

Servant Leadership and Eldership

Notes from a 1992 PBC Pastors' Conference

Overview:

This paper is devoted to the topic of "Servant Leadership and Eldership" with the bulk of the material being taken from 2 taped sessions of the 1992 PBC Pastors Conference. The reason so much time/space is being spent on this topic is that as the Leaders/Elders go, so goes the church!

The greatness of PBC past started with its leaders. Forty-five years ago, five men from different denominations decided they wanted something more than what they found in the churches around the area. What therefore ensued was in-depth Bible teaching and a return to a Biblical framework for governing the church with Jesus Christ as Head of the Church (see DP Message, "The Lord and His Church" for an in-depth review of this). As these men were faithful to the guidelines laid out in scripture God worked mightily. This faithfulness was by understanding that the primary role of Elders is the ministry of the word and prayer (see attached letter from Ray Stedman to Bill Hyatt on Keeping Biblical Eldering on Track). According to Ray, "If Elders do not have time for this ministry of the word and prayer then they should not be Elders at all." In this same letter Ray closed by saying, "The church will never be stronger than its leadership, but if leadership is faithful the Lord will do great things among them." The temptations, however, to fall back into; focusing on the minors and not the majors, self-sufficiency and Lording it over others can so easily occur. This is why a Leader/Elder must be focused on the ministry of word/ prayer both individually and collectively with the other Leaders/Elders and secondly, he must understand the New Covenant* so he can successfully model this New Covenant lifestyle to the members of the Body; the purpose being in getting them to follow not him, but their one Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

May it be our prayer as we read this material to find the Biblical model for how the Lord's Body as an "organism" is to function, not His "organization"!

(*The New Covenant defined - "Christ in you the hope of glory" and its implications for life such as operating out of rest; dependence on an all sufficient Christ working in and through a person to bring the results)

Servant Leadership:

Most Christian organizations are run the same way as a business using a line organization. This is where one has a President at the top, with VP's reporting to him, Managers reporting to the VP'S, Department Heads/Supervisors reporting to the Managers and then the Workers reporting to the Supervisors. The church today in many cases is no different. Substitute Sr. Pastor for President, Associate Pastors for VP's, High School/Jr. High/Music Pastors for Dept. Heads and the congregation for workers and one has the same line organization. In this line organization everyone waits for orders and programs to get set up from/by the President (or in the churches case Sr. Pastor) before getting started. Also, in a line organization in order to move up the ranks one has to compete. Competition, however, results in hurt and resentment when one person is promoted and the other is not.

The church, however, is to be different. From Ephesians 4 we understand that each member of the Body of Christ is equally important as each is given a spiritual gift or gifts and then is strategically placed to carry out the work of the ministry. Because each individual is equally important and placed strategically by the Lord in a specific place (home, work, neighborhood, etc.) with spiritual gifts designed for that specific ministry, all competition is eliminated as each member of the Body is unique and crucially important. In line with this thinking in Mark 10:35-42, Jesus says that instead of the person being prepared for a position in the organization, the position is being prepared and conformed for the person and his specific gifts.

Jesus in this Mark passage also says, "that the Gentiles lord it over one another." This is referring to the way the Gentiles function in their society where there is a hierarchical structure with a chain of command. Jesus then says, "But this is not so amongst you." In other words this is not the way Jesus says that His kingdom functions. Instead Jesus says in my kingdom, "You are all brothers," which means that each of you is at the same level and to become great one must become a "servant" of all. This word "servant" means "bond-slave" indicating a lifetime commitment and not trying to be free from one's duties at the earliest opportunity. Jesus is saying that the world's system will not work in His kingdom. Leadership comes by servanthood, not by appointment by the organization or by position. The criteria for the job description for being a leader in the kingdom is being a "bond-servant" or "foot-washer" with Christ as our example (being last instead of first and the servant of all).

What Jesus is describing is not the classic line pyramid/hierarchical style of leadership that the world uses, but in contrast Jesus describes what management gurus would call a "horizontal" structure. These gurus would describe this horizontal structure as very inefficient as there is one Head with everyone else on the same level/rank below the Head. In this type of organization in order to function it is critical to have communication and cooperation between all people at the same level/rank. As there is no upward mobility competition is supposedly eliminated as well. It is only the force of one's ideas (in the church hopefully this is from the Word of God), the degree of helpfulness/cooperation or an ability to get things done that gives one any authority or distinguishes one in an organization such as this. It is not authority or recognition from the organization but instead it is recognition by one's peers that this is a person who can teach/help me to do my job better or help me in getting the job done that sets one apart.

This is exactly what happens in the Body. A leader is not operating from any authority given by the organization, one's position or anything that resides in oneself. The authority that we have comes from the Word of God and from the members of the Body who recognize your gifts (speech/service) and respond to you. Qualifications for leadership are therefore based upon:

1. Our willingness to serve (serving the Lord, not men)
2. Our spiritual gift

The spiritual gift that we have determines what we will do. This is something we did not produce in ourselves. It is the gift(s) that God has given us. It is as one uses this spiritual gift(s), empowered by the Spirit of God to help the Body, that the Body recognizes this person.

Once a leader has been identified, how is he evaluated? In the business world or in the world in general it is done quantitatively ("how we measure up to the job description, how many widgets did we sell, etc."). This type of thinking has permeated the church as well ("how big is your church, how many people have you led to Christ, etc. "). However, this is not the correct way. Instead it should be qualitative. Our Lord just wants us to be a servant and serve the people He brings our way. If it is only one over a 10 year period, that is fine (compare this to the 5 year plans of some churches). Look at our Lord's ministry here on earth. In 3.5 years he had only 11 disciples with a focus on 3 which by worldly standards was a failure!

In summary, how do we look for servant-leaders?

a. Identifying Bond-Servants

Look again for the people who are serving. The Lord defines himself as a "servant of all" and a "foot-washer." Therefore this is the major job description as a leader. How do you know a person is a servant? This person would have an attitude of caring applying this to filling needs that are present in the Body. And it does not matter if he gets recognition or not because he is doing it as unto the Lord. A true servant does what he does from the heart to be seen by the Lord, not by men. Going one step further, a true servant understands the New Covenant and rests knowing that it is the Lord working in and through him/her that is producing the results. Therefore it is not the position or need for other men's approval/ recognition that is producing the desire to serve, but just a loving desire to be a humble vessel used by God.

b. The Body Responding

To see if the desire is coming from some need for acceptance within/without or truly from the Holy Spirit, it is important as already mentioned to see the Body respond to the person. This is not a response to one necessarily because he is a super charismatic forceful leader. But once again it is because this person is living a New Covenant lifestyle; operating out of rest as It is Jesus doing the work through Him that is producing the results in his life/teaching and not himself. If it is himself and not "Christ in Him," he might have an effect for awhile but their will be no fruit over the long term. This brings to mind the story about one man who wanted to be an Elder at PBC. He had just moved to the community and presented his resume to the Board of Elders stating his past Eldership experiences in other churches. The reply by the Board was, "Just walk among us for awhile, Brother, and let's see what God does and how the Body responds to you." The man replied, how long would this be. The Board replied, "Oh maybe a year or two!" Needless to say, the man quickly left PBC not to return. Getting back to the point, in some cases it may be difficult to see if the desire Is truly from the Holy Spirit or perhaps it is ingrained from parents /friends/ background/the need for acceptance or even from one of our discipleship groups because he is a buddy with one of the Pastors and has his seal of approval as one of the guys. Another example of this is that many people go to seminary because of parent or peer pressure from without and not the Holy Spirit's leading from within. However, a degree on the wall does not translate to spiritual gift. An example of this in the past was PBC Interns. As they were placed in various ministries only about 50% had an effect on the hearers. Once again it is the Body that recognizes a person's gift and the Lord confirms it by bringing about the fruit.

Elders:

The requirements for Elders are outlined in Titus 1:5-9, Timothy 3:1-7 and I Peter 5:1-4. From these passages 28 character qualifications are noted (see Bob Smith's paper, "The Living Church" for a review of these qualifications). However, specifically from the I Peter passage there are four critical items that a man must be about if he is to be recognized as an Elder; shepherding the flock, leading the flock by finding the mind of the Lord, not lording it over the flock and being living examples. Let's look at each one.

I. Shepherding - Peter remembered what the Lord had said to him in John 2 1:15-17, "Do you love me, then tend my lambs...shepherd my sheep...and tend my sheep." Peter responds by saying, "You know all things, you know that I love you.." The Lord here is saying to Simon that the basis for shepherding is love. Love for the sheep? No, it is love for the Lord Jesus! An Elder's assignment is based upon the degree to which he loves the Lord Jesus (Mother Teresa said the key to her ministry was spending an hour with Jesus each morning). Peter is being directed to focus his attention on the Lord Jesus rather than the sheep - in a normal job description all the focus would be on the job description....shepherding the sheep. But in this case, it is not as ones focus is to be on the Lord Jesus Himself. Peter is to be zeroed in on loving Jesus (loving Jesus = total responsiveness to Jesus - not Peter's agenda, but giving Jesus the final authority for whatever happens). It is out of loving the Lord that the assignment flows. Shepherd the flock of God, but remember it is His flock.

Elders must be evaluated on their love and spiritual relationship with Jesus. An Elder is not an Elder because he is a good banker) attorney, has a lot of money or was a member of the right discipleship group and had the endorsement of the most extroverted Elder/Pastor. This does not make sense because the criteria is to shepherd the flock in relationship to ones love for Jesus Christ and ones willingness to submit to Him as Head of the Church.

An Elder is like a good Australian sheepdog; only responding to the whistle of the Head Shepherd. The dog helps sheep that have strayed per the order of the Head Shepherd. The Shepherd Is up on a hill whistling to the sheepdog. These sheepdogs love their Master and are willing to do whatever their master wants or requests. Applied to the church, individual Elders are not to respond to what the Sr. Pastor or most extroverted Elder wants, but what the Lord wants!

From watching true shepherders with their sheep, they perform the following duties:

- a. set up an atmosphere without fear (as a guard)
- b. dispel friction amongst the sheep and settle disputes
- c. care for fleas/flies (rear end and muzzle)
- d. supply food and water (green pastures, still waters)

2. Leading By Finding The Will of God - Long ago the PBC founders who were not seminary grads but pragmatic businessmen said, " We have been in other churches/denominations and we want to do it differently. If Jesus Christ is Lord of the Church like He says He is then He is going to have run this place." Then the question was asked, "How can we really find the mind of the Lord in a pragmatic way so we know what He wants us to do?" As they looked at Acts 15 it said that "all of the leaders agreed as led by the Holy Spirit." Therefore they decided that they would go with a unanimous vote. From their experience in the business world they knew that apart from the Holy Spirit working it is impossible to get unanimity on anything (In the business world on a Board of Directors there are always two sides of an issue with camps on both side. The ensuing result is power politics, arm-twisting, active attempts to try and sabotage a result after a decision is made or just passive sitting by and waiting for the result to fail so that on the next issue the other Board Members will side with them, etc. etc.) Even with ones wife it is difficult to get agreement plus the timing seems to be always different. So these founding fathers of PBC proceeded ahead with using a unanimous decision process as the way of seeking the mind of the Lord on any issue, but with three rules:

a. No arm twisting allowed - Paul Winslow tells the story of him trying to push a particular point of view but Craig Duncan was not responding. Paul said to himself) "Whoa, let the Lord take what is good in your argument and convince Craig what is good in It apart from me pushing." This takes restraint on the part of the extroverts!

b. Everyone must speak to the issue - Paul Winslow tells the story of the time when he was not yet an Elder but an advisor to the Board of Elders. At that time 144 of PBC's neighbors had gathered a petition to get PBC shut down due to the disruption they felt PBC was causing in their neighborhood and there was to be a Public Hearing of the Palo Alto City Council to discuss this matter. Paul as an advisor to the Elders on this subject as he was doing the legwork said in his best managerial language to the Board, "You all must make a decision now otherwise PBC might get shut down." 1 2 Elders agreed with Paul on an active course of action (Including Ray Stedman) but I Elder did not. Paul replied, " I understand that you have this unanimous decision rule but there is a real possibility that if you do not act now PBC really could get shut down." The Moderator turned to Paul and said this man has spoken so we will wait until God brings us to unanimity. Two weeks later at the next Elders meeting to his amazement Paul's dire prediction had not come true and by that time all of the other Elders had switched over to that lone Elder's viewpoint. The Lord had proven that He could and would protect His Church.

C. Allow time for a decision and do not care about the consequences regarding how long a decision takes - As shown in the last example with the threat to shut PBC down, by waiting the situation sorted itself out on its own. There are many other examples of this as well. One is the time Dave Roper was brought on staff. For a year or so prior to that they had found an excellent candidate or two to fill the vacant college pastor position. Each time all the Elders agreed except one Elder that this other person was the person for the job. Because they did not reach unanimity they waited. The wait or the inability to reach unanimity lasted over a year but in the end Dave Roper became available who proved to be the exact fit for the job. Another example was of a person that Ray Stedman and Paul Winslow thought would be a perfect fit for a staff opening but was not brought on board initially as the Elders could not reach unanimity. This went on for over 4 years as his name kept resurfacing as a possible candidate. During this period, however) God took that candidate through some deep water that if he had been brought on board in the beginning who knows what would have happened. Finally after this 4 year period the Elders reached

unanimity and he was brought on staff.

What about mistakes? If Elders are not regularly attending Elders meetings) or if the ministry of word and prayer (as described in Ray Stedman's attached letter) both individually and collectively is not happening, or these 3 rules described above are not being adhered to in the unanimous decision process; the results will be the wisdom of men and just plain bad decision making. However, properly done with no arm twisting, with every Elder speaking to the issue, allowing time for a unanimous decision to be reached with no regard for the consequences and most importantly the whole process bathed in the ministry of the word and prayer then and finally then when unanimity comes one can say by faith that the mind of the Lord has been found.

3. Lording it over - As we saw in an earlier section the structure of the church is "Horizontal" in nature. This means that there is one Head, Jesus Christ and everyone reports to Him. So we have Christ on one level and the rest of the Body getting their orders from the Head on the next level using their gifts that the Holy Spirit has given them in their respective ministries where the Lord has placed them. And then the Leaders and Elders who are "the servants of all" are in essence under the members of the Body if one was drawing an organizational chart. This is completely backwards to the world's way of doing things. In the world the Bosses above make the program and then the workers below carry out the plan. In many churches this is no different as the Sr. Pastor comes up with the plan and Lords it over everyone to get the plan and program implemented.

In the Lord's church it is different. The ministries are determined by Him with the members of His Body carrying out the ministry where He has placed them. The job of an Elder is to walk alongside these people and ministries as a counselor/advisor, someone to bounce ideas off of and someone who cares and will pray for the people involved and their ministry. It is not as a Boss as one can see from the organizational chart described earlier) as Elders are actually underneath the Body serving. The Elders minister below & behind the flocks like sheepdogs, helping the sheep get out of gullies, briars, etc.

Paul Winslow would be asked by people in ministry what they should do in their ministry and how they should do it. Paul would reply that he could not do that, "I cannot tell you what to do, you work for the Lord. Let the Lord tell you what to do as He is perfectly capable of directing you the way He wants as He communicates directly to the hearts and minds of individuals in your own walk and ministries. Now I can help you by giving you some principles gleaned from the Word of God that will perhaps help in your decision making process and I will pray for you, etc."

As ministries develop, individual Elders are assigned to 1 or 2 ministries as Advisors. Most problems get solved by the people running the ministry. However) in the rare instances where a problem cannot be solved the individual Elder will act as a "conduit" to bring the situation to the complete Board of Elders where the mind of the Lord is sought and a decision made after unanimity is reached. So what we never see is one Elder as the Boss or ultimate authority in problem situations in His assigned ministry or anywhere, but instead acting as a "mouthpiece/ conduit" to bring it to the Board of Elders where only a unanimous decision by the complete Board of Elders is valid in seeking the Lord's mind regarding a problem or an issue.

As one can see this is a cumbersome process and the Body is not going to be able to get answers right away. What this means is that many of the problems get solved before even reaching this point (in actuality probably only 10% reach the Board). An example of this at PBC is the van situation. Two ministries need a van at the same time and both parties wanted Paul Winslow to make a decision on who would get the van. Paul replied, "I cannot make a decision I can only give advice. If you want me to take it to the Board it will take a long time to get an answer. My advice is that since each side are reasonable people work it out with each other (Eph. 5:21, Submit or be subject to one another in the fear of Christ)" In the end both sides worked it out themselves. Where the issue would get taken up by the Board would be in the decision of whether we need to purchase a new van as the ministry needs are exceeding current capacity.

Regarding budgets for big decisions not too much time should be spent dwelling on the details or on how much money is in the bank. These items of course enter into it. But if there is a true need and it is the will of the Lord as determined by unanimous decision by the Board of Elders, then because this is His Church He has

the resources to provide for it. The Lord is perfectly capable of motivating the individual members of His Body to provide these resources as he leads them. Once again it is by unanimous decision that the mind of the Lord is sought on these matters regarding funding needs such as buying new vans or a new building addition etc..

An example of this was at PBC North where the Elders after seeing the needs for additional classroom areas for fellowship and teaching the Word of God agreed unanimously to proceed with the project that totaled somewhere around \$160,000 (back in the early 70's that was a large sum of money and it was during a small recession). The project was divided up into 6 phases with each phase to be finished first before proceeding with the next one. Paul Winslow's first comment as an Advisor to the Board of Elders was) "How much money do you have?" The reply from the Elders was, "None." Paul asked, "When do you take out the loans?" The reply from the Elders was, "There will be no debt." What had brought the Elders to that point that they felt they could build the new building? It was the fact that they had reached unanimous decision. They then presented It to the Body saying that this is what the Lord wanted and we will let out one contract at a time doing each phase as the money comes In. The first contract for around \$15,000 was released and 6-8 weeks later when it was finished 10 and behold there was the money to the penny to pay the bill and the regular weekly giving had not dropped off either. There were no thermometers placed at the back of the church. There was only a picture in the back of what the new building would look like. Each phase was started and finished in a similar way without a hitch. And then to top it off when the project was finished there was still a need for \$10,000 for furnishings. The Elders prayed about this matter and the next day someone who had recently died, left \$10,000 to the church which went for these furnishings.

In summary for the 10% of the time where the individuals and their ministries cannot solve the issues at hand and an Elder's decision or more accurately the Board of Elder's corporate decision is needed it Is important to remember two key things:

- a. The three rules already discussed are strictly adhered to (No arm twisting, All must speak, Allow time to make a decision).
- b. All the Elders insist on being under everyone else and refuse to be the Boss anywhere along the way to the slightest degree.

By remembering it is the Lord's church and the complete Elder Board sitting together is seeking the mind of the Lord, the result will be that one never has Elders "Lording it over ," because they are all servants seeking a unanimous decision on what the Lord desires for His Church (not our church or even PBC, but His Church).

4. Be examples - "Look at those who lead and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith." This is what Elders are to do . They are to live life in full view of everyone so others can see the outcome of their life and their spiritual walk in their home life (their relationship with their wife, children) at work (relationship with co-workers), in their community, etc.. By seeing their servant leadership and New Covenant lifestyle the sheep in turn will be persuaded to submit and follow their Lord as well (Example: Ray Stedman, Bob Smith, Bob Roe).

How do we keep Elders and Pastors straight?

Elders and Pastors should be evaluated every two years. The process used at PBC to do this is as follows. Two Elders are selected to talk to the Elder or pastor being evaluated. In a meeting over lunch or dinner the two Elders talk to the one being evaluated about three areas of his life.

- a. Family Life (relationship with wife & children)
- b. Spiritual Life (relationship with the Lord)
- c. Ministry Life (relationship with the Body)

In the setting where love is expressed by these two Elders) questions are not judgmental but they are just meant to help all understand where this Brother (or Sister) is at. Then after this lunch or dinner, at some later date all

the Elders and Pastors meet together with the Brother (or Sister) being evaluated. The discussion is led by the two Elders with the notes who give a summary of what they have gleaned. Then the person being evaluated can correct them in front of everyone if they are wrong or misinformed on any points. Other Elders may also ask questions as well to the evaluatee. At the end of the meeting together, the person being evaluated is excused. Then only a unanimous decision determines what is told to the person as to what God wants changed in his life, changes in ministry/ responsibility or in some rare cases asking an Elder or Pastor to step down. But it is by unanimous decision. As Paul Winslow said, individually knowing the biases of each Elder it would be difficult to submit to only one Brother's assessments. However, done unanimously the evaluation is taken as coming from the Lord. This is what keeps everyone humble as Brothers (and Sisters) before the Lord. Later after the Board reaches a unanimous decision, the same two Elders take the person being evaluated out to lunch or dinner and tell them what the mind of the Lord was for them.

How do we keep the congregation straight?

From our past discussions since there is no line authority, all that Elders are doing is walking beside the sheep helping them as sheepdogs trying to get them to follow not them but the Chief Shepherd. There are however, pragmatic problems that still arise. How do you first minimize these and then resolve them? There are three processes by which this is accomplished.

1. Feed them the Word of God - Through preaching, discipleship, seminars, kolnionia groups, men's/women's bible studies, etc.. Unless the sheep are taught they will naturally want a leader which will be the most charismatic person (King Saul, look at Christendom today). 90% of the Pastors/Elders time needs to be in feeding the sheep. Don't be the ceremonial head and not have time to preach/teach the Word of God. Teaching of God's Word is one's #1 priority no matter what the congregation says. Pastors/Elders are charged with teaching the sheep the whole counsel of God. Unless a Pastor/Elder makes this their #1 priority one will end up becoming a King! This is so important that this whole church government model will fall if the sheep are not fed the Word of God. If the whole counsel of God is taught with a real emphasis on the New Covenant, they will discover who they are in the Body of Christ, their gifts, etc. and become so busy serving and ministering that Pastors/Elders will then be able to take the flak of any sheep who can be pains!

2. Ministry of the Saints - If #1 is true, then as the sheep learn who they are in Christ, how to use their gifts, etc. they will begin to bear one another's burdens caring and admonishing one another (some also will become quite good at this and these are the next leaders who will provide Pastors/Elders with additional help in keeping the sheep straight). On the whole as mentioned earlier 90-95% of the problems will get solved in this way by the Body if they are properly taught. In Paul Winslow's tenure at PBC only 4 problems in keeping the sheep straight became so serious that they warranted direct action by the Board of Elders. In all 4 instances which Paul researched very carefully, many of the Body had already approached that person in an attempt to resolve the issue before it progressed further. Two to three times it involved the Matthew 18 procedure (a procedure that is not meant to be punitive but redemptive) and the issue was told to the church. A couple of times the people involved threatened to sue PBC (one was a lawyer!) but the Lord protected the Body at PBC and nothing became of it. Another time a few years later one of these people returned to fellowship at PBC.

In summary, the Lord is perfectly capable of building His church if we just let Him. We do not need to build it ourselves! As Bob Smith used to say, "All the victories are His and all the mistakes are ours." However, if Leadership is faithful, then God will do great things This was the legacy of the first generation of PBC leaders. May it be ours as well in the second generation.

August 11, 1996. Corrections: dolphin@best.com
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