

# LEADING Mike Davies GOD'S PEOPLE

THOUGHTS, PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL HANDLES ON LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH





# Leading God's People:

by Mike Davies





## Leading God's People

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# LEADING GOD'S PEOPLE

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this course is to help us understand, celebrate and embrace Biblical leadership in our lives. Whatever role you fulfill in the body- be it an elder, a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, a team leader, a parent, a manager, or simply a believer who wants to lead others to Jesus, we all need to be aware of how Biblical leadership works.

We live in a culture that has eroded respect for leadership. It has taught that leaders should be subject to the people; it is one that undermines leaders whether they be in government, in the workplace, in schools, and in homes. We need to redress the balance because Godly leadership is an integral part of the Kingdom. We, therefore, need a restoration of Godly attitudes to leadership in all spheres of life. In this world where authority has been wielded very badly, very often, and where people who have been hurt and abused by authority are reluctant to submit themselves, we face a huge challenge. We need to be a people who, like the Roman centurion, know that to carry authority we must be submitted to authority (Matt 8: 5-13). We need to realise that leadership is the key to the health of any church, organization, and family. If we *really* do want to change the way the world sees the church, and if we want to reach our world for Jesus, then we need to institute, exercise and develop Godly leadership.

As we look at leadership from God's perspective there may be things that challenge or scare us, but we must become determined to follow God's plans and principles if we want blessing in our life. It may seem scary or even 'dangerous' doing things this way, as we see through our culturally-influenced lenses, but the only thing more dangerous is not doing it God's way!

This manual will help us to see what Godly authority looks like, who exercises it and how, which people carry authority in the church and how to respond to it. We will first look broadly at principles of leadership and later look at specific leadership roles within the church. There is a degree of repetition as certain principles are covered from different angles. The purpose behind this is so that this manual can be used in a multi -faceted way. It can be used for self-study or it may be used as a tool for further leadership training in various settings as the reader follows the instructions of Paul:

*"You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:1-2).*

# FIRST PRINCIPLES

## A. Leadership is from God

Even before the creation of the world, leadership existed. Before man was created there was leadership and submission- for these are inherent characteristics of the Godhead.

Mark Driscoll, in his book *On Church Leadership (A Book You'll Actually Read)* writes:

*“Jesus is our example of how we should both act when we are in authority and react when we are under authority. First Corinthians 11:3 is one of the key texts for what theologians call functional subordinationism. It is the biblical teaching that our Trinitarian God exists as a community of equals with different roles and deference for authority within the Trinity. For example, throughout his life we see Jesus constantly speaking of his submission to the authority of God the Father; Jesus continually states that the Father sent him to earth on his mission and that he was doing what the Father told him to do and saying what the Father told him to say” (Pg 67).*

We see this concept further expounded in Philippians 2:5-11:

*“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.*

We see here that although Jesus has equality with the Father, He chooses to submit, recognising that He carries a different function within the Trinity. The Holy Spirit, likewise, submits Himself also, recognising His function.

Leadership is inherent in God, and therefore, in His creation. When God created man, He named him Adam. Adam, in turn, named the animals and later named his wife, Eve. Adam and Eve together named their sons. This naming was an exercise of authority and an illustration of headship. Thus, we see that God has authority over man, and man carries this delegated authority over creation and over his wife. In turn, parents have authority over their children (this raises questions regarding the role of women, and of the nature of delegated authority, both of which will be covered later).

We see leadership in nature (a pride of lions, a pack of dogs etc. have leaders), and we see it any time there are group of people engaged in some endeavour together. There has been a trend in certain church movements to try and remove leadership. If you attend their meetings they will tell you that they have no leader. This is inaccurate, of course. They will still have a leader even if they do not describe him as such. For proof of this, simply ask when and where the next meeting will be- somebody will make the final call.

Many of the problems people have with Biblical leadership stem from a lack of understanding of this principle: in the Kingdom of God, a leader is *not* more important than a follower. An elder is not more important than a deacon, a deacon is not more important

than a new believer. We are all loved by God and we all are vital to the healthy working of the body of Christ, we simply perform different functions! (Rom 12:3-8; 1Cor 12:1-31).

Many people will argue that democracy is the best system for decision-making, but democracy has great weaknesses. First, democracy usually involves choosing a leader. This is because it is simply too cumbersome to subject every small decision to a vote, even in a small group and so the chosen leader becomes the decision-maker! Second, democracy eventually erodes leadership as, in order to be elected, the leader must please the people and bow to their wishes. The leaders that arise out of democratic systems, certainly in modern times, tend to be those who offend the fewest special interest groups. They become people who are afraid to make unpopular, but necessary, decisions at the fear that this will cost them their position. Winston Churchill illuminates the weaknesses of the democratic system, *"The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter."*

The Bible does not instruct us to set up democratic systems in the church. True, the deacons were chosen by the people (Acts 6) but this was less a case of democracy, and more a case of the people as a whole recognising who God had already chosen: those who were of good reputation, full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3). Elsewhere it is clear that God chooses His leaders and then expects His people to submit to them. For example:

*"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb 13:17).*

Such principles exist not just within the church but in society as a whole. We must also obey the following God-ordained authorities: government (Rom 13, 1 Pet 2:17); employer (Eph 6, 1 Pet 2:18); husband (1 Pet 3:1, Col 3:18, Eph 5:22); and parents (Eph 6).

Obedience and submission are themes that run throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. Unless we are willing to acknowledge God's ways we will never attain the purposes for which we have been called. We must embrace the concept of loving, servant leadership in our churches and in our homes.

## B. Delegated authority

This concept can be well-illustrated by using the example of an ambassador of a country. When the ambassador of a nation communicates with a foreign government, he does so with the authority of the government that he represents. He dares not represent a position contrary to the government he represents or he will soon be recalled. Yet, when he does represent his government, he knows that all the resources of that government are behind him. So, having delegated authority means that, in this example, the country that you represent entrusts you with authority to act on its behalf.

Biblical leadership operates in the same way. When a person exercises authority, he must do so knowing that such authority has been delegated to him by God. He carries no authority in, and of himself, but is an ambassador of God:

*"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).*

As ambassadors, we must ensure that we represent God well in our words and in our actions:

*“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12).*

Our authority has been delegated to us. Ronald Reagan once said, *“Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don’t interfere”*. We have seen that God delegates His authority, and in many cases, He then leaves room for men to make decisions for themselves, within the parameters that He has set. As Mark Driscoll states:

*“For this kind of biblical faithfulness and practical flexibility to occur in a church, there must be a distinction between principles and methods. The Bible is clear that God is to be worshiped, preaching is to occur, and the elders are to lead the church. However, the methods by which these can be done faithfully are many and must be culturally appropriated based upon where a church is ministering. As a result, things such as music styles, number of preachers, and how the elders are organised are freedoms that God allows the elders to decide, because God works through leaders empowered by his Spirit and governed by his Word under the rule of his living Son... This also means that the elders and other appointed leaders have the right to not only enforce God’s rules of the Bible, but also have the freedom to make a few house rules as needed so that people know, for example, that they need to turn their phones off during a worship service or that members need to provide a giving pledge each year so that the church can make a reasonable budget projection” (On Church Leadership. A Book You’ll Actually Read. Pg 29).*

The elders of the church are responsible for leading the church and making decisions regarding doctrine, discipline, and direction (more on this later). Some of these decisions are made based on clear prescription of Scripture and others by the leading of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, application of cultural relevance where necessary and possible. This is why different churches can have different out-workings of certain issues yet still be Biblically based, have the same heart, and work together in the Kingdom.

Of course, just as God delegates authority to men (e.g. to elders, to fathers, to governments), so those men can, in turn, delegate authority to others. Within the church, every position of responsibility carries a different degree of delegated authority. This principle of delegated authority needs then to be replicated. Just as God delegates authority and then leaves room for men to make decisions, so too should elders allow certain freedoms for individuals to whom they have delegated authority to fulfill their responsibilities. It is pertinent however that such individuals recognise that their authority is delegated, and to do their best to represent the eldership team faithfully and to the best of their ability. Personal preference needs to be set aside at times to ensure that all the leaders in the church speak with one voice, one heart and one purpose. Without this, there can be no unity, and without unity, there can be no blessing (Ps 133).

Now, this sounds like a fine model when those in authority represent God well, but what happens when they fail to do so? What happens when leaders fall into sin or heresy? What happens if they become manipulative and controlling? That is when we need to understand submission and obedience- and the difference between them.

## C. Submission v obedience

Submission and obedience are not the same thing. It is possible to submit without obeying and to obey without submitting. To illustrate we can look at some examples:

When leadership (elders, husbands, parents, government) leads a person into sin, then it is no longer acting as a good ambassador of our King. In such circumstances, we are called to obey the higher power, that is, to obey God and not man. We see this in both the Old Testament (e.g. Daniel's three friends in Dan 3) and the New Testament (e.g. the apostles in Acts 4). In each of these cases, Godly men refused to obey the authorities placed over them as it would have led to sin. Yet we see in their response that they remained respectful and willing to obey wherever they could so long as their obedience was not in opposition to God's Word or way. Yet they were also willing to be subject to the consequences of disobeying such commands. This willingness to accept the consequences shows that although they could not obey, they maintained an attitude of submission.

In contrast, it is possible to obey without submitting. The story is told of the boy who was repeatedly told by his school teacher to sit down. Eventually, after being threatened, he sits but says, "I'm standing on the inside!". It is possible to obey commands externally whilst having a rebellious heart, this is obedience without submission.

We are called to be people who willingly submit to and obey Godly authority; that is, a people who obey wherever possible while submit always to delegated authority in attitude, if not in action. God considers the heart attitude at least as important as external actions.

There is a form of rebellion that is common today, but which is not new. It manifests in statements like this:

- "I hear what you're saying but I've been a Christian for 30 years and know what's what"
- "That's your perspective but I can hear God too"
- "I need no man to lead me, I have the Holy Spirit"
- "I don't want to be controlled by men"

This is the same attitude as displayed by Aaron and Miriam toward Moses (Num 12). They said that whilst they recognised Moses as a prophet- they were prophets too! They had a grievance against Moses, which may have had some merit (his marriage to a foreign wife) and developed an independent and unsubmitive attitude. There was truth in what they were saying, even about being prophets, but their motivation was an unwillingness to submit to what they saw as flawed leadership. God's response is instructive. Of course, He knew Moses' faults, but He had chosen him to lead. He vindicates Moses and punishes Miriam. Although it is undoubtedly true that all believers can hear God for themselves, and are led by the Holy Spirit (or should be), this is not an excuse not to submit. Rather, it is an opportunity to serve your leaders and pray for them, encourage them, and submit prophetic words to them.

On the other side of the coin, leaders are called to exercise their authority well:

*"Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you" (Tit 2:15).*

Such authority must be exercised with love, with humility, with a fear of God and with skilled hands and integrity of heart (Ps 78:72). We should also understand that the people we are leading often find the concept of submission difficult to comprehend. A major reason for

this is that many of them have been exposed to ungodly, selfish, manipulative, hypocritical, sinful or abusive authority figures in the past. Whilst it is natural for people who have been hurt to want to protect themselves, the answer is not to eradicate authority. As Mark Driscoll again writes in his book:

*“The answer to abusive authority is not an absence of authority but rather righteous authority that rules under the authority of Scripture and Jesus” (Pg 8).*

We need to lovingly guide people into a place where they can submit to authority, where they can feel safe, and where they can understand that authority is not used to oppress or keep down but to keep safe. A parent, for example, warns a child not to play with matches; this is not to control or spoil the child’s fun but to prevent the child from being burned.

In summary, as leaders we must exercise patience as we try to reshape and remodel the negative views of leadership, coupled with the bad experiences that people have had; and as followers (for we must surely be both) we must be submissive in attitude, even if we are unable to be obedient in action.

## D. Leadership is plural

As we have already seen, when looking at delegation, is that leadership works best when it is exercised in team. A team works best when every player knows his part, when the plans of the coach are implemented and when the interests of the team are put above that of the individual.

In a fairly small group, an analogy of a soccer or rugby team works well. The coach puts the players in place based on their strengths and giftings (not value or importance) and the players then play the role they have been given. There is usually a captain who, again is not more important than the team (and may not even be the most gifted player), but who is responsible for leadership of the team on the pitch.

As a team grows, a better analogy is that of an American Football team. Here there are multiple teams within a team (offense, defense, special teams) each unit with its own coaching staff and captains, all under the control of a head coach. There is more interdependence, more delegation and perhaps, even more, specialisation (for example, one player who only ever comes on to kick a field goal and does nothing else!). These principles of team apply within the church too.

Leaders need to understand the dynamic of the team they are working with, and that such dynamics are fluid. They need to change and grow as the team changes and grows. A failure to embrace change or to accept that one’s own role within that team may change significantly can minimise the performance of the entire team.

An important aspect of a successful team is that the members of that team should have differing personalities and giftings. In this way, the weaknesses of one are covered by the strength of another. The key is that despite the differences between individuals on the team, there is one heart, one mind and one purpose with a mutual submission. Unity is not brought about by uniformity and it is the beauty of a team that each member has something unique to contribute.

Here are some characteristics to consider when bringing a person onto the leadership team:

1. Do they love God with everything?
2. Is their call confirmed? Do they feel in themselves that this is God's call on their lives and has it been attested to by other leaders and/ or through the prophetic?
3. Do they have the anointing- a Holy Spirit ability- for what leadership requires?
4. Are they self-starters? If they can't lead themselves then they can't lead others.
5. What is their gifting? Are they able to teach, to communicate or to flow in some gift?
6. Do they understand God's blueprint? Do they have the same 'DNA' (same heart and vision).
7. Can they get revelation from God? Do they hear God for themselves and not second hand?
8. Is there a hidden agenda? Are they serving to get something/somewhere?
9. Are they shepherd-hearted? Are they empowering or controlling? Do they lead or drive people?
10. Are they passionate about the things of God? This shows in self-discipline and withstanding temptation.
11. Are they secure? If so, they will be open, accountable and vulnerable.
12. Are they experienced? While we can take risks with experience, we need to know that they are capable.
13. Are they obedient? This is a sign of love for God (1 John 2:5).
14. Do they have people skills?
15. Do they walk by faith? Have they been tested?
16. Are they sacrificial? Do they give even when it hurts?
17. Are they sensitive to God and to people?
18. Do they love the Word? Can they handle it correctly?
19. Do they possess humility? Self-praise is a curse in the Kingdom and arrogance discredits.
20. Do they handle praise and/ or criticism well?
21. Do they love to be first? Like Diotrephes, who loved to be first (3 John 1:9) whereas in God's Kingdom the first will be last (Matt 20:16).
22. Do they have personal integrity? Can the team trust them?
23. Are they teachable? (Prov 9:7-9).
24. Do the people recognise the gift and call?
25. Do they gather people? Where Jesus lifts up leaders, men are drawn to them.
26. Do they love people? Do they show favouritism to some? (Jas 2:1-7).

27. Are they generous? With finances, time and emotions.
28. Are they contented? Free from striving; free from the pursuit of material gain (Matt 6:31-33).
29. Is their theology sound? Do they have extreme theology, making grey issues black and white; or majoring on minors?
30. Do they have a heart for the nations?
31. Do they take short cuts or do they submit to God's timing and processes?
32. Are they team players, able to submit and lay down their own opinions etc.?
33. Are they faithful? To friends, to their word, to the Spiritual Disciplines.
34. Do they have their own convictions? Or, do they simply comply outwardly?
35. Are they flexible and open to change?

## E. Hierarchy in leadership

As mentioned before, leadership is a function and role in the body and has no bearing on an individual's value. Hierarchy is a 'dirty word' in much of the church as many people struggle to differentiate between function and value. We live in a world where egalitarianism is preached and where many take as Scriptural the words of the American Declaration of Independence, "all men are created equal". How can there be hierarchy, it is argued, if everyone is equal? This Driscoll clarifies beautifully, when talking about men and women in leadership:

*"In hearing that males and females are different, modern ears tuned by a culture of egalitarianism (meaning "equal" or "level") are prone to hear that males and females are not equal, which is untrue. The Bible teaches that both men and women are made in the image and likeness of God, which means that men and women are equal by virtue of creation. They do not need to be identical to prove their equality in the same way that a right hand and left hand are different but equally necessary... Subsequently, since we are made male and female, it is clear that God's image and likeness is best shown forth by men and women who function together in partnership like the Trinity, in which God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are equally God with distinctions, submission, and unity" (On Church Leadership. A Book You'll Actually Read. Pg 29).*

We see hierarchy then among the angels, among God's leaders (from Adam, through the patriarchs, then the priesthood and into the New Testament) and in the Trinity, Itself! Interestingly the very word hierarchy derives from a word used for the "ranked division of angels" which itself came from the Greek 'heirarkhia', meaning the rule of the high priest. Furthermore, we see that it is not a modern idea as it is implied in the descriptions of the church as both a family and as an army.

Churches, Scripture shows us, should be governed by elders (with apostolic input) who then delegate certain responsibilities to deacons, and others, within the church. Here we see hierarchy clearly. Yet we should also see that there can exist hierarchy *within* an eldership team!

In Acts, we see Peter initially leading the church in Jerusalem, but he is soon replaced in this role by James, the brother of Jesus, who wasn't even an original apostle (indeed he only came to faith once he saw Jesus resurrected). James, along with Peter and John, seem to carry more authority than the rest, even though they are all elders (Acts 2; Acts 8:14; Acts 15; Gal 2:2 etc.). Scripture even shows us that some elders, based on gifting and function, are worthy of more honour:

*“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17).*

Hierarchy then is not to be feared, but embraced, provided that the men who lead do so based on a love for God, a love for His church and a love for His people. They must be servant-hearted, humble men who do not serve their own interests but the interests of others. Even within this hierarchy, there needs to be mutual submission and accountability and a high degree of teachability in each individual. There must be a constant ‘dying to self’ in order that each leader can say, as John the Baptist did, *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (Jn 3:30).

An eldership team in a healthy church aims to govern by consensus as they try to hear the voice of God. Ultimately, because there is a recognition of the grace placed on the lead elder's life, and on the fact that God has called him to lead the team, he has the right, if necessary, to overrule other elders in the decision-making process. This right is rarely invoked, as a good leader listens to the counsel of others, especially when those others are elders of the Lord Jesus. Driscoll says about this role:

*“Therefore, for an elder team to function effectively, it must have a called, qualified, gifted, devoted, humble, and competent senior human leader who leads the elder team and helps guard the gate for new elders joining the team to ensure unity and success. To do his job, that man must not have blind obedience or complete unaccountable authority. Rather, he must have the freedom, trust, authority, respect, honor, and support of the elders and other church leaders to actually lead the church. If not, there can be no leadership; leaders will no longer lead the church working on behalf of the best interests of the Gospel, but will become representatives of various agendas, departments, factions, and programs in the church. Without a senior leader, dissension will come as people fight over resources; there will not be decisions, but compromises, which are the death of the church” (On Church Leadership. A Book You'll Actually Read. Pg 23).*

In turn, not all elders have equal authority in each decision. There are those who have been recognised as being gifted in ‘directing the affairs of the church’ more than others. Sometimes these men will meet and bring a decision to the rest of the team. Likewise, different ‘portfolios’ are made up of different elders (for example, each different congregation, a finance team, etc.) who have a greater responsibility than others in certain areas of church life. These portfolios are necessary, as the eldership team is so large that decision-making would become slow and cumbersome otherwise, causing the church to become immobile.

In turn, various responsibilities are then delegated to deacons, and others, who then lead their own teams, with varying degrees of delegated authority, to accomplish necessary tasks and administrate the life of the church.

## F. Organic v organisational

It is popular in many church cultures today to speak of being organic rather than organizational. This is well meaning, and at times helpful, but care must be taken. In our churches, we never want systems to replace relationship, or to be program-driven, rather than Spirit-led. In fact, one of the major driving forces behind producing this leadership manual is an understanding that the key to life, health, and growth in the church is people, not programs.

If we look at nature, however, we see that although all living things are organic, they possess a degree of structure. The more complex the creature, the more it can achieve. For example, a jellyfish is complex compared to an amoeba but simple compared to a human. Whilst the jellyfish can, therefore, perform much more complex tasks than an amoeba, it pales in significance before the abilities of a human. Likewise, as a church grows, and as it desires to achieve more, it needs to put systems in place to allow for more complex and efficient functioning. These systems should be 'invisible' (just as the human skeletal and nervous system are invisible) and should serve the body, not vice versa. The problem with systems is when they become sacrosanct- rather than merely a tool for a task that is willingly discarded when it no longer serves its purpose. Failure to see them as tools produces traditions that nullify the Word of God (Mk 7:13).

When we look at the ministry of Jesus we see that He focused on people, not systems or institutions, and yet He was not afraid of organisation. When feeding the five thousand He put systems in place (dividing people into small groups, delegating the distribution of food, etc.) in order that the miraculous could flow. Skillful leaders know how to flow with the Spirit, find the life of Jesus and allow Him to lead, whilst also being administratively sound. They know how to maximise resources and how to do things efficiently without becoming slaves to systems and programs.

## G. Leadership by example

Bob Mumford once said, "If I have measles, but I tell you that I have mumps, what will you catch?" He was speaking about the principle that *who* leaders are, is more contagious than what they say. There are stories too numerous to mention of churches being adversely affected by the hidden sin of the leaders. Likewise, congregations usually adopt many of the characteristics of their leaders. Whether the leader is a passionate worshiper, a man of prayer, a lover of people, etc., will reflect in the attitudes of those he leads. This is not only because people will imitate what they see, but is also due to spiritual dynamics whereby a leader can 'break open' certain things into the life of the church, both positive or negative.

As theologian Albert Schweitzer said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing." This is why the qualifications for leadership, as described in Scripture, are almost exclusively linked to character and not to gifting or ability. Leaders then, must not only lead by example but must be careful in raising up other leaders. It can be tempting to raise others into leadership on the strength of their gifting but they must first ensure that the man's character has first been tested.

In the next section, we will look at how God tests leaders by examining the life of David.

# OLD TESTAMENT LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

The Old Testament was written, at least in part, so that we could learn from the example of those who went before us (1 Cor 10:11) and we know that ALL Scripture is useful to us (2 Tim 3:16). It is safe to assume, therefore, that there is much we can learn about church leadership from the Old Testament.

Let's look at David...

First, we are going to look at the life of Israel's greatest king. This is a man who was a type, or shadow, of Christ. If we wish to be great leaders, we could do worse than study the life of David.

David was arguably the best and most successful King that Israel ever had. There are three statements made about him that make him stand apart from every other king that Israel had:

- He led with skilled hands and integrity of heart (Ps 78:72).
- He served the purposes of God in his generation (Acts 13:36).
- He was a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22).

Given that these are fitting epithets for any leader, something we should all aspire to, then it would be useful to study his life and character and to learn what we can from his leadership journey.

## A. How God tests a leader

We are told that Jesus was tested in the desert (Matt 4:1) and that men are to be tested before they are appointed as deacons and elders (1 Tim 3:10). The purpose of such testing is not to cause us to fail, but to refine us, to strengthen us, and to demonstrate to God's people that such men are worthy to be followed. There are many ways in which we are tested, many of which we can see illustrated in the life of David.

1. **Being overlooked.** When Samuel was invited for supper by Jesse, all of his sons were present except one! (1 Sam 16). David was overlooked by his own father when his family was being honoured by the presence of Israel's greatest prophet of the time. God will often allow us to be overlooked (consider when others are thanked, chosen, 'promoted', honoured or recognised). This is a test of our hearts- to check for pride, arrogance, selfish-ambition or a willingness to trust God. Men often accuse leaders of 'standing in the way' of their ministry. However, we need to understand that no man can thwart the will of God and that if someone truly has a calling then God will make a way.
2. **Servanthood.** Once David was anointed to be king, he continued to look after his father's sheep and was soon also serving Saul as a musician. As if he weren't busy enough with these, he was sent by his father to take lunches to his brothers. It would have been easy to become proud and refuse to do such supposedly menial things, but David remained a humble servant. If we cannot learn this, and develop this heart, we will become terrible leaders.

3. **Being sidelined.** Between the time that he was anointed, until he became king over a united Israel, David spent 20 years as a shepherd, a servant and as a fugitive. He must have wondered at times if Samuel had made a mistake. Yet these 20 years were an essential part of his learning to be a great leader; even though he must have felt sidelined or forgotten during those years. During this time, he learned about how the royal household and the royal court worked (as a harpist and as a friend to Jonathan), he learned the geography of his land intimately (a necessary skill for a great general) and he formed alliances with, and gained knowledge of, the surrounding nations, their armies and their tactics. Without those 20 years, he would never have been the great king he became. Similarly, Moses spent 40 years as a shepherd before he saw the burning bush and Paul prepared for 13 years before entering his apostolic ministry. God's timing is perfect and we must be willing to wait: an inheritance easily gained is easily lost!
4. **Being falsely accused or misunderstood.** When David took food to his brothers, one of them, Eliab, accused him of evil motives (1 Sam 17:28). Our 'brothers' can bring accusations against us and we must handle them in a Godly manner. We must humbly seek whether there is truth in such accusations (and if we cannot see it, ask others' perspectives, as we may be blind to our own faults, and our hearts are deceptive). If the accusation is false we need to respond graciously and even be willing not to defend ourselves, but let God be our vindicator. It could be that defending ourselves could come at the cost of unity and so we should seek the glory of God and the well-being of the church above our own reputation, as did Christ (Is 53:3). It is certain that if this kind of trial does not happen before a man becomes a leader he will surely experience it thereafter!
5. **Being discouraged.** Upon volunteering for a job nobody else is willing to do, David is told by his own king that he is unable to do it (1 Sam 17:33). As leaders, we must be very careful not to destroy faith and not to disqualify people based on appearance. When we are convinced that somebody has unrealistic expectations of their own abilities and calling, we need to encourage them toward that for which God has equipped them. Yet even here we can never make an absolute call, for, in the end, God can use anybody. We like to say, that we place a comma at the end of such a statement, not a full stop. On the other side of the coin, the story is told of the actor Edward Norton who is often asked by aspiring actors for advice on 'making it' as an actor. He tells them, every time, to give up because they don't have what it takes. Asked why, he responded, "If they gave up just because one person said they wouldn't make it, then they never would!" We need to persevere in the face of discouragement, in faith, while at the same time ensuring that we are aiming for something that God has genuinely called us to. He who desires to be an elder desires a noble task (1 Tim 3:1), yet if God has not equipped a person to be an elder, then he should realize that it is an office in which he will find no life, no joy, and no freedom. When we do the thing to which we are called, whether elder, deacon, businessman, teacher, mother or rocket scientist, that is when we find our fulfillment, our purpose, and our joy. That is what we should aspire to, and press toward, in the face of the greatest discouragement.
6. **Being intimidated.** David was intimidated by Goliath from the moment he stepped out to meet him. Our enemy still does the same. David's response was one of faith, knowing that God would give him victory as He had done previously with the lion and the bear (1 Sam 17:34). Every leader will face intimidation as he steps into something new. Every leader needs to be a man of faith, willing to take on the giants, willing to attempt something so big that it is doomed to failure unless God intervenes. In many ways, the faith of the leader will determine the limitations of those he is leading. A leader needs

to see beyond the vision of the average man: beyond the limitations of human sight and understanding.

7. **Being praised.** Once David killed Goliath he received the praises of the people (1 Sam 18:7). It has been said that success tests us in ways that failure never can. If the enemy cannot crush us, he is likely to puff us up. If we cannot handle success with humility, and with a desire to see God honoured in it, then we will eventually fail as leaders. It is worth noting David's motivation in killing Goliath- it wasn't his own glory but God's! (1 Sam 17:46). It is also worth noting the reaction of one of Saul's servants prior to David's victory over Goliath. He refers to David as a brave man and a warrior (1 Sam 16:18), this despite David never having been in battle. This young man was probably speaking prophetically. Whilst it is wonderful to receive prophetic words over our lives that speak to our future in Christ, we need to weigh them and test them. We should be careful to give ourselves over to trying to force them to be fulfilled. They can be a wonderful encouragement to us, but we need to respond to such words in a mature manner, understanding that if such a word is from God it will come to pass at its allotted time.
8. **Being persecuted.** The more successful David became, the more his own leader, out of insecurity, tried to kill him. It is unlikely that any of us will experience our leaders trying to kill us literally, but it is possible that God will allow us to suffer at the hands of leaders to test us. David's response to Saul was one of honouring and submission: even after Saul was killed David sang a tribute to him (2 Sam 1:19). He recognised that it is God who raises leaders and God who removes them. By submitting to Saul, even under extreme circumstances, he was demonstrating his submission to God and exercising his faith in God to raise him up to his rightful position as king in God's time. Remarkably David even recognised that God was using Saul to shape him and that it was God who helped him endure these trials (*"You have given me relief when I was in distress" Ps 4: 1*).
9. **Self-promotion.** David never fell into the trap of self-promotion. He did not try to force God's hand, the king's hand or the hand of the people. On any number of occasions, especially as a fugitive, he could have taken matters into his own hands. He could have foreshortened the time it took to become king. He could have taken Saul's life, and few, if any, would have held this against him. Yet he knew something that few others did. He knew that it *must* be God who raises up a leader, who puts Him in place, who makes the way. Every time we try to take a short-cut through the purposes of God we heap trouble on ourselves.
10. **Becoming king.** It is easier to desire something than it is to live it out. Upon becoming king, David realized that it was perhaps less glorious and certainly more difficult than he ever could have imagined. It is easier to see the problems and shortcomings in a church than it is to provide the solutions. It is easier to criticize another man's leadership than it is to carry that burden of leadership oneself. The greater one's authority, the greater the burden that one carries. To borrow from the Spiderman story: "with great power comes great responsibility."
11. **Fear of man (or woman).** A leader who fears man more than he fears God is a liability. One only need look at Saul, David's predecessor, to see this. There were a few times when David had to obey God at the cost of his own reputation. This is most clearly shown perhaps, in the response of his own wife to his exuberant worship (2 Sam 6:20-22). In our modern society, where democracy is held up as a virtually sacred institution, it can be surprisingly easy for leaders to become subject to the desires of the people. Leaders need to be courageous followers of Christ who bend to the will of the Great Shepherd and who can lead others there too. This takes wisdom, skill, and courage, as often

leaders are taking people where they do not want to go, to do what they do not want to do, at inconvenient times, with people they don't want to go with!

12. **The things of the world.** When David fell into sin with Bathsheba it was at a time when he should have been at war but instead chose the comforts of home (2 Sam 11:1). A constant fight, for every believer, is to give ourselves completely to the Lordship of Christ and to give up the things of the world, as Paul urged us to do (Phil 3:8). At the core of the Christian life is a dying to self, a surrendering of a life of compromise, comfort, and convenience. Often becoming a leader requires a greater degree of sacrifice in terms of time, resources, career, income, etc. The enemy will gladly offer things that seem good to us to prevent us from entering into God's best. I have seen numerous instances of men being offered promotions, well-paid jobs, etc. that would take them out of the life of the church just as they were about to be asked onto eldership or into 'full-time' positions within the church. It is not simply before entering ministry this test comes, for it often manifests years down the line: either because the issue was not properly dealt with in the first place, or because the leader due to busyness, pressure, etc. loses his joy in what he is doing and begins to fall in love with the things of the world. For an example of this, see Demas, who was described as a fellow worker of Paul (Philemon 24; 2 Tim 4:10).
13. **Idolatry.** When David saw Bathsheba, he decided that he wanted her, regardless of the cost. She became an idol in his life. An idol is often described as anything that sets itself up against Christ in our lives, or which becomes more important than Christ to us. This is true, but it is worth noting that in Israel the idolatry that they fell into was often one of adding other gods to their worship of Yahweh. In such instances, Yahweh was considered the supreme deity whilst others could still be worshiped. This is the kind of idolatry that many people fall into today- claiming to still put Jesus first, but having other things in their lives that assume an importance greater than they should, and to which they devote themselves. This can include family, money, career, sport, or even ministry. Idolatry will inevitably lead us away from the truth, away from God and into greater sin. Just as for David, adultery led to murder- sin gives birth to sin (Jas 1:15).
14. **Failing.** Every leader will fail at some time. There is an old expression, 'the only people that have done nothing wrong are those who have done nothing'. Failing in itself does not disqualify a leader. What determines success is whether that leader is prepared to try again. We need to learn from our failures, we need to repent of moral failure and we need to have the courage to stand up again and continue. Many of the best leaders I have known are those who have failed, but have responded in a Godly manner and continued to be faithful. Anyone who has been in leadership for any length of time will have stories of failure and redemption. Every great leader will acknowledge his weaknesses and failings, and every great leader will allow God to take his weakness and be glorified through it (2 Cor 12:9). David's response to having his failure pointed out to him by Nathan is instructive and we should seek to respond in the same way:
  - o He does not try to defend himself or justify his position.
  - o He is quick to repent (Ps 51).
  - o He is willing, as a leader, to let this be publicly known.
  - o He accepts the consequences.
  - o He continues to carry out his calling in God.

Of course, if a leader falls into sin there may need to be a period of time in which he is removed from a position of authority, even if there is repentance, in order for restoration to take place etc.

15. **Loss.** David suffered perhaps every parent's worst nightmare when his child died (2 Sam 12:15-23). It would have been easy to blame God, to become bitter, resentful, angry or disillusioned. Instead, he looks at the situation from the perspective of eternity (*"I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" v23*), and recognises that although this is a painful experience, God is still the same God as He was- the God of Psalm 23. We will all have to deal with loss, with disappointment, with 'winter seasons' and 'desert experiences'. Times when we experience more suffering than 'blessing'. Yet these are necessary times. These are the times when we learn to press closer into Him, to dig our roots deeper, to trust Him more and to develop a greater faithfulness and fruitfulness 'in and out of season' (2 Tim 4:2; Gal 6:9). In addition, we develop greater empathy in these times, which in turn makes us better and more caring leaders. We cannot become 'fair weather' leaders. People who are excited and committed only when life goes the way we wish. We need to be those who push through in the difficult times, both for our own sake and as an example to those who would follow us.
16. **Family.** Perhaps David's greatest failure was with his family. A number of his sons were rebellious, as they were not held to account for their actions. (1 Kings 1:6). A leader must get the balance right in his life, managing his household well (1 Tim 3:4) while not making an idol of them. Jesus asked us to be willing to sacrifice family and yet we are called not to neglect them. The same Jesus who asked, *"who are my mother and brothers?"* (Matt 12:48) is the Jesus who, whilst in agony on the cross and close to death, ensured that His mother would be well looked after (Jn 19:26-27).

When we face any of these tests, we need to allow God to work His processes in us. We cannot afford to avoid these processes, to short-circuit what God is doing, or paper over the cracks that He exposes. If we do so, then we will simply find ourselves 'walking around the mountain' to face the same test, in a different form, at some time in the future. For example, a person who moves job or church because he cannot submit will sooner or later find himself in another situation where it is difficult for him to submit.

In 2 Tim 1:15 Paul speaks of a man called Phygelus who 'turned away' from him. The name "Phygelus" name means fugitive! Here perhaps, is a man running from his past- he has not dealt with issues, and his past keeps rearing up into his present. God loves us enough to continue presenting us with such tests, in order to deal with those aspects of our character that would destroy us, hurt the church, or prevent Him being fully glorified. Painful as it may be, we need to embrace any 'spiritual surgery' that God wishes to perform on us. Let Him cut away our flesh in order that we can become more like Him.

If we are obedient to Him and submit ourselves to His processes then we can say, like Paul:

*"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).*

## B. The character of David

These tests moulded and shaped David. They also served to reveal who he really was and what his character was really like. Have you heard of the 'toothpaste test'? That is, that despite a tube saying toothpaste on the outside, one can only really know what is on the inside once pressure is applied. It is only under pressure that we see a man's true character. So, we see that character is both *revealed* and *developed* by our experiences. David's character, while not perfect, was one worthy of imitation. Here's why:

1. **Faithful.** Whatever he was asked to do, he did it and he did it well. In fact, he often went 'above and beyond the call of duty'. For example, when looking after the sheep he killed a lion and a bear. I am sure that had he gone home and explained to his father that a sheep had been taken by either of these, this would have been an acceptable reason! After all, was his life not worth more than that of a single lamb? Yet he was prepared to give his all to faithfully accomplish the task he was given (in contrast to Saul's character 1 Sam 9:5). David reaped what he had sown in faithfulness. In 2 Sam 23:15-16 we see his three mighty men simply hear his desire for a drink of water and wanting to meet his needs, risk their lives for him. We do not serve a God of just enough, we serve a God who gave His all for us, who lavishes His love on us. If we are to represent Him well we too need to be lavish, we need to be extravagant and we need to do way more than the just enough.
2. **Loving.** David's very name means beloved, a trait that he shows often. Most significantly we see this in his relationship with Jonathan. He was a man who loved and inspired love in others. We can desire to be men of faith, men of power and men of influence- but the greatest thing we can ask for is love.
3. **Submissive.** Many of us know what it is like to be abused by authority but few, if any, have experienced it as badly as David did. Out of insecurity and jealousy, Saul first tried to cause David's death at the hands of others, before eventually trying to kill him himself. He threw spears at David and took to hunting him down in the desert. David would not attack his king verbally or physically, recognising that it must be God who protects, vindicates and eventually elevates him to position of king. He knew that it was not right to try to take matters into his own hands. Such was the honour, respect and submission he showed for his king (even though Saul was a backslidden, demon-tormented, unfaithful leader) that he repented for damaging Saul's cloak (1 Sam 24:4-6) and rebuked others for their lack of care for him (1 Sam 26:15-16). If David could submit himself to such a man under such circumstances after having been anointed future king over Israel, then we would do well to submit to, honour and respect the authorities that God has put over our lives.
4. **Secure.** When we read of David's mighty men (2 Sam 23 and elsewhere), we see that they achieved great exploits, greater perhaps, than David himself. David was not insecure about this. He did not feel threatened by them but rather he knew that their victories were his- that the greater their success, the greater Israel would become. Likewise, Godly leaders are often required to lead those who may carry a greater anointing or gifting in some areas than they themselves do. Indeed, every leader should be willing to one day be surpassed by those he is leading. A failure to accept this produces leaders of small capacity who frustrate and kill the spirit of large capacity individuals (Saul acted in such a way with David). We should praise God if He adds hugely gifted people to us, and lead from a place of security, where such people can be released to be a blessing to the church.

5. **Loyal.** David was intensely loyal. He was loyal to his friends, to his king, to his nation, and to his God. Indeed, he was so loyal that after becoming king he found Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, and brought him to his table to honour his covenant with Jonathan (2 Sam 9:6-7) despite the potential danger this could have caused him (certain factions could well have used Mephibosheth's ancestry to claim him to be rightful king). Leaders expect loyalty from those they lead, but they also need to be those who show loyalty. We will reap what we sow.
6. **Worshiper.** David wrote at least 75 of the 150 Psalms. Undoubtedly, he also wrote others which were not recorded as Scripture. In addition, we see him dancing passionately and extravagantly when the Ark of the Covenant is restored (2 Sam 6:14) to its rightful place. He was a skilled musician chosen to minister to King Saul when he was tormented by an evil spirit. Time and again we see him portrayed as a man of prayer and worship, whether publicly or privately. Godly leaders need to be people who spend time in the presence of God. As we worship, God is enthroned in our praises (Ps 22:3). It is this life, this presence of Jesus, that is attractive to people; that draws the power of the Spirit; and which empowers us to bring people into life, health, and freedom. Leaders need to know how to find God when alone, to 'dig their own wells' so that they can hear His voice for themselves and for others. They also need to be those who set the example to other believers in the way that they worship in public: passionately and extravagantly.
7. **Quick to repent:** David was not perfect. He was an adulterer and murderer. Yet he is described as a man after God's heart. How can this be? I believe that in no small part it is because he was open about his failings and quick to repent. We only know about his sins because he allowed them to be recorded! Most kings of his day would allow only flattering things to be entered into official accounts- only enemies and successors would dare record anything negative. David, however, let all of his failings be recorded. This is a wonderful example to leaders of today. We dare not 'sweep things under the carpet'. People do not feel insecure when a leader confesses to failings, they feel more secure! They know they are led by real people, with real weaknesses, but who are quick to be accountable and to repent. David was quick to repent and to accept the discipline of God whether that was the consequence of his adultery and murder, or the numbering of his army (2 Sam 12; 2 Sam 2

### The qualities of David as a leader

1. **Prepared.** We know of a man who some years ago, felt called to preach, though it seemed none of his leaders saw that in him. Each week for a couple of years he would prepare a sermon and practice it, preaching to himself. Every week he prepared and yet was never asked to preach. One day, two years later, the lead elder of the church had to find a replacement preacher at the last minute. He phoned this young man and asked if he could be ready to preach. The young man answered that he had been ready for two years! He now got an opportunity, preached well and eventually took over that church (becoming in the process a very popular and prominent preacher). David was prepared long before he walked in his destiny. He allowed God to use his time in the fields looking after sheep; his time playing the harp for Saul; and even his time as a fugitive in the desert, to teach him and prepare him. Too many people today want to be recognised before they will serve. In God's Kingdom, the opposite principle works: we are recognised once we have served. Several people, for example, have asked me if they can have a chance to preach on a Sunday. My answer is simple: you have plenty of opportunities to preach (Sunday school, home group, work, among friends, etc.), you don't need me to open the door. If God has gifted you in preaching then your gift will make a way for you.

2. **Anointed.** Many secular businesses today are teaching Bible-based leadership principles. This should be unsurprising to us because God's ways work! However, there is one significant element to Biblical leadership which cannot be ignored. No matter how well trained, educated, committed and popular one may be, the one overriding, essential attribute of a leader in God's Kingdom, is that he has been anointed for the task. David was anointed, that is, He was empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform the task of being King. Without it, he could not have brought the blessing of God to Israel that he did. Scripture is clear that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to each one as He pleases (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4 etc.). Some are gifted and called by Him to be elders, deacons or apostles, and some are not. Some have a gift of leadership and some don't. We must each discover what God has called us to do, and do it. We should aspire to church leadership not because it is glamorous (I wish), or because it will give us prestige, or because it fills some need in us. We must perform the functions for which we have been designed by God. I believe that one of the reasons for the numbers of church leaders who burn out and leave ministry is because many of them were never meant to be there in the first place. If, however, that is what we have been called to then we should not settle for anything less (and everything else, in that case, is less!)
  
3. **Sacrificial.** Kareem Abdul-Jabbar the legendary basketball player once said, "A team will always appreciate a great individual if he's willing to sacrifice for the group." He knew that a true leader is one who knows the value of personal sacrifice. David was a man willing to sacrifice, willing to pay the price, and willing to give himself for what God had called him to. People often see leadership in terms of power, influence, and prestige, but in God's Kingdom, it is a matter of responsibility, servant-hood, and sacrifice. This is clear from the words of Jesus (Matt 19:29-30; Matt 20:26; Matt 23:11). Even after he entered into a position of wealth and privilege David remained a man of sacrifice (2 Sam 24:24).

## C. A leader prepares the way for Christ

The purpose of God's leaders is described in Ephesians 4. Though it is speaking specifically of the 'five-fold' or 'ascension' gifts, it serves as a general job description for leaders in the church:

*"...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Eph 4:12-16).*

In other words, our job is to introduce people to Christ and then help them to become mature disciples of His. An Old Testament passage in Isaiah gives us some wonderful principles for achieving this. Let's look at this passage together and see, not only how leaders prepare the way for Christ- but also how Christ prepares his leaders:

“A voice cries:

*‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain will be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.  
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isa 40:3-5).*

1. **A highway is needed.** We need to reach out to those in the desert and make a way for Jesus to be revealed to them. Indeed, we are the road and Jesus desires to be revealed in and through us. Through our actions and our words- we show Christ to the world! This road needs to be prepared, just as John the Baptist prepared Israel for the coming Messiah. John’s purpose was not to glorify himself, but to glorify the one who came after him; he knew he was not to be the centre of attention but that he was to point people to the Messiah; to the Hope of Israel. Elsewhere Isaiah speaks of a road that is safe (Isa 49:11-12; Isa 35:8-10), over which people can travel to the city of God to worship. God wants to build us into a road, a road from earth to heaven, for His glory to come!
2. **Before construction comes destruction.** Before a road can be built the land needs to be cleared. Loggers with chainsaws cut down trees, and rocks and debris are removed. God must remove every obstacle from our lives, even things that, like those trees, are old and deep-rooted. Large tree stumps are often blasted from the ground, leaving their roots exposed so that they will die and can then be easily pulled up and burned. A great motto for the Christian life is ‘Dying to Live’ because it emphasises the Biblical principle of dying to self. We understand that we must die so that Christ can live in and through us (Gal 2:20; Jn 12:24-25; Matt 10:39 etc.). We need to allow Him to do this work; to remove the attitudes values and thought processes that have become ingrained that are not from Him. We need to yield to Him and pray, as David prayed:

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”  
(Ps 139:23-24).*

Anything that is in us that stands in God’s way or is a stumbling block to others must be dealt with radically (i.e. literally from the root).

3. **Every mountain shall be made low.** Once that process is complete the land is leveled. Rocky outcrops are destroyed and high places are brought low. This is God busy dealing with issues of pride and self-sufficiency, with things that hold too prominent a place in our lives and which would be an obstacle to a greater knowledge of Christ.

*“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete” (2 Cor 10:4-6).*

By this stage the area does not look beautiful and pristine: we can often feel useless, ashamed and scared. The things that gave us security have been removed, and we can feel naked and vulnerable. It is not God's intention to leave us like this, however, for He wants to cover our nakedness, remove our shame and complete the work that He started.

4. **Every valley shall be exalted.** God now begins to deal with the low places. He deals with the insecurities; with the secrets of the heart. Hidden places become visible as 'earth is moved' to fill up the valleys. What has been broken is used to fill up what is lacking (i.e. the rubble from the previous stage of roadworks is used to build up low areas). God is able to work with us because we have been humbled and broken. Promotion begins, opportunities open up, and people notice what was previously invisible to them.

*"Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush hi." (Luke 20:18).*

*"But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you" (Jas 4:6-10).*

5. **The crooked shall be made straight.** We have all seen roads that are incredibly crooked and twisted, with hairpin bends and other tight turns. These roads are incredibly slow to travel and are dangerous, especially at times when visibility is poor. The word 'crooked' (Hebrew 'aqob') appears three times in the Old Testament:
  - o Jeremiah 17:9 "the heart is deceitful (aqob) above all things".
  - o Hosea 6:8 "Gilead is a city of wicked men, stained (aqob) with footprints of blood" (NIV).
  - o Isaiah 40:4 "the crooked, deceitful, polluted and stained (aqob) will be straightened".

Making the "crooked straight" is God is dealing with hidden motives, things that even we might be unaware of. His intention is to make us Holy, a straight, safe and easy path for others to follow.

6. **Paving.** The road is now level and straight but needs to be paved. In this state, it is easy and safe to use in any season, in any weather, day or night. Yet paving itself can be a difficult process. A compactor flattens and compacts the ground, subjecting it to pressure repeatedly to ensure that the foundation for the paving stones is solid, safe and will not shift. We must allow God to test us; to put us under pressure in order to shape our character, and to reveal anything that would cause problems once we have built onto the foundation. It is worth noting that Heaven's roads are paved with gold. That is how we will one day be: pure and holy. What was dangerous is now safe! People can see God in his leaders, thus making their own journeys easier and safer. We may not understand the processes as they happen, it may be painful and hurt at times, but we need to trust Him, knowing that:

*"for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28).*

Of course, travelers on that road may sing the praises of the view and of the destination, but few will sing about the road – but does it matter? Glory belongs to God, and to Him alone!

## D. How leaders are chosen

It must be emphasised that leaders are chosen by God and recognised by man. This requires that leaders rely on revelation, not observation. They need to see who God is raising up and recognise them rather than select men out of personal preference, pressure from people, or by taking the path of least resistance. Samuel Brengle said men are chosen:

*“By self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold uncomplaining embrace of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but like Paul, by counting those things that are gain to us as loss for Christ. This is a great price, but it must be paid by the leader who would not be merely a nominal but a real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is recognised and felt in heaven, on earth, and in hell”.*

There is a great need for leadership in the church. A need to return people to the values and ways of the Kingdom. It was prophesied about John the Baptist that he would ‘make a people ready for the Lord’ (Lk 1:17) which is exactly what leaders are called to do today.

**It is not what or who we are, but what and who we can become that causes God to call people into His service. Likewise, we need to see not who people are but what they can become.**

Leaders are called to bring hope to the hopeless and to bring them to a place where they reflect the glory of God. Without leadership, people slide into mediocrity, disunity and eventually into death (Matt 26:31)- which is why God is continually searching for those He can raise up into leadership. Such leaders are not elected, neither are they chosen at the whim of existing leaders, they are raised by God. The question must then be, ‘What does God look for?’ Scripture provides the answers:

- 1 Samuel 13:14 “the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart...”
- Acts 13:22 “...He raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will”.
- Jeremiah 5:1 “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her”.
- Ezek 22:30 “And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none”.

What a tragedy it is that there are times when God cannot find even a single faithful man. It is for this reason, and also so that His power can be displayed in our weakness, that God most often chooses the willing rather than the gifted.

God sometimes chooses a man based on his ready faithfulness: he has proven himself and has prepared himself. Like David, he has fought his lion and his bear. He has been tested and found faithful. Sometimes, though, God chooses a man based on potential, like Gideon (Judges 6). We have looked already at the life of David so let us look briefly at Gideon.

## Let's look at Gideon...

When he was chosen, he was struggling with self-doubt, low self-esteem, and fear. He was beating wheat in a winepress (which is an arduous and inefficient task, as there is no wind in there to blow away the chaff). His own efforts at providing for his family are laborious and bearing little fruit. Gideon certainly wasn't filled with great faith at this point- at first, we see him destroying the altar to Baal by the dark of the night when no one will see him, and then he is laying out a fleece to confirm the message brought to him by an angel!

Though he was young, untried, the least of the least and lacking in faith, God saw what he could become! He saw what Gideon couldn't see: He chose him for his potential. We can often feel unprepared when we are called by God, but we must be willing. Likewise, we need to be those who can see the potential in others, willing to take risks where necessary to see them grow into the fullness of what they can become by grace.

When God finds a person, He desires that they be willing, that they be fully obedient (1 Sam 15:22) and that they take responsibility for that which God entrusts to them. If they do so then He will use them and use them to their limits. In fact, He will go beyond those limits as He increases the capacity of those who have been faithful stewards of what they have been given (Matt 25: 14-29). He does not expect perfection, but He does expect obedience. Look at these men who He chose:

- Noah had a drinking problem
- Moses had a bad temper and a speech impediment
- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all liars
- Elijah was a depressive
- Rahab was a prostitute
- Samson was a vain skirt-chaser
- Peter was impetuous
- James and John were ambitious
- Paul was a murderer of Christians

Yet each of these was used by God as they allowed Him to change them, and as they became obedient to Him and faithful to His ways. God often chooses those we would not. We easily find fault with others whilst finding it difficult to see the good. We often look at the outward whilst God judges the heart (1 Sam 16:7; Acts 1:24; Acts 15:8). Even those who seem disqualified can become *"a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work"* (2 Tim 2: 20-21) if they are faithful and obedient.

It is easy for leaders to be led by the bleating of the sheep; to spend all their time and energy on those who cry the loudest. This is not how we should lead. In fact, this often amounts to little more than management and running around putting out fires. This is an inefficient and ineffective leadership style. We should rather be spending most of our time with those who are faithful- who will themselves be able to lead others:

*"...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2).*

We need to spend time discipling such faithful people, inspiring them and encouraging them to fan into flame the gifts that are in them (2 Tim 1:6). In short, we should be those who start fires, not those who are constantly putting fires out!

# THE COST OF LEADERSHIP

*"For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'" (Lk 14:28-30).*

It has been estimated that eight out of ten church leaders do not 'finish well'. There are a number of reasons for this, one of which is a failure to count the cost before they start. Leadership costs. And the cost is great! What is more: the greater the call, the greater the cost!

A leader must be willing to pay the price that Jesus demands, he must daily take up his cross (as must every believer) and he must pour out his life for others, becoming the servant of all.

*"...whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:44-45).*

Leaders set themselves up for criticism, for accusations and for the attacks of the enemy. They forge ahead and make the way for others, like a cyclist at the head of a peloton (main group of cyclists in a road race) who faces more resistance than those who follow in his slipstream. They are the tall trees that catch most wind. As the philosopher, Nietzsche said, "life always gets harder towards the summit, the cold gets colder, the wind stronger, the burden of responsibility heavier".

Leaders are also those who are judged more harshly because they have been given more responsibility:

*"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (Jas 3:1).*

*"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account..." (Heb 13:17).*

For the apostle Paul, his physical suffering was even a sign of his authentic apostolicity! Reading the following passages does a great deal to remove any delusions about the glamour of authentic biblical leadership:

*"From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal 6:17)*

*"Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one--I am talking like a madman--with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and*

*thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor 11:23-28).*

Paul suffered greatly, as do many of God’s leaders. Only one of original apostles, John, died of natural causes and even then, only after torture and exile. God’s leaders willingly take on this burden in order to bring life to others. Just as Jesus laid down His life for the sheep, true leaders of His church do the same.

*“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you” (2 Cor 4:7-12).*

# FULFILLING A MINISTRY

We have seen that God requires faithfulness. His leaders must fulfil that with which they have been entrusted. We need to see that though salvation is a free gift, it comes with responsibility. The consequence of receiving salvation is a desire to be obedient, which among other things, means committing oneself to serving Jesus and His church.

Jesus spent approximately three and a half years in ministry, during which he spent almost half of that time gathering people, and half discipling those closest to Him. Interestingly, by the end of His ministry, He had only 120 faithful followers and might have been considered a failure. Yet those 120 who had been trained and equipped, those 120 who had proved faithful, they turned the whole world upside-down. These were ordinary men and women: unschooled, fishermen, prostitutes, tax collectors, etc. These 'foolish things' confounded the wisest of their day (1 Cor 1:27). Jesus focussed on reliable men who themselves were qualified to teach others! (2 Tim 2: 2).

## How does Jesus see who is trainable?

Luke 5 gives us a wonderful insight into how Jesus tested for faithfulness and teachability when calling His first disciples:

1. The crowds were listening (not doing/obeying).
2. Jesus saw the boats. He watches our every move, there is nothing hidden from Him.
3. When Jesus came upon them the fishermen were washing nets: they were faithful with what they had. Failure to wash the nets would mean they would rot and then they would lose fish the next time they went out. If a man was to become a 'fisher of men' Jesus would expect the same faithfulness and dedication. Peter did not let the basics slide even in his time of frustration, tiredness and 'drought'. Neither can we let the basics (prayer, the Word, worship, etc.) slide when we are tired or seeing little fruit.
4. Jesus interrupted Peter's routine by getting into the boat. God often interrupts us and when He does we need to accommodate Him.
5. Jesus makes a 'small request' and asks Peter to put out a little way. He doesn't ask too much of him at first. Only later does He ask Peter to go out into deep water. Peter would have been exhausted from fishing all night and perhaps a little frustrated. To put the boat out at all was a major inconvenience, and yet he was willing to obey. He was willing to place his resources at Jesus' disposal.
6. Peter is then asked to go out deeper to fish. Jesus was not a fisherman like Peter and so it would have been easy for Peter to rely on his own knowledge and experience but He chooses to obey even when it made no sense. After all, he knew that the right time to fish was the evening and he had caught nothing. There seemed little chance of catching anything now. Peter did not let his pride, his intellect or his tiredness prevent him from submitting to the Lord's instructions. He obeys simply because he is asked, not because he feels like it or understands it.

To be trainable we need to have the same response, not just to the direct prompting of Jesus, but to those He chooses to use-His leaders. We submit to leaders as we would to Christ Himself. With this obedience comes fruitfulness. The blessings of obedience are

obvious. God does want to bless us abundantly but He cannot bless disobedience. By being obedient and submissive we position ourselves to receive.

7. Responding by seeing our own sinfulness just as Peter did. This is the inevitable response of having a revelation of Christ. No matter how 'holy' we seem to others, compared to Christ we are dirty and sinful (cf Isa 6). It is when we see our sinfulness, our spiritual bankruptcy, that we cry out for and receive His mercy; that is when we are truly ready to be used. It is from this place that Peter is commissioned (*"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" Matt 4:19*).
8. Peter then had a choice. To leave behind his livelihood and everything he knew, to 'put to death' his old way of life, his security and his provision, or to carry on as before. He chose to follow- will you? Often a leader feels that he wants a person to fulfil their destiny and to make the right choices more than they do. Jesus Himself was grieved when the rich young ruler chose not to follow Him. All we can do is paint a picture of a glorious future, to encourage and exhort, but we cannot make the choice for a person.

# SERVANT LEADERSHIP

*"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life" (Rom 6:22).*

As you can see from this Scripture, we are called to be slaves to Christ. In order to understand servant- leadership we need to understand the nature of slaves/servants:

1. A slave exists for the good of his master; he has no rights. A Godly leader gives up his rights for the good of the Kingdom. I was once asked why a woman does not have the right to be an elder (more on women in leadership later), my answer was that no one in the Kingdom, man or woman, has any rights at all!
2. A slave sees to his master's needs before he sees to his own. Leadership in the church means often giving up one's own preferences, comforts, and desires for the sake of the church.
3. A slave possesses nothing, everything belongs to his master (even his family). Fortunately, we serve a good Master who desires the well-being of ourselves and our families, but we must place these things into His hands.
4. A slave was not able to provide for himself and so was reliant on his master for food, clothing, and lodging. As we put our Master's needs first he will provide these things (Matt 6: 25-34).

These attributes of slaves can give us an idea of what it means to be slaves to Christ, and how that influences the way we lead.

It is interesting that God's leaders are often referred to as his servants. Consider reference to, my *servant* Moses, not my leader Moses (Num 12:7). Jesus, the revolutionary, turned the principles of the world and the religious institutions upside down. He showed by example that we must humble ourselves, even to the point of death; not lord it over those we lead; not put a burden on people we are not prepared to carry ourselves; not be hypocritical; lead with our lives not just with words; and put the needs of others first.

Gal 5:13 sums up the attitude of servant leadership, *"...through love, serve one another"*. In reality however, few leaders serve, too many serve their own interests and not enough follow Paul's exhortation:

*"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:1-8).*

If we are not yet servant-leaders, how do we get to that point? We allow ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2) so that we see things from His perspective. In this way, we will see the glory of service; the wonder of His ways and the joy set before us (Heb 12:2). But even so, faithful servants face several challenges:

1. **Fatigue.** There is no leadership without the expenditure of energy (2 Cor 4:16; Mk 5:30). If we are never fatigued, then we are never giving all. The price of avoiding fatigue is mediocrity. Don't confuse fatigue with failure and allow God to refresh you in these times.
2. **Criticism.** It is true that you can't please all people all the time, and so the answer to this is simply to try and please one Person all the time- Jesus. Criticism from people is inevitable so it is important to be secure in your walk with Jesus, and your desire to please Him.
3. **Rejection.** Jesus was rejected by those He came to serve, and He promised us the same fate. People will often not want what we have come to give them. We see that children rarely thank their parents for discipline or a dose of medicine, even if they need it and it is given with love. Paul promises that in the last days people will be, among other things, rebellious and ungrateful.
4. **Pressure and pain.** A leader who loves the church will carry the burden of the church (2 Cor 11:28). He will feel the pain of those he leads and he will also feel the heart of Jesus for every backslider, every rebel and every person who rejects the Gospel.

Given all this, many will wonder why anyone serves at all? The answer is clear:

1. **A love for Jesus.** Love produces obedience and good deeds. Just as a mother is willing to bear the pain of childbirth and many sleepless nights out of love, so we too are to bear the 'burdens of leadership' for the love of Christ and His body, the church.
2. A love for our brothers (Gal 5:13).
3. **We serve because we have been chosen.** It is what we have been designed and called to do and it is only by walking in this calling that we fully develop our faith.
4. **Rewards.** We are promised rewards for faithfulness, in this life and the next (Col 3: 23-24; Gal 6:9).

# THE GLORY OF BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

We have seen the cost, but there is also a glory to leadership. Just as Christ was exalted because he humbled Himself (Phil 2) so God's leaders can experience glory if they are willing to humble themselves and pay the price.

1 Tim 3:1 tells us that it is an honourable ambition to aspire to eldership. We struggle with the concept of ambition in the Kingdom but there is a Godly ambition which is a desire and willingness to be used rather than a 'campaign for promotion'. James and John were rebuked for their worldly ambition (Matt 20:20-23) as Jesus tells them that they have no idea what they are asking for: they want the glory without the price. Glory and sacrifice are intertwined in much of Scripture. In fact, there is glory in the sacrifice! I have often said that I have never sacrificed anything for Jesus. This is because, whatever I have given up for Him I know has been, or will be, replaced by something better. As Jim Elliott once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

In the previous chapter, Matthew 19, the disciples remind Jesus of their sacrifice, "*See, we have left everything and followed you*" and here He tells them of the reward and the glory they will receive for having made such a sacrifice. Eventually, they all (except John, though he was tortured and imprisoned) pay the ultimate sacrifice- being martyred for their faith.

This in itself was glorious: **The glory of leadership is its sacrifice.**

To be ambitious for eldership then is to desire hardship, sacrifice, abuse on behalf others, to pay a greater price, to be judged more strictly and to give oneself to others! All for the sake of His glory!

# KEY PASSAGES FOR LEADERS TO KNOW, UNDERSTAND & LIVE BY

Whilst *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"* (2 Tim 3:16) there are two particular passages that it would serve every leader well to study, meditate on and follow. They are Psalm 23 and 1 Cor 13 which I consider useful for obvious reasons.

## Psalm 23

This Psalm describes the Good Shepherd. If we are to be His under-shepherds, representing Him well, then it should describe us also. We can take a line by line look at it to discover the essential ingredients of a Godly shepherd.

1. **The Lord is my Shepherd:** We need to recognise that we are under shepherds. First and foremost, we serve Him and the sheep that we lead are HIS sheep. Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matt 16). He did not say *you* will build my church, neither did He say I will build *your* church. It is His church, His sheep and we are His leaders. We, therefore, need to recognise that we have been given responsibility for what is most precious to God, His people, and that any authority we carry is an authority that has been delegated to us by Him. Shepherds of the Biblical era were much different to those today, and these differences give radical insight into what is expected when leading God's people:
  - o They would often know their sheep by name. It has been said that such shepherds, even if blindfolded, could recognise each sheep by touch. In the same way, we need to know those for whom we care. We must always remember that they are people, not projects.
  - o The shepherd would remove burrs and tics from the fleeces of his sheep to keep them healthy. We too need to help free the sheep from things that will make them spiritually sick.
  - o A shepherd walked in front calling the sheep on. Today's shepherds walk behind, often using a dog and/or a stick to drive the sheep. We need to lead by example, paving the way for the sheep, not driving them on. Remember, people catch what we are, not what we say.
  - o The shepherd would look for the stray sheep and bring them back.
2. **I shall not want.** Paul wrote to the church saying that he longed to come so that he could add what was lacking. This should be the heartbeat of every leader- to long to meet the needs of the sheep. We need the ability to perceive a person's real needs and bring them to a place of wholeness and maturity so that they are not lacking or in want.
3. **He makes me lie down in green pastures.** This speaks of a healthy diet for the sheep as green pastures are lush and succulent. In our leading, we need to provide a sufficient, healthy spiritual diet for the sheep. It is almost impossible to make a sheep lie down unless four requirements are met. They must be free of fear, free of friction with other sheep, free of being tormented by flies or parasites and they must also be free from hunger. This can only occur under the watch of a diligent and faithful shepherd.

4. **He leads me beside still waters.** The shepherd needs to know where clean and healthy water can be found. When sheep are thirsty they will wander off in search of a drink and they will often end up drinking from polluted sources, where they pick up parasites or other diseases. A skilled shepherd, in order to keep the sheep in the pasture, will not build fences but will dig wells where the sheep can drink deeply of fresh water. As leaders, we must dig these wells through time and intimacy with God ourselves.
5. **He restores my soul.** When a sheep is described as 'cast down' it means that it has fallen onto its back. A sheep in such a position is unable to right itself, and will usually die if help does not arrive. We often find people who are 'cast down', these are the ones who need to be gently lifted, put on their feet, and have their souls restored.
6. **He leads me in paths of righteousness.** If sheep are left to their own devices, they will follow the same old paths until those paths become ruts. They will graze the same areas until they are ruined and pollute the ground with disease and parasites. We need to lead people out of their ruts, along paths which lead to life and health. Whilst each individual is responsible before God for how he lives his life, a leader will be responsible for how he has led the sheep. Great leaders take people from one point to another along the path of righteousness. Whether counseling, preaching or leading a meeting, the leader's aim is to take people somewhere – leading them in paths of righteousness. There is a school of thought that if we simply preach the Word then people will change but I believe that this is not sufficient. When preaching, we need to help people 'see a preferable future', creating in them a desire for change- and then showing them how to get there. Godly leaders must have a high regard for righteousness and a no-compromise attitude to sin, because of this they are able to model, preach about, and equip people to live righteously.
7. **For His Name's sake.** There is an old saying, 'The sun (Son) doesn't shine when the stars are out'. God is not looking for superstars, that is, for men who want to take glory for themselves. Rather, Godly leaders are those whose heart it is to bring glory to God, to lift high the name of Jesus, and point people to Him.
8. **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me.** Sheep would be taken to certain ranges in the summer and then brought closer to home as winter approached. As the pastures were on the hills, the return journey often involved traveling through a valley. We all experience valley times, winter seasons, etc. and a good leader will help to encourage the sheep at such times, spurring them on to continue the journey toward the destination. Such encouragement is not done from afar but by being with the sheep: as they walk through the valley, you are with them.
9. **Your rod and your staff they comfort me.** A shepherd could use his rod in a number of ways. It was the main weapon used to defend the sheep and also used it to correct a sheep when it was wandering off the right path. The rod was also used to count and examine the sheep (Ezek 20:37)-to closely examine the state of the sheep's skin as it parted the wool. Leaders need to examine and know the condition of the sheep placed under their care. The staff, on the other hand, was used to draw sheep together (e.g. a lamb to its mother) or to draw a sheep to the shepherd. It is used for gently guiding sheep, or even just to touch a sheep to let it know the shepherd is there. A leader needs to know when and how to use each of these tools skilfully. As Scripture tells us, "*correct, rebuke and encourage*" (2 Tim 4:2 NIV).

10. **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.** Here the Good Shepherd is recognised for honouring the Psalmist. For a king to invite a person to eat with him was considered the greatest honour. Leaders need to be those who honour the sheep. It is easy to become critical, to look at faults and weaknesses, but we need to be those who see with the eyes of Jesus. We need to see what a person may become in Christ, and to help them become this.
11. **You anoint my head with oil.** Anointing oil is a type or picture of the Holy Spirit. In preaching, worshiping, praying, counseling or ministering in any capacity, we need to be people of the Spirit. We are not called to be great orators, skilled musicians, spiritual gurus or dispensers of good advice! Without the Spirit, we will fight a losing battle. However, if we, as leaders, can be those from whom the Spirit flows, we will bring life, healing, and freedom to those we lead.
12. **My cup overflows.** If we lead well and minister in the power of the Spirit, then there will be an overflow into the lives of those we lead. They, in turn, become those who minister to others, who have an overflow from which others will receive. Churches often speak of a 'priesthood of all believers', which is true, but we actually need to *prepare* people for ministry and then release them into it if we want to see that reality realised.
13. **Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.** A sheep that has the care of an expert shepherd will be content, feel safe and be full of faith. This statement of faith is made by a man who knows that the Good Shepherd is providing care, provision, protection, guidance, direction, encouragement and, where necessary, discipline. This is a man who is not being 'managed', nor being treated like a project, but is lovingly led into the fullness of life that God intends for him. In the same manner, we are called not to be managers but leaders who love and care for God's flock.
14. **And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.** A leader should always have eternity in mind. God is more concerned with our eternal state than He is with our momentary comfort. It is a sobering thought that the actions and words of a leader have eternal consequences. This is why Scripture tells us that not many should aim to become teachers and that teachers will be held doubly accountable.

## 1 Corinthians 13

This passage is the definitive description of love. Without love I am nothing. Love is the driving force behind everything we do as leaders, both love for Jesus and for His people. When a leader loses his love for the people, He needs to get before God and find it again because a leader without love quickly becomes controlling, manipulative, insecure and ineffective. As we study 1 Corinthians 13, we can learn what Biblical love looks like, and how it changes the way we lead.

Love is (NIV translation):

1. **Patient.** Patience is a vital characteristic of a leader. People often do not respond as quickly as we would like: they can often fail to listen or fail to obey or they might get stuck in unhelpful or sinful patterns in their lives, which can easily become a source of frustration to those who lead them. We can never lead out of frustration. Whilst we can never compromise on truth or Kingdom values, we need to realise that people are on a journey and that there is a process of sanctification. We need to lovingly and patiently guide people along this path, remembering how patient God has been with us.

*“The greatest sin of leadership is impatience” Henry Blackaby.*

2. **Kind.** We serve a kind God, a God of grace and mercy. A God who is benevolent and whose kindness, Scripture tells us, leads us to repentance (Rom 2:4). The context of this verse is in relation to the mercy of God, that although we deserve eternal punishment He has given us the opportunity to repent and receive forgiveness. Those we lead need to know that their leaders are approachable and will show mercy to them; and that they will point them to repentance and forgiveness. God's leaders need to reflect His kindness.
3. **Does not boast, is not proud.** Pride is called the original sin because it was the downfall of Lucifer. Any attempt by man to take from God the glory that is rightfully His is no less of a sin than that. If we achieve anything in God, it is because of His grace and His power flowing through us, and the glory belongs to Him. As Phil 2 states clearly, we must have the attitude of Christ Jesus who humbled Himself.

*“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2: 2-8).*

4. **Is not rude.** This speaks largely of acting in an appropriate manner and not being offensive. Whilst we acknowledge that the Gospel message in itself will be an offense to some, we must ensure that they are not put off by what we do but that Jesus is the rock of offense, not us.
5. **Is not self-seeking.** Leaders serve the people. The people are not to be used for the advancement, comfort, ego or financial gain of the leader. Leaders need to represent Christ who laid down His life for the sheep.
6. **Is not easily angered.** Being temperate is a requirement for both elders and deacons. This essentially means being even-tempered; not easily losing one's temper (and, I suggest, being emotionally stable). It is not difficult to see why a leader must be even-tempered. A leader must never react to a circumstance in such a way that emotions cloud judgment as we are called to be those who respond, as Christ would, to any situation.
7. **Keeps no record of wrongs.** This can be one of the hardest characteristics of love to develop and live in. Our natural tendency is often to bring up the past when dealing with people's failings but again, we must represent our Heavenly Father well. The Bible tells us that God does not hold our sin against us once we have repented (Is 43:25 etc.). Wisdom dictates that this does not simply mean we forget about a sin, in some contexts (perhaps there may need to be restitution that needs to take place: legal consequences, etc.) but it does mean that people need not fear approaching their leaders with their failings.

8. **Does not delight in evil.** It seems that this is stating the obvious and perhaps it is. Yet we do need to be people who will not compromise with sin, excuse it or accommodate it. Furthermore, we must never rejoice in another's failures. 'Schadenfreude' is a word meaning 'to derive pleasure from another person's misfortune'. It is scary that this happens often enough that there is a word to describe it! We need to understand that a victory for one is a victory for all and a failure for one is a failure for all (1 Cor 12:24-26).
9. **Rejoices with the truth.** Jesus is the truth (Jn 14:6). To delight in truth is to delight in Him. It is the truth that sets us free (Jn 8:32) and sheds light on dark places; and it is the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth (Jn 16:13). Despite all this, it can be difficult to sometimes rejoice in the truth, for as we've often said: the truth hurts- and then it sets you free. When we are in a position where we must communicate a hard truth to a person, we must not shrink back from doing so, but we must do it with love. As the saying goes: truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is sentimentality.
10. **Always protects.** Shepherds are responsible for the state of the sheep. The sheep need to be protected from harm that may come to them: from wolves, from enemies and even at times, from themselves.
11. **Always trusts.** This essentially means believing the best of a person. Needless to say, there are times when a degree of trust must be withheld (we do not, for example, allow anyone with a history of child molestation to work with our children). But, we do need to trust that as any person subjects themselves to the headship of Christ, He WILL complete the work He started (Phil 1:6). Whilst we need to be wise those we are leading need to feel that we are on their side, that we are for them and that we believe the best of them.
12. **Always hopes.** At the end of the chapter in 1 Cor 13, Paul speaks of three things that are eternal: faith hope and love. If we can ensure that we hold to these three virtues in our leadership we will see tremendous fruit in the lives of those we lead. People often come to us without hope, and sometimes without faith. It is our responsibility to bring them to a place of hope no matter their current circumstance. This we can never do if we ourselves cannot find faith and if we cannot be people of hope.
13. **Always perseveres.** It is so easy to be tempted to give up on people when they have failed, especially if they fail repeatedly. Yet love NEVER fails. Even when we have had to discipline somebody and 'hand them over to Satan' as per 1 Cor 5, love continues. In fact, discipline itself is an act of love, it is redemptive, with the intent of seeing people restored.

# OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

In this section, we will look at the offices in the church which are prescribed in God's Word. Scripture only recognises two offices within the local church: elders and deacons. I will first take a comprehensive look at elders (what they are and what they do)- and then do the same for deacons.

## A. Elders

There are three words in the New Testament that describe the same office and are virtually interchangeable. They are:

- Presbuteros: translated as elder
- Episkopos: translated as overseer (or bishop)
- Poimén: translated as shepherd (or pastor)

We see all of them, for example, in 1 Pet 5:1-2 where each term is used in connection with the same office.

Driscoll picks up on this and gives the following definition of elders:

*“Elders are the male leaders of the church who are synonymously called pastors, bishops, and overseers throughout the New Testament. While the various words are used interchangeably, they each refer to a different aspect of the same role in the same office. As an elder, a man has rank and authority to rule and govern a church. As a bishop, he has the responsibility before God to rule and protect a church. As a pastor, he has the high honor of caring for Christians and evangelizing non-Christians. As an overseer, he has the responsibility before God of leading and managing the church” (On Church Leadership. A Book You’ll Actually Read. Pg 14).*

On page 19 he continues,

*“An elder is not someone who is a helper that does a lot of work for the church, because that is the definition of a deacon. Rather, an elder is a leader who trains other leaders to lead various aspects of the church. Therefore, no man should be an elder unless he can effectively train people to not only be mature Christians, but mature Christians leaders who train others”.*

He categorises elders into three main groupings, with each individual elder carrying one or more of these roles within the team. Together they fulfill the offices that made up the ministry of Jesus Himself:

- **Prophet:** strong in vision, study, preaching and teaching, doctrine and in calling people to repentance.
- **Priest:** compassionate, pastoral, merciful, loving.
- **King:** administration, planning, maximizing resources, executing plans.

Needless to say, we need a mix of all three of these as each has weaknesses that are covered by the others.

In the Old Testament, the elders would sit at the gates of a city where they would govern who could enter; pass judgment on matters concerning the citizens of that city, and interpret laws. Each city would have its elders who would administrate the affairs of their own city. This is a picture of elders in the church. We see in Scripture that there was a church in each city, governed by elders.

Eldership is exclusively male, as we have already stated, the reasons for which we will look at separately.

Now that we've looked at what an elder is, in terms of definition, let's look in some detail at the Biblical qualifications for leaders in God's church. To quote Driscoll again:

*"Human leadership in the church is little more than qualified Christians who are following Jesus and encouraging other people to follow them as they follow Jesus. Because of this, church leaders must be good sheep who follow their Chief Shepherd Jesus well before they are fit to be shepherds leading any of his sheep. This is in large part what Paul meant when he told Christians in various local churches to "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Cor 11:1)" (On Church Leadership. A Book You'll Actually Read. Pg 12).*

We need to take care, for it is remarkably easy to confuse three aspects of a person's make-up when considering them for leadership. These are:

1. **Character.** This is the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual or the 'distinctive nature of something'. It has been said that "Everyone tries to define this thing called Character. It's not hard. Character is doing what's right when nobody's looking." Character is what qualifies a leader in God's Kingdom. Character is not to be confused with charisma.
2. **Charisma.** This is the compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion in others. Whilst it is often beneficial for a leader to have charisma, this should not be confused with character or substance. It can often be skin deep.
3. **Charismata.** This is the spiritual gifts (literally 'gracelets') a person may have. Whilst we need to ensure that a man is graced to fulfill a particular function, such giftedness is independent of character. As a grace gift, it is undeserved and it is irrevocable and a person may operate in it despite character flaws or weaknesses. Furthermore, strength in one gifting does not ensure strength in another. For example, a number of men gifted in signs and wonders have fallen into error in the mistaken belief that such acts confirm that their teaching is correct.

## B. The qualifications of elders

Now that we have clarity on these terms, let's look at two passages of Scripture which speak directly to the qualifications of elders.

*"The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care*

*for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil" (1 Tim 3:1-7).*

*"This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you-- If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1:6-9).*

There are a number of overlaps in the list provided by these passages, but if we combine them we see the following regarding eldership:

1. **To desire eldership is to desire a noble task.** The desire for eldership is a qualification thereof. There must be a desire to serve and take on the responsibility of an elder before one can function in this role. This desire should be a Godly desire to serve, not a selfish ambition or desire to 'lord it over' others. As Peter wrote:

*"So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly" (1 Pet 5:1-2).*

2. **Above reproach.** Reproach speaks of criticism, disapproval or disappointment. Of course, an elder need not be perfect (for then there would be no elders!) but he must be a man who lives an exemplary life. A wonderful example is James who was thrown off the temple pinnacle and then beaten to death. He was nicknamed 'The Just' because of his virtue. It is said that even his enemies could find no fault with his actions.
3. **The husband of one wife.** The first point to make here is that eldership is described as male (note that it does not say the partner of one spouse). Second, a more accurate translation would be 'a one woman man'. There are various opinions about whether this disqualifies a man who has been divorced, though it would obviously rule out a man who has multiple wives! There is a variety of opinion as to whether a divorced man can be an elder, and there is not space here to go into an in-depth study. However, we should perhaps note that these qualifications relate to current character, not past failures and that divorce and remarriage is a complex and multifaceted issue. A possible way to deal with this is that if a man has been divorced, then at **the very least**, there should be an examination of the reasons that led to that divorce and whether there are any consequences to that which would affect him leading the church into the future.
4. **Sober-minded/temperate.** An elder must be even-tempered and not given to extremes of behaviour.
5. **Self-controlled.** An elder who cannot control himself cannot lead others.
6. **Respectable.** He must be 'of good behaviour' or 'modest'. In other words, an elder cannot be given to lewd behavior. This does not mean one cannot conform in behaviour to the cultural expectations of certain segments of society, but that he does not act in such a way as to hinder the Gospel message. It could be said, of course, that David acted in an

'unrespectable' or undignified manner when dancing before the Lord (2 Sam 6:14), but he was not acting in a way contrary to the culture of the Kingdom. Elders must exhibit, by example, behaviour that is pleasing to our King whether that be in meetings or in 'everyday life'.

7. **Hospitable.** This is defined as receiving or treating guests or strangers warmly and generously. An elder sees the church as family and acknowledges that it is his responsibility to draw people into the life of the family and to do so without prejudice or favouritism (Jas 2:1-4).
8. **Able to teach/hold to the Word/Instruction in sound doctrine/able to rebuke.** This speaks of more than simply the ability to impart information. It speaks of carrying the authority to establish correct doctrine in the life of the church. At a time when we are surrounded by many strange and dangerous doctrines, the elders must be able to protect the sheep. They must be able to hold to sound Biblical teachings and practice, and to be able to competently and persuasively counter any false doctrine that comes into the life of the church. It would be erroneous to think that elders should allow the sheep access to any teaching and then to decide for themselves what is acceptable. Throughout Scripture it is shown that it is the eldership team's responsibility to protect the sheep from deception: failure to do so will result in much damage to the church and to many individuals. Indeed, much of the New Testament is given over to refuting false teaching. The apostles were not reluctant to condemn what they saw as heresy and to warn the church to avoid the teachings of certain men, who they were even willing to name (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 4:14).
9. **Not a drunkard.** Whilst it is self-evident that an elder should not be an alcoholic, I think it is fair to say that we could interpret this as 'not having addictions', and not be too wide of the mark. An elder must be able to have control over the 'desires of the flesh' (Gal 5:16-26). He must not be mastered by anything except Christ- not wine, drugs, food, TV, computer games, the internet, sport, etc. It is interesting that often sobriety and watchfulness are linked in Scripture. As the 'watchmen' elders must remain sober and able to fulfill their obligations. Ezek 33:6 gives a stern warning to watchmen who fail in their responsibility to protect the people.
10. **Not violent but gentle.** This goes beyond physical violence. An elder must have a gentle spirit and he must be approachable (2 Tim 2:24). There is a difference, however, between a peacekeeper and a peacemaker. Elders are not called to avoid or prevent conflict, they are called to resolve conflict in order to bring true peace. Sometimes conflict is unavoidable in leadership and a Godly leader will not shy away from this. He will work at making true peace and not keeping 'false peace' for fear of confrontation.
11. **Not quarrelsome.** In 2 Tim 2:23 and Titus 3:9 Paul warns against indulging in meaningless controversies. Elders must discern when it is necessary to discuss/debate or fight for a truth and when to 'let sleeping dogs lie'. Furthermore, an elder's priority must always be to bring people into truth, rather than winning an argument or being right.
12. **Not a lover of money.** It is impossible to serve both God and money (Matt 6:24). As a servant of Jesus Christ and His church, an elder must be free from the temptation to make decisions and guide people from a motive of materialism. For example, an elder must not minister in such a way as to avoid displeasing those who are key financial contributors in the life of the church. An elder must be free from the temptation of counseling, preaching or administrating church life in such a way as to benefit materially in a personal capacity. Of course, we know that a worker is worth his wages (1 Tim 5:18)

and an elder who works well should receive a financial reward, but such rewards should not be the motivation for ministry or an influencing factor therein. An elder must be motivated by love and a desire to serve. Furthermore, an elder needs to set the example for believers in all things, including faithfulness with the resources God has entrusted to Him, and obedience in such things as tithing and generosity. Note that a love of money would result in a lack of giving and a lack of generosity, and would, therefore, disqualify such a man from the role of elder.

13. **Manage his household well.** The church is a 'household of faith', if a man cannot be faithful with the small (his immediate family) how can he be expected to be faithful with the large (the church family)? He must be a man who loves and leads his wife and children, as well as all the people and possessions he has been given care over.
14. **Submissive/believing/faithful children.** The word sometimes translated 'believing' here can also be rendered as 'faithful'. We do not believe that a man is disqualified from eldership if his children grow up to become unbelievers. Even a perfect father can see his children go astray (Jesus lost Judas; God as Father of Israel saw them repeatedly fall into apostasy). What we can say, though, is that the fruit of the way he has parented is usually evident in the lives and attitudes of his children. If they are rebellious and disrespectful this can often be attributed to a lack of guidance and discipline. Whilst each child is free to make their own choices, if all a man's children are rebellious it should raise question marks about his ability to be a 'father' in the household of God. We would need to look at each case individually, for example, if a man only received Christ in later life when his children have already grown into disrespectful and rebellious adults, this may not necessarily disqualify him.
15. **Not a recent convert.** Again, we need a flexible and Spirit-led approach as it is difficult to define what constitutes a 'recent' convert. The principle to follow here it seems is more linked to spiritual maturity, and a developed track record of faithfulness, love, and humility.
16. **Well thought of by outsiders.** The character of a man should be seen not just when he is in church. We must look at his family life, as we have already seen, but we must also look at his work life and his social life too. Does he act the same way in front of his unsaved work colleagues as he does with his church friends? Is he a good employee or an honest businessman? Does he work hard and live a life of integrity? Do people know that he is a believer, does he share his faith? These are all questions that need to be asked of an individual before he is brought onto eldership. If it is valid to ask for a reference from a previous employer before recruiting a person into a secular job, is it not also valid when ordaining someone into eldership?
17. **Not arrogant.** Humility is an essential quality of a Godly leader.
18. **A lover of good/upright/holy.** Holiness is a positive attribute, it is not made up of things we do *not* do (for example not smoking, not drinking, not swearing etc. does not make us holy). We act a certain way because we have been made holy, and a leader needs to show this by example. He behaves in a good, moral, upright way not because he 'has to' and not in order to try and 'earn religious brownie points' but rather an elder behaves in a Godly way because he is a 'lover of good': he loves to please God and recognises that God's ways produce good fruit that lasts into eternity.

19. **Disciplined.** Paul wrote of the importance of being disciplined (1 Cor 9:24-27) for he knew that a lack of self-discipline could lead to disqualification from the race. To be a follower of Jesus means to subject oneself to discipline (if we do not discipline ourselves, our loving Father will do it, Heb 12:8) as we are called to be Disciples. We must be disciplined with our time, our thoughts, our emotions, and our actions. An elder must lead by example in the spiritual disciplines such as prayer, worship, studying the Word, giving, fasting etc.

*“Three things are noteworthy about this list. First, the list is really about men being good Christians, assuming that good Christians will make good pastors. This is curious because too many pastors are not very good Christians. Second, the qualifications for a pastor are in large part tied not to his work at the church, but rather to whether or not he has been a good pastor in his home with his family and in his world with his neighbors and coworkers; too many pastors are good pastors at the expense of being good husbands, fathers, neighbors, and the like. Third, establishing whether or not a man actually meets these criteria requires relational time in community over a long season because the list is about counting character, which is more difficult than counting rocks, as one pastor has quipped” (On Church Leadership. A Book You’ll Actually Read. Pg 16).*

Of course, a man may meet all of these qualifications and not be called to be an elder. Elders are not self-appointed, nor are they appointed by committees or congregational votes. They are called by Jesus Christ and recognised by men. Paul tells elders that “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28). Ordination onto eldership is in recognition of what a man has been called to, and to some extent, what he is already doing in the church (though with ordination comes an anointing to equip him to be more effective in this calling).

Such recognition must come from the existing eldership team, especially the leader of that team, often with the input and advice of an apostolic figure working into that church.

## C. The duties and responsibilities of elders

These are the qualifications for eldership – but what do elders do in the life of the church? The duties and responsibilities of elders are listed in Scripture as follows:

1. Prayer and study of the Word.
2. Ruling/leading/governing/managing the church, rightly exercising Godly authority and power.
3. Being good stewards of finances.
4. Caring for God’s people (for who they will give an account) by feeding and protecting the sheep.
5. Living exemplary lives.
6. Teaching the Bible correctly, establishing right doctrine and combating false teaching.
7. Preaching.
8. Praying for the sick.
9. Working.

10. Protecting the church.
11. Setting the vision/direction of the church.
12. Disciplining unrepentant Christians.
13. Obeying the secular laws as the legal ruling body of a corporation.
14. Developing other leaders and teachers.
15. Learning from each other.
16. Leading corporate church meetings.
17. Strengthening the church.

We know that as elders we will give an account before God for how we have led the church (Heb 13:17) so it is a responsibility and a privilege that we take very seriously.

We understand that the church does not belong to us but to Christ and that it is, in fact, Him who builds His church (Matt 16:18). We are called to represent Him, to love the people and lay down our lives for them, just as He did. Our role is that of servant-leaders whose motivation is love (Lk 10:27; 1 Cor 13:1-3; 1 Pet 5:1-7). Despite the seriousness of the role, we do so gladly and willingly, knowing it is by doing so that we fulfill the calling of God on our lives and serve His church the best way we can.

## D. Deacon

The word "deacon" comes from the Greek word 'diakonos', which simply means "to minister" or "to serve". The definition of the word gives us insight into the actual role and daily responsibilities of a church deacon. The Greek word for deacon is mentioned over 63 times in the New Testament, and each mention gives us insight into the original role of a deacon. This role may vary according to the needs of a particular church but a deacon's function is to serve the people of God. The office of deacon is mentioned on two occasions in the New Testament. Both occasions are in relation to elders because the two groups of leaders work so closely together.

The office of a deacon was created to free up the elders to seek God's will for the church and to make sure the necessary needs of the church were still met (Acts 6:2-4). They could be described as 'pastoral assistants' as, practically speaking, they work hand-in-hand with the elders. If elders are the commissioned officers of the army of God, then the deacons are the NCO's. A strong deacon team (diaconate) is essential to the health and life of a church.

## E. What qualifies deacons?

*“Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well (1 Tim 3:8-12).*

We see that the qualifications are almost identical to those of elders except they need not have the ability to teach. Being a deacon in itself is a high calling, essential to the well-being of the church. This is seen in the story of the choosing of the original deacons. The apostles say to the people,

*“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty” (Acts 6:3).*

The only glaring difference in the passage from 1 Tim, is that ‘deacons’ wives’ are mentioned. We need to look at this in some detail.

The Greek word here literally means women, not wives, so some translations have “Likewise deaconesses...”. We must, therefore, ask what Paul had in mind here. Was he referring to women who assist deacons, deacons’ wives or women deacons? Which of these we consider correct will determine whether there is a Biblical mandate for women deacons. For the following reasons, we would view ‘deaconesses’, to be the more accurate translation, which would then encompass all three of those options.

The reasons for this are:

- Paul seems to refer to some women in the church as deacons e.g. Phoebe in Rom 16:1. Likewise, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Euodia and Syntyche may well have been deacons.
- If he was speaking of the wives of deacons then he would have been setting a higher standard for deacons than elders, as there is no qualification mentioned for elders’ wives.
- Grammatically the word likewise fits best with an interpretation that the preceding list is for male and female deacons, with the next list being for female deacons exclusively. This incidentally is followed by a subsequent list that seems to be for male deacons exclusively.
- Women do hold positions of leadership and influence in the church, even if that is restricted in many churches to Sunday school, women’s ministry or administration.

Whilst it is true that Paul has previously forbidden women from teaching we cannot take this as a blanket ban on all teaching or positions of leadership. Paul was specifically alluding here to the exercise of authority in terms of doctrine, that is the preserve of eldership (and which the ability to perform, is a requirement thereof). Few people would suggest that women are forbidden from all teaching (even in Sunday school, the home, school etc.) especially since Priscilla (along with Aquilla) are described as having teaching roles.

Therefore, we can see that female deacons did, and should still, exist in the church and that there are qualifications for them just as there are for male deacons. These are:

- Exclusively female qualifications: *“must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things”* (1 Tim 3:11).
- Exclusively male qualifications: *“the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well”* (1 Tim 3:12).

Paul seems to be indicating here that a male deacon is most vulnerable to sexual sins and abdication of authority in the home, whilst a woman is more vulnerable to emotional and verbal sins.

Interestingly, after the qualifications are listed, two rewards are mentioned for deacons who serve well-

- A good standing for themselves
- Great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

It is also stated that a person must be tested before being ordained as a deacon. We see this testing as follows:

- The person has been watched over a period of time and has demonstrated faithfulness, character, and servant-heartedness.
- A healthy practice before ordaining deacons is to announce the names of prospective deacons to the church before they are ordained. The church members then have the opportunity to inform the elders of anything which may disqualify such a person from being ordained.

## F. Role of a deacon within the body

Now that we have looked at what qualifies a person to be a deacon, let's consider their role within the body.

Deacons are not governmental. They support the elders and to take away the burden of a lot of the practical aspects of church life from them (Acts 6:1-3). That is not to say that deacons are merely those who help practically. We read in Acts of deacons ministering in great power (Stephen preached powerfully and was martyred; Philip was a powerful evangelist) and elsewhere we see that deacons hold a high office and receive great spiritual reward for faithfulness (1 Tim 3:13).

We cannot define exactly what deacons do in a church- as their duties can be anything that the elders need from them in order to keep the church functioning well. By performing their role, they allow the elders to find God and lead God's people into all that He has for them.

Deacons often lead communities (home groups), though not all do, and some community groups are led by people who are not deacons. Deacons may be responsible for other ministries in the life of the church (the poor, the kids, administration, etc.). Some may be full-time and some part-time. What they all have in common though is that they have proven reliable, and can be entrusted with leading others (2 Tim 2:2). They should carry the values of the eldership team and in turn teach these values to others. It is likely that most members of the church will be closer relationally to deacons than they will to most elders.

Examples of the work of our deacons include:

1. Looking after the needs of the poor. Ensuring resources are allocated effectively and to the right people, in line with Biblical principles, and the values of the church.
2. Following up and looking after new converts. Inviting visitors into homes and connecting them into community groups. Making sure new converts are disciplined.
3. The smooth running of church services. Including setting up of chairs, tea and coffee facilities, sound and A/V systems. Cleaning the venue (yes, this includes toilets), ensuring visitors are welcomed and made to feel comfortable. Anticipating and meeting the needs of the elders.
4. Ensuring practical needs are met. Such as food for sick families, looking after children, etc.
5. Administration. We have full-time deacons as personal assistants, overseeing salary payments and expenses, organisation of events etc. Part-time deacons are involved in overseeing other administrative tasks that need to be performed.
6. We have deacons overseeing children's church, youth, multimedia presentations and other portfolios in the life of the church.
7. Ultimately, the role of a deacon is to make happen whatever the elders of the church need to be done.

Deacons are an integral part of the church; without them, we would not be healthy. They are a vital cog in the structure of the church, helping to disciple members, facilitate meetings and events, etc. They are to be honoured and respected as men and women whose lives are worthy of following and imitating (Heb 13:7).

## “DOING COFFEE”

The mandate of every believer is to make disciples, not just converts. As leaders, we understand the principle that ‘I am my brother’s keeper’ which in turn means that there has always been a willingness to speak into each other’s lives. This has often been done over a cup of coffee, hence the phrase, “doing coffee” when needing to address an issue or area in someone’s life.

That we see the necessity and are committed to it, doesn’t make it easy. Many of us dislike conflict but it is sometimes a necessary consequence of taking discipleship seriously.

*“Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning” (Prov 9:7-9).*

*“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (Prov 27:5-6).*

*“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Prov 27:17).*

We must love people enough to risk our friendships and chose to be ‘peacemakers’ not ‘peacekeepers’. So, practically speaking, if this is something that all leaders need to do, how do we actually go about it?

1. Ask yourself if what you have seen is a real issue. Often, we can become upset or irritated with another person because of what is in us.
2. Ask yourself “Will it help that person to hear what I have to say?” We should only speak for the other person’s benefit, not to make life easier for ourselves.
3. Pray first. We have no right to address a person until we have prayed for them.
4. Go in humility, especially if that person is a leader or is older (1 Tim 5:1).
5. Find an appropriate time and place for the conversation.
6. Speak first to that person alone (only if they refuse to repent of a sin issue should you ever discuss it with somebody else).
7. Speak the truth in love.
8. Be specific, be truthful, be encouraging and be redemptive. The aim of such a conversation should be to help the person become more like Christ, not to make them feel guilty or ashamed.

Of course, this works both ways. We need to be open to people speaking into our lives too. This can be difficult at the best of times, but what do we do if we disagree with the perspective a person gives us?

1. Check what was said against the Word and Holy Spirit, not your own emotions. Do not simply react. We cannot listen only to things we agree with; the most offensive things are probably those that are true.
2. Pray sincerely about it and ask God to show you what you cannot see (Ps 139:23).
3. Obey those put over you, unless their advice is clearly contrary to the Word or is clearly sin.
4. If necessary, get an HONEST 2<sup>nd</sup> opinion (don't simply keep getting advice until you hear what you want to). Sometimes we simply *cannot see* what a person is saying, however, if several people say the same thing then we need to believe them- even above our own judgment. This is a true test of teachability. Submission speaks of 'positioning oneself to be persuaded'. We need to do this rather than entrench our position and defend ourselves. Many in leadership have been in this position before and have learned to trust the judgment of the team over their own, even if what they are saying seems to make little sense at the time.
5. Remember God always rewards obedience.
6. Be especially cautious of reacting if somebody 'attacks' or addresses one of your 'sacred cows' (e.g. your spouse, your children, the way you drive, etc.).
7. Do not rely on 'having peace' about something in judging its truth. We sometimes can 'lose our peace' (temporarily) because God tells us something and we do not want to hear what He has to say.

# WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

As we have seen, we believe that women can and should, fulfill leadership roles. They can exercise leadership in certain areas of church life and in the home (over their children, under the headship of the husband). It needs to be stated also that men need women, just as women need men. In Driscoll's book, we read that:

*"Men need wives so utterly that, even though sin had not yet entered the world (and the world was technically perfect), it remained incomplete and therefore "not good" until the creation of Eve...men alone simply cannot be fruitful, multiply, honor God, and have the Trinitarian intimacy they were created to enjoy, and so God made women to be of help to men. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 Paul says, 'For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.'" (On Church Leadership. A Book You'll Actually Read. Pg 31).*

We have also shown that we consider men and women are equal before God. They are, however, created to be different (and not just biologically) in order to fulfill different functions and to complement one another. Men and women do not have to be identical to be equal. As they were created together 'in His image' it is clear that God's image and likeness is best shown by men and women who function together in partnership, like the Trinity, with distinctions, submission, and unity.

So why then can women not be elders?

*"I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2:12-14).*

The headship of men can be seen in creation. The Scripture above shows how Paul uses creation to argue for the headship of men. When we look to Genesis it is interesting to note that although Eve sinned first, God called out rhetorically to Adam, "Where are you?" God held the man primarily responsible! Adam chose to blame God, and the woman, instead of accepting responsibility for his failure to lead. Eve, in effect, defended Adam by blaming Satan. The curse that God pronounced included the following:

*"To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16).*

Some have suggested this infers that male leadership came *after* the fall, and no longer applies since Jesus has broken the curse, but this shows an incorrect understanding of the preceding chapters and of this particular verse. This verse is best read as meaning that woman will have pain from *both* her husband and children. The pain from her husband will be in her desire to rule over him but he will rule over her. In other words, it is not male rulership that came with the fall- but rather a failure to accept and be happy with male rulership. That this is so is confirmed by a reading of Gen 4:7 which describes sin's desire to rule Cain. Gen 4:7 uses the same language and thus gives insight into how we read Gen 3:16.

Some argue that the story of Deborah shows that women can hold the highest positions of leadership. Yet even here we see that although she acted as judge and prophet, she clearly wanted a man to lead. Barak refused to lead strongly and was rebuked for it. What we learn from this story is that occasionally God will work with a Godly woman rather than an ungodly man.

1. Elders in the Old Testament were exclusively male. If there was a radical change from this norm in the New Testament period, we would expect to read of it because such a change would have required much teaching to change mindsets. For example, we read a lot about circumcision, as there was a radical departure from Old Testament norms.
2. Jesus Himself continued with the Old Testament mandate by selecting an exclusively male leadership team: every apostle was male. Some have argued that Jesus did not select female apostles because the culture in His day would not have accepted this. They forget that the disciples were chosen by the will of God the Father which was revealed to Jesus after spending a night in prayer. Also, rather than obeying social customs, Jesus frequently broke them! He was, in part, killed because of his violation of social customs. We should also note that Jesus elevated the status of women above social norms on several occasions: He spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well; used women as examples of faith; taught theology to women; allowed a sinful woman to anoint Him; and had the first reports of His resurrection given by women. Two of His closest friends were women. Jesus honoured, taught, and loved women and even included them in vital positions in His ministry. But he did not elevate women to the highest level of leadership, in keeping with the creation order and Old Testament precedent.
3. No female elders are mentioned in the New Testament. Although we do read of many women who are highly regarded and fulfill essential roles in the church. For example, Priscilla worked alongside her husband Aquilla, as a teacher, though she is never described as an elder. Lydia likewise, was a blessing to the church and presumably was head of her household in the absence of a husband.
4. 1 Tim 2:11-3:5 seems to exclude the possibility of women elders. First, unlike the list of qualifications for deacons, there is no mention of women. Second, women are forbidden here from teaching. We have already seen that this cannot mean all teaching, nor can Paul have wanted women to remain absolutely silent in church (elsewhere he gives instructions for women who prophesy) but the Scripture still has significance on the point of eldership. Driscoll clarifies as follows:

*“(I) believe that the word used here for “authority” (the only place it is used in the New Testament) refers to the highest authority in the church, that of elder-pastor. This also seems logical in the context, as what immediately follows in the next chapter of 1 Timothy is the requirements for elders-pastors, which include being a mature Christian man and an exemplary husband and father. Correspondingly, Paul forbids women to teach (which would include preaching because it is an elder duty, according to 1 Timothy 5:17) and exercise authority (such as enforcing church discipline or setting doctrine) as elders-pastors. The teaching spoken of in 1 Timothy 5:17 likely refers to preaching and teaching as done by the elders, as every other time teaching is spoken of in the remainder of the letter it is in reference to the teaching of an elder” (On Church Leadership. A Book You’ll Actually Read. Pg 42).*

Again, the argument that this was a bending to the social norms of the day forgets how much Paul suffered for defying social and religious traditions. In fact, Paul, and the Scriptures in general held a much higher view of women than was the religio-societal norm. As Driscoll elaborates on page 44:

*“Clearly, God’s intention is that Christian women would be well-informed theologians, and to do so they must first learn to respect the male pastors whom God has appointed to instruct them. While this simple admonition may appear patronizing to our modern ears, it is in fact because of this verse that it seems so. Ironically, if it were not for God’s command through Paul that women be taught theology, modern-day feminist theologians would not be theologically astute enough to argue against the rest of Paul’s teaching. After all, it is only in those places where Paul’s influence has spread that women have been liberated, while throughout much of the rest of the world women are more likely to be considered mere property, denied an education, and handed a veil behind which to disappear into oblivion”.*

- We have the evidence of church history. Throughout the history of the Christian faith, this position has been widely agreed upon by everyone from the early church fathers John Chrysostom and Augustine; to the Catholic theologian Erasmus; to Lutheran reformer Martin Luther; to Presbyterian reformer John Calvin; to Baptist theologian John Gill.
- Finally, logic dictates that women in eldership would be problematic. If a woman could be an elder, then a woman who is called to submit to her husband would hold a position whereby he was called to submit to her. Whilst we do accept the principle of mutual submission this would provide an untenable situation. God is a God of order not confusion, which would surely result from such a situation.

We highly value and esteem the women of the church but we believe that eldership is a role for men. This is not because men are in some way superior to women but because we are created differently for different functions. Though only men are elders, our wives play a crucial role on the leadership team. They don’t just support their husbands, but often bring insight and perspective that is highly valued. They are spared, however, from carrying the burden of responsibility of taking decisions and the consequences thereof.

We know that this is a contentious issue in the church today, but we must take a stand on what we believe to be a clear Biblical principle. Please appreciate that we believe women are not second-class citizens in God’s Kingdom and are essential to the body. They can prophesy, lead worship, teach in certain contexts, etc. just as men can. They cannot, however, fulfill ‘governmental’ positions.

I appreciate that this is not an exhaustive treatment of the subject so if you have any problems or questions regarding our position on women in ministry please feel free to contact me.

# CREDITS

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It is impossible to credit every person who has contributed to the compilation of this manual. It is the distillation of things I have learned over thirty years, from many different preachers, authors, leaders, friends and family. It is possible however, to single out a few individuals who have had a direct bearing on the content contained within these pages,

Thank-you to the following people, whose work this really is:

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9. Mark Driscoll whose book *On Church Leadership (A Book You'll Actually Read)* I have quoted from liberally. He is an amazingly gifted communicator and has a handle on leadership that few people seem to have these days. I heartily recommend his book to you.

*The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been. ~ Henry Kissinger*

*People are more easily led than driven. ~ David Harold Fink*

*Lead and inspire people. Don't try to manage and manipulate people. Inventories can be managed but people must be lead. ~ Ross Perot*