

‘New Testament Models Of Leadership’

An old man went to the doctor complaining that his wife could barely hear and so the doctor suggests a test to find out the extent of the problem. He says, ‘stand far behind her and ask her a question, and then slowly move up and see how far away you are when she first responds.’ The old man excited to finally be working on a solution for the problem, runs home and sees his wife preparing supper. Standing around 20 feet away, the man asks, ‘honey, what’s for supper?’ After receiving no response he tried it again 15 feet away, and again no response. Then again at 10 feet away and again no response. Finally he was 5 feet away and he asks, ‘honey what’s for supper?’ She turns around and says to him, ‘for the fourth time, it’s curry!’

It’s my prayer that everyone can clearly hear what I’m saying, if not, sit next to me at dinner time and we’ll talk about it while we’re eating our curry. When we think about New Testament models of leadership, I don’t think there’s a better person to begin with than Jesus Himself. I believe Jesus is the prime example of what leadership is all about and it’s an example that’s worth following.

Think about this, the One who spoke creation into existence, the One who is all powerful, lowered Himself and became a servant. **Philippians 2:5-7** ‘Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.’ That’s an incredible thought isn’t it, Jesus, God in the flesh, took on the very nature of a servant.

Mark 10:45 ‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’ The One who sits at God’s right hand side, the One who deserves to be served, came to serve. Jesus, God in the flesh, came and washed the disciple’s feet. And so if we learn anything from Jesus about leadership, we learn that leadership is all about serving.

I would like for us to spend a little time looking at a very familiar story in our Bibles. Because within this story, I believe we can learn four important truths from Jesus about leadership.

1. Jesus was willing to serve even when it was inconvenient. **Matthew 14:13-14** ‘When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.’

Jesus had just received news that His cousin, John, had been brutally murdered by Herod. And so, it’s understandable that He wants to have some quiet time alone. But notice what happens, He didn’t get any time alone because the crowds followed Him.

Now if that were you or I, we would be saying, ‘listen, my cousin has just been murdered and I need some time out, please respect my wishes as I mourn the loss of my cousin.’ And I’m pretty sure that some of us would become a little frustrated or even angry with those around us when they demand things from us because they won’t allow us some time out to mourn our loss. We would be telling people, ‘it’s not a good time right now, it’s really an inconvenient time for me to help you guys out’.

But notice Jesus doesn’t become angry or frustrated, He looked at the large crowd, had compassion on them and healed their sick. Now I think preachers get this more than others. You’re at home and you’ve had a really busy day, your exhausted and then the phone rings at three in the morning. The caller tells you, her husband has been rushed into hospital with a suspected heart attack, **could you come to the hospital and pray with them?** Or maybe you’re in the middle of teaching a Bible study and someone walks into the class and says they need to speak to you straightaway.

These people coming to Jesus when He wanted to be alone was terribly inconvenient, but yet, He put other people’s needs ahead of His own. You see, loved ones, there will always be people in need and there will always be times when we have already made our own personal plans. Jesus says, the sign of a good leader is seen in their eagerness to serve, even when its really inconvenient. A good leader will drop everything they’re doing because they understand God has a greater need for them to meet.

2. Jesus was willing to get stuck in. **Matthew 14:15** ‘As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.’

After healing the sick and teaching them throughout the day, evening approached and the crowds became hungry. The disciples tell Jesus to send the crowd away to find food for themselves. But notice what Jesus tells His disciples, He says to them, **Matthew 14:16** ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’

You see, Jesus originally wanted some time to Himself, but instead, He spent time healing the sick and teaching the multitudes all day. And as evening approached, this would have been a great opportunity for Jesus to have that time out. He could have easily said to the disciples, ‘ok, you guys go to the villages and buy food for them’, but He didn’t, He told them, ‘you give them something to eat’. In other words, Jesus didn’t just sit back and let others get on with the task at hand. He got stuck in and was willing to work with the disciples.

Have you ever had times when you just can’t be bothered serving? Maybe the congregation is hosting a fellowship meal, but instead of helping out by serving the food and making sure your guests have food first, all you want to do is just sit down and enjoy the meal. Think about an event like this one, we all know that you don’t just arrive and everything is already set up. People have to come in early to set the place up and then they have to put all the tables and chairs away when their finished. Jesus says the sign of a good leader, is seen in their willingness to get stuck in and help others serve.

3. Jesus encouraged others to get involved. After healing the sick, teaching the crowds all day and getting stuck into the work with His disciples. He now goes on to encouraging others to get involved. **Matthew 14:17** ‘We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered.’

Now Jesus couldn’t have easily handled this situation on His own, but He didn’t. The disciples wanted to send everyone away but Jesus challenges them to do something even greater. In other words, He wanted to stretch their faith, He wanted to stretch their imagination.

Let me ask you, in your congregation, **are you being challenged to serve in areas where your faith and your imagination is being stretched?** Let me share with you one of my own personal goals whilst I’m working with the church at Liverpool. I want to fill the meeting place with sinners who have been touched by the grace of God. Now some might say, ‘wow, that’s being a little unrealistic’, but I would say, ‘no, that’s being very realistic.’

You see, I understand that God could fill that place in the blink of an eye, without my help. But I also understand that, I need to work with God and other members of that congregation to achieve that goal. That’s why we’ve got an intensive outreach programme for this year, which includes cooperate evangelising and personal evangelising. And I’m sure, if the whole church gets behind it, then God will work with us and bless our efforts to achieve that goal.

Jesus says, the sign of a good leader is seen in the way they encourage others to get involved. Jesus was patient with the disciples, He gave them time to develop their faith, but He never stopped encouraging them to get involved in what He was doing.

4. Jesus will do what we can’t. Although Jesus wanted some time out on His own, He was willing to serve even when it was really inconvenient to do so. He could have done everything Himself, but He was still willing to get stuck in and get others involved. And when the disciples couldn’t do what only Jesus could do, He was willing to step in and do it.

Matthew 14:18-21 ‘Bring them here to me,’ he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.’

All the disciples could do was gather together five loafs of bread and two fish but He did the impossible, He multiplied the food and fed the masses and still had some food leftover. And notice, that Jesus didn’t rebuke the disciples, He didn’t say to them, ‘is this the best you can do? Is this all you can come up with?’ He didn’t rebuke them for their idea about sending the crowd away to the villages to buy food for themselves. Jesus knew that their efforts and ideas were genuine efforts and ideas, that’s why He didn’t have a go at them.

For too many years now, possibly out of frustration, many leaders within the church get frustrated with other members because they’re not getting involved enough in church life.

Listen, we will never encourage other to serve along with us, if all we do is put people on guilt trips. However, if those around our leaders are being honest and deliberate in serving others, then that will encourage the leaders themselves to serve more eagerly.

Jesus says, the sign of a good leader is seen in the way they just serve others when no one else will. When leaders lead others and follow the lead of Jesus themselves, they will be able to accomplish so much more for the Lord in His kingdom. Someone once said that, **'it's impossible to be a good leader, if they aren't willing to follow someone else's lead.'**

And that's exactly what Jesus's disciples did, they went on to be great leaders because they followed the lead of Jesus. Jesus came to earth to set the ultimate example of what it means to be a great leader, but before He left this planet, He trained His apostles to do the same. Jesus had spent just over three years with these guys, they ate together, travelled together, and all the time Jesus was training them to become leaders of His church. Imagine sitting at the feet of the best teacher the world has ever known for over three years.

During his time with them, Jesus invested a lot of time in them, He called them by their own names, He prayed for each of them individually. **1 Corinthians 12:8** tells us that in the church **'God appointed the apostles first.'** **Ephesians 2:20** tells us that the church is **'built on the foundation of the apostles.'** **Ephesians 4:11** tells us that **'the apostles are Christ's gift to the church.'** **Acts 2:42** tells us that the first Christians **'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.'** In other words, the followers have now become the leaders.

Jesus says in **Luke 4:43** **'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.'** Jesus came to proclaim the good news, and **what was that good news?** **1 Corinthians 15:1-4** **'Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.'** That good news is the Gospel message that Christ died, was buried but rose again from the grave.

And so, the **first** thing we learn from the apostles, is that a good leader will always obey the commands of the One they are following. **Mark 16:15** **'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.'** Jesus says in **Acts 1:8**, He wanted the apostles to preach **'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'** After the death of Stephen we read in **Acts 8:1** **'On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.'**

Paul says in **Romans 15:19-20** **'So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.'**

Listen church, if the Great Commission isn't the heartbeat of any congregation, we've sadly missed the point of being Christians. If God's commission was to send Jesus to preach the good news to the lost. If Jesus' commission was to send the apostles to preach the good news to the lost, then the church's mission should be to preach the good news to the lost.

One Sunday evening, William Booth was walking in London with his son, Bramwell, who was then 12 or 13 years old. The father surprised the son by taking him into a pub! The place was crowded with men and women, many of them bearing on their faces the marks of vice and crime; some were drunk. The fumes of alcohol and tobacco were poisonous. Booth said to his son **'Willie, these are our people; these are the people I want you to live for and bring to Christ.'** Years later, Bramwell Booth wrote, **'The impression never left me'.**

You see, a good leader will always obey the One they are following. They will always go and share the good news with anyone, no matter where they are or where they are from.

And the **second** thing we learn from the apostles is that good leaders will be bold in their preaching. On the Day of Pentecost, **Acts 2:14** tells us that **'Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd.'** And when you read through **Acts 2** you just can't help but notice just how bold Peter was in his sermon. Throughout the **Book of Acts** we read about how the apostles were persecuted, placed in jail and flogged, but still they continued to preach the Good News.

After Peter and John had been released from prison, they met with the church and Acts 4:31 says, ‘they all spoke the word of God boldly.’ When Paul arrived in Ephesus, Acts 19:8 tells us that he ‘spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.’

In other words, a good leader will always be bold in preaching the good news, whether it offends people or not. A good leader will always boldly declare to anyone who will listen that Jesus Christ, died for our sins, was buried and rose again three days later. A good leader will always be willing to boldly declare what Peter declared in Acts 4:12 ‘Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.’

The third thing we learn from the apostles is that a good leader will always be precise. Notice when Peter was preaching the first Gospel message, he understood all of the Scriptures. He says in Acts 2:16 ‘This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.’ And then he goes on to quote Joel’s prophecy. Peter obviously understood what Joel meant in his prophecy, and he understood this prophecy was pointing towards the Christ.

We saw the same thing happening with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Acts 8:34-35 ‘The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.’

The eunuch didn’t have a clue who Isaiah was referring to, but Philip did and He went on to explain how Isaiah’s prophecy was pointing to the Christ. In other words, not only was their preaching bold, their preaching was precise. Because they knew the Old Testament Scriptures, they used those Scriptures to back up what they were preaching. The apostles didn’t preach about themselves; they didn’t preach about things they knew would please the people, they preached Christ crucified as 1 Corinthians 1:23 tells us. A good leader will use the Scriptures to ‘correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction,’ as 2 Timothy 4:2 tells us. Someone once said, ‘a leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.’

The fourth thing we learn from the apostles is that a good leader will help the church make wise decisions. Acts 6:1-4 ‘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.’

Here we find the Greek Jews complaining against the Hebrew Jews because their widows were being neglected of some food. But notice, the apostles didn’t choose who would take care of this need, the apostles told them to ‘choose seven men from among themselves’. The point I’m making is that the apostles, even though they had all that authority from Jesus, didn’t make decisions for the church. They simply guided them and encouraged them to make the right decision for themselves, for that particular problem.

We find something similar over in Acts 15:1-2 ‘Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue’.

We find here that some Pharisees from Judea were insisting that the Gentiles Christians must be circumcised in order to be saved. And as you read through the chapter, we find there was a lot of discussion. Peter had something to say, Paul had something to say, Barnabas and James had something to say. And notice, rather than getting into a heated debate with one another, they actually listened to each other’s thoughts. They respectfully listened to their personal testimonies and listened carefully to their explanation of Scripture.

They came to the conclusion that ‘we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are coming to God.’ Acts 15:19. After a lot of discussion this was the decision, Christians who were not Jews didn’t have to follow Jewish practices and customs from the Law of Moses. But I want to point out something really important here.

1. This was not a private discussion that excluded the congregation. Acts 15:12 ‘The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through

them'. The text clearly states the whole assembly listened to the debate and discussion silently.

2. After the decision was made, the whole church participated in a decision to spread the news. Acts 15:22 'Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.'

Notice who was involved in this decision to spread the news that the Gentiles didn't have to be circumcised. The apostles were involved, the elders were involved and the whole church was involved. In other words, the apostles didn't make the decision to send Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas on their own. The apostles simply guided and encouraged the church to think about what was being proposed and then using the Old testament Scriptures, encouraged them to make the right decision about it.

Let me finish by sharing a few thoughts on the spiritual model of eldership. I'm not going to go into the text where we find the qualities which are required for a man to be an elder as we find them in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. But let me say this, it seems to me that many of our congregations have found themselves in one of three positions when it comes to being organised as a church.

1. **Un-scripturally organised.** This simply means the church is governed by something other than elders and deacons.
2. **Scripturally unorganised.** This means something that is expedient, useful or helps us. Now some would argue that 'business meetings', 'men's meetings', where the church commits men to lead the church is useful. However you won't find any authority in the Scriptures to have any 'business meetings' or 'men's meetings'. They might be useful but they're not right because the men aren't qualified leaders of the church.

There is also the idea of evangelistic oversight, this is where a man plants a church and has some measure of authority in the church. 1 Corinthians 4:15 'Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.' Remember Paul planted the church in Corinth and because they had no elders, he had authority. But this was only a temporary measure until the church appointed elders from among themselves.

3. **Scripturally organised.** This means God governs His church and elders are what God wants in place. Titus 1:5 'The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.'

The first thing which strikes me here, which is lacking from many of our churches, is that there seems to be a sense of urgency. In other words, this task was unfinished and not complete until elders were in place. So we could say, if the congregation you're a part of at the moment, doesn't have elders appointed, there's a sense in which your congregation is incomplete until you do have elders in place.

Acts 14:21-23 'They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.'

I want to point something out here which is often overlooked and misunderstood. These elders were appointed in 'Antioch of Pisidia', 'Lystra', 'Iconium', and 'Derbe' just three months after the churches in these places had been planted. We can't say that these elders had a Jewish background and were already familiar with God because each church was in a pagan city where there were no Jews and no synagogues.

We might ask, [how could they become elders after three months, if an elder isn't to be recent convert?](#) The answer I believe is that they had the gift of supernatural knowledge and faith, as 1 Corinthians 12:8-9, describes. The point I'm trying to make is that just as we read about the urgency in appointing elders in Crete, we also get a sense of urgency when we read about Paul and Barnabas appointing elders so quickly in these cities.

Let me finish by asking you, [why should a congregation have elders?](#) Well, quite simply, because it's God will, that's the way God designed His church to function. To have those qualified spiritual leaders in place to oversee and shepherd His people.