

REMEMBER YOUR LEADERS
Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
Autumn Ridge Church
November 24-25, 2018

No. 7: Remember
 Text: Hebrews 13:1-8

When I depart at the end of January there are certain truths I very much want you to remember. We have been working our way through this list and today we come to **REMEMBER YOUR LEADERS.**

Hebrews tells us: **"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."** (Hebrews 13:7)

Leadership is essential to any church that wants to be spiritually healthy and about God's business. But leadership is particularly important during a time of transition, such as Autumn Ridge is about to enter.

Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians who are facing a number of struggles. These include persecution outside the church and doctrinal differences inside the church. So the writer tells them to **"Remember your leaders."**

The reference is probably to leaders who are no longer with them. Perhaps they had died as a result of persecution or they had moved away.

Thankfully it is easier for us to remember our leaders because they are still with us, and by leaders I primarily mean the Pastors and Elders of our church. So let's dissect this text and see what the Holy Spirit has to say to us at Autumn Ridge. There is a message outline in your RidgeLines if you would like to follow along with me.

First we hear **A CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH.**

We are to "remember our leaders." Now we are not just to know their names. The context shows that we are to honor our leaders. And that's a challenge because many leaders don't have a very good reputation right now.

It's hard for us to respect some of our political leaders because of the way they are behaving. Business leaders aren't much better when we see how some have been guilty of ethical lapses.

At one time church leaders were respected but the clergy abuse scandal in the Catholic Church and the moral failure of a number of megachurch Protestant leaders have made it hard for congregations to trust their church leaders.

So who are the leaders we are to remember? It is those who “spoke the word of God” to us. So we are not to remember bad leaders but good leaders. This is a challenge to all leaders to live lives that are worth remembering.

We are in the process of selecting new Elders. These are voted on by the congregation at our annual church meeting in February. Perhaps you know of someone who could be a leader worth remembering. Please pass on their name to an Elder or Pastor.

As we do so let us reflect on the serious words the scriptures have to say to church leaders. Listen to Peter: **“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1-3)**

Notice an elder is to be an example worth remembering. We can see that to be an elder is a challenging calling. This is why James advises: **“Not many of you should become teachers, ... (teaching is the task of Elders and Pastors) because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” (James 3:1)**

But if the elders do a good job we need to acknowledge this. So Paul tells Timothy: **“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” (1 Timothy 5:17)**

Now here’s what you need to know about the leaders of your church. They direct the affairs of our fellowship well. The Pastors who will remain when I am gone are outstanding men and women. You want to hold on to them and keep them. They are gifted and godly individuals. I have been blessed to work with them and I will miss them greatly when I go. But I am glad that these pastors will be here to steer the church through this interim period.

The same goes for our Board of Elders. They are an exceptional group of men. They take their task seriously. They have busy professional lives but they give hours of their time gladly and unpaid to care for the flock of God here.

Our Elder Board meetings often go until 11:00pm at night. They are attended by all our Elders and Pastors and everyone is present who could be there. In addition, all our elders are on various committees that also meet each month.

Our Elders are available at a moment’s notice to go to the hospital or someone’s home to pray for a person or counsel them. On top of that, our elders participate in Life Groups, mission teams, and service projects.

They are not perfect, nor do they claim to be, but they are striving to fulfill the qualities of being a leader of this church. And we are greatly blessed to have people of this caliber.

Next we see from our text **AN OUTCOME TO CONSIDER.**

We are told to, **"Consider the outcome of their (the leaders') way of life."**

Here is a list of biblical qualifications to be an Elder or a Pastor. There are 22 of these drawn from the pastoral letters of Timothy and Titus. So a leader is to be:

- Self-controlled
- Hospitable
- Able to teach
- Not violent but gentle
- Not quarrelsome
- Not a lover of money
- Not a recent convert
- Have a good reputation with outsiders
- Not overbearing
- Not quick tempered
- Loves what is good
- Upright and holy
- Disciplined
- Above reproach or blameless
- Faithful to his wife
- Temperate
- Respectable
- Not given to drunkenness
- Manages his own family well
- Sees that his children obey him
- Does not pursue dishonest gain
- Holds to the truth

You can see that the standard for leadership is high. Now none of us have attained to all of these. But your Elders and Pastors aspire to them. So look at their marriage. Look at their home life. Look at their work life. **"Consider the outcome of their way of life." (Hebrews 13:7)**

In the previous chapter Hebrews reminded us that **"we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses." (Hebrews 12:1)** We all need examples of how the Christian faith should be lived and God places Elders and Pastors in the church so we have models before us of what it means to follow Christ.

I have had the joy of working with these men and women for many years. I have seen the outcome of their way of life. They have encouraged me in my own faith and I give thanks for each one of them.

That's not to say our leadership hasn't made mistakes. We have. We don't get everything right, but because of the quality of the men and women in leadership in

this church and because they seek God's wisdom there has been exceptional stability in our fellowship.

By God's grace we have avoided many of the divisions that have hurt other churches. Our leaders have not aligned us with any political party. We know we have Democrats, Republicans and Independents in our fellowship. We encourage you to vote and leave at that.

We have not taken a position on education choices. We rejoice that we have homeschoolers, public schoolers and private schoolers in our congregation. Our elders have said that is a parent matter and we support parental choice.

We have avoided arguments over which Bible translation is best. We encourage you to find a Bible translation that works for you and then read it faithfully. We have Calvinists and Arminians, charismatics and dispensationalists, egalitarians and complementarians, premillennialists and amillennialists all getting along together. It's not that these issues don't matter. They clearly do. And many of us cherish the position we hold.

But our leadership has chosen to focus on what we have in common. So we fix our eyes on Jesus and he said little to nothing about most of these issues. Our unity is the result of wise leadership by your Elders and Pastors.

Now what exactly is leadership? It has been said that leadership is the ability to hide your panic from others. I can identify well with that definition.

Stuart Briscoe tells the story of a young colleague officiating at a funeral of a war veteran. The dead man's military friends wanted to have a part in the service at the funeral home. So they requested that the pastor to lead them down to the casket, stand with them for a solemn moment of remembrance, and then lead them out through the side door.

This he proceeded to do but unfortunately the effect was somewhat marred when the young pastor picked the wrong door. The result was that they marched with military precision into a broom closet in full view of the mourners and had to make a hasty retreat covered with confusion.

This true story illustrates a cardinal rule or two. First, if you are going to lead make sure you know where you are going. And second, if you are going to follow make sure that you are following someone who knows what they are doing.

Harold Fickett famously said: "There are three requirements for a good church. The first is leadership. The second is leadership. And the third is leadership." Lack of leadership may be part of the reason why 6,000 to 10,000 churches disappear every year in America.

Next from our text we see **AN EXAMPLE TO COPY.**

The writer tells us **"Imitate their faith."** How will Autumn Ridge remain healthy in the next year? The answer is by having godly leaders and godly followers. This will happen when we copy the lives of our leaders and duplicate in our hearts what we see in theirs.

This picture shows George Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge. It tells us something profound about our first President. It demonstrates that the method of great leadership is humble service, seeking the will of God, our true leader. This is what makes a nation and a church great.

All of us need spiritual heroes that we can follow. I have told you that our Elders and Pastors provide that motivation for me. But God gives us other leaders too.

In my study upstairs I have photos of two of my heroes. They are leaders whose examples continually inspire me. One is Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the greatest preacher of the 19th century. The other is Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the greatest preacher of the 20th century.

Who are the Christian leaders who motivate you to keep going following Jesus?

God wants us to have these examples to copy for the writer of Hebrews goes on to say, **"Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you."** (Hebrews 13:17)

That is a vital verse on church leadership. It describes the two-way relationship that exists between the leaders of the church and the congregation.

A congregation must have confidence in their leader, and leaders must be worthy of that confidence. Church leaders have the immense responsibility of watching over the spiritual wellbeing of the people in their fellowship. This is a very serious matter because one day our Elders and Pastors will stand before God and give an account for how they have performed their duty.

For their part, the congregation is to submit to the authority of their God-given leaders. When this relationship works well it is a joy being a leader. When it doesn't it is a burden.

Over the years our Elders have made some decisions that have made them unpopular with some of our congregation. As a result the Elders received a great deal of criticism. This was immensely painful, especially when it came from individuals our Elders were close to.

The problem was that the Elders could not tell the whole story out of respect for confidentiality. I have seen them silently take the criticism, often at great cost to themselves.

Sometimes years later the whole story came out from another source and the people who had been angry now understood why the decision had been made.

I tell you this because if your leaders do something that doesn't make sense to you, remember they are rational people. They want the best for our church. They care deeply about you. There is part of the story you don't know and they can't tell you because of confidentiality. This is especially true where staff decisions are involved.

During the next year the Elders and the Pastoral Transition Committee will be interviewing candidates to be the Senior Pastor of Autumn Ridge. They will not be able to disclose these discussions to you out of respect for the candidate who will not want their present church to know they are in conversations with us.

This is a time when it is essential that you have confidence in your leaders. So pray for them to have wisdom. Support them. When it's appropriate they will give you all the information you need, but in the early days you may have to take a lot on trust.

I said earlier that primarily our leaders are our Pastors and Elders. But there are also other leaders in the church that we want to remember and encourage. Right now we are looking for a new Children's Pastor and a new Students' Pastor.

We have two search teams composed of members of our fellowship who have been tasked to find these two new Pastors. You can see the names of the search teams on the screen.

CHILDREN'S PASTOR SEARCH TEAM	STUDENTS' PASTOR SEARCH TEAM
Ben Boldt (Chair)	Jennifer da Silva
Ben Cockram	Jim Fleming
Jim Fleming	Kevin Lake
Becky Montpetit	Tara Maier
Derek Remme	Angie Pankratz
Rachel Sviggum	Tom Pankratz
Dave Verburg	Neil Postier
Elann Wright	Abe Rodemeyer (Chair)
Katie Yager	

Please pray for these leaders. Look for ways to encourage them. Maybe you know of a candidate they should consider for the job.

Finally, our text gives us **A CONSTANT FOR THE FUTURE.**

We are told the good news, **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8)** The truth is that church leaders come and go. But Jesus is always with us.

This is his church and he is the same now as he was in the past. He brought this church into being back 1857 and his power hasn't changed. So he can wonderfully guide our leaders and our congregation in the days to come.

Every Pastor has their day. They lead for a while but then they leave. The curtain comes down on their period of ministry. But Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever.

That means that his leadership is everlasting. In that statement lies the secret of earthly leadership. The real leader is the person who is led themselves by Jesus Christ.

Notice this statement declares that Jesus is always the same. In the great yesterday of world history Jesus died for us as our unique sacrifice. Today Jesus is the forerunner who has already entered heaven and is even now interceding at God's right hand for Autumn Ridge. Our future is known fully to Jesus. He lives forever as the Lord of history who is coming back for those who are eagerly waiting for him.

So with joy we say together our **Victory Verse** for the week.

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)