A Parting Conversation

Keith Crosby · Hebrews 13:7; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 5:1-4

AT A GLANCE

Keith Crosby reads Hebrews 13:7 and 17 as the two bookends that summarize the whole chapter, drawing out three commands to the congregation: remember your leaders, obey and submit to them, and let them serve with joy. He insists these charges exist for the congregation's own good, not the elders' — because eldership is simultaneously the most thankless and the most meaningful calling a person can carry.

- Remembering a leader means weighing the whole pattern of a life, not isolating one bad hour to justify disobedience.
- Obedience is outward compliance and submission is the heart's willing deference — Hebrews 13:17 commands both together, not either alone.
- Letting elders serve with joy rather than groaning is not kindness toward them — it is the congregation's own spiritual profit.

> *"Their joy is your profit, because that is how God has set it up."*

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

Hebrews 13:7 — Remember your leaders. They taught God’s message to you. Remember how they lived and died, and copy their faith. (ERV)

Hebrews 13:17 — Obey your leaders. Be willing to do what they say. They are responsible for your spiritual welfare, so they are always watching to protect you. Obey them so that their work will give them joy, not grief. It won’t help you to make it hard for them. (ERV)

1 Timothy 2:1-2 — [1]First of all, I ask that you pray for all people. Ask God to bless them and give them what they need. And give thanks. [2]You should pray for rulers and for all who have authority. Pray for these leaders so that we can live quiet and peaceful lives—lives full of devotion to God and respect for him. (ERV)

1 Peter 5:1-4 — [1]Now I have something to say to the elders in your group. I am also an elder. I myself have seen Christ’s sufferings. And I will share in the glory that will be shown to us. I beg you to [2]take care of the group of people you are responsible for. They are God’s flock. Watch over that flock

> because you want to, not because you are forced to do it. That is how God wants it. Do it because you are happy to serve, not because you want money. [3]Don’t be like a ruler over those you are responsible for. But be good examples to them. [4]Then when Christ the Ruling Shepherd comes, you will get a crown—one that will be glorious and never lose its beauty. (ERV)

The argument

Eldership as Paradox — the thankless calling that is also the most meaningful

Before working the text, Keith Crosby names the tension that makes the whole charge necessary: eldership is simultaneously the hardest and best work a person can do. He confesses, "I can't think of a more thankless and misunderstood job that a person could have. And at the same time, I can't think of a more gratifying, satisfying, joyful, and meaningful job as well." Elders absorb suspicion precisely because "somebody has to make the hard decisions… even if it is unpopular," yet the same men rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, discipling young men across decades and standing at deathbeds. This double nature — "the best and worst job you're ever going to have rolled into one" — is why ordinary faithfulness toward elders, not some new heroic gesture, is what the text asks for.

> **Insight —** *Recognizing eldership's built-in cost keeps a congregation's gratitude honest rather than sentimental.*

A Life Is Watched Like a Video, Not a Snapshot — remembering, considering, and imitating "the faith" rather than the man

Working verse 7's three intensifying commands, Keith Crosby explains that "remember" means calling leaders to mind constantly and specifically in prayer, "consider" means looking again and again at the outcome of a life, and "imitate" caps the sequence. He flags a nuance lost in English: "in the original Greek it says imitate the faith… not blindly. We're not a cult, but we are to follow them as they follow Christ." Because no leader escapes scrutiny if isolated to a single bad hour — "I can take an hour out of anyone's life and make you look dumb, reckless and unwise" — the congregation is called to weigh a leader's whole pattern of living, not its worst frame, and to imitate not the man but the Christ he is following.

> **Insight —** *Faithful remembrance judges leaders by the pattern of a life, and imitates the Christ behind them, not the man in isolation.*

Obedience Is Compelled, Submission Is Willing — verse 17's guardrail exists for the congregation's own protection

Keith Crosby distinguishes the two commands of verse 17: "obedience is outward and physical… submission is a matter of the heart… a settled disposition." Together they refuse "a one and done Christianity, box-checking," each intensifying the other. He anticipates the objection — what if I disagree with a decision? — and offers the text's own process rather than

dismissing the question: examine whether the conflict is "a matter of preference or principle," take a complaint to the man himself rather than "the parking lot," and remember that a charge against an elder requires "two or three witnesses" and can lead to removal if sin is proven. The command, he insists, "is a guardrail. And the guardrail is on your side of the road for your protection."

> **Insight —** *Submission to godly leadership is not blind compliance but a disciplined, textual process for both trust and accountability.*

Their Joy Is Your Profit — the financial language behind "no advantage to you"

The final command — "let them do this with joy and not with groaning" — closes the passage with a warning Keith Crosby draws out through the underlying Greek: groaning is a cry of agony and grief, and the word rendered "advantage" carries financial force, meaning profit or gain. "For that would be of no advantage to you" is therefore not sentiment but arithmetic: making an elder's watch harder costs the congregation itself, not merely the elder. "When these men serve with joy, you are the ones who gain. Their joy is your profit, because that is how God has set it up." The charge to church members is accordingly practical — thank an elder to his face, join rather than spectate, refuse to add unnecessary grief to an already grief-bearing office.

> **Insight —** *A congregation's care for its elders is not charity toward them but stewardship of its own spiritual good.*

Cross-references

- Matthew 7:1-5 — urged as the self-examination step before bringing a complaint against a leader
- Proverbs 18:17 — cited loosely to warn that the first account sounds right until examined
- Hebrews 11 — pointed to as the 'Hall of Faith' standing behind the charge to imitate a leader's faith

DEVOTIONAL

There is a way of watching a life that condemns, and a way that heals. Pull one frame from anyone's years — one bad hour, one sharp word, one failure — and you can make a saint look like a fraud. But Keith Crosby's image will not let us stay there: the Christian life is a video, not a snapshot. To remember a leader rightly is to let the whole reel run, to watch the pattern rather than freeze the worst moment, and to notice, underneath the pattern, whose faith is actually being imitated — not the man's own righteousness, but Christ's, worked out imperfectly through him. This is harder in an age suspicious of every authority, quick to isolate the frame that confirms our grievance. But the text does not ask for blind deference. It asks for a

submission that is willing rather than merely compliant, and it hands the congregation an honest process when disagreement is real: examine yourself first, speak to the man and not about him, and trust that God, not the crowd, holds the final account. And underneath all of it sits a strange, tender arithmetic: their joy is your profit. A church that grieves its shepherds does not punish them so much as impoverish itself. A church is not a country club or a democracy — it is a family, held together by people who watch over souls they will one day answer for, and it is family, finally, that Keith Crosby is describing when he calls this a parting conversation and not a goodbye.

Reflection

- Whose whole pattern of life — not just their worst remembered moment — have you refused to watch fairly, and what would it cost you to reconsider?
- Where have you offered outward compliance without the settled, willing submission of the heart, and what would that submission actually look like this week?
- Is there a leader whose burden you have quietly made heavier through complaint rather than joy — and what would it cost you to thank him instead?

Closing prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day, a day we can rejoice and be glad in. You are the God who causes all things to work together for good, even what others intend for evil, to preserve, to save, to grow your people. We thank you as you shepherd us, your people, through those you have set to watch over us. We praise your name, in Jesus' name. Amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

Caring well for your elders is not charity toward them — it is the congregation's own commanded, God-given good.

This week

This week, choose one elder by name. Read Hebrews 13:7 and 17 over him in prayer, asking God to protect and encourage him, then thank him in person, out loud, for how he shepherds you.

Return to Hebrews 13:7