
A Call for Effective, Contemporary Christian Leadership

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Introduction

Authentic, Spirit-enabled Christian leadership *really matters*. It is not just men and women serving in “Christian” roles, such as pastors of churches, Sunday School teachers or denominational hierarchies, but wherever Christians are located in society, whether education, business, politics, government, media, community groups or the home. Influencing our world for good, as followers of Jesus Christ, all gets back to the quality of leaders, their personal commitment to Christ and their willingness to be “salt” and “light” in their circles of influence, to engage proactively, positively and purposefully, springing from a Christian world view geared to hearing and obeying God’s will.

Our ideals of leaders are often defined by our cultural expectations: strong, dominant, knowledgeable, charismatic, successful, usually men. Few churches would invite to their leadership team someone who publicly states “I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:28). However, Christian leadership is above culture. It is all about Jesus. Our dominant narrative as leaders must be Jesus Christ.

As I have explored this topic, I have discovered that much of what is written about Christian leadership (including by popular authors) is very generic; it can be applied to a lot of different settings; in order to broaden its appeal, it is often stripped of Christian content. We are assured that the principles work, even if applied by non-Christians, because they are eternal truths, however all too often that involves taking the message out of its context and enabling. I am convinced that we need to go back to first principles. Striving for leadership can be a good thing, but it is not to be for its own ends (Jeremiah 45:5). It is not about gaining honour from people (John 12:26), or for self-advancement, but for God’s purposes.

For many years, I have been both a Christian leader in a church setting, as an ordained minister, and a Christian in the rough and tumble business world. The chapters that follow are my attempt to portray what I believe works in developing, releasing, enabling and multiplying leaders who will touch our world for God.

A Biblical Example of Leadership

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.” (Acts 6:1-6)

This case study, involving the selection of some of the Christian community’s first leaders, is instructive, because it is at odds with prevailing ideas of leadership (both then and now), but the Bible celebrates it as a model that “worked”. The selection criteria required that candidates be:

- full of faith in God (not faith in their abilities, or their connections)
- full of the Holy Spirit (evident to others)
- full of wisdom (God’s wisdom, not man’s ideas, cf James 3:13-17)
- already involved in Christian work (not merely aspirational)
- willing to serve, even if it involved looking after a marginalised group, out of the limelight
- not obsessive about their “ministries”, gifts, status
- Inclusive, willing to work together as a team
- influential, for the right motives
- recognised by their own Christian community as men of integrity
- willing to submit to other leaders

Re-Defining Christian Leadership

- Start talking about Christian leadership and the following will often spring to mind:
 - high church tradition (usually Western) and denominational hierarchies
 - televangelists
 - right/left wing alliances of Christian groups with power agendas
 - aging/shrinking congregations searching for relevance
 - challenges interpreting Christian traditions and “truth” in the 21st century
- Contemporary Christian leadership is not:
 - position – too many Christian leaders confuse position with authority
 - hierarchy – although “order” *is* necessary (after all, who wants chaos?)
 - “charisma” – can be empty, without character or conviction (charisma means “graces” or “gifts”, not a personality trait, a “right” to be clung to, cf Philippians 2:6)
- Effective leadership:
 - influences the lives of people (leadership that walks alone is not leadership)
 - is a way of life – not just “a job”, career, or vocation
 - challenges people to go “above and beyond” in Christ’s work (cf Paul, Acts 20 28-31)
 - is relevant to people (cf Matthew 7:28, 29)
 - builds people – does not just titillate, entertain, or use them
 - makes people stronger as Christians (ie in the likeness of Jesus Christ, Ephesians 4:12-13)
 - is able to apply eternal truth to contemporary life – more than simply updating the vocabulary
- Not rhetoric – words alone are a cheap currency, quickly spent, all too often leading to division
- Not necessarily paid “full-time”, but a full-time commitment nevertheless
- Not hungry for the perks of position (cf Mark 10:38)

Qualities of Godly Leaders

- genuinely committed to Jesus Christ – non-negotiable for leaders in any age or culture
- walk with God, know God (through prayer, testing), obedient to Him
- hear from God for “today” (Hebrews 4:7)
- speak God’s word to their generation with conviction, starting with those around them
- people who spend time with them feel closer to God
- know how to trust God (from experience)
- know they are personally limited, but God is limitless
- recognize a specific call – comfortable in the call, not striving to be like others, not comparing
- have focus (“I want to know Him”, Philippians 3:10)
- have empathy with people; love them genuinely
- are able to build solid teams (Amos 3:3)
- are teachable (Exodus 33:13; Psalm 25:4, 5)
- have self-discipline (able to lead self before expecting to command others; 1 Corinthians 9:23-27)
- have a good reputation, even among outsiders (1 Timothy 3:7)
- demonstrate “humility”
 - not a common word
 - humility before God and toward others
 - (earthen vessels, cf 2 Corinthians 4:7) – reliance on self leads to disappointed
- cultivate a godly vision – where going, how know when arrive (John 1:37-39)
- willing to mentor others (2 Timothy 2:2)
- unambiguous, eg easy to say “change”, but need to be clear and consistent (1 Corinthians 14:8)
- know the message of Christ is relevant to peoples’ lives (cf John 4:28-29)
- know how to rest in God so as to avoid burn out

Calling all Leaders.....

- grow as a Christian (1 Timothy 3:6, 10) – *who* the leader is (ie as a person of character committed to Christ) is more important than his or her role or the tasks at hand (Daniel 11:32 – note the order)
- get a clear grasp of God’s purpose for your life
 - “wait” on your call; do not rush ahead of the Holy Spirit’s leading, timing
- humbly start where you are, with what you have
 - don’t fall for the limiting stereotype that effective leadership is defined by title or paid position
- be faithful with what you have/are, even if it is only small (Luke 9:17)
 - God can raise up leaders from unexpected quarters (Esther 4:14)
 - God knows the future and prepares leaders (Joseph, Genesis 50:20)
- develop your competencies, skills (2 Timothy 2:15)
- define and understand the need
- pray about how to influence those around you
- be available; don’t bemoan a vacuum of leadership, but work with the Holy Spirit about what He wants *you* to do
- study the lives of those who are influential in your life; spend time with them, learn from them

Read the following chapters carefully, prayerfully and draw from them as building blocks as you develop and use your leadership gifts.