

# Learning to Lead: Leaders in the Community

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[ 0 : 00 ] And the second reading is from Romans 13 verses 1 to 7 and that's on page 1140. So that's Romans 13 verses 1 to 7.

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.

Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

[ 1 : 09 ] Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes.

For the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him. If you owe taxes, pay taxes.

If revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect. If honour, then honour. Thanks very much.

Well, please keep Bibles open there at Romans chapter 13. And for those who want to take notes.

So as Peter's doing that, just to remind you, this is a short series we've been doing on leading, learning to lead, and we've been looking at leaders within marriage, leaders within home, leaders within the church, and this morning we're looking at leaders within our community.

[ 2 : 30 ] And I recognise that in preparation, part of this, particularly the last part of it, is a lot of application.

And I hope that it will provoke conversation, discussion amongst us, but also that that discussion would also lead into action as well.

And just to encourage you as well, if you've missed out on any of these talks, you can listen to them online. And they're there for our encouragement as well.

So, Romans 13, 1-7, leaders in our community. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for people in the past, for leaders like the Apostle Paul, who were given the task and responsibility of writing your word down.

And we thank you that we now have that word, preserved for us in our own language, that we can learn from ourselves. And we pray that you would help us today as a church to understand what it is for us to be leaders within our community and how we should respond to those who are leaders in our community.

[ 4 : 07 ] Encourage us, and may it be used by you, to further your gospel and the building up of your kingdom. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, we start with a question. Who will lead? Well, a little over a year ago, we were calling for the removal of our past government.

We wanted them out. But now that we've got a new government, a coalition, it seems that we're still not happy. According to a recent survey, which was just conducted just after the referendum, 75% of the country are now dissatisfied with the government's performance.

Being a leader is not easy, as Enda Kenny is discovering. And despite winning the referendum, getting the yes vote as they campaigned, his popularity and his party have all lost significant points in recent weeks.

But who would you want to take his place? What party would you choose to be in their place?

[ 5 : 24 ] Who could do any better? For most of us, we rather like to sit on the sidelines with the majority of the country, point fingers and complain.

But I want to encourage us this morning to think about, what about us? People like us getting involved and making a difference.

I'm not promoting any particular political party that you should be signing up to, but what I am encouraging is active involvement, locally and nationally.

Some people have perhaps been brought up on the view that the church should remain separate from the state. Others say that the church should rule the state.

Not sure what your views are on that, but I think the Bible is somewhere in the middle. And it's saying that as far as Christians are concerned, our country and our community needs leadership and Christians ought to play their part in it.

[ 6 : 37 ] And that's what we want to encourage this morning. So we're going to look at two main things. First of all, leadership is a wonderful gift from God.

Look at chapter 13, verse 1. We'll read there. Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.

So I think it's quite clear that the governing authorities, the government that we have today in our country and within our community, have been put in place by God.

Jesus himself recognised this fact when he was brought before Pilate on trial. And he turns to Pilate and he says to him, you would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

[ 7 : 50 ] So any political party, any authority that is in place is only there because God has allowed it. Now while we recognise, and we're going to look at this in more detail in a minute, that many who are leaders abuse their position and power, the institution, the idea of governing authority is something good from God.

It is good for us and it is good for our society. I know the Leaving Cert is on at the minute and I don't want to draw too much attention to it, but when I did my Leaving Cert a few years ago, the book that we had to read and study on the English syllabus was William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

I don't know if any of you ever read that one. Well, for me it was a bit of a haze as I just looked out the window for most of the classes and wondered what it was all about. But I did remember something about the big idea.

The ringleader, I think, was a guy called Ralph. But no associations there anyway. But I do remember this, that it was all about a group of these well-educated British boys who were on the plane and they crash-landed on an island.

And without supervision of adults or any other kind of leadership, disorder and chaos began to reign amongst these children.

[ 9 : 15 ] The eldest was only 13. And they all began to fight and bully and form different rival groups. And very quickly, one of the children actually gets killed.

Ironically, the one who is killed, he seems to be the weakest one, his name was Piggy, had asked all the rest of the boys this question. Which is better, to have rules and agree or to go hunting and breaking things up?

They had him removed. I think the book is a social comment on what happens when we remove leadership from society. Anarchy.

All hell breaks loose. There's disorder and chaos all around us. So we must not reject leadership. Instead, we must recognise that leadership is actually a good thing from God to bring stability and order to our lives and to our country.

And because leadership is from God, we must learn to submit to those who are in leadership. Look at verse 1. That's how it starts. Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.

[ 10 : 36 ] What? I have to submit myself to end a Kenny? Yes, you do. Submission to our leaders is actually an expression of our ultimate submission to God.

And we've come across this idea of submission as we've worked through the whole idea of learning to lead. It means, submission simply means to live under God's good order and God's good design. So we looked at wives having to submit to husbands, children having to submit to parents. All of us have to submit to those who are in positions of authority, in governance.

And submission isn't a sign of weakness, but a willingness to live God's way. So all of us are called to submit to the governing authorities in our country and community.

Now before we move on, let me just have a sidetrack here. Do you remember our reading in Acts? Peter had just brought about this healing and the authorities told Peter to stop preaching, to stop teaching in the name of Jesus.

[ 11 : 51 ] And what did Peter say? He says, we cannot help but preach. We must obey God rather than men. So when it talks about submission to authorities, yes we must submit to our authorities, but when what the authorities say come into contradiction with what God has to say, then we must choose to obey God over our leaders.

But on the whole the point here is that we should submit to those who are in authority. And this point is made stronger in verse 2. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.

And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. So to rebel against your leaders is actually to rebel against God. That's how closely knit they are.

Not to submit to your government and to the decisions and the policies they make is actually a willful expression of I'm not submitting to God. Because that's how law and order happen.

breaks down. Verse 6 is a good example. This is also why you pay taxes. For the authorities are God's servants who give their time, their full time to governing.

[ 13 : 12 ] And we all know and we all complain about it and we all give off about it how we all have to pay tax. And we're going to have to pay more tax. Not least the recent household tax.

How many of you like me thought I'm not going to pay that. I'm not going to sign up. Did you? Well, we mightn't agree with it but our governing authorities have decided that this is what is good for us. This is what is right and best for our country. So in an expression of our submission to God we register, we put our names and our addresses and we will pay our household tax.

So leadership is a good gift from God and as an expression of our love and our commitment and our obedience to God we submit to those in authority.

It's good for us and it's good for our society. So that's the first thing, that leadership is a good gift from God. Secondly, leadership is an exercise of grace.

[ 14 : 22 ] It's a gift of grace. Look at verse 3. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right but for those who do wrong.

Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good but if you do wrong be afraid for he does not bear the sword for nothing.

He is God's servant an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. So those in position of power and authority the governing authorities as they're called here are not only put in place by God they are actually called servants of God.

In other words they are to act on behalf of God. So leadership doesn't mean you do as you choose and you do whatever you like to the people under you.

No it means that we are to exercise God's character. Leaders are to be people who lead with grace. So the decisions that they make are to be good for the people and to be good for society.

[ 15 : 44 ] And we've already mentioned that many who do get into positions of leadership abuse their position and power and they bring a lot of harm to people.

As Paul is writing this we know that it's not too far off when Nero becomes leader over Rome.

He was the one who would persecute Christians who would blame Christians for the burning of Rome. He would do terrible things to the people but yet he is still saying to the believers submit yourself to those who are in authority.

We saw it last year in Libya with the brutal regime of Colonel Gaddafi. We see it right now in Syria as we watch the news of President Bashar Assad as he watched the indiscriminate killing of his own people women and children.

So we recognise there are many people who are in positions of leadership who abuse their authority and cause a lot of harm. That does happen. And we don't need to look outside our own country for example we've got our own gangsters and villains.

[ 16 : 57 ] They may wear collars and ties but they still cause damage and they've brought our own country into a terrible mess. But again I think the general principle and we shouldn't lose this here is that it is God's intention God's desire that those who are in leadership would express God's

character character in their decisions and in their policy making.

They are God's servants to do good. They are to be as we might call them servants of God's grace. They are to see that God's grace gets worked out in society. We see this in two ways. Look at verse 4. For he is God's servant to do you good.

But if you do wrong be afraid for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

Now whether there's an argument here for corporal punishment you can discuss that afterwards. I'm not bringing that into this now but what I want us to see here is that governing authorities have a dual role.

[18:16] They are both to protect the people and they are to punish the people. They are to protect the people from injustice and they are to punish those who are unjust.

That is why there are leaders in society. Leaders are put in place by God to stand up for the weak for the vulnerable and for the marginalized and leaders have been put in place by God to deal with the greedy the unjust and those who exploit.

And all of this when it begins to work as it should do is actually an expression of God's greater and general grace in action. It's a working out of God's character in society.

So for example today the most vulnerable in our society within our community are those who are on low incomes single parent families and immigrants.

And so we should expect that our leaders are working towards their protection and care and that they should be seeking to bring justice on those who exploit and those who pay below minimum wages.

[19:30] And we get an example of this in verse 7. So he says give everyone what you owe him. If you owe taxes pay taxes.

If revenue then revenue. If respect then respect. If honour then honour. Because we know that part of our tax system and our revenue is to help those who are for whatever reason are unable to provide for themselves.

It's a good system that we have within our country. And the governing authorities are to be responsible to ensure that those who can pay do pay and we should support them.

But they should also punish those who abuse the system and milk the system and that they are equally dealt with. So leadership is not something to kind of point fingers and complain about and give off about.

Leadership is a gift of grace. It's a working out of God's character within society. So leadership is a good gift from God and it is a gift of grace.

[20:43] But what does that mean for you and for I? Well I think it's this. Third, that we should be leaders in our community. It's a calling for Christian leadership locally and nationally.

if leadership is a gift from God to society and if leadership is a gift of grace for society then we ought to see many Christians in positions of leadership.

We need to be people who take the step that take the initiative and that we become conduits or channels of God's grace into our community.

That might be starting a local action group who are seeking better resources for young people. It might be joining a board who are seeking better education facilities for our children.

And these are the kinds of areas we ought to be immersed at within local levels and I know that some of you are and that's great to see and we ought to encourage it more and more.

[21:57] But let me suggest two areas that are of particular need within our wider community that perhaps we can have an input or something that we should certainly be raising and thinking and wanting to implement.

Here's the first. Protect the vulnerable. One of the most vulnerable groups in our society today are immigrants, people who've moved to this country for all kinds of reasons.

And the survey that I looked online at has just been published this week reported and it showed that unemployment among immigrants rose by 40% in the last three years compared to only 10% among Irish nationals.

Now I know that's still a big figure but just there's 40% unemployment has risen with immigrants and 10% among Irish nationals. And the knock-on effects upon people is what they term consistent poverty.

Consistent poverty means a low income which lacks basic needs such as adequate clothing, warmth and food. And they're saying now that there are many people because of unemployment that they do not have access to this.

[ 23 : 25 ] They're put into a bracket of consistent poverty. What do we do? What's our role within this? Well maybe it's people having to stand up and take initiative to find out where these people live and start an action or support group to do something about it.

maybe it's already joining an existing group as a Christian and using your God given Christian principles and applying them and seeing them worked out for the common good of people. Joining and getting alongside the weak and the helpless assisting them and pleading their case. I talked to a lady recently in another church who has been helping somebody in that situation. Who has been going with them to the local court to plead their case, to work with them, to stand with them to try and improve their situation because simply they hadn't the resources to do it on their own.

It requires leaders who will do that even just on a friendship level. I give you one example from history. I'm sure you've all heard of John Wesley.

[ 24 : 43 ] a very famous preacher connected with the Methodists. I actually think he preached in Kinsale on one occasion. He's well known as an evangelist.

But he wasn't just an evangelist. He was somebody who took local action, locally and nationally, to change much of what was going on. And I read here how Britain was at that time.

This is a quote. It was characterised by wanton torture of animals for sport, the bestial drunkenness of the populace, the inhuman traffic in African Negroes, the kidnapping of fellow countrymen for exportation and sale as slaves, the mortality of parish children, the universal gambling obsession, the savagery of the prison system and penal code, the political bribery and corruption, nothing's changed, the ecclesiastical arrogance, the shallow pretensions, and it goes on and on and on. And it says it was really, really bad. Life was bad for people. But people like John Wesley did something about it.

And this is what he did, amongst others, and we'll come back to one of these in a minute. He saw the slave trade being abolished, the prison system was humanised, conditions in factory and mine were improved, there was no longer child labour, and education became available to the poor for the first time.

[ 26 : 31 ] Here was a Christian man campaigning and driven by his Christian convictions, making a change locally and nationally.

If he could do it, then I'm sure people like us could do the same, just on a very basic level. So protect the vulnerable is one way we begin to lead within our community.

The second is this, confront the unjust. It's a known fact that the poorest in our community are the most exploited and because people are desperate for money, we know what happens.

People work for below the minimum wage and without basic employment rights, so if the employer wants to get rid of them, they just dismiss them and they've got nothing to show for it. And what's happening is that many parents are having to go and work longer, they're having to take two or three jobs, and their little children are just having to stay at home and fend for themselves.

Maybe an older brother or sister is to look after them and they might only be ten. And this is what's happening within our own neighbourhoods. Again, what are we to do in this situation?

[ 27 : 46 ] Well, I think it can mean raising the issue with our local politicians, campaigning for tougher penalties, seeking that employers who are abusing the weak and the vulnerable are brought to justice.

And we should stand with those who are in those difficult situations. It takes leaders to do it.

Another example of this, and again it's in the past and maybe this is something we need to see happen again, but William Wilberforce.

You might remember him from the film Amazing Grace. He was a politician in the 1780s in Britain, a member of parliament.

he fought against many different things and as one person for 26 years, along with the encouragement of the likes of John Wesley, brought about the abolition of the slave trade in Britain. And that led to the abolition of the slave trade throughout much of the British Empire and at that stage they owned half the world. He was also responsible for freeing Sierra Leone and making that a free colony.

[ 28 : 55 ] Wilberforce was a man of God who loved God, who read the Bible, who was a Christian, but yet he was driven by his Christian principles to see God's grace being channelled and worked out in society.

So if he could make that huge big change, then I'm sure we can make little changes within our own community. So why should we do all of this?

Why should there be a call for Christian leadership locally and nationally? Well it's this reason, that it makes God's grace visible and tangible.

Look back at Romans chapter 12 a minute. Romans chapter 12 is a turning point in the book of Romans. Chapters 1 to 11 is a great big telling of God's amazing grace, his mercy, his goodness of how Christ gave his life for us.

And then we get this turning point at the beginning of chapter 12 and then he says, chapter 12 verse 1, therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy because you have received so much grace from God.

[ 30 : 20 ] because you have had so much from what Jesus has done. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your spiritual act of worship. And chapter 12 then goes on and chapter 13 goes to explain some of the ways in which we can begin to live out that grace to others.

And one of it is being leaders within our community that we've just been looking at. In response to God's grace, the gospel that has taken effect in our lives, there's a call for leadership to bring God's grace to our society.

You see, the gospel is not just to be heard. The gospel is to be seen in action. If our community is going to come to Christ, then Christ must become visible to them.

men. And this is not to promote deed over word or social action over evangelism. There is an order and a priority. Simply saying here that the most needy in our community, they need to hear the gospel of Christ.

[ 31 : 35 ] They need God's grace. But they've also got to see God's grace in action. Now, I don't know if there will be many here who will make it into politics, whether we'll see your face on the ballot sheet one day.

Maybe we will. I hope we do. But we are people who are to be leaders in our community. Leaders who seek to bring God's grace into action, to do us good, to do us right.

so that the gospel and his kingdom continues to grow and be established. So I encourage us to not just leave it here as we close, but to take what we've been looking at and explore it.

Maybe there's questions. Maybe we just need to rethink our whole idea of what leadership is. But are there ways we can begin to be leaders in our community?

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for every person here, for every job that they are in, for every position of influence that they find themselves in, for those who are on boards of schools or on various committees.

[ 33 : 13 ] We thank you for each person for where they are seeking to be leaders in their community. And we pray that you would fill each one with your Holy Spirit, to be courageous, to be strong, to stand for what is right, to stand for justice and seek to correct that which is unjust.

I pray that for each person here that we would all be conduits and channels of God's grace to our communities and to our neighbourhood.

May you use each one of us just in small ways and may you even be pleased to raise up Christians who will become TDs and local counsellors, who can stand for truth, who can stand for what is right, so that our country and our society continues to be good, where people are treated equally and fairly.

And above all, where your gospel is able to be continually proclaimed freely, where we can continue to meet as we do today and live out our faith.

We thank you for our country, we thank you for the leaders that we have, we pray for wisdom for them and we pray for their continued change of heart, that they would lead according to God's design and not their own.

[ 35 : 00 ] We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.