

The Lord and the Elders

Introduction

This book is the result of a partnership between two men who have been graced by God to learn firsthand both biblical and experiential truth in the arena of the leadership and functioning of a local church. Both men are former businessmen who have been called to become pastors. One is older with three grown and married children. The other is younger with five children still at home. Both have wives who know the Scriptures and minister to many.

We would like to acknowledge our great debt to the leaders who have set the example before us: Ray Stedman, Ed Stirm Sr., Bob Smith, Dave Roper, Charlie Luce, Bob Roe, and the elders of Peninsula Bible Church and Valley Bible Church. These godly men led the way by word and by deed. We are truly grateful for both. We also want to thank our wives who have shared our journey and never failed to encourage and support us.

Our reason for writing this book is that we believe the Lord of His church has asked us to do so. It is our prayer that God will open the minds of each reader to hear and understand His truth. Toward this end we hope the pages of this book will act as stepping stones.

Your brothers in Christ,

Dorman Followwill, the younger
Paul Winslow, the older

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Two: Organization

The time is the fall of 1970. The place is a hallway connecting offices at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, CA. I was in that hallway on a Wednesday morning because of a management consulting assignment my company had accepted a short time before from PBC. This assignment came about as a result of some dramatic changes that were occurring within this modestly sized church located in the suburbs of a great university town. Hundreds of people were flocking to the services. Clearly something was happening, but no one quite knew what it was or what to do about it. Certainly the Spirit of God was moving among the hippie culture usually associated with San Francisco's Haight Ashbury district. These people were coming hungry to hear the Word of God and to learn about Jesus. In addition there were many middle-aged engineers and their families—people from all parts of the country, who were just beginning to move into the world of Silicon Valley and were looking for a church home.

The start of this influx was the New Year's Eve service at the beginning of that year. The place was packed with close to one thousand people. When the moderator invited new believers in the crowd to share their testimony, the Spirit of God took over and ran the proceedings for close to four hours. That was the beginning of Body Life services at PBC and for the next four years, every Sunday evening was jammed with people sharing the new life of Christ within them.

The change to PBC was somewhat overwhelming. The congregation went from some 600 people to over 3,000 in the span of six months. Conservative churchgoers found themselves sitting side-by-side with barefoot people wearing muumuu dresses. Many learned openness in sharing their life with others. Others learned to be hospitable. Most learned how to bear one another's burdens. And all learned biblical truth as is was taught expositively by Ray Stedman, Dave Roper, and other gifted teachers.

With such explosive growth, PBC desperately needed help with financial accounting, with organizing a separate corporation to handle training and publishing functions, building an addition for youth and adult ministries, and with many other issues which had not been troublesome when they were much smaller. Since it was my task to help them in these areas and eventually to make proposals to the board of elders, I was meeting that morning with one of the

secretaries to get additional financial information. As I entered the hallway I heard voices coming from behind an office door which was slightly ajar at the end of the hallway. It soon became clear to me that the men in that office were studying the Scriptures together. I listened for a while and several things struck me forcibly:

Although I recognized the voices of Ray Stedman and Dave Roper (the main teaching pastors), there didn't seem to be anyone acting as the "expert." Everyone seemed to be entering the discussion at the same level.

These men were very honest and open about their study of the Scriptures. There was an absence of theological dogma and Christian cliches. They rarely cited theologians or well-known commentaries—they simply let God's Word speak for itself.

These men were intensely practical in applying the Word to their own lives. There was a transparency about them as they acknowledged what God was saying through His Word to them personally.

Finally, there was a depth of reasoning and study that I had never heard before. Gone were the shallow observations I was familiar with from past men's bible studies. Instead I quickly observed that these men were very serious about understanding the Scriptures.

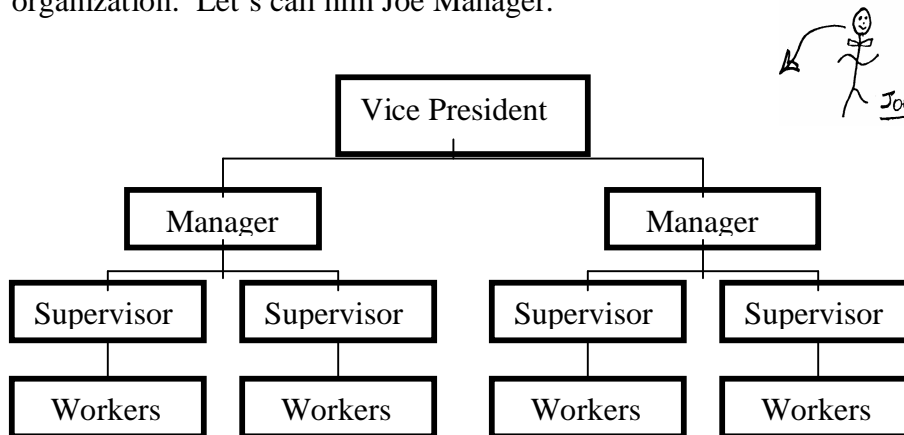
After some time, I knocked on the door and stuck my head into the room. "May I sit in for the rest of this?" I asked. "I promise not to say a word." "Of course," Stedman said, (it was his office.)

For the next nine months I never missed a Wednesday morning study. I even changed my travel plans because I realized this study was like pure gold to an out-of-work prospector. Simply put, *it changed my life*. And it was not just studying the Scriptures with these men that so powerfully affected me, but it was also watching how they related to each other and carried out their ministries.

Don't get me wrong: it wasn't that I was unacquainted with the Scriptures. I gave my heart to the Lord when I was six years old; I grew up in a conservative church denomination where my parents were missionaries and denominational leaders; and I learned early that I had some facility for teaching the Scripture. So what was so different about these guys? It wasn't just the way they studied the Word; it was how they acted toward each other. There wasn't a senior pastor in charge of everything. They seemed to act more like brothers than members of an organization do. I remember being quite puzzled during my ten month consulting assignment. After all,

I was a management consultant and supposed to know how organizations worked; besides, I had rattled around Christendom for quite a while. Gradually the Lord helped me understand.

My process began by thinking about how organizations usually work. Since I was quite familiar with the business model, I began there. Below is a simple organizational chart with a stick figure representing a leader in that organization. Let's call him Joe Manager.



There are several things true about Joe:

Joe's occupation identity is directly attached to his organization. The organization's goals are Joe's goals. The organization moves him around for their best interests.

Joe is placed in a vertical relationship. He reports to the vice-president above him, and he has several supervisors working below him. This means Joe is in a position of line responsibility.

What else can be said about Joe in this organization?

Joe's job is defined by the organization as being the boss (manager).

Joe qualified for this position by competing and achieving.

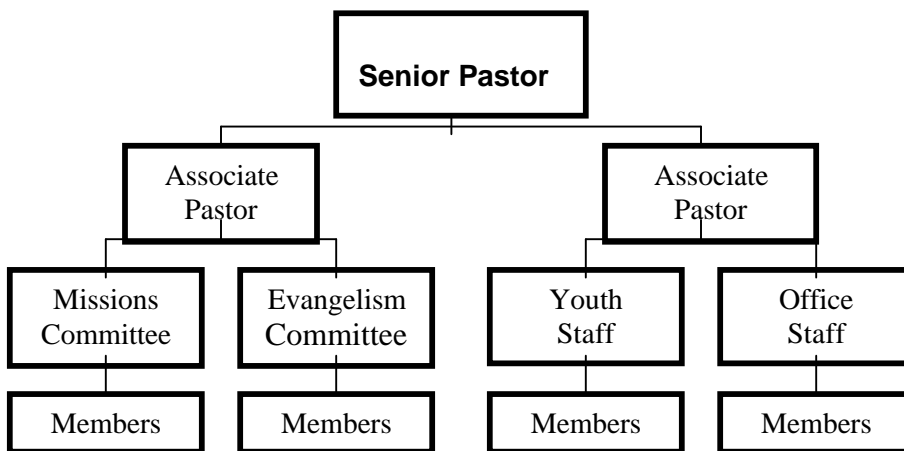
Joe's responsibility (job description) is set by the organization. Joe's authority comes with the position.

Joe's evaluation is on a quantitative basis.

The foregoing sounds right, doesn't it? The reason is all of us have grown up from childhood learning how to fit in with a variety of organizations—schools, work at McDonalds, athletic teams, occupational jobs—which all functioned this way. We feel quite

comfortable with this arrangement because we all know that authority doesn't come without responsibility and vice versa. Additionally, job descriptions and evaluations are quantitatively oriented. This all means we are somewhat protected from arbitrary evaluation: since we are not easily attacked personally, our superiors have to show we didn't carry out our responsibility before they can fire us.

The foregoing description is not very dissimilar to the responsibility and authority structure of many Christian organizations. If we simply change the names in the boxes we can have a typical church organization.



We can make exactly the same statements about the people in the Christian organization that we did about Joe in the secular organization.

The senior pastor is defined by the church as the one in charge and the associate pastors have specific areas of responsibility under him.

All pastors qualify for their jobs by obtaining higher education, and competing with fellow seminary graduates.

All pastors, committees, and staff have job descriptions set by the organization of the church.

Each pastor's authority is derived from the position.

Each pastor's evaluation has significant quantitative criteria. (Notice, since the first four things are true, the evaluation must necessarily be *quantitative*.)

A pastor friend once told me that he had recently been evaluated in his church. He said, "It was really interesting; they set five-year goals for me." When I asked him what kinds of goals were given, he responded, "I was told that in five years I had to have three hundred more young people in my ministry than I have now." "Do you think that's realistic?" I asked. "I guess it's possible if I really work hard," he replied. He went on to explain that they were going to keep track of his progress: indeed, he had to write a report every six months detailing how he was doing.

I didn't want to throw cold water on his parade but I couldn't help thinking, "I wonder what the Lord thinks of this program?" Suppose the Lord wants him to spend the bulk of his time during the next five years bringing the young people he has to maturity in Christ—in other words, to concentrate on quality not quantity. Did Jesus ever do that? It would appear that He did, since He spent so much time on just twelve men. In my experience, most churches and para-church organizations are like my friend's church. They are clearly committed to doing the Lord's work but, without being aware of it, they are functioning very much like secular organizations. But perhaps you say, "What's wrong with that?" Let's go to the Scripture and see what we can learn.

While looking at how Jesus developed His organization (the Kingdom), I discovered that the disciples thought along lines very similar to us regarding organizational structures:

And James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Him, saying to Him, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And they said to Him, "Grant that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left." (Mark 10:35-37)

The disciples knew from Jesus' teachings that a kingdom was coming. They also were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and king of this new kingdom. They were hoping this kingdom would be the long promised earthly kingdom the Old Testament prophets had predicted. Jesus had tried to dissuade them from their hope of an earthly kingdom, but they chose to ignore his statements in favor of their growing enthusiasm for the overthrow of the Roman oppressors and the establishment of a glorious Israeli kingdom with Jesus as the reigning king and messiah. Because they were thinking of a physical kingdom with a government administration functioning under the king, James and John got the idea that they had better ask the boss (Jesus) for a high position of responsibility and authority before the

rest of the disciples thought of it. Matthew records that they even got their mother involved in asking Jesus for important positions for them.

Can you guess how the other disciples felt about this request? In verse 41 we are told:

And hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.

Before we think too uncharitably about James and John, we must recognize that they were just acting as we might have within an organizational structure. That is, they were *competing* with their associates to be assigned to a higher position of authority than they presently had. They wanted vice-president on the right and vice-president on the left, and they surmised that this was as high as one could go. The other disciples thought the same thing and realized that they would be reporting to James and John. That's why they were indignant.

Jesus, at first, seems to go along with them. He questions them about their qualifications for the jobs they are seeking.

But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to Him, "We are able." (Mark 10:38)

Jesus is saying, "Gentlemen, there are some tough qualifications for these jobs." He uses two metaphors: the cup and baptism. He is referring to the cup of the experience that he will have to go through. (The Psalmists used that phrase many times in the Old Testament.) Baptism means to be submerged in something. From our perspective, we know that Jesus is talking about being submerged in the rejection, the hatred, the agony, and the death of the cross. He is asking them, "Are you able to participate in that? That is what the job calls for." They glibly reply, "You bet. We can do it." But Jesus goes on to say that the Kingdom organization is quite different from what they suppose. He gives two clues in verse 39:

And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

The first thing Jesus says is that leadership positions cannot be granted by either he or the organization. “I cannot grant you that position.” The second thing he says is that the position is prepared for the person, not the other way around. That’s quite a change from the organizations most of us are used to. “What do you mean; the boss, the Messiah, can’t give us vice-president positions in the kingdom? Furthermore, I’ve never heard of an organization tailoring positions to fit the person. What’s going on here?” Now obviously, I don’t know if the disciples really thought those things, but I know I would have, had I been there.

Thankfully, Jesus goes on to explain what He meant.

And calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. (Doesn't that sound exactly like our chart?) But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
(Mark 10:42 – 45)

Do you understand what Jesus is saying? *There is something about how the kingdom functions that is quite different from what you are used to. Most organizations require that authority and responsibility be exercised over others. But My kingdom doesn't work that way.*

There are at least four principles comparing the differences between how Jesus wants His kingdom to function with most of the organizations we know.

- 1. The line responsibility of the typical pyramid of authority is not acceptable for the kingdom. Applied to the church this means that associate pastors should not report to “senior” pastors. You may remember that on a different occasion Jesus said, “One is your master (meaning Jesus) and you are all brothers (all on the same level).”*
- 2. Greatness or leadership does not come from appointments given by the organization, but from servanthood. One has to learn to serve others. This fits in with what Jesus told James and John: “Any position in my kingdom is prepared for the person.”*

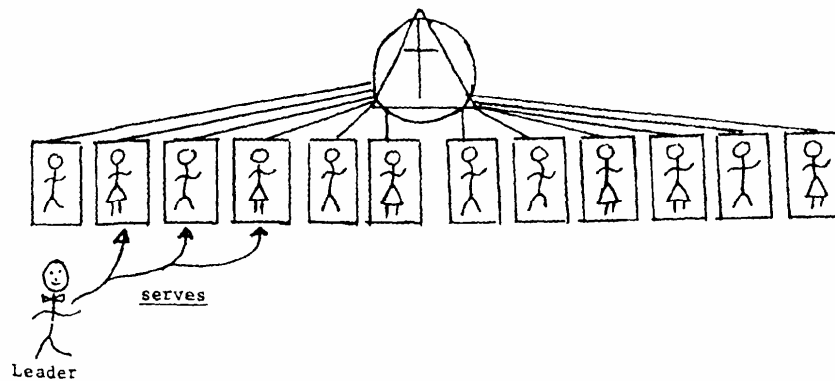
3. *The criterion (job description) for leadership in the kingdom requires being a bondservant.* A bondservant in Jesus' day was someone who chose to be a servant for life. Furthermore, it involves a willingness to be last instead of first.

4. *Jesus Christ, as a bondservant, is our leadership example.*

He gave up all His rights—everything He had, to serve others.

Therefore it seems that the church must be organized quite differently than most organizations. In other words, we should not take secular management and organizational principles and apply them to the church if we want to be serious about what Jesus says.

What can we do then? What follows is an attempt to picture what I see Jesus saying to His disciples:



Here we have what could be called a *horizontal* structure in contrast to a *pyramid* structure. Jesus is the head; everyone reporting directly to Him while being on the same level with each other. This eliminates line responsibility, thus fulfilling Jesus' command that **“all of you are brothers.”** No one is in authority over anyone else. This does not mean there are no leaders—there are. But these leaders are not “over” someone; they are not “lording it over others” because they have positions of responsibility. Rather, these leaders serve, from underneath as shown pictorially.

In this scenario what are specific characteristics of the leader?

The leader is *recognized* by the Body of Christ not by an organization. That is, ordinary people in the local church identify their own leaders on the basis of service. This is what happened in Acts 6:3 when the congregation put forward seven men to help provide for widows. These men were already

known to be full of the Holy Spirit and to be servants of the Body.

The leader is *qualified* on the basis of spiritual gifts and faith. There is no competition because the Holy Spirit assigns the particular leadership gifts “just as He wills” (1Corinthians 12:11), and people in the Body see these gifts being exercised by faith.

The leader’s area of *responsibility* is defined by the Lord as explained in 1 Corinthians 12:5. Thus the leader naturally moves to serve in a particular area of need.

The leader’s *authority* comes from the Body because the people who are being ministered to willingly choose to submit to the leader. The Spirit in the people authenticates the actual servant-leading of their leader. No title or position causes this response.

The leader’s *evaluation* is qualitative, not quantitative. Galations 5:22 lists the fruits of the Spirit. Notice that these all relate to who a person is, not what he does. Can quantitative criteria be placed on the fruit of the Spirit? No—these are clearly concerned with quality. This is why the numbers game does not work with leaders in the Kingdom. Nor should it work, because God might “assign” a faithful leader to a ministry where ten years of work produces one convert. Is this quantity acceptable by God’s standards? It can be. How can anyone of us guess what God is going to do when He is maturing men and women in Jesus Christ and building into them the qualities of the Holy Spirit? How can anyone put a quantitative value on that?

You may now be wondering, “How does leadership apply to elders?” How should they oversee the church?” Read on—the leadership characteristics described in this chapter will be applied to elders in the next.