

stay in your lane

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GOD-GIVEN AUTHORITY

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preface

"Stay in Your Lane" is written with the image of a sprinter. The sprinter has his own lane, needs to know his lane, and although he needs to stay in his lane, it brings freedom, space, and the possibility to reach full potential.

The title is not intended to be derogatory as the phrase has been used at times. Those who do not know their lane can run aimlessly as they trip up and possibly even get injured. Staying in one's lane can bring safety to everyone.

"Stay in Your Lane" examines four areas of our lives where we need to find and develop our responsibilities and attitude: government, work, home, the church. All of these are needed and it is imperative that we understand and develop each role in our lives.

As you develop your position in different aspects of life, remember the words of Jesus, ***"But whoever would be great among you must be your servant."*** Matthew 20:26

"Stay in Your Lane" consists of four study guides for personal or group discussion and twenty-four devotions to help you lead with humility and obey with delight.

"Authority exercised with humility,
and obedience accepted with delight
are the very lines along which our spirits live."
C.S. Lewis

LESSON ONE

Government

PASTOR NOBLE BAIRD



As we begin our new series on God's authority, we are going to begin with our government. However, before we begin, let us remember first and foremost who we are - followers of Jesus Christ. Therefore, as we get into some potentially political discussions, let us remember that we are all in this together and as Paul reminds us in Galatians 3:28, ***"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*** We are one in Jesus Christ, yes we have differing opinions and that is okay and I am thankful we do! Yet, the most important thing to remember at the end of the day is the truth that we are all in this together and we are on the same team, Jesus' team!

January 20, 2009, is a day I will never forget. I was a junior in high school and had the privilege to go on a junior-senior trip to Washington D.C. That morning, all of us students and teachers left the hotel at 4:00 am! Looking back now, waking up at 4 is not as difficult as it was then. Yet, as we all woke up and gathered our necessities for the day, we left the hotel and headed for the subway. When we were about a mile out from the Washington Monument and the Capitol, all the subway trains were shut down and we had to walk to get to the National Mall. As we were walking down the street, I was amazed to see military personal, hummers, and even a tank on the streets to patrol and contain traffic. Once we finally arrived at the National Mall, as a group we were about halfway between the Washington Monument and the Capital building. For the next several hours we waited and tried to keep warm, as history was about to be made before our eyes. Before long, the soon-to-be 44th President of the United States was sworn in on the stage.

1. Do you have a moment in our history as a country that you lived through and have not forgotten?

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2. Who is a President that you admire?

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As we open to the book of Romans, Paul does a fantastic job of communicating the mind-set and giving understanding as to our response and attitude towards those in governing authority. Beginning in Romans 13:1-2 Paul writes, ***"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."*** I love Paul's boldness as he writes what God has put on his heart. We read that there is no room for the discrepancy on who is subject to governing authority - everyone! But Paul takes it a step further. He knows, and really God knows since He is the one who commissioned Paul to write about this, that we are going to question man's authority or who we have voted into power. Yet, the second half of verse one tells us who put our governing authority in place, God.

3. What is the ***"therefore"*** in verse two, there for?

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4. Can you share a story from God's Word about someone who was disobedient to God's authority?

_____

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Ever since Genesis, the beginning of the world, there has been a battle between obedience and disobedience to God's authority. We know that in Genesis chapter 3 we have what is referred to as "The Fall." It is a moment in our history, as a world and a people, that forever changed the world. It was more severe and had more ramifications than any other event in history. We were separated from God and forced to live a life apart from His presence. Yet, because of what happened thousands of years ago in the garden, the world was given a chance at reconciliation and redemption through Jesus Christ. Therefore, upon confessing and believing Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer, we are called to a life of obedience to the Father. It is through this lens of obedience that we must view those in governing authority, as it is honoring to God.

Now, I want to look at another passage with that view and understanding of obedience in mind. In 1 Peter 2:13-17, we read, ***"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."*** Here, Peter reiterates the same teaching and understand as Paul in Romans chapter 13, yet he is more blunt and to the point.

5. What human institution and authority ought we be subject to?

_____

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6. Who is the one authority we are called to fear?

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At the end of verse sixteen, Peter makes the statement, ***"but living as servants of God."*** If you do not get anything else from this lesson, please hear this. The reason that we honor and respect every human institution and governing authority that is in place is ultimately to show the world that we are different. Further in this passage, Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:21, ***"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."*** You see, by showing respect and honor, we are showing love and being an example of Jesus Christ. Yes, it will be difficult at times to show honor and respect. Yes, we will disagree and if we ask our brothers and sisters in Christ, around us it is safe to say that we have all disagreed with some governing authority at some point! However, we are ultimately called to obedience to our Heavenly Father and to live as an example of Jesus.

Paul wraps up this topic in Romans 13:5-7 writing, ***"Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."***

7. Who are we ultimately honoring if we honor the governing authority placed over us?

_____

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8. Is there someone in authority who you have not shown respect and honor to, whom you need to change your attitude toward or with them?

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Talking about the government is not an easy subject. I have had many debates and discussions with family, let alone friends and co-workers. Regardless of whether you are red, blue, green, or whatever color you may lean to on the political field, I hope you remember to have the proper lens.

"The very word authority has within it the word author.
An author is someone who creates
and possesses a particular work.
Insofar as God is the foundation of all authority,
He exercises that foundation because
He is the author and the owner of His creation.
He is the foundation upon which
all other authority stands or falls."
R.C. Sproul

MR. PRESIDENT

GOVERNMENT, DEVOTION 1

Sierra Combs

In my lifetime, there have been six American presidents, and of those, I really only have memories or personal opinions of four. I have never cared much for the topic of politics, and I did not grow up in a household where it was a focus. I feel like the majority of today's generation of American kids will not be able to say the same when they are adults. The political climate of society today is so divided and it is extremely loud. Thanks (or not) to social media, everyone has an opinion and everyone gets to share it. This coupled with the fact that our current president is very opinionated and has no problem bluntly speaking his mind only adds to the divide. Never before in my lifetime have I seen a man so vehemently hated by many and so strongly loved and embraced by others. It is the reason I deleted the Facebook app and refrain from watching the news. To me, the divide and the loudness on both sides are maddening.

God created us all with different types of personalities and passions and because of this, we are bound to have opinions. As Americans, we have the right to believe what we want and say what we want. I am thankful for this freedom. However, just because we have an opinion does not always mean we need to scream it from the rooftops. Instead, we should take our thoughts, feelings, and opinions to the Lord and see what He would have us do with them. Before we go into what the Bible says about this, we need to remember why we should do so. As born-again believers, our main focus in life is to honor and glorify the Lord. He has given us His Spirit to mold and shape us into becoming more like Him. It is not always an easy process. We have to die to ourselves daily and deny the flesh. That means that we need to actively fight against our own selfish desires

and walk in the way Jesus calls us to walk. With this being said, 1 Peter 2:17 tells us, ***"Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."*** I want to take a special focus on the last sentence. Not only are we to honor and love everyone, but we are also commanded to honor our political leaders. It does not say to honor only the leaders who we agree with, or even only the leaders who we deem to be "good people." You can think what you want about our current president or the presidents in the past, but none of them hold a candle to the leader Peter was referring to here in his letter. The emperor at this time was one of the most wicked and evil tyrants in history - Emperor Nero. The man persecuted and murdered thousands, including his own mother! He threw people to lions for entertainment. He dipped Christians in wax, impaled them on poles, and lit them on fire to form human torches. This man was pure evil and yet Peter told Christians to honor him.

How can we as believers honor the leader of our country, even the ones we do not like or disagree with? Paul reminds us in Romans chapter 13 that God is the one with full and complete authority and is the One who puts kings and political leaders in their places. Even though we might not understand why, we can trust that God knows what He is doing and is in control. Since God has put our president in office, we should not only speak of him respectfully but we should focus our energy on praying for him. In 1 Timothy 2:1-3 we read, ***"That supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior."*** We please the Lord when we honor and pray for our leaders.

Giving honor to the President does not mean that we have to like him, agree with everything he says and does, or that we should not

speak out for what is right. It does not even mean we cannot express and expose what is wrong. However, we should do so with honor and respect, trusting God and praying for the authority He has set up. We should honor the President because we fear and love the Lord. We should let Him work out the rest!

POLICE

GOVERNMENT, DEVOTION 2

Roger Allen

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Growing up in the 1960s, there were many shows on TV demonstrating how cool it was to be a policeman. Held in high regard and given respect by most people, the police were to be looked up to. Having an uncle on the sheriff's department made it even more impressive to a young boy. When visiting, he would show us some of the tools a police officer would use in the line of duty. During the social unrest of 1967, my uncle would stop by the house just to let us know everything would be all right.

Years later, my cousin would also join the sheriff's department and continue the family line in law enforcement. With family and friends in the department, I was taught to have high respect for those who put on the uniform. As a society, we knew that they were there to protect and defend us. However, as the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, we saw a gradual shift in how society would view the police. As a boy, I was told to address police officers as sir, not as another three-letter reference. I was taught to obey and respect those who wore the uniform. We now see a general disregard for those we now call "cops." I am writing this only to make a point of how far we have moved away from honoring and respecting the law. In many ways, we have made the police "RoboCops" instead of "peacemakers," taking away their ability to make a sound judgment. Yet, in Matthew

5:9, it becomes very apparent how God feels about those who keep the peace.

Today, we no longer see the police as peacemakers, but rather as adversaries. In our society, we battle them every chance we can. We neither believe their testimony nor do we trust them. We use video as a negative narrative while giving limited background to the whole story. We have been taught to disdain all that they stand for, and all that they do. In less than my lifetime, I have seen one of the most respected professions become one of the least. We have decided we will disregard all authority without the judgment that comes with it. This is in direct conflict of God's Word.

Romans 13:2 says, ***"Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."***

So why have we come to a place of dislike and hatred for those who would lay down their life for us? Knowing every morning that this might be their last, they willfully put on the uniform. Leaving behind their family and those who love them, they protect someone they have never met. With no expectation of gratitude or promotion, they do their duty. If we search our hearts, it does not take long to realize where this societal disobedience gets its origin. Our hearts, sinful and broken, provide the perfect road to prideful disrespect. Delivering on the first chance to defend ourselves, we can default to our most debased form. The very pride that brings us to disdain the authorities also brings us to willful neglect of God's Law. We want what we want, and are not satisfied until we get it. Even as Christians, we will dismiss the authority with which we do not agree. When legislation does not go our way, we are quick to say we are being persecuted for our faith and become indignant. Sometimes, it is to the point of lawlessness. This is pride, pure and simple. So,

before being quick to judge those who have authority, remember the Lord appointed that person or persons in a place of leadership over you. He and He alone has the wisdom and omnipotence to put in place those He needs to reveal His glory. I realize this can be hard, but we must have faith that God knows what He is doing. He has put them in place so we can have law and order. Remember, God is not a God of confusion, but of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33).

One day, society will realize that God's omniscience superseded our desires, and He blessed us with certain individuals to protect and serve our community. Let us not forget, sometimes with their very own life.

John 15:13 adds, ***"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."***

FREE TO SERVE

GOVERNMENT, DEVOTION 3

Jeannie Yates

Although it feels like a lifetime ago, I remember so clearly the feeling of my first solo drive after getting my driver's license: freedom! It was just me, the radio, and my blue 1989 Ford Ranger. It felt like I could go on forever as fast as I wanted, wherever I wanted, but in reality, there was still a speed limit and still a curfew. In order to experience that freedom, I had to submit to my parent's parameters, the laws of the state, and the rules of the road.

In 1 Peter 2:13-17, we are told, ***"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good, you should silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."*** We are called to submit, yield, obey, and honor those that God has established as the governing authority (Romans 13:1). As Christians, we represent Christ to this lost and fallen world. How we show respect and respond to authority can be a direct reflection of the condition of our hearts. As Peter mentions, by ***"doing good,"*** we can silence the arguments of those who lack wisdom.

However, it goes a little deeper than just our words. A juxtaposition is defined as "two things being seen or placed close together with contrasting effect." Did you see it in the passage you just read? Right at the beginning, Peter says to ***"be subject… to the emperor as supreme, or governors."*** A little bit later, he tells us to ***"live as***

people who are free." How can I submit and still have freedom? The answer comes right after that. We are called to be ***"living as servants of God."*** In order to be free, we have to serve. We also see this in Matthew 20:26-28 when Jesus says, ***"But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

How good are we at showing honor to our governing officials? Even when we disagree, we can honor our government by regularly praying for them and seeking ways to serve them with kindness. Let us not forget that God is the One in control. Romans 13:1 tells us, ***"There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."*** We can trust His authority and His plan. We can choose to use our freedom to serve others. Galatians 5:13 says, ***"For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."***

TAXES AND US

GOVERNMENT, DEVOTION 4

John Rigg

"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." Romans 13:1–2 (NKJV)

In these verses, the Apostle Paul describes to the Christians in Rome just how people and governing bodies are to coexist. People are to respect governing bodies by submitting to their authority, mainly because God has placed them there, and secondly by resisting governing authority, a person would bring judgment on themselves.

While there will always be a large variety of topics that the government and people do not agree upon, one of the greatest tensions between people and government, is taxes. For centuries, the government has collected taxes to pay for a variety of services. However, corrupt officials, misappropriated funds, and ineffective programs have created mistrust among people and a reluctance to honestly file their taxes or to even pay them at all.

Even in Jesus' day, there was anxiety between the Roman government and the people regarding tax monies to be collected. The following Scripture records the Pharisees and Herodians approaching Jesus in an attempt to trick Him up by asking a tax question.

Matthew 22:17–21 says, ***"'Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show***

me the coin for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said, 'Caesar's.' Then he said to them, 'Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'"

We often quote Jesus when talking about taxes by repeating His answer, ***"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."*** However, it is rare that we quote the full answer, ***"And to God the things that are God's."***

According to the CSB Study Bible, "The denarius was a Roman silver coin that bore a portrait of Emperor Tiberius, a Latin superscription that said 'Tiberius Caesar, son of the Divine Augustus,' an image of a goddess, and superscripted titles of the Roman high priest."

Jesus approved the payment of taxes to Rome. However, He said that coins ultimately belong to the one whose image it bears. So, if coins bearing Cesar's image belong to him, give them to him.

Then what are we to give to God?

Genesis 1:26 says, ***"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'"*** As mankind bears the image of God, we belong to God. It is just like how the coin bearing Cesar's image belonged to him. Jesus wanted His listeners to understand that it is not only important to give the government their due taxes but to also give God what is due to Him as well.

So, for me, two questions arise from this:
Am I giving all my taxes to the government?
Am I giving all of myself to God?

WILL OF GOD

GOVERNMENT, DEVOTION 5

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." 1 Peter 2:13-15

What is the will of God for your life? Since will means desire, what is God's desire for your life? This is a question that has been contemplated by many for years. We want to know what God wants us to do! The starting point is not who to marry, what school to go to, where to live, or what job you should take. It is salvation. In 2 Peter 3:9, we read, ***"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."*** The most important starting point in determining God's will for our lives is that we believe and repent. We need to believe that Jesus died for our sins but rose again, conquering death and the grave. However, it should not stop there. We need to repent or turn from serving ourselves and live for the Lord.

Part of living for the Lord is described in this 1 Peter passage, ***"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution."*** When government does not contradict God and His Word, we need to be subject, submissive, or obedient to it. Peter goes on to tell us why, ***"For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people."*** Our interaction with government and those in authority over us is part of the ***"will of God"*** for our lives. Please capture the goal Peter states, ***"By doing good***

you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." Our lifestyle is a major part of our witnessing. It is our talk and our walk. We do not want to be viewed as hypocrites, selfish, or rebellious, as it could be a stumbling block for others coming to the Lord.

In every election, people are looking for a man or woman to save our country. No person or political party will save us. Only Jesus brings salvation, restoration, and peace. God has blessed America. It is time for America to bless God. Remember, part of blessing God is being a good citizen who obeys God first but is respectful to authority with words and actions.

OBEY GOD OR OBEY MAN?

GOVERNMENT, DEVOTION 6

Pastor Roy Townsend

Have you ever heard the question of whether you should obey God or obey man? As followers of Christ, we are often caught in the middle of this question. We have many who do not want to submit to the authorities because we disagree with them, their decision, or the direction that they are taking our country. I often have to help people as they are grappling with the decision to follow the direction of our government or to strike out in their own direction. I often take people to Romans 13:1-2, which says, ***"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."*** We have pretty specific instructions here that we, as followers, are to obey the governing authorities. Further, it says that God gave them their authority and that they exist because God instituted them. From there, we get a warning: if we resist the authority of the government, we are resisting what God has appointed.

Some people say that to obey means that we agree with the government, but we are told to obey, and there is no requirement for agreement. Since they are appointed by God, they are appointed above us. Then comes the question: what do we do if the government orders us to do something contrary to God's commands? We see this in Acts 5:27-29, which says, ***"And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, 'We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' But Peter and the***

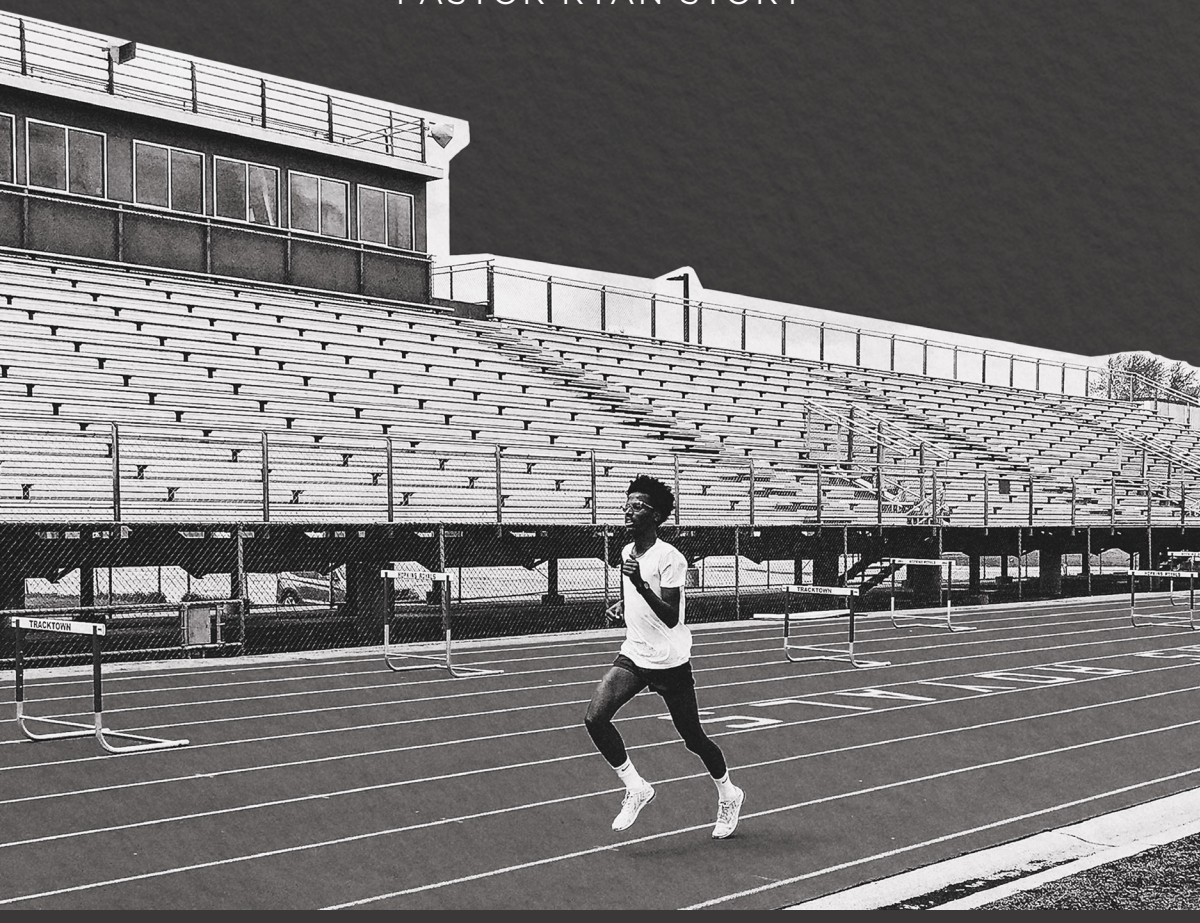
apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'" Here, the Apostle Peter and the other Apostles were arrested and told they could not preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but they gave the answer, ***"We must obey God rather than men."***

We teach a high view of Scripture at the River Church, and when we are told to submit to those that God has put in authority in positions, we are to obey them unless their laws force us to obey man rather than God. We see this in the Old Testament when King Nebuchadnezzar demanded to be worshiped like a God. What did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do? They did not bow down to worship the image of the king. What does this mean for us? We have a duty to obey God, and a duty to obey God by obeying the authorities unless the authorities are forcing us to disobey God.

LESSON TWO

Work

PASTOR RYAN STORY



Fill in the blank: My boss is a _____.

Hopefully, when you filled in that blank you did not have to repent to Jesus for sinning! Everyone has a different experience when it comes to their "boss." Some people have amazing people who are in the position of authority where they work. Sadly, some people are not able to share that same sentiment.

I have only had four jobs in my life. I worked at a grocery store from the time I was a teen until I was in my mid-twenties. I had a part-time job as a substitute teacher, which lead to me being a classroom assistant, and then eventually I got hired at The River Church. I have been very lucky that all of my bosses have been amazing people.

Back in my twenties, early in my career as a stock boy, I had a major issue; I had a horrible attitude. My way of doing something was the best, and I had no problem telling my bosses what I thought. Clearly, this did not help me get promoted to a different position. Luckily for me, I had a department head take me aside and tell me he wanted to bring me on to his team, but I would have to watch my attitude. I remember him looking at me saying, "This promotion starts with you. You are a great worker, but your attitude stinks. If you have a bad attitude, I do not want you on my team. If you can show you have a better attitude, I would like you on this team." That idea of "it starts with you" has stuck with me for years.

"Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust." 1 Peter 2:18

1. Why does God's Word tell us we must be ***"subject to your masters with all respect"*** regardless of how our boss treats us?

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2. Is it right to "work better" for a boss who treats you better compared to a boss that treats you worse? Why is this truth so hard to put into action?

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If you ever want to get me a soapbox, and let me rant about the importance of strong leadership, I am game to do so. Leadership is so essential to an organization's growth, but that organization's growth only happens at an individual's level. When people get better leadership, they should get better themselves. However, there is also a bit of a gap that exists inside any organization when subordinates begin to think they are above their boss in understanding, competency, organization, and skill.

3. Why is a humble heart so important to being a good employee?

_____

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_____

"For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God." 1 Peter 2:19-20

4. How often do you take responsibility for your work ethic, attitude, and quality of work? Why is it that we tend to blame others for our own work?

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5. What does Peter say we should do when we suffer for doing good?

_____

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_____

6. What does Christian endurance look like in the workplace? (Bonus points if you have a Bible verse to prove your point.)

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_____

7. What can grumbling, complaining, gossiping, slacking off, insubordination, and passive aggressive behavior do to a believer who is trying to endure?

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There is a huge reality that not everything is rosy at about most everyone's job. There will be a point where you do not overly like your boss. For many people, simply quitting is not an option. I have heard many people "vent" about the difficulties of their job. I love the last portion of 1 Peter chapter 2. I love that Peter pulls us to focus on Jesus even when working for difficult bosses. ***"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls"*** (1 Peter 2:21-25).

If we break down 1 Peter 2:18-25, we can see five ways we ***"might follow in his steps."*** It starts with your heart wanting to show Jesus in your actions so we are all being a witness for Jesus in our workplace.

"He committed no sin."

8. How can our sin against our boss be a detriment in the workplace?

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9. How can our sin in the workplace be a hindrance to a coworker?

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10. How can you be more intentional about being obedient to Christ rather than the sin of your flesh at work?

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"Neither was deceit found in his mouth."

11. Have you ever lied, gossiped, or complained at work? Did it help the situation?

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12. Why is it so hard to speak truth to an authority figure?

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13. How can you ensure your mouth is not adding more toxins into your work environment?

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"When he was reviled, he did not revile in return."

14. How do you respond when someone hurts you?

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15. How can you go about "not repaying evil for evil" to your boss?

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"When he suffered, he did not threaten."

16. How do you react when things are tense at work? How do you treat your co-workers or your boss?

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17. Why are difficult times so important to our growth in our relationship with Jesus?

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"Continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."

18. Why is trusting in God so essential to working in a place when you feel your boss does not care for you?

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19. How can trusting God in a not so great work situation help you grow your faith?

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I hope we can now relook at that initial statement.

My boss is an opportunity to show Jesus.
My boss is a person whom I will serve.
My boss is a human who needs to be shown Jesus.
My boss is a person I will love as Christ loved me.

BOSS OR LEADER?

WORK, DEVOTION 1

Pat Bedell

I am almost positive everyone can relate to a job in their past that was awful. It seems that when you land a new job with a new employer, you are taking your career to the next level and all is right in the world. For the first several weeks at this new job, you are on cloud nine while you get along with all of your colleagues, you enjoy the work, and you genuinely are being successful in your endeavor. Then there is the inevitable "first correction" that is made by your direct boss. Now depending on your personality, some may take this correction or instruction to be condescending and get very upset about it. Some may take it personally and think that the boss hates their work. Others might take the correction constructively and carry on with their normal duties. Depending on the type of superior that is in charge makes an incredible difference in the success of its business and employees. What makes a good boss in the eyes of God?

First and foremost, most superiors either refer to themselves as either a boss or a leader. I am sure you can pick out which superior has a better motive in helping their employees succeed. I have had enough jobs and have seen many different leading techniques to know what makes a good leader. Ephesians 6:4 says, ***"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."*** So when that inevitable conflict arrives, the leader can get the message across to his/her employee in a tasteful manner with the intent to help the employee succeed instead of making the employee feel inadequate. A few verses later also clear up who is the leader. Ephesians 6:9 says, ***"Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening,***

knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him."

What do you do if you are working for a boss that is unjust in his ways and is not a very good leader? I have drawn the short straw many times in my life with working for unjust bosses. I was miserable, I developed a hate for my superiors, I became very passive-aggressive, and it made me into a person that I did not want to be. In 1 Peter 2:18, it says, ***"Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust."*** This is the opposite of how I treated those bosses and simply put, I was sinning. Once it got to the point where it affected my home life and my relationship with my wife, I had to sever ties with that company and find different work.

With all of the jobs that I have had over the years, I have always learned something new with each one. You always learn what kind of work you like, what you do not like, and also you learn the type of people you like to be around. You also learn what a bad boss and a good leader look like. You learn how they act, how they treat their employees, and also you can see if the boss/leader has either themselves or their employee's best interest in mind. We are all called to work, for God has chosen us to be in that position to give us the opportunity to share His Gospel and show how to love one another. Colossians 3:12-13 says, ***"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."*** Now that you understand a little bit better what a good leader is in the eyes of God, I encourage you to discover what a good servant looks like. Ephesians chapter 6 and 1 Peter chapter 2 are good places to start!

BAD BOSS

WORK, DEVOTION 2

John Rigg

As someone who has been in the workforce for over 45 years now, I have come to this realization - I have been a good and bad worker and as well I have been a good and bad boss. I know that at times I have failed to meet the expectations of my boss and at other times I have also failed those who have worked for me.

For everyone that has ever had a boss, you know how pleasurable it can be when that person meets your expectation of a boss. Maybe your boss's expectation goes something like this: a good boss never overworks you, gives you plenty of time off, dispenses raises frequently, and certainly does not scold you for playing solitaire on your work computer. When working for a person like that, fulfilling your role as a good worker is a breeze!

However, we would agree that the person in authority over you falls short at times of your expectations for a boss. What if this person is ungrateful for the work you do? Are they excessively critical or negative towards you and constantly making unrealistic demands of you? Does this change your role as a worker? Do you become a bad worker because you have a bad boss?

As with all things in life, we should look for wisdom in the Word of God. In 1 Peter 2:18 (NKJV), we read, ***"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh."***

I do not know about you, but this Scripture made me pause. That is why I continued to read it over and over and over again. Eventually,

my understanding became this - workers (servants) are to be obedient (submissive) to their bosses (masters) no matter what kind of boss they are! Regardless of whether they are gentle or harsh to me, my reaction towards them is to be the same. I am to be obedient (submissive) out of reverence (fear). It is a fact of life that in any society or organization, there must be an authority on the one hand, and obedience to that authority on the other. Without it we have chaos.

If the lack of chaos in the workplace is not enough for you, then hopefully the next verse helps, ***"For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully."***

God is pleased when He finds us so conscious of our relation to Him that we endure wrongful doing without upholding self or fighting back. When we humbly take unjust treatment, we display Christ, and this gains us favor with God and is a witness to the world that so desperately needs Him! This does not imply that working for the "bad boss" is our only option, it just means that while we are employed, we are to work remembering Christ's example.

God's plan to rescue the world from sin was contingent on the obedience of Jesus as He suffered unjustly, submitting to the authority and will of God.

Whether you work for a "good boss" or "bad boss," God has a plan for your obedience.

ENDURE

WORK, DEVOTION 3

Pastor Randy T. Johnson

The word "endure" is used 112 times in Scripture. It must be a pretty important concept. We know we are called to "keep on keeping on." The Christian life is not designed to be a plush, easy life. It comes with challenges. Some words from William Barclay are rattling in my mind, "Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory." The reason we are called to endure is so that God will receive glory. Therefore, it is worth the pain.

Paul uses the word "endure" four times in his first letter to the Corinthians. While describing ministry, he says, ***"To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things"*** (1 Corinthians 4:11-13). The contrast is striking. They are being reviled and they repay it with blessings. They are being persecuted and they do not quit. They are willing to press forward for the cause of Christ.

Paul continues the concept of endurance in 1 Corinthians 9:12, ***"If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ."*** Paul reminds us that our goal and purpose in life should be to glorify Christ. We do not want our bad attitude or harsh words to become ***"an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ."*** Our desire should be to bring people to Christ, not block the opportunity. There are times by our enduring a bad situation that others will notice and ask where we find this hope and strength. It is in Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul points out that God will help, ***"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."*** No matter how bad the situation gets, we do not have to make the wrong choice or even say the hurtful words. We can stand strong because He is faithful.

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 13:7, Paul describes love, ***"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."*** This might seem like an odd verse to end a devotion on endurance in the workplace, but it should relate. When Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment, He said to love God. He then quickly added that we need to love others. Endurance is easier when you love. Love those whom God has placed around you and over you at work. Pray for them. Encourage them. When you take these steps, enduring proves to be valuable and fruitful for the Kingdom.

HOW TO BE A GREAT EMPLOYEE GOD'S WAY

WORK, DEVOTION 4

Mateas Darden

The most difficult part of a job transition is adjusting to a new boss. When we become a follower of Christ, we shift from being our own boss into becoming an employee of the true Boss. This new position places God as the focus and authority in our lives. As a result, we get a new training manual and access to perfect love. As He refines us, He hires us with the intent to reflect Him in our earthly lives and our earthly jobs. Here are five ways that reflection can begin.

First, be humble. Throughout the Bible (Luke 14:11; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 1:5), humility is a prominent virtue outlined. We are called, as Christ-followers, to be humble in respect to others and God. The Bible tells us that God resists the proud. Knowing that is the case, we should continuously pray for humility so that God remains working in our lives. How can an employee be great with God resisting them?

Second, be helpful. The Bible warns against being lazy (1 Corinthians 10:31; 15:58; Philippians 2:14; Colossians 3:23-24); instead we are called to be doers of the Word. As an employee, this means doing what you are asked. As a Christian employee, this means going above and beyond because you are reflecting Christ. Honor and glorify God by meeting the needs you see or offering solutions to problems. In the book of Philippians, we are commanded to not grumble or complain. Instead of grumbling, remember who sees you work and ultimately who you are honoring in the process.

Third, be wise. Wisdom begins with fearing the Lord (Proverbs 4:6-7; 19:20; 24:3-7; James 1:5). A great employee applies wisdom in all areas of their life to do their spiritual and physical jobs to the best of their ability. God builds through wisdom. If anyone lacks wisdom, they are told to ask God and it will be given to them. In other words, God does not deny a request to be wise so this is something a great employee cannot work without.

Fourth, be submissive. Good employees understand that God is completely in control and just (Romans 12:18; 13:1-7; Hebrews 13:17). He has placed every leader in their role (and removes leaders). It is not our place to rebel against authority, it is our job to be diligent with what we have been entrusted. God is all-knowing and all-powerful, He accomplishes His purposes in ways we may not understand (Remember when He used Nebuchadnezzar? Or the Assyrians? Or the Babylonians?). Strengthen your relationship with God, concern yourself with what you are responsible for, and strive for peace to the best of your ability. New Life Camp director Tim Woelkers, Jr. says, “Love Jesus, serve people.”

Fifth, be flexible. Ultimately you are not in charge and you do not know everything; God does and that is why He makes the plans (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 8:28; Colossians 1:16-17). Being a great employee involves adjusting to changes that occur and giving God permission to interrupt. Be open to doing what God asks of you; in addition to what your boss asks of you. After all, it is an anomaly for things to go as you planned. My advice is to accept that (have a good cry if you are a planner like me) and move on with the day. After you accept this, rejoice in the truth that God is sovereign and works all things out.

FOR GOD

WORK, DEVOTION 5

Pastor Randy T. Johnson

"From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate." Genesis 39:5-6

The main point of this passage seems quite clear. God blessed Joseph. He not only blessed Joseph, but He blessed everyone and anything around Joseph. Potiphar and his estate were flourishing because God blessed him through Joseph.

However, I think there is another aspect that is too often missed: Joseph was faithful to God. Joseph had been belittled by his brothers, thrown in a pit, threatened death, sold into slavery, taken far from home, and humanly speaking had no hope of ever seeing his dad again. All sense of normality was gone. As he served in the house of Potiphar, he was faithful. He was faithful to God; therefore, he was diligent with his work. He was a hard worker. He was a hard worker when Potiphar was watching, but he was a hard worker when Potiphar was not home, too. With Joseph in charge, Potiphar ***"had no concern about anything."***

The key to Joseph's success was that he had an audience of One. There was only One that he wanted to impress. In everything he did, he was working for God. God was the focus of his diligence.

It can be difficult to work for an unbeliever or a godless person. It can be tempting to slack off when no one is watching. It can be hard to press forward when we are not appreciated. It can be challenging to give our best when it is not acknowledged. It is easy to follow the crowd. However, Joseph knew One was always watching. He was the One Joseph strived to please.

Galatians 1:10 challenges us, ***"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."***

As servants of Christ, we need to live it. When "no one" is watching, remember One is watching. When many are watching, focus on the One, the true and living God.

"Not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." Ephesians 6:6

"Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord." Colossians 3:22

AND THEN SOME

WORK, DEVOTION 6

Pastor Randy T. Johnson

"On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds." Numbers 17:8

God Almighty does not deal with ordinary people in simple ordinary ways. He is a God of the Extra Ordinary. In Numbers chapter 17, God displays His willingness to go over and above the call of duty. Korah's rebellion caused immense confusion and complaining throughout Israel. A battle over leadership had surfaced. So, God set up a test to distinguish whom He had chosen to lead Israel. The staff belonging to the man He chose would sprout. One leader from each of the tribes of Israel picked a staff, wrote his name on it, and gave it to Moses. Moses then placed the staff before the Lord in the Tent of the Testimony. The next day when Moses entered the Tent, he immediately spotted Aaron's staff. Yes, Aaron's staff sprouted. However, it more than just sprouted. In just one night, it sprouted, budded, blossomed, and produced almonds! God had agreed to perform a miracle so the people would realize the leader was truly chosen by Him. God not only spoke through the miracle, but He also shouted. He had the staff sprout – And Then Some.

"And said to Moses, 'The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do.'" Exodus 36:5

Moses heads up the construction of the sanctuary in Exodus chapter 36. God has chosen Bezalel, Oholiab, and every skilled person to do

the actual work on the sanctuary. God has gifted them and now gives them the opportunity to express their talent. All of Israel was invited to contribute offerings for the tabernacle. Verse five says the people brought more than enough for doing the work.

After understanding how God has gone way over of what could be expected in His relationship to us, it is only natural to respond back in like manner – And Then Some.

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."
Colossians 3:23-24

Christians should be the best employees ever. They should be known for honesty, teamwork, encouragement, and a full day's work. They should be known for going over and above the call of duty.

The difference between the ordinary and extraordinary Christian lies in just three words – And Then Some.

LESSON THREE

Home

PASTOR PHILIP PIASECKI



They say imitation is the highest form of flattery. Now that may be true if we are talking about someone copying the style of a professional athlete. I remember growing up wanting my baseball swing to look just like Ken Griffy Jr's beautiful swing. That may be true if we are talking about a musician wanting to sound like somebody famous. I can think of multiple bands and worship leaders that have heavily influenced my style of worship leading. However, sometimes imitation can be eye-opening and insulting, like when a friend imitates you and your first reaction is, "Do I really act like that?" My children are at a perfect age for this, my daughter and son constantly do things that make my wife and I go, "Oh no, they learned that from us didn't they?" These things are sometimes cute, but other times show us that they have been learning from our bad example in their lives.

1. Is there someone in your life that you always wanted to be like or have closely imitated?

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2. Can you think of a time where a child or family member imitated something about you that opened your eyes to a negative behavior?

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When I was thinking about God's order of authority in the home, this idea of imitation kept finding its way into my head. The scriptures that we are going to be looking at consistently talk about leading with an example and actions because we all know that actions speak louder than words. Husbands cannot lead their families in a godly way if they are not first living in a godly manner. Parents cannot expect their children to obey what the Lord says if they themselves are not

being an example of Christ to their children. So, with this in mind, we should take a look at what Scripture specifically says about authority in the home to husbands, wives, and children.

Husbands

Ephesians 5:25-33 says, ***"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."***

In 1 Peter 3:7, we read, ***"Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."***

3. Men, time to be honest, do you see yourself loving and leading your wife and family in this manner? What areas do you need to improve on?

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4. What does it mean to live with your wife in an understanding way?

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God's order of authority in the home begins with the husband. When we talk about Biblical authority and submission, too many men jump at the opportunity to talk about how Scripture tells their wives to be submissive, while completely missing out on how Scripture tells them to lead their families. Verse 25 in Ephesians chapter 3 tells men to love their wives as Christ loved the church. In case you may have forgotten, Christ loved the church by sacrificing Himself and dying on a cross. This is a serious and sobering call to us men on how we are supposed to be loving and leading our wives. When we are talking about authority in the home, it is true that the Lord has put husbands in the place of authority, but this authority calls on us to lead as servants in our household not to rule with an iron fist. Too many men take the approach, "Do what I say, not what I do." That is completely missing the point of leadership.

The authority given to us by Christ to lead our families needs to be taken seriously, and the best way to do that is to take our relationship with Christ seriously. If we are not plugged into Christ, we will never be able to lead with authority well in our family. I cannot even imagine the spiritual growth that would explode in so many households if more husbands would strive to lead and serve in a Christ-like manner.

I would be remiss if I did not address what 1 Peter 3:7 says as well. Men are commanded to live with their wives in an understanding way and to show them honor. This is our responsibility as godly husbands, this is not something that is optional. To be good leaders, we are not to be bad-mouthing our wife behind her back, we are to build her up and give her understanding and grace when it is needed. All of this is the exact imitation of how Christ interacts with His church.

5. What are some godly ways husbands can lead by example in their households?

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Wives

Ephesians 5:22-24 says, ***"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."***

In 1 Peter 3:1-6, we read, ***"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external - the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear - but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening."***

6. How does our culture encourage or discourage women to behave in the way this Scripture describes?

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For some, these Scriptures can be a bit touchy, but historically one of the reasons that this subject needed to be addressed to women is so beautiful. In the early church, many of the new believers were women who were the first people in their household to believe in Jesus as their Savior, and this created so many questions of how they should behave towards their unbelieving husband. Back in biblical times, having different religions within a home was essentially unheard of, so these believing women are encouraged to continue to love and respect their husbands, hoping that this example would bring him to the Lord. So many women today have bravely stepped up and become a spiritual authority in their home because unfortunately, the husband is not a believer. By continuing to love and respect their husband, even in disagreement, they are setting an example that one day could help bring him to saving faith in Christ.

7. What are some practical ways that a wife that is a believer can be a godly example to her unbelieving husband?

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Also, when Scripture tells wives to submit to their husbands, this does not mean sit quietly in a corner. One of the things I love about my wife is that she is passionate and willing to share her thoughts with me. I would never want her to only silently follow me. This is so important within the authority of the home, that everyone feels like their thoughts and opinions can be said and heard by others. It is okay to disagree, what is essential is how we respond after a disagreement. To submit to your husband means that ultimately you will follow his lead, even when you may have a differing opinion. Also, an important distinction here is that your foremost authority is God and the Scripture. Especially when dealing with an unbelieving spouse there will be times where respectfully you will have to

disagree and refuse to do something because it goes against the command of God. Same as with husbands, a wife's relationship with the Lord needs to be priority number one. A godly woman can love her husband and lead her children only through the strength that her relationship with the Lord gives her.

8. What does a godly authority structure between a husband and wife look like?

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Children

Ephesians 6:1-4 says, ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.' Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."***

9. How can children honor Christ in their relationship with their parents?

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In the order of authority within the home, children find themselves at the bottom of that list. If you are a child reading this, sorry, but enjoy the lack of responsibility while you have it. One day you will have people looking to you as an authority figure, and at times you will wish you could go back to just doing what your parents told you to do. In all seriousness though, Scripture tells children to obey their

parents, because it is the right thing to do. It is not because parents are always right, but because God has placed them in the position of authority. Being a parent of two kids now, I look back at all the times I disagreed with my parents and have slowly realized that they were pretty much always spot on. If you are a Christian kid with unbelieving parents, most of the last section about wives applies to you as well. Through your honor and obedience towards them, you can show them Christ. One day they could come to faith in Christ through your testimony of how you honored and respected them.

10. How can a child who is a believer impact his unbelieving parents for the Gospel?

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Ultimately in God's order of authority in the home, every family member needs to make sure they are ultimately falling under God's authority. Parents, the best thing you can do for your kids is to have a strong and public relationship with the Lord. The closer you are to God, the easier it will be to serve your family. The more you help your child's relationship with Christ grow, the more they will find themselves obeying and respecting your authority in their life. When we feel like our home life is teetering, that is the time to refocus ourselves on the Lord and make sure that it is Him and the things of Scripture that are at the top of our priority list.

11. What are some ways we can tell the structure of authority is off in our home and what can we do to bring the proper order back to it?

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HUSBANDS

HOME, DEVOTION 1

Larry Gabbara

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."
Ephesians 5:31 (NIV)

As a young husband, I thought I knew what it meant to be a husband, leader, and the "man in charge." I quickly realized I did not have a clue! It took years until I learned that the only way I could lead was to be in line with what God had designed me to be, that is, to be a man of God.

John 13:14-15 says, ***"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."***

My model is Jesus! Jesus came and served us while He was here on Earth. He laid down His life to provide us with the free gift of salvation. I serve Jesus with my wife and love, respect, honor, and protect her. In order to be the spiritual leader to my wife, God needs to be the center of my life and our relationship. Spiritual leadership is knowing where God wants me to be and living a lifestyle that honors God in all my ways.

Even though my wife loves the Lord with all her heart and is well versed in the Word, I need to be the spiritual leader of our family. This was not how I grew up. As a young Catholic, I thought the spiritual leader was the church, the priest, and the Pope. My father did not take the spiritual lead. The expectation was that I would learn

everything I needed to know about God in the Catholic school that I attended. So this principle was not natural to me, not part of my upbringing. I have learned since I gave my life to Christ that I am to be the spiritual leader. I have worked on growing in my faith and in the Word.

Ephesians 5:25-28 (NIV) adds, ***"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself."***

My responsibility as the spiritual leader will be to continue to stay in the Word, look to the Lord for guidance, and to continue to love, honor, and cherish my wife.

WIVES

HOME, DEVOTION 2

Debbie Gabbara

"He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." Proverbs 18:22

"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Ephesians 5:22-25 (NIV)

When thinking about what it means to me to be a wife, my mind sometimes wanders back to when I was in the seventh grade. We were given an assignment to write about the career we hoped to have when we finished school. I remember it being very difficult for me to decide what would be the topic of my report. All I could think was that I wanted to be a wife and mom. I was so blessed to be surrounded by incredible ladies that were a great example to me of what a godly wife should look like. I have no recollection of what career I chose for that project, but I have loved being a wife and mother.

Marriage is not always easy; it takes work to have my husband feel that he has found a "good thing" as the verse in Proverbs says. We are both firstborns and spent most of our careers in management positions, giving direction to others. We can be bossy and regularly clash because we both know the "best" way to do something and are each confident that our method or opinion is the right one. I am often in pretty deep when I recall the verses from Ephesians and remember that I am called to submit to my husband as to the Lord.

Learning to submit has definitely taken work on my part. The closer I grow to the Lord, the better I understand submission. We see in Scripture that Christ constantly submitted to the will of the Father. Understanding submission to be an attitude of trust has helped me to have a greater love and respect for my husband.

Genesis chapter 2 tells us that man was not created to be alone so God made a woman, a helper for him. When we submit to our husbands, we submit to the Lord. God created wives to complete husbands. Their love for us grows when we respect them and trust them to lead us.

Proverbs 31:10 (CEV) says, ***"A truly good wife is the most precious treasure a man can find!"***

PARENTS

HOME, DEVOTION 3

Jill Osmon

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be king in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." Exodus 20:12

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Ephesians 6:1-3

As we are studying God's order of authority, parents are a massive lane that we must learn to navigate as kids and as adults. It seems like obeying your parents is pretty straight forward, yet we have all struggled with it in varying degrees. I am a rule follower, so following rules and obeying came somewhat easy for me. I know I hear the collective eye rolls, and I deserve them; however, I know I have some people out there that are the same (give me a shout out all of you rule followers!).

If we pull the lens back a bit and see our call to obey and honor our parents, we see the deeper connection in how we should obey and honor God. Obeying and honoring our parents (even as adults trying to honor our parents), can be difficult. We do not always understand what they are doing and why, yet we trust that they have our best interest at heart.

I have read Ephesians 6:1 a bunch of times, even noticed the part where it says a commandment with a promise. To be honest, I have never really put a lot of thought into it. Diving a bit deeper, it seems

like God is promising blessings if we obey Him. I have lived my whole life "obeying" God and I have certainly not received the blessings I have wanted. So it is a bit confusing, I have obeyed God and my parents so where are my blessings?

I have struggled with this for a long time. I am sure each of you has something in your life that you have desired (a child, a job, a career, a spouse, a loving family, a repaired marriage) and yet it is allusive.

It can be painful.

I am forever grateful that God is not in the business of granting wishes but instead providing what is best for us. That always looks different than we anticipate, but oh how sweet it is to find yourself in the center of where God has placed you. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, ***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."***

Look at Psalm 37:3-5, ***"Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act."***

If we obey and honor our parents, we will have a long life. God wants to give us the desires of our hearts. Let us not forget what proceeds all of this. Our command is to obey, trust, be faithful, and delight in the Lord. If we find ourselves doing all of those things, our idea of desires of our hearts or living long takes on a different meaning. We hold onto promises from God, knowing that if we put our trust in Him and obey his commandments, He transforms our ideas of what a life well-lived looks like. We find our delight in Him and we will find the earthly things are not as important as the heavenly.

So, next time we lecture our kids about obeying us, take a moment and explain that in their obedience they understand God more, and it brings them closer to see what God wants from them.

GRANDPARENTS

HOME, DEVOTION 4

Debbie Kerr

"My husband I have been blessed with the sweetest, most beautiful grandchildren on the planet," said every grandparent everywhere! Seriously, the first time you lay your eyes on one of your grandchildren you do not even understand how your heart can stretch so far it could burst. When you talk about order in the family, grandparents play a very important role. It is our job to spoil these precious ones we did not birth, and then hand them back to mom and dad to fix - much to their dismay, I might add. I remember receiving my children back home after a stay with my parents and I always said, "It takes two good spankings to get them back to normal." Seriously though, they came home thinking they were large and in charge! Now, mind you, I was not raised that way by those people I called Mom & Dad! They lovingly ruled a tight ship where there was no shortage of a good spanking or a lecture followed by lots of laughter and ice cream! However, somehow when that first little granddaughter was born, the strict rules went out the window and the ice cream and pony rides were aplenty. I can visualize all the grandparents reading this, smiling from ear to ear with joy and delight as they nod their heads in agreement.

What does God expect from us as grandparents? Some grandparents raise their grandchildren, and their role is back to the original plan to train up a child in the way he should go. However, for those who do not need to take on the responsibility of parenting, we still have a huge opportunity to influence and guide our grandchildren to love and obey Jesus.

My mother's parents lived four hours away when I was growing up. My precious grandmother taught Bible clubs from her home for

many years. The principal at the elementary school would remind the children at the end of the school day and several would run down the street to Mrs. Becks for a Bible lesson, plenty of hugs, and warm cookies. She told the best stories and whenever we were together I would ask her to tell me my favorite one. I was always perplexed that each story she told had the same moral at the end. It is actually a verse in the Bible, found in Numbers 32:23b, ***"Be sure your sin will find you out."*** I never forgot that story or the moral. I remember times growing up when I would put that verse to the test. God's Word will always accomplish what it sets out to do, and my sins were always found out, in one way or another.

Even though I only saw my grandparents a couple of times a year, they both left a very huge impact on my life. I now tell those same stories along with the moral to my grandchildren. Grandparenting is one of God's greatest blessings, we get the best of both worlds. Enjoy the fun and games but do not forget to take advantage of every opportunity to impact their hearts and minds towards Jesus. It is their heritage.

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." 3 John 1:4

JUST DO IT!

HOME, DEVOTION 5

Holly Boston

The most vivid memory I have of my grandmother is when we were talking in her living room about 24 years ago. I was a mother of two and had been a Christian for about a year. My husband and I were having difficulty agreeing on whether or not to have more children. I decided for the first time ever to pray for guidance. A short three months later, I found myself telling my grandmother of our dilemma and my decision to pray. I confidently and proudly asserted that God decided and I was expecting a baby in eight months. Without missing a beat, my grandmother responded with, “Oh, is that who you’re going to blame?” I was shattered.

We all have different family backgrounds. Some were raised in Christian homes (God bless you!) and some of us attended church but biblical truths and principles were never discussed and applied to daily living. Still, others were raised in homes where God and Jesus were not even on the radar. I have noticed something about God’s Word - when He gives a command, there are no conditions attached. He does not say forgive others if they apologize; love others, if they are loving; or submit, if your husband loves the Lord. He simply says to forgive, love, and submit. Respecting your elders is no different.

In 1 Peter 5:5, we read, ***“Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another; For God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”***

That is interesting. As we read, I do not see, “Respect or submit to your grandmother if she responds in a godly or even a caring

way." However, I do see a promise of God's grace. God's fourth commandment reads: ***"Honor your father and mother, as the Lord your God commanded you"*** (Deuteronomy 5:16). No conditions are noted but we find a promise of long life attached to it. Many commentators agree that this is a "multigenerational attitude of respect" and applies to grandparents. As I combed through articles, I found commentators suggesting this is an "outdated sentiment." Historically, this saying meant that elders should be respected because of their knowledge and experience. However, since the young of our culture know more than the older it is an irrelevant saying. Believer, we are called to respect our elders because of who they are (His creation); not because of what they know or have accomplished. He also sites situations where the older have mistreated the younger. Believer, the sin of others does not negate God's commands. His command is not based on what our elders deserve. We are called to: Just Do It!

As a new grandmother, I feel compelled to address my fellow grandparents. I have a young granddaughter, Leah Kate. As much as I love my children, there is nothing like the love I have for my granddaughter. She has done nothing to earn my love but as Proverbs 17:6 says, she is her Grammy's "crown." I know many grandparents who have become very critical of their children's parenting skills and stunned by the behavior of their grandchildren. Psalm 145:4 says that we are to share God's works with the younger generation. Grandparent, have you introduced your grandchild to the One who saves and transforms lives? I constantly hear grandparents complain they are overburdened with caring for their grandchildren and others complain they hardly see them. Too much time, too little time - the real question is, "How are you spending your time with them?" Are you sharing stories of the amazing works God has done in your life? Proverbs 13:22 says, ***"A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children."*** Have you spent half the time making sure they

receive an eternal inheritance through Jesus Christ as you have on their temporal (material) inheritance?

One more thought: My parents and grandparents were (are) very good at telling stories of their youth. They love telling stories about how hard they had it or how they "went without." I do not remember them sharing who got them through it. My parents and grandparents did not have a personal relationship with Jesus to depend upon and to share with other generations. I do. I am determined to make sure Leah Kate knows the Savior Grammy serves. Honestly, this intimidates me. I have never seen it done. However, God is faithful to equip me (Ephesians 4:12).

I intend to pray and then: "Just Do It!"

CRAZY CAT LADY

HOME, DEVOTION 6

Sierra Combs

Psalm 24:1 (NLT) tells us, ***"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."*** In this series, we have been studying God's order of authority. We know that at the very top of that authority umbrella is God Himself. He is the creator of everything and lines up all authority down the chain. There are many different authorities the Lord has given to people, and I was asked to handle the topic of animals in this devotion.

If you know of me and my "situation" you probably are not surprised that this topic was given to me. There is a chance that it was randomly assigned to me, which would be comical. In my current state of life, most people (especially those who follow me on Instagram) would call me a "crazy cat lady." I am not exactly sure when and why I turned into a crazy cat lady, but the term is accurate. While I only have two cats who live inside my house, we recently moved to some property that was slightly overrun by partially wild cats. I say partially wild because while they are feral, they had come to expect somewhat regular meals fed to them by the previous owners. We moved in shortly before winter, and the cat situation was getting out of control. There were at least twelve adult cats, several teen cats, a few grade school age, and 3 brand new little babies. I have always loved cats so this was both a dream and a nightmare.

At first, I tried just not feeding them, figuring they would eventually get the hint and leave my back deck for the forests full of mice. I would make it a few days and then just feel really bad for them so I would sneak some of our indoor cat food and put it outside when my husband was not looking. Funny thing is that he was doing the

same thing. Do not ever let him tell you that he does not like cats because he babies them just as much as me. While several of the kittens did not make it through the winter, when spring rolled around I found myself the owner of ten outdoor cats, all of whom now have names, all of whom are now fat from being fed three square meals a day, some of whom I may actually like more than my two indoor cats. When I say crazy cat lady I am not just using an expression. I fully admit that I have become crazy. I once actually made bowls of chicken soup for them because it was cold and damp outside and I just love them so much. Turns out my favorite cat, Alice, is currently pregnant and I am once again reminded of the dream/nightmare situation I am experiencing. By the time this book goes to print, I will likely have 135 cats on my back deck and will have to get another job just to feed them.

Craziness aside, God created animals and put them under human authority. Genesis 1:26 (NLT) tells us that after God created the animals, He created Adam and gave him dominion over them, ***"Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.'"*** Genesis 2:19-20 goes on to tell us that ***"out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field."*** I give a lot of credit to Adam for creativity. Naming ten cats (plus three possums and the occasional stray visitor) is challenging enough, I cannot imagine being responsible for naming every type of creature!

The man was given the task to be the steward of the Earth, bringing all the other created creatures and elements into the service of God. Things changed a bit once sin entered the world. After the Flood, mankind was once again given authority over the animals, and God even widened their usual plant-filled diet and gave them permission to eat the animals as food. It was then that the human/animal relationship shifted and animals started to fear humans. Even though God changed the way we interact with animals, we are still responsible for treating them humanely.

One day, after the Lord returns, things will once again look like they did originally in the Garden. ***"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them"*** (Isaiah 11:6). Until then, we get the honor and blessing of being caretakers to His creation. As for me, that includes all of my crazy cats.

LESSON FOUR

Church

PASTOR PAT ROWLAND



There are many ideas of what the church or a church is or should be.

1. In your opinion, how would you describe the church?

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To understand the role and authority of the church in our lives we need first to go back to the beginning of the church. In Matthew 16:13-18, Jesus is speaking to His disciples when the word “church” is introduced for the first time, ***“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’”***

The disciples had no context for the word “church," but Jesus was clear that at that moment with Peter’s words Jesus would build this new thing called a church.

2. What was Jesus referring to as the “rock” of the church?

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St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City has placed the bones of Peter in a tomb beneath the church, believing it is Peter by which the church is

built. Though he played a significant role, the church has been built upon a principle, not a person. It is the Gospel, that was proclaimed by Peter through the work of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter two that established the church. The Bible says that when the people heard the message, ***"they were cut to the heart"*** (verse 37). Those who accepted the message were about 3,000. In one day, God established the church.

Acts 2:42-47 says, ***"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."***

3. What was the focus of the early church?

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4. What role did the apostles play in leading the early church?

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The apostles were chosen, prepared, and called by Jesus to be Gospel carriers taking the message to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). They became the first

church planters, traveling throughout the world sharing the Gospel and starting churches in city after city. The pattern was for them to preach the Gospel and to disciple these early converts before moving on to a new city. These churches were in need of leadership in their absence, so they appointed elders. Acts 14:23, ***"And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed."***

5. What qualities do you believe are required of an elder in the church?

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6. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7. How does this list compare to yours?

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The role of an elder is a tremendous responsibility, which is why choosing one requires prayer, fasting, and guidance from the Holy Spirit. An elder is not just a person that has been around for a long time, but one who is of high character, high regard, and spiritual maturity. He is involved in leading the church and serving on behalf of Christ who is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18).

Peter describes elders as shepherds of the flock in 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: 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; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

7. There are multiple passages in Scripture that point to the church being a flock and Jesus being the shepherd of the flock. What are some of those passages?

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The primary responsibility of a shepherd is feeding, or in this case, teaching. Every elder must be able to teach the Word of God, and when they do so it is with the very authority of Christ.

8. How do you view a message in a worship gathering, as the words of a man or the words of God?

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As a preacher of the Gospel, elders have an anointing by God sharing a message with God's people as the words of God. An elder is to humbly seek to speak the words of God, not words of their own, much less the words that people may want to hear. An elder is accountable to God and will give an account.

Hebrews 13:17 says, ***"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account."***

James 3:1 adds, ***"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness."***

A measure of a preacher-elder is that of humility in their life and speech, yet a willingness to proclaim with boldness the convicting words of the Gospel. In a culture where people like to hold to their own version of the truth and desire a feel-good message, an elder must remain faithful to the message.

The second responsibility of a shepherd is protecting the flock from "wolves." Acts 20:28–30 says, ***"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them."***

9. What are the "wolves" in today's church? How do you see elders protecting the "flock"?

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In both duties, it must be remembered that the flock belongs to God, not to the pastor. God entrusts some of His flock to the pastor and elders of a church to lead, care for, and feed.

10. As members of the flock, how are we to respond to elders?

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In 1 Peter 5:5-6, we read, ***"Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace***

to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you."

As a follower of Christ, we have all submitted ourselves to the ultimate authority of Christ. A regular attendee of any church has submitted to the leadership of that church. Submission is an attitude of spiritual maturity and the process we all go through in seeking to be more like Christ.

The elders are the pastors, the spiritual leaders of the church, and they are concerned for the deep needs of their people, not simply for what lies on the surface. The greatest way to support the elders is to pray for them and to trust them. Please close out this time praying for the elders of The River Church.

ELDERS

CHURCH, DEVOTION 1

Mark O'Connor

There was a time in my life I did not love authority. When we are young or immature, we do not want anybody telling us what to do or how to live. Come to think of it, I still do not all the time. That being said, I am thankful that the Lord showed me the need for such authority.

One of the things I am forever teaching my students is the importance of learning not only from their experiences but the experiences of others. History gives us a clear picture of what leadership and what role our elders play in the church in both good and bad ways.

The Lord has placed the leaders and elders of the church in their roles for very specific reasons. Like much of God's plan, I wish I could figure out exactly why and what that meant for me, but then I guess it would not be much to do with having faith.

When I learned to trust that those who are placed in authority over me were there for a reason, whether I liked it or not, things started to become a little clearer for me. Falling into submission and recognizing that we all have a part to play in this big thing God has laid out brought peace.

The book of 1 Timothy starts off by telling us that those who are leaders in the church aspire to a noble task. Not all of us are in, or will ever be in, that place. What we are called to do is trust that the Lord has led us to a place where the leaders in the church are constantly seeking God's wisdom and guidance the same way that we are called to do in our own lives.
If you find that place where God is moving, the church is moving

in the same direction, and the leaders are seeking and trusting the Lord, put down those roots and buckle up as you are in for quite a ride because you will begin to see God move in some pretty incredible ways.

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:1-3

MOTIVES MAKE THE MAN (OR WOMAN)

CHURCH, DEVOTION 2

Pastor Roy Townsend

Ever hear the saying, "Motives make the man?" That is the impulse behind your actions that ultimately determine if it was honorable or not. Even in our legal system, the intent of a person to harm someone brings about more severe punishment. However, even when something good happens, the motive behind it should be honorable.

When I was working with students in a school setting, I had someone take another student's backpack with all their books and devices. When I had eventually tracked it down, I had camera footage of the student taking her bag. He left the building and put the bag in the trunk of his car. So, I called the student into my office and when he arrived, I noticed he had an identical backpack. I went from believing that he stole the backpack to realizing that he may have taken the wrong backpack. I showed him the footage of him putting the backpack into his trunk. We went out to his car trunk, and there the other backpack was sitting with all the books and devices. So the question was, "Did he steal the backpack?" I did not think so. It was unfortunate, but I did not believe his motive or intent was to steal the backpack.

Romans 12:17 reads, ***"Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all."*** Further, 2 Corinthians 8:21 states, ***"For we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man."*** These verses are a perfect challenge in today's world, and apparently, they were pretty important words when the Bible was written. Remember, the "motives make the man or woman." We have been instructed by God to do what is honorable from every perspective. This can be hard. I have

worked with a lot of families that really only want obedience from their children, but I would challenge parents that you want obedience with the right motives. We as parents want children to do the right things for the right reasons.

God wants the same from His children. He does not just want us to follow the rules, but He wants us to love Him in a way that we want to follow the rules. Our motives are important to accomplishing this goal. In 1 Peter 2:12, we read, ***"Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."*** Doing the right things with the right motives will allow the world to see God through our actions. We need to remember, the world is looking for us to do the right thing for the right reasons!

HUMBLE LEADERSHIP

CHURCH, DEVOTION 3

Patrick Bicknell

One of the things that breaks my heart the most is hearing stories about individuals who have gone through some sort of church hurt, specifically from a pastor or leader in the church. Far too often, I see videos that come up on social media where people are talking about the hurt they have been through and how they have deconstructed their faith. Deconstruction is something that is beginning to happen more and more, and essentially, deconstruction can be described as rethinking one's belief and faith and rejecting previously held beliefs. Church hurt from leaders is oftentimes what causes people to deconstruct their faith. I have heard story after story of people who experienced a pastor who was manipulative, narcissistic, egotistical, prideful, or any other form of abusive behavior, and what it caused in the person who experienced this hurt was an apprehension towards Christianity as a whole. They began to reject Christ and reject the faith they once held.

This is not a devotion on deconstruction, but rather, it is a devotion discussing the lane of authority the church has as described in the Bible. My hope with this is that we can have a proper understanding of how the church is to conduct herself and that we can help minimize the amount of people who experience church hurt.

In the book of 1 Peter, chapter 5, the Apostle Peter explains the roles of shepherds, which talks about pastors and how they are supposed to lead. Peter specifically charges the shepherds in verses 2-3, saying, ***"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; not domineering over the those in your charge, but being examples of the flock."***

He then finishes this section but exhorts everyone to be humble by saying in verse 5, ***"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"*** Peter makes it clear how the pastors are to exercise their authority. They are to be those who seek to lead the flock of God, not dominate them. They are to be those who care for the flock of God, not hurt them. The church has a specific lane of authority, and it is not to be the ruler of the lives of the congregation but rather in humility, guiding and leading the flock of God in lives of holiness and obedience to the Lord.

I think 1 Peter 5:5 gives us the guideline for how to spot a church, pastor, or leader who is getting out of their lane of authority. Humility is the key. When a church begins to leave their lane of authority, they have already left behind humility and have embraced the plague that is pride. We need to be on the lookout for this and help those who lead us if we begin to see them stray into prideful, domineering leadership.

EXAMPLE

CHURCH, DEVOTION 4

Pastor Randy T. Johnson

Albert Schweitzer said, "The three most important ways to lead people are: by example, by example, and by example." As we talk about church leadership, we know that setting the example is paramount. Jesus even said this after He washed the disciples' feet. In John 13:14, Jesus said, ***"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."*** Jesus, the ultimate leader, lived a life worth copying.

Paul wanted to be a role model. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, he said, ***"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."*** I used to think he was saying that he wanted people to imitate him in the areas where he was doing things right and imitating Christ. Yet, he did not want people to imitate when he was missing the mark. However, there are other passages where he confidently says, "Follow my lead. Do as I say, and as I do."

"I urge you, then, be imitators of me." 1 Corinthians 4:16

"Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."
Philippians 3:17

"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit." 1 Thessalonians 1:6

"For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you." 2 Thessalonians 3:7

"It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate." 2 Thessalonians 3:9

We need to live lives worth imitating. We are called to "be holy." God expects us to live a life of thankfulness due to the gift of salvation. Be real.

"A good example is far better
than a good precept."
Dwight L. Moody

WHO'S IN CHARGE?!

CHURCH, DEVOTION 5

Holly Boston

Our youngest, Carter, has autism. Every year as a student, we attended an IEP to discuss his progress and establish goals for the school year. When he was 13 years old, the conversation started with the typical questions: age, date, address, teachers' names, and the name of our president. Carter responded with a resounding, "Barack Obama." As we celebrated his correct response, he continued, "But my dad says." Having no idea what he was going to say next, we quickly interrupted him and segued into a different topic. Later, Greg and I would discuss the importance of voicing our opinions out of his earshot.

From the time we are born, we experience different types of leadership - a parent, a teacher, and a supervisor. Also, if you have a saving relationship with Christ, you are under the leadership of Jesus. At some time or another, most if not all of us, have asked the question, "Who put him (her) in charge?" We have all questioned the decisions mandates of our leaders at some point. I will never forget when God had me read Ephesians 5:22, ***"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord."*** No conditions were given. It is just a straight-up command. What? I hope I am not alone when I admit that sometimes I question even His leadership.

Whenever you are struggling with understanding and following God, there are stories in the Bible that will remind you that you are in good company. Read the book of Habakkuk. It is a quick three chapters. Habakkuk was God's chosen prophet to Judah. During that time, Habakkuk was grieved by the spiritual decay surrounding him in spite of his prayers and his commissioned message to the people.

When he sees the invasion of Judah by Babylon, the most wicked nation of the day, and God's people being carried into captivity, he is confused and begins a question. Habakkuk 1:3 says, ***"Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong?"***

Have you wondered the same thing, "Has God taken His eye off the ball?" Have you ever believed the lie that evil is winning? Have you ever questioned who He "allows" to win elections, who He elevates at your workplace, who He gives a teaching certificate, or who He gives children? Then the big question, "Is God really in control or has He turned a blind eye?" God answers Habakkuk and He answers you. Habakkuk 1:5 says, ***"Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told."***

Habakkuk needed to be reminded that God is fully in control, God's thoughts and His ways do not often make sense, and He can use anyone or anything to bring about His purposes. Believer, we are in need of the same reminders.

Psalm 11:4 says, ***"The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man."*** No matter who is in charge on Earth, they answer to the God of Heaven.

Isaiah 55:8 adds, ***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord."*** God's eternal decisions often are a mystery.

Paul adds in 1 Corinthians 1:27, ***"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong."***

God can use anyone. Do you remember Judas?

So once we wrap our mind around the truth that God does not just allow people to take positions but actually places them in authority (Romans 13:1), how are we expected to respond? I would consider myself to be a rule follower. I am obedient in my actions (mostly). My husband and I obey the laws of the land, comply with the expectations of our supervisors, and treat our parents with respect (mostly). However, Carter's response that day revealed our rebellious hearts. We were teaching him disrespect with our careless words. Believer, we must remember that all authority, good and bad, comes from God (Romans 13:1) and they are sent for our good (Romans 13:4). To rebel publicly or privately is the equivalent to rebelling against God. We are called to live a godly life and according to 1 Timothy 2:1, this includes praying for our leaders. Believer, our leaders do not need our critical, condemning words but our humble request that God would provide them with wisdom, leading, and protection.

Suggested Scripture to pray are Ephesians 1:17-18 and Colossians 1:9.

Let us pray!

WATCHING FOR SOULS

CHURCH, DEVOTION 6

Pastor Ben Kirkman

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."
Hebrews 13:17

Looking back over my past, I am so thankful for the different pastors that God brought into my life that took Hebrews 13:17 to heart. They understood that they had a God-given responsibility to "watch for my soul," and they took the charge very seriously. Every one of them was different in personality yet they all had two very important traits - they loved me and they wanted me to know and love the Lord.

One of those pastors, my youth pastor, had an incredible impact on me for which I am eternally grateful. He invested in me more than was required of him (He took me on his family vacation - that is just crazy!). He lived out the messages he preached. He loved the Lord, he loved people, he was as genuine as they come. He modeled to me what it meant to love and to serve. I can look back and see God using this man's faithfulness to work in my life and play a huge role in my having a desire to serve the Lord with my life. I specifically remember it was on a mission's trip to Canada with him where I surrendered my life to the Lord to be whatever He wanted me to be. Fast forward some twenty years and that pastor is still faithfully, lovingly, pastoring people.

Who has God used in your life to encourage you along the way as you follow Him? Are you willing to let someone help and encourage

you in your walk with the Lord? God did not design us to navigate this crazy life on our own.

I encourage you to reach out. There is a pastor who would love to encourage you along the way as you follow Christ. Find a pastor that loves the Lord, is faithful to the Word of God, is willing to love and serve people, and lives out the messages he preaches. Understand he is not perfect and will make mistakes. Let him help you as you follow the Lord. You will be an incredible encouragement to him, as he will be to you.

As I write this, I have been reflecting over the last 15 years of ministry that the Lord has given to me - stories of people that I have tried to encourage to follow the Lord but they sadly rejected Him and went their own way, as well as people who were willing to let me encourage them to follow the Lord and are still faithfully following Him today. It brings great joy to look back at those who faithfully follow and a terrible sadness to remember those who rejected. Come alongside a pastor, let them encourage you, and as you faithfully follow the Lord you will also be an incredible encouragement to him.

OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "we don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord's Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher it's bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***"all things in common."*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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