



## Sermon Transcription • Romans 1:8-15 (NIV)

### What a Good Leader Looks Like

Pastor Jeff Bucknam

**[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]**

So I'm from Seattle, and Seattle has a really warm place in my heart. I came to faith in Christ when I was kind of early in high school in the Seattle area, and so I immediately got plugged into the Seattle church scene which is not very big, to be honest. Considering the size of the city, you'd expect there to be more churches in the town itself and the area, especially more faithful churches - there aren't that many. Honestly, if you put Seattle on a list of the most secular cities in the United States it would kind of be at the top, or at least near the top. Seattle, Portland, the Pacific Northwest - that area - it's very similar to Vancouver in terms of the way that people approach faith, people approach Christians; it's an increasing hostility there, in fact, to it. So any time that there's a church that seems to be able to engage with Seattleites, man, I'm right on board with it.

When I was in high school, there was a church that had that kind of ability. But the leadership of the church, there were some moral failures among the leadership, and so it ended up cratering. It's had a difficult time recovering. Since then there has been another one. When I was just leaving Seattle in the 1990's a bunch of the people that I grew up with, and actually attended church with, decided that they were going to help a guy plant a church - that guy's name was Mark Driscoll and the church was called Mars Hill. And in the 90's it was planted with several people, that like I said, I grew up with I was friends with and so I was always keenly aware of the kind of ministry he was doing. I was really a real champion of it, in fact, I wanted that church to make a real difference and it really did, quite honestly, for a while.

I don't know if you know anything about Mars Hill or Mark Driscoll, you probably have heard those names maybe in the news. People from our area, actually, had started to go down to Mars Hill during the weekends sometimes. I knew people who used to go once or twice a month because they went down there to hear Mark preach, he's a very gifted communicator. He had a real ability to connect with young men in particular and the church grew and grew and grew, as a result. They ended up opening campus after campus after campus and did like what's called a video venue which is they broadcast Mark's sermons to each one of those locations. I think they ended up having 15 different campuses. They even had one in Sydney, Australia, for a period; Albuquerque, New Mexico. I mean we're talking worldwide impact. They're really good with their online presence and so podcasts - I think, hundreds of thousands of people used to listen to Marks sermons online.

This is a big deal for a church in Seattle to have that kind of impact, and Christianity in Seattle really became somewhat in vogue because of him. He was, he was different. He used to write an editorial



for the *Seattle Times* which is just crazy. The *Seattle Times*, I mean, they don't like Christians at all and to invite a pastor to be an editorialist – was amazing. Just the favour that God had on him and that church was remarkable. Until...I started hearing some murmurings about some of the difficulties of Mars Hill quite early on because I had friends who were leaving the church who had been in leadership and were leaving and saying, "Jeff, this is not going well. There are some problems, in fact, with the leadership the way that Mark talks that are, especially behind the scenes, quietly, that are not healthy."

Mark used to decimate his opponents with the most uncharitable language. He used to do it through a pseudonym online, but that became known. He used to say things that pastors shouldn't say. Actually, people shouldn't say, but especially pastors shouldn't say. He has a rough temper, in some ways, at least that was what was reported. And then different things started to be reported like they paid - the church paid - for a...one of Mark's books to be put on the *New York Times* best seller list. There is a way that you can rig that system by paying a company to raise the profile of your book and then you can call yourself a *New York Times* best selling author. A lot of people do it, but it's... I don't know...doesn't seem, doesn't shout integrity when you do it. Mark also was found at a couple points in a couple of his books to have plagiarized whole sections from other people And the people I was talking to - I remember sitting across the table from a friend at a Red Robin in North Seattle, who had planted the church with him, and he said to me, "Jeff, I'm telling you the environment among the leadership is toxic." And that started to be the reports even outside the church. More and more pastors were leaving the church, more and more were reporting that that's exactly what was going on. So they confronted Mark about it. He didn't want to admit wrong. He thought that they were the problem. And in 2014, just two years ago, this became such a big story that *The New York Times* - *The New York Times* - picked up this story about this church and they wrote these words. This is from August 22 in 2014, just two years ago:

"Mark Driscoll has long been an evangelical bad boy, a gifted orator and charismatic leader who built one of the nation's most influential mega churches despite, or perhaps fuelled by, a foul mouth, a sharp temper and frank talk about sex... The church he founded, Mars Hill, enjoyed rapid growth in the Pacific Northwest – one of the most secular regions of the nation – and it claims 15,000 members worshipping at 15 campuses in five Western states, and 200,000 more people watching its services online every week.... But now Mr. Driscoll's empire appears to be imploding. He has been accused of creating a culture of fear at the church, of plagiarizing, of inappropriately using church funds and of consolidating power to such a degree that it has become difficult for anyone to challenge or even question him. A flood of former Mars Hill staff members and congregants have come forward, primarily on the Internet but also at a protest in front of the church, to share stories of what they describe as bullying or 'spiritual abuse,' and 21 former pastors [ah wow! That's a lot!] 21 former pastors have filed a formal complaint in which they call for Mr. Driscoll's removal as the church's leader.... Mr. Driscoll is rapidly becoming a pariah in the world that once cheered him."

Well from that date until this, it's seen the explosion of Mars Hill, and by that I mean it broke apart. All the campuses became their own churches, Mark was unwilling to go through the process of



restoration that the elders wanted to bring him through. And I can go to Seattle today and I can go to my friends' houses and some of them don't attend church anymore. They were leaders in that church and they don't attend church anymore; and they will tell you that they are not sure what they think about Jesus because of this whole thing. My point is that my experience with Seattle Christianity and Christianity in general has proven this point - for better or for worse the Church rises and falls on its leadership. For better or worse, the Church rises and falls on its leadership. I was in China a few years ago speaking to some leaders of the Church in China, and I asked them, "What are the challenges, the immediate challenges that you are facing?" You know so many people are coming to faith in Christ in China that they can't keep up with it. Churches are just flourishing in the most hostile circumstances, but so many people are coming to faith in Jesus. So I asked these leaders, "What is it, what is the challenge that you face?" And they said, "Listen, we have lots of people but very few leaders, very few good leaders. What you see today, what we're scared about, is all of it will be for nothing if we don't get good leaders so that in thirty years time the Church is still flourishing." For better or worse, the Church rises and falls on its leadership.

Which begs the question, what does a good leader look like? What kinds of things do good leaders do? What kind of traits do they have? There are lots of places in the scriptures that I can take you that would describe leaders more deliberately than the passage that we're going to study here, but this passage really does show a leader - the Apostle Paul and his approach to his church or to this church, the church in Rome. Which he had never actually been to or met. It shows certain traits of his that are exemplary and necessary for good leaders to have if the church is going to flourish. So what I want to do in the next few minutes, is I want to walk through five of those traits. Five traits that the Apostle Paul shows about good leadership. Now, you might sit here and say, "Well, wait now, so this is just about church leaders?" *Yah* it's basically a message about people who are in leadership in the church but it's not just for them, ok? Everybody is in leadership somewhere, right? You're parents, fathers - everybody is involved in some area where they express some authority or leadership over another person. What does it look like for you to lead those people in a godly way? What kinds of things are you going to need to commit to, if you want to see those people flourish in Christ? What kinds of things should we as a church (if I attend a church or I'm looking for a church or shopping for one) what kinds of things should I look for in the leadership of that church to be exhibited in order for that church to flourish in the days ahead? Five of them. They are not the only five, but five from this passage. So, look, let's walk through it together.

### **[Good Leaders Affirm God's Work in Those They Serve]**

Here's the first: Good leaders affirm God's work in those they serve, or those they lead. Good leaders affirm God's work in those they serve. Here's Romans 1:8,

"First [before I say anything else,] says the Apostle Paul, 'let me just...first], I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world."



Now, when he says “all the world” he’s not, I mean, he’s not talking about Papua New Guinea. What he means is the Apostle Paul is saying look - everywhere I go, and I’ve been a lot of places in the Roman world, everywhere I go people are talking about the fact that you guys believe. “You guys” being the Roman Christians. Like, it’s a huge deal that God has brought you to faith in Christ because you’re in...you’re in Rome. Let me explain what I mean there. So here in Abbotsford if you make the local paper you’re kind of proud of it, right? You might cut it out and put it on your refrigerator, right? But then while you’re putting it up on your refrigerator you are thinking to yourself, “So this paper goes free to everyone’s door.” Some people actually put signs out to say, “Please don’t leave this dumb paper, ok!” <laughter> So if the *Vancouver Sun*, though, picks up that story, hmmm...little more chesty! <proud voice>“Ooh, yes! Look at little ole Abbotsford, it’s a story of little ole Abbotsford, about what’s going on here. It’s actually been picked up by the big city.” </proud voice> Then if the *National Post* picks it up mmm! [punches the air in a downward stroke] “Well, like we’re important, look what’s happening. Did you see the *National Post*? Did you hear the – *The New York Times* picks it up?” I mean it’s a big deal that Mark Driscoll’s story gets picked up by *The New York Times*. Little ole Seattle has a story in *The New York Times*, this must be a big deal. Well this is what Paul is saying, “Look, look, it’s one thing for this event in Palestine on the edge of the empire about some guy who died and claimed to be Jesus...claimed to be the King of the Jews, died and rose again three days later, and everyone started claiming he was still alive. That’s one thing for that to be reported just in Palestine, but for it to reach the center, the cultural center of the world Rome, so that people, the elite in Rome are embracing it, <cheers> whoo! That’s a big deal.

So Paul is saying to this church you don’t know how important your belief is. Now, I find this interesting because, I know the rest of the book of Romans and I know that in the book of Romans there are lots of issues with this church. I mean, Paul could have started by saying I have a lot of problems with you people - the fights you are having between Jews and Gentiles, this needs to stop! There were other issues that the church was having - theological disagreements, false teachers that were coming in. Paul could have said a number of things to this church about the negative but he chooses first to say, “No, here is where I see God working in your lives.” Good leaders do this. They’re aware of the negative, *totally* aware of the negative, but they focus first on the...the positive. It’s easy to focus on the negative, you know that, right? You could tell me all the problems your kids have. I come to you, I see your kids and I say, “Oh, they’re wonderful!” “No, no, they’re not wonderful. You should see their room.” <laughter> The people that you lead, you know their weaknesses. I had a friend a few years ago he walked me around their church. There was nobody there and on the wall of their church they had pictures of the different elders of the church and their spouses. He came to the first one, and he said, “This is the elder wall.”

I said, “You guys have pictures—““Yeah, we have pictures of the elders. Yeah get this guy, he’s an elder. Ok, so let me tell you about that guy. He’s got this problem and this problem, and he drinks too much. And you should, oh, his wife is the one next to him, she’s *nuts*.” <laughter> Like he’s telling this to me, “She crazy man!” <laughter> Ok, so he describes all the things that she’s done. “Oh, and you think she’s bad! Look at this lady over here.” It’s another wife of one of the elders, right? “She’s nuts! ...And this church...and I’ve had this problem with all these people. He just went on, for seriously about 10-15 minutes, standing at this wall describing to me all the things that were wrong with the leaders of his church. Later, at lunch, he said, “You know I’m just...I’m struggling right now. I’m just



trying to figure out whether or not I should stay or go.” I just said, “You should go.” <laughter> Right? Like you can’t talk about the elders wives like that and not go. It’s easy to focus on the negative, it is. It’s very...Paul didn’t focus on the negative, though. You...you do realize that in the lives of your kids, if you grab them by the shoulders and you look them in the eye and knowing full well all the challenges that they have and all the ways that they are falling short and all the things that they need to work on in their life - but you grab them by the shoulders, look at them in the eye, and say, “Here are the places that I see God’s spirit in you.” Do you realize the kind of impact that’s going to have in their lives? We cheer when they get the hit or score the goal or whatever, and we reinforce to them that those things are important. If you grab them by the shoulders and you look them in the eye and say, “I’m going to forget about all the negative stuff, I want you to know that God’s Spirit is this in you. He shows up here and here and here, and when I pray for you I thank God for you because of those things.” So when you lead like that the spirits of the people you are leading they soar.

I just had lunch, just this week, with a dear friend of mine and he works in a church in Bellingham - he’s a church planter there. And they’re losing some people in their church which is - for a church planter - it’s like awful! It’s the hardest thing to face. You barely have anybody there anyway, and then they start leaving. And I asked him, so - these are core people - and I said, “So, what are you going to do? So what is it that goes on in your heart when that starts happening?” I asked him. And he said, “Aww, it’s terrible and I feel really awful. But, Jeff, listen, you got to know. You know what God has done in our church for the last number of years? You know that this couple that came to faith in Christ while they were in university up on the hill over there, they ended up coming to faith and they started thinking about missions. And during...through the preaching of the Word and the growth of their small group, all of a sudden they decided they were going to take a chance and go to Zambia! And now they lead this mission...they lead this mission organization over there. It’s reaching, you know, thousands with the Gospel. That happened in my church! I had another couple coming forward to me saying, ‘Hey, we’re starting to feel the tug of world missions on our heart.’ I could tell you story after story of people in my church, my little church, who are going out and changing the world.” He glowed, and I thought, “There it is. That’s, now, that’s good leadership.” All sorts of problems, but good leaders affirm God’s work in those they serve. That’s number one.

### **[Good Leaders Keep Praying]**

Number two, good leaders keep praying. Romans 1:9-10,,

“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit and the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.”

Paul’s like, “Listen, I wanted to come to you before. I still...like I’ve had these plans, and I’ve been praying.” How has he been praying? He uses the interesting words: “...that without ceasing I’ve been praying and always.” Okay, does that mean that Paul, if you had met Paul in the street, what you have met would have been a man who would have been saying, “I pray for the church in Rome. I pray for the church in Rome. I pray for the church in Rome. I pray for the church in Rome.”



“Hey, Paul, can I have a word?”

“I pray for the church in Rome. I pray....” Without ceasing he keeps – No, it means it’s regular... it’s regular. Meaning that Jews usually prayed three times a day. So Paul’s saying that whenever I sit down you’re on my list. I’ve committed to pray that I am able to get to you, all the time. I just want you to know I pray for you all the time. This is something that Paul writes in several of the letters that he writes to the churches, “I’m praying for you continually.” Now when I read that, honestly, I feel indicted because I’m a Pastor, and I don’t think I would describe my prayers for anybody as...without ceasing...always. Yeah, I’ll pray - intermittently. You know, once this week, and maybe a couple weeks later, and, “Oh yeah I saw them again, I’ll pray again.” But this kind of pleading, this kind of continual like what kind, what kind attitudes do you have to have about God and yourself in order to lead to that kind of consistent prayer? I’ll give you two. One attitude, is an attitude of destitution. So what do I mean by that? I mean an attitude that says that I have no ability to manipulate the circumstances to my favour. That I am - in this circumstance - out of choices. I have nowhere to turn but God, the only one who’s going to make this happen is if God makes it happen. Attitude of destitution. When do you pray in a pleading way with God? Is it when things are going really well? Right? You have money, the bills are paid, the health is good, the car still works. Is that when you’re pleading with God? *NO!* You’re pleading with God when you’re facing a circumstance that there is no way that you can get through. The doctor’s report said that - they’re saying there’s no hope. God, what the...you have to...you have to come through. There is not enough money to pay the bills at the end of the month. I, we need you to come through. Oh, Lord, my child is not doing- Lord, I can’t affect them no matter what I say...you have to. We shut the door to our room, kids go away cuz I got to pray, I got to pray, I got to plead...without ceasing and always. Why? Because you’ve reached the end of your tether, you’ve got nothing left to give. The difference between the Apostle Paul and you and me, though, is that he recognized that he was at the end far sooner than you and I do. He recognized that, “Look, I am no big deal. My ability to control my circumstances is no big deal.” But you and I think, “Yeah we can take care of it.” So why does he pray without ceasing? Because he has an attitude of destitution. You’ll pray without ceasing if you have an attitude of destitution. But you’ll also pray without ceasing if you have an attitude of confidence...in God’s feelings towards you.

An attitude of confidence in God’s feelings toward you. Last week I was asked to speak at a prayer retreat, that’s associated with our church, and they told me, “We’d like you to speak to us, about 50-60 people who are leaders in prayer in our church, and we’d like you to speak to us about the Lord’s Prayer.” You know the Lord’s Prayer? Some of you that have grown up in the church will know it. It starts when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray he starts by saying, “You need to pray like this: ‘Our...Father who art in Heaven hallowed be your name...’ Isn’t that an interesting beginning? “Our Father.” So, in other words, when Jesus is saying, “When you come to God in prayer, seeking him, the way you need to understand your relationship to him is not as Sovereign King - even though he is that. The way you need to understand your relationship to him is as your Father.” Now, some people have had really bad Fathers put that to the side. Consider the best Father that you could ever imagine - that kind of Father. See, that touches home with me because I got...I have a little girl, I have a little six year old girl...who - I have told my wife you need to keep her away from me when she wants something. Because what she will do - she does her hair a little bit <moves hair around face> Right? To make it...she has little strawberry hair and these big blue eyes and this round little face and she comes to me





with her hair done like this <moves air around face to mimic hair> just the way I like it. And so she comes, and she will pass by her mother, right? Kind of...get out of my way, Mom. And she'll come right to me, she'll climb up on my lap and she'll cross her little legs and she'll put her hands down she'll look down then she'll look up. <laughter> "Daddy?" Sometimes she throws in the kiss. Right, the little kiss on the cheek, the soft one? <laughter> "Daddy...can I?" Honestly, before the words are out of her mouth I'm like, "YES! YES!" <laughter> Like, "What a pony? Yes! We'll put it in the garage, honey, it will be wonderful. I don't care. What car do you want? You're six, I don't care." Listen, my boys, I love saying no to all the time. I mean, I love it, right - *no*, no, no. But I've had to tell my wife, "I can't say no to this daughter. Please, when she comes this way you got to stand in front of her and say don't approach him like that." Because my heart is so inclined towards this girl and I'm telling you that when you come to God and you climb up on his knee you have no idea how much he loves you. How inclined toward you he is. That you'll pray without ceasing and ask for the moon to a God who's your Father - who can't even wait for the words to come out of your mouth. And he's like, "Yes, uh huh uh huh uh huh." He knows how to give good gifts to his kids, he does. This is what Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-11, he said:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

He's a better parent than you are, and even you would give him...even you would give your kids that kind of thing. You'll pray more fervently if you know you're destitute and you know God loves you like a Father. Good leaders know this. They embrace those truths and it drives them to prayer for those they serve.

### **[Good Leaders Know Their Plans Depend on the Lord's Will]**

Number three. You guys are going to have to listen quicker than what you're doing. This is the last warning, so here we go. Number three: good leaders know their plans depend on the Lord's will. Romans 1:9-10 Paul writes,

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, [so this is the verse we just read] asking that somehow [so here's the content of what he's praying for, asking that somehow] by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you [so, I've wanted to come to you guys before]."

Quite, honestly, this whole passage is essentially Paul's apology letter. I mean just the whole beginning is like-have you ever received a letter from someone, you write an email and they don't write back for a long time and you say, "I'm so sorry I didn't get back. Here are some reasons why." This is basically what Paul is saying, "I've wanted to come to you guys for so long. I'm so sorry that it



hasn't worked out." But when he points out the reason that is hasn't worked out he's...he's basically said, "I'm only going to be able to come to you if it's God's will. I pray that if it's God's will I will make it to you." At the end of the book he actually lists off a number of reasons why it is that he hasn't been able to get to them. He's been busy with the churches that he's dealing with in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. "Like I want to go to Rome but I can't get there because I've had to deal with all of this mess." And maybe the reason that he's not able to get to Rome is because in 49AD they kicked all the Jews and Paul is a Jew. Even if he gets there what is going to do, stand at the edge of the wall? "Let me in!" So in other words, God's providence, which governs all things - God's providence has limited my ability to get to you. So even though I've made plans, God's had a different plan. See, good leaders recognize this. And because they recognize that God's providence is supreme and it governs all that they do - even when they make plans for those they serve or the plans that they want to help people flourish by - even if they make these plans, they hold them very loosely. They recognize that just because it's my idea doesn't mean that God is obliged to do it, maybe he's got something better. Have you ever had that happen? You want to go this way and God turns it this way and you're like, "Ahh..." and then like seven years later you're like, "Yes!" <laughter> When I came back from New Zealand - I graduated from Seminary, moved to New Zealand to be a teacher at a bible college and then after two years decided, "Look, I want to be in the local church. I want to be a pastor in a local church. I want to preach." I really did sense that the Lord's call on my life was that. So I thought, "Ok I'll do that in the United States, that's where I'm from." So we left New Zealand and went back. And for about nine months we were back in the United States and I was applying to every local church I could think of. Everyone that was listing for an opportunity for a pastoral role. "I'll take anything," I said. I applied to about 76 churches. About 65 of them never said anything. Actually, I got an email, like seriously, like a year ago from one of them. I was like, "That was 15 years ago, what is wrong with you people! <laughter> Umm, no, I won't come." But 76, I thought, "Surely, Lord. I mean, I'm trained. I think I've got the ability, just give me a chance," I would say. But no, nothing came to fruition, nothing. You know the only thing that came to fruition was the church back in New Zealand. So we moved back to New Zealand, because...do you know in nine months I had a regular dialogue with God, and the dialogue was very one sided - it was me yelling at him. In the mornings, on the bus with my headphones in with my arms crossed, quietly in my mind saying, "You are so- what are you doing? Like it is not that hard for you to provide an opportunity for me to go to a church and just serve. I just want to serve...I don't care what it is just put me in a position." I was talking to my wife just recently and she said to me, "I look, Jeff, if you could go back to that time, those nine months, and if you could give yourself a job - a ministry position in that time - would you go back, and would you change history so that you could (in a little time machine) you go back, would you do it?" I said, "No way!" No way. I love this church. I love you, I do. I love this church. I love where I am today. I love the fact that God has placed me, I think...I think, in my sweet spot. And I'm thankful that I had an experience in another country serving people there. It has made me a richer man. I'm thankful for all the friends I've been able to make along the way and none of that would have happened had I gotten my way, had God not said, "Nah, that's not my will." So you and I get mad at God but I'm telling you that you and I would answer our prayers for our plans the same way God is answering them if we knew what he knows. He is a Father who wants to give good gifts to his kids but I'm telling you he's the kind of Father who's like, "I'm not going to give you a snake here when you're asking...I'm going to give you the good thing the ultimately good thing." And you know some of us have lived long enough to realize-





yeah he does do that. And that should colour our planning today, shouldn't it? Shouldn't it? If you're frustrated with the Lord because your plans haven't come to fruition maybe it's because he loves you more than you love yourself. Good leaders, they keep their hands open to what the Lord is doing. You know we wouldn't have had the book of Romans had Paul not been delayed, so I'm thankful that Paul was delayed.

### **[Good Leaders Are Confident God Brings a Harvest Wherever Ministry is Done]**

Number four good leaders are confident God brings a harvest wherever ministry is done. Good leaders are confident that God brings a harvest wherever ministry is done. Look at Romans 9:11-13 here,

“For I long to see you, [Paul says] that I may impart to you some spiritual gifts to strengthen you [I want to show up at your door so that I can help you. The Lord has gifted me in a particular way and I'm going to utilize those gifts in order to strengthen your faith. I know that that's what going to happen if I show up. But it's not just that way, verse 12] that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. [I know that if I show up on your doorstep and I give you also going to give in response. So this is not a one way street in terms of me blessing you I know you're going to bless me in return. That's what ministry is like. I don't want you to be unaware, verse 13] I do not want you to be unaware brothers, that I have often intended to come to you but thus far have been prevented in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.”

I love this text because of his confidence. He's basically saying, “Listen, here's the thing, I'm going to show up to you and I'm going to proclaim Christ and harvest is going to happen.” I find that, personally challenging. Here's why: I struggle every weekend with preaching. Most Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons for me look like this - in the quiet moments, my mind is being assaulted with thoughts of failure. “You shouldn't be doing this, Jeff. You're no good at it. You should have just stood up and just read the passage and saved everyone a lot of time. It would have been better. I don't know, God, why in the world have you called me to this work. I'm so ill equipped, I don't know what I'm doing; I want to help them, but yet I don't know if I'm...it's not going to be for their benefit, Lord, unless it's really great.” I know that's Satan attacking me. He does this to preachers, ask any of them. But here's why I think this is interesting. The Apostle Paul's attitude is so contrary to mine. His attitude is, “Look, just open your mouth. I mean the ministry is basically rigged. Just stand there. If I show up to you and I start talking,” says the Apostle Paul, “I know that God will bring a harvest because he got there and he was sowing seed way before I showed up. So my job is to show up, open my mouth, God brings the harvest.” Rigged. It's great! You find passages that lean this way and like explain God's perspective on this stuff - like Acts 18:9-11, when the Apostle Paul, he's in Corinth and he's started to preach the gospel there and there is no fruit yet, and so at night in a dream God speaks to him:

“And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.’ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”



“Listen, Paul, I’ve already been there. They’re my people.”

Paul’s like, “There’s nobody here who’s your people.”

“Yes, there are! So what you need to do...you just need to start preaching.”

Have you guys ever been bowling? I hate bowling, like it’s the worst thing ever. I’m sorry if you’re like a professional bowler. Its just dumb. I hate bowling because I throw it in the gutter all the time.

All...the...time! You think it wouldn’t be that hard. You just roll it down the middle. I just, I don’t

know...it goes in the gutter. I get mad in the middle of it right I got like 20 points. How do you even count the points? Anyway, you get 20 points <laughter> and I throw it in the gutter, so that it banks

and I can see if I get it back out because I know it’s going to go in the gutter anyway. I want to go

home, and to me it smells like a smokers lung, bowling stinks. You know what? You know what

helped me? My kids, the last time I went bowling like *years* ago, my son had just been with his school and he said, “Dad, you don’t need to, you can get rid of the gutters.”

I said, “You can?” and he pushed this button and up come these little bumper things. I’m like, “Now *this is good*, right? This is good bowling. <cheers> Strike!” It’s amazing. I’m telling you that the ministry is like bumper bowling. That’s what he’s saying here, “Just throw the ball, man, like I’ve set it

up for success. They’re already there, harvests. The problem is that there aren’t enough workers, so

just show up, proclaim the message, reach out to your neighbour. You think it’s so difficult.” God has

been there way before you got there. Just open your mouth, see what he’ll do. Good leaders are

confident God brings a harvest wherever ministry is done. Charles Spurgeon, one of the great

preachers in the history of the world, gives a word to other ministers of the gospel. he says this,

“Beloved, have a genuine faith in God’s word and its power to save. Don’t go up into the pulpit preaching the truth and saying, ‘I hope some good will come of it.’ But confidently believe that it will not return void, but must work the eternal purpose of God. Don’t speak as if the gospel might just have some power or might have none.”

### **[Good Leaders Preach the Gospel Even to Believers]**

Finally number five. Romans 1:14-15, good leaders never outgrow the gospel. They never outgrow proclaiming it, they never outgrow embracing, they never outgrow the gospel. So this is what Paul says at the end here,

“I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.”

“See, God called me to be the minister to the Gentiles and he did not delineate which Gentiles, so I just figure all of them. So even the really smarty smarts. Right the Greeks, who speak Greek and are really wise; and the Barbarians who are called Barbarians because they don’t speak Greek and when the talk it sounds, “Bar-bar-bar-bar-bar-bar.” It’s where the word comes from. So the Greek-speaking elites, the Barbarian - the nonGreek-speaking scum. I don’t care what kind of Gentile you are, God’s called me to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. That’s why I want to come to you, guys, at Rome so I can proclaim the gospel to you.” Who’s you? Christians or not? Who’s he talking to? The



Roman church, right? I want to come and I want to proclaim the gospel to you, to you Christians in Rome. Why on earth would you want to proclaim the gospel to Christians? Because Paul knows you never outgrow that message. What is the thing that you need to hear today? More than anything else, what is the thing that you need to hear? That despite your sin, despite your failure - through faith in Christ, you stand holy and righteous before God. That no matter what it is that you did this week (and man, you did some stuff this week) that you enter here as a complete and utter failure, but in the eyes of God you are the greatest success that can ever be spoken of. His son, you're hidden in Christ. He looks at you and you are clothed in his righteousness. I could...I could, honestly, I could get a list of the ten commandments and go one by one and say, "How'd you do? Did you covet anything this week? Hmm? How were your words...to your spouse? Perfect?" <laughter> Right. And you'd be one big <mumbles dejectedly>...and it gets worse and worse and worse and by the end you're feeling terrible. Of course you're feeling terrible! You know what the great beauty of it all is? It's that that law leads you to repentance and faith in Christ who fulfilled the law. He is your righteousness. Listen, you're never going to outgrow that. You're never going to outgrow that because you're gonna fail next week and the week after and the week after and week after; and you're going to come back and the message you need to hear that is that you - that the Body of Christ was broken for you and the Blood of Christ was shed for you.

Look, let me finish with just a little storey that Philip Yancey wrote in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace*, that presses that fact on people, ok?. It's a story he told about one time when he was preaching a sermon at his church and he had to offer communion where people come forward and they receive communion at a communion rail. Here's what He says,

"A few times at my church I preached the sermon, then assisted in the ceremony of communion....

Those who desired to partake would come up to the front, stand quietly in a semicircle, and wait for us to bring them the elements. 'The body of Christ broken for you,' I would say as I held out a loaf of bread for the person before me to break off. 'And the blood of Christ shed for you,' the pastor behind me would say, holding out a common cup.

Because my wife worked for the church, and because I taught a class there for many years, I knew the stories of some of the people standing before me. I knew that Mabel, the woman with strawy hair and bent posture who came to the senior citizen's center, had been a prostitute. My wife worked with her for seven years before Mabel confessed the dark secret buried deep within. Fifty years ago she had sold her only child, a daughter. Her family had rejected her long before, the pregnancy had eliminated her source of income, and she knew she would make a terrible mother, and so she sold the baby to a couple in Michigan. She could never forgive herself, she said. Now she was standing at the communion rail, spots of rouge like paper discs pasted on her cheeks, her hands outstretched, waiting to receive the gift of grace. 'The body of Christ broken for you, Mabel...'

Beside Mabel, were Gus and Mildred, star players in the only wedding ceremony ever performed among the church's seniors. They lost \$150 per month in Social Security benefits by marrying rather than living together, but Gus insisted. He said Mildred was the light of his life, and he didn't care if he lived in poverty as long as he lived it with her at his side. 'The



blood of Christ shed for you, Gus, and for you, Mildred...’Next came Adolphus, an angry young black man whose worst fears about the human race had been confirmed in Vietnam. Adolphus scared people away from our church. Once, in a class I was teaching on the book of Joshua, Adolphus raised his hand and pronounced, ‘I wish I had an M-16 rifle right now. I would kill all you white honkeys in this room.’ An elder in the church who was a doctor took him aside afterwards and talked to him, insisting that he take his medication before services on Sunday. The church put up with Adolphus because we knew he came not merely out of anger but out of hunger. If he missed the bus, and no one had offered him a ride, sometimes he walked five miles to get to church. ‘The body of Christ broken for you, Adolphus...’

I smiled at Christina and Reiner, an elegant German couple employed by the University of Chicago. Both were Ph.D.s, and they came from the same Pietist community in southern Germany. They had told us about the worldwide impact of the Moravian [Missionary] movement, which still influenced their church back home, but right now they were struggling with the very message they held dear. Their son had just left on a mission trip to India. He planned to live for a year in the worst slum in Calcutta. Christina and Reiner had always honoured such personal sacrifice - but now that it was their son, everything looked different. They feared for his health and safety. Christina held her face in her hands, and tears dribbled through her fingers. ‘The blood of Christ shed for you, Christina, and, you, Reiner.’

Then came Sarah, a turban covering her bare head, scared from where doctors had removed a brain tumour. And Michael, who stuttered so badly he would physically cringe whenever anyone addressed him. And Maria, the wild and overweight Italian woman who had just married for the fourth time. ‘Thees one will be deeferent, I just know.’

‘The body of Christ...the blood of Christ...’ What could we offer such people other than grace, on tap? What better can the church ever offer other than [the Gospel of God’s grace to imperfect barely coping and broken people just like you and me].’

You’ll never outgrow this message. Praise God, I’ll never stop proclaiming it to you. The body of Christ is broken for you, and the blood of Christ was shed.

Let me pray for us, Lord, I’m so thankful for your grace. And I pray, Lord, that you would take the message of the gospel and you would shove it into our hearts and massage it. That we walk out the doors of our church today, certainly, recognizing what it looks like to lead well, and, certainly, what it looks like to live well, but, Father, more than anything that we would know that our Saviour loves us. And that we have a Father in Heaven who crossed great boundaries to make us his own. So, Lord, help us feel that, not just know it, but feel it and may it impact all that we do and say in response in Jesus’ name we pray, amen.