



God's Grand Design

WEEK 1



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Sermon Manuscripts

Sermon 1: God's Grand Design – Selected Scriptures

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Introduction

We're starting a new series this morning titled *Exponential Leadership*. In this series, we will be unlocking God's design for infinite possibilities in your life and ministry. For the first sermon in the series, we don't have a defined text. Instead, we're going to be looking at a bunch of different passages, and I'll put those on the screens for you.

But I want you to know that God has big designs for you, bigger than we can possibly imagine. He has designs for your home, for your church, and for your community. He has designs to bless you, to prosper you. God is deeply invested in the joy and well-being of His children in all aspects of their lives. But, to receive all the blessings God has for us, we have to operate within the framework of His grand design.

And that's really where the problem comes in. God always has designs that are best. We're the ones that mess it up. You see that in Genesis. God created a perfect world. Then, He put human beings in it. And for a time, He had a perfect relationship with humanity. God walked in the Garden in the cool of the evening with Adam and Eve. So, God designed and created a perfect world where He had a perfect relationship with humanity, and we're the ones who messed that up. Adam and Eve chose disobedience. They chose another plan. So, sin entered the world. And every single person, except Jesus, has chosen that same path. We've chosen to reject God's design for perfection, and we suffer for it.

But that's the beauty of the redemption story. The Christian story is a story of God redeeming His original design. It's true as he redeems sinners and restores our relationship with Him. And it's true in other areas of your life as well.

That's what this series is about. God designed that both men and women would be leaders.¹ When we operate inside the leadership framework that God created, we're blessed. When we operate outside of God's framework, we suffer. It really is that simple. God designed humanity for a leadership purpose. And we miss many of the blessings God intends for us to have because we operate outside of His leadership design. Most of the time, we do it unknowingly and unintentionally. But when we don't understand God's design for leadership, and when we don't operate inside of God's design, not only do we suffer, but the people God has given us the responsibility to lead will suffer as well.

I'll give you an example of that from my own life. I had been the pastor for about eighteen months at our last church. And it had been one of the craziest seasons of my ministry to be a part of God's work there. In eighteen months, the church had quadrupled in size. The vast majority of that growth came through evangelistic growth. People were literally wandering in off the street getting saved in the middle of the week. It was awesome.

But, from my perspective, the people in the church came to a point where they quit on me in the midst of this crazy season of God's work. That's what it looked like to me. God was doing all of these amazing things, and my people said, "Okay. We're good. This is good enough." They lost their evangelistic zeal. They lost their mission zeal. Functionally, they quit doing many of the things they did that God used so powerfully. As a result, the church got to a certain point where the growth slowed, and then the growth stopped.

Alisha and I saw it, and we were doing everything we could to keep the momentum going. I knew God willed that none should perish, right? Scripture tells us that. God didn't

1. Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2016). On pages 53-63, Geiger and Peck explore God's design for leadership as seen in the creation narrative, how the fall affects God's design for leadership, and how Jesus redeems God's original design.

decide He was through saving people, so why aren't people coming to the saving faith like they were before?

But, no matter what we did, I could not get the people to go any further. And I ended up getting really frustrated with my church. Where did the passion go? Where did the hunger to see lost people come to saving faith go? We had a lost and dying community, and there was no zeal to reach them.

I went on and on like that until one morning when I was in my prayer closet. I had a big mirror in there, and I caught a glimpse of my reflection in the mirror. The Holy Spirit gave me a moment of clarity, and for the first time, I asked the question, "What if they're not the problem? What if I'm the problem?"

The uncomfortable truth was that I was the problem. The church had outgrown my capacity to lead it. So, to continue being effective as a pastor, I had to grow as a leader.

We tend to think of leadership as something that you have or you don't. We think that we're either born leaders or not. We think that if you can lead this, then you must be able to lead that. That idea is not true. There are layers to effective leadership. There are principles to learn and skills to develop.

God has a design for leadership. God designed everyone to be a leader. God designed you to be a leader. There are principles for leadership in God's word. We can learn these principles, develop our skills, and become more effective in leading our homes, churches, and communities. But until we get serious about developing the skills God means for us to have, there's a hard ceiling on what God can accomplish in us and through us.²

That's what happened to me. I had reached my leadership ceiling. The weight of that really settled on me because God means for the Church to be a place of hope and help for everyone. Because of my limitations as a leader, the people's needs were not being met. People were suffering. People were going to Hell. And I'll never forget that morning in my quiet time when I came to that recognition. It was like the Holy Spirit punched me in the face. I committed myself to God that morning that, to the best of my ability, I would never again hinder His work because I wasn't the leader He created me to be. I realized that through hard lessons.

The simple reality is that God has created all of us to be leaders. God designed mothers and fathers to lead in different areas of their homes. When they don't lead the way God designed, the spouse suffers, and the children suffer.

2. John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 1. John Maxwell refers to our "ceiling" as the Law of the Lid. Maxwell notes, "Leadership ability determines a person's level of effectiveness."

Nobody wants their child to suffer. I want my boys to have all the blessings I can give them. But if I don't lead the way God designed me to lead, and if I don't allow Alisha to lead the way God designed her to lead, they absolutely will suffer because of my failure. It's true in the home.

It's true in the church. God designed both men and women to be leaders in different areas of the church. Every believer in this room has been gifted by God for a leadership role in the Church. When we don't exercise that fully, every person in the church suffers. We all miss out on the blessing you are meant to be.

It's true in the home. It's true in the church. And it's true in the community. God designed you to be a leader beyond the walls of your home or your church. He designed you to be a leader in the community, in your place of work, in the places you go, and in the things you do. You were created for this.

And so, as we study God's design for leadership over the next few weeks, I want you to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting because the last week in this series is a commitment Sunday. I will ask you, as the Holy Spirit leads you, to respond in obedience and commit to pursue ongoing leader development. And I'll warn you, it's not something that happens overnight. It takes commitment to become what God designed you to be. It takes perseverance to become what God designed you to be. And it takes time to become what God designed you to be. But, if you're willing to take that next step, there are no limits on what God can do with you.

A Word of Caution

Now, as we begin, let me give you a word of caution. We want to be very precise with this. When we're studying leadership roles and male and female roles, we want to say what the Bible says: nothing more, nothing less. If we don't say what the Bible says, if we don't go all the way to the extent that Scripture goes, then there are people who are marginalized. God has designed both men and women to be leaders. If we don't go to the extent Scripture goes when we talk about this, then we are placing arbitrary, manmade restrictions on God's design.

So, we want to say what Scripture says, but we do not want to say what Scripture does not say. If we go past Scripture, then we're outside the bounds of God's design, and God will not bless what He has not ordained. So, we want to be precise and say exactly what the Bible says.

This can be challenging for our culture and our churches because God designed men and women to lead differently and in different areas. That shouldn't be a challenging thought. Common sense sees that God created men and women with differences. *We are all created equal, but we are not all created the same.*

Since the day Alisha and I got married, I've had a very specific job. My job is to get things off the top shelf. I'm six foot four. My wife is five foot two. We are equal, but we are not the same. That's obvious.

A problem occurs when we assign a value structure to what God has given equally. God doesn't assign different values to different roles. The small church pastor is just as valuable and just as integral to God's work as a large church pastor. They are equal in God's eyes, but He's given them different roles and responsibilities. Our tendency is to assign value to the different roles and say that the larger church is to be desired. When the reality is that God's will is to be desired, not our arbitrary value structure.

And so, when we consider leadership, God has given men and women different leadership roles and responsibilities. They are equal, but they are not the same. We lead in different ways.

The Three Spheres

Specifically, I see three different spheres where God designed men and women to exercise leadership roles. We have leadership roles in the home for men and women. We have leadership roles in the church for men and women. We also have leadership roles in the community for men and women.

In the Home

In the home, *men are designed for leadership through spiritual direction.* Men are called to be the spiritual leaders of their households. That means setting the tone for your family. Joshua 24:15 says, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Leadership through spiritual direction means modeling Christ love. Ephesians 5:25 says, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." A man's job is to lead in modeling the sacrificial love of Jesus for your wife and children.

Not only does a man lead the home through spiritual direction, but *a man also leads in the home through material provision.* Fathers are responsible for providing for the physical and emotional needs of their families, ensuring their well-being and security. 1 Timothy 5:8, "But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

There's a trend in society that infuriates me to no end. It's the "stay-at-home dad" trend. Listen, your wife can make more money than you. That's perfectly fine. We'll see that in just a second. Women have a role in business and financial affairs. But a man better be out working. A man better model a strong work ethic for his children. This is God's design.

But men have a leadership role through spiritual direction, through material provision, and *through loving correction*. Fathers are called to discipline their children with love and wisdom, helping them to grow in righteousness and maturity. Hebrews 12:7 says, “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”

Listen, when I was a kid growing up, my momma would discipline me, and that was okay. But I didn’t want my daddy involved. I remember one time when I was young, I did something stupid, and my momma went to whip me with one of those paddles from the paddle ball game. Do you know what I’m talking about? The paddle that has the little ball attached with a bungie cord? It’s pretty thin. And when she went to whip me, it broke. And I laughed.

Then, I heard the most terrifying words. “Since you think it’s so funny, we’ll tell your dad when he gets home from work.” I didn’t want any part of that. “Momma, please don’t. I’ll never do it again. I swear. Don’t tell daddy!” Both men and women can discipline their children, but God designed men to have a very specific role there. But those are three leadership areas that are unique to men in the home.

Women also have leadership roles in the home. We don’t ever talk about this. Most of the time all we hear is that men are the spiritual leaders and women should be submissive. And what’s intimidated through saying that is that women should sit down and shut up and stay out of the way.

I’m going to give you a hint for the next couple of weeks. If that’s your attitude, then you’re a bad leader. Over the next two weeks, we’re going to look at how to lead like Jesus. That attitude isn’t part of the leadership package.

The truth is women have leadership responsibilities in the home, too. *Women are designed for leadership through nurturing and teaching*. If all you have is the father’s strict discipline, you have a very sad home. Mothers are called to nurture their children, providing both physical care and emotional support. They play a crucial role in teaching their children about God and His ways (Prov. 1:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:5).

Women are designed for leadership through wisdom and guidance. Alisha has a completely different perspective than I do. She is far wiser than I am. I’m a hammer. Every problem is a nail. That’s not how it works.

Leadership is not ordering people around. That’s what we think leadership is. We’re going to get into this next week, but the simplest definition of leadership is that leadership is

influence.³ By that definition, Alisha influences me far more than I influence her. But she does it through wisdom and guidance.

This is what women are designed to do. They provide wisdom and guidance to their husbands and children, helping them navigate life's challenges and make godly decisions (Prov. 31:26; Prov. 6:20-22).

Women are designed for leadership through encouragement and support. Most men are not naturally great encouragers. I'm certainly not. Mothers provide encouragement and support to their children, helping them to grow in confidence and in their relationship with God (Isa. 66:13; Deut. 6:6-7).

God designed men and women to lead in different areas. It's not cut and dry. The man is not the boss of all things. That's true in the home.

In the Church

It's also true in the church. And this is where it becomes really challenging because women's ministry roles are a hot-button issue right now. There are many churches that go too far with women's roles in ministry. They operate beyond God's design. But there are vastly more churches that don't go far enough with allowing women to exercise the gifts that God gave them and lead accordingly. The end result is that we suffer because we miss out on over half of what God intends for us to have. So, when we're talking about leadership roles in the church, we need to be precise so we can operate according to God's design.

I see two areas that God uniquely gives to men in the church: *preaching ministry and pastoral ministry*. Men are designed to exercise leadership in those two areas inside the church. In pastoral ministry, men are called to serve as pastors, elders, or overseers. Scripture uses three different words to describe the same office. But leadership in that office is restricted to men. Scripture is plain on that in places like 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. So, men are responsible for shepherding the congregation and providing spiritual oversight. That's pastoral ministry.

Men are also responsible for the preaching ministry. Men are called to teach and preach the Word of God, ensuring that the congregation receives sound doctrine and grows in their understanding of Scripture (2 Tim. 4:2; James 3:1). Preaching is a unique leadership area that God gives to men. So, let me be plain. Men are called to be the pastors and preachers. That's God's design.

But those two areas are the only two areas that are unique to men, which means women have a much larger role to play in the leadership of the church than they are usually allowed to.

3. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 11.

Their ministry is much more than being a nursery worker or children's volunteer. Those are usually the areas that women are isolated to. But God means for us to receive so much more than that from women.

Both men and women are to lead in teaching and mentoring ministries. Titus 2:1-4a says, "But as for you, *teach what accords with sound doctrine...* Older women likewise are to *teach what is good, and so train the young women.*" You can teach without mentoring, but you can't mentor without teaching. Both men and women have a leadership responsibility in the church to teach God's word and to invest in the men and women around them. I see very little intentional mentoring in the church. I see very few people in the church intentionally investing in each other one-on-one.

Both men and women are to lead in missions and discipleship ministries. Women played significant roles in evangelism and mission work, spreading the gospel and supporting missionary endeavors (Phil. 4:2-3; John 4:28-30, 39). The first evangelist to the Gentiles was a woman. It was the woman at the well in John 4. She went back to her home after encountering Jesus and shared the Gospel with both men and women.

When Paul was on his missionary journey, there were women missionaries with him Philippians 4:3, "Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, *who have labored side by side with me in the gospel* together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." Women were missionaries.

Just this year, at the Southern Baptist Convention, we commissioned 83 missionaries. The majority of those were women. In fact, women outnumber men on the mission field by a ratio of at least two to one.⁴ These are women who are going to Pakistan and Afghanistan and India and China and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Do you know why? Because the great commission is given to everyone.

Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). The great commission isn't just for pastors. It isn't just for men. It is a mandate from Jesus to every believer to go and make disciples of all the nations.

Notice the Great Commission doesn't say, "Men, you go make disciples of everyone. Women, you keep the nursery." Jesus says to every believer, "Go and make disciples of all the nations." And then it says, "Baptize them and teach them." That is not given to men only. And that is not restricted for women only to do that for women. That is a blanket commandment from the Lord to every believer, and there are examples in Scripture of women discipling men.

In Acts chapter 18, we meet Apollos. He was a brilliant public speaker. He was competent in the Scriptures. He genuinely loved the Lord, but he was missing something. His doctrine was slightly off. So, Priscilla and her husband Aquilla pulled him off to the side and helped him have a fuller understanding of Christ's work.

Priscilla wasn't the bystander there. She wasn't standing behind her husband. Her name always comes first. She was the leader in discipling Apollos.

The truth is that God has gifted both men and women in this area and has commanded them to go, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey the Lord. Both men and women are to lead in missions and discipleship ministries.

Another area that could be really challenging for us is that *both men and women are to lead in prayer and prophetic ministry*. Both men and women in the New Testament exercised the gift of prophecy, speaking forth God's word to edify, exhort, and comfort the church (Exod. 15:20; Judg. 4:4; Joel 2:28-29; Luke 2:36-38; Acts 21:8-9; 1 Cor. 11:5). There is absolutely no way around that.

In Luke 2:36-38, we see Jesus's parents bringing him to the Temple. In the Temple, we meet a woman named Anna. In verse 36, it says, "And there was a prophetess, Anna..." In verse 37, it says, "She did not depart from the Temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day." Anna the prophetess, her entire ministry was to pray in the church.

In Acts 2:17-18, Peter declares, "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and *your daughters* shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on *my male servants and female servants* in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and *they shall prophesy*." Peter tells the people, "That day is today."

In Acts 21, we meet Phillips's daughters. In verse 9, they are introduced. "He [Phillip] had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied." So, these are not women who prophesied under the leadership of their husbands. Luke specifically tells us that isn't true. They were unmarried. He also tells us they don't just carry the title of prophetess. They actively prophesied.

Let me give you one more reference. 1 Corinthians 11:3-5, "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. *Every man who prays or prophesies* with his head covered dishonors his head, but *every wife who prays or prophesies* with her head uncovered dishonors her head since it is the same as if her head were shaven."

4. Paul Akin, "We Need More Men on the Mission Field," accessed August 12, 2024, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/need-men-mission-field/>.

It is expected that men will pray and prophesy in the church. In the same way, it is expected that women will pray and prophesy in the church. That's why Paul is giving instructions on it. He says, "Men, when you pray and prophesy, you do it like this. Women, when you pray and prophesy, you do it this way."

I could go on and on with examples, but I've given you three. Women praying and prophesying in the assembly was the rule, not the exception. Before Jesus, it was that way. In the early Church, it was that way. In the Church proper, it was that way. And it's that way today.

Now, your small group next week unpacks more fully what this prophetic ministry is, along with other gifts. So, if you want to know that is, be in a small group next week.

But it will suffice to say for our purposes this morning that prophecy doesn't usurp the structure of the Church that God designed. Men are to lead in pastoral and preaching ministries. We said that. Those are uniquely given to men. But the Holy Spirit clearly gives women the gift of prophecy, and it is clear that they should be using that gift in conjunction with prayer in the church.

In the Community

So, both men and women have God given areas of leadership, in the home, in the church, and finally, in the community. *Both men and women are designed to lead in advocacy and justice* (Prov. 31:8-9; Isa. 1:17; Micah 6:8). Both men and women should be in the community advocating for justice, caring for the marginalized, and fighting for the rights of the oppressed. Proverbs 31:8-9 says, "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." Leadership roles in the community involve standing up for those who cannot stand up for themselves.

Both men and women are designed to lead with charity and service (Acts 9:36-39; Prov. 31:20; Matt. 20:26-28; Gal. 5:13). Both men and women lead by serving their communities through acts of charity, providing for the needs of the poor, and showing hospitality. Their leadership in service reflects the heart of Christ and meets practical needs within the community.

Finally, *both men and women are designed to lead in business and enterprise*. It's okay for women to work. It's okay for both men and women to make money. Men and women lead in the community by engaging in business and enterprise, contributing to the economic development and prosperity of their communities. Their entrepreneurial spirit and diligence are key to community growth. When Proverbs talks about the Proverbs 31 woman, it says, "She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night."

Call to Action

Listen, the whole point of this first message in our series on leadership to show you that both men and women are designed by God to lead. This is my heart for the men here this morning. I want men to rise up and be the spiritual leaders in their home. I want them to be providers and protectors. I want them to be leaders in the church. And I want to see men making a difference in our communities.

And to the women, I want you to hear me say this. I want you to know that God created you to be more than a sideline sitter or a pseudonym writer. You have a name. Your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. The moment God saved you, He also gifted you to be a leader. You were never meant to hide your abilities and serve only from the shadows. You were created for a purpose.

The point is that God designed both men and women to be leaders. We can explore what this means as we go. We can explore how we apply it as we go. But I want you to know that God designed you to be a leader.

I have to tell you, that morning in my office when I realized I was the problem, when I realized that people's needs weren't being met, when I realized that people were dying and going to Hell because I wasn't the leader He created me to be, it changed the trajectory of my life. I made a commitment to become what God designed me to be. That's an ongoing process. I'm better today than I was yesterday, and by God's grace, I'll be better tomorrow than I am today. But I'm not going to sit idly by and watch people I care about struggle and suffer because I'm not what I should be. Leadership is something you were created for. You can learn how to be the best leader you can be.

Are you willing to take the next step and become the husband, father, wife, mother, and leaders in our homes, churches, and communities that God created you to be? If you are, we're going to have our invitation time in just a moment, and I want you to make a commitment to the Lord to be present in what we're doing in this series. I want you to surrender your hearts and minds to Him as we learn about His design for leadership. I want you to be present in the small groups. And I want you to be sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. By the time we're done, God will have called some of you to different leadership roles and responsibilities in ministry. Will you make that commitment this morning?