

Essential Truths III: Working With God

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A New Kind of Leadership

When the Lord Jesus established his Church, he introduced a whole new kind of leadership. Unlike the leadership style of the world, this leadership is based on servanthood. In [Luke 22:25-26](#), he told his disciples:

“...The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. *But you are not to be like that.* Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”

The model of leadership in the Church is radically different from that in the world. Unlike the world, where leadership means “lording it over” those underneath, Christian leadership is based on a servant mentality. We see this model of leadership exemplified in Paul.

Read Romans 1:1

In this first verse, Paul introduces himself to the Roman Church. As a formal introduction, he would understandably list the credentials that would give him authority to speak into the lives of the Roman Christians. But what is the very first credential that Paul gives?

“Paul, *a servant of Christ Jesus*, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God...”

Before Paul referred to his ministry as an apostle, he called himself a servant ([1 Corinthians 3:5](#); [Ephesians 3:7](#)). This meant that

The Birthright
 Taking the Baton
 The Great Commission
 The Body of Christ
 The Ministry of Every Believer
 Joining the Work of God
 The Tree of Life
 The Ministry of Reconciliation
 Filled with the Spirit
 Ministry to the Body
 Sent into the Harvest
 Speaking the Word of God
 A Lifestyle Gospel
 Salt and Light
 Enforcing the Victory
 Signs and Wonders
A New Kind of Leadership
 Establishing a Daily Church
 Making Disciples
 The New Wine
 The Goal of Ministry

he saw the *primary* description of his ministry as “servant.” The word “apostle” was *secondary*, a subtitle, an appended description that simply qualified what *kind* of a servant Paul was. God intends this servant attitude to underscore all ministry. Servanthood defines ministry, motivates ministry and provides the boundaries for all ministry.

In **1 Corinthians 4:1,5**, Paul elaborates on his servant definition of ministry:

“So then, men ought to regard us *as servants of Christ* and as those entrusted with the secret things of God...For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, *and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.*”

The Subtle Elevation of Man

Yet despite the servant model of leadership being so clearly taught in Scripture, what we see within church leadership often varies quite markedly from this model. This is because there is a subtle push-pull toward an elevation of the leader.

The pull of elevation

There are internal forces that can drive a leader toward self-elevation. These internal forces are described as:

- **Selfish ambition** – Ambition is an inherent quality present in the leadership gift, but when that ambition is self-focused (on the needs and desires of the leader) this will lead to self-elevation (**Philippians 1:17; 2:3**).
- **Insecurity** – An insecure leader will seek to “shore up” his position of authority, and this can only happen through self-elevation.
- **Competitiveness** – Paul calls this motivation “envy and rivalry” (**Philippians 1:15**). In fact, you will find that envy and selfish ambition often go together in Scripture (note **Philippians 1:15,17; Galatians 5:20-21; James 3:14,16**). Competition among church leaders is based on a comparison between outward measures of success, and this leads without exception to self-elevation.

These three things – selfish ambition, insecurity and competitiveness – are classic hallmarks of the old self. If a leader has an unresolved old self, then the result will be self-elevation.

The push of elevation

But there are also external forces that can elevate a leader. Many congregations like to put their leader up on a pedestal, for two main reasons:

- People like to live vicariously through their leader. In other words, the leader’s success becomes a reflection of their own success.
- People like to transfer their individual responsibility to their leader. In other words, the leader “does it for me.” I don’t need to witness, because

our leader is the perfect evangelist. I don't need to give too much of my time to others, because our leader is the perfect pastor.

It goes almost without saying that this puts incredible pressure on many church leaders, yet this push toward elevation is hard to resist. There is, however, a very real and present danger to this pedestal-position. When a leader falls from the pedestal created by the congregation, it can be devastating to many Christian lives. And it is fact sadly repeated down through history that the higher a leader is placed on a pedestal, the greater the potential for a fall.

Once again, this is the old self raising its ugly head in church life. For if the congregation has a problem with unresolved old self, then the result will often be the elevation of their leader.

Leadership is not, however, about elevating ourselves. "For we do not preach ourselves," says Paul, "but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."

A Different View of Leadership

Let's take another look at Paul's self-description of leadership found in **1 Corinthians 4:1**:

"So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and *as those entrusted with the secret things of God.*"

This statement by Paul is made to counter an attitude that had prevailed within the Corinthian church, an attitude that drove them to elevate their leadership, creating competing factions that clustered around different leaders.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:3-9

It is in response to this worldly attitude toward leadership that Paul insists that the Corinthians "regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God."

This verse is a real eye-opener, for it reveals what lies at the very core of New Testament leadership. For, according to Paul, leadership is simply a defined expression of servanthood, circumscribed by what God has entrusted to you. Here we discover that all leadership flows from two things:

The act of entrusting

The moment God *entrusts* something to you, ministry has been set in motion. Your capacity as a leader emerges from this divine trust that has been given to you (and we shall see later in the study that leadership can be expressed on many different levels). For you, the important question is:

What has God entrusted to me?

The answer to this question will shape your ministry and, ultimately, your role in leadership.

The act of being faithful to that trust

Once you have identified the trust God has given you, you now need to be faithful to that trust. In **1 Corinthians 4:2**, Paul goes on to say:

“Now it is required that those who have been given a trust *must prove faithful.*”

Paul described his ministry as “simply discharging the trust committed to me” (**1 Corinthians 9:17**). The concept of a trust means that a leader has a pre-arranged responsibility committed to him, bounded by that which was agreed beforehand. It is important in ministry not to step beyond the boundaries of the trust that has been committed to you.

The Servant-Leader

Like most things in God’s Word, servanthood can only be truly understood by a direct revelation from God. We need a daily dose of “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation” (**Ephesians 1:17**) in order to grasp what it means to act as a servant-leader each and every day.

Let’s look first at the injunction of Jesus to the leaders of his Church in **Mark 10:43-45**:

“...Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Do you notice how in this command to be “slave of all,” Jesus himself leads the way? He puts himself forward as the example of what ministry and leadership is all about. He leads by leading, by providing a model to follow.

Read John 13:3-17

Jesus is the great example of what a leader should be like. In attitude and action, he exemplified the subject of this lesson – “a new kind of leadership.” And in **Philippians 2:5-7**, Paul says:

“Your attitude should be *the same as that of Christ Jesus*: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...”

This servanthood is not a mere euphemism. It is not just a term that we use because it has a nice biblical ring to it. It is a fundamental property of New Testament leadership. And for this model of leadership to work, several things must come into play:

A different ambition

Rather having “selfish ambition,” a Christian leader should have a godly ambition – an ambition to serve both God and his Church. Rather than having an ambition

to see one's personal "kingdom" enhanced, the Christ-like leader should have an insatiable passion to see God's kingdom extended.

Paul describes how Christ "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." If a leader is in "grasping" mode, this is a sure sign that selfish ambition has taken root. But when there is no sense of grasping, the leader can then be consumed by an ambition that is outside of himself – the ambition of none other than Christ.

Read Romans 15:17-20

A different motivation

Read Galatians 1:10

A leader can be motivated either by the desire to please men or to please God. The desire to please men corrupts leadership.

In **1 Thessalonians 2:3-6**, Paul writes:

"For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. *We are not trying to please men but God*, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. *We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.*"

Jesus also emphasizes the importance of a God-pleasing motivation, and exemplifies it in his own ministry, when in **John 5:30** he says:

"By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, *for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.*"

A different reward

A godly leader is one who does not find his reward in the accolades of success but in the commendation of the Lord himself (**2 Corinthians 10:18**). The location of a leader's reward is absolutely vital to proper attitudes and motivations in church leadership.

Read Matthew 6:21

Are You a Leader?

Not every believer has the gift of leadership – the capacity to lead tens, hundreds or thousands of people. But there is one sense where every believer is a leader. Any time you take the initiative, any time people fall in behind the direction that you take, you are leading.

Leadership is actually defined on three different levels:

➔ **The role of leader** – God has set leaders within his Body. These leaders

fulfil specific functions and roles within the Church, and have authority invested according to those functions and roles. Roles must be appointed.

- **The gift of leadership** – This is the capacity given by God to lead people. Not everyone has the gift of leadership. This gift can be recognized quite simply. If something needs to be done, a leader will tend to rise to the challenge, like cream rising to the top. The gift of leadership will make its presence known.
- **The act of leading** – This happens anytime a person takes the initiative and another person falls in behind that initiative.

A person who fulfils a leadership role should, for obvious reasons, have a *gift* of leadership and actually *lead* others. But you may have neither the role nor the gift of leadership, yet still lead.

In a sense, we are all leaders at one time or another. If you don't think you are, just look at these examples:

- **Parenthood** – Are you a father or mother? Then you are a leader within your family.
- **Prayer** – Every time you attend a prayer meeting and you lead out in vocal prayer, you are expressing a limited measure of leadership.
- **Witness** – When you lead someone to Christ, you are doing exactly that – leading.
- **Discipleship** – As you nurture others in their growth in Christ, you are leading them forward in their walk with the Lord.

As you can see, there is role-defined leadership and there is also a roleless leadership. But whatever the kind of leadership, the principles of leadership remain the same. You are a servant who has been entrusted with something from God, and you are to be faithful to the trust you have been given.

Under Authority

Read Matthew 8:8-9

This centurion was a role-defined leader. He was in charge of a century (one hundred soldiers). Yet as a leader, he understood that he had authority only because he was under authority.

Most people see the authority of the leader without realizing that the leader is also under authority. Many see the authority without perceiving the responsibility behind the authority.

Authority and responsibility are flip sides of the same coin. In fact, there are two things that any leader should understand before he or she steps into a role of leadership.

- There can be no authority without responsibility
- There can be no responsibility without authority

The measure of authority should match the measure of responsibility, and just as responsibility is delegated, so is authority. There is always a danger when someone gives you a responsibility without the authority to match that responsibility. Likewise, a person should never take authority over a situation without being willing to take on a responsibility equal to that authority.

We'll now take a look at one specific type of leadership role within the church – the role of elder. As we look at the ministry of eldership, we will see many principles that apply to every level of leadership within the church.

Understanding Eldership

Read Acts 15:4-6

By its simplest definition, an “elder” is someone who is older in the faith, with a leadership gifting in the Body of Christ, regardless of what kind of ministry gifting that may be. Even though Peter was an apostle, he called himself an elder (**1 Peter 5:1**). John also called himself an elder (**2 John 1**). Elders can have different ministry functions (**1 Timothy 5:17**) and can be appointed (or “ordained”) for special leadership roles within a local church body (**Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5**).

In **1 Peter 5:1-3**, Peter describes the function of a church elder:

“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder...*Be shepherds* of God’s flock that is under your care, *servicing as overseers* – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; *not greedy for money*, but *eager to serve*; *not lording it over those entrusted to you*, but *being examples to the flock*.”

Let’s look closely at Peter’s description of the role and function of an elder.

Be shepherds

The Lord Jesus is called the “great Shepherd of the sheep” (**Hebrews.13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; Revelation 7:17**) and sets the example of a “good shepherd” – one who lays down his life for the sheep (**John 10:11-15**). He is the “Chief Shepherd” (**1 Peter 5:4**) and every leader who shepherds his flock is responsible to him.

In modern society, the allegory of a shepherd is somewhat removed from the experience of the average Christian, but this was not so in Bible times. When Peter spoke of being shepherds of God’s flock,* his readers knew precisely what he was talking about.

A shepherd didn’t *drive* the flock from behind; he *led* the flock from out in front. It is this picture of a leader who doesn’t just *tell* the way, but actually *shows* the way, that Peter is referring to here.

* Interestingly, Peter’s admonition to the elders echoes his own personal commission from Christ (see **John 21:15-17**).

Paul also uses this same allegorical description of leadership in **Acts 20:28**:

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. *Be shepherds of the church of God*, which he bought with his own blood.”

Serving as overseers

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7

An overseer, or “bishop,” is someone who has the responsibility of guiding and leading a church (**Titus 1:6-9; Philippians 1:1**). This term is equivalent to the ministry of “pastor” as it is generally understood today.

With the responsibility of oversight comes the authority from Christ to govern a church (**Romans 12:8; Hebrews 13:17**). Jesus is called the “Overseer of our souls” (**1 Peter 2:25**) and the model for how an overseer should lead.

Acts 20:28 also describes this function of church oversight:

“*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God*, which he bought with his own blood.”

To oversee means, in its core essence, to “keep watch,” and Paul tells us what an overseer should keep watch over – both himself and his flock.

Not greedy

Read 1 Timothy 6:5-11

Read Luke 12:15

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:4-5

The motive of Christ-like leadership is not self-gain but self-giving. A leader can, of course, receive financial support from a church (**1 Corinthians 9:7-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18**). It is not money itself that is at issue here. It is the love of money that is at issue (see **Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 6:24**)

Eager to serve

Read 1 Peter 4:10

A leader is not just to serve, but also to be *eager* to serve (**1 Peter 5:2; Romans 12:11**). If we do anything out of dry obligation, this is not pleasing to God. Rather, everything we do in the Christian life should be as a response to God’s grace (**1 John 4:19**). We give our lives in ministry *because* of God’s goodness to us (**Romans 12:1**).

Not lording it over

Read Matthew 20:25-26

Read 2 Timothy 2:23-26

To “lord it over” means to take the place of the Lord in people’s lives. Only Jesus Christ is Lord (**Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Corinthians 8:9**). A leader’s desire should not be to build a big ministry for himself or to lord it over other churches (**2 Corinthians 1:24**), but to work with other ministries to help the Body to grow into “the full measure of the stature of Christ” (**Ephesians 4:11-13**, KJV).

Being an example

Read Titus 2:7-8

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6

Read 1 Timothy 4:12

True leadership is leadership by example (**2 Thessalonians. 3:7-9**). In **Hebrews 13:7**, the writer gives this admonition:

“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and *imitate their faith*.”

This is the way that Christ leads – by example (**John 13:15; Ephesians 5:1-2; 1 Peter 2:21**). In fact it could be said that the primary skill that any leader should develop is in how to *lead* – that simple act of showing how it is really done. This “follow me” principle pervades the whole of the New Testament’s concept of leadership.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1

The Elders of a City

Read John 17:20-23

The purpose of leadership is to lead. Leading means having a vision and a goal. That vision must be an expression of the vision of the Lord Jesus himself.

In order to see fulfilled his vision of a world brimming with the knowledge of the glory of God, Jesus prayed that “all of them may be one.” God’s plan is bring the leaders of the Church – the “elders” of a city or town or region – together in unity, in order to pray together and work together. This is the foundation upon which he will pour out his Spirit.

The united front presented by the “elders of a city” is also the ultimate expression of the “follow me” ethic of leadership in the Body of Christ. As the leaders of the Church on the highest level express the selflessness of mutual servanthood, so there will be a trickle-down effect. God is raising fathers and mothers in the Body who will forge the way, showing what the “new kind of leadership” is really all about.