

DEVELOPING LAY LEADERS

Introduction

In this session, our focus is going to be on the developing of lay leaders in your church. This is something that I've been increasing passionate about over the past few years and have sought to do at my church. In fact, two years ago the other elders and I developed a process for training lay leaders at our church. Then at the beginning of last year, we began implementing those plans.

So, what you've got in this talk is not just a theory of how to develop lay leaders. I'm also going to give examples of what we've done and what we learned since then. My goal is not to say everything there is to say about lay leaders, but I do want to give you the tools you need to develop a plan for training lay leaders. So, let's get started. We want to begin by understanding the biblical basis for lay leaders.

1. Understand the Biblical Basis for Lay Leaders

From the outset, a question we may have is 'Why even have lay leaders?' Now, given that you're actually in this session, I doubt you have that question! However, if a strong lay leadership is missing from your church context and you begin trying to raise up and train one, then you may get that question. So we want to briefly answer that question. And I would say in developing lay leaders, we are doing two things. First we are embracing the biblical commands.

1.1. Embrace the Biblical commands

Is there a biblical command for lay leaders? Well, they aren't called that, and but yes, I think there is. In Ephesians 4, Paul says there is one body of Christ, yet God works among and through his people individually as well as corporately.

He says, *"There is one body and one Spirit . . . But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.' ⁹(In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers"* (Eph 4:7-11).

Paul says that after Christ's descent to the earth in the Incarnation and death on the cross, he ascended back to the right hand of God in heaven after his resurrection from the dead. And part of that triumph of God meant Christ giving gifts to his people. Paul says that though there is one body, there different gifts. So what kind of grace-gifts did he give? Paul doesn't given an exhaustive list, but he says, *"[Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers."*

Here is the foundation upon which the church is built and the means by which is maintained. Notice the commonality: all of these people are involved in word ministry. They are all gifted to share the Word of Christ in different ways. And then, notice why God gave these gifts: *“he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”* (Eph 4:8, 11-12).

These men are to do two things: equip the saints for ministry and build up the body of Christ. Paul says the saints of God are those set apart in holiness for God’s purposes, and this means—in part—being involved in ministry. Thus, an essential component of the ministry of the church’s leaders is to train up everyone else to do ministry alongside them.

This doesn’t mean that the ministry the people do will be the same. But that the goal is same: building up the body of Christ. This is the clear basis of what we are calling “lay ministry.” That is, the ministry of every day Christians that God desires in order to build up his church. And within that context, there will be leaders. Meaning, there will be those lay people who have not only been gifted tremendously, but will have a desire to serve and will therefore take the lead in ministry. They will lead by setting the example in doing ministry themselves as well as by helping others become involved in ministry.

I think other many other New Testament texts show the calling of every Christians to ministry—like Acts 2:16-18; Romans 15:14; Ephesians 2:8-10; Colossians 4:2-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:24-25. But this is one of the clearest in showing that truth with the specific intention that the pastors will be training them to do the ministry God desires them to do. And, from the apostle Paul, we have an example of what this looks like in practice.

1.2. Examine the Biblical examples

This is something of the practical side of things. What biblical examples do we have of lay ministry? In Colossians 4, Paul talks about *“my fellow workers for the kingdom of God”* (4:11) and he names off all of these people who are working with him in ministry—Tychicus, a *“beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord”* (4:7).

There is also Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, and Luke. None of them apostles, yet all of the serving alongside Paul. The reality is that not everyone can be at the center or the forefront of ministry but everyone can have a part in ministry. Paul was the one at the center of things here. He was the apostle, he was the one with the unique calling. But what did he do? He gathered around himself a band of brothers. Paul put together his ministry cohort; his gospel posse.

These people were a group of gospel workers that he drew alongside him and taught them what gospel work looked like. These people became *fellow workers*—some staying with Paul, others being spun out into their own ministry, being left behind to take up on-going work as Paul forged ahead where the gospel was not yet known.

We see this beyond Colossians 4. In Romans 16, Prisca and Aquila are described as his *“fellow workers in Christ Jesus,”* Urbanus is called a *“fellow worker in Christ”* and Timothy is *“fellow worker.”*

In 1 Thessalonians, Timothy is also called *“our brother and God’s co-worker in the gospel of Christ”* (1 Thess 3:2). And in Philippians, Epaphroditus is a *“brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier”* (Phil 2:25). In the same book, Paul wants Euodia and Syntyche to be restored in their relationship because these women *“have laboured side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life”* (Phil 4:2-3).

Perhaps my favorite example is Epaphras. He was a man travelling (probably on business) and heard Paul preaching the gospel in Ephesus. He believes and is baptized and is discipled by the apostle Paul. When he gets back to his hometown Colossae, he immediately begins sharing the gospel he heard and others are saved. The result? He starts a church. Epaphras wasn’t an apostle. He wasn’t a pastor or elder. He didn’t go to Bible college or seminary. He didn’t even have a few online credits. But when he got back home, he didn’t just sit around praying for God to send Paul or another apostle to his city to share the gospel. *He* shared the gospel.

All these people Paul mentions had different gifts, different backgrounds—some were Jews and others were Greeks; some were common laborers and one was a doctor. But all of them were working together for the sake of the kingdom of God. Why? Because Paul had invested in their lives, training them to minister alongside him.

In this picture of apostolic ministry, we have an example of how to implement the plan of God for everyday Christians to be involved in ministry. Pastors are to be training God’s people for God’s work. In practical terms, that also means training lay leaders who will not only be sharing in ministry, but helping to train others as well. The pastor can do a basic level of training through the regular ministry of preaching. But he doesn’t have the time to train every person in the church. Therefore, by training a group of lay leaders, he is not only multiplying and broadening the ministry, he is also establish a team of people who can help train others for ministry.

2. Design a Process for Training Lay Leaders

Okay. So, how do you do this? How do you go about actually training lay leaders? First, you have to think through the details the training you want to do. You have to design a process for training lay leaders. This involves three things.

2.1. Determine specific ministry

If you’re going to invest time and energy into training leaders, you need to begin by figuring out what you actually want them to do. How do you want them to lead? What kind of ministry do you want them to have?

There can be a kind of general training for church leaders, but you’re going to be more effective at your training and will be more happy with the leaders you produce if you first decide what kind of ministry you would like them to do. You might have some clear leadership positions: community group leaders and Bible study teachers. But you might also have a broader kind of ministry training. One of the things we wanted was people who could train others and set an example in what we call

“everyday ministry.” This is a simple, lifestyle ministry of prayerfully speaking God’s word to help move others toward maturity in Christ. This involves evangelism and encouragement—speaking to the lost and saved.

It could be anything from sharing Christ to people at work, to welcoming and keeping up with newcomers to the church to coming the church ready to share about something you read in the Bible with another Christian who might be struggling. There isn’t any official title or position to that kind of ministry. So, from the beginning, you need to sit down and think about the kind of gaps you want to shore up in the church’s ministry. But at the same time, you also need to think about the kind of people you want.

2.2. Determine suitable candidates

Here is an important point that we need to really get if your lay leaders are going to be successful. You can’t treat ministry like a math equation. You can’t simply plug and chug people into positions. You’ve got to have the right people serving in the right ways. That means building ministries around people rather than programs. This requires some work on your part. The best thing to do is sit down with a simple graph. Along the top, put down the basics stops along the Christians life: from first-time contact with the gospel, follow-up by church members, conversion, new believer discipling, maturing, to training in ministry.

Then along the side, list all of your church members and those regularly attending. Finally, start plotting where they are at. Are they a new Christian in need of someone coming alongside them, in a discipling relationship? Are they a person who has already gone through several training type events but aren’t involved in ministry? Are they a person who has no formal training from your church but are always seeking to serve?

Next, do the same kind of thing with all of your ministries. Do you have the kinds of ministries your church needs? Are you heavy in one area but weak in another? For example, if you only have two single-mothers at your church, you probably don’t need a specific ministry to single-mothers even if you have had that ministry for years. But if you have lots of new Christians and no kind of new believers class, that would be something to get going with. You get the idea.

Based on what you see on the graphs, you can begin thinking about what you have in terms of people and needs. Knowing where your people are already at and what kinds of needs you have will enable to think strategically about who to train for ministry and what kind of to train them for.

2.3. Determine a strategic plan

Training isn’t just going to happen. Nor is it going to work well to just try to cobble something together. You need to make a plan. In part, you need a plan because it will keep the trainer and those being trained accountable through the process. Life happens and it’s all too easy to cancel a session because something else comes up and if you do it once, it makes it easier to do it a second and third time.

If the expectations are laid out clearly at the beginning, then everyone knows what is coming and what it will take to get to the end. Secondly, determining a plan makes sure you don't get to the end and realize you left something out that was important to cover. When we were going through our process, one of the things that we wanted our leaders to be able to do was prepare and lead a discussion of a Bible passage. But it only dawned on me several weeks in that I was leading our opening Bible discussion myself each week. So, I had to adjust things and let them know that they would be given an assigned text to lead us through.

This would allow them to get feedback on how they could improve. So, as we think about this planning, I would say that it needs to include two big components, the second component being made up of three specific approaches.

2.3.1. Plan for life investment

Your plan should be *more* than a classroom environment. In other words, let them see you at work and get to know you. If the people you're training are young, bring them into your home and show them what a godly marriage looks like. Show them how Christians parent children. It doesn't matter how old they are, bring them over and show them how to be hospitable. Share your life with them. Don't view this as simple information transfer—as important as that is. Think about getting to know them on a personal level, even as you let them get to know you on a personal level. Think of yourself more as a mentor than a teacher. You're not less than a teacher, but more than that.

This gets at what Paul says about living a life that is worthy of imitation by others. Paul invited the Christians he served to not only listen to his teaching but to watch his life. It's actually pretty amazing when you think about it. Listen to what he says:

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

"though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church" (1 Cor 4:14-17).

"Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 10:32-11:1).

"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 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, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia" (1 Thess 1:4-7).

Paul himself seeks to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ. And in doing so, seeks to provide an example for the other Christians he's ministering to. Likewise, plan on teaching in such a way that you are actually investing your life into the people you're training. Plan to interact with them in such a way that they can see what you're teaching them in your own life and you are concerned for them just as you are the kind of ministry they can bring to the church.

I love the example provided by Marhsall and Payne in their book, *The Trellis and the Vine*:

Imagine a reasonably solid Christian said to you after church one Sunday morning, "Look, I'd like to get more involved here and make a contribution, but I just feel like there's nothing for me to do. I'm not on the 'inside'; I don't get asked to be on committees or lead Bible studies. What can I do?"

What would you immediately think or say? Would you start thinking of some event or program about to start that they could help with? Some job that needed doing? Some ministry that they could join or support? . . .

[Y]ou could pause, and reply to your friend, "See that guy sitting over there on his own? That's Julie's husband. He's on the fringe of things here; in fact, I'm not really sure whether he's crossed the line yet and become a Christian. How about I introduce you to him, and you arrange to have breakfast with him once a fortnight and read the Bible together? Or see that couple over there? They are both fairly recently converted, and really in need of encouragement and mentoring. Why don't you and your wife have them over, get to know them, and read and pray together once a month? And if you still have time, and want to contribute some more, start praying for the people in your street, and then invite them all to a barbeque at your place. That's the first step towards talking with them about the gospel, or inviting them along to something."

Of course, there's every chance that the person will then say, "But I don't know how to do those things! I'm not sure I'd know what to say or where to start." To which you reply, "Oh that's okay. Let's start meeting together, and I can train you."

I love that. Imagine how much different ministry leaders would serve if that was the kind of training they received.

Plan for life investment *and* plan for life transformation.

2.3.2. Plan for life transformation

What do I mean by life transformation? Here I'm getting at the fact that training a lay leader for ministry is simply part of the larger disciple-making process. This means addressing three areas of the person's life. These areas can be summarized in a memorable way by calling them the head, the heart, and the hand. Or, if you prefer, you can refer—as some authors do—to working on the person's conviction, character, and content. Whatever you choose to call it, the point is that in your training, you are seeking to address the whole person.

So, first, you want to plan for the head.

2.3.2.1. Plan for the head

By the head, we are talking about *learning information*. Specifically, we mean teaching them biblical and theological convictions. The easiest way to do this is to assign some books or articles on different subjects of theology, have them read it and discuss it as part of your training. Now, this is one of those parts you may be tempted to drop from your plan. You may think that the people you're looking at for leadership are, in part, being looked at because they already have a good biblical grounding. They don't need more theological training. But the truth is, we never stop learning. We never exhaust the depths of the Bible's teaching. Even the most mature and learned of our people grew through this part of their training.

I'm guessing the other big reason for thinking you may not do this—maybe even the biggest reason—is that it doesn't have anything to do with training them for the tasks you want them to accomplish. But the reality is, our methodology always flows from our theology. How we engage in ministry is affected by how we understand God to be and what we believe his plan for the world to be.

Take evangelism, for example. Do you believe 2 Corinthians 4? *"And... if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"* (2 Cor 4:1-6).

If you believe that Paul says here—that Satan blinds the eyes of unbelievers, but when we preach the gospel, God opens blind eyes—that will affect how you do evangelism. It will cause you to pray more to the God who opens blind eyes. It will cause you trust in the power of the gospel. It will cause you to emphasize a word-based approach to evangelism rather than a deeds-based approach. It will cause you trust less in what you do and more in what God does.

Do you see? It doesn't mean you don't work hard or preach less or drop deeds altogether. It does mean that you keep the focus where it needs to be: prayerfully proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

What we believe affects how we minister. In fact, just before this, Paul shows his own application of this truth. He says, *"having this ministry [of the new covenant] by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ²But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God"* (2 Cor 4:1-2).

Paul says, even when the responses are not what we wanted, even when people are rejecting us and our message, we do not lose hope. Why? Because God is the one who saves. He is the one who opens blind eyes. We don't need to compromise the gospel by trying to manipulate people into a response or by hiding the difficult bits of our message. No, we put our confidence in God who opens blind eyes.

Ministry leadership on any level—from the most senior of pastors to the deacon's assistant to the children's Sunday School teacher—ministry leadership is an exercise in applied theology.

It's serving based on, and out of, what you know to be true of God from his Word. Therefore, we cannot leave out this part of our training plan. For us, that meant working through parts of Grudem's *Systematic Theology*. We read key sections ahead of time, then discussed it together. Even if you don't agree with everything in Grudem, it gives you a good starting point for thinking and discussing and learning.

2.3.2.2. Plan for the heart

Knowledge can puff up says Paul, and he had first experience of that as a Pharisee (1 Cor 8:1). But more broadly, it doesn't do any good to have people who know their Bibles and Christian doctrine but are ungodly, immature in their character. In training them for ministry, we want to be training them for godliness. Paul talks about this a lot in his letters. He tells Timothy to *"Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness"* (1 Tim 4:7). He mentions again in his second letter to Timothy: *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"* (2 Tim 3:16). When he writes to Titus, he makes it clear that being trained in righteous living is an intended, expected fruit of the gospel itself.

He says, *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹²training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works"* (Titus 2:11-14).

When you think about developing lay leaders as part of the larger goal of making disciples, this becomes an important part of the training process. When we did our first formal lay leader training, we met every other week for two hours. In addition to the short Bible studies we did at the beginning, we also ended our time with a discussion of a sermon we had all listened to. And in that discussion of the sermon, along with all of the other materials we had been reading, we aimed at applying the message to our lives and made a point of praying specifically for God to be at work in our lives. Those sermons were hand-picked to be ones that focused on virtues of godliness. For example, we listened to a series on the Beatitudes, then a series on humility, and more. Again, the point here—however you do it—is to have a plan for cultivating godliness in the people you are training for ministry leadership.

2.3.2.3. Plan for the hand

This is the final step in this training process. And it's no less important than the others. When we talk about the head, the heart, and the hand, the hand represents practical skills needed for the ministry. In other words, don't just work at building their theology and character (as important as those things are). You also need to give them the training they need to actually do the ministry you're grooming them for. This is the kind of nitty-gritty, sand between your toes on the beach, real-world kind of training.

When you see movies and commercials for the beach, everything looks wonderful and idyllic. But then you get there and you reality hits. It's glorious, but sand gets everywhere—on everything, in everything.

If you go with a family, there might be critters in the water or on the beach that scare your kids. You have to think about when things might be crowded and carrying coolers and towels and toys and life-vests, and if you want to set up some kind of shade. The same is true for ministry. You don't say to someone 'Hey, I want to train you to be on our hospital visitation team' and never explain the details. It's great to cultivate in them a sense of love for the church and the lost, confidence in the gospel, and a servants heart as they learn more about the cross and the reality of hell.

But you also need to give them some practical instructions. You need to tell them about shift change for the nurses and quiet hours, so they know when the best times to visit will be.

You need to give them cautions about bringing food because of potential diet restrictions and about bringing a couple bucks to maybe buy them a magazine or something else they may like from the gift shop.

Give them instructions on when it's appropriate to leave the room when the doctor comes in and when it's appropriate to sit. Tell them to take a Bible and what kinds of texts to read and how to pray for the person. Make sure you hit the practical details of the ministry. This is what the "hand" component is all about: training your people with skills and competencies they need to successfully carry out their ministry assignments.

3. Implement Lay Leaders in the Church's Ministry

This is the final stage of this development process. This is where, having training your ministry leaders, you actually send them into ministry. Here are some final, short bits of advice.

3.1. Prepare the church

For the most part, even if they don't need to know, people in your church want to know what's going. Sometimes, it's important not to share all the details of something. But if nothing else, you should tell them that you are in the process of training ministry leaders and the basic of how you're doing it—namely, that you are focusing on the head, heart, and hand.

This does two things. First, it gets people ready for new faces to make in the lead in certain ministries. When someone is announced as the new point person for your community groups, or shows up one Sunday as a new Sunday School teacher, people won't wonder why or what's going on. They will make the connection. Second, it will provide an opportunity for you to ask the congregation to join in the process by praying for those being trained. At the beginning you don't even need to share names. You can just say, 'We're about to bring a new emphasis of training for ministry and we want you to be praying for that process—for those training and for those being trained.'

Then give them a short, bullet point list of those three emphases and a couple of verses next to each one. Again, this make them feel like they are involved and you it's not going to hurt to have them praying for you! Finally, it has the effect of showing them that you are being intentional with ministry and taking the Bible seriously.

If you give them the basics of what you're doing and tie to passages like Ephesians 4 and the Pastoral epistles, you are actually teaching your whole congregation about the importance of ministry as well as being faithful to the patterns and examples we have in the Bible.

3.2. Provide intentional opportunities

The one thing you don't want to do is pour your life into someone over the course of a few months, or a maybe even a year (depending on what you want them to do) and then have them sit in the pew each week. You want this process to actually produce a lay-level ministry leader.

So, especially at the beginning, have a specific plan for implementing these leaders. Don't just pull the trigger on the starter pistol. Set up some lanes for them and coach them on how to jump the hurdles. Connect them to people and opportunities and get them going in ministry.

When we trained one group, we specifically wanted them to be people who could come alongside people who were immature and struggling and help them grow. We trained them to do this by discipling them through one-to-one prayer and Bible reading, loving them, and investing in their lives. After we were done, we began identifying people in the church who could benefit from that kind of relationship and help them set up those discipling relationships.

Conclusion

In my opinion, training lay people to do ministry is not only practically helpful for your church, it is also spiritual beneficial. You are making use of the gifts and resources God has given your church through his people. If you are a pastor, you can't do everything. Therefore, we should follow the example of the apostle Paul and train up for ourselves and our church a team of fellow workers to help you make disciples and advance God's kingdom.

RESOURCES FOR THE HEAD, HEART, AND HAND

HEAD: *Systematic Theology* (Grudem); *The God Who Is There* (Carson); *Doctrine* (Driscoll & Breshears); *18 Words* (Packer).

HEART: *Holiness by Grace* (Chapell); *The Fruitful Life* (Bridges); *The Hole In Our Holiness* (DeYoung); *When I Don't Desire God* (Piper).

HAND: *The Cross and Christian Ministry* (Carson); *The Trellis and the Vine* (Marshall & Payne); *Iron Sharpening Iron* (Sear); *How People Change* (Tripp & Lane); *Everyday Ministry* (Botkin).

*A good place to get started: *The Course of Your Life* (Payne)