

What Is Spiritual Leadership in the Local Church

by Ralph Sutera

Ralph Sutera explores the principles of spiritual leadership in the local church, emphasizing the importance of worship, mutual ministry, and clear priorities for effective church functioning.

Duration: 59:29

Scripture: Psalm 95:6, Psalm 100:4, Jeremiah 29:11, Matthew 22:37, Romans 12:1, Colossians 3:16, James 1:22

Topics: "Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the problems of the tragedy of the new program cycle in churches. He acknowledges that not everyone may agree with his ideas but emphasizes the importance of open-mindedness and learning from each other. The speaker shares an anecdote about a crowded church service and how one man eagerly squeezed into the front row, inspiring others to do the same. He then encourages congregations to sit closer together in order to create a sense of intimacy and engagement. The speaker concludes by stating that the concepts he presents are based on biblical principles and can be transformative for church leaders and their congregations.

Transcript

What is spiritual leadership in the local church? As we begin the study, let me suggest that it would be healthy if you could hear the whole thing through, if at all possible. The material is designed as study material. We're not going to read the entire manual, but it's designed so that you can take it home and study it individually as well as in group settings.

The sessions are not designed to cover every item that is mentioned in the manual. The principles apply to any group in the church, even though we're going to be talking about, primarily, the highest levels of leadership in the church. The principles apply to any group that has people underneath you.

If you have people underneath you, the same principles can apply. As we discuss something like this, it's so easy to negate our past and say, wouldn't it have been great if we would have understood some of these principles sooner? But it's like everything else that we think is very important, and that is that we do not negate our past, but thank God for bringing us to this hour with open hearts to hear what God has to say to us. The presentation was not born out of books.

It was born out of the live circumstances of relating to churches with specific problems and how to find God's answer to minister to so many of those problems. The concepts that are going to be shared, I believe, are biblical. They are startling in that, in many respects, we have overlooked them.

They're going to be very striking, both to church leaders and to the leadership. Nobody will be left out. I am very candid to say that I believe they are very idealistic.

They are very idealistic. They may not all be attainable, but I believe that there must be a starting point in setting biblical principles into motion if we ever expect to see what God longs to do in the church. Also, I feel that they are potentially attainable, primarily within the framework of revival truths functioning in a local church.

It's more than just understanding principles, but where a group of people have seen what it is like to be able to minister to each other, to bear each other's burdens, to relate to each other and praying for each other in a very real way and see those things happen, they begin to sense that the principles that I'm going to share today are attainable, and I really believe that it's in that framework. They function best where there's a body of people who know what it means to minister one to another. What is important are the principles that will be expounded, not necessarily the methods suggested for implementing them.

Methods may vary with every local situation, but the principles, I believe, remain intact. Of course, I'm realistic enough to know that there are exceptions to all these kinds of things that are discussed because of the unique varied backgrounds of different situations. Actually, we're all learning together.

There's not a time that I share this that I'm not learning something else about these specific truths and concepts of church life. I learn from you, and we all learn together. Therefore, as it's a growing process, God keeps refining the principles in all of our hearts.

Don't get lost in individual statements, but let's get the key concepts that I believe God would have us understand together. I would warn you against trying to implement a lot of these things in a local church body where there is not an understanding of how the church functions as a body fellowship or where there's not been the kind of revival truths that cause people to minister to each other with transparent honesty. If you're in that kind of a situation, I'm glad that you're here so that you can learn some of these principles and then keep it on file and believe God to minister to your hearts and lives, and then, as it begins to happen, you'll begin to see it function in your own church.

One man said after taking a series like this, he said, It will take me 50 years to live out what I've learned today. Actually, it's not a matter of living it out. It's a matter of allowing the life of Christ to live through us.

And at that basis, we begin to see that these things are really attainable. Seriously, God has raised up certain men for leadership capacity in churches, for a city, for a period of time, that function in a manner that may be totally the opposite from the basic principles I'm going to enunciate today. In my country, there are several men like that.

It's as if God raised them up for a city. They may be there the rest of their life as men who lead congregations and they are strong, dynamic leaders. And when I share the principles of a body function and as people outwardly look at some of those churches and see the success, they'll say it doesn't seem like they put those into function and here they are successful in such a real way.

And that is true. But let me remind you that there are not many men that are called like that. In most situations, in most communities, in most congregations, it's down to where the rubber meets the road, where ordinary common people are used of God in a unique way and must learn how to minister to each other in the biblical framework.

Remember, the Bible says that not many mighty are called. And not many have those capacities to be almost, in a sense, genius at organization, at preaching, at captivating a whole city at a time. But there are some, and I want to keep that as a frame of reference, lest anybody misunderstand and think that I'm suggesting that God cannot work in other ways apart from what I'm suggesting today.

Now, if you looked at the explanation of purpose, there are some of the points that are very specific that we should note. Number eight, we're not trying to tell anyone what to do or attack any church or church leaders who have operated in any manner that is different from what we are suggesting. We're not interested in depreciating any man or any man's ministry.

Not at all. We're not to humiliate or depreciate the past. We're learning together, and we thank God for what he has taught us in the past and what he's going to teach us even today.

And so the bottom statement might be fitting here, where it says, beware, be careful not to look at anyone as a target of what is being suggested. We each need to make these truths and principles personal. How does it relate to me, where I'm living in my Christian life and my Christian experience? Number nine, not attempting to take into account the different forms and variables of church structure and specific ministries that God gives one church apart from others.

In some situations, the size of a church and the cultural patterns must be seriously considered. Number ten, we're here to offer concrete suggestions to any congregation that feels itself on dead center, how it can move into an atmosphere of love and continuing blessing by the lifestyle and example of the leaders and the leadership. And if you're here and God is blessing your church in a marvelous way and you feel as if this is not necessary, fine.

Maybe there's one concept that you might learn today that might bless you. But I believe there are many of us who feel that our church life seems to be on dead center and God wants to teach us some things that can help in that whole area. Then number eleven, the most significant thing that can happen would be that this would encourage serious discussion and evaluation of every church program, the direction of the church, the church ministry, in the light of some basic biblical injunctions that we believe that God has forced to understand.

The page that says, use of words, page that says, use of words, basically discusses some of the words that we need to understand. The first one is the word leadership. The word leadership.

Whenever we refer to the word leadership today, we are talking about the pastoral staff. The pastoral staff is leadership. That's what we're talking about.

When we talk about leaders in the church, we are now talking about the elected, appointed spiritual ministries of the church. Such as the deacons, the elders, the Sunday school teachers, the sponsors, the lay-level involvement of people who are leaders in the local church. That's what we're relating to.

Keep that frame of reference. The leadership, the pastoral staff, the leaders, the laymen who are given the unique privilege of ministering in so many ways. Now the basic premise for the study, the basic premise is

this, that the leadership, that's the pastoral staff, is responsible primarily for the climate to be right, loving, and spiritual.

And then to transfer God-given initiatives and directives to the leaders. To transfer God-given initiatives and directives to the leaders. And there's a key statement, and I underline it in my notes, primarily by a personal ministry to each of the leaders.

Primarily by a personal ministry to each of the leaders. That is a key statement, and it will come out loud and clear in the discussion of spiritual leadership in the local church. Now what about the leaders, who are the laypeople that are given the opportunity of ministering? They are primarily responsible for the direction and the decision-making of the local church.

Direction, decision-making. Also, I like the term creative initiatives, and I kind of put that in quotes in my notes. Creative initiatives.

That is, to seek God for creative initiatives to be considered for the church. And then, of course, keep in mind, responsible for implementing the directives that come both from the leadership and the leaders. That is, directives that come from the pastoral staff as well as the leaders in the church.

But the leaders themselves, as a body, a collective body, are responsible for implementing whatever directives come from both groups together. Then I like that third concept, and I really have double-started in my notes. Both groups are responsible to each other and to the congregation so that there will be no dissipation in either area.

Actually, they are responsible to the congregation to minister to each other. To minister to each other so that there will be no dissipation in either area. No dissipation in either area.

So that's the basic premise that we are working on today that will come into focus as we develop what it is God is saying. Now, there are key people in the church. Key people in the church.

And here they are. I like to put it this way. First of all, there is the power, the power of the church.

The power of the church. And I like to consider that the power of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit.

He is the key person in the church. The power of the Holy Spirit. And then I like to suggest that there is power in the church.

Power in the church. And that is, first of all, the power in the few. The power in the few.

Power in the few. And that is primarily the church leaders. The elected, appointed leaders who have specific powers that God has ordained them to have as being elected in that capacity.

The power in the few. Then there is the power in the few. Power in the few.

And I like to consider that the collective congregation. A congregation collectively does have unique power in any congregation, in any church. And then there is the power in the you.

Power in the you. And that I like to consider two things. The pastoral ministry.

The individual pastoral ministry. There is unique power that God has given in the power of pastoral ministry. And then more than that, the individual gifts of people.

The individual gifts of God's people. Individual gifts of God's people. And that's what the Bible talks about when it says every joint is a supplying joint in the body.

So there is the power of the church, the Holy Spirit. Power in the church, the few, the church leaders. In the few, the collective congregation.

And in the you, the pastoral staff. And then each individual exercising his spiritual gifts. Now you notice the page that says key questions.

Key questions. And there are three basic key questions that you note on the page. The first one is something like this.

Do both the leadership or the pastoral staff and the leaders, those are the elected appointed positions, clearly have their rightful God-given roles defined? If so, what tangible evidence can you state to substantiate this? Should the pastoral staff act as organizer, dictator, manipulator, quarterback, fullback, coach, player coach, or what? What about the leaders? What about their role? Is it a spiritual role? All of those things are very significant statements about how we look at the leaders of the church, the pastoral staff. Notice the second question. Is it ever possible for a church to see clearly God's plan for its ministry so there need not be a change in the basic direction and the program of the church with each change in pastors? Is that ever possible? How many think it is? How many don't think it is? How many don't think? Look at number three.

Is it ever possible for spiritual leaders to be so convinced of what God is saying so that they can say to a pastoral candidate, we're not looking for any new program. God has already made the program clear to us. We will happily accept any new ideas, new concept God has given you that will enhance or reevaluate the program God has given us.

Simply tell us how you will minister to us so that we will be more like Christ to better do the work of the ministry. Is it possible? If it is not possible, then why not? That's a serious question. Why is it not possible if it is not? That's a very interesting question and we're going to tie that up as we end up this discussion on the problem of leadership.

And that is, can a church group say to a pastoral candidate, we know what God's saying to us about this church and the program and the direction. Will you, what are you going to do now to enhance our lives so that we can get on with the thing that God has already given us to do? Is that possible? Is it not possible? Do you think that layman cannot know God that thoroughly or must the direction of the church always come from a pastoral staff? That's a key question. Now, the problem that is stated is basically six-fold.

The problem stated, and you'll note the discussion of it, and here is the outline of several pages. Here's the outline. The problem stated.

Why do we have a problem of spiritual leadership in the church? First of all, the priorities of the church are not clearly established, defined, and promoted. Secondly, the philosophy of leadership is distorted, and that's on page two, second page of that discussion. Thirdly, the problem of the use of spiritual gifts.

I'm just giving you the outline, then we'll go through it. That's also on page two. Then, the pastoral role is often distorted.

Fifthly, the privileges of laymen, misdirected, misdirected. And sixthly, page three is the problems, this is what I call the problems of the tragedy of the new program cycle. The problems of the tragedy of the new program cycle.

Now, I understand as I share these concepts that there will be people who listen, who will have varying ideas, and may not completely agree with me on everything that I'll say today. I well understand that. And that's the privilege that we can learn from each other.

So, don't bog down on a few statements that you might not completely see, understand, or even agree with. Let's keep in mind what I said, that we're gaining basic principles that will make a difference in the way we approach the work of God, as we let God keep us with open minds and open hearts about these truths. Now, let's look at that first one, as we begin the first one.

First of all, it is that area of the problem of the priorities of the Church are not clearly established, defined, and promoted. Not clearly established, defined, and promoted. Now, you'll notice the use of those words.

Not clearly established. Not clearly defined. Not clearly promoted.

Even though they're run together, if I would take the room, I would put them individually. Because there are congregations, I personally feel, who have never established their priorities. They really don't know what their priorities are for that congregation.

There are some that have established them, but have never clearly defined them for their people. To be able to grab, or have a handle to grab hold of them. To really understand what those priorities are.

And then there are some that may have established them, and may have defined them, but do not promote them. And I see those words as very significant. All three must be clearly enunciated.

They must be established, they must be defined clearly, and then they must be promoted, so that our people know exactly the direction we believe God wants the church to go. Now, it is true that a spiritual church will seek to define its priorities in the light of God's priorities. See, we say we want to find the priorities.

Then we say, well, what are God's priorities for the church? Now, we can get many different ideas about this. But I would just like to suggest that the basic priorities that I see from the scripture are the fact that worship and praise to God must be top priority in the church. Now, is there anybody who really thinks that that could be out of line? I really do not feel that people would object to that.

For worship and praise must be top priority. In the church, if we understand what the church is supposed to be and how the body is to function. Then I'd like to suggest that ministering one to another is a top priority, so that the body will be healthy.

And then I have listed a third priority, and that is to maintain a climate in order that those two things that I've just mentioned, worship and praise and ministering one to another, can continue in the church. And the statement is that when that is true, I believe that spirit-filled witnessing will proceed out of that kind of a church. Now, I'm not suggesting there will not be some witnessing going on without that.

I'm not suggesting there will not be some souls being saved. But I'm talking about corporately as a body. I believe that the greatest way for spirit-filled witnessing to occur is when these things are intact.

Worship and praise, where we have such a relationship with God in the body. And then where we've learned the importance of keeping the body healthy, where we are ministering to each other at a very real level. It is at that kind of a situation that I believe that God will bring spirit-filled witnessing.

There will be a motivation to be able to serve God at such a level as some of us have not seen before. Then notice that I suggest that the priority of worship and prayer in the average church has been seriously diminished. There's a key statement.

Worship is always Godward in direction. It is Godward in direction. Now, let's just take a few minutes and talk a little bit about worship.

Not too long, but just a few thoughts about worship. Here is a very interesting statement. Here's a statement.

The greatest thing a believer can do for God is to engage in a personal direct communion with God, which becomes the fountain of all God-honoring service. Souls which touch God personally become magnetized with a spiritual force which the world can neither deny nor resist. The world can neither deny it nor resist it.

That is a profound statement. Souls that touch God personally are magnetized with a spiritual force that the world cannot deny nor can it resist. A. W. Tozer makes this statement.

God wants worshipers before workers. Indeed, the only acceptable workers are those who have learned the lost art of worship. It is inconceivable that a sovereign and holy God should be so hard up for workers that he would press into service anyone who had been gifted regardless of his qualifications.

The very stones would praise him if the need arose and a thousand legions of angels would leap to do his will. Very interesting statement about worship. Here's one more by Catherine Dubois who said, and I quote, if God wanted Christians only in order that they could rush around working for him, he could have done better by creating robots.

They would not make the many errors or rebel against him as we do. But this was not the case. God did not want robots.

He wanted people who could be loved and who could respond to love. He wanted people to see him worthy of worship and to respond voluntarily to him with praise, love, and adoration. I have an interesting picture that looks something like modern worship.

Modern worship. The words are rather small, but there is Sally sitting in church and she's looking at someone else. She says, that's a terrible color Sue's wearing.

And Ronnie couldn't carry a tune in the bucket. I wouldn't wear shoes like Debbie's wearing to a dog fight. And then it pictures her on the way out of church saying, I feel sorry for people who don't bother to worship on Sunday.

Doesn't that seem to be so significant of so many of us who say we have been in an hour of worship and there are so many things that have distracted us. Here is a key statement. Worship is always Godward in direction.

It is always upward. Upward, Godward in direction. So the key is not what you received out of it, but rather what did God get out of your time in his presence? What does God get out of it? And if we say worship is top priority, let me suggest that we owe to God in worship several things.

We owe to God several things in worship. And you have a page that talks about this, so you might as well put it in. I believe if it is top priority, we owe him our greatest reverence.

Our greatest reverence. If it is a top priority, we owe him our greatest reverence. We owe him our intense love.

Intense love. We owe him extreme devotion. If it is top priority, we owe him extreme devotion.

We owe him complete adoration. Complete adoration. If worship is top priority.

We owe him unrestrained honor. Unrestrained honor. We owe him unlimited praise.

Unlimited praise. He said that it is Godward in direction. Will you allow me to suggest that many things that we do in the church are manward in direction as far as the ultimate goal is concerned.

Just think of the average Sunday morning service. Think of the fact that most of the announcements are manward in direction. They relate to how we will make out next week and all kinds of details that we need to know.

Think of the kind of songs that we sing most of the time in our worship services. I use the word worship in quotes. Think of the songs that we often sing.

We sing, There shall be showers of blessing. What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear.

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. When it's time to pray, someone will thank God for all of his blessings to us. And then he will go from there and ask God for all kinds of other things that we need.

Whether nationally, whether in our community, whether in our church, whether in our families, or for individuals. When the choir sings, it will sing, I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God. Or some other song like that.

Or whatever it might be. Or then when it goes to the sermon, the preacher will preach. And generally, by the time he ends his sermon, we have heard all kinds of things that will make us better people.

If we would just respond to them. Now is there anything wrong with that? No, I didn't say there was anything wrong with that. But I'm asking you one question.

What went Godward in direction in that whole hour? If I look at all of what I've just mentioned, primarily, almost all of it was manward in direction. It's what will help me. I'll have a friend in Jesus.

Isn't that wonderful? He's going to bear all of my griefs. There shall be showers of blessing. Oh, see, I'm going to be blessed.

And all the songs. And the pastor is saying, if you'll respond to God, you'll be better for it. You'll be richer for it.

You'll be happier for it. See, I am blessed. Don't misunderstand me.

God is not opposed to that. But I'm suggesting to you that in the truest sense, I wonder if that really is worship. You see, I believe that worship is not primarily what we receive from God.

But it's primarily what God receives from us. You see, we are the inheritance of God. The Bible says that.

And if we are the inheritance of God, then the recipient ought to be the one, the recipient of an inheritance is the one who gets the greatest blessing. And if we are the inheritance of God, then if we say we are worshiping, and that's top priority, then the recipient ought to get the greatest blessing. And there are very few times in our church life where we really concentrate on genuine worship.

Such as a song service. Holy, holy, holy Lord God almighty. Such as when the scriptures read all the earth adores thee.

The book of Revelation. The creation manifests the glory of God. Or other portions of scripture.

Such as when the prayer is offered. The prayer is not asking God for anything. But only giving glory to God for who he is as God in his glory and his majesty.

Such as when the sermon is preached. It relates to the holy character of God. And when we leave, we know that we have extolled and exalted a holy God.

Without asking him for anything. To just give praise and honor to his name. Now every church will see that from a different perspective.

But I am suggesting that I believe that we need to get back to teaching our people the difference between what we receive from God and the holy adoration that must go to him on the basis that we say worship and praise is top priority in the church. Now letter B suggests that the worship and praise has been seriously diminished. It has been seriously diminished in the average evangelical church.

And I've given some ways in which I believe that's true. First of all, the time consciousness the time consciousness of the average evangelical church has seriously diminished worship and praise from being a top priority in our local church situation. It has been seriously diminished worship and praise.

Now what do I suggest there? The worship service on the Sunday morning in the average evangelical church seems to be the most time conscious hour of any hour in the church. It seems to be the one hour that people are punching the clock or watching the clock more than any other hour in the church. Now I suggest that it is the most time conscious hour in that we have kind of boxed God in when we talk about worship and praise.

We have boxed God in in a very unique way. We have carefully seen to it that everything is limited and yet we say it is top priority. Then also let me suggest that the emphasis given to activities limits the concept of worship.

The emphasis given to activities limits the concept of worship. Now I'm suggesting two things here. One is that the morning worship service has so many activities that are related to it.

By the time you have the opening song and the prayer and the announcements and the offering and the choir number and the special number and the sermonette which makes Christianettes and the beckoning

benediction that has to all be in before twelve o'clock there is really very little time for any concept of what I'm suggesting. In relation to genuinely worshiping God in many churches. And so that, the emphasis on the activities going on limits it.

Also could I suggest on that thought that the emphasis in the church life on activities limits the concept and the importance of worship in many of our churches. Our people are so busy as busy beavers keeping the program going and running taxi service between their important functions of the church and their children's important functions of the church and so many homes have been so splintered by even the running back and forth by the automobiles to keep everybody happy in the life of the church for all their individual functions. Now I'm not speaking against the functions but I'm really suggesting some of the ways in which the area of worship has been diminished because so much activity has taken the place of the priority.

If we say it's top priority we have to take a good hard look at it. Either it is or it is not in the life of the church. There's a third thing that limits worship or that diminishes the priority as far as people understand it.

Now that seems strange to say. The empty front pews in the average church. Whenever a congregation needs new pews I often feel very sorry for the front pews because they are still new.

They've been used so little in so many churches. Well you say what does that have to do with worship? Well have you ever had the displeasure of walking into a church where everybody sat in the last four or five rows and the pastor was way up front and between him and them was a great gulf mix and it was a lot of woodwork. Have you ever gone through a service like that? Now if you have I want to ask you a question.

How did you feel about worshiping in a place like that? What are your thoughts when you walk into a church where you see people sitting like that the last four or five rows? Can you give me very quickly a few of your thoughts? What would you think if you walked into a church and you saw people sitting like that? What are some thoughts that would go across your mind immediately? They're not really interested. What else? What other thoughts would go across your mind? No. Not a close relationship to each other.

They're way back there. To whom? To the pastor. Not too much communication there.

What else? It's a cold church. Why? Because there's what? No love? You couldn't feel love? Well they seem to be all back there together. Just stay at the back door and you'd be alright.

Close to the back door. What else would it be saying to you? What happened? They want to get out in a hurry. What's that? They got in late.

Could be. All of them come late. Maybe some of them would be self conscious about misbehaved children.

Could be. Anything else? Well let's not lose any more time but we could have a field day right here and sometimes I have where I've gotten all kinds of ideas of what people would think walking in a church like that. Now let me just switch it around.

Can I? Yes? Uh huh. Alright. Okay sometimes it says maybe the ushers are not ushering properly to lead people up.

Well there are all kinds of things that we could say. But I was in a church like that where I was asked to preach. Now do you think that I would preach to a congregation all sitting on the last four rows and we were way up here and it was a long narrow church.

Do you really think that I would preach to a congregation that looked like that? Well you're right. I really wouldn't. Because I really believed that that congregation needed to be taught a very unique beautiful lesson.

That we're really as a body and I'm in that body as well. I'm a part of it. Otherwise you say well what would you do? I would do one of two things.

One is I would possibly consider if they're not interested in moving I would take the pulpit and move right down there and put it right in the aisle way close to the back. So I could see the white of their eyes. But before that I would do the other.

I would use the song that is generally used and that is we're marching to Zion. Everybody stand and sing we're marching. Don't you feel sorry for that song how it gets abused.

Or onward Christian soldiers march against the war. Force march. But you know we would try to march everybody up.

And I actually did it in one congregation where it was so necessary. And I said now I would like to see what this congregation would look like sitting all in the first three rows. And when they started to march from the back to those first three rows it was amazing.

When they began to move forward I was watching the expressions on their face. The expressions started to change. They started to smile.

They almost seemed like they came alive. And when they all got in those first three rows, guess what happened. The rows I was watching them sitting next to each other like that.

And they were just kind of looking and I think maybe they were not, they had never been quite that close before. And guess what happened. There was one man who couldn't fit on the first three rows.

I don't mean because of his size, but because of the fact there was no more room. The rows were full. What do you think he did? What do you think he did? He had the rest of the church to sit in.

What do you think he did? Sat on the floor in the front? No. What do you think he did? Sat behind me on the platform? No. What do you think he did? Sat on the fourth row? No.

Sat on somebody's knee? Now, I know they were loving, beginning to love, but not quite that intimate yet. Sat in the back view? No. Well, so you can save my time.

Here's what he did. He just looked at that fellow in the end of that row and he was sitting there and I watched it. He just went like this.

Boom! And it was like the domino theory was in effect. All those hands all down the row fell over this way. And they had to squeeze over.

He wasn't going to miss out for anything in the world. He was going to be in it no matter what he did to squeeze. Guess what happened by the time the service was over? One fellow couldn't breathe.

Squashed. You know, the pastor said, I've been trying for three years to get this to happen in this church. And he said, now that we're here we're going to stay here and just rejoice and enjoy.

And you should have seen it made all the difference in the world. Now let me ask you a question. If you were just coming to town and were looking for a church and you walked into a Sunday morning service and you saw people all sitting together in a huge church and they're all sitting together in the first three rows right very close to each other, what would you think about that? What would you think about it? Give me your thoughts.

How would you react to that? Or relate to it? What's that? They're rejoicing? Well, how would you relate to it? What else? Good fellowship? What else? They... That's a good one. He said that I must have preached there the Sunday before. What else? Well, let me tell you what you think.

They must really want to get close to God. They must really want to get as close as they can to the preaching. They don't want to miss anything that God wants to say to them that morning.

And if any group of people is that close together with such a big church, I would love to see what would make them be so close to each other and close to the pastor. They must certainly love each other and I think I'd love to chip in here and see if I can help them fill this church. Am I right? I believe I am.

Do we get the point? The way we even sit in a church has a reflection as to whether or not we give priority to worship and to the body of Christ. I cannot resist this one. By the way, one lady told us in an Eastern Canadian crusade, she said, you know, the thing that has happened in our church since the Revival ministry is this.

Before Revival, we would have to beg people to sit in the front of the church. Now we have to beat them off with a club to keep our front seats. That's very interesting.

Somebody said, we're really peculiar people. We want the front of the bus, the back of the church, and the middle of the road. But I cannot resist this one.

It was in a Reader's Digest article, and it was entitled Almost Heaven. A West Virginian coal miner was a very wealthy man, and he said to the pastor's wife, I want to send you on a holiday, on a vacation, for three months to Europe, and when you come back you're going to be surprised to see what you're going to see. And what he was designing to do was to build a brand new church while the pastor and his wife were gone.

And that's exactly what he did. He built the finest church that money could buy, and when the pastor came back, he said, oh, pastor, look here, it's the finest building that money can buy. No expense has been spared.

And he was right. A magnificent edifice, both outside and inside, but there was one striking difference about that church. Here was the striking difference.

There was only one pew, only one pew in the sanctuary. A church with only one pew, the pastor said, you just wait until Sunday, the coal miner said. Just wait.

So Sunday the people came to church, the early arrivals, those who come early, they arrived at church and there was only one pew. So they filled in the one pew. But where was it? The pew was in the back of the auditorium.

Way in the back of the auditorium. So when the pew was full, a switch clicked silently, a circuit closed, gears meshed, a belt moved, and automatically the rear pew began to move forward. When it reached the front of the church, it came to a stop, and at the same time another empty pew came up from below at the back, and more people came in and sat down.

And so it continued, pews filling and moving forward until finally the church was full from front to back. And when the pastor saw it happen, he said, wonderful! Marvelous! Wonderful! Marvelous! Well, the service began, the preacher started the preacher's sermon, he launched into his text, and when twelve o'clock came around, he was still going strong with no amen in sight. You know what that's like.

Of course you know what that's like. Especially in the deep south we learn some of those things from our wonderful black brethren. You know, one of those black brothers had been preaching for an hour and a half with no end in sight on the Sunday morning service.

And he was preaching all the way from generations to revolutions, and not one sermon. And he got to Prophet Jeremiah, you know, he's got one book of the Bible, and he finally got to good old Prophet Jeremiah. And the black brother said, now children, here we am, come to good old Prophet Jeremiah! Where else are we going to put good old Prophet Jeremiah? And one deacon got up and said, Pastor, he can have my seat because I was going home.

Well, that's what it was like the Sunday morning. Twelve o'clock, and I was still going full force ahead, and guess what happened? Just at that time quietly a switch clicked, a circuit closed, gears meshed, and a belt moved, and automatically the pulpit with the preacher sank out of sight. And the congregation said, wonderful! Marvelous! Wonderful! Marvelous! Well, what am I suggesting? That the way we sit, the empty pews, and the back-to-the-front idea often gives people that we're not so sure that worship and praise has top priority.

Here's another thing that limits it. The physical building, the physical building itself, the physical building itself says that we're not so sure that worship and praise and prayer has top priority. Now, where in your church building, the physical structure, is there a place where people can get alone with God in prayer and not be disturbed for anything? A place that is specifically designed just for that purpose.

Where in your church is it? I asked a pastor like that one day. I said, where in your building can you get alone with God and know that you will not be disturbed for anything else? And he thought a moment, and he said to me, he said, you know, he said, when you ask a question like that, he said, objectively about it, I think the only place like that is in the boiler room. I said, that's a pretty hot place, isn't it? He said, that's one place I would not be disturbed.

I asked another pastor that question. He said, I said, where do you go? Well, he said, if we want any special times of prayer, we just use the choir room. Use the choir room.

I said, that's interesting. Here you are on your knees, or a group of people on their knees, and the choir director comes whistling a merry tune down the hall. You know, a choir director's always singing and whistling something.

And he comes down the hall, and he barges into the choir room. He doesn't know anybody's in there. He barges in.

Why? He has to get all of those choir gowns. He has to get them off of their hangers and take them to the dry cleaners. And so, while you're on your knees, there he is, trying to pull down those choir gowns, and a few hangers fall on the floor while you're praying.

Or, he's got to get all that music for that special cantata, and he's opening those hard, those heavy drawers. You know, the choir drawers are generally where all the heavy music is, and it's going to squeak as he opens it while you're praying. That's a nice way to be praying and have a priority of prayer, isn't it? I was being taken through a quarter of a million dollar building a number of years ago.

It would be a lot more now. And I saw a nameplate on every door. Choir room, Sunday school office, pastor's study, the nursery.

Beautiful, metal plate names. I said to the pastor, I said, where's the prayer room here? I said, you have a room for everyone else here. Where can anybody get along and meet God? Oh, he said, I never thought about that.

I'll tell you how this truth got to me. Several ways. One is by a little cartoon in the newspaper.

And maybe you've seen a cartoon that says a child's letter to God, when the children write a letter to God in picture form. And here's a child who was writing to God and saying, Dear God, it was a picture of a church. And a child at the front door of the church.

And the door slightly open. And the child knocking and saying, Dear God, if this is your house, which one is your room? That's all it said. And you know, that made such an impression on me.

If this is your house, which one is your room? And I began to think of a child. What is the most important place in a home for a child? Well, you say, you could have a lot of things answered there. But one specific place.

I believe it is his own room. That's the place where he can take Johnny in and close the door behind him. And that's where he and Johnny tell their little secrets to each other.

They don't want anybody to know. That's where they can be alone. Where they can really map out the strategy.

How they're going to do this and that and the other. Nobody will ever know about it. That private place.

That's my room. That's where, let's go, we can play alone there. We can talk alone there.

You know that made such an impression on me? You know, in most of our churches, we have a room for everything else to happen, but not a place where people can get alone with God in his house. And I understand, I understand that we as believers are the house of the temple. I understand that.

But in a physical sense, the building that is designed to be a place where we can really learn God, the priority of being alone with him, and worship and prayer is seriously diminished in many of our churches. I'll tell you the second way in which I learned this lesson. It was in Dallas, Texas, when they said to me, you go through this beautiful church.

It was called the Lighthouse Mission. And at that point, it was worth a half a million dollars, and now it would be about two million dollars worth, I'm sure. It, up until that time, was the most beautiful church that I'd ever seen.

And when I looked at it, they took us, the nursery, I've never seen such a nursery. I've never seen such facilities for the Sunday school. I've never seen a beautiful, more beautiful pastor study, the secretary's office, everything.

And I don't want to take the time to describe it. It seated about a thousand people. Beautiful all the time.

But by the time we got finished, the man said, now I've saved the best till the last. And he took us from the foyer right down there. It had two aisles, just like the church we're in now.

And we walked down there. He said, come with me. We walked down these aisles to the front of the auditorium where the pulpit was, the platform.

And he said, now come with me. And when we came down those two aisles, there were stairways, two stairways right in front of the platform that went down this way and down this way. They met together right in the center at the lower level.

They met together at the lower level. And when you went down those stairways and looked in, now if you looked in, you would be right underneath the whole platform. When you looked in, you are in the Garden of Gethsemane.

There's Christ on the wall, picture of Christ on the wall. Whether it has to be or not, that's not the point. Indirect lighting.

Imitation shrubbery. Kneeling pads all around the wall where people could kneel. Plush carpeting where no sound would be a problem.

Acoustical tiles so that it would be... Right at the entrance was a bulletin board where people would call in prayer requests and people as they come to pray would come into that place and pray, take those requests. There was no other way to get in that room or out of that room. No other purpose but for people to meet God.

When invitations would be given, people would walk right down the aisles and right down into the prayer room and there they were, ready to meet God. People come in all hours of the day and they knew that church as a praying church. People call in prayer requests all the time around the city.

Why? The physical building itself said that prayer, worship, praise, meeting God is top priority. I think that is the most significant thing. And God has taught some of our churches to take a good hard look at that.

I know you can meet God everywhere. I'm not realistic enough to know that. But in a true sense, I believe physical building limits that whole area.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/21/SID21202.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ralph-sutera/what-is-spiritual-leadership-in-the-local-church/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net