

Who Can Lead the Church

Various Scriptures

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 30, 2017

To start out our time this morning, I want to mention that it's my three-month anniversary at the church. I'm a veteran now; I'm an old timer. My wife and I have been here for three months now. Time flies when you are having fun. I arrived in Canada on January nineteenth, and Katie and the kids arrived on the twenty-eighth. I want to tell you that we have been tremendously blessed so far. You have been such an encouragement to us. We can't wait to see what the Lord will do in the years to come. To see your passion for Christ and His Word, to see your love for each other and your love for the church has been such a blessing.

In a museum in Michigan stands a huge locomotive steam engine, and beside it is a machine that tells you where all the power goes in the train. It says that ninety-six percent of the power goes to the locomotive; it goes to the front, and only four percent goes to the rest. Some churches are like that. All the power goes to the front. All the effort comes from the locomotive. Everyone else just sits there. We don't have that problem here at Grace Fellowship Church. We have more than four percent of the people involved and it's been a blessing to see it. So thank you. You have been such an encouragement to us. It has been a wonderful three months.

With that said, this morning we are on the back half of a series called Foundations of the Church, where we are looking at some foundational or fundamental issues of the church; where we are looking at the train if you will, and the tracks, and the locomotive, and the whole works. I told you before that you guys already have a great foundation here. You already have some great tracks to follow. I just want to come alongside and add to it. I just want to build on what you have already built. And to do that, so far we have talked about what the church is and what the church does. We have talked about how the church is different from the world and the parachurch. We have talked about why the church is messy and why it is necessary. We have looked at the perfect church or the ideal church. We have covered a lot of ground so far. We have covered a lot of tracks. And now it's time to draw it to a close, or to start drawing it to a close. Now it is time to start bringing the train into the station, which we will do this week and the following weeks.

And to do it this week, I want to talk about the issue of leadership. We haven't covered that so far. But what does the Bible say about leadership? What does it say about leading the church? Have you ever wondered that? I am sure you have; it's a very important question. So goes the leaders, so goes the church, right? So goes the conductor, so goes the train. To say that another way, people will never rise above their leaders; they will never go past them. They are not supposed to anyway. You will always go where your leaders go. You will always do what they do. You will always follow in their footsteps. So where are they supposed to step? What are they supposed to do? I think if you asked that question to the average leader today, you might get a lot of different answers but if you asked it to men from the past, they would tell you that a leader is supposed to work. That's his job. He is supposed to work. That's what God has called him to do.

Just a couple of examples of this:

It was said that Martin Luther didn't go to sleep every night; he collapsed every night, he passed out. He was so exhausted at the end of the day that he literally collapsed and fell into bed. He wrote commentaries, he lectured in seminary, he preached every Sunday and it left him spent at the end of the day.

D.L. Moody did the same. Moody would often go to sleep after praying "Lord, I am tired". That was the last thing he said before falling asleep. "Lord, I gave it all I got." "Lord, I gave it my best shot." "I'm tired." "I'm worn out."

The early Methodists did this. It was said that the early Methodist preachers died in their twenties from sheer exhaustion. They preached for an average of twelve years each and then died. They were circuit preachers; they preached on a circuit. They went to three churches each Sunday, all on horseback, through the rain, through the snow. It wore them out, and they died young.

The early Baptists did this; they were lay preachers. They worked in the fields all day, worked in the mills, worked in the mines. Then they preached or they pastored the people on the weekends and it wore them out. It put them in an early grave as well.

Some other examples of this:

It was said that G. Campbell Morgan was in his office at six am each day, studying hard, laboring over the text. William Carey started his day at four-thirty am. George Mueller did the same. In fact Mueller read through the Bible some two hundred times, and he said that most of it was done before breakfast. Most of it was done while everyone else was asleep. Jonathan Edwards studied an average of eleven hours per day. John Calvin did the same. John Owen said in early life, he spent fourteen hours a day in his study. He said later on that it was too much. He had to back off because it was affecting his health.

You get the point that a leader is supposed to work. The men of old understood that he is supposed to be a man of toil. He is supposed to be a man of great effort and energy. He cannot be lazy. He can't fold his hands and rest. As the reformer Hugh Latimer put it, "The Saviour of the world, the King of Kings was not ashamed to work and neither should His people be." Or as one of the Puritans said, "If you will be Christ's disciple or His minister, then you must take up your cross and it will make you sweat." But I think it all raises the question, what does that look like?

Okay, leaders are supposed to sweat; I get that, that makes sense. Nobody wants to follow a lazy leader; nobody wants to follow a couch potato. But what kind of sweat are we talking about? What kind of work should he do? It can't just be any kind of work. Obviously there is a wrong way to do ministry. There is a wrong way to lead the church. So what kind of work are we talking about? That's what I want to talk to you about this morning. This morning, if you are taking notes, we are going to look at some job descriptions for a leader in the church. I have six of them. six job descriptions for a leader in the church. Leaders are supposed to work, but what does that look like? Here are a few job descriptions, and the first one is this: A leader rules well.

He rules well.

Turn in your bibles to 1 Timothy 5 and as you are turning there, the word “rule” sounds kind of harsh today; almost heavy-handed. We don’t usually like to speak of people “ruling” the church because it sounds bossy or tyrannical, “rule with an iron fist” sort of thing. But it is a Biblical word which means it is a good word if used correctly. In 1 Timothy 5:17, Paul says this: “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.” Now we don’t have time to get into everything in this passage but I want you to notice a couple of things. First, I want you to notice that leaders are to be elders. Paul says: “the elders who rule well”. That word “elders” in Greek is *presbuteros*, from which we get the word “Presbyterian”. It referred to a group of godly men who are called to lead the church. It wasn’t a term of age although it sounds that way. Some of the men who led the church in Bible terms were young. Timothy was young, the apostle John was young, and that’s the point. “Elder” was a term of maturity. It referred to a man that the congregation recognized as being mature. Men they could look to and say: “That is what a Christian is supposed to be.” He writes that: “that is what the Christian life is supposed to look like.”

To identify these men, Paul gave us a list of their qualifications earlier in 1 Timothy 3. He wrote that:

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

That is the kind of man who is supposed to lead the church, Paul says. That is what Christian eldership looks like. It looks like you are above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectful, and so forth. I also want you to notice that there were several elders in this passage. Not one elder but several elders. Paul writes that, “The elders who rule well...” in verse 15. There are several of them, a variety of them, a plurality of them. This is a plurality, not a monarchy. This is a group of men leading the church, not one man sitting on the throne. And the reason for this is simple. One man can’t do it all. One man can’t get to it all. One man can’t visit everyone, talk to everyone, and be with everyone. It’s impossible.

Robert Greenleaf in his book on spiritual leadership puts it this way:

To be a lone chief atop a pyramid is abnormal and corrupting. None of us are perfect by ourselves, and all of us need the help and correcting influence of close colleagues. When someone is moved atop a pyramid, that person no longer has colleagues, only subordinates. Even the frankest and bravest of subordinates do not talk with their boss in the same way that they talk with colleagues who are equals, and in that environment, communication usually becomes warped.

That was well said. Eldership is not a pyramid. It's not a group of men under one boss. It's a plurality. It's a multiplicity of leadership.

And that leads to one more thing I want you to notice in verse 17: Elders are to rule well. That's what all of this leads to. "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honour". We don't have time to get into the issue of "double honour" here, but just know that it has to do with paying someone. "It is okay to pay a man who serves as an elder", Paul says, but before he gets to that, he mentions ruling, which is another way of saying leading or governing. "Elders are to govern well", Paul says. "They are to lead well" according to the principles laid down in 1 Timothy 3. They must be above reproach in their leadership. "Blameless" is another way to translate that. I don't think any of us would have trouble following a blameless man, right? I don't think that any of us would have trouble following a man who is above reproach in his leadership. We usually have trouble following men who are not above reproach. We usually have trouble following men who are not blameless, like our political leaders. They do things they shouldn't. They say things they shouldn't. Which makes them hard to follow. Elders don't lead that way. They are supposed to rule well.

And let me just say that when a man does this, he won't be harsh or cruel. He won't rule with an iron fist. He will rule, but not with an iron fist. It will be a gentle rule, it will be a kind leadership. And let me just say that he won't dominate people when he does this. He won't bully them around. This is elder rule, not elder domination. This is elder leadership not elder dictatorship.

It was a famous saying of the Roman Emperor Caligula that said, "I don't care if you respect me so long as you fear me." Elders don't lead like that. They don't want you to fear them. They don't try to intimidate you.

And it leads to another job description for a leader in the church: he shepherds the flock of God. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 5. Like I just said, Biblical leadership is not harsh. It is gentle and kind, like a shepherd, and that's what Peter says in 1 Peter 5:1-2. Peter says to, "shepherd the flock of God among you". He tells the elders to look after the church like a shepherd would; voluntarily and not under compulsion, eagerly and not for sordid gain.

I mentioned last week that most towns in the first century were rural, which means that they knew what a shepherd was. They saw them every day. You couldn't go anywhere back then without bumping into one and everyone knew that a shepherd only had a handful of sheep. This was the day before corporate farming. So he didn't have thousands of them. He had dozens of them, which means that he knew all of them personally, intimately. He knew their names and their habits and their quirks. He knew their moods and their tempers and their personalities. He knew whether they were having a good day or a bad day. He knew whether they were happy or sad. He knew whether they were hungry or tired or whatever. He knew everything about them because he was one with the sheep. He was almost a part of them. He was around them so much. It was because of this that some of the ancients despised shepherds because they thought it was gross to live among animals that way. But Peter says that elders will do this with their people. They will live among them like a shepherd would. They will become a part of them. They will become one with them. They will know their names and their habits and their quirks.

They will know their moods and their tempers and their personalities. They will know whether they are having a good day or a bad. They will know whether they are happy or sad. They will know whether they are hungry or tired or whatever, because they are shepherds. They are shepherds.

A church in downtown Minneapolis really tried to live this out by making their elders walk to church; in one of the coldest cities in the States. Freezing temperatures in the winter time. They made their elders, their teaching elders, walk to church to remind them to be shepherds. To remind them to be around the people. That's the idea here. You can't shepherd from a distance. You have to do it close up. You can't shepherd from a thousand miles away. You have to do it life-on-life. In their neighborhood.

Another way to look at this, A friend of mine recently became an elder at a large church and he was asked after taking office "What's it like? What do you spend all your time doing?" And he said, "Listening. I listen. I go to church and I hear how the people are doing, and I pray with them, and I serve them." That's a shepherd. That is ruling the people well. I don't come here to tell you what to do. I don't come here to boss you around. I don't come here to give you orders. I come here to listen to you. I come here to hear from you. I come here to learn how you are doing so I can pray with you and serve you.

Eldership is really simple at the end of the day. It's not that hard. You only need to know two things, and that's it. You need to know your Bible, and you need to know your people. That's it, that's all you need to know. Get these two things down and you got it. You only have two commandments: Love God and love your neighbor. And elders are people who do this well in the church. They are supposed to be. They love God and they love their neighbor. They are above reproach in that.

The Apostle John had a reputation for doing this in the early church. He was known as a good shepherd. The story is told of how John, as an old man, led someone to Christ, and they abandoned the faith. They became a thief and a murderer. A very bad man. So John found out where he was hiding and he went to him. He walked straight into his den of thieves and at the sight of him, the man fled. He ran away, and John at ninety years of age, ran after him. And he said, "Have pity on me, man, for I will have to give an account to God for you. Please repent. Please come back to Christ." And the young man did. He broke down and wept and came back to Christ.

You see, that's a shepherd. That's what this passage is talking about. That is ruling well. You don't fleece the sheep, you love the sheep. You don't attack the sheep, you run after the sheep. You get down on your knees and weep with the sheep. You stoop down and you pick them up and help them get back on the right path.

And that leads to another job description for a leader in the church. He doesn't lord it over people. A leader doesn't lord it over his people. If you read on in 1 Peter 5:2-4, it says:

Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor

yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

That phrase “lord it over” means to exercise dominion over something. It means to dominate it, to boss it around, to beat it like a dog. Elders don’t do that. They don’t beat people like dogs. They don’t rough them up.

In an article on this subject, Jack Hughes writes that:

Bad leaders often treat anyone as an enemy who disagrees with them or seeks to humbly confront them in the fruit of the Spirit. Sternness, warnings, and threatenings are apparent, not love, care and concern. The sheep become scared of the leadership, not the Lord. They become frightened of offending them, not Christ.

That is what Peter is referring to here. Elders are not supposed to scare people. They don’t intimidate them or treat them as an enemy just because they disagree with them. That is lording it over someone. That is putting yourself on the throne and putting them way beneath you.

In the Roman world of the first century, everyone led like this by the way. Lording it over people was just a way of life to the Romans. It was said that at the Emperor Caligula’s dinner parties, the guests would sit around the table with their faces pointed to the ground for fear of offending him. Elders don’t do that. They don’t scare people. They don’t make them sit around with their faces held down. Instead they prove to be examples to them. That word “example” in verse 3 means “a model” or “a pattern of something”. We have all seen model airplanes. They are not the real thing but they remind us of the real thing. They point us back to it. Peter says that elders are that way with Christ; they point us back to Him, they remind us of Him. When we look at elders, we should see Christ. When we look at our leaders, we should see our Saviour. That’s a tall order. That’s not easy to do. And it reminds us of how different elders are from other leaders. Christ was a different sort of leader, wasn’t He? He wasn’t the type of man to make you fear Him. He washed the disciples’ feet. He touched the leper. He ate with tax collectors and sinners. Elders are to lead like that. They are not to lord it over the people.

I think we would all agree that it is hard to follow someone who lords it over you, isn’t it? No one likes that. I read a poem recently that said:

There is a pastor himself he cherished
Who loved his position but not his parish
So the more he preached
The less he reached
Until his position and his parish perished.

That’s pretty good. Your parish will perish if you don’t love people. It will die if you beat them like dogs. It reminds me of what George MacDonald said, “It is the half-Christian clergy that is the main cause of the so-called failure of the church.”

The church fails when its leaders act like half-Christians. It fails when its leaders are not examples to the flock. This is where it starts. This is where it all begins. So goes the leaders, so

goes the people. So goes the elders, so goes the church. If the elders don't act like Christ, no one will. If they don't get this right, no one will.

Howard Hendricks taught at Dallas Theological seminary for more than fifty years. He was a great scholar and a wonderful Bible teacher and author but he says that he wasn't saved by scholarship. He was saved by a Sunday School teacher named Walt, who gave him a ride to church. It wasn't anything special. It wasn't anything elaborate or deep. He just picked him up and gave him a ride. But later on Hendricks said, "I can't tell you much about what Walt said to me but I can tell you that he loved me. He loved me more than my parents did. And that love opened up my heart to the Gospel and it led me to Christ."

That's what Peter is talking about here. Howard Hendricks wasn't led to Christ by being bossed around. He wasn't led to Christ by being brow-beaten or put in his place. He was led to Christ because someone loved him. He became a Christian because someone cared about him. That is how elders are supposed to lead; they are supposed to lead with love, they are supposed to lead like Christ.

And that leads to another job description for a leader in the Church. Church leaders should be humble. They should be humble. They should rule well, they should shepherd the flock, they should not lord it over the people, and fourth, they should be humble. I think we all understand that power corrupts, right? Give a man enough power and it will corrupt him. It will go straight to his head. So Peter reminds us in verse 5: "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Peter writes to younger men first here because it is a temptation for younger men to be proud, to buck up against authority. But it is a temptation for older men too. Older men can resist leadership just as much as younger men, so Peter says, "all of you, clothe yourselves with humility". "All of you be humble", he says. Put humility on like a jacket. Clothe yourselves with it. Wrap it around you. We had a saying in seminary that you can't knock a man down who is an inch tall. You can't hurt a man's pride if he has no pride, if he has no ego. And this is how everyone is to be in the church, especially the leaders.

And let me show you what this looks like practically. Let me show you what it looks like when a leader is humble. When a leader is humble, he is approachable. People can approach him. They can come up to him with their concerns and their problems. They can sit down with him and tell him what's on their heart. A humble man won't have a "No Trespassing" sign on his forehead. He won't have a fence up telling everyone to back off. His life will be an open book, which means that he will also be hospitable. He will show hospitality to others. He will welcome them into his life. He will invite them into his home, into his office, into his world.

He will also be confrontable. A humble man is a confrontable man. He is not infallible and he knows that. He is not perfect and knows that. He still makes mistakes and he is willing to have those mistakes pointed out to him in love. Above reproach doesn't mean beyond reproach. Blameless doesn't mean sinless. He is also liberal or giving. He doesn't say "mine" to everything in the church. He doesn't say "mine" with the men's ministry and "mine" with the

music ministry, and “mine” with the teaching ministry. He shares all of that with others. He is tactful. He watches what he says. He is not judgmental. He doesn’t condemn people. He is not confrontational. Everything is not a fight to him. But all of this falls under the umbrella of humility. All of it relates to what it means to be a leader in the church.

J. Oswald Sanders says, “True greatness, true leadership, is achieved not by reducing men to our service, but in serving them in love”, and “you can only do that with humility”.

And that leads to another job description for a leader in the church, and we will go through these next ones quickly. He is peaceful. A leader makes peace in the church. He doesn’t start arguments all the time. Like I just said, everything is not a fight all the time. Everything is not an “oh yeah” conversation. Everything is not an “I’ll show you” conversation. I won’t ask you to turn there for the sake of time but, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 says: “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord, and give you instruction and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.”

Leaders teach you to live in peace with each other; that’s what they do. “They labour among you” Paul says. “They have charge over you in the Lord”. “To make peace, to bring unity to the church”. They don’t argue all the time. They don’t debate every chance they get. They are not brawlers, as the King James version has it in 1 Timothy 3. They are not “a giver of blows” in the Greek. The way some men talk, it feels like they are constantly giving you blows, doesn’t it? It feels like they are constantly punching you in the face. Everything is an argument to them. Everything is a jab.

I told you about the Peanuts cartoon where Lucy told Linus to change the TV Channel and he said, “Why?” and she said, “because I have this” (holds up fists). Elders don’t lead with this. They don’t talk theology with “this”.

They have the opposite approach. They make peace. It was said that John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim’s Progress, died on his way to reconcile a man with his father. The two had gotten into a fight. They weren’t speaking to each other and John Bunyan heard about it. And he rode all night in the rain to reconcile them and he caught a cold and died. Matthew Henry died the same way. Elders do that. They die making peace. They die with the words, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” on their lips. You can win more flies with honey than you can with vinegar and elders win people over with honey.

And that leads to our final job description for a leader in the church and it all culminates with this. A leader should teach the Bible. This could be an entire sermon on its own, but a leader should teach the Bible. They teach it with their lives, by being shepherds and humble and peaceful and diligent, hardworking and they should teach it with their words.

Paul says this several different ways in Scripture. He says that elders should guard against false teachers in Acts 20:28: “Be on guard for yourselves and for the flocks, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” Paul says that the elders are to be on guard. They are to protect the church from heresy and false doctrine. As John Calvin said, “Every pastor should have one voice for the sheep and another voice for the wolves” and that’s the idea here. Leaders should

have a voice for the wolves. They should be able to say “back off” to an imposter. “Don’t teach that stuff here. It’s dangerous.”

Titus 1:8-9 says the same thing essentially: “Be sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word... so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” An elder exhorts in sound doctrine, he encourages people to follow it, and he refutes those who contradict. He calls them out.

1 Timothy 4:15 says: “Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.” 1 Timothy 4:13 says: “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” And finally, 2 Timothy 4:1-2 says: “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”

Paul tells Timothy to “preach the Word...in season and out..”. That phrase: “in season and out of season” could be translated “when it is popular and when it is not”. There are times when it is popular to teach the Word of God, popular to be an expositor, and there are times when it is not; but either way, Paul says that an elder should teach it at all times. Either way, “I charge you in the presence of God to do this”, Paul says.

I am guessing that you don’t come here to listen to my opinions, right? You come here to listen to the Bible. That’s why you are here. That’s why you come week in and week out. You don’t come here to hear cute stories. You don’t come here to get a pick me up and a warm fuzzy. You don’t come here to be entertained. You come here to hear God’s Word. And it is my job to give it to you. That’s what elders do. It has been said that, “Some pastors preach longhorn sermons. A point here and a point there and a lot of bull in between.” You don’t want that. You don’t want bull in between. You want the Word of God. That’s why you are here, and it is the leader’s job to give it to you.

So those are a few job descriptions for a leader in the church. We could talk about more, but those are the ones we have time for. In fact as I was preparing for this, I got a copy of Larry Nelson’s thesis from The Master’s College and he said in there that there are more than forty job descriptions, or forty character qualifications of our leaders in the church. So we could do a whole series on this. We just scratched the surface.

A leader in the church, if he is going to do it right, will rule well, shepherd the flock, not lord it over them, be humble, peaceful, and will teach the Bible. And he will do more than just that. And while that is helpful, some of you might be wondering, “That’s great, what am I supposed to do with this?” Okay, the elders are supposed to teach the people and shepherd them and make peace with them. That’s helpful, that’s great, but what does it have to do with me? I’m not an elder, I’m not a leader. So how does this apply to me? A couple of ways.

For one, you need to pray for your leaders. That is one way this applies to you. You need to pray for the men who lead you. Pray for God to bring you men like this, and pray for God to bless the men we already have who are doing this. We don’t have elders yet, we don’t have official leaders yet, but we do have men who are leading, who are shepherding and teaching

among us. So pray for them. Ask God to give them strength for the task.

You also want to encourage the leaders that we have. Be an encouragement to them. This is a tall order as you can see. We want men to work themselves to death for you and do it humbly and peacefully. That's not easy. That's very difficult, and we want them to do it for free. They don't get paid. They do it for free. So do everything you can to encourage them and be a blessing to them.

And finally, follow them with a willing heart. Follow your leaders with a willing heart. Put your hand to the plough and follow them. Work with them. Get on board the train. Like I said earlier, you do a great job of this already. We have more than four percent of our people working here at Grace Fellowship Church. The locomotive doesn't do everything. I am just asking you to keep up the good work. Keep doing what you are doing. Don't think that because we don't have elders, that we don't have a church yet. We are a church now. We are the people of God now. Which means that we do His work now. So keep it up. Keep working on the train. And let me pray for you as you do that.

Let's pray.