

Leadership Transitions
Pastor Joe Oakley
GFC – 3/12/23

We've been preaching a series called Transitions for Growth. Last week I preached a message entitled Transitions for Church Growth. I talked about two major transitions we are making to facilitate church growth. First is a time change from 9 to 10. Grace Latino from 11:15 to 12:45.

Second, I started teaching on leadership transitions. I'm going deeper on that topic today. This is not the usual type of message we preach and you might think, "What does this have to do with me?" It has everything to do with you.

Last week I taught on the 5-fold ministry and how that impacts us as a church and you personally. We saw how God uses different tools to equip us. He uses the Word, the Holy Spirit, circumstances, other believers. One of His main tools is the 5-fold ministry. We get this from Ephesians 4:7-13

He has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. That is why the Scriptures say, "When he ascended to the heights, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to His people."

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

The 5 gifted ministers listed here are what is called the 5-fold Ministry. Their job is to prepare God's people for ministry – not to do all the ministry themselves. And they are to be in the church until we all come to unity and full maturity. The body of Christ is not there yet, so we still need the 5-fold ministry.

Ephesians goes on to give us the results of the 5-fold ministry. When these ministries are working in the church, you will:

Grow in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness

Become stable

Speak the truth in love

Build strong relationships and unity

You will find your ministry and be equipped to do your part.

Do you need these characteristics in your life! YES! And we are committed to help you that biblically that means we need the 5-fold ministry operating in our church.

By the way – people came up to me last week asking how to start finding their place in ministry. I told them that the place to start is to take a spiritual gifts test to identify your spiritual gifts. You can find that on our website at gfc.cc/serve or on our church app. The next step is to talk to our connection ministry about ministry opportunities. Also the serving opportunities are on our website and app. If you are not serving yet, those are your next steps.

As I explained last week, we have a vision to have our leadership structure based on the 5-fold ministry. It's been hard to figure out because we don't personally know of any churches that are structured that way. We've been studying, reading books and talking to other church leaders about this for several years.

By the way – I ran this by our apostolic elder Olen Griffing and he loves this idea very much. He said it reminded him of the way the church in Jerusalem functioned. I had thought the same thing.

Most churches today are structured in a traditional top/down model. We have that structure on paper to keep track of who reports to who.

But in our model of church structure, elders lead the church. In the New Testament, apostles started churches and then they turned those churches over to a group of leaders called elders. For instance, Acts 14:23 says:

Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church. With prayer and fasting, they committed the elders to the care of the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

Paul instructed other apostles to do the same thing. He told Titus in Titus 1:5-7

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every church, as I directed you. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless...

And Paul goes on to list qualifications for elders. I want you to notice that elders are those who oversee the church. And in the New Testament, elders are synonymous with pastors. For instance, 1 Peter 5:1-2 says:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.

In this passage – the same ministers have 3 different titles: Elder, Shepherd and Overseer. The word elder in the Greek is *presbyteron* – which literally means older. But in regard to church elders, they don't have to be senior citizens.

I became an elder at Shady Grove Church when I was in my early 30's. What the word elder implies is spiritual maturity.

Peter shows us that these elders have 2 main functions – to lead and feed. The word shepherd is the Greek word *poimaino* – which means to feed and tend a flock. Feeding and caring for the flock is a pastoral role.

By the way – I've heard people say that the word pastor is only mentioned in the Bible once. Their conclusion is that pastors must not be very important. But these people are showing their ignorance of biblical hermeneutics – which is the branch of theology that deals with principles of interpreting the Bible.

Yes, the word pastor is found only one time in the English Bible, but the Bible was not written in English! True Bible scholars and teachers know that you must discover which original Greek word was translated to English. Many times the same Greek word is translated into different English words in different passages.

So, if you look up the word pastor in the Strong's Concordance, here's what you will see: *poimen* (poy-mane'); a shepherd (literally or figuratively):

KJV - shepherd, pastor.

The part saying KJV shows the different ways the word *poimen* is translated in the King James Version.

If you then look up that word in the Englishman's Concordance it will show you every time that Greek word is used in the New Testament and how it is translated. You will see that this word *poimen* is used many times in the Bible and every time it is translated shepherd other than the one occurrence of pastor in Ephesians 4.

So – when someone tells you the word pastor is used only one time in the Bible, please inform them that the Greek word is normally translated shepherd and is found many times in the Bible. Pastor and shepherd are synonymous in the New Testament.

So, elders have the pastoral role of teaching and tending the sheep. The word overseer is the Greek word *episkopos* literally means oversight. Thayer's Greek Lexicon says it means: to look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, care for.

So elders are pastors or shepherds, who feed the flock, care for the flock, and oversee the flock. We see that again in 1 Timothy 5:17

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

So, in the New Testament, elders are pastors/shepherds who feed the flock and lead the church.

As I said last week, we believe that we need to reposition our elders to focus on big picture items like vision, mission budget and personnel – rather than

spending too much time on small details that bog down our ability to get things done in a timely manner.

Also – we felt the need to expand our leadership base so we can have input from more leaders in the church. Also – those of us who planted the church and are elders are getting older and we need to raise up new leaders for our future.

So, we are creating an apostolic team that will focus on accomplishing our vision. All other ministries fit into one of the other 5-fold roles – pastoral, teaching, prophetic, or evangelistic.

But – we feel we need to make some changes to it. We don't have this totally fleshed out yet – there are many details to be determined – but I want to share what we know.

We are creating an apostolic team composed of pastor level leaders. Listen closely – these people are not apostles. But they team will carry out an apostolic function in the church. They will focus on accomplishing the vision and mission of GFC that the Lord has given our elders.

Now, I know this creates some problems because we have different understandings of the word apostle. Some people believe that only the 12 that Jesus called (minus Judas, adding Mathias) are to be called apostles. But that's not biblical because the New Testament mentions many others who are called apostles.

For example, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 says:

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried and He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have died. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one born at the wrong time. Notice that He appeared to the 12 apostles first, but later He appeared to all the apostles. Who are all these apostles? Well, we read about them in Luke 10:1

The Lord now chose seventy other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all places He planned to visit.

The word sent is the word apostello in the Greek – meaning sent out. The word apostle means a sent out one. It refers to someone who is sent out as a representative and who has authority to make certain decisions and act on behalf of the sender.

In the Bible, that word apostle refers to the original 12, the group of 70, Matthias, Paul and 11 others including Barnabas, Silas and James. There are a total of 83 people in the New Testament who are called apostles. And the ministry of the apostle continues to this day.

Some people believe that apostles and prophets are no longer valid ministries in the church today. But Ephesians 4 says they are needed until we are in perfect unity and we become like Christ. In case you haven't noticed – we aren't there yet! So, all the 5-fold ministers are still needed today, including apostles!

In the Bible, there are different types of apostles. There are apostles who are missionaries like Paul. They take the Gospel to unreached people groups and plant churches. There are apostles like Peter who was called to minister to the existing people of God. Paul said in Galatians 2:7-8

God gave me the responsibility of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as He gave Peter the responsibility of preaching to the Jews. For the same God who worked through Peter as the apostle to the Jews also worked through me as the apostle to the Gentiles.

So, someone can be an apostle to one group or church, but not to others. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:1-2

Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

Some apostles in the Bible planted churches, some did not.

Some wrote books of the Bible, some did not.

Some were traveling missionaries, some ministered in one church.

Some apostles in the Bible are listed by name, but we are not told anything about what they did.

Some apostles were evangelists, some were pastors, some were teachers and some were prophets.

Apostles did not and do not all fit in the same mold. What is common to them is that they were called by God and sent out to accomplish a specific purpose.

Over the last few years, God has expanded our view of apostolic ministry. We believe in the original 12 and the 70 and all those listed as apostles in the Bible.

We believe there are those who are sent as apostles to the body of Christ today. Pastor Olen is one of those. He is an overseeing apostolic elder to us, to Gateway Church, and to many other churches, ministries and missionaries around the world.

We are not claiming to hold the office of apostle – but there are different expressions of apostolic ministry. There are local apostles who are only apostles to that church. Paul said in Philippians 2:25 – Young’s Literal Translation

And I thought it necessary to send unto you Epaphroditus — my brother, and fellow-workman, and fellow-soldier, and your apostle and servant to my need.

Epaphroditus was an apostle to the Philippian church, not to others.

Some apostles are sent out to plant a church in a particular area and they oversee the church as a spiritual parent. Pastor Deb and I have that role at Grace Fellowship. We are the senior pastors, but we also have an apostolic role as the founding pastors to be father and mother to this house.

There are also apostolic teams within local churches. The 6 people who started this church all had apostolic roles in the beginning. An apostolic team planted this church, but once the church was established, we all had different roles.

We are now sending out an apostolic team within our church to carry out the vision of the senior pastors and elders. The elders make high-level decisions about mission, vision, budget, policies and people. The elders are surrounded by an apostolic team that focuses on implementing the elder’s vision.

These people will not be called apostles. They are all on our pastoral level of ministry, but they will be called an apostolic team because they are sent out by the elders to accomplish a specific apostolic purpose.

In the Bible, apostles were mature disciples who were sent by the church to plant churches or start ministries. That’s a major function of our apostolic team – start ministries.

The elders are the keepers of the vision, DNA and culture of the church. The apostolic team will develop strategies to accomplish the mission and vision of the church.

They will oversee the day-to-day operations to ensure the vision and strategy are being carried out.

Together, the elders, apostolic team and 5-fold ministers will identify and equip leaders and start ministries within the church.

Elders have vision, but vision needs strategy – so Pastor Anthony Walker, our Associate Pastor, will lead the team because he is one of the most strategic thinkers we know.

Strategy needs to be carried out – so Mary Scarce, our Executive Pastor, will be on the team and oversee the day-to-day operations of our ministers and staff.

Once the apostolic team gets more established – we will begin to establish the other 5-fold teams.

We are so excited because we believe revival is beginning in America!
 We have been praying for revival for years!
 And we've had prophetic words about what God will do in our church.

When Dr. Bosman was here teaching us about establishing a culture of care - he gave a prophetic word during the service.

He said, "Pastor Joe and Deborah are incredible leaders and there are great things waiting for you. You are at a place to let go of some things because God wants to take you to places where you have never been. There are some positive things you are holding onto and their time has expired and you've got to get ahold of some different things for going forward. You've got to let go of these things because God is getting ready to take this church to heights that you have never even imagined or thought of. God is going to give you a vision for going forward that is nothing like where you have been. And to the church at large, there are some things you will have to let go of. Don't hold onto that for your security, your security is in Christ Jesus. Don't be afraid and don't be anxious for your redemption is drawing nigh."

That's an exciting word. I asked him if he had any specifics about what things I needed to give up, but he didn't give me any. So, we've been praying and seeking God and we believe this is part of what we need to do. This is exciting to me because Jesus said in Matthew 9:17

No one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved.

This message today is about new wineskins! New wine represents a fresh move of the Holy Spirit. Revival! Wineskins represent the structure that contains the new wine. I've you saw the movie Jesus Revolution you saw how the old wineskin – the old way of doing church – was not able to hold the new wine! New wine needs new wineskins! Which comes first – the new wineskin or the new wine? The wineskin!

So, the fact that God is leading us to a new wineskin means that new wine is on the way! Revival is on the way! A move of the Spirit is on the way!

We are already entering into it, but get ready because God is getting ready to pour it out in greater measure! Can you give Him some praise!