly with cultural ideas of leadership. He does this in a series of three comparisons. Leadership is not something done under compulsion (duty) but is something done with a free and willing heart. Leadership is not to be used as a means to gain benefit (through deceit implied) but is an opportunity to serve those being led. Finally, leadership is not an opportunity to feed one’s ego with position and power but is an opportunity to live as an example of the life of Christ before others. Clearly, Peter has in mind leadership as an activity guided by humility, and he does so because he has seen such leadership in the life of Jesus and heard it proclaimed from Jesus’ lips (Matthew 23.8-12; Mark 10.42-45). Peter himself has modeled this type of leadership by writing to encourage churches he did not plant, encouraging them as an equal rather than as a superior. In line with Jesus’ teaching about humble leadership, Peter notes that the path of humility leads to exaltation, and this with the return of Jesus.

After addressing the leaders, Peter turns to the members of the various congregations, as his intent is more in line with relationships within the church than leadership. He addresses the congregants as those who are younger. This may be literally true, but, more than likely, Peter is using a term of contrast with elder to speak to those who are not as “mature” in the faith. His instruction to these believers is simple. They are to relate to the leaders in the same manner in which the leaders relate to them; that is, they are to willingly come together as the church, live as an example for the leaders, and serve the leaders.

Peter’s words, when considered thoughtfully, have a profound structural and relational impact upon both the ancient and modern church. Rather than being viewed as a hierarchy, as are most organizations and institutions, the church becomes something of a flat structure because various roles are filled with attitudes of service and mutual concern. With Peter’s instruction that all the believers were to clothe themselves with humility toward one another, a statement

of intentionality and effort, Peter effectively undoes all ancient and modern preconceptions about even the purpose of the church. For in the carrying out of Peter's instructions, the church becomes a community in which the life of Christ is practiced with intentionality with one another. In this way, the church becomes a training ground for how people are to relate to God, as they are to humble themselves before God so that they might experience the exaltation God intends for them. Such a life, even a life of Christian community practiced in this manner, certainly grates against all ancient and modern sensibilities and feelings of securities. This life is simply off any map and thus could cause a great deal of anxiety with people wanting to know how basic personal needs might be met. Peter simply states that such concerns could be given to God with confidence because God lovingly cares for all his people..

### **Real life with Blake:**

Humility is easy until you try it, at least I find this to be true for myself. Stepping down. Serving. Honoring others first. These are simply not in my wheelhouse. They don't come naturally. In fact, they are aspects of the life of Christ that I cannot form within myself, but that doesn't mean I wait around waiting for God to zap me, granting me a good dose of humility. God intends that I practice being humble and in this practice his grace fills and shapes me. But where do I practice? I can practice with my family. I can practice with my co-workers. I can practice with the cashier at the grocery store. But God has given me a specific training ground in which he intends I practice: the church. The church is nothing less than the gathered people of God, who come together for the purpose of being transformed. The church comes together and becomes a safe place to practice "putting on" the life of Christ. As a leader, I have the opportunity to practice leading in a new, Christ-like way. Connecting willingly rather than begrudgingly. Giving rather than seeking to get. Showing rather than telling and pointing. In the same way, I have the opportunity to see and experience the lives of others who relate to me in the same way, providing a mirror for me and examples which inspire me to offer myself even more fully as a servant. God has given me this wonderful thing called the church, this practice

ground, and when I take full advantage of it, somehow I am formed, transformed in such a way that I know more fully how to relate to the one who made me.

### **Real life with you:**

How do we become humble people? We don't become humble simply by sitting at home waiting for God to make it happen. We don't become humble by trying really hard. We become humble by opening our lives to God's grace by intentionally practicing humility. But where do we go to practice? We go to the gym to practice basketball. We go to the pitch to practice soccer. We go to the diamond to practice baseball. Where do we go to practice humility? We go to church! When we consider the words of the New Testament we discover the church is nothing we thought it to be, but it is everything we know we need. The church is not an organization or an institution, at least not like any we are accustomed to. The church is nothing short of a practice field, a safe place where we come together for the purpose of experiencing transformation. We come together to practice things like humility! As we practice we get to try it on and see it tried on. In it all, God's grace infuses us and changes us and we begin to understand what it is to relate not just to one another but to God himself. So, what do we do? How about we go to church? Let's meet together not because we have to but because we need to, we need to experience life-change and the church is a safe place for that to happen. Seek to connect, and as you connect try on some humility. Try serving someone rather than seeing what you can get out of them. Try to express care, genuine care rather than putting on a "I am here because I have to be here" attitude. Try living as an example for others to follow rather than telling everyone who will listen how you think things should go. Try on the life of Christ within the church. We promise you, it will change you.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP

 [twitter.com/blake\\_shipp](https://twitter.com/blake_shipp)