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Series: [The Anatomy of a Church](#)

The Anatomy of a Church (2)

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

[Acts 20:28](#)

(Continuation from 12/01/13)

Shepherds and Construction Workers

Some contemporary church leaders fancy themselves businessmen, media figures, entertainers, psychologists, philosophers, or lawyers. Yet those notions contrast sharply with the symbolism Scripture employs to depict spiritual leaders.

In [2 Timothy 2](#), for example, Paul uses seven different metaphors to describe the rigors of leadership. He pictures the minister as a **teacher** ([v. 2](#)), a **soldier** ([v. 3](#)), an **athlete** ([v. 5](#)), a **farmer** ([v. 6](#)), a **workman** ([v. 15](#)), a **vessel** ([vv. 20–21](#)), and a **slave** ([v. 24](#)).

Each of those images evokes ideas of **sacrifice**, **labor**, **service**, and **hardship**. They speak eloquently of the complex and varied responsibilities of spiritual leadership. **Not one of them makes out leadership to be glamorous.**

That's because it is not supposed to be glamorous. Leadership in the church—and I'm speaking of every facet of spiritual leadership, not just the pastor's role—is not a mantle of status to be conferred on the church's aristocracy. It isn't earned by seniority, purchased with money, or inherited through family ties. It doesn't necessarily fall to those who are successful in business or finance. It isn't doled out on the basis of intelligence or talent. **Its requirements are faultless character, spiritual maturity, and a willingness to serve humbly.**

Our Lord's favorite metaphor for spiritual leadership, one He often used to describe Himself, **was that of a shepherd**—one who tends God's flock. Every church leader is a shepherd. The word *pastor* even means "**shepherd**." It is appropriate imagery. A shepherd **leads**, **feeds**, **nurtures**, **comforts**, **corrects**, and **protects**. Those are the responsibilities of every churchman.

Shepherds are without status. In most cultures, shepherds occupy the lower rungs of society's ladders. That is fitting, for our Lord said, "**Let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant**" ([Luke 22:26 NASB](#)).

Under the plan God has ordained for the church, leadership is a position of humble, loving service. **Church leadership is ministry, not management.** Those whom God designates as leaders are called not to be governing monarchs but humble slaves, not slick celebrities but laboring servants. **The man who leads God's people must above all exemplify sacrifice, devotion, submission, and lowliness.**

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Jesus Himself gave us the pattern when He stooped to wash His disciples' feet, a task that was customarily done only by the lowest of slaves ([John 13](#)). If the Lord of the universe would do that, no church leader has the right to think of himself as a bigwig.

John 13:5-20 (NASB)

⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

⁶ So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter."

⁸ Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

⁹ Simon Peter *said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*."

¹¹ For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"

¹³ "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for *so* I am."

¹⁴ "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."

¹⁵ "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."

¹⁶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him."

¹⁷ "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

¹⁸ "I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but *it is* that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'"

¹⁹ "From now on I am telling you before *it* comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am *He*."

²⁰ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

One great difference exists between herding sheep and leading a church. Shepherding animals is only semiskilled labor. No colleges offer graduate degrees in shepherding. It isn't an extremely difficult job. Even a dog can be trained to guard a flock of sheep. In biblical times, young boys—David, for example—herded sheep while the older men did tasks that required more skill and maturity.

Shepherding a spiritual flock, however, is not so simple. The standards are high and the requirements hard to satisfy. Not everyone can meet the qualifications, and of those who do, few seem to excel at the task. Spiritual shepherding demands a godly, gifted, multiskilled

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man of integrity. Remember, he is also described as **teacher**, **soldier**, **athlete**, **farmer**, and **slave**. Yet he must maintain the perspective and demeanor of a boy shepherd.

That's not all. Church leaders are spiritual construction workers. In [1 Corinthians 3](#) Paul likens ministers to master builders who follow a set of biblical blueprints, laboring in partnership with God to construct a building—the church: **“We are God’s fellow workers; you are ... God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it”** ([vv. 9–10](#); NASB).

1 Corinthians 3:10-17 (NASB)

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

¹² Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

¹⁴ If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?

¹⁷ If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

Wise builders follow the blueprints precisely; the slightest deviation from the architect's plans in the early stages can result in a tottering monstrosity by the time construction is completed. God's Word is the blueprint for spiritual construction, and only those who follow it exactly are building anything that will stand firm.

As builders, then, we must build by the right plan. And as shepherds, we must lead in the right paths. Either way, we determine the direction of our people. [Hosea 4:9](#) says, **“Like people, like priests”** (NASB). In other words, people emulate their spiritual leaders.

Perhaps that explains the pathetic state of the contemporary church. Many of the best-known and most visible religious leaders utterly fail to measure up to biblical standards for shepherds. Every leader who follows their pattern is destined to fail. They are building with the wrong set of plans, and they are misleading their sheep.

Churches can survive nearly every kind of problem except a failure of leadership. We need a scriptural refresher course for spiritual shepherds, a new look at the Architect's master plan. That's what this teaching series is about.