

Leaders of the Church

by Bob Hoekstra

Bob Hoekstra's sermon emphasizes the distinct biblical principles governing church leadership compared to worldly standards, highlighting the importance of character and spiritual maturity in leaders.

Duration: 55:25

Scripture: Acts 6:4

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Servant Ministry"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of church leadership being aligned with biblical principles, focusing on the need for leaders to be servants, prioritize prayer and the ministry of the word, seek to be Christ-like examples, and operate within the framework of the body of Christ, led by Jesus as the head.

Transcript

We're now going to look at issues of church leadership. Church leadership, critical issue in the word of God and in life in the body of Christ. We'll look first at one of two studies, the first called leaders of the church.

Then second, we'll look at strategic leadership issues. First, concerning leaders of the church. It is true that too often in the church world, church leadership is patterned after the world.

So often, we find that the choice of leaders in the church world is on the same basis of how the leaders in the world are chosen. Gifted, talented, influential, strong businessman, whatever it is, good politicians, often when they come to the Lord and come to the church, it's like, oh, they are the leaders. Maybe, but not necessarily so.

There are many who are leaders in the world who even after they're saved, do not become leaders in the church. It's a whole different kingdom. Leadership arises on different issues.

And sometimes, a leader in the world will become a leader in the church. But it's not automatic. But sometimes, we treat it almost as automatic.

And often, once selected as leaders in the church, leaders sometimes function in the church, much like leadership in the world. The Lord's kingdom is not of the world. Even in the realm of leadership, selection and the principles of ministering are going to be different.

What we need is a biblical, spiritual perspective. What should be behind the selection and operation of leadership in the church would be issues such as we have looked at previously in our The Church, How Jesus Builds It studies. Leaders in the church should be developing along lines of the head and the body.

The head and the body, that's how the church develops. The relationship between each Christian and the Lord, and then as we live in Him, relating to one another. Leaders in the church should develop through their relationship with the head and their ministry one to another in the body.

And we must see that behind all that we're looking at in this issue of church leadership. Let's look for a moment in 1 Timothy 3 at leadership positions in the church. See how the Lord has arranged it.

Leadership positions. 1 Timothy chapter 3. 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 1. This is a faithful saying. If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

Here's one of the terms of leadership in the church. A bishop. It could be translated overseer.

A bishop or an overseer. Let's keep that in mind and look at chapter 5, verses 17 and 18. Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine, that is, teaching.

For the scripture says, quote, you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain, and the laborer is worthy of his wages. Here we have a different term. Elder.

An elder. The elders here we see are to rule. The governing of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is basically placed into the hands and lives of elders.

They are to rule. And we're told here that those who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor. What would the double honor be? Well, certainly respectful following.

That would be a strategic kind of honor. But verse 18 makes it very clear. It's a little play on the word honoring.

It has to do with giving value or giving compensation. So it would be financial honoring. The laborer is worthy of his wages, especially those who labor in the word and in doctrine.

Those who labor especially in the word and in doctrine. I believe that this is speaking primarily of the Ephesians 4.11 picture, the pastor-teacher. There are elders in the church, but there are some elders who are pastors and teachers.

And those who are pastor-teachers, those are the ones who are to be considered worthy of double honor. When a church starts to provide compensation, that is taking folks into vocational Christian ministry, it's the pastor-teacher, I believe the scripture says, the church should start out with. We made a mistake on this in the church I first pastored in Dallas.

We had a huge facility and a small church body, and it took a lot of attention to take care of that facility. And there were four of us as a volunteer staff that started this church of a few dozen folks. And when resources began to come in, we started to compensate financially the brother who was in charge of the facility because it took so much time.

It just seemed to make practical sense. But it overlooked the word of God. It got the priorities out of order.

And the facility got more and more attention. But the sheep got less and less attention. And it finally dawned on us and some of the other men, they said, Bob, I think we should be setting apart more of your time for the ministry of the word and teaching and just see if anybody will help out any time in keeping the facility clean and maintained and all of that.

There are vocational Christian servants, and there are such in the church. And they are the ones that are considered worthy of double honor. That's where we start out.

Others in the church life can certainly become vocational servants where their job is their ministry. But I think this sets the priority, the priority of the ministry of the word through those who minister in leadership. Now, an interesting thing.

We've seen a few terms. Bishop, that would be episkopos. Could be translated overseer.

And then elder, presbyteros. And if those sound like kind of denominational terms, they have become that. We've gotten words in the church like Episcopalian and Presbyterian.

And those become types of church government, it seems. And awful, often it in, awful, maybe that's a good word. Forgive me, Lord, if that's wrong.

But often, often we treat it like kind of a multi-level hierarchy of church government. We think of the Episcopalian or Presbyterian kind of a hierarchy of order. And you even get religious organizations where you've got deacons, elders, bishops, cardinals, and you can go right on to the pope himself.

Hierarchy of leadership. Though there are different terms in the word, the fascinating thing is really it's just the elders who are to rule, not the board of deacons, not a person, the pastor, not the congregation, but the elders who rule well. But the interesting thing is the scriptures actually use these terms synonymously about the same persons in their role in office.

Just describing different aspects of what those persons in that office of leadership do. Where do we find that in the word of God documented? More than one place, but Acts 20 is one of the clearest. Acts chapter 20.

In Acts chapter 20, verse 17, gives the setting. From Miletus, that is the coastal town near Ephesus, he, the apostle Paul, sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. What is happening here is Paul, the apostle, is on his way to the last trip to Jerusalem.

His last trip, he thinks, by Ephesus, and he calls the leaders down for a little kind of mini church leadership conference. And they're called here the elders of the church, the presbyteros. Let's go further.

Verse 28. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. There's the other term, episkopos, bishop, overseer.

And look what they are commanded to do. To shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. To shepherd, that's the word from which we get pastor.

So right here in this one passage, elders are then called overseers, and they're told to pastor. Those are three of the basic terms in church leadership. Pastors, overseers, elders.

Really, they're the same people. It's not a hierarchy. It's one group of leaders just given different perspective in each term.

The overseer would be the one who the aspect of seeing over the whole life of the church. The presbyteros, the elder, the spiritually mature. And then the pastoring, by the same people, the shepherding and caring.

And then the pastor teacher, I believe, is what we often call the senior pastor. That is the one who takes the role of leading, how? By feeding. Leading by feeding the word of God, the pastor teacher.

It's a pretty simple arrangement. Had a friend in Dallas when I pastored there. He understood all of this clearly, but he used to love when he'd see me, especially at a group gathering.

He'd go, hey, Bishop Bob, good to see you. You know, and folks, there's a bishop here? He knew that was just one other way to indicate a church leader, a pastor, an overseer. Yes, I was a bishop once.

But those who lead the church as elders, they are bishops, which just means overseer. They are elders. They're to be the spiritual, mature ones.

And they are to pastor, shepherd, feed the flock. Pretty simple, really. Leadership position of guiding the church.

Where do the deacons fit in? Well, they come here later in 1 Timothy. 1 Timothy chapter 3, where we began. 1 Timothy 3.8, likewise, deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, and so on.

But just the term deacons now, we'll look at qualifications later. Deacons, literally that word could be translated servants. And when you look at Acts 6, where perhaps we have a picture, I personally believe, as many do, that it's sort of the prototype, the first appointing of deacons, servant helpers.

Acts chapter 6, the church was growing, but a complaint arose. The disciples multiplied. And the Hebrew widows were getting their food, but the Hellenists, the Greek Gentile widows, were not getting their daily distribution of food consistently.

So the 12, the leaders of the church functioning, the apostles then functioning in that first church as the overseers, elders, pastor-teachers, they called the congregation together and said, we're the leaders, but we can't set aside our ministry of the word to serve at the widows' tables. Doesn't mean that it's unimportant for people to have their needs met. It's just the prioritizing of role.

And it was not right for them to spend their time ministering to this need. So verse 3, they asked that the brethren seek out among themselves seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we, the leaders, may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles. And when they had prayed, the apostles prayed over them, laid hands on them, appointed them to this role of helping.

Then the word of God spread and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. And the ministry of the word went on, unhindered by things that could distract the ministry of the word. But it's still

important, but God had others to take care of that.

And I do believe that was the first appointment of deacons. Deacon is really a servant role to help out leadership in a certain area. One of the titles of elder pastor is overseer.

Those in that role see over the entire affair of the church. There are those called deacons, that is servants, who serve and assist. Those who see over all of it, how do they help? By taking an area of it.

You brothers, the widow's tables. You, brother, sister, the nursery. You, the music ministry or whatever.

And those are the deacons that help in the service of the leadership of the church. It's not a hierarchy of leadership. It's really the Lord is the head of the church.

Jesus said, one is your master, you're all brothers. I mean, the hierarchy in the church is so simple. There's the Lord and all the rest of us.

I mean, it's so simple. But in that other level of all the rest of us, we take different roles and functions. He's the master, but he calls out some in the flock to press hard after him as under shepherds.

And through the words say, here's the voice of the shepherd, come on, this is the way he's going. It's not lording over people, it's right among them leading the way. And then there are servant helpers who'll take different areas of the care of the flock.

It is so simple. It's so beautiful. It's astounding how we've complicated it in the church world.

So that's a little picture of leadership positions, elders, pastors, overseers, and then deacon helpers. Let's look for a moment at leadership qualifications back to 1 Timothy chapter three. Leadership qualifications, interesting list.

This describes the kind of lives the Lord is preparing and shaping and equipping to use. It doesn't describe perfect people, only the Lord was the perfect man. It does describe people maturing and being transformed, noticeable, significant presence of spiritual development.

1 Timothy three, verse one. This is a faithful saying. If a man desires the position of a bishop that is an overseer, he desires a good thing.

It's not a bad thing to desire that office, nor is it a bad thing being desired. Of course, motives have to be checked, but if God's calling us to that ministry, no surprise if a desire develops to serve that way because God works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. And a spiritually mature brother will be delighting in the Lord, Psalm 34, and the Lord will be giving him the desires of his heart.

You know, Psalm 37, verse four. The Lord will be giving those desires in his heart. That's the way it works.

So it's not bad to desire that, but motives are always an issue. Some desire it for prestige or position or power or influence or who knows what a man can desire such a thing for, but it's not per se bad. It's a great way to serve the Lord if that's what the Lord is calling to.

But a bishop overseer then must be blameless. Again, not perfect, but not something in a person's life that can be taken to the word where it's forbidden, and yet there it is taking place in that person's life, characteristically, consistently. The husband of one wife, the husband of one wife.

Not just the obvious, not having multiple wives, but really probably not even remarried invalidly. I mean, some men go from wife to wife to wife. That's not right.

Oh, there are some conditions in which the Lord grants the ending of one marriage, but they're very limited and very specific. But I think even more than that, just think of it in the very terms given. The husband of one wife is a man really being a husband to that wife.

Many men aren't. They're married, but they're not being husbands. They just stop at home and get their food and clothing.

They're not being husbands. And some, they show a real care for women, but it's more than just a silly flirtatious way. They're not really devoted to their one wife.

And I think all the way from improperly married or remarried or improperly relating to our own wife, all of those would be violations of this. How a man relates to his wife is a real key issue in church leadership. Also temperate, moderation in their lives, sober-minded, not silly clowns.

That doesn't mean we can't have great humor. I mean, God has built into us great humor. And you can even look at the teaching of Jesus.

He said some things that just had to provoke kind of, oh my God, you know. You're straining out a net and swallowing a camel and the disciples listening, oh my God. I mean, it's a very humorous picture, but it's a true and a sad picture at the same time.

And there's both humor and soberness in it. But some, I mean, there's some just pastors that are just, let's face it, kind of stand up comics. Well, praise God for the gift of humor.

And some use it profoundly well. I mean, you can really make a point with humor, but you can also totally distract. And even beyond that, just general deportment in the family of God.

Some just love to be nothing but a constant court jester. And I kind of like humor. And this is one I just need to be reminded of.

There's a lot in the kingdom of heaven to be exceedingly serious about. Not holiness is sourness. And if you crack a smile, your face will break and you're disqualified from office or whatever.

But this is still a significant issue. Sober-minded, of good behavior, not doing crazy things. Hospitable, willing to receive people into our lives.

Now, here's a real strategic one, able to teach. In a while, we'll just glance at the qualification for deacons. The reason I say glance is not because it's unimportant, but because the lists are so similar.

But you know what? This qualification does not appear in the qualifications for deacons. This is a very strategic difference. Why? Because a deacon doesn't have to have aptitude, ability, gifting to teach the word to function as a servant helper over a given area.

You don't have to be able to teach the word to be sure the widows get their food. You don't have to be able to teach the word to be sure the nursery is given care and love and attention. But if you're gonna shepherd the flock, you've got to be able to teach the word of God.

Very strategic qualification. Not given to wine. Oh, those who have their lives influenced by alcohol and all.

How can they leave the church? Not violent. Not greedy for money. Well, there's a big one.

Billions of dollars are made out of the motivation of greed in the religious world. It's tragic. And so often, of course, God's name is signed on.

I mean, that's how you really get people moved and stirred. Those who just have to have money and they're chasing money and they're after money, they're not to be leaving the church. Earlier, we saw not violent.

Now we have the other side, but gentle. The shepherd's gentle. He's not shoving around the sheep or kicking the sheep, you know? He's leading the sheep and caring for the sheep.

Not quarrelsome. The flesh loves to argue. Oh, not that we shouldn't become willing to contend earnestly for the faith, but even that must be done in gentleness and humility.

Not covetous, not desiring things that others have. Here's a big one. One who rules well his own house, having his children in submission with all reverence.

For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God? A real insight as to whether a person is ready for leadership in the church is how is he leading in his home? His home is like his little mini flock. He has a few sheep there, especially his wife, but even the children. And how's he doing there? Again, not that there has to be perfection in the home.

Again, only the Lord Jesus was the perfect one and we are to be those being perfected, being made more and more like him. But if it's chaos at home, if it's rebellion with the kids everywhere you turn, left, right, and center with the kids at home, then the Lord is saying that's a home to pray for and minister to and lead. It's not a home in which a leader is yet being developed.

A lot of insight on leadership preparation can be seen by what's happening in the household. Verse six, not a novice. You know, not a brand new believer.

Lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the same condemnation as the devil, which was pride and self-exaltation. Satan said, I will be like the most high God. He thought he deserved a throne like God.

New believers pushed too rapidly into leadership. They can succumb to that temptation of pride. And we err sometimes on this in the church, especially if a person is famous, rich, influential.

They get saved. They're just thrown out in front of everyone. It's cruel to do that to them and it's unwise for the flock of God.

Verse seven, moreover, he must have a good testimony among those who are outside that is unbelievers, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. It even matters in church leadership what the unbeliever thinks when they look upon that person. That's an interesting thing, isn't it? How we select leaders in the church, especially when it comes to pastor, elder, deacon, overseer, really has so much to do with character qualities.

First Timothy 3, eight through 13 goes right on into deacons. Likewise, deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not giving them much wine, not greedy for money. And the list goes on and it's very

similar, very similar.

Verse 10, but let these also first be tested, then let them serve as deacons being found blameless. A couple of things here. The fact that the list for deacons and later their wives, some would say that's talking about deaconesses, some would say it's the wives of the deacons.

Either way, the point is, the list goes on very similar to elders. Think about that. We sometimes say the elders, they take care of the spiritual affairs of the church and the deacons, the practical affairs.

I've said that at times and I see an aspect of that in the word, but more and more, I think that sometimes that is somewhat inadequate and almost misleading because it almost gives the impression the deacons aren't in the spiritual ministry. Elders, pastors, spiritual care of the church, deacons, the practical things. Well, in a sense, yeah, it was a practical affair to get the food to the widows, but remember, these men had to be full of the spirit, full of wisdom and faith.

It isn't just a matter of spiritual and practical. All ministry must be spiritual. Some as the spiritual feeding of the sheep through the word, that really sets it apart from just getting practical care out, but it has to be spiritual men in spiritual ministry.

And I think when you look at the list of qualifications, the same kind of character is expected in deacons as in pastors, elders, overseers. And then verse 10, let these also first be tested, then let them serve as deacons or servant helpers of the overseer leaders of the church. Early on in ministry, I personally and those who labored with me, we made some big mistakes in this area.

What we often did was, well, way back, we kind of had nominations and voting for deacons. Well, that's an invitation to disaster. I mean, you talk about bringing a political convention into the body of Christ.

The church that I got saved in, actually, they did that too. It was a congregational rule and leaders were nominated and voted upon. And one year after I was saved, I was nominated and voted as a deacon in the church.

Well, I was no more ready to be a servant helper to the overseers. It's a popularity thing. I was on staff in the church before I was saved and got saved.

It's good for staff members to get saved. And the church loved my dad very much. It seemed like wherever the Lord took my dad, he was just tremendously loved.

He was such a generous, loving man, never knew anyone as generous as my dad. And his whole ministry was based on giving. And so people loved him.

Here's Chaplain Ray's son, Bob. Oh, he'd be a great deacon. Not so, not so.

I mean, the crazy things that can come when you bring a political approach from the culture into the church. Well, then how do we find deacons? Well, we tried another approach in Dallas. We just selected some that looked like they might be good deacons.

This is kind of a neat guy. Let's give him a shot at it. Overlooking a very key verse.

Let these also first be tested. Those you think who might be moving toward that direction, let them be tested. How so? Just let them live in the church of Jesus Christ.

Don't even hold an office or a position in front of them. Just let them be tested by how they walk with the Lord, relate to the head, and how they minister one to another. We found it's a tremendous blessing God has given here.

Let them first be tested, then let them serve as deacons. You know how we felt the Lord was saying they'd pass the test? When they were a virtual functioning deacon without being appointed. Then all we did, we just recognized God has raised up a deacon.

It got to be so easy. And we made very few mistakes after that because we were watching what God was doing. We weren't guessing what might work.

And I think that's kind of the spirit behind this, though there's no tight system on how to apply this first hand, but I think that's the spirit behind it. Let these also first be tested, then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. If you notice there's not a problem in their walk in service, hey, the Lord may be raising up a deacon there.

But this issue of deacons, they do not have to be able to teach the word, but they do need the same character as elders, overseers. In leadership qualifications, primarily these are the issues. Character qualities, proper relationships and testimony, spiritual maturity, family life, those are the issues.

What is not in view is a long list of talents and abilities. Worldly influence and position is not a qualifying advantage. Often it's a disadvantage.

It doesn't prohibit people from being leaders, but often it's a hurdle to their growing in humility and spiritual maturity. There's great danger for the church when exceedingly talented, influential, able, gifted humans are thrust into the leadership of the church. Great ability lacking spiritual maturity is great trouble in the body of Christ.

And often a lot of church trouble comes from that very source. Very able people are just swept into leadership, but they don't have the spiritual maturity or the calling upon their life. And they don't walk in the enabling of the Lord, they kind of draw on the natural resources of the flesh.

And you can't mix the flesh and the spirit and leadership is to be a spiritual calling. Now for some moments that remain, let's look at some leadership priorities. Some leadership priorities.

Biblical realities that are strategically, vitally important in the lives of leaders in the church. These are important issues for all believers, but those who take leadership, there's a multiplication of importance in these matters in their lives. Luke chapter 10, Luke chapter 10 verse 38.

Now it happened as they went that he entered a certain village and a certain woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word. But Martha was distracted with much serving and she approached him and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.

And Jesus answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things, but one thing is needed. And Mary has chosen that good part which will not be taken away from her. What an important issue this is in priority for leadership in life and service.

It's really a picture of living and serving with our heart and focus and hope at the feet of Jesus Christ. Martha was diligently serving the Lord, but she was worried and troubled about many things. She was distracted with her much serving.

Ministry is a great thing, but ministry can even be a distraction from higher issues like the Lord himself. And the one we're serving can get eclipsed by the service that we think we're engaged in for him. And the ministry becomes the thing.

And it's so big and all-consuming that we're even distracted by it. It's interesting. Martha's in the kitchen.

She's laboring. Mary's out there sitting at the feet of Jesus. Martha's getting kind of distracted and perturbed it seems.

And she goes out there to get this straightened out. And the impression is that she's thinking, I'll just bring this to the Lord's attention and she'll just shoo Mary right in there. We'll get the help we need in the kitchen.

What a shock it must've been to her when she says, Lord, don't you care that my wife is sick? Don't you care that my sister's left me to serve alone? Oh, poor me in service. Wasn't that awful in the feeling? Therefore tell her to help me. Surely expecting Jesus to go, Mary, let's be practical.

In the kitchen, Martha's swamped. And not that we shouldn't help each other. And not that what Martha was doing was wrong, but it's a matter of priority.

What is more important? What a shock to Martha when Jesus turned and said, Martha, you're worried and troubled about so many things. And parenthetically, I might add, now I'm gonna tell you something that's gonna blow your mind. One thing is necessary.

This is a powerful truth. The one necessary thing. It's almost hard to believe it at times.

Why? Because there are often a thousand things that are important. And beyond the thousand things that are important, there are usually 10,000 things that are urgent. And the important and the urgent can so easily eclipse the one necessary thing.

This is a challenge to every believer, but especially so to those who lead. If those who lead miss this, no surprise if most others will miss it. This is one of the ways God can really use us to lead.

Direct people by example, word, and teaching to keep the one necessary thing in the heart and center of all that takes place in our lives and our ministries. The one necessary thing, what is it? It's the good part that Mary chose and could not be taken away from her. She was sitting at Jesus' feet and hearing his word.

Now, because this is the one necessary thing, I believe the big implication here is it's totally portable, totally adaptable to every situation and time. Sure, a great, pure, specific, full entering into this could be our private devotional time with the Lord, just sitting at his feet, no distractions, nothing else. But in those seasons of life, like say a newborn or toddlers, you don't just tell your two and three-year-olds, mama will be back in 30 minutes.

Well, there'll be no house when you return. Those kids need that constant care, but this can still be going on in the heart. There are all kinds of conditions someone might be hassling, someone might be in prison

and vicious guards kind of beating on the bars or putting screeching sounds in.

You might not have your classic quiet time or you're out marching on a chain gang all day in captivity or something. Since this is the one necessary thing, it's gotta be totally portable and adaptable to every situation. It's gotta be a heart matter, not just a procedural or ritual matter.

And I do believe the sweetest application of it is that personal quiet time, but it must be more portable and adaptable than that so that even when we go out into action or service or action or service is demanded of us for various reasons and it would be unkind, unloving and irresponsible not to go into action. Our heart can still be at the feet of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, man can only live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

And there Mary sat receiving life itself from her Lord speaking truth into her heart and life. That's always the priority, always. Well, we can get this confused.

Again, I don't mean to tell too many horror stories about the church I was saved in, but there were some horrific things. I mean, I praise God I was there because I got saved there. And I'll forever thank God for that and the pastor who got the gospel out.

But I remember one day our dear pastor did something very interesting. This passage brings to mind and we're prone to do things like this. He lined up all of the servant women in the church who were hard laborers and he had big purple badges for them and pin them on them in front of everyone.

And then we gave them great Thanksgiving. And on that badge was an amazing statement. I remember it though it happened 1,500 years ago.

Said the Royal Order of Martha. Whoa, wait a minute. And his point was, as he expounded this, these are the ones who really get it done.

Almost putting down the one with the heart of Mary. The Royal Order of Martha. Yeah, it's good to be a laborer like Martha, but if we labor like Martha, let's keep the heart of Mary.

And we can exalt in the church just busyness. We knew a lot of those women and praise God some of them were Marthas. Their badge should have said, God is giving me the heart of Mary.

They were Marys. Mary heart with Martha laboring. But some were just frantic Marthas, and kind of irritated at others.

They didn't roll up their sleeves and get in as deep as they did. This is a staggering thing to kind of sort out. I mean, who would ever imagine that there's one necessary thing.

When the elders at Calvary Chapel of Irvine had walked out of Pastor Chuck Smith's office with my ministry card in their hand, Chuck had given it to them. I'd been getting to know him that year in 82. They were without a pastor at Irvine and went to see Pastor Chuck.

He gave them my card and said, I think this brother could probably help out you over there. We just come from Dallas, Texas. They did call and subsequently asked if we'd pray about coming to pastor the church.

You know what hit me in that? Because then we were also doing living in Christ ministries full time, like we have been now the last five or six years. Then on a much smaller scale, though we thought that would be

our ministry the rest of our days. The big thing that hit me was this.

Lord, my heart's drawn to these people. You've given me to some degree the heart of a pastor. I love the shepherd by teaching.

And we can probably carry on living in Christ ministries, which was really on our heart from the previous church, the radio tapes and conferences and all and concentrating on some of the topical studies that we felt were so critical. But here's what hit me. Lord, if I go back into pastoral ministry, am I gonna become Reverend Martha? Because I knew from 14 years of pastoral ministry that no one is more likely a candidate for getting distracted in ministry than the pastor.

No one does more than the pastor. No one in the church is expected to do more. And many, many say, pastor, I know you're busy, but could you please? And it just keeps multiplying.

And that's fine. They're totally free to ask such things, but it can just mount and build. And often many in the church kind of have this subtle misconception that, hey, that's what we're all supporting him for anyway.

He does the work, we pay the bills. It's a very worldly perspective, but it's easy to think that way unless our mind is renewed and we're transformed in our thinking. So pastors can get buried.

And you who are pastors, you know what it's like. Any given day, you can have a thousand issues arise. And at times, every one of them is screaming out, I'm number one, I'm number one.

Do nothing else, do me now. We pastors can be like that man of 100 years ago on the Ed Sullivan Variety Show. I remember as a young man watching that, the plate spinner.

He had those flexible poles. He'd put China ware on top, plates, and then he'd get them spinning. And he'd just keep adding them.

And he'd get so many going that he'd get to where he had to stop putting them up and just race to the other end and pop that one he started and keep it spinning. And then he had to just keep doing it. By the time he got to the end of the row, he couldn't even add any more.

He just had to race back down to the other end. And it was quite entertaining. One day it hit me as a pastor that that's exactly what I was doing.

That's exactly what I was doing. And these were important things. Well, at least some of them.

And I did the others because though they weren't important, they were at least urgent. Everybody's yelling now, now, now. Deadline, tomorrow, yesterday.

This is a tough one to believe and a greater one even to apply. There is one necessary thing. This is a real leadership priority because if there's only one necessary thing, if leaders miss it, most in the flock will miss it.

If we're gonna be healthy and on target in the Lord's calling for us as leaders, we wanna live in light of the one necessary thing. It'll take a great work of God. Who but God can sort all that out? Give us the wisdom and liberty to function in this direction.

Then Acts chapter six, verse four. We touched on it lightly before. It's good to take a few minutes on it.

Acts chapter six, verse four. But we will give ourselves, devote ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Devoted as leaders to calling upon the Lord in his mighty name and ministering out his word as he opens his word to us.

Leaders given continually to the word and the ministry of prayer. Oh, those in the church, so wise to be sensitive, to help pastors guard their time and priorities, to help them stay in the word and in prayer. And so often for pastors, it's not the bad things.

Most good-hearted pastors aren't wasting their time playing four rounds of golf a week. And that's what keeps them out of prayer and the word. Most good-hearted pastors, it's the good things, the valid things, the things that God wants to get attention, that often compete with their time in prayer and in the word.

And it's good to have this vision as leaders, but it's good to share this vision. And it's good for those of us who help pastors, deacons, and just others in the flock. To just say, Lord, show me how I can get under the load and take some of these tasks.

How I can do things that will guard the time of my pastor. But it's easier to spend time in prayer and in the ministry of the word. This is what the pastor, overseer, elders, bishops are to be doing in the church, primarily, not exclusively.

I mean, they can do the most menial things too. Oh, if a pastor thinks he's above that, he's missing the point. But our lives can't be consumed with good things like getting food to the widows, which is so good, so right.

God cares for those widows. But there are many in the church that can get the food to those widows. Some of them full of the spirit, faith, and wisdom.

But if you're a pastor, God has called you to primarily devote yourself to prayer and the ministry of the word. That's really the heart of our ministry. As we live under him, seek him, hear from him, and proclaim it out to the people of God, covered with prayer, so that it's all a work of God, not just a religious activity of giving instruction on religious details.

Another leadership priority, Matthew 20. And this is the priority of servanthood. Servanthood.

But Jesus called them to himself and said, Lord, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them. Rulers, lording it over, the Gentiles. And those who are great exercise authority over them.

Yet, key phrase now, it shall not be so among you. But whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first, right out there in front in spiritual greatness, let him be your slave.

In what way? Just as the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Our king, the king of kings and lord of lords, our master, whom we all serve. Here's the amazing thing, he's a servant king.

Even he doesn't lord it over and dominate his sheep. But he anoints them and cares for them. And when he was here on earth, though he could have demanded everyone line up and wash his sandaled feet, and he would have had the right to.

He's the one who got down on his knees and washed our feet. I mean, how could you have a more profound example? Servanthood is what spiritual greatness is about. And if we're gonna lead out in the church of Jesus Christ, a leadership priority is God give me the heart of a servant.

And this is one of the reasons pastors should not be above any task. But it's even beyond that, when they concentrate on their primary task, prayer and the ministry of the word, it's to be as a servant, not as a boss. As one who wants to feed those sheep, not dominate those sheep.

And this goes for everyone in the church, we're all to be servants. But for all to be servants, how will any catch the vision if we're not teaching it and practicing it as leaders in the church? A key leadership priority, may the Lord give us a heart and vision for that. And then last, 1 Corinthians 1, verse 11, leadership priority of being Christ-like examples.

1 Corinthians 11, verse one. Paul said, imitate me, follow me, live like I live, just as I also imitate Christ. Just as my life matches the life of Christ.

It should be the desire of leaders to be in the process of being transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that others can look to us and get an example, an illustration, a living human picture of what it is to live among mankind in Christ-likeness. Now again, every Christian should have this desire to be like Christ and thereby be an example to others.

But what a leadership priority, Paul, a key leader in the early church, called people to follow him as he followed Christ. The desire to be Christ-like examples, not to be known as these capable experts who have this professional career of leading the church. But just, Lord, make me an increasingly Christ-like example.

What a way to lead. The more the Lord makes us like him, our life becomes leadership. I mean, just our life becomes something that leads people in the right direction.

What a wonderful leadership priority, a desire to be a Christ-like example. Now in all of this, in conclusion and reflection, leaders of the church, God is looking to develop the spiritually mature, not perfect people, but maturing people. And also, he's wanting to develop servants, not big shots, not bosses.

Not bosses, but servants. But let's take this back again in reflection to the spiritual setting of the word of God. All of this must flow out of body truth, the very nature of the church.

The church is a living spiritual organism, not a dead religious organization. It's the body of Christ. And Christ himself is the head.

He's the leader. So leaders in the church will develop as they hold fast to the head. Those called to leadership will come into their leadership first by holding fast to the head, rightly relating to the Lord Jesus, and then ministering one to another so that their servanthood and their gifts are put into exercise as members of the body.

And as they're doing that, members of the body will recognize, oh, the Lord is raising up a leader. This is so unlike the business world. This is so unlike the world of politics.

This is the way in the body of Christ. Leadership in the church is such a critical issue. Oh, may God give us a vision to do it his way and not man's way.

This lets the Lord Jesus build his church and keeps it out of the hands of man. Let's pray together about this. Lord, for our own lives, if you're calling us to leadership in the church, may we walk in these truths as you transform us and even renew our minds to think this way and walk this way.

And Lord, throughout the church of Jesus Christ, give us leaders like this, we pray, and leaders with these types of priorities. They fit your word, they glorify you, and such lives can be greatly used in the church of Jesus Christ. Lord, protect us from the ways of man in the church and give us godly leaders connected to Christ ahead in serving his body, we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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