

# OUR SHARED LEADERSHIP

SERIES: PBC DNA: WHY WE DO  
WHAT WE DO



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2 Corinthians 4:5-12,  
5:16-17  
Fourth Message  
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*2 Corinthians 4:5-12, 5:16-17*

I really wanted to be captain of my high school volleyball team. I would not have admitted it at the time because in high school you cannot admit to wanting something like that. But I wanted it. I knew that I wasn't the best player on the team. I had no false assumptions. Our best player was a guy named Dan. He was about fourteen feet tall and could jump another few yards on top of that. He was a great player.

I was not the best player, but I thought that maybe I contributed some kind of leadership to the overall team—some energy or something else. Dan wasn't too talkative. I thought I was a leader of sorts. I could rally people and get them excited. I think I wanted to be voted captain as a way of validating that. I wanted some acknowledgement that what I contributed was significant.

I think I believed that if I wasn't the captain, I wasn't a leader.

What does it mean to be a leader? How is a leader supposed to act? What about in a church setting? Does that change anything? What is different about leadership in the Kingdom of God? How should a church be structured and formally organized?

This morning we are continuing in our "PBC DNA" series, looking at some of the foundational values of our unique community. One thing that has always made PBC a fairly different kind of place is how we view leadership.

The way in which God has revealed himself in the Bible suggests principles regarding leadership to go against much of the standard way of doing things. We are going to talk about some of those values that we have seen in the Scriptures. We will look at one general theme that seems to be present in Scripture. Then we will talk about how that theme has been applied at PBC in a few of our different leadership structures. We will end by reflecting on how all of this changes the way we relate to God.

Our goal is to get an overview of how we understand leadership at PBC. The most helpful phrase to capture it all is "shared leadership." This morning we'll try to grasp our shared leadership.

This is always an important topic, but perhaps it is important in a new kind of way right now. Our culture has raised questions about leadership. Leadership in government is always a huge issue on our minds. We have had questions raised about some leaders in the entertainment industry. Lately, I've seen a fair amount of writing with some backlash toward the leadership style in the Silicon Valley. And of course, Christian leaders are under constant scrutiny for the ways that they lead.

We need to learn some lessons about leadership. So we are going to see what leadership looks like at PBC, but the ideas we will be talking about apply in many more areas as well. This could change how you lead in your family. It could change how you lead in your community or your profession or your social circle.

We are going to learn about how we as a church think about leadership. But our greatest need in the world is not for people to understand leadership better. Our greatest need is for more and better Christ-following leaders to step up.

As you listen this morning, give special thought to how you might become a leader. Or a better leader.

We will discover that being a leader is not exclusive to the organization or community or cause in which you are leading. Ultimately, it has to do with Jesus. You being a leader has everything to do with you being a follower of Jesus.

Let us start by looking at biblical principles of leadership.

## Shared Servant Leadership

It is hard to pick a single passage that forms the basis of an entire philosophy of leadership. Our values stem from a holistic view of how leadership is viewed

throughout Scripture. But we are going to start by looking at what Jesus says about leadership. It doesn't say everything, but it is a great place to start.

**Mark 10:42-45:**

**And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

When we evaluate leaders in our culture, how do we decide whether they are good leaders or not? What makes a leader a good leader in our world?

Think about the leaders of Silicon Valley. We evaluate them by their outcome. What did they produce? What did they accomplish? What did they achieve? We have some leaders around here that have produced incredible innovation. They have formed and steered huge organizations. They have made things that are literally changing the world.

But do those things make them "good" leaders? The leaders might be effective. They might be productive. Or even brilliant, creative, and innovative. But are they "good"?

Jesus looks at the leaders in his day and says to his followers, "it shall not be so among you." He claims that those who follow him ought to lead differently. In the kingdom of heaven leadership must look different. Leadership in his kingdom isn't about exercising authority or having a higher position than someone else. Leadership is about serving. Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.

Two thousand years later, the phrase "servant leadership" has finally caught on. You can find the term in the most secular books on leadership and the most prestigious MBA programs in the nation. When most people talk about "servant leadership," they mean that people with authority ought to use that authority for the sake of others, not for their sake. Leaders should not be about themselves. They should be about others.

That is true, but I don't think that is all that Jesus was talking about. "Whoever would be great among you

must be your servant." Jesus is describing a completely different kind of leadership here. I don't think he is talking about what people in positions of authority ought to do. It is much broader than that.

"Jesus leadership" isn't about titles and positions and decision making. What if Jesus means that leaders are supposed to serve people? Not just have people's interests in mind, but offer themselves up for the sake of someone else.

Leadership is about initiative, risk, vulnerability, faith, diligence, creativity, and sacrifice. Leadership is about being a servant. Laying yourself down. It is seeing a gap and stepping into it. Offering what you can bring to the situation.

That is servant leadership. And it means that each of us can lead. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant." There might only be a few positions of authority. There are only so many titles available. But there are plenty of ways to serve. If leadership is serving, then it is something available to all of us.

Every single one of us is a leader. We are all called to serve. We are called to lead. All of us do it. Which means that together we share the burden of leadership. We share our leadership. This is our most basic call. Serve. Lead. Together.

There is a terrible lie that most people believe. It has destroyed organizations and families and churches. It has sent individuals on frantic pursuits of status. It has turned ambition into competition and achievement into pride.

Most people think leadership is like ice cream. That kind of thinking will kill you.

I love ice cream. It is impossible for me to eat a little bit of ice cream. I want all that I can get. If my family buys a carton of ice cream at my house, here's what happens. We get out all the bowls, and we start scooping the ice cream. We are trying to balance it out so that everything is equal.

But here is what I am thinking: with every scoop that leaves that carton and ends up in someone else's bowl, "that's ice cream that I don't get." Every bit of ice cream that gets put into someone else's bowl is ice cream that doesn't go to me. I love my kids. I want them to enjoy ice cream, too. But at that moment, they are competitors. They are eating the ice cream that I could have eaten.

That is how we are trained to think about leadership. If this person has one scoop of leadership, that is a scoop that I can't have. There is only one carton of leadership. If I have more, then you have less. Leadership is a limited resource.

But that is not how Jesus is describing leadership. Anyone can serve someone else. Anyone can take on a hard task. Anyone can raise their hand and step into a complicated situation. There are so opportunities for leadership in this church, in the community, in your family.

This is why we talk about leadership as shared leadership. We are all leaders together. We all share the calling of leadership. No one person is at the top of the triangle. No one person gets the whole bowl of ice cream. There is plenty to go around.

Leadership is not like ice cream. It's like water. If you come to my house and ask for a glass of water, I will get one for you. If you want another one, no problem, I will give you more. If you want a third, fine. Fourth. Fifth. Six glasses of water. It is all fine. I am never worried about running out of water in my house.

In the Kingdom of God, there is no shortage of leadership opportunities. Everyone can be a leader. There are plenty of places to lead because leadership is not about title or position. It is about stepping into situations. Offering yourself. Opening yourself up to criticism. Serving others. That is leading in the Kingdom of God.

In fact, I would say that at PBC leadership is the most critical resource that we have. Last weekend we went away for a men's retreat with over one hundred men from this church. It was a great weekend. One of the best things about it was all the ways that different people stepped up into leadership. Emcees, hosts, small group leaders, testimonies, TED talk presenters, hiking guides, and a hundred other kinds of leadership. Men who saw someone they didn't know and started a conversation. Men who listened to a guy having a hard time. Men making themselves vulnerable: sharing in tears what God was doing in their life. That is a retreat full of leaders. A retreat full of servants.

This simple idea—that real leadership is shared servant leadership—is the main part of the basis for most of how we think about leadership at PBC. Leadership is not focused on one group of people—the supposed leaders of the church. It isn't a title or a position or the

authority to make decisions. Leadership is a willingness to step in, get your hands dirty, and give it a shot. We share it with all of us.

## Elder Leadership

We are serious when we say that everyone is a leader and that this church runs on the energy of the leadership from the body, not from those who have titles. But, there does have to be some organization. There are titles. We do have certain people who are asked to be decision makers in various contexts. The formal structure of our church leadership has sought to implement these universal ideas of leadership into some structure.

In particular, one thing that makes us unique is that instead of having a senior or lead pastor who is charged with making the vision and direction decisions for the church, we have a team of people called elders. This comes from Scripture, where we observe that the early church seemed to be governed by a plurality of people who shared the task for formal church leadership.

In general, the New Testament has more guidance about what kinds of people ought to be in formal positions of church authority than about the responsibilities those people should have or the structure of church government. I think that is why you can find churches with many different kinds of governing systems. There is more information in Scripture on the character of people serving as elders than their responsibilities.

But there is some help. Let us look at a passage in 1 Peter that gives good direction to the basic way that elders should think about serving their church.

### 1 Peter 5:1-4:

**So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.**

It has been eye-opening for me when I have travelled to Africa and India to observe shepherds and how they operate in a culture. In Africa, the shepherds

are often younger boys. Twelve-year-old boys with long sticks, leading a flock of sheep or goats to market and back.

One thing about shepherding is clear to me. Shepherding is not a glamorous task. Shepherds' work is important, but they are not important people. In the ancient near East, shepherds were rough and dirty outsiders. They were not respected leaders. They lived in isolation.

But shepherds took care of one of the most important resources of the community: their animals. Animals were food, livelihood, wealth, and inheritance. Shepherds cared for those animals. This would be similar to a father in the Silicon Valley putting his entire investment portfolio in the hands of his twelve-year-old to take care on his way to school.

Peter says the elders are supposed to “shepherd the flock of God.” It isn’t a glamorous role, but they are tasked with caring for the most important resource in God’s Kingdom: his people. Elders shepherd the flock of God.

Our elder role is to look out for things. To care for the flock. To pray and listen and counsel.

One of our elders recently emailed a letter he dug up from Ray Stedman talking about what elders are supposed to do. Ray said that “elders are to deliberately refuse to get involved in solving what you call ‘practical’ problems, the nuts & bolts of running a church.” He gives the three tasks of elders as focusing on studying and teaching the Bible, prayer, and seeking direction from Jesus.

Sometimes that can be difficult. This past Monday we had our regular elders meeting. You should all know that the main part of our elders meetings are always open to anyone visiting or joining. We had some important items to discuss that night and honestly, I was anxious to get to them. But we started by studying the Bible. Praying together. Listening to each other. Sometimes I can get impatient with those kinds of things. Let’s get to the decision making.

But then I remember passages like this. Prayer and study are the main parts of what it means to be an elder around here. We’re not in charge of the flock. We are shepherds. And shepherds usually don’t own the flock. Shepherds take care of animals that don’t belong to them.

The last sentence of this passage makes that point very clear. Elders in the church serve as shepherds, “until the chief shepherd appears.” This is why prayer and Bible study are so critical. This is not our flock. We are only “under-shepherds” of the flock that belongs to another.

Elders are not in charge. When the church is described as a body, the elders are never described as the head. The elders are not the head of the church body. That isn’t how the New Testament describes it. Christ is always pictured as the head of the church. We saw this two weeks ago in that beautiful passage from Ephesians where the incredible working of the church as a body was described. Christ is the head.

So elders are only part of the body. And they serve as “under-shepherds.” They serve in their positions under the leadership of Christ.

This is one of the reasons decisions of the elders have to be made with a unanimous vote. Everyone has to agree. We believe that if Christ is the shepherd and he is leading us in a particular direction, then he is capable of aligning us all in that same direction.

Any one of us can get things wrong. None of us has a more direct line to guidance from God. And while it is possible for all of us to get things wrong, it helps to protect us from that. It helps to remind us that we are not in charge. Elders shepherd, but Jesus is the real shepherd.

## **Our Leadership Model**

We have talked about our basic philosophy of leadership and the way that plays out in our board of elders. But we have a few other specific positions. It is helpful to understand them and see how we view them. Our three primary positions are elders, pastors, and deacons.

We currently have nine elders, but that number can differ. Nine is probably as few as we have had in a while. We have had as many as twelve or fourteen. Elders serve an indefinite term. That is not the same as a “life sentence.” It just means that elders serve as long as they feel called and step down when either they or the rest of the board feels that their calling has changed.

Historically, our biblical interpretation has been that elders are only men. That is our current practice. Currently, we do have some diversity on



how to understand the Bible in that area. But without unanimity to change, we have agreed to maintain our current structure.

Most of the elders serve as volunteers. But there are three of us who serve as pastors and elders. In that sense, we have a dual responsibility.

People generally think of pastors as people who work for the church. That is true to some extent. We currently have 11 men and women paid by the church to serve as pastors full-time. But we understand pastoring to be more of a spiritual gift than an office. There are far more pastors in our body than we have on staff. It's just that some are called to use those gifts full-time in service to this community.

Our third position is that of deacons. There are over thirty deacons at PBC. They serve in numerous ways, from organizing practical help to stepping in on leadership tasks to being connections for new people, to helping mobilize other teams of volunteers.

The role of deacon is one that goes back to Acts 6 when the early church raised up certain people to share in the practical needs of the community.

So we have elders, pastors, and deacons. But we also have ministry directors who work alongside pastors. We have support staff in our office for tasks like accounting and graphic design and communications and facility management. We have volunteer teachers and leaders and counselors and mentors.

I hope you are seeing how everyone leads at PBC. There are some people with titles and positions, but the body together leads.

## Following Jesus

We are grateful that God has been good to us. We have participated in the work of the Kingdom of God for 70 years, and we are hopeful for many more. We believe in shared leadership. We believe in elder leadership. But mostly we believe that all of our leadership stems not from our ability to lead, but our ability to follow.

I was talking to someone a few years ago who was trying to find the best career fit. He had served in various positions where he worked for other people. He was looking for a role where he had more responsibility. He commented the lines of "I'm just not good at following someone else. I work best when I'm in charge."

That might work fine for various positions, but around here that doesn't work. If you cannot be a follower, you will never survive as a leader. Leading always involves submitting.

Jesus is our real leader. All of us are following him together as a community. So any of our leadership, whether it's informal or with positions and titles or in our families, has to operate within the basic framework of all of us following Jesus.

This is what we do. We follow Jesus. We serve as leaders. And we do it again. The cycle continues. Follow. Lead. Repeat.

Think about going on a hike. Someone is at the front of the line. Everyone else is following him or her. That person is a leader. But their leadership is only as good as what they are following. Do they have a map? Have they been on this trail before? Did someone tell them about it? What are they following as they try to lead?

A leader is only as good as whatever he or she is following. So if you want to exercise leadership, the place to start is by following Jesus.

A few years ago we had shirts printed for our Summer Leadership Institute, which hires college-aged interns for the summer. On the front, the shirt said "FOLLOWER." On the back, it said "LEADER." This is what we were trying to communicate. When Jesus looks back, he sees followers. When others look forward, they see leaders.

Now, we are not naïve to think that just saying that we are following Jesus solves all our problems. Leading and following is still hard work. You have to listen, sacrifice, be open to other views, work hard to restore relationships, and ask for forgiveness. You don't just pray, and everything works out.

In practice, following Jesus means that everyone realizes that none of us is actually in charge. Jesus is the one in charge around here. So every leader at PBC— elder, pastor, deacon, small group leader, communion server—everyone has to submit. We have an extremely high value here for our leaders being willing to submit.

The New Testament is very clear about the idea of submitting. Paul instructs the church at Ephesus to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Following Jesus means that we submit to each other.

In many organizations, people think of leadership and submission as opposite things. I want to have more leadership responsibility, so I don't have to submit to other people as much. I want to be the boss, so no one tells me what to do. As I move up the chain of command, I have to submit less, and I get to lead more.

Leadership does not work that way at PBC. Around here, everyone has to submit. And honestly, that can make this a difficult place to be. I am an elder and a pastor and plenty of things happen around here that I would not choose. But following Jesus means that I don't get my way. There are times when I submit to my brothers and sisters.

At PBC, leadership does not always flow downhill, and submission does not always go up the hill. Everyone leads. And everyone submits. This is what it looks like to follow Jesus. He is the head of this church. Everything we do around here points to him. We all follow Jesus.

## Conclusion

I really wanted to be the captain of my volleyball team. If you assume the best, then I wanted to offer the team some kind of leadership so that we function well together and be successful. If you assume the worst, I was an insecure high school kid who wanted some kind of a title to make me feel better about myself.

I didn't end up becoming the captain of my team. But I think I was able to offer a kind of leadership to the team. I didn't really see it at the time. But leadership isn't about title or position or recognition. I could be a leader whether I was a captain, a starter, or a warmer of the bench. Leadership is about giving yourself for the sake of others.

That's how we think about leadership at PBC. Everything looks different when you're following Jesus. Leadership within the Kingdom of God is different from the kingdom of the world. It's about serving others and not necessarily getting your way. Leadership and submission aren't polar opposites. They go together. We all lead. We all submit.

All of that means that shared leadership is important. It is not what happens in elders meetings or the decisions that pastors make or the agenda of the super secret and oh-so-powerful executive committee meetings that really shape this church. It is the body, offering themselves in leadership throughout PBC.

We lead together, all of us. Some have positions and titles. Some do not. But everyone leads. And everyone submits to Jesus. Our chief shepherd is Jesus. He is the head of this church. We all submit to him.

We don't have it figured out. Our structure is not what protects us. We are always trusting that God will lead this church. It is his church. Jesus is the head. God has led us here. He has gotten us this far. He has always protected and cared for us., and we trust that he will continue doing that in the future

So jump in. Lead. Submit. Serve. Follow. Do it again. Let's follow Jesus and lead together.