

A Word From Your Pilot by Jeff Strite

1 Peter 5:1-5:11

OPEN: On a Continental flight a pilot began his usual comments to the passengers: "Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon and welcome on board Continental flight 428. This is your Captain speaking and I have some information about our flight. We've reached cruising altitude of 35,000 ft. & will be turning down the cabin lights. Turning down the lights is for your comfort and to enhance the appearance of your flight attendants."

"Just a few observations: There may be 50 ways to leave your lover but there are only 4 ways off this airplane. In case of an emergency your flight attendant will assist you on leaving the plane. In the event of an emergency water landing your seat cushions can be used for flotation; if that happens please paddle to shore & take the cushions with our compliments."

Later, after the plane landed & passengers were about to disembark, the pilot again came on and said: "As you exit the plane, make sure to gather all of your belongings. Anything left behind will be evenly distributed among the flight attendants. Please... do not leave children or spouses."

APPLY: Now, obviously, that pilot was just having fun with the passengers. I'm sure he'd grown tired of saying the same stale speech over and over again for weeks on end and just wanted to liven thing up a bit. But most of the time pilots and airplane crews are very serious about their instructions. In fact, one webpage I visited had wordings pilots would use in every possible contingency - it went on for 4 pages when I copied it into my files. I found that there were speeches the pilot might give in the event of:

- Turbulence, where the plane was shaken by cross winds of downdrafts.
- Depressurization of the cabin of the plane
- Aborted takeoffs where the plane was forced to stay on the tarmac.
- Bomb threats
- Hi-jackings... and so on.

Apparently there are airlines that have instructions on how their pilots should address every and any serious situation.

The one thing I noticed about ALL those instructions was that the Pilot's role was to tell passengers what they needed to know in order to have a safe and comforting trip.

Now, here in 1 Peter 5 Peter is telling us what WE (as Christians) need to know.

Throughout this letter we've been repeatedly reminded that we are strangers and aliens in this world. We don't belong here. And because we don't belong here, because we're just passing through this world, the Bible repeatedly tells us that we will encounter difficult times. We will suffer. We will be persecuted for our faith.

And so we need to be told how we're going to ride out the storms of life.
We need to be told what's being done to protect us
And we need to be assured that God –will always be there with us in those difficult times.

The 1st thing Peter does in this 5th chapter is to introduce us to the flight crew. These are the people who are responsible for your well-being and comfort. These are the ones who on board to watch over you and protect you. These are the ones who are trained to keep you safe when life gets difficult.

Who are these people?

They're called Elders.

1 Peter 5:1-3 tells us "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."

The Elders are the first line of defense in the congregation.
They are the ones who are shepherds and overseers of all of us.
God has entrusted them with YOU and me.
And their job is to be our servants and our examples.

That's why God was so demanding in their qualifications.
Elders are to be good fathers and husbands. They're to be men who KNOW what the Bible says and have the backbone to stand up for good doctrine. They're to be men who are so dedicated to Christ in their daily lives that EVEN the world knows they take their faith seriously and live for Jesus in all that they do.

We've been blessed here to have 4 of the finest Elders I've ever met. And that's a good thing. In fact that's critical for our survival as Christians our safety as a church is in their hands.

ILLUS: I read the true story of a man who was on a flight in California that had been

delayed for some time in Sacramento. The flight attendant explained that there would be a 45-minute delay, and if they wanted to get off the aircraft, they would reboard in 30 minutes.

Everybody got off the plane except one gentleman who was blind. His Seeing Eye dog lay quietly underneath the seats in front of him the entire flight. He had apparently flown this very flight before because the pilot approached him and, calling him by name. "Keith, we're in Sacramento for almost an hour. Would you like to get off and stretch your legs?"

Keith replied, "No thanks, but maybe my dog would like to stretch his legs."

So the pilot got off the plane to walk the blind man's Seeing Eye dog.

Now picture this: All the people in the gate area stopped where they were. All eyes were focused on this pilot as he walked off the plane with the Seeing Eye Dog! And The pilot was even wearing sunglasses.

When the people saw this pilot with that dog, they all scattered. They not only tried to change planes, they also tried to change airlines!

Now, why did they react that way? Why did they all become scared and run away?

Because they thought their pilot was blind and they had no desire to trust their lives to a man who couldn't see to fly their plane.

Elders are called to LEAD the congregation.

And as Jesus noted, you don't want the blind leading the blind you all could fall into a pit together.

Men who don't know how to love their wives and raise their kids; men who don't know their Bible and don't have the backbone to stand up for Christ. And men and don't live out their faith with passion... are blind men.

They have no business flying God's plane filled with God's people. Because they'll just end up putting the plane in the ditch.

Now, you've got great Elders here (Dave B., Dave M., Jim B. and Don A.). They are men who you can trust and look up to. They take their role as overseers and protectors and servants seriously. They aren't in this for pride or glory – they're in it to serve Jesus Christ and you are a blessed people because of that.

And God wants you to model yourselves after these men.

Peter says they are our "examples"

And then he says... "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes,

all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."

1 Peter 5:5-6 NKJV

ILLUS: Submit yourself to yours Elders.

In a way we have an excellent example of the outcome of a young man modeling himself after the "Elder" he respects. Ryan Seybold has spent a great deal of time with Bruce Cameron (the director of Rainbow Christian camp in Converse, IN). Because of that time Ryan has modeled himself after Bruce and has taken on Bruce's passion for missions and the desire to serve God in a full time ministry.

That's what Peter tells us we need to be like we need to submit to our Elders. We should live in such a way that we eventually become like them and model their priorities for Christ in our own lives.

But Peter doesn't stop there.

He says WE ALL are to be submissive to one another.

"...all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility"

ILLUS: Most of the time, when folks ride on airplanes they are there to be served. They've paid a lot of money for that trip and they want a pillow, they want a meal, they want to watch a movie. Oftentimes, when they don't want something special... they just want to be left alone. The more important they are, the more they want others to serve them.

ILLUS: Now, that is the way some people "DO" church.

They come to the church building and sit facing the stage and they intend to be served. (At this point I went down and sat in the audience).

- (Slumping down in my seat) "I hate this song. I hate the words. I hate the music. I just hate this song... and I'M NOT SINGING IT."

You know, when I was a kid we sang just about every song in the hymnbook. And there was one song we'd sing at least once every year and I absolutely hated the song. It went like this: "Happy day, happy day, when Jesus took my sins away." It was a terrible song. The lyrics were ok, but the music was like singing funeral dirge. I absolutely despised this song. But you know what... everybody sang it. It was a depressing song but everybody sang it, and they sang it because they were singing it to Jesus. It may have

been poorly written, but it was our song of praise to Jesus.

- OR... (looking bored again, I slap my wrist and hold it up to my ear as if listening for the ticking in a wristwatch. I turn to the man beside me and say) “Did my phone stop? How long is that guy going to go on talking. I know it’s a communion meditation, but it’s not supposed to be a sermon.”

Let me let you in on a secret here. I’m the only full time staff here. Anyone else who gets up front and speaks does so because they love Jesus and they want to share what’s on their heart. Granted, there are times when they could be a little more conscious of time and be more to the point in what they say. But they are up there speaking because they are trying to serve you by their words.

- OR (turning to the person next to me in the seats) “For pity’s sake, Jeff’s used that illustration at least 4 or 5 times in the past few months. And that sermon doesn’t speak to me at all and I’m just bored out of my skull. I just want him to get done speaking so I can get home and have some roast preacher for lunch.”

Now that doesn’t happen here (or at least no one tells me if that’s how they really feel) but there are churches where that happens almost every week. Why? Because there are people who come to church to be served... not to serve. And whether it is being offended at music and long winded talks or with a boring sermon they’ve lost the view of what church is all about. It’s all about serving one another.

But Peter writes: “...all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility”

What Peter is telling us is... that may be the way things are on other airlines. They may go to church and take their seats with the intention of being served other places - BUT NOT HERE! Here God calls us to be servants of one another and you haven’t done church until you’ve ministered to someone in this congregation.

Now, there’s a reason for that.

There’s a reason why we need to minister to each other.

I Peter 5:8 says: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

The people seated in this church building every week who have been under attack over the past few days. They’re hurting and they need someone to reach over and pray for them or listen to them as they tell their troubles.

Now, granted, that is the job of the Elders.

And yes, the preacher needs to be there for folks when they're struggling.

But the Elders and the preacher can't be everywhere, and so God is counting on YOU to make a difference for others. That's what He's saved you to be able to do.

- A couple weeks ago Joe (one of our members) got up right in the middle of my sermon and went over to help out Doreen (a woman who's here in a wheelchair that comes to worship with us from a nursing home). He did this RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF MY SERMON. But you know, that's what he should have done. My sermon isn't nearly as important as his ministry to that woman.
- A few weeks ago I was in a Bible study and one of the ladies slowed down the study by her insistence that she help another of women who was having trouble turning the pages of her Bible and finding the scripture they were looking at... and everybody understood. They knew that this lady's ministry to her friend was more important than how fast they made it through the study.
- A couple months ago, a man came to me and asked for an envelope from the office. I said "sure", and as I was looking for one I asked what he needed it for. He said there was a family in the church who needed help and he wanted to give them money without them knowing where it came from.

That's what church is all about.

Church is all about us submitting and serving one another.

The Elders are supposed to submit to us.

And you are to submit yourselves to the Elders.

And you are to submit yourselves to one another.

We ALL do that so that all of us get to our destination as safely and comfortably as possible.

But what do we do when that doesn't happen?

What do we do when the Elders and the preacher aren't all that good at their jobs?

What do we do when the Christians around us fail to meet our needs and they're not there to strengthen us and comfort us when we struggle?

What do we do then?

Well, Peter tells us: "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.” I Peter 5:7-10

Cast all of your anxiety on Him.

When you go through the trials and tribulations of this life know that there is a GOD. A God Who called you to His eternal glory in Christ and Who will HIMSELF restore you – strong and firm and steadfast.

Now, here’s the deal...

The church is the place God wants us so that we can be sheltered from the struggles and difficulties of this world. God wants us to be sheltered by the fatherly hand of good Elders. And God wants us to be protected and nurtured by other Christians who know us and care what happens to us. God wants them pray for us and hold us when we need comforted.

But the sad truth of life is that mortals often fail.

We all sin and fall short of the glory of God.

We all get busy living our own lives and facing our own problems.

We all get distracted and fail to be there for others on too many occasions.

The problem for a lot of Christians is that when the church fails them... they don’t know what to do. They get frustrated and angry and feel abandoned and rejected.

If the Elders don’t do their job and the preacher doesn’t do his... or the congregation comes off as being unloving and uncaring they feel lost and betrayed.

But I noticed something here in I Peter 5.

While Peter tells the Elders what they’re job is.

While he tells the rest of us what our job is.

NOT ONCE did He say “Cast Your cares on THEM”

NOT ONCE did He say “These folks will make you strong & firm & steadfast.

NOT ONCE did He say “The people will protect you from Satan.

Why not?

Because that’s not technically our job.

Who’s job is it?

It's God's job!

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”
“(God) will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast”

Let's face it folks: I will fail you now and again

The Elders will fail you

Your fellow church members will fail you

There may come a time when none of us will be able to be there for you.

But God will. God will always be there for you. He'll never leave you and He'll never forsake you. His is the voice you need to listen for when everyone else fails to save you from your troubles.

ILLUS: Just outside Miami Doug White, his wife and 2 daughters were flying home from a funeral. Around 1:30 in the afternoon/Easter Sunday the plane's pilot suffered a heart attack and died.

Now White had just gotten his own pilot's license flying small planes but the King 200 was a far more complicated and difficult plane to fly. It's the type of plane that requires instrument training and special skills to fly safely. White didn't have that. In fact he had no idea what any of the instruments would do. The only thing he knew how to operate in the cockpit was the radio.

Fighting down his panic he realized the pilot's body might (at any time) slump back over the controls and cause the plane to lose control and realizing that (even with help) he might not get the plane down, he nervously keyed the mike he said "Miami. I've got to declare an emergency. My pilot's unconscious. I need help up here."

For what seemed an eternity there was no reply.

But then a calm assuring voice from outside of his plane talked him through the next 45 minutes. And because of that calm voice from outside the plane White was able to land the plane safely.

The pilot he had counted on could no longer help him. White needed that voice from the outside to bring his family safely home.

One of my favorite passages in Scripture is from Isaiah 40:28-31

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will

run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Here’s the deal.

We need each other in this church.

We need strong and Godly elders, and we need the folks seated around us on Sundays. We need each other in order to handle the daily struggles of life. But ultimately it’s God who gives us strength when we’re weary. It’s God who can renew our lives and make it so that we can run and not grow weary and walk and not faint.