

## If I Lead Will Anybody Follow? By Jeff Strite

Romans 12:1-12:8

OPEN: I once talked with a friend of mine who told about the new preacher his congregation had hired. In the type of church my friend attends they have “pastors” who are placed in the position of running the church. And my friend was talking about the great respect he had for his church’s new leader.

What had impressed him the most about this new “Pastor” was that he had taken charge almost immediately, and had shown the congregation he was in command... by changing all the locks in the church building.

Paul wrote: “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift... is to lead, do it diligently.” Romans 12:6 & 8

In my friend’s kind of church (where the “Pastor” changed all the locks) what do you think this “Leader” was communicating to his congregation? He was saying:

- He was in charge.
- He had the keys to everything... and they didn’t.
- If they wanted anything at church they had to go thru him.
- HE WAS THE LEADER!

Now, in this congregation I’m lucky to know where all the keys are.

There are certain keys I don’t even have!

In fact, I’m not even the “Pastor” here... I’m the preacher.

Do you know who the pastors are here?

That’s right. The Elders are the pastors.

The Elders are the shepherds of the flock.

And the Elders and I work TOGETHER to help lead this congregation.

This church is structured this way for a couple of basic reasons.

1st – the Bible calls Elders “pastors”... because that’s their job.

Peter writes: “To the ELDERS among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be SHEPHERDS (pastors) of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” I Peter 5:1-3

God never designed the church to be overseen by just one man.

When we look at the Scriptures, It seems to us that the preacher (that's me) and the Pastors (the Elders) are to jointly oversee the congregation and lead the church.

The 2nd reason we think this sharing of leadership is a good idea is just a matter of practicality. If I were to be the Pastor and try to run everything in this congregation, it would drive me nuts!

ILLUS: I recently talked with someone from one of these Pastor-ruled congregations who recently asked me if I ever grew tired of the load I had to carry of being the "Pastor" (being responsible for everything that takes place in the church). This woman's husband was a "pastor", and she saw first hand how all the burdens of leadership fell on his shoulders. I gently explained that, in this church, there are several pastors and we all carry the load together.

So, I guess what I'm trying to say is – you don't have to pastorize me. I don't have a "title" and I don't need one. All you need call me is "Jeff."

Now, getting back to the Romans 12 passage - the word Paul uses here is interesting. The Greek word for "lead" is "pro-istemi" which means "to stand before" or to "stand in front". It's a very simple word. And it's very basic when you think about it. The leader "stands out in front"... and leads.

But there are two very different views on what it means to "LEAD". One view is that the leader is the one with all the power. He's the guy with all the keys to the building. If you want in the building, you have to go through him.

ILLUS: Years ago, my dad was hired as a USDA meat inspector. They gave him a hard hat and a white coat and a badge and they sent him to places where cattle and pigs were raised and slaughtered for food. Now, dad had been a farmer almost all of his life. He'd slaughtered his own cows and pigs and chickens over the years. And he not only knew the USDA rules... he also had some common sense. He knew the folks he was inspecting were just trying to earn a living and his job was to make sure that they kept the slaughter area clean, that none of the meat was diseased, and that their workers didn't leave any hair on the meat when it's sent out the door. Sometimes, if he wasn't busy, he'd even get his knife out and help cut away pieces from the meat that didn't belong.

But dad told me that there were other inspectors who went out of their way to be difficult. It seemed they would look for ways to impress the owners with their authority. In essence they made life hard for the owners... not because they had to, but just because they could. Dad's said: "You give some guys a white coat and a badge and they become tyrants."

Jesus talked to His disciples about this in Mark 10:42

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them."

In other words, there are guys out there who like to change all the locks so they have control. And Jesus tells us that's the worldly way of thinking about leadership.

But Jesus tells us His leadership model was to be something entirely different.

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

NOT SO WITH YOU. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:42-45

In other words, Christian leadership is all about serving... not controlling

As Peter told the Elders in I Peter:

Be shepherds (pastors) of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being EXAMPLES to the flock." I Peter 5:2-3

Now being an Elder at this church DOES involve making decisions. The Elders have to decide what we should do and not do as a congregation. They set limits and goals for us as a body of believers. But the more important role of Elders is that they are to be EXAMPLES of what a Christian man should be.

That's why part of their job description is that they should be good fathers and husbands and that they should be well thought of in the community. Elders are to stand out in front and lead by example so that we want to be like them when we grow up as Christians.

So Christian leadership is all about setting examples and being servants.

Now... do you have to be a "designated leader" to lead?

The answer is no!

All you have to do is be able to set an example.

All you have to do is "stand out in front" of people and show them the way so that people will follow you as you follow Christ.

ILLUS: At the last congregation I served, the Elders were having a hard time reaching a decision on a specific subject. After much discussion, they decided they needed to go and ask the advice of a man in the congregation a man who was NOT an Elder.

He was an older man who'd been a Sunday School teacher at the church for years. And he had impressed them with his humbleness and wisdom. They knew that if anyone could help them figure out what needed to be done in this given situation... it was him.

So I went out with the Elders to this man's house and we sat around that man's dinner table and he gave them good advice... and they followed his advice.

In earlier sermons, I noted that God gave these 7 gifts listed in Romans 12 to specific individuals in the congregation to serve as inspirations to the rest of us. In other words, each of these 7 gifts in Romans 12 represent characteristics that God wants ALL of us to practice in our lives.

But now, wait a minute.

We can't all be leaders can we?

I mean, there can only be so many leaders.

There's got to be some followers, doesn't there?

ILLUS: There's a true story told of a young woman who wanted to go to college but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?"

Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "No," and returned the application.

She expected her honesty to end up getting her a rejection notice. But to her surprise, she received this letter from the college:

"Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower."

(S. I. McMillen, in his book "None of These Diseases")

There can only be one or two of the world's kind of leaders because the world's kind of leaders are looking for power - and those kinds of leaders have little intention of sharing power.

But Jesus said: "... Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."

You can only have one or two of the world's kind of leaders in a room.

But... how many servants can you have in a room?

A whole bunch of them.

The room could be filled with servant type people.

Why? Because a servant, by nature, is there to serve...not to be served.

Servants don't have power. They have responsibilities.

They submit to each other and share the load with each other.

They're not concerned with whether their wants and needs are met. They're too busy meeting the wants and needs of the others in the room.

Ephesians 5 talks about how we can STAND UP and GET OUT IN FRONT in submission.

Ephesians 5:21 says "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Then the next few verses tells us how to submit to other in our lives no matter what our position in life may be.

It tells wives, for example:

"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord." Ephesians 5:22

Then it tells husbands how to submit to their wives:

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

Ephesians 5:25

Then it tells children how to submit to their parents:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Ephesians 6:1

Then it tells fathers how to submit to their children:

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4

Then it tells employees (slaves) how to submit to their employers:

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ." Ephesians 6:5

And it tells employers how to submit to their employees:

"And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him." Ephesians 6:9

When you get submission right then you become an example to the rest of us. You LEAD in teaching the rest of us to be servants. And by leading us in Servanthood... you become great in God's eyes.

But as we noted before, there are certain people have the GIFT of leading.

You can tell who they are because they are the ones who keep things organized at any church event. They oversee dinners and special outreaches to the community and other activities.

If you have that gift, what might it look like?

- Able to visualize final results
- Develops loyalty in those around him
- Able to delegate
- Handles "push backs" well
- Makes assignments well
- Very alert to details

- Completes tasks efficiently
- Ability to be decisive
- Involves others in activities, including cleanup
- Godly motives in projects

Negative aspects of this gift can be

- Viewing people as merely resources
- Manipulating others' loyalty
- Showing favoritism.
- Delegating to avoid responsibility
- Placing projects ahead of people
- Overlooking people's serious faults
- Failing to explain directives or to offer praise
- Pushing blame on onto others
- Losing interest in finished jobs
- Becoming self-righteous

(<http://www.mulock.org/media/Gifts%202012.pdf> p. 17)

This kind of gift is usually observed in folks that take charge of situations and make things happen in the church. At its best, it is a gift that glorifies God and guides the church. At its worst, it can be a gift that glorifies the person and creates pet projects that the person never lets go of.

ILLUS: I remember one church in another community that had a powerful children's choir. In time, the folks who ran that choir became the force that controlled the church. Everything in the church revolved around that ministry and if anyone dared question or threaten that ministry, the folks in charge did everything from threaten the board to firing the preacher. They were subject to no other authority. They held the keys to all the locks.

When you get right down to it... it's all a question of who owns the keys.

CLOSE: So, who does own the keys?

Who owns the church?

Who owns you and I?

That's right... Jesus does

ILLUS: I was driving the bus last Wednesday for JAM (our elementary age youth group) and one of the kids asked me if I owned the church bus. I told her "no. The bus belongs to Jesus." I made it clear to her that everything about this congregation belongs to Jesus.

When Peter was writing the Elders in I Peter 5 he said this:

“Be shepherds of GOD’S FLOCK that is under your care, watching over them — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the CHIEF SHEPHERD appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” I Peter 5:2-4

The church is God’s Flock.

The chief shepherd (the real pastor of the church) is Jesus.

As long as we know who owns us and who owns everything that is here - everything will go the way it should.

Jesus is our ultimate leader.

And when the mortal leaders of a church know who owns the church and the people... they themselves can “receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” I Peter 5:4

When we place ourselves in submission to the great Pastor (Jesus) we know that on that final day when we stand before the throne of God, we’ll here Jesus say to us:

“Well done, good and faithful servant.”

## INVITATION

Footnote: I began this sermon with an overview of the 7 gifts. On the screen we showed a cartoon of a dinner party where the dessert has slipped out of the hostesses hands and now lays on the ground. Then I described how each of the 7 gifted individuals may react to that scene:

1. The Prophet: “That’s what happens when you’re not careful.” (Motivation: To correct the problem)
2. The Servant: “Oh. Let me help you clean that up.” (Motivation: To meet a need.)
3. The Teacher: “The reason that fell is because it was too heavy on one side.” (Motivation: To explain why it happened.)
4. The Encourager: “Oh and that was such a beautiful dessert and you did such a good job with it.” (Motivation: To boost the hostess’s confidence in her skills).
5. The Giver: “I’ll be happy to buy a new dessert.” (Motivation: To give to meet a tangible need)
6. The Leader/Organizer: “Jim would you get the mop. Sue, please help pick it up. Mary, help me fix another dessert.” (Motivation: To achieve the immediate goal of the group.)
7. The Mercy giver: “Don’t feel badly. That could have happened to anyone.” (Motivation: To relieve embarrassment)