

A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE GIFT OF LEADERSHIP AND LEADING BY EXAMPLE

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Abstract

Much has been written on the topic of leadership. The need to train leaders is as great now as it has ever been. However, we don't want to take the search for leaders too far. As the church looks for leaders, there is danger of placing too much emphasis on the gift of leadership to the exclusion of other gifts and to the harm of those without the leadership gift. At the same time we have to challenge all Christians with the call that they have to lead by example. This does not mean that all Christians have the gift of leadership. It simply means that they are able to lead by letting their lights shine. This paper expounds on the distinction between leading by example and having the gift of leadership. It promotes a balance of attention to all gifts that God gives his people. It also encourages faithful training for all Christians to use their gifts first to serve *the* leader – that is, Christ.

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Introduction

Perhaps my favorite story from my brief experience in the public ministry happened on a Sunday morning. I was preparing the materials that were to be used for adult Bible study, helping move tables from outside to inside, when a couple of the ushers from the congregation pointed out a flat tire on another member's van as it rolled in. It turns out this member had run over a nail at some point on the drive to church. As we carried on with adult Bible study, I noticed one of the ushers was missing. Class ended and the turnaround for late service began. The same usher, who was always one of the helpers to pull down tables and chairs, was still missing. He did not return until 10 minutes into the late service.

After the service I did not have a chance to talk to this usher. He was not a man of many words to begin with. And besides, he was busy cleaning in the Sunday School room. So I found the member who had the flat tire to talk about getting it fixed. But when we went outside, we couldn't even tell which tire it was that had been flat. The tire had been refilled with air and the hole had been sealed. We were both a little perplexed, but went back inside. It wasn't until later that day that the member with the flat tire told me that the wife of the usher explained what had happened. The usher had removed the tire from the van, taken it to a shop down the road to get it sealed, and returned to place the tire back on the van. Without telling anyone except his wife, he rejoined the service. It was possibly the simplest, most humble act of service I have ever observed. He helped someone in need without looking for anything in return.

When we see acts of service like this one, it is easy to recognize the servant's heart. This heart is a characteristic of any leader in the church as well. But having the servant's heart does not necessarily make one a leader. The usher in the above story clearly has the heart of a servant. But he was never one to be a leader, other than by his example.

The topic of leadership in general is one of the hottest topics in discussions at churches today. How do we find leaders? How do we then train these leaders? How do we get leaders involved in the work of the church? Much has also been written on leadership. Go to any library and you will likely be able to find plenty of resources on leadership in the workplace. Surf the internet and you will find hundreds of lists with titles such as "10 Qualities of a Good Leader" or "17 Signs that You Should be the Boss."

Being a leader in the workplace is something that many people dream of. Typically leadership entails power – the power to hire or fire, the power to do what you want at work, the

power to make decisions without consulting anyone, etc. In many cases, leaders (bosses) have this kind of power. They can direct things the way they want without having to answer to anyone else in the office.

Because this concept of leadership is so engrained in the way we see leaders, we will find people with a misperception of the way God describes leadership. “We might be tempted to think of leadership as handling people. Scripture describes it as nurturing them. We can slip into viewing the task of leadership as managing and maintaining an institution.”¹ Certainly managing and maintaining an institution are necessary things for a company. Likewise with a church, maintaining the institution is important. However, God has not gifted leaders for the sole purpose of building a church and keeping that building operational. “Scripture reminds us [leadership] is gently nurturing each member of the group.”²

From reading Scripture and being a part of a congregation, any Christian will come to the understanding that solid leadership is necessary. In order to have a direction for the church and in order to utilize the gifts of everyone in the congregation there must be quality leaders (note the plural) to help other members utilize their gifts. Perhaps the most important thing for every leader to recognize, however, is that as they are helping others utilize their varied gifts, leaders have their own gifts – one of them being leadership itself.

It is important to recognize that leadership is a gift for two reasons: motivation and humility. God has given the leader something to use. As with any gift that God gives to his people, he *expects* us to use it. But we cannot force someone to lead who does not have the gift of leadership. And someone who has the gift of leadership cannot use this gift as a reason to boast.

Many problems that arise come from a misunderstanding of what leadership is. There are many different definitions and applications of leadership, but all definitions generally focus on the same idea: leaders bring out the best in those around them with their example of service. As we study this spiritual gift that God has given to certain people, hopefully this general definition of leadership is something that all Christians live up to. As servants of Christ, we all want to lead by example.

¹ Richard E. Lauersdorf, “Personal Qualities of a Christian Leader” (paper presented in Salt Lake City, UT, July 19, 1991), 4.

² *Ibid*, 4.

At the same time, we would not call all Christians leaders. Leadership is a spiritual gift, and not everyone has been given that spiritual gift. Paul says in his letter to the Romans,

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Ro 12:6-8)

Aubrey Malphurs gives this definition of the spiritual gift of leadership: “We define a Christian leader as a servant who uses his or her credibility and capabilities to influence people in a particular context to pursue their God-given direction.”³ Leaders find a way to inspire others to use their gifts. Leaders find a way to inspire action. Unfortunately our sinful natures often look to what we already have done, and we feel no desire or obligation to follow someone else’s example. Leading by example does not necessarily inspire someone else to action. So while all Christians are to lead by example, not all Christians are leaders.

This fact is often glossed over when discussing the need for leaders in the church. As we look for leaders in congregations, it is possible to get too caught up in the search because of how important leaders are. And so the temptation is to fall into “need to lead” type language – language that pleads to members in the congregation to be leaders. But it is not every Christian’s calling or gift to lead other than by their Christian lives. So there needs to be a distinction in the conversation. **When we talk about the need for leaders in the church, we need to distinguish between the two types of leaders: (1) those who lead by example (all Christians) and (2) those who have the gift of leadership, because we cannot create leaders, but only recognize the gift that God has given to them.**

Literature on the Topic

Anyone researching a topic relating to leadership is going to find plenty of sources to draw from. The church has recognized the need for leaders to step up and use the gift of leadership that God has given to them. And much has been written to help them do just that. Also beneficial are books that people have written to help train leaders – things you should stress that they do and things that they should avoid. Most importantly, books have been written on

³ Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 20.

what exactly a leader is. Authors that stick to the truths of Scripture naturally come to the conclusion that leaders are first and foremost servants. How could they not be? Leadership is a gift that God gives to his people. Just as with any other gift that God gives – be it musical talent, superb athleticism, entrancing rhetoric, or a patient heart – God has called us to use these gifts to serve him.

As far as literature written on leaders being servants, it would be difficult to add any more information to the field. However, I chose to look into the field of leadership because I wanted to grow personally in this area and because I wanted to see if there was anything that could still be said relating to leadership. I mentioned it in the introduction already, but as I researched the topic, I noticed that most information on the subject of leadership deals with the gift of leadership. There is good reason for that: leaders continue to be an important part of the church's ministry. Developing the gift of leadership is not only important, it is especially difficult. It is not easy to convince people who have the gift of leadership to take up the challenges that come along with it and so that they can nurture that gift.

And so we need help. We need guidance on how to train and encourage these leaders. We need resources that give advice on how to prepare leaders for the work that will be assigned to them. Leaders need resources for further study to equip themselves with the tools necessary to lead in a way that imitates the ultimate Servant-Leader.

However, there is another kind of leadership. This other form of leadership is not the gift of leadership that only some Christians have. No, this leadership is a kind that all Christians have. It is the ability to lead by example. While the literature available does touch on leaders leading by example, I was not able to find sources that dealt with leadership by example to any great extent. Nor do they focus on the distinction between those with the gift of leadership and all Christians who lead by example except with passing comments.

My hope in this thesis is to create a discussion of that distinction. There is a gap in the understanding of the distinction between the gift of leadership and leadership by example, with the latter receiving less attention. Rather than simply acknowledging the fact that there is a distinction between the gift of leadership and leading by example, I want this distinction to be a theme in all leadership training, because it leads to the clear understanding that leadership the way most people understand it – that is, being blessed with the gift of leadership – is not a gift that all Christians have.

That is not to say that those without the gift of leadership cannot lead by example or even take charge of a situation. It just means that not everyone is capable, qualified, or required to fill the role of leadership that is necessary in the church. If someone cannot fill that role, he should not feel bad about it. Rather, he can recognize that his gifts are better suited for a different area of serving God and his people.

Most of the sources that I found that dealt closely with the topic of leading by example and the gift of leadership came from a Scriptural foundation. Occasionally an author will draw conclusions from a passage of Scripture to support a preconceived idea that he had about leadership. But generally, God's Word is clear and is properly interpreted when it comes to how God wants his people to lead. Therefore, I was able to find many high quality sources that are firmly rooted in Scripture. Campbell's and Reiersen's book⁴ narrows the focus of leadership to administration and the gifts required in that area. Richards' and Hoeldtke's book⁵ is helpful for leaders seeking to identify other gifts in the congregation. Lingenfeller⁶ writes about going into a cross-cultural setting and finding leaders. Despite his tendency to lean toward an Evangelical viewpoint of spiritual gifts (phrases such as "surrendering to the Holy Spirit" crop up in his writing), Costa Deir⁷ offers insight on developing leaders once they are found. Other consulted sources can be found throughout the rest of this paper.

While consistency in literature is something for which we can be thankful, it led to a struggle in my research to find sources that said anything different from each other. Either they were closely related to what I wanted to present in this paper, or they dealt with an aspect of leadership that I was not able to explore.

The result is kind of a bad news/good news situation. The bad news is that while a general bibliography of all resources consulted would be extensive, the referenced books list is relatively short. The good news, however, is that the books I was able to reference are of a high quality and reliable, if for no other reason than they have a firm foundation in Scripture.⁸

⁴ Thomas C. Campbell and Gary B. Reiersen, *The Gift of Administration: Theological Bases for Ministry* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981).

⁵ Lawrence O. Richards and Clyde Hoeldtke, *A Theology of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1980).

⁶ Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

⁷ Costa S. Deir, *The Exemplary Leader* (Lima, NY: International Leadership Seminars, Inc., 1996).

⁸ And really, is there any better measure of the quality of a resource than comparing it to Scripture?

Hopefully through the fine work these authors did and on the basis of Scripture, this paper can add to the topic of leadership. It will aim to encourage others to keep studying this important gift that God has given his people by filling in the gaps of information on servants leading by example and relating that to the spiritual gift of leadership.

Servants Leading By Example

“In everything set them an example by doing what is good” (Tit 2:7). These words from Paul’s letter to Titus speak to the need of leaders setting an example. They are words that apply to every Christian throughout history. As in the story of the usher who helped change a tire, a Christian looks to lead by example without thought of personal gain. The usher chose not to tell anyone except his wife what he had done to help. That was a decision that he made that worked for him. Would he have been wrong to tell others that he had helped another member? In his case it may have seemed “braggy,” but that does not mean it would have been wrong. Those who set a leadership example are not wrong to let others see their work, because it’s only by seeing this example that someone else can see the good that they do.

Again, all Christians seek to lead by example because all Christians seek to imitate Christ. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells his readers to “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children” (Eph 5:1). Not everyone has the gift of leadership, but all can be leaders by imitating Christ. “His style was to love, not force; to guide, not dominate; to give, not get; to lead by service, not dictation.”⁹ Jesus made this teaching clear with his disciples. When James and John came to him with a request to sit in positions of authority in heaven, Jesus reminded them of his example: not to be served, but to serve. Only in serving is anyone able to lead as Christ did by example.

Indeed James and John were leaders, even among Jesus’ disciples. They were blessed with the gift of leadership. Jesus recognized this quality in them and chose to include them in some of his most intimate moments. However, James and John had forgotten the fundamental qualities of a leader. In fact, they had forgotten some of the fundamental qualities of being a Christian. So caught up were they in the idea of being close to Jesus – of being recognized by Jesus – that they forgot one of the most important teachings that their Lord had stressed

⁹ Lauersdorf, “Personal Qualities of a Christian Leader,” 2.

throughout his ministry: serve.¹⁰ Jesus, the ultimate servant leader, gave them the reminder to be servants. Peter recalls the words of Christ by encouraging his readers in 1 Peter to be “eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

In all things, Christians are eager to serve. It may not always be natural. It absolutely will not always be glamorous. In no place is this more evident than in the upper room as Jesus washed his disciples’ feet (Jn 13:1-17). Jesus sets an amazing example for his disciples by taking one of the lowliest servant duties. But also notice the example that all Christians – that is, those who imitate Christ – can learn from Peter.

As we recall throughout Jesus’ ministry, Peter was not always the wise, measured writer that he is in his letters. Always eager to defend his Savior, Peter occasionally was overzealous in his efforts. From discouraging Christ from fulfilling his mission on earth to cutting off the ear of a man carrying out his duty, Peter didn’t always see the bigger picture or remember the principles that Jesus had taught him.

And yet Peter is able to recall the words of Christ that were spoken to him years earlier. He encourages his readers – he encourages us – to serve and be examples to the flock. We are examples for each other, and we are examples for the world. As a church body, we proclaim this message publicly. The WELS statement on Church and Ministry declares, “We believe that every Christian is a priest before God...In this sense all Christians are ministers, or servants, of the Gospel. God wants all Christians to share the message of salvation with other people.”¹¹ All Christians follow Christ’s example of proclaiming the message of salvation – that is, the Gospel. Christ served the ministry of the gospel by teaching that he was the only way to salvation. We likewise teach Christ as the only way to salvation because we are part of the universal priesthood. In 1 Peter we read, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pe 2:9).

And so we look for opportunities to share that Gospel through our example in the world.

Build up the body of Christ by preaching, teaching, encouraging, exhorting, rebuking, correcting, feeding and increasing peoples’ understanding of God’s will with the Word, in a patient and loving way. And then from that Word nourished,

¹⁰ These statements based on the section from Mark 10:35-45.

¹¹ Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Commission on Doctrinal Matters. *This We Believe* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), Church and Ministry, 29.

faith enriched culture of a strong body of believers let leaders surface as the situation demands, and lead.¹²

This quote is from a paper for a conference convention at which many people with leadership skills were present. Pastor Zarling recognizes that much of this statement is directed at pastors, who are already considered leaders in the church. But these are words that every Christian can take to heart. As leaders by example, every Christian wants to grow in the understanding of the Word. And as we grow in that understanding, we recognize that God has blessed different members of his church with varying gifts. That is where the expectations arise to allow leaders to surface and lead. This will be dealt with more in the second part of the paper.

We have a clear example from Peter of someone who could, and perhaps should have, spent more time following than leading in the early stages of his life as a Christian. As someone with still limited understanding of Christ's purpose and ministry, he would have benefited from even more time listening and pondering Christ's words. This is not to say that he did not spend much time already listening and studying the Word. By the time we arrive at the scene in the upper room where Peter and the rest of the disciples continue to display their limited understanding, they had already been with Jesus for about three years. The same goes for later that evening in the Garden of Gethsemane when Peter cut off the ear of Malchus.

Not only would it have been beneficial for Peter to devote more energy to following, it could also have been beneficial to others to see someone of Peter's character being a follower. The same goes for Christians today, especially those strong in the faith. "A good disciple may become but doesn't automatically make a good leader. Some disciples will make good leaders, and some will make even better followers. The church of the twenty-first century desperately needs good followers as well as leaders."¹³ From this statement, people who are called followers would not also be called leaders in the sense that they inspire others to use their gifts by using their credibility and capabilities to influence people in a particular context to pursue their God-given direction.¹⁴ But that does not mean that this follower is not a leader when it comes to following Christ's example.

¹² Philip E. Zarling, "Training Leaders in the Church to Serve" (paper presented at the Southern Pastor, Teacher, Delegate Conference, February 3, 2003), 14.

¹³ Malphurs and Mancini, *Building Leaders*, 34.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 20.

Consider how valuable the good follower is. Without someone to follow the instruction and encouragement of the leader, even the best leader does little good. Think of someone organizing a week of Vacation Bible School during the summer. The coordinator could begin working months in advance. He could advertise by sending out thousands of flyers. He could make phone calls to any prospects that are known to have children. He could even make visits to those that might be more difficult to convince that this week of study in God's Word would be a beneficial time for their children. He could maybe do all of these things by himself, but if he does not have the support of people in the church, the Vacation Bible School will be of little value to the children.

The coordinator talks to members of the congregation to get them to help. Volunteers are needed to run crafts and games, teach the Bible story and Bible memory verses, organize music and snacks, and more. When you add to those the volunteers needed to be in charge of each group of kids, you realize that the idea of one person – or even a few people – accomplishing this on their own seems ludicrous. If no one is willing to take charge of different stations, the VBS will struggle to accomplish its purpose. While there is one leader of the Vacation Bible School, there are many people who work together to make it happen. Every single one of these people could at the same time be called a leader and a follower. No matter how prepared the leader might be, it is useless if no one is willing to help.

This past year, I had the privilege of coordinating a Vacation Bible School at the congregation which I served. With approximately 115 children between the ages of three and ten on the church property each day, many volunteers were necessary. These volunteers ranged from the age of 12 to 70. I was proud to call every all of them leaders by example, and yet all of them were happy to consider themselves followers. This only worked because they understood the purpose of what they were doing. Every volunteer was told that their main goal was to encourage the children who were attending the VBS with God's Word and trust that this Word would work in their hearts.

This idea may sound fundamental, and yet these fundamentals are at the heart of every Christian doctrine. In Isaiah we hear that "as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth" (Isa 55:10). We proclaim the Word even as followers and trust that Christ works through the Word as he has

promised. “What does this quality of following the Leader say about looking for the talent and hoping the attitude will come later when nominating people? About getting to know our lay people better? About getting information about them from the grass roots before appointing them?”¹⁵ Before we can lead, we must follow. As Isaiah says, we proclaim the Word and trust its power rather than our own gifts to affect change in hearts.

Those who shared the Word with the children who attended the Vacation Bible School did so as followers – those following the direction of Christ. They proclaimed the Word trusting that God was faithful to his promise. “We’re obligated to serve him but, at the same time, we must be willing to serve him. In short, we willingly obligate ourselves to serve.”¹⁶ That is the attitude of every Christian. Indeed we serve him because that is what comes naturally. In response to the grace that he has given to us, all Christians serve Christ because he has given us himself. This sacrifice provokes a response in us that can only share that same Gospel of forgiveness with others.

That was the amazing blessing of seeing these followers/leaders step up and serve Christ by volunteering to share their faith with the children. Even though many of them were not people that would be leaders in the understanding of the word that relates to the gift of leadership, they were all leaders in that they were eager to share their faith with the children who came to hear more about their Savior.

Earlier I mentioned that the volunteers for the VBS ranged from ages 12 to 70. Can you imagine a twelve year old being a leader? Probably not. Just about everyone would say that someone who is twelve years old is far too young to have the experience necessary to be a leader. And yet there were a number of twelve year olds who were willing to volunteer their time to help. They let their lights shine as an example to those who were even a couple years younger than they were. And by the end of the week, there were a few ten year olds from the camp who asked if they could volunteer their time next year to help because they saw how much fun the older kids were having by serving their Savior.

The same could be said of every single one of the volunteers from the Vacation Bible School. Even though many of them were not blessed with the spiritual gift of leadership, they were able to demonstrate their Christian leadership by working alongside others to bring the

¹⁵ Lauersdorf, “Personal Qualities of a Christian Leader,” 2.

¹⁶ Malphurs and Mancini, *Building Leaders*, 37.

Gospel to children who had never heard it or who had a very limited understanding of what it meant to them. “Spiritual leaders were never intended to be authority figures to followers, but fellow workers, servants, and colleagues in the work of the ministry.”¹⁷ Means qualifies his statement by saying that leaders do have authority. But it is a unique kind of authority. The purpose of this authority is not to be an authoritarian, but to facilitate the ministry of the whole body. Throughout the weeks leading up to and including Vacation Bible School, those blessed with the gift of leadership were working alongside those who may not have that gift of leadership. Together, they serve Christ in their work with different gifts.

But how can people blessed with the gift of leadership work in such a way with people who are followers? How do they follow along with the followers? In Paul’s letter to the Philippians we read: “Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.” This is the calling of all Christians. With the life that our God has given us, we serve Christ in everything. We imitate his life of service, and by imitating him we follow his example of leadership.

Indeed all Christians have the call to lead. They lead by example. But simply living a life of service to Christ does not necessarily make one qualified to be a leader in the congregation. The gift of leadership is a gift. And as we encourage fellow Christians to use their gifts of leadership, we have to recognize that not all Christians have this gift. What we do have is the gift that Christ gives to all who believe. We are all the salt of the earth. Matthew 5 reminds us:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Mt 5:13-16)

Only by being the salt of the earth and letting our lights shine can we imitate Christ as the servant/leader and share this light with all people.

¹⁷ James E. Means, *Leadership in Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 47.

The Servant Leader

One cannot write a paper on leadership without at least touching on (or more likely emphasizing) the servant-leader aspect of leadership. As we distinguish between the leadership responsibility that all Christians have and the gift of leadership that God has granted to certain individuals, all Christians have this in common as leaders: they are all servants.

This truth has been clear throughout our study of leadership. One can only lead by serving. But it bears mentioning and applying to each form of leadership – both to the gift of leadership and leading by example. “Christian leaders are to be *consecrated* leaders, leaders who follow the Leader...with the question constantly before them, ‘Will what I am doing praise Him?’”¹⁸ This is a question that not only those with the gift of leadership ask, but all Christians can ask. With all that we do and with every gift given to them, Christians seek to praise Christ and imitate him.

This goes for all Christians regardless of where they are in their lives. Included in the idea of serving Christ is stewardship. “Stewardship becomes part of the issue, stewardship of time, talent, and treasure.”¹⁹ We know how the stewardship principle applies to our lives. We give our best to the Lord because he has given us all things. Our best includes our money and it includes using all of the gifts that he has given us to praise and proclaim his name.

If someone is gifted in music, it would be wrong to not utilize that gift to praise God. If someone is gifted as an athlete, it would be wrong to not use that gift and glorify God while using those talents. With any of these gifts, we do not use them to bring glory to ourselves. Just as the pianist does not play a difficult piece in church to make his own skills known, likewise a leader does not take charge of a situation in order to make himself seem better than others. In all situations, the gifts of a Christian are used to serve.

God wants all his people to evaluate where they consider themselves to be in his kingdom. He makes it clear that the role of servant should be valued more highly than any other. The servant role is one that he gladly took upon himself, and it is one that he praised to his disciples. “If we were to pick one word in describing Jesus’ leadership, might it not be the word servant?”²⁰ We again reflect on the story of the brothers James and John requesting to be seated

¹⁸ Lauersdorf, “Personal Qualities of a Christian Leader,” 1.

¹⁹ Zarling, “Training Leaders in the Church to Serve,” 6.

²⁰ Lauersdorf, “Personal Qualities of a Christian Leader,” 1.

in positions of authority with Christ in when he returned to his glory. Jesus told them to instead follow his example – to not be served, but to serve. And he demonstrated the ultimate form of service. He gave his life for his disciples. He gave his life for us.

This servant attitude was not anything new to the people of Jesus’ time. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the humble attitude Jesus would display – how he would perfectly fulfill the role of a servant for us. He established the perfect form of serving. At another time Jesus was eating at a Pharisee’s house and noticed the guests taking positions of prominence. He reminded them the value of humility and taking a seemingly lesser position. Jesus summarized this advice as such: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 14:11). He later demonstrated this humility and service by washing the feet of his disciples.

Frankly, this dose of humility is never an easy one to swallow, especially for a leader – someone used to being in charge, being followed, and likely being complimented for his dedication and work. One of the reasons that this humility and servitude may be difficult to accept is that people have an improper understanding of humility.

This is something I struggled with when I was younger. I always assumed humility or being humbled meant something more along the lines of being ashamed. And so I never understood the phrase “I am humbled by....” Often someone would accomplish something amazing. Then the community would offer praise for said accomplishment, making comparisons to other great names of the past, and the accomplisher would reflect on what he had done and say “I am humbled to be included with such names.”²¹ Of course now it is clear that he recognized that he stood on the shoulders of giants and made advancements to their work to achieve something great.

All Christians are able to apply this thought to themselves. We stand on the shoulders of Christian giants. In fact, it is only as we stand on the shoulders of Christ that we are able to accomplish God’s will in us at all. Servants who are trained to lead do so in humility. “Servant-leadership does not mean that sometimes one leads and at other times one serves. Rather, it

²¹ To be fair to my younger self, this phrase is used far too often by people accepting the recognition that others have given them (cf. LeBron James on winning the NBA Most Valuable Player award, Casey Hopkins on receiving funds for a Kickstarter project, etc.). In order to not appear too boastful or braggish, they will include the word humble to make themselves feel better about what is clearly bragging. No doubt this phrasing is part of the origin of the current popular phenomenon of #humblebrag.

means that the leader best leads by serving; more than this, it means that one leads only by serving.”²² In order to maintain a spirit of humility and service, constant self-evaluation is required. Leaders evaluate themselves to see if what they are doing is serving Christ. Does it damage their reputation in any way to the point that others will be turned away from the Gospel message? Is what they are doing serving others? Does it lead them to Christ? Does it lead them to look at themselves and evaluate how they are using their own gifts to serve?

Ultimately, this service is the most important part of any gift. We serve God and others with the gifts he has given us. This is especially true of leadership. And so we not only say that all Christians are in one sense leaders in that they lead by their example, but we also can say that all Christians (including those with the gift of leadership) are followers. We follow THE leader. We follow Christ. Again and again we revisit Christ’s exchange with his disciples. “Jesus wants leaders that are willing to sit not at his right or his left but at his feet.”²³ A servant learns first from him. A leader learns first from him.

The idea of leaders first being followers may sound contrary to reason. “A primary requirement for a leader in the church is the ability to follow; that is, following Christ by following other God-given authorities.”²⁴ Christ the servant leader was a leader by following the God-given authorities of his time. His famous line “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” demonstrates his willingness to follow the authority that God had set up. This act of leadership was one for all Christians to follow. One does not require the gift of leadership in order to follow the God-given authorities. One also does not require the gift of leadership in order to lead by following the God-given authorities. This is just one more way that the line between leaders and all Christians is blurred. But it is not blurred in a bad way.

All Christians follow Christ’s example of service with their gifts. As anyone with a human nature can attest, it can be a grind to constantly be serving. In order to imitate Christ, the greatest servant, we dedicate our whole lives to service. Others may not always notice it. In fact, we may not always realize the acts of service we perform when moved by the Holy Spirit working in our hearts. A friendly word to a struggling coworker can be a great act of service that lifts the mood of the coworker and leads to that person renewing a commitment to Christ.

²² Means, *Leadership in Christian Ministry*, 48.

²³ Malphurs, *Being Leaders*, 43.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 86.

But most acts of service will not reward us with the visible, feel-good impact of seeing the result of a kind word leading someone return to the Word. Oftentimes the constant thought of serving others can lead to something resembling a burnout. Constantly concerning ourselves with serving others could wear down anyone.

This is true especially of leaders because their gifts are often more prominent than others'. Add to the public nature of their gifts the ever present call to serve and leaders may be regretting their gift rather than being thankful for it after a short time. "Apart from seeking as our leaders godly men who are full of the Spirit and wisdom and building them up with the Word of God, the next single most important thing we can do is to train leaders to instill a positive attitude."²⁵ The only way that this positive attitude is possible is by God's work. While it certainly can add pressure that all Christians have a responsibility to serve Christ with their gifts, this same truth offers relief to God's people as well.

These gifts are ones that God has given us. He is the one who makes us what we are. He is the one who causes these gifts to flourish in each one of us. When we recognize that he is the one in control of these gifts and their results, it removes our own ego from the picture. We use our gifts to serve him joyfully and trust that he will work through them. He will accomplish what he desires through our faithful use of our gifts to faithfully proclaim the message of salvation.

This understanding of the gifts that we have is crucial to encouraging a positive attitude in the hearts of leaders. As we concluded earlier, leaders will often feel the grind of living as servants more than others because of the scrutiny that results from having such a conspicuous gift. Indubitably all Christians struggle with serving others at times. God promises comfort for his people by relieving them of much of the responsibility. While we truly are at fault if we fail to use our gifts to serve our Lord, God promises immeasurable blessing to his people through the use of his Word. We can again recount Isaiah's words: that the Word we proclaim will not return empty. It will accomplish what God desires. Even more than the pressure this places on us to proclaim the Word, we draw comfort from knowing that using our gifts to share the Word allows God to work and to accomplish his will through his Word.

The only way to instill the positive attitude that is so important in all Christians, but especially leaders, is to stress those occasions that may seem to be failures can be used by God to

²⁵ Zarling, "Training Leaders in the Church to Serve," 16.

instead work in a different direction. This direction may still be far from what we expected. But God promises that there will be an effect through the faithful use of his gifts and proclamation of the Word. And so we do encourage that positive attitude. “Building a positive attitude takes time and consistency.”²⁶ For those training in leadership, it will take the entire period they are training, continuing into the time of leadership and throughout their lives.

Countless Christians have pointed to poor moods that result from time spent away from God’s Word. It can be considered common knowledge among Christians that a lapse in personal time spent in God’s Word leads to a bleaker outlook on life, or a poor attitude, or some other issues that affect their response to the everyday trials of life. And so we encourage all Christians, but especially leaders, to have an active devotional life – to nurture their gifts and to grow in the comfort of their salvation.

Servants with the Gift of Leadership

A fitting analogy comes to mind. One of the church’s callings is to recognize the canonicity of Scripture. We have long known that it is not the role of the church to create the canon in any way. We do not have the authority or the right to decide what is God’s Word and what isn’t. We simply recognize divine inspiration. In a similar way, we can say that we do not make leaders. We cannot give someone the spiritual gift of leadership, nor can we turn someone into a quality leader who has not been given that gift. What we can do, however, is recognize those who have the gift of leadership. To continue the analogy of the canonicity of Scripture, the church has the responsibility to recognize Scripture as God’s Word. After recognizing God’s inspired words, we have a responsibility and privilege grow in the Word and are nurtured by that Word. Likewise, after we recognize the gift of leadership, we have the responsibility and privilege to nurture that gift and train those who have it.

This gift of leadership is the heart of our study on the distinction between the call to leadership that all Christians have and those blessed with the gift of leadership. In order to make sure that we understand what the difference is, we have to examine the qualities that make a good leader.

²⁶ Zarling, “Training Leaders in the Church to Serve,” 17.

In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, Paul emphasizes the spiritual qualities of a leader more than the qualifications for a specific task. But he also recognizes that a candidate for leadership requires certain qualifications. “An effective leader grasps Christ’s vision, shares His mission and helps others do the same. His concern is to help them become co-workers and fellow-soldiers, not bleacher-sitters and sideline-spectators.”²⁷ In order to be that effective leader, a person has to not only have a vision that lines up with Christ’s plans for the church, but also apply that vision to the situation in which the unique group of believers finds itself by laying out goals that fall into the realm of human responsibility.²⁸ That is not something that every person has. Not all people can confront a situation and determine what they are going to do about it.

A story from Aesop’s Fables that sticks out to me is the tale of a group of frogs that want a leader. At first, they choose a log as their leader. But they find that they could hop all over the log and it would do nothing about it. So they leave the log to look for a different leader. They then choose a stork because he is far bigger than they are and seems like the kind of character that can be in control and authoritative. Unfortunately they discover that the stork is too controlling. He tells them what to do all the time, and they end up rebelling, and he ends up eating them.

If we do not properly distinguish between those who are gifted with leadership skills and those who can only lead by example, problems such as the one the frogs faced will result. We cannot raise up a leader from among us who is not fit to lead. Someone may set a good example but not have the personality necessary to take control of a situation and guide others in the path they should go. By the same token, someone may have a fiery personality that many people look for in a leader, but not the foundation, the loving concern, or the level head to go along with that personality. Placing either of these two extremes in a position of leadership can lead to problems for everyone. “Much damage can be done by unqualified people trying to do something for which they are not sufficiently prepared.”²⁹ In this statement, Zarling makes the point that we do not want to force anyone into a position of leadership. The same goes for any spiritual gift that God gives to his people.

²⁷ Lauersdorf, “Personal Qualities of a Christian Leader,” 4.

²⁸ For help with understanding what it means to share the vision of Christ, cf. Robert Koester, *Law and Gospel: Foundation of Lutheran Ministry* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 134-147.

²⁹ Zarling, “Training Leaders in the Church to Serve,” 12.

Think of a typical “man’s man” garage. You will find the necessities – a car, lawn mower, shovel, etc. Most guys will dream of more as well – garden tillers, hand tools, hedge trimmers, weed whackers, bicycles, and much more. All of these have their own individual use. They all have a purpose and can do some things well. But they will not be useful for something they were never intended.³⁰

The same thing goes for the body of Christ. We read in Ephesians how God has given gifts and talents to his people. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:11). Each part of the body has its role. It would be foolish and even arrogant to position someone outside of his or her God-given role.

To use a modern illustration, Richard Sherman is widely accepted as the best defensive back in the National Football League. Quarterbacks rarely will throw his way for fear of throwing an interception. In 2014, one of his teammates praised Sherman’s ability at the cornerback position, saying he is one of the best to ever play the position. However, he recalled Sherman’s days as a college wide receiver, saying that the All-Pro cornerback was a terrible receiver, and yet he remained a fantastic football player. Although Sherman continues to claim that he was a great receiver, we can gather from the position change and from other witnesses that the opinion of his current teammate is likely an accurate one.

Considering all the different gifts that God has given to his people, we accept that we likewise do not want to put anyone in a position in which they do not belong. This is especially true of leadership. Just as it would be silly to place someone with limited creative abilities as a craft leader, so would it not be wise to place someone with limited leadership abilities in a position where he or she is not comfortable.

Not only would it be unwise and arrogant to decide who has leadership abilities and who does not rather than allowing them to shine on their own, it also places far too much emphasis on the person with abilities (or the one who lacks the ability). Ultimately we recognize this gift of leadership as one of service. With every gift that God gives to us, we want to use it to serve him and to serve others. If we focus too much on how special the gift is, or even worse on how special the person is for having the gift, we move into an area of works righteousness that would

³⁰ Zarling, “Training Leaders in the Church to Serve,” 8.

be difficult to escape. I say this because the reality of works righteousness places all responsibility onto the person's shoulders. All credit ultimately rests on the sinner. Concerning leadership, if we praise the one who has the gift rather than the one who gives it, we find ourselves in that realm of works righteousness – giving all credit to the person.

Finding Leaders

Going back to James' and John's request for positions of authority, the problem that Jesus identifies ultimately returns to their motives. "At issue are the motives behind the thoughts that generate such questions. Is your motive as a leader to serve Christ and his church and ultimately to glorify God, or is it to gain for yourself personal prominence, prestige, and power?"³¹ Any thought or action that we have or carry out that is motivated by selfish reasons is a works righteous act condemned by Christ in his dealing with James and John.

Positions of authority in his kingdom are set by God. They have been predetermined by God for those whom he chooses. In the same way, spiritual gifts are set by God, predetermined by God for those whom he chooses. To add anything to that is to misunderstand the gifts that God has given his people. If we say that we have the ability to bring out leaders in the church, it is tantamount to claiming that we can bestow spiritual gifts on someone.

This is where having a proper distinction between leading by example and having leadership skills is so important. Does the person have a clear recognition of the needs of his people? Is he personally concerned with the needs of his people? Does he first go to God with those needs?"³² If these qualities are not evident, or do not become evident, it can be stated simply that such a person is not a leader. That does not make him less of a Christian. It just means that leadership is not his spiritual gift.

One common question that crops up in talks of leadership runs along the lines of: "What if I do not have anyone with the gift of leadership in my congregation?" Especially in smaller churches this is a common question. "To understand why we need to equip people, we need a healthy and biblical view of ministry. The ministry of the church is not to be the work of a few for the benefit of themselves. Rather it is the work of everyone for the benefit of the whole

³¹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 32.

³² James M. Hein, "Nehemiah: Old Testament Leader for Modern Times" (paper presented at the Redwing Conference, October 11, 2010), 4.

congregation.”³³ This can become a frustrating thing for people in a small congregation. When the pastor and a few others are doing most of the work, it can lead to frustration that results in rash action. It can lead those leaders to question their own abilities and it can lead to them seeking leadership from people who do not have that gift.

In situations where the leaders are frustrated with the lack of participation, it is always good to return to the principles that make a quality leader so that they can test themselves and those to whom they are looking to step up. “The test of effective spiritual leadership is whether the leader can say to followers: ‘You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord.’ Failing in this, leadership has failed in its most crucial activity.”³⁴ This statement is good in the sense that we always want to have a test for ourselves and for other leaders in the church. However, it is statements like this that can lead to a misunderstanding of the spiritual gift of leadership.

Certainly no one would argue that all Christians want to live among others and inspire others to become imitators of us and of the Lord. These are the words of Scripture.³⁵ So if one accepts the Bible as God’s Word, he has no choice but to accept the truths that Paul states here. A Christian wants to be an imitator of Christ and inspire others to imitate Christ. But the conclusion that is drawn from this statement can be misunderstood. A leader naturally does inspire others to imitate him. People will see a quality person living his life for Christ and seek to do the same because they respect that person. If someone who claims to be a leader completely fails in accomplishing this goal, he indeed has failed as a leader and probably should rethink whether he has the gift of leadership or not.

But let us not state this too strongly. Even the best of leaders will not inspire everyone to follow him. In fact, he may cause people to do the exact opposite. We again look to Christ as the perfect example. Even as he preached to people in his hometown, he was driven out. As he preached to the Jews, those who by all human reasoning should have been his natural followers, he was rejected. Today, the same applies for leaders in the church. Pastors will be rejected.

³³ Glenn C. Daman, *Developing Leaders for the Small Church: A Guide to Spiritual Transformation for the Church Board* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publication, 2009), 145.

³⁴ Means, *Leadership in Christian Ministry*, 49.

³⁵ 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 – “Because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

Prominent laymen will be rejected as they share the Word. Even as they encourage people within their own congregation, personalities may clash. There will be misunderstandings. There will be problems that result from living in a sinful world among sinful people in a congregation that is full of sinners. There will be times when a leader will fail to cause others to imitate him and to imitate Christ. When Christians lead following Christ's example, we remember the words of comfort that he offers us: "He who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects e rejects him who sent me" (Lk 10:16).

This again leads us to the conclusion that it is not the person that makes the gift great, or even the greatness of the gift that makes the person. But rather it is the greatness of the one who bestows the gift on his people that brings about such amazing results with those whom he chooses.

And since we cannot point to the person with the gift, we return to the primary qualifications for a leader. "The church must return to the primary emphasis on the scriptural qualifications for spiritual leadership. Leaders who are spiritually authentic, blameless, mature, congenial, and compassionate must be recruited, trained, appointed, and invested with proper authority."³⁶ This list of qualifications drawn from Scripture seems like a tall order. As we look around a congregation, there may not seem to be many who can live in this way. On our own we could not hope to attain such high standards. Even with those who have been blessed with these gifts will far too often slip up and in a very noticeable way show that they cannot maintain the role of a leader by themselves. In such times when there seem to be few capable of leading, what do we do?

Truly there is no denying that the gift of leadership is an important one. One can say with little fear of dispute that leaders are necessary for a church to successfully grow and spread the Gospel. That is why so many people are desperate to create leaders in their church. It is why a leadership emphasis and leadership training are in such high demand wherever we go. But we again recognize that we cannot create leaders, just as we cannot force someone who is a leader to lead in a different manner. "Leaders can't expect to excel in all ministry situations."³⁷ In the same way, we can't expect all people to excel in leadership situations.

³⁶ Means, *Leadership in Christian Ministry*, 42.

³⁷ Malphurs, *Being Leaders*, 131.

If a congregation is lacking in leadership and cannot create leaders from nothing, what can they do? The simple answer? Trust God. He has promised that we are the body and Christ is the head. He provides the necessary parts to accomplish his will. And just because someone does not immediately seem to have the gift of leadership does not mean that he will not develop it later on. “There are some natural born leaders, and there are those who have leadership thrust upon them who do well...”³⁸ Philip Zarling wrote this statement to show that leaders are ones who step up and take charge when they are put in the position to do so. This may be more natural to some. But even with those who struggle more with it, God is the one who provides the skills necessary to accomplish what is required. It does not mean that anyone who steps into the leadership role is going to succeed. Zarling’s quote continues: “...but not everyone has the gifts to be a leader.”³⁹ While a person may set a good example and demonstrate the leadership that every Christian has in that way, he may in the next moment fail when he is put into a leadership role and asked to lead in a way that he was not gifted to do.

Perhaps the best biblical examples displaying positive and negative outcome of having leadership thrust upon two people are Moses and Aaron. By all human appearances, Moses did not have all the necessary qualities to be a leader. He was talented and intelligent, having grown up in Pharaoh’s household. But he was also timid and did not seem to understand fully God’s will for himself, much less for God’s people. And yet God chose him. Moses was thrust into the leadership position and excelled. Unsurprisingly, he made mistakes, showing his human frailty. But God overcame that frailty and accomplished great things through Moses.

While not a polar opposite, we see different results with Aaron having leadership thrust on him. When Moses went up the mountain to receive the 10 Commandments, Aaron was left with the people. As we know, he failed in leading the people to imitate God. The people instead led him to turn away from God. But later on we see Aaron leading by his example and helping Moses as the Israelites fought the Amalekites. Aaron later developed into a solid leader of the people as their high priest. Similar to Peter, Aaron needed more time to develop and grow in his faith before he assumed the role of a leader with the gifts God had given him.

Ultimately we can only ask God to provide his people with the gifts necessary to effectively carry out his work. And he wants us to ask him. “When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he

³⁸ Zarling, “Training Leaders in the Church to Serve,” 10.

³⁹ Ibid, 10.

had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Mt 9:36-38). God reminds us that he is the one who sends out workers. He is the one who provides gifts for his church to gather his people to him. As with all workers, his people are going to have different gifts. They will have different strengths to work with and develop throughout their lives. Some may not realize their gifts until later in their lives. Others will recognize their gifts immediately and be able to begin developing them already early on in their lives or while they are still young in their faith.

We cannot create leaders or force them to lead before they are ready. This draws us back to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 as we examine the qualifications of a leader. Again, the majority of these qualifications are spiritual – gifts that come from studying God’s Word. We see descriptions such as “loving what is good, self-controlled, holy, disciplined, holding to the trustworthy message...so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” The Holy Spirit works through faithful study of Scripture to grow and develop the gifts necessary to lead. Rushing the development of a leader is another unfortunate result of a congregation looking for leaders.

Training Leaders

If we cannot create leaders, is it wrong then to talk of training leaders? It is beneficial to look at the school system as a guide. The question often pops up when it comes to teaching children with varying amounts of intelligence: Is their intelligence from nature or nurture? Most teachers would agree that there are some elements of both with every child. Some grasp mathematics more easily than others, while others excel at creative writing. Some succeed when it comes to all things academic, while others cannot find anything that they excel at or anything that interests them in the classroom.

Research projects have shown that some kids have a greater capacity for retaining information regardless of whether or not their mothers listened to Mozart while they were pregnant. But we also see some people who never seemed to show a special flair for business or creativity work past their own shortcomings and succeed in their efforts. Walt Disney, widely regarded as one of the most creative and ambitious men of the last century, accomplished such a

feat. He overcame a lack of education and training in the arts, along with many failures in his career, to establish the successful company he left behind.

The same may be said for someone who never seemed to possess the skills necessary to lead. And yet by throwing himself into God's Word and growing in his faith he develops the skills necessary to lead. This is one of the amazing works that the Holy Spirit can and has accomplished in his people. With such a person, it is simpler to be wary of putting him in a position of leadership because of how unqualified he seemed previously. And yet because of the gifts that he has developed and been granted through God's work, we have no choice but to encourage him and to make him a leader because he fits the description that God has given us of the gift of leadership.

On the other hand, as mentioned in the previous section, there may be a temptation to put someone into a leadership position while they are still young in their Christian faith and understanding. "The talent trap is the presence of a very gifted leader in the church whose character strengths may be questionable. It's a trap because it may be tempting to recruit or hire such a person based on extreme gifting alone and without adequate assessment of spiritual qualifications."⁴⁰ Without the foundation in God's Word, even the most talented person will struggle to lead God's people. We again have to go back to qualifications of a leader. There we are reminded that the majority of these qualifications are spiritual and can only be gained by being in the Word and living the Word.

The person who does not grow in God's Word becomes like King Saul. Although he had all the appearances of a leader and was immensely skilled and talented – although he met all the worldly requirements for a king – he did not develop in his knowledge of God's Word and will in his life, and so he fell away. Ultimately by turning away from God, he was led to his downfall as king, as well as many others being led astray from God as well. Imagine the damage that he did, all because he failed as a leader – that is, he failed to continue to grow in the skills and gifts that God had given him, skills that included the spiritual gifts necessary in a leader.

"Before we can develop the theological foundation of the church, as leaders we must build a theological foundation within our lives. This is not to say that we need to have formal training, but we should have enough understanding of theology to be able to evaluate and

⁴⁰ Malphurs and Mancini, *Building Leaders*, 86.

develop ministries consistent with sound doctrine.”⁴¹ Part of being a leader means following Christ’s example and following God’s will for his people. In order to do this, one must have knowledge of what Christ has done and what God’s will is. Leaders are going to be required to encourage others in their faith and to defend their own faith.

So to answer the question posed at the beginning of this section: is it wrong to train leaders? The simple answer: absolutely not. From the person who has hidden leadership skills that require time to develop to the one who has these leadership skills pouring out of him, training is necessary to develop these gifts and abilities and to maintain them for the benefit of all people. “Despite the ambiguity and confusion in leadership research, it is clear that spiritual leaders must be above reproach, possess personal integrity, and have a reputation for honorable character. Church leaders have always struggled to achieve and maintain the ethos necessary for effective leadership.”⁴² Because it is such a struggle to maintain these qualities, we have to ask for God’s help.

By this mindset then, it is possible for someone to say that anyone can go through leadership training. What if their skills are there but hidden? Indeed this is a valid question. And it is a reason to place an emphasis on leadership. We know that it is a necessary and important gift to have, and so we want to encourage anyone who has it just as we would want to encourage someone with a musical ability or a friendly personality to use their gifts to God’s glory. Of the spiritual gifts listed in Romans 12, leadership is one of the most visible. “There is a practical side to recognizing the need for leaders. And that is, pure and simple, with more members gifted to be leaders, and trained to be leaders and leading others to serve according to God’s direction more ministry will get done.”⁴³ This is sound, biblical reasoning that God has blessed and brings about visible results for those who properly apply it.

As with any time when reason comes into play, a danger can arise from misapplying this reasoning. We always have to keep in mind the one who bestows these gifts on us. By misapplying the reasoning from the statement that more leaders equal more ministry, we lose sight of the one who has given us the ministry.

⁴¹ Daman, *Developing Leaders for the Small Church*, 141.

⁴² Means, *Leadership in Christian Ministry*, 41.

⁴³ Zarling, “Training Leaders in the Church to Serve,” 5.

As a crude illustration of misapplying the reasoning here we could take the casual coffee drinker. With limited information, someone who is struggling with fatigue in the morning might find that he is more effective after a cup or two of coffee. He is more awake and more alert. He is more efficient in his work. However, he does not want to become addicted to coffee or rely on it every morning to wake him up. But after a few mornings with similar results of being refreshed by the caffeine boost, he finds that he wants it every morning. And so instead of the occasional stop at McDonald's before work for \$1 coffee, he finds himself buying a coffee maker and the grounds necessary so as to make his own coffee for much cheaper. Pretty soon he finds that he wants more and more. He figures that if he has four or five cups instead of one or two, he will become that much more efficient and get even more done. Anyone who has been on a caffeine high could tell you that the opposite is true. He will instead become giddy and unable to focus on one thing.

As we apply sound Christian reasoning to the statement that more leaders will result in more ministry being accomplished, we have to be careful to not fall into the same trap that the casual coffee drinker turned addict falls into. Too many leaders can cause less work to be done because they all want to do things their own way and none want to follow. A crude idiom that describes this situation says, "Too many pencils, not enough paper." We can't draw a beautiful sketch of what we wish to accomplish without followers allowing themselves to be the canvass with which the leaders work. We have to encourage people to follow just as much as (if not more than) encouraging them to lead.

Since the gift of leadership is just that – a gift – it is not our doing that makes it better. We can reject the gift and force it down, just as we can reject the gift of faith and force it away. But we cannot develop the gift on our own, just as we cannot grow in our faith on our own. "Pastors introduce lay training programs but cannot motivate people to get involved. Laypeople are passive receivers, the object of the pastor's ministry rather than the subject of ministry themselves."⁴⁴ This is a problem that can result from not having enough trained leaders. The church needs people to encourage others to continue growing in their faith. Part of growing in faith is sharing that faith with others through ministry. It is the responsibility, or even better the commission of every Christian to share the Gospel message with all people. All Christians are to

⁴⁴ Zarling, "Training Leaders in the Church to Serve," 4.

be the subject of ministry in the sense that they let their lights shine before others and lead by their examples.

It is the leaders among them that encourage this growth. And growth can only occur from study in God's Word. "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity..." (Heb 6:1). As all Christians grow and move past the teachings of the Gospel, they of course never forget that teaching, but rather expand their knowledge and their faith in that teaching by discovering the added blessings that God has given to us through the first gift of his Son buying us back from death. It is Christ's example that we follow as we study the Word. Even he grew in his understanding of the Word as a young boy. Luke tells us that "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Lk 2:52). We also hear of the time that he was in the temple with the teachers, having chosen to limit himself in his state of humiliation.

The perfect Leader recognized the need to train himself. He understood the necessity of being in God's house and studying the Word. We follow his example by growing in the Word as well. Leaders especially cannot grow their gift without God's help and without first growing in the Word. We need to train leaders and encourage all people to examine themselves to see if leadership is one of their gifts. But ultimately we recognize that we cannot force leadership on anyone. We trust the one who gives us gifts, and the one who wants us to use these gifts to serve him.

Misunderstanding Leadership

And so we come to the final point of why it is beneficial and necessary to distinguish between the leadership all Christians are responsible for by their example and the spiritual gift of leadership. We have already mentioned that one of the dangers of serving, especially for leaders, is burnout. Myron Rush summarizes some of the causes of burnout. "The ten most common causes of burnout: feeling driven instead of called, failing to pace ourselves, trying to do it all ourselves, excessive contact with people's problems, majoring on the minors, unrealistic expectations, developing too many routines, an inappropriate view of God's priorities for our lives, poor physical condition, continuous rejection."⁴⁵ While any one of these could be applied to leaders in the church and incorrect understanding of their roles, Gary Smalley touches on a

⁴⁵ Myron Rush, *Burnout: Practical Help for Lives Out of Balance* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, Inc., 1987), 27-28.

key thought that has always plagued leaders: “If I don’t do it, no one else will...or no one else will do it right.”⁴⁶ This burnout results from placing too much emphasis on the traditional understanding of serving. The idea seems impossible when describing a Christian. How is it possible to serve too much? True, serving God and serving others with our entire lives is the calling all Christians have. But in carrying out this call we have to understand how we can best serve.

Even for servant-leaders, this means taking time for themselves. Sometimes the best way to serve others is to devote time to personal growth. This leads us back to training leaders in congregations. It is so easy to get caught up in the outward actions of leaders that we forget how important personal development is. Neglecting the needs of the leader results in misunderstandings both by the leaders and by those whom they lead. “There are four common misconceptions about servant leadership: It’s about doing ministry for others, being passive, focusing on the leader’s weaknesses, and ignoring the leader’s own needs.”⁴⁷ These misconceptions are some of the key contributors to burnout among leaders. All of them come as a result of lack of understanding from those whom they lead. These followers do not understand that they also have a role in making someone a good leader.

“The task of leadership is to make sure people are being equipped with the Word of God so that they can be effective in ministering to others.”⁴⁸ Only by being around leaders and hearing the Word of God can followers allow leaders to accomplish the goal of equipping their people with the Word.

While distinguishing between leaders and followers is important, we recognize that each is necessary to make the other effective. All Christians lead by their examples. But many of them follow the example of those with the gift of leadership, who in turn follow the example of the perfect Leader. In order to understand the importance of different Christians and their gifts, especially leaders and followers, we have to remove the misunderstandings of the role that each one plays in the church.

God has given all people gifts. These gifts are only useful by his grace. They can only be nurtured by his work through time spent in his Word and carrying out his will. Leadership is

⁴⁶ Frank Minirth, M.D. et al., *How to Beat Burnout* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 40.

⁴⁷ Malphurs, *Being Leaders*, 43.

⁴⁸ Daman, *Developing Leaders for the Small Church*, 139.

no different, and in fact requires a special emphasis on this truth. Personal growth and care for the leader's own spiritual welfare is just as important as looking out for the spiritual growth and welfare of those whom he leads.

Conclusion

Leadership is an important spiritual gift that God gives to his people. It is useful and necessary in every congregation. In one sense, we can say that all Christians are leaders. All Christians lead by example. They serve Christ with their gifts out of thanks, but also with the hope that others who see their actions will in turn use their own gifts to praise God as well.

While in that sense we can say that all Christians are leaders, we cannot at the same time say that all Christians have the gift of leadership. It is not just using their gifts and inspiring others through their actions alone that are included in the gift of leadership. "Though differing in personality and varying in gifts, Christian leaders have this in common: They follow the leader and oversee His work in such a way that by their example and influence they inspire others to follow Him, too."⁴⁹ The gift of leadership is leading by example, and so much more. A leader is able to motivate people and influence them through personality, work ethic, and reputation to be the best servant of God that they can be. "Christian leaders are servants with credibility and capabilities, who are able to influence people in a particular context to pursue their God-given direction."⁵⁰ We heard this same definition given in the introduction to our study. Fundamental to being a good leader is a person's reputation. People will recognize that the leader is trustworthy and follow him not because they want to be like the leader, but because the leader inspires them to imitate Christ. That is the goal of every Christian. But with no gift is it more necessary than with leadership. For the pastor, or the council member, or the Vacation Bible School coordinator, the goal is to get the people they are leading to use their gifts to serve Christ in imitation of Christ.

A good leader may not always start out as such. Personal growth and training in God's Word are vital to improve upon this spiritual gift. As far as leadership goes, Gary Kuhne writes about developing leaders who are disciplined, discerning, organized, and biblical. "A disciplined

⁴⁹ Lauersdorf, "Personal Qualities of a Christian Leader," 5.

⁵⁰ Malphurs, *Being Leaders*, 33.

practice of holy living is what God intends for the Christian desiring to be a true disciple⁵¹...It is extremely important to guard a growing Christian against error in teaching, emphasis, or activities⁵²...Priorities help in developing a life pleasing to God⁵³...A man of God must be a man of the Word.”⁵⁴ Training in these areas may bring out the gift of leadership that a person never knew he had. And so we encourage all Christians to exercise their leadership as servants of Christ. Lead by example and lead by serving. But also recognize the distinction between leading by example as a Christian and leading through the gift of leadership. It is easy to assume that everyone understands the differences. But unless they are taught that not everyone is a leader, people can be left with the impression that they have a responsibility now to lead others. Simply stated, that is not everyone’s strong suit, and this impression can lead to misunderstandings, hurt feelings, or even more disastrous results.

Taking Things Further

One of my favorite quotations from this paper is the one about instilling a positive attitude in leaders.⁵⁵ Often a negative outlook will lead to burnout for the Christian or will turn off the person that the Christian is attempting to reach. For someone looking for an area of research that is bursting with practicality, studying a positive attitude in the psychological world would be of great benefit. Of course we know that it is not our attitude or emotions that give efficacy to the Gospel. So this area of research would fit under the realm of pre-evangelism. But one could find links to just about any outreach mission: door-to-door ministries, preschool outreach, online advertising, etc. Of course there would not be many people who would argue that a positive attitude is necessary in ministry. So the researcher would have to look for a way to make it into a thesis.

Another topic for research that could be pursued would be Old Testament examples of leadership. In this paper I used mostly New Testament passages as Scriptural support. However, I had to mention the Old Testament examples of Moses and Aaron. Some of my research included study into Isaiah and Nehemiah as leaders. Perhaps further research would allow

⁵¹ Gary Kuhne, *The Dynamics of Discipleship Training* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 61.

⁵² *Ibid*, 85.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 99.

⁵⁴ Kuhne, *The Dynamics of Discipleship Training*, 117.

⁵⁵ Zarling, “Training Leaders in the Church to Serve,” 16.

someone to tie that into the qualitative research done with pastors of a congregation. I envision a compare and contrast type scenario where the writer examines examples of good leaders and bad leaders and looks for similarities and differences between them and Old Testament leaders.

As far as how we can make use of this proper distinction of leadership roles, we have to let this information color all that we do in leadership training. Again, it is easy to become overly concerned with the lack of leadership in a congregation. But we remember that God provides for his church. He provides for his people. He provides people with the necessary gifts to accomplish his will. While it is essential to focus on the important gift of leadership and train them, we have to be careful not to do so to the exclusion of others. Otherwise those without the gift of leadership will feel that they need to step into a position that they are not qualified for. Even worse, it can lead to the feeling that they are not as important to the work of the church.

And so we stress the servant-follower nature of all Christians. We follow the perfect leader who is Christ. This statement goes for all Christians with all different kinds of gifts. Leadership trainers include humility as part of their instruction. And of course as all Christians grow in their gifts they train to use these gifts in service. As Christ led his disciples with acts of service, so do all leaders lead their followers with acts of service and with the hearts of a servant.

Finally, I recall again another of my favorite examples from the short time I spent in public ministry. It was one of the most difficult winters that the Atlanta area has had in recent memory. They rarely see snow or zero degree temperatures ever. And the year I was there they saw both of those frequently. As a result, pipes that were not insulated for the cold weather were bursting in not a few buildings. One of those buildings happened to be our church. Water was pouring from the ceilings in the preschool rooms and storage areas which resulted in severe water damage to the walls and much of the materials that were in those rooms.

And so the church had to hire a crew to first of all come in and dry the place out. Then a separate crew had to be hired to tear out the walls. Eventually a third crew was hired to put the walls back up. Meanwhile, another crew had to be hired to fix a pipe near the road that had also burst. Suffice it to say, I certainly would have had no idea where to even begin to remedy any of these problems. But this situation goes to show that God places his people where they can be used. As it happened, the Director of Trustees/Head of Maintenance on the church council did know what to do. He made calls to arrange everything. For several weeks he spent every weekday working from church and handling everything that needed to be done with the various

workers that were going in and out of the building. When the time came to move some of the items that had not been damaged back into the church, he recruited people to help. His display of leadership was an encouragement not only to me, but to many other members who were involved in the process.

And yet when he was questioned about it, he never pointed to himself or complained about all the work that had to be done. He simply led in the best way he knew how and trusted that other people would follow his leadership. He displayed the heart of a servant for the purpose of glorifying his Savior. Certainly he did all of these things because he loved his church family. I was reminded of this story from the following quote found in my research: “The love of leaders for their followers is the reason servant leaders serve; it’s their motivation.”⁵⁶ This council member was motivated to serve because he loved the people who were also willing to follow him. But more than anything else, he did it because he loved his Savior.

He was a shining example of a leader who used his leadership skills faithfully – encouraging others and willing to work alongside them. This differs from the usher mentioned in the introduction who, without making a fuss, changed the tire of a member in need. The usher did not demonstrate the gift of leadership with his actions, and yet he simply was a leader in the sense that his example was one that all could follow.

Is either example (the council member or the usher) better than the other? Is either less important than the other? If we have a proper understanding of what it means to be a leader and what it means to be a follower, then we know that one is not better than the other. It is simply different members of the body of Christ using their gifts to praise and serve him. We have all been given various gifts by our Savior. Out of thanks to him – because we love him – we use these gifts to serve him and follow him. Leaders in the church always remember first to follow Christ before they lead. Leaders use their gifts to enhance the gifts of followers. Followers likewise use their gifts to enhance the gifts of the leader. Each work together to accomplish the commission of the church here on earth: to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that God has commanded us. Amen.

⁵⁶ Malphurs, *Being Leaders*, 41.

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