

105

# Called to Lead

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**L**EADERS ARE NOT JUST BORN; they are called, gifted and equipped by God himself. They are continually growing in their understanding of who they are called to be, what they are called to do, and how they are called to lead. This chapter will explore these developmental issues and identify the essential competencies of leadership in the church.

## What a Leader Needs to Know

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### Knowing the People You are Called to Lead

Proverbs 20:5 says *“the purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, and a man of understanding draws them out.”*

This proverb uses the image of a well, dug deep in the ground through layers of earth to water below. A bucket tied to a rope was lowered into the well and plunged under the water in order to fill a bucket. Then, the bucket with the extra weight of the water needed to be “drawn out” to the surface. Not easy work. And the deeper the well...the more labor involved. The “purposes of a man’s heart” speaks to motivations, why someone chooses to do or say what they do. These “purposes” are shaped by our history, relationships, hurts, joys and life lessons.

When we think of even one aspect of our own story, why we think about a certain issue in a certain way, or why we react (either positively or

negatively) to any given situation in a certain way, and then have to explain it to someone, **we know our hearts are indeed deep waters.** Think of the complexity surrounding the last “miscommunication” you had with a family member, co-worker or friend. We realize how complex we are, but it is amazing how quickly we lose that perspective when it

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comes to working with other people and their strengths and struggles. In ministry it is tempting to fix quickly or heal lightly, negating the wisdom of this very proverb. The purposes of our hearts are deep waters, and the purposes of the hearts of the people we are leading are as well. Therefore, a wise leader must take time to listen well to others, ask good questions and then listen some more in order to draw out the purposes of the hearts of those they are called to lead. As those purposes begin to be drawn out, important information is given to a leader about the people and the context in which they are called to lead.

**Some questions to ask as you begin the process of knowing the people you are called to lead:**

- Who are the group of people I am leading, and what do I know about them?
- What is their history over the last 5 – 10 years? Previous to that?
- How do they view leaders? Skeptical? Aloof?
- What do they expect from them? Too many things? Not enough?
- How do they view themselves? Capable? Achieving? Underdog? Unworthy?
- What are their strengths/weaknesses?
- What are their needs/desires?
- What encourages them? What motivates them? What bursts their bubble?

- What do they get excited about?
- What kinds of things do they become stressed about?
- How do they handle conflict? How do they handle unexpected issues that arise?
- Who are influential people to the group and why?
- Do these people have formal authority (a position, paid or unpaid) or informal authority (who people naturally consult/follow)?

Take a moment to reflect on your overall experience and interactions that speak to these questions. Each question can lead to many more, as you get a sense of what some of the answers might be, and areas in which you need a better understanding. These are not meant to be questions you directly ask people, but areas to discern through relationships, time, and questions asked at appropriate times with certain people. Usually, there are specific people in your context who are not threatened by your questions and are insightful about the people and context in which you are called to lead. It might be helpful to have a ministry journal where you can note answers to these questions and refine them as you gain further information while in the process of leading this specific group in your specific context.

If you are a ministry leader who has been in your church for a long time, you might feel like you already know the people you are called to serve. Let these questions help you to stand back and look at the people you want to serve from a new and fresh perspective. You might see some new things as you answer these questions because being a member of a community makes it difficult to have an objective view concerning its strengths, struggles, and needs. You already function and relate in your community and system of relationships without having to think about it.

If you are new to a church it will take time for these answers to come into focus. You may have initial answers, but then, over time, prayer, and through serving the community, a more developed answer will start to form. These answers will contain deeper more hidden motivations and will be more complex and nuanced than many of your initial hunches. These questions are not meant to take away from the individuality of each person, but allow you to get an overall sense of the group you are leading. Also, these questions are part of an ongoing assessment process. **Without**

**a doubt, just when you think you've got it figured out, something will change. It is part of the journey of being a leader.**

**“Few practical ideas are more obvious or more critical than the need to get perspective in the midst of the action...Great athletes can at once play the game and observe it as a whole...We call this skill ‘getting off the dance floor and going on to the balcony’, an image that captures the mental activity of stepping back in the midst of the action and asking ‘What is really going on here’”. (Heifitz, 51)**

What difference does this make in your leading? You may have an idea where you are supposed to lead people, and it may be masterful and divinely inspired, but patiently and tenderly shepherding people through the process depends on knowing the people you are called to serve on a deeper level, allowing you to anticipate potential obstacles, and be aware of potential concerns. The quality of relationship you have with the people you are serving, your ability to understand and walk alongside them while answering their questions and understanding their fears, are all important factors as you move forward. As Heifitz points out, effective leaders are actively on the dance floor while retaining a view from the balcony.

### **Knowing the Ministry System You are Called to Lead in**

While attending a women's event in a large church, a woman approached and asked me about my view of educating children as this was an area of struggle for her. She said, with some passion and a few tears, “All the women in our church put their children in our Christian school.” She was a former public school teacher who was invested in and burdened for public education, and whose children currently attended their local public school. She felt called to serve and use her gifts in her children's school and felt distressed that the movement of her church was away from the mission field in which she had chosen to invest. In addition, she was also wrestling with a sense of guilt, as well as condemnation among her friends about her educational choices.

Later that day another woman in the same church told me she was wrestling with similar concerns “because all of my neighbors (who go to my church) are home schooling their children.” She and her husband felt

pressured to conform but didn't feel confident they were cut out to home school, yet worried about the views of their friends if they chose differently. "Our church really believes home schooling is the best way to educate children." If I was able to have more conversations that day, I might have possibly discovered a third or fourth perspective!

Conversations like these help us understand a bit more about our ministry system. They also give us many more follow up questions to ask individuals and ourselves as we go through our day in and day out, year in and year out call to lead. The first conversation gave me one idea of what

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was going on, and the second gave me a different one, leading me to ask many more questions rather than offering answers. It was the beginning of starting to understand that particular ministry system. I was just scratching the surface. **Systems are made up of people, and groups of people, with different levels of position and authority, collective history, hurts, joys, all of which make that system very "deep waters".**

In order to know your ministry system, you need to have these conversations while being able to place the information you receive into a larger perspective. This process takes time and requires continually being "on the dance floor" while retaining a view "from the balcony" in order to gain a bigger perspective. Some of the important things you are initially looking at from the balcony are the people in leadership positions, paid or volunteer, and those who have formal or informal authority in your ministry system. These leaders can be in official paid positions, volunteers, or those people who others in your system look to for guidance as to how to react, respond, or think about certain issues. These people are often the ones who give us major insights into our ministry system enabling us to have a better grasp on what is going on.

In Peter Scazzerro's book, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, there is a

chapter entitled “As Go the Leaders, So Goes the Church.” In this chapter, he humbly makes connections between the issues he was unwilling to face in his own family of origin and marriage, his emotional, relational and spiritual maturity as a pastor, and the spiritual growth of his church. Our ministry systems highly reflect their leaders’ strengths and struggles, it is unavoidable. Scazzero’s insights serve as a caution for us as leaders as

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we consider our willingness to face and work through difficult emotional and relational issues in our own lives and the potential impact of that work, or lack thereof, on others we serve. Nevertheless, understanding the leaders of our church is always an important place to look to gain insight into our ministry system and how it functions.

In the large church mentioned earlier, where I was visiting, the senior pastor had five children and they were all home schooled. The Associate Pastor had his three children in the Christian school, and was heavily involved in its promotion. He was also the leader of the first woman’s home fellowship group. As I chatted with him I learned more about the church’s past that help shape its current concerns over education. The former senior pastor (who founded the church) had put his children in the local schools, and his children had gone through some serious rebellions and one had even rejected the faith. Many of the church elders, deacons, and congregation provided support to this family during that time. Even though these events had transpired a number of years in the past, the ongoing impact from this difficult period was a lingering fear of the public school system. Yet, most of the people who walked through this time and transition failed to see the impact of this event on the current underlying view of public schools that was being caught and taught in their midst.

**“We all get swept up in the action, particularly when it becomes intense or personal and we need most to pause. Self reflection does**

**not come naturally...Most people instinctively follow a dominant trend in an organization or community, without critical evaluation of its merits. The herd instinct is strong. And a stampede not only tramples those who don't keep pace, it also makes it hard to see another direction – until the dust settles.” (Heifitz, 51)**

**Some questions to begin thinking about your ministry system:**

- Who are the leaders I am working under and what do I know about how they function?
- What motivates them and what stresses them?
- How do you think they view themselves?
- How do the people they lead/serve view them?
- How do you think they view the people they lead?
- How do leaders in our church deal with conflict?
- What do the leaders seem to value?
- What is “taught” by certain important people, and what is “caught” from them, or others in the system? Are there any discrepancies?
- What are people anxious about?
- What do people talk about with the pastor?
- How does the leadership team view themselves? Where are their blindspots?

**Draw a diagram on paper to best represent the structure of authority.**

- How do people view and respond to authority?
- What is the process by which big decisions are made and communicated?
- How are people brought into the process?

Being called to a position of leadership for our Lord within a ministry system is a great honor, but **in order to lead, you must understand the people you are called to lead, and the ministry system you are serving in.** This informs how you lead, love, serve, pray, advocate for, come alongside, shepherd, develop leaders and programs, disciple and mentor others. It will also allow you to answer questions from both those over and below you about “why are we doing this and not that?” and “how come she was asked to be a small group leader for the new min-

istry?” and “why haven’t we started a ministry specifically doing this or that?” to the best of your ability.

### **Knowing Yourself in Your Ministry System**

After seminary, I quickly had three babies and felt like I had lost a bit of my identity. When I got an opportunity to serve our local church by sitting on an advisory committee that was looking into the issues of a certain demographic of our church and community, I felt honored and excited to use my gifts and years of training to help in a ministry capacity. The task and issues were very important and close to my heart and I was very invested in the outcome. But as we finished our year long commitment, and made our suggestions to the leadership of our church, it became clear that they were not ready to move on some of the bigger and deeper things we had suggested. In fact, it seemed like they had regressed on their desire to move forward at all! I was crushed, and soon found myself in a mentor’s office. He calmly listened, understood my grief, and was also a bit concerned at what might be the outcome. But then he asked me—is it your challenge, or that of the leadership of our church?

My first reaction, informed from my heart rate and the hours and hope for change I had put into this, was an unequivocal “MINE!” But after my emotions cooled, as I stood back, I realized that I had been asked to give my opinion, research, and contributions, but not lead the charge. I had lost the ability to see the limits of my role in the system, and differentiate myself from the church leadership and ministry system over the course of my committee work. I was viewing the challenge and its outcome as tied to my identity and reflecting my convictions. My role had limits as one volunteer member on a committee. .

And the committee’s hard work was essentially for the leaders’ information, in order to help them lead well. But I had made the problem mine. I was personally taking the church’s challenge on myself, thinking the outcome somehow was a reflection upon me, and it was making my emotions and heart rate soar.

This father in the faith allowed me to take a look at myself, and not be defined in that moment by the leaders’ responses and decisions. To be helpful, I needed to differentiate myself from the system I was serving in, and the leadership I was under. I could respectfully disagree with them. I

could submit to those who had been called to lead, remain connected to them in relationship, and yet stand apart from them in my thinking and advice, without undermining them or agreeing with them. When I was given the opportunity to hear their plans, I could calmly say to them, “It seems as if these decisions are going to bring great challenges for you (not us, or me). How are you planning to address those?” Or “How do you see these decisions reflecting some of the deeper concerns that we talked

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about?” I could prayerfully choose to participate in the direction they were leading, or not, and give thoughtful reasons why. I needed to mature in my ability to both remain connected to my leaders, and yet respectfully disagree with them, and not let my identity be caught up in someone else’s decisions, nor allow my emotions about the issue to render me useless, or a hindrance to God’s work through his leaders.

Leaders lead in a variety of ways. Sometimes we lead from “above” and sometimes we lead from “below.” We seek to be led the way we would want someone to respond to our leadership, whether positively or negatively. **A leader who has the capacity to know and do the right thing understands himself or herself apart from others and so is able to achieve distance from a situation and observe what is really going on, without letting personal reactivity or anxiety get in the way. (Leaders Journey, pg 18)** In order to do this we need to be able to see our own contributions, strengths, weaknesses, similarities and even differences from the system.

It is not a natural thing to have objectivity when it comes to looking at ourselves, our patterns, our contributions in and to the ministry system. Gifted leaders can tend to be absorbed in the vision that God is calling them to, the strategizing to pull the vision off, and the urgency of motivating their people to get on board. If you remember the movie

“Braveheart,” many of us are taught to view leadership like Mel Gibson playing William Wallace before the battle against the English, gathering and motivating the hearts of the rag-tag group of Scots to defend their freedom, even at the almost certain cost of their lives. When he finally bellows, “They may take our lives...but they may never take our freedom!” Most of us are ready to come off the couch, put on some blue face

## *How do we know we have done enough listening, assessing, praying, seeking God before moving to action?*

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paint and kilts, and fight with them.

Many of us desire that moment to rally the troops, in large or small numbers – bringing energy, action, enthusiasm – in a new vision for a Bible study, a life changing book for a small group, a new ministry model, etc. But **how do we know we are part of God’s leading, and not swept up in the momentum, or our own selfish desires creeping in to our leading for God?** How do we know that our own sin patterns, relational issues, or influences from the whispers of loving but misguided friends are not steering the ship as we lead? How do we be a calm and winsome presence in the storm of making decisions with others that may or may not agree with us? How do we know we have done enough listening, assessing, praying, seeking God before moving to action?

**The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership. In fact the key to successful spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader’s internal life than with the leader’s expertise, gifts or experience. (Peter Scazzero, the *Emotionally Healthy Church*, pg 20)**

**Some questions to begin thinking about your role and understanding yourself in the ministry system you are serving in:**

- If I stepped back and looked at myself, what would I say are my

greatest strengths and greatest weaknesses as a person?

- In my ministry role?
- From what I can tell, how do the people I serve view me and my role?
- How do I think the people who I lead view me? How does that affect me?
- How do I deal with conflict? Unpleasantness? Issues?
- From those above me? From those I serve?
- What are the issues/Who are the people I tend to react to?
- When do I feel defensive? Insecure? Frustrated?
- Whose opinion of me means the most to me in my ministry system?
- How do I view my role?
- How do I think people respond to my leadership?
- What do I try to avoid? What motivates me?
- What aspects of what I do in ministry give me deep pleasure as I lead/serve?

**Determining what the right thing for our lives and our churches is no easy task. The search requires the engagement of the spiritual disciplines of silence, solitude, prayer, and fasting. It did for Jesus, and it does for us who follow him. Hearing from God is the first step. But having heard, we must still find the emotional and spiritual maturity to do God's will, even when the pressure to compromise is strong. (The Leader's Journey, pg. 19)**

I hope these questions have spurred on your thoughts about the role of a leader, and have given you a sense of going “to the balcony,” in order to step back from what you are doing in the midst of your leadership calling, or what you are about to do in a new ministry role or task. In this next section we are going to get on the balcony in a different way that is equally crucial to a leader - to get an overview of redemptive history, and see what that means for how we lead on the dance floor of ministry today.

## **Perspective in Leadership**

We have looked at how a leader needs to “get off the dance floor in order to get on to the balcony” to know how best to serve God by knowing the people they are called to lead, the ministry system they are called to serve

in, and by knowing themselves and their roles in that system, no matter how big or small. **A leader also needs to keep the perspective of the greater story**, the overarching story of redemptive history that their individual and collective ministry story is contained within and is furthering. We are part of something that is much bigger than ourselves, bigger than our ministries, our local churches, or even our denominations. It is only a brief season of this living history that we are serving in, and this has important implications for our leadership of God’s people before God and a watching world.

### **Perspective: The Larger Story**

If we pulled back and looked at the Bible cover to cover, we would see four important aspects that are formative and foundational to the way we live and operate as human beings in our world in this time in history. They make sense of our “dance floor” and “balcony” experiences. They are Creation, Fall, Redemption and Glory. We will take a brief look at these from passages of scripture, and implications for leading.

## **Creation: Genesis 1 & 2**

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### **Read Genesis 1:26-31**

This passage talks about how we are made in the image of God, and given what is called the “creation mandate” – be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion. Humanity, in the image of God, was led by God, to lead for God over the earth, in the opening chapter of Scripture. As the overview of creation is given to us in this chapter, and the sixth and final day of active creating, the image bearers, male and female, were called to lead in the image of the triune God, who said “let us make man in our image and let them rule...” Together, male and female, were to rule for God in the world He created, and the design allowed man and creation to flourish – it was beautiful, lush, right, fragrant, fertile, VERY GOOD!

### **Read Genesis 2:18-25**

If we look to Genesis 2, we see a more detailed account of the creation of humanity. We see that when Adam was going about his task of naming

the animals, he grew more and lonelier, as none of the animals were a right companion for him. My husband always comments when he teaches on this, that Adam had the best boss, the most intimate and fulfilling quiet times with direct communication with God, and no frustration in his work and exercise of dominion – really, everything a man could want! Yet, God said it was “not good” for him to be alone (which makes us think of the repeated “good, good, and very good” in the Gen. 1 creation account...except it is the first thing that was NOT GOOD, and that

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should give us great pause!), and then Adam went about experiencing the “not goodness” of it as he named the animals, and his loneliness in life and purpose grew. We see this emphasized in his poetic response “This, at last, is bone of my bone...” He has been waiting. The naming of the animals was painfully long living in that reality, without his companion, someone corresponding to him. The creation of Eve moves the Hebrew from prose to poetry in Adam’s exclamation, reflected in the indented words in our English translation.

- What does God say in these passages about the way He set this world up?
- What do these passages say about relationships/companionship?
- What do these say about our designed purpose in creation?
- What do you notice about the intention of leadership in this passage?
- Are things flourishing or struggling?

## **The Fall**

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### **Read Genesis 3:1-24**

Humanity was created to be God’s vice-regents, under-rulers on the earth

for God. This became immeasurably more challenging with the events that followed in Genesis 3. The Fall happened through the temptation of Eve, by the serpent questioning her about God's goodness. Through their disobedience, brokenness entered the world. In the consequences of Adam and Eve being tempted by the serpent and disobeying God's parameters, we see both the qualitative and dispositional change in the earth and its economy,

*But we also see God's mercy and grace in withholding for us the most intense consequences and full and just extent of the law, and placing them on the promised Redeemer.*

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its inhabitants and vegetation, and in relationships and the struggles that came with consequences. Flourishing was no longer easy under man's leadership of the earth. In fact, the opposite was now very possible.

But we also see God's mercy and grace in withholding for us the most intense consequences and full and just extent of the law, and placing them on the promised Redeemer. Thorns and thistles and sweat and struggle will mark labor for sustenance, and pain in childbirth and struggle in relationships will and do mark our days, where no amount of discipline or avoidance can allow us to escape them. Yet in Genesis 3:15, in the midst of our darkness, is the first promise of the One, the Seed of the Woman, who will crush the head of Satan, and make a way to redemption, restoration and Glory. It is God's love that shines, even in the grievousness of Fall.

### **For Reflection:**

We all experience thorns and thistles, struggle and difficulty in our lives, work and relationships.

- How does this passage make sense of some of the things you are facing in your life, relationships and as a leader?
- What relationships for you are difficult, broken or tense?
- What tasks are more of a struggle than anticipated?
- What things in your life and ministry are you "sweating" over?

- What does your heart naturally do with these aspects of brokenness? (doubt God? Fret? Get angry?)

## Redemption

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### **Read 1 Peter 2:23-24; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21;**

In humanity's first and foundational catastrophic moments, when Adam and Eve fell, God didn't wipe us off the face of the earth. Like the loving Father that He is, He didn't give us what we deserved (giving mercy) by not bringing immediate death upon Adam and Eve, but gave us what we did not (giving grace) by providing a way of redemption that satisfied the just payment of the fullness of our sin. It was His promise of a redeemer, the Christ, His own Son (Gen 3:15). And as true sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, we are sinners, and we need him – for our justification (point of salvation), our ongoing sanctification, and in the promise and fulfillment of it one day in our glorification.

And Jesus came, in history about 2000 years ago, born of a virgin girl, crucified, He was an atoning sacrifice for our sins, purchasing our redemption with his blood. We live knowing much of God's promises and prophecies have come to fruition in time and space, documented in history, as we await the fulfillment of the rest of them.

### **For Reflection:**

- Think back on your own personal story of redemption – when did you know that Jesus was your Savior?
- Think on your life since then – how does your redemption impact your life, your relationships, your work? What has your redemption meant for the impact of the Fall on your life?
- What does this mean specifically for your leadership role?

## Glory

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### **Read Romans 8:18-30; Revelation 21:1-5**

As we are in the last days, the days in between the redemption that has already come, and the full redemption yet to come we are living in tension. For this reason, theologians refer to this time we are living in as

“the already and the not yet”. But one day He will come again to usher in what we know have and experience in part and by faith, but someday will experience fully and face to face. **And we live and minister, awaiting His second coming, to usher in the new heaven and the new earth, fully restoring us and creation.**

### **For Reflection:**

- Close your eyes for a moment and think about what the new heaven and new earth will be like based on these passages. Where is Jesus leading us?
- What does this mean for our leadership?
- What is the role of the Spirit in the “already and the not yet?”
- What is our role?
- What are the some of the challenges of leading in “the already and the not yet?”
- What are some personal challenges for you living and leading in “the already and not yet?”
- Why is the overview of God’s story and where we are in it important to keep in perspective as you lead in your particular role?

### **Synthesizing the Larger Story in Our Lives: Implications for Leaders**

One of the applications of living in light of the larger story is honest self reflection, personally and in our leadership. As we think of the perspective of our world and life view, there is one application that we can not avoid: We are sinful (yet redeemed) leaders, leading sinful (yet redeemed, or maybe some not redeemed) people.

**People do not sin simply in the abstract or in theory. We sin tangibly, and deeply. And sometimes grievously. And leaders are no exception.** And we all have the same fallen hearts that are capable of committing the most heinous crimes, whether in seed form, or fully blown. It is the single most important area for us to lead in. We are called to concrete honesty in this area, and deep dependency on our Lord to work in us and through us for our ongoing journey in our sanctification. We can’t lead people to where we have not, or will not, go.

And that means humility, deep humility (ugh...swallow) and real

confession to God and maybe to certain trustworthy people in our lives. It is not a call to everyone knowing every detail. But we can not live as though we do not sin anymore, or that ours is somewhat “acceptable sin” versus that of people we are leading and the depth of their sin. The beauty of the gospel is that the deeper the sin that God allows us to see in our hearts, lives, choices, words and actions, the deeper and more real and

***We can't lead people to the good news of the gospel by only showing others our strength and areas of victory.***

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beautiful is the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, who took the proportional wrath and punishment to redeem each of us, because He loves us. And now, even when struggling and fallen, if we are His, we are beloved children, who God rejoices over, forgiving us even more than seventy times seven.

We can't lead people to the good news of the gospel by only showing others our strength and areas of victory. What is caught from us is then the wrong message, even if what we are teaching from our mouths is doctrinally and scripturally true and right. **Only in our weakness and our own need of the gospel, where we all can identify, can we lead people to the true gospel, where the good news becomes applicable.** We need a deep awareness of our need for the leading of Jesus in our own lives, as well as in others. We are sinful leaders in the process of being restored, leading sinful people in the process of being restored...and we can't lead people where we are not willing to go.

### **Read 1 John 1:5-10**

- What sins/sin patterns have more of a temptation or grip on you now, and are tempting you to ignore or justify?
- What is the response of our Lord if we confess our sins? Do you really believe that with your deeper sins?

**A leader is primarily someone in whom the gospel is actively at**

work in their hearts and lives through faith, and their relationships, words, and actions, testify to it. Their leadership call and abilities are grounded in, and are an outworking of, this same faith.

## Perspective on Leadership: Self and Motivations

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### Read Matthew 20:21-28

What are your initial thoughts on what this passage tells us about the heart of leadership?

This is a pregnant window into a moment with Jesus and his twelve disciples where He lays out for us the foundational aspects of leadership in God's economy. We have a mother's request: notice her humble position, kneeling before Jesus, and then, her seemingly self-less words on behalf of her sons. She does not know what she is asking. She is in over her head. But in her we see a bit of what is in each of our hearts; the desire for more power, for prestige, for a bit of glory and honor on ourselves, mixed in with our right desires to give it to Him. We want to be under Him (most of the time) and know we are not Him (most of the time) but in our hearts we are continually vying for position, sometimes with Him and sometimes with others serving alongside us.

The cups, briefly: Can anyone drink the cup of suffering and wrath that Jesus would drink for us on the cross, our perfect atoning sacrifice, to satisfy the punishment from the judgment we deserve? No! Does she know what she is asking Jesus on behalf of her sons? No! She is looking to the glory, not the sacrifice. **There is no glory without sacrifice in God's economy of leadership** – it is one of the very things that qualify us for leadership. Humble serving, even as leadership positions and status tempt us to be served and sit “above”, marks a leader who loves the Lord.

However, there is a sense in which we can drink of the cup of suffering in this life. Both of these disciples would indeed drink of the cup of suffering for the gospel before their lives were over, which is probably what Jesus is referring to when He says “you will drink my cup”. James would be the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2) and John was exiled to Patmos (Rev 1:9). But we can drink another cup, the cup of redemption, because He drank the cup of suffering for us.

Notice what happens with the remaining ten disciples. What is going on in their hearts when they realize what is going on?

It is the same thing that was going on with the mother's heart and the hearts of her two sons. If the two sons were to go up in status, then the remaining ten have no where to go but down a tier of leadership, authority and prestige. And there it is. The commands of "loving the Lord their God, and loving their neighbors as themselves" were far from their minds and hearts. And if we are honest, at times, it is far from ours in

*He calls on their experience of leadership in the world – the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so with you.*

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relationships and ministry. Self gain is a stronghold.

So Jesus uses the moment to lay down some formative groundwork for leadership in the kingdom of God, so there would be no confusion with the heart of leadership in the world. They are summarized in four little words, whose implications turn our consciences and choices, as leaders, upside down:

Not so with you. **Not so with you.**

He calls on their experience of leadership in the world – the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so with you. People in power use their power to make themselves more powerful, prominent, authoritative, and influential, while allowing those under them know that they are not authoritative and using them to serve their self aggrandizing goals. They "lord it over them".

**Not so with you.**

Then He lays it out for them. Whoever would be first among you must be your servant, and whoever would be the first among you must be your slave, and even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

If I am honest with you, I will tell you that this passage calls me to

have a long lingering moment in the mirror of my heart, a good honest look at myself as a leader. In this passage is Jesus' call to leadership, and it is not what comes naturally to the human heart. After years of leading in both para-church and church settings, volunteer and paid, with positions of greater authority or less – some things can begin to feel more natural about dying to self, dying to self gain, image, power, etc...but every situation and ministry context and call to lead brings with it new and unfore-

***This makes us dependent. Dependent on God's power made perfect in our weakness.***

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seen challenges. So it never becomes “old hat”. This makes us dependent. Dependent on God's power made perfect in our weakness. It is contrary to the worldly call to outward perfection, hiding weakness, and thinking ourselves inappropriately “worthy” of the call. It is a leader's call to vigilance, by faith, in battling both the overt and clandestine desires of our hearts for self gain, and walking with Him as we lead, love and serve.

**For Reflection:**

- What do you think it looks like in our day to lead by “lording it over” others? Can you think of a modern day equivalent?
- Have you ever been/are you under the leadership of someone (outwardly or more inwardly/subtly) like that?
- What was the situation? Take a moment to reflect on it and write down what comes to mind?
- How would you have liked to be led? What would that have looked like? What environment would that have created?
- What are some critical aspects of a Biblically “successful” leader Based on Jesus' message in the passage?

*There is a way that seems right to a man,  
but in the end it leads to death. Proverbs 16:25*

**The gospel calls us to a different kind of leadership, and different philosophy of why we lead, and a different methodology of how we lead.** It is one that doesn't seem as "right to a man", but it leads to life, people, churches and creation flourishing under it. In this passage Jesus turns our earthy perspective on its head. Whoever wants to lead must serve, be first must be a slave (or last), and like Jesus, give up his life for many. Godly leaders may or may not give up their physical life in the sense of physically dying, but those in God's service of leadership are continually called to see with different perspective, love with a sacrificial love, cling to Jesus for the ability to die to our own vision of grandeur in leadership, and get down to our contextualized and earthy equivalent of washing the feet of those we are leading, and call others to do the same.

One senior pastor puts it this way, "If someone has a compliment about the ministry of our church, I quickly point them to the many gifted people in the body that made that possible. But, if they come to me with complaints, I quickly take the responsibility myself". The applications abound with each individual and ministry position, in each context (ministry system), and each person's strengths and weaknesses, and the needs of the people you are leading, and in community around you.

### **Comparison of Two Ministries:**

Two separate churches had the same problem: They were growing by leaps and bounds with new families moving to their area, and coming to church for the first time. Great problem to have! But the pastor and leadership teams (elders/staff) of these two churches handled them in two vary different ways.

The first church had a volunteer coordinator for the children's ministries and was exhausted and tapped out by the time Sunday came from making phone calls every week asking for additional volunteers. When the pastor saw the problem, heard from his coordinator, and used his leadership to make an appeal to the congregation that week. After the first week, there were a few takers, those faithful church members, who answered the call, but not more than that. The pastor began to highlight week after week the need for more volunteers, and used his position to ask for help from up front.

Over time, they had to close a few of the rooms on different Sundays, and the continual call for help in the service made people wonder why a church didn't want to minister to children. This also made visitors and members feel uncomfortable using the nursery. They wondered if there were going to be enough people who really loved children (not just feeling guilty) there to help and didn't want to be a bigger burden to the already struggling nursery. The amount of new families began slowly dropping off.

The second church had a volunteer coordinator as well, and when she began to be overwhelmed by the amount of children on Sundays and the need for more volunteers, she also got little response from phone calls. Her pastor also saw the problem and immediately began talking to his staff and elders. That weekend in the service the pastor said how excited he was to see new faces and families in the church, and how excited he was to see what that meant for their growing nursery and children's ministry.

The following week the assistant pastor was preaching, and the pastor was in the children's ministry greeting parents and welcoming children into the nursery, changing diapers, holding crying babies, and serving where there was the greatest need, with some elders and staff helping him. The elders were instructed which weekend rotation they would be serving, and which they would be "on call", if there were too many children for the ratio they required for safety. Elders would be pulled out of the service at any time on those weekends.

### **For Reflection**

- What do these scenarios tell you about these two leaders' differing philosophies of ministry and way they work those out?
- Based on these scenarios, what do you think it would be like to work with each leader?
- What do you learn about leadership from these two examples?
- What makes a leader successful?
- What does this mean for you and your ministry/leadership role?
- What does that mean for who you recruit to lead under you and alongside you in your ministry/leadership role?

### **Perspective on Leading in a Ministry System: The Church**

## **Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11, 12-31; Romans 12**

One of the things that is unmistakable about these passages is the call of the church to be a unified body among the diversity of its gifted members. There are a variety of gifts, just like a variety of parts within a human body, some are more visible, attract more attention, are given more recognition and appreciation, and unfortunately, in our broken world – can tend to be given more value and honor, both in Paul’s time and culture, and in ours. Gifts are given by one Spirit, for the common good, for the building up of the body, in the service and to the glory of our one Lord and Savior.

*Gifts are given by one Spirit, for the common good,  
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We need the other parts. Sometimes we forget that. And they are designed to be led in such a way that they work together in unity and mutual appreciation amidst their differences in function and make up. “The eye can not say to the hand, I have no need of you”. And as one part of the body harms the whole body if it brings harm on another part, it also brings blessing on the body if it builds up another part. “If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together”.

We can make an educated guess here, but when we think of the members of the body and which part might be the ones pertaining to leadership – the eyes, mouth and head tend to come to mind. They are the speaking, leading, teaching, shepherding gifts. They require a working together to have view and sight, and help send messages and unify the body to move and function well in what it is called to do and get it where it is called to go.

The leadership role and gift has something to do with promoting and preserving togetherness in the body. A body doesn’t function well without an armpit, or a palm, or toe. Ever broken a toe? Dion Sanders, NFL star

and professional football player for the Dallas Cowboys was sidelined for most of a high salaried season with “turf toe”. Just one – turf toe. I’m sure he was wishing it sounded a little more glorified, like a torn ACL or broken arm. But I think that brings out the point. Toes are not as honored. But I bet as his whole body was sidelined game after game, and he was watching and waiting and hoping for that toe to heal, he found a bit more respect and appreciation for that little part of his body and just how important it is.

### **Applications in a Ministry Setting:**

There was a meeting in a ministry where the leader said to other leaders of different areas within that ministry, “wouldn’t it be amazing if our whole ministry was made up of Type A, go-getters just like us? Imagine all we could accomplish!” According to this passage, the Biblical answer is a

*But what about those in the ministry without leadership gifts, who are in the small groups being led? Who served in soup kitchens and set up tables?*

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resounding “No!” No one would get cared for but everyone would fight for the lectern, visions would be dreamed, strategies would be materialized, but there would be no one to implement it.

Another ministry only utilizes people with leading gifts, and values and gauges its success on the amount of small group leaders it raises up and trains in a year. But what about those in the ministry without leadership gifts, who are in the small groups being led? Who served in soup kitchens and set up tables? Went on mission trips? Loved a neighbor well? They felt unwanted and lesser as members. And while someone would argue that this might be in the realm of somewhat acceptable for a specific para-church ministry geared for a specific task, over a specific period of time, according to this passage it is surely not okay for the church. Nor does it reflect the way ministry should be done in the church according to this passage. And those called in serving leadership for God’s church are

called to lead with this in mind.

A wise church leader once shared with me that one application of this passage for him as a leader was whenever he had the means to hire another person to work alongside him in ministry, he would actively “staff to his weaknesses”. That meant giving up to God the desire to hire someone very similar to him in gift mix and affinities, who would be fun and easy to work with. When it came to paid or volunteer leaders, he would look for those with the same core values and heart for the ministry, but would look for someone with different gifts, skills, strengths and weaknesses, that they could complement one another, and together in unity serve more of the needs of the body, and serve them better, by the diversity of their gifts.

### **For Reflection:**

- What do these passages say about the heart and work of a leader who serves the church?
- What does leadership development look like according to this passage?
- What do you think it means practically in your ministry context to honor the lesser parts of the body? Which parts are less honored or valued in your ministry system?
- Which physical part of the body do you think most describes you/your gifts?
- Describe a time when you have been given honor or encouragement by someone in leadership over you? What was the experience like?
- Who in your ministry do you struggle to work with/encourage/value and/or support the most? Why? How do these passages bring some perspective to that relationship?
- If you were going to hire someone to complement your weaknesses, describe the kind of person you would hire?
- What or who do you think God is calling you to think about? Serve? Reach out to?

### **Addendum: Read 1 Corinthians 13**

Though rarely read together, the passage that follows is 1 Corinthians 13, one of the most quoted passages in the Bible, and usually read at wed-

dings. While it has an wonderful place in a wedding ceremony, it's most immediate application comes from it's context – the body of Christ, about love among the members of that body as they use their gifts to build it up. The first two verses say “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understanding all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” Aren't these speaking to the greater gifts we have just been exhorted to eagerly desire – speaking/leading gifts in a maturing believer?

- What does this passage add to the previous passage about leadership?
- How important is it?
- Think of the people you serve and their experience of your leadership: What is like to be led by you?

## **Perspective on Leading People: Paul**

### **Read Acts 17:1-15**

Look at the landscape of what Paul was leading through as he continued to bring the gospel to the Jews first, then to the Gentiles under persecution from the Jews who were offended by the message that Jesus was the awaited Christ, the Messiah. In Thessalonica it was intense – even bringing harm on households, violence, and Paul was taken during the night to get him out of that city. And the opposing Jews were so stirred up they even followed him to Berea.

- What do you think was Paul's perspective “on the dance floor” in Thessalonica? Do you think it went the way he hoped?
- What do you think was his perspective “from the balcony”? What was accomplished?

### **Read 1 Thessalonians 1-2.**

This was written historically after the account in Acts 17, where he was bringing the gospel to them, but was taken from them due to the danger on his life. He had not been able to return to this people in this fledgling church, and they were starting to doubt him, his ministry, and aspects of the gospel.

They were threatened in some sense by the same thoughts and experiences we have from time to time with people who have invested in our

lives, led us for a season to grow in our relationship with Jesus, mentors and small group leaders – were we simply a project? An acquisition for his religious personal gain? Or did he really love them and speak truth to them? Maybe the people who were bringing doubt about Paul and the gospel were right? He hadn't been there to answer, and was taken away, and he hadn't come back.

In these 2 chapters, Paul calls them to remember how God moved

*. . . Paul, like Jesus, knew the hearts, concerns, fears, anxieties, misconceptions and cultural context of those he was called to lead.*

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among them in the power of the Holy Spirit, and there was fruit of their faith. He calls them also to remember their time together, and how Paul treated them, felt about them, preached the gospel to them in words and actions from a pure motive, without flattery, with the love of a nursing mother and tender father, and to please God. As you meditate on this passage, see how Paul, like Jesus, knew the hearts, concerns, fears, anxieties, misconceptions and cultural context of those he was called to lead. Contained in these two chapters is record of his careful, thoughtful and loving leadership of them.

### **For Reflection:**

- How does this fill out the account of Acts 17?
- What can you gather from these 2 chapters about what has happened since he left them?
- What were the Thessalonians “taught” from Paul’s words when he was with them?
- How did that work with what was “caught” by them from Paul’s actions and choices?.
- How does this echo what was caught and what was taught by Jesus?
- What does this mean for you in the role you are leading in?

## **Get To Know The Writer**

**Hillary Coffee** grew up in the New York City area and came into a saving relationship with Our Lord in her junior year of High School with the help of Young Life. After going on staff with a campus ministry in Pennsylvania, she befriended professors as well as administration and students, and realized that if God was calling her to minister to the college campus, she needed to get trained and equipped to enter into the challenging conversations and objections that many had with Christianity. She met her husband, Clay, in seminary, and they were married while in St. Louis. After graduating together, God began their family, and they moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where Hillary stayed at home with her 3 children, served on committees, led and taught Bible studies, taught pre-marital seminars, and helped with shepherding and discipline cases. She also has been a seminar speaker at the Connect Conference (CTS), Synergy (RTS Orlando), and the EPC *Charis* Conference.

Hillary is the Coordinator of Ministry to Women at Central Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, MO, and holds a Masters of Divinity from Covenant Theological Seminary, where she is also a Visiting Instructor.

## **For Further Reading: Called to Lead**

**Gospel Transformation** (Second Edition). by World Harvest Mission.

**Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading** by Ronald Heifitz and Martin Linsky

**Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary on Sin** by Cornelius Platinga

**Restoring Broken Things: What Happens When We Catch a Vision for the World Jesus is Creating** by Steven Curtis Chapman and Scotty Smith

**The Emotionally Healthy Church** by Peter Scazzero

**The Enemy Within: Straight Talk About the Power and Defeat of Sin** by Kris Lundgaard

**The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation** by Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech