



Strand: AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP	Subject: <i>A Call for Authentic Christian Leadership</i>	Lesson: ONE
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A Call for Authentic Christian Leadership

1. Introduction

a. Personal background

b. Structure of the Course

Five (5) lessons:

1. A call for authentic Christian leadership
2. Jesus Christ and leadership
3. The Christian leader as a caring shepherd
4. Resilient leadership
5. Ten enduring lessons I have learned about authentic Christian leadership

These five weeks are introductory. We could go deeper and wider eg vision, teamwork, resilience, leading change and leaders who leave a legacy. A list of relevant resources available from Christian books shops will be made available.

Are you a leader, or an aspiring leader? This series is for you.

There is no shortage of teaching about leadership. Some is written for secular audiences. Others is aimed at leaders of Christian organisations, eg churches; reading them, the assumption is usually made by the authors that the readers are Biblically literate.

The context for this series is Christians in leadership positions in *any* context. As a Christian believer, a child of God, where you are is where Jesus Christ is. The role you play is a gift from God, and He can enable you to do it well. You may be the only genuine Christian whom people around you know. There is a real need for leaders who are Christians to recognise their callings as such and gain the wisdom to fulfil God's purposes.

Leadership is both a calling and a learned life. This is true, whether you have come into have come into a leadership position through skill preparation and promotion, or simply because events turned out the way they did. Some leadership strengths are developed through education, mentoring and practice. Opportunities can seem to come down to being in the right place at the right time. Leadership is more than "a job", career, or vocation.

Setting out, or consolidating your leadership role, this series aims at identifying key issues and opportunities you will face. It is also a good time to identify risks, to avoid being derailed (too many promising or experienced called leaders end up failing.) The doors God opens up for us, and kinds of leaders we become, stem from how we respond *now* to the lessons He wants to teach us.

“Why do I want to be a leader?”

It is important to question and understand what motivates/drives you. And why people should follow you.

There are basically two end models, and we need to choose:

- Model of the world: “Hail benefactor.” Leadership means having ambition, goals, followers, people who will do what we tell them to do, and who will make us look good. Leadership often brings greater levels of income and benefits (perks). It gives status and people notice us. But if you are addicted to power and authority for their own sake, if you like to be surrounded by people whom you manage, if you get a buzz out of giving others instructions, Christian leadership is not for you. You may be very successful in your chosen vocation, you may rise to the top, you may improve society and achieve greatness, but *please* don’t aspire to Christian leadership.
- Jesus’ model. Jesus led and inspired people. Thousands flocked to listen to what He had to say. Other leaders were curious or jealous of his popularity, and his teaching (as long as he remained influential). Jesus’ leadership was not based on the acceptance and approval of others. It stemmed from self-emptying, humility, taking the role of a servant and holding human acceptance so loosely that He willingly put it all aside and went to the cross when it was time to do so. When Jesus calls a man or woman to leadership, He begins with the cross. Leadership is all about serving. Do you still want to be a leader?

The Need for Christians in Leadership

Authentic, Spirit-enabled Christian leadership really matters.

Not just men and women serving in “Christian” roles, such as pastors of churches, missionaries, worship leaders, youth or children’s leaders, or denominational structures (all are important), but wherever Christians are located in society, whether education, business, politics, government, science, media, the arts, community groups or the home.

Christian leaders (ie leaders who are Christians) can strongly influence our world for good, as followers of Jesus Christ. It all gets back to their personal commitment to Christ and their willingness to be “salt” and “light” in their circles of influence, to engage proactively, positively and purposefully, springing from a Christian world view geared to hearing and obeying God’s will.

Our ideals of leaders are often defined by our culturally constructed values and expectations:

strong, determined, driven, wilful, ambitious, dominant, knowledgeable, charismatic, successful, usually men.

Few aspirational churches would invite to their leadership team someone who publicly states “I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:28). Or who has spent time offending other leaders, languishing in jail, appears to have disabilities and may not be a gifted preacher (Paul). However, Christian leadership is above culture. It is all about Jesus Christ. Our dominant narrative as leaders must be Him. When it comes to leading as a Christian, Jesus bluntly tells that we can nothing apart from Him (John 15:1-8).

As I have explored this topic, and been privileged to serve in secular and Christian leadership roles, in a variety of cultures, over the years, I have discovered that much of what is written about Christian leadership is very generic; it can be applied to different settings; in order to broaden its appeal; it is often stripped of Christian content altogether. We are assured that the principles work, even if applied by non-Christians, because they are eternal truths, however all too often that involves taking the message out of its context and enabling.

We must go back to first principles. Striving (or being available) for leadership can be a good thing, but it is not to be for its own ends; Jeremiah warns us not to aspire to greatness for its own sake (Jeremiah 45:5). It is not about gaining honour from people (John 12:26), or for self-advancement, but for God's purposes. God will never share His honour with anyone (Isaiah 42:8). But He *will* enable those whom He calls into leadership roles.

For many years, I have been both a Christian leader in a church setting, as an Assemblies of God (now Australian Christian Churches) pastor, and a Christian in official leadership roles in the secular world.

The conclusions that follow are my attempt to portray what I believe works in developing, enabling, releasing and multiplying leaders who will touch our world for God.

A Biblical Example of Leadership

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

There are many doors into Christian leadership. The ones we think are most obvious are not always the ones God chooses. If we are humble, He will lead us in the context of His purposes.

The dominant model of leadership in our world is the hierarchy model - the leader at the top directs a team of underlings. This case study from Acts, involving the selection of some of the Christian community's first leaders, is instructive, because it "worked"; we are still talking about it 2000 years later. The selection criteria required that candidates be:

- readily available to be used by God to serve others; the initial impression is that those who served tables and performed more of an "administrative function"; to assist a marginalized group this way would involve being taken out of the limelight of mainstream ministry and doing some fairly mundane, perhaps messy, jobs
- full of faith in God (not faith in their great abilities, their connections, or even their concepts of "serving God"); such leadership is not knowing "stuff" but knowing Him.
- full of the Holy Spirit (this was to be evident to others)
- full of wisdom (God's wisdom, not man's ideas, cf James 3:13-17)
- already actively involved in Christian work (not merely aspirational)
- willing to serve impartially
- not obsessive about their "ministries", gifts, prestige or experience
- inclusive, willing to work together as a team
- influential, for the right motives
- recognized by the Christian community as men of integrity
- willing to submit to other leaders, and to one another

What kind of leader are you?

Let's Re-Define Leadership

Do you know the specific reason you are a leader?

Start talking about Christian leadership and the following will often spring to mind:

- high church tradition (usually Western) and denominational hierarchies & titles
- CEOs of mega churches
- televangelists
- right/left wing alliances of Christian groups with power agendas
- aging/shrinking congregations searching for relevance
- challenges involved in interpreting Christian traditions and “truth” in the 21st century

Christian leadership does not revolve around:

- position - too many leaders confuse position with authority (they are not the same)
- hierarchy - although “order” is necessary (after all, who wants chaos?)
- “charisma” - can be empty, without character or conviction (*charisma* means “graces” or “gifts”, it is not a personality trait, a “right” to be asserted or clung to, cf Philippians 2:6)

Effective Christian leadership:

- wants to know God, to glorify Him, and do His work with & through the team
- listens to God's voice and accepts His vision for the specific work He wants done
- influences the lives of people (leadership that walks alone is not leadership)
- challenges people to go “above and beyond” (cf Paul, Acts 20 28-31)
- is relevant to people (cf Matthew 7:28, 29) ; builds people - does not just titillate, entertain, or use them
- makes people stronger as Christians (ie in the likeness of Jesus Christ, Ephesians 4:12-13)
- is able to skillfully apply eternal truth to contemporary life - more than simply updating the vocabulary we use
- is not rhetoric - words alone are a cheap currency, quickly spent, all too often leading to division and elitism
- is not necessarily paid “full-time”, but a full-time commitment nevertheless
- is not hungry for the perks of position (cf Mark 10:38, 42-45)

*Christian leadership is about serving, not managing, in all spheres of life.
Serving others inverts the pyramid.*

Qualities of Godly Leaders

- genuinely committed to Jesus Christ - this is non-negotiable for leaders who are Christians in any age or culture
- walk with God, know God (through regular intentional prayer, listening to the Holy Spirit, learning from testing), obedient and accountable to Him
- hear from God for “today” (Hebrews 4:7)
- speak God's word to their world with conviction (including when they speak)
- people who spend time with them end up feeling closer to God
- know how to trust God (from experience)
- know and acknowledge that they are personally limited, but God is limitless
- recognize a specific call - comfortable in that call, not striving to be like others, not comparing, copying
- have focus (“I want to know Him”, Philippians 3:10); not limited to a vision statement
- have empathy with people; love them genuinely

- are able to build solid teams (Amos 3:3)
- are teachable (Exodus 33:13; Psalm 25:4, 5)
- have self-discipline (able and willing to lead and discipline themselves before expecting to command others; 1 Corinthians 9:23-27)
- have a good reputation, even among outsiders (1 Timothy 3:7)
- demonstrate “humility” - this is not a common word - humility before God and toward others; (we are made of clay, cf 2 Corinthians 4:7) - reliance on ourselves all too often leads to disappointment
- cultivate a godly vision - where they are going, how they will know when they arrive (John 1:37-39)
- are willing to take the time needed to mentor others (2 Timothy 2:2)
- don’t hold grudges, resentment, baggage; know how to forgive, let go and rest in God
- know that the message of Christ is relevant to peoples’ lives (cf John 4:28-29)
- know how to rest in God so as to avoid burn out

Leaders who are Christians God and lead others to know, love and serve Him.

If you desire to be a leader, as a Christian, that is a good thing

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

God can raise up leaders from unexpected quarters (Esther 4:14)

He knows the future and is even now preparing new leaders (Joseph, Genesis 50:20).

Be part of His plan.

Maximise your life for God’s glory.

