ACTS OF LEADERSHIP
Week One: Am I a Leader?
Pastor Rick Henderson **September 27-28, 2025**

There's a place in Northern California that has what must be the greatest county fair in country. You're probably thinking that you've been to a good county fair. And I'm sure you have. But what set this one apart was that it capped off with a demolition derby.

I don't know if you can be a good American and not love a demolition derby.

When my son was 2 years old, *because I have the wisdom of a father*, I knew the time was right to take him. But how do you explain the glory of a demolition derby to a 2-year-old? I knew he could only understand once he saw it. The whole county attended this event. You had to get there early to secure your seat.

My problem was that Jack wouldn't have any of it. From where we sat in the arena, waiting for the event to start, he could see the animals and rides around the fairgrounds. He couldn't understand why his dad was making him sit in the no-fun bleachers. It must have felt like a punishment. I brought all the snacks. I bribed him just like you would a puppy. Nothing worked. He was so mad at me—until the engines fired up and those cars started circling. Once he could see it, he was transfixed.

He stopped being a Velociraptor and sat on my lap for hours, without moving. He couldn't take his eyes off the action, battering rams on wheels crashing into each other. Every once in a while, the joy would well up in my son, like pressure building in a volcano, and he would **(act out a grunting yell)**. My adorable toddler son transformed into a primal caveman. It's one of my proudest dad-moments.

What happened? He didn't have the capacity to imagine the experience that I envisioned for him. When he finally saw what I could see all along, everything changed. Is it any different for us?

When we **CAN'T** see a better future, we need someone who **CAN**.

- When you can't see a way out of debt, you need someone who can.
- When you can't see a way forward in dating that doesn't feel like reducing yourself to a commodity, you need someone who can.
- When you can't see how to find joy in singleness, you need someone who can.
- When you can't see how to endure the burdens that you're carrying, you need someone who can.
- When we can't see a pathway forward that leads to thriving in any area of life, we need someone who can.

By the way, this is one of the reasons that it is foolish to only seek advice from people who are in the same point of life as you. I hope you are in a small group, or Bible study, or something with people older and younger than you, and who have different life experiences than you. If you only cluster with people who are like you, you may not be wrong, but you're probably not going to be wise.

If there is a good or better that we cannot yet envision or imagine, we need leaders who can see it, who are able to expand our imagination, clarify our vision, and guide us toward it. This does not mean we check our brains at the door or blindly surrender agency. It means we invest trust and embrace humility, so that we are open to being led and guided toward the good and better.

If we are not open to being led, not able to be challenged from a place of trust, we will be confined to living inside a box that will never be bigger than our own ignorance and moral brokenness. If this resonates at all, Jesus has some good and sobering words for us.

JOHN 10:10 *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

There are real spiritual forces at work that want to take everything good from you. Behind every lie that captures our imaginations and affections, behind every injustice, behind everything that is wrong and broken in the world, there are real, evil, spiritual forces working to destroy. This is why followers of Jesus know that no human being in this life is your enemy. Yes, there are people who do horrible things. Yes, there are people who want to be your enemy. But we know it's not that person who is the enemy, it's not a group of people who are the enemy—it's the very real evil spiritual forces behind it all.

And Jesus said that's why he's here. Into our mess he came to give you and me a full and thriving life. He is the one who sees reality for what it is and who can see a better future. So of course, these were the very next words out of his mouth.

JOHN 10:11 *"I am the **good shepherd.** The **good shepherd** lays down his life for the sheep."*

Where are my parents at? Have you ever found yourself saying something like, "I'm going to teach these kids to behave even if it kills me." The good shepherd said, "I'm going to give you a full, satisfying, thriving, abundant life—even if it kills me. I'll give up my life so that you can have it."

If you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus, can I ask for your attention? If I had your life experiences, I'd likely have the same doubts that you have. If I could see life the way you see it, I'd probably feel the weight of the same unanswered questions that hold you back. I would never ask you to push those aside. What I'm asking is, while holding them, would you let

yourself see Jesus for who he is? He'd rather give up his life than for you not to have life to the fullest. If it turned out that God does exist, isn't that what we hope he's like?

To all the followers of Jesus, let's truly behold what a good shepherd he is. What does a shepherd do?

- Comforts
- Searches for
- Feeds
- Nurtures
- Guides
- Protects
- On and on

A shepherd embodies every facet and feature of leadership, even if it costs him his life. As you let your thinking calibrate to Jesus as the good shepherd, the ultimate shepherd, hear these words from him.

JOHN 14:12 *Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do* ***even greater things than these****, because I am going to the Father.*

I'm going away. I'm leaving you with work to do. All the shepherding work I've been doing, you will do it, too. Believe it or not, you will do even greater than me. Do you have the faith, do you have the courage to let yourself believe that? If you've been around for a while, you've heard me say this.

SERIES THESIS: Leadership is a **DESTINATION** of discipleship.

Following Jesus always leads to leadership. Because he's leading us to do as he did. No doubt, some of you want to pump the brakes. Maybe you don't know how to dispute what I just said, but for you, it doesn't feel right. You don't see yourself as a leader. You don't feel like a leader. Maybe you don't want to lead. Before you discard this as being for someone else, I've got three questions that I think will change your mind. These questions are why we should all be thinking seriously about leadership.

3 QUESTIONS:

1. Who do I look to for leadership?

Every time we consume information, news, or advice that shapes how we perceive the world and how to engage with it, we look to that source for leadership. The danger is that we can do this so easily and naturally that we aren't aware or intentional. Who do you look to for leadership?

2. How am I leading myself?

We are all responsible for managing ourselves. That's self-leadership.

- When you go to bed and when you get up—those are leadership decisions.
- What you feed your body and what you feed your soul—those are leadership decisions.
- What thoughts you will and won't entertain in your brain—those are leadership decisions.
- Are you just spending time or investing your time—those are leadership decisions.

3. Who looks to me for leadership?

The first two questions apply to 100% of humans. I'm willing to bet that the third questions apply to every single one of us, too. If anyone ever asks you some version of, *"What do you think _____?"* You have been trusted with influence. That's leadership. If anyone ever asks you some version of, "*What do you think I should do when _____?"* You have been trusted with influence. That's leadership.

Don't you dare sell yourself short. If you have influence, if you have resources, if you have responsibility—you are a leader. Your life is full of leadership moments. And if you follow the good shepherd, he is leading you to become a leader like him.

Will you grab a Bible and open it to the New Testament? Acts is the fifth book: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts. This is the history of what happened with the first churches and some of the first followers of Jesus. During this series, we're going to follow their ups and downs as they followed Jesus, which led them to leadership.

ACTS 1:3-9 *After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

Could you imagine getting to hang out with Jesus for 40 days after the resurrection. I love the unfiltered honesty of the Bible. This is not a story of happy clappy belief. The resurrection broke their brains. It took Jesus giving them many convincing proofs for 40 days. I wish I knew some of things he did to help them process.

Matthew was a close friend of Jesus and an eyewitness to this. He wrote about it period in a more condensed format. He wrote that even on the last day, right before Jesus ascended to heaven, there were disciples right there with him, who still doubted. Coming to terms with who Jesus is and the reality of his literal, physical resurrection from the dead is no small thing. It's life altering. And Jesus was patient understanding, even when his closest companions were stuck in doubt. He's a good shepherd. He's not a bully.

Do whatever you have to do to turn your imagination on right now. You're with Jesus for a month. He's talking non stop about the kingdom of God, things you could never see or imagine on your own. You're sitting at the feet of a man who's been to other side of death and back. It's your turn to ask a question. What are you asking? This is what they asked.

ACTS 1:6 *Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

Are you kidding me?! They had access to all of that and this was their question.

THEIR QUESTION: When will you build our nation?

They were at a tipping point. I don't think we should fault them for wanting to be out from under the boot of Rome? How could we fault them for wanting their own nation that was strong, free, and founded on God-honoring values and beliefs?

And yet, they were at a tipping point. Was their allegiance to their kingdom going to be surrendered, and exchanged for allegiance to Jesus and his kingdom, ***OR***, were they going to attempt to impose their kingdom agenda on Jesus' kingdom agenda? Some of them might have been thinking, can't we be fully committed to both? What if that's not how it works? What if they had to choose? Which kingdom allegiance was going to win out?

Will you write this down? Then I will explain it.

We don't all share the same **GUILT**, but we do share the same **VULNERABILITIES**.

They were 1st Century Jewish Nationalists. I'm not a 1st Century Jewish Nationalist and neither are you. None of us are guilty of our allegiance and affection for the kingdom of Israel rivalling our affection and allegiance for Jesus' kingdom. But if we take a moment to understand the appeal of 1st Century Jewish Nationalism, we might discover that we have the exact same vulnerabilities, even though those vulnerabilities are expressed very differently in our lives.

Could it be true that there is rivalry in every single one of our hearts, inside of yours and inside of mine? Which kingdom is going to get our allegiance and affection? Will it be our little kingdoms or will it be his?

APPEAL OF 1st CENTURY NATIONALISM

- It makes me more comfortable in this world.

No doubt they saw a strong and free nation as **THE** pathway to a comfortable life.

[As I'm talking, start putting on my hunting harness.]

I love comfort. I think it's great. I'm a fan. If I can be real, I have a problematic relationship with comfort. Instead of enjoying it as a good thing, I have a track record of elevating it to an ultimate thing. There is something inside of me that desires my comfort more than my own good. Can you relate? Hold on, it gets worse than that. There's something inside of me that desires my comfort more than your good. Comfort is not bad, and it's not wrong. And yet, any life that is oriented around comfort is inherently dangerous.

You're probably what I'm doing. This is a harness I wear when I'm in a tree stand. It connects to a lifeline in case I fall. I hate this. It's awkward. I'm not as coordinated as I'd like, sometimes I get tangled a bit. This is NOT comfortable. But I wear it because I could fall out of a tree. If I weren't wearing this and the fall didn't kill me, my wife would.

I promise you, there are things about following the leadership of Jesus, and embracing the call to lead like Jesus, that are not comfortable. It's just not. But it keeps you tethered to life that is truly life. You know this. I'm just a friend who's reminding us. It's OK to be uncomfortable.

Feeding our appetite for comfort can starve our allegiance to the kingdom of Jesus. The appeal of 1st Century Nationalism was that…

- It centers and prioritizes the concerns that are most naturally and urgently felt by me.

There was nothing wrong with them caring about all the immediate needs in their nation in the first century. Those were real. Yet, we know that there are concerns that transcend that. Jesus wanted to lift their eyes and ours to a bigger story.

- It affirms, instead of confronting, the story I tell myself about myself.

I don't know how they would have phrased it, but we can summarize the appeal of 1st-century nationalism in this way. *If we make our nation strong, free, and guided by the right values, then we can achieve lives of significance that are secure and satisfying.* That's a compelling story. It's just not a true story.

A full and satisfying life, that gives us the security and significance we desire, is found in Jesus and Jesus alone. There is no other human project, no matter how good or how grand, that will satisfy what we're looking for.

- It reinforces the illusion that it's virtuous to hate my enemies instead of loving them.

A problem with 1st Century Jewish Nationalism was that it rooted all the problems of the nation in their enemies, both on the outside and enemies within. When your view says that people are the problem, it becomes virtuous and good to fight, even to hate those people. And when that takes root, we start to hear messages that ridicule and condemn love for enemies. We hear messages that condemn empathy. The way of Jesus is so much better than that.

They were at a tipping point.

THEIR QUESTION: When will you build our nation?

What was Jesus' answer?

ACTS 1:7-8 *"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.*

Translation: Nunya bizness

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Can you see what Jesus did here? There was a better future they couldn't yet see. Instead of scorning them, he brought the better into view. It was essentially this.

- Your kingdom is this big [picture of Israel].
- My kingdom is bigger than all of this [picture of the universe].
- I'm sending you out as my ambassadors to invite everyone here [picture of globe] to enter.
- I'm not giving you power to build this [picture of Israel].
- I'm giving you power to go here [picture of globe] and represent me. Go be good shepherds and invite people into my kingdom.

And that's what they did. The gospel spread, and we know it today, only after this group of disciples trusted Jesus enough to set aside their nationalistic tendencies, thoughts, and desires. Instead, they chose to place their allegiance and hope in Jesus and His kingdom.

What about us? Are we ready to accept his mandate and go out as his witnesses, his ambassadors? If this makes you nervous, like I'm going to ask you move across the globe, just breathe.

No one goes **EVERYWHERE**, but everyone goes **SOMEWHERE**.

Do you know where you are? You are here **[SOMEWHERE]**. Whatever you or I decide to do with whatever time we have, whatever influence we have in the place we're at—those are leadership decisions. If you follow the good shepherd, he is leading you to use your influence where you are.

Be an ambassador of Christ whenever you are. You're a neighbor, you're a coworker, you're a teammate, you're a friend. Don't try to be be a good neighbor, a good friend, or a good coworker as a tactic or strategy. That's fake and shallow. You are good friend or neighbor because you love those people. Do you know that's the singular reason why we do Ridgefest?

We love the people of this city. Our only agenda is to love them. What if our love for them made it easier to believe that God sees them and loves them, too? Maybe you're ready to take the step of being an ambassador, a witness for Jesus by joining a team at Ridgefest.

Maybe you're ready to be an ambassador, a witness for Jesus by asking someone to come here with you. I'm convinced that people share what they love with who they love. If you love what you're experiencing with Jesus, and there are people you love who don't have that experience, ask them to come and sit with you.

I don't know if you're going to believe me, but when you decide to start praying for people—that's a leadership decision. Unless you are completely self-absorbed person, which you're not, you know about hurts and challenges that people are carrying. Start praying for them. Don't be afraid to tell people you're praying for them. It doesn't have to be weird. You can say, "A couple of weeks ago when you mentioned that thing, I've been praying for you." You're going to find that most people feel seen and valued because you cared enough to remember.

Don't be surprised if people ask you to pray for them. Do you know that's a leadership moment? When you are asked to pray for someone you are trusted with influence. You get to appeal to King of Heaven on their behalf. That's a sacred responsibility.

I want to leave you with this thought.

If you know Jesus, it's because someone thought **YOU** were worth talking to and **HE** was worth talking about.

Even though our brains might agree that this is true, in our hearts, some of us can't imagine talking about our faith out loud with someone else. If that's you, that's OK. Would you be willing to pray this prayer?

PRAYER: *Jesus, thank you for the people in my life who thought I was worth talking to and that you were worth talking about. Even though I can't see it yet, would you help me see how you could use me to help others know you, too?*