

THE EFFECTIVE CHURCH LEADER

Adapted from the teachings of Frank & Wendy Parrish and Ralph Mahoney

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God Shapes His Leaders!

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In the New Testament, the word “effective” means “active, powerful, strong, mighty”; the dictionary definitions include “prepared and available for service”. So the purpose of this teaching is to help you – through Christ – become the most active, strong, powerful church leader you can be, one who is ready for service.

Godly leadership is service. Godly leadership means work – often hard work, but work that is always rewarding and lasting. Godly leadership, however, is not your ultimate goal, **but it is a means to an end: *the edifying and equipping of the Body of Christ, the spread of the Gospel and, most importantly, the glory of God.***

For this teaching to be effective in your life, you must study it prayerfully and apply what you learn to your own life. You must also **study the Bible** along with it. The Word of God contains all that you need to know about godly leadership. Therefore, this teaching will direct you again and again to search the Scriptures.

As you study, let the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit lead you, teach you, and shape you into an effective, godly leader in the Body of Christ.

I. Depending Upon God

More than 2½ million Israelites followed Moses out of Egypt into the unknown wilderness. That was a huge leadership responsibility – one that Moses did not seek out (read Exodus 3).

Moses began as a **reluctant leader**. He did not believe that he had the skills or abilities to lead so large a group of people into such an important journey (Ex 3:11-4:16). But God saw something in Moses that He desired to use. Moses’ human limitations were not a problem for God – **nor are yours**.

Moses argued with God about His call. He knew that he was not qualified to do what God was calling him to do (Ex 3:11-4:16). He likely doubted his own abilities and feared what this calling might involve. But God promised to be with Moses, and to provide the help he needed to fulfill God’s great assignment for him.

[We will study much more about what God taught Moses about leadership in Part Two: The Biblical Pattern For Leadership Multiplication.]

A. We All Need Shaping

When Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt, he was inexperienced in God's way of leadership. God will often put people into places of responsibility before they feel ready or able. Perhaps you have already been thrust into a leadership position where you are facing frustration or even failure. If so, take heart!

Being given responsibility beyond what we are comfortable with is frequently part of God's shaping process. God uses these times of "stretching" to teach us important lessons. These situations grow our faith, expand our abilities and increase our trust in God. In such times, we learn to **depend more upon God** (Prov 3:5,6).

The Lord encouraged Moses by assuring him that his fears and weaknesses could be overcome by God's help and power. Moses – like every one of us – also needed teaching, shaping and help from others. He needed to develop his abilities. Most importantly, he needed a far deeper dependency upon God and His power and wisdom than ever before.

B. God's Ability – Not Ours

God does not choose His servants based upon their cleverness, talent or wisdom. If you are worried that you do not have the "skills" to fulfill God's assignment for you, that is actually a good thing.

As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul taught us about that very thing: *"...not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence"* (1Cor 1:26-29).

Paul also recited the reasons he could have depended upon himself: his vast education; his zeal; his devout Hebrew heritage; his obedience to the Law. Yet Paul spent three years in the desert of Arabia separating himself from his own fleshly gains, in order to truly gain Christ (Gal 1:17; Phil 3:4-8).

Paul understood that in his own power or wisdom, he could accomplish nothing eternal. It was *"...not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God"* (1Cor 2:4,5). Paul was not trying to gather followers to himself. He wanted all to follow Christ Jesus the Lord. That could be accomplished only by the power and Spirit of God, not by the cleverness of man.

A wise servant of God recognizes **that it takes more than his personal ability or experience** to qualify him for the work of ministry. It is only through **God's ability** – God's calling, power, gifts, wisdom and anointing – that one will truly be fruitful in ministry.

God looks for those who are loyal to Him – and completely His – and then HE does mighty works **through** them (2Chr 16:9). It is the person's heart, his character, his willingness to depend fully upon God and obey Him – these are the traits that will make him a vessel fit for the Master's use.

II. Cultivating Christlike Character

When people respond obediently to God's call, God will take responsibility to prepare

and shape them for His use. God will use His Word, His Spirit, circumstances, other people – whatever He chooses – to shape His servants.

That is the primary message of Romans 8:28: “*We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*”. When we love God, He takes everything that happens in our lives and works something good from it. However, what is the true biblical meaning of “good”?

We may think that God’s “good” for us consists in: comfort, health or material blessings; a “powerful and successful” ministry; or easy circumstances.

But God’s “good” for us is much more important to our maturity than temporary comforts or worldly success. God’s ultimate good for each of us is explained in the very next verse – “*to be conformed to the image of His Son*” (Rom 8:29).

God’s “good” is when He uses everything in our lives to make us more like Jesus. The very best church leaders are those who daily yield to God’s work in their hearts and lives. They are becoming more and more Christlike in their character and ministry. Let us look at why that is so essential.

A. Christlike Character:

The Leader’s First Calling

We would all agree that church leaders must devote themselves to the daily study of God’s Word. They need to work at developing their gifts and calling. They will likely spend many hours in ministry service. Those things are all essential parts of ministry and are always important priorities.

In all the “doing”, however, leaders must not lose sight of **their most important quest**: to know Christ; to have His likeness formed in them; and to have His Spirit empower them.

Many people seek to find spiritual fulfillment from their “ministry” or “calling”, instead of through their relationship with God. They become far more concerned with what they can **do** or accomplish than with who they are **becoming** in Christ.

Our spiritual destiny is not just about what we **do** for God. It consists instead in the conforming of our life to **be** like Christ’s. Our destiny – first and foremost – is Christlikeness.

There is no doubt that the Apostle Paul was an extraordinary man. God used him to lead thousands of people to Christ, write Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, plant churches and move in spiritual gifts with power. We would certainly say Paul fulfilled all that God called him to do.

Yet Paul’s top priority was **not** his calling. It was his passion to know and become like Jesus! It was Paul who wrote, “*Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death*” (Phil 3:8,10; read also verses 12-15).

The New Testament contains many references to our spiritual destiny. And almost every one of them points us in the direction of knowing and becoming like Christ. **God is not nearly as interested in what we will do for Him, as in what we are becoming to Him.**

B. What Is Christlike Character?

Becoming like Christ involves, in part, the development of our Christian character – our nature, our moral make-up. This is not revealed in how “perfectly” we can behave outwardly. It is about being truly “transformed” from the inside. That inner change will then be reflected outwardly through our attitudes and actions.

1. Reverence For God

Christian character is not about honoring or impressing man. We must all answer first to Almighty God. The starting place for Christlike character is the “*fear of the Lord*” (Prov 9:10) – our awe and reverence for Him and His holiness. Becoming Christlike begins with living out our faith with reverence and respect for God, Who looks upon our hearts (1Sam 16:7).

2. Servant-Heartedness

Christian character involves **sacrifice**. We must be willing to die to our own desires and lusts. We must lay aside our personal agendas or conveniences in order to become more like Christ. Remember, we are called to be **servants** of the Lord Most High.

Jesus encouraged us to bear in mind that true servanthood is not just doing what is expected. It is sacrificial; we must look for opportunities to do even more than our minimum duty (Luke 17:10).

There might be times when **less** ministry activity is necessary, if other God-ordained priorities are being neglected (such as family or prayer). Most importantly, as servants of God we are to be **obedient** to all that He desires (1Sam 15:22,23).

3. Repentance

Developing Christlike character is described by Paul as putting on “*the new man*” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). That is accomplished by living a lifestyle of repentance.

We must be quick to respond to the Holy Spirit’s correction. He dwells within each believer in Christ, affirming us as we are obedient to God’s ways. The Holy Spirit will also convict us on a moment-by-moment basis, if we are sensitive to His promptings.

Our response to the conviction of the Holy Spirit is **repentance** – a change of mind or direction. We may be in the middle of saying or doing something, but if we sense the Holy Spirit’s conviction, we should stop.

If we ignore the Holy Spirit, we will become less sensitive and eventually hardened to His work. However, as we respond, we become more sensitive to His will and promptings.

Developing Christlike character – or being **sanctified** – is a daily process of conviction, repentance and transformation. The Holy Spirit assists in our sanctification (2Cor 3:18; Titus 3:5). Of course, the Spirit also works through the Word of God. Sanctification cannot happen without the Word; but the Word must be accompanied by dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

4. Changed Behavior

Part of putting off the old man also involves changing our behavior. Paul was quick to point out that **we must make choices with our will** to leave behind the ways of our old nature. Carefully read Ephesians 4:25-5:21 and Colossians 3:12-17.

Being Truly Transformed

Being Christlike is **not** about only an outward conformity to rules and regulations. That is what the Pharisees did. They tried to look good on the outside, without allowing their hearts to be changed. That is called “self-righteousness”, and accomplishes nothing but legalism and spiritual death (read Matthew 23 and 5:20; 7:21-23).

Jesus called the Pharisees “*whitewashed tombs*” (Matt 23:27,28). They had the outward appearance of holiness, but were full of uncleanness and hypocrisy.

We cannot make ourselves pure and holy. We must rely fully upon Christ’s work. Christ has “paid the price” for our sanctification. It has already all been provided for us. But we should not just try to “act” outwardly sanctified. We must yield to God and cooperate with Him as He works in us to transform our lives. He will do that as we learn the Bible, obey God, grow in truth, and are instructed and led by the Holy Spirit.

Be assured that Jesus has provided what we need to become like Him; but we must also do our part as faithful and obedient disciples of the Master.

C. More Than Character

A large part of becoming Christlike is obtaining the beauty and purity of Jesus’ character. But that is only part of what the New Testament teaches as becoming like Jesus.

When we receive Christ as our Savior, we become people of God’s Kingdom. **Every** believer has this privilege. It is not just reserved for leaders.

As Christ’s “Kingdom ambassadors” (2Cor 5:20), we are to be living expressions of the life of Jesus. We are to do our best to represent Him and His desires here on earth. Thus, the goal of all believers should be to reveal both **Christ living in us** and **Christ ministering through us**.

To have the full image of Christ formed in us means two things:

- To be Christlike in our character and personal holiness; and
- To be Christlike in ministry power and grace.

Jesus lived in complete holiness, righteousness and purity – we desperately need that part of His image formed within us. But Jesus also functioned as a servant, in all the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit – which we also need formed in us and released through us.

As we are becoming Christlike, our lives should manifest both the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22,23) **and** the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:4-11,27,28).

Jesus said, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father*” (John 14:12). When Jesus went to the Father, He sent us the Holy Spirit. One of the reasons was so that we might be enabled to do the works of Christ.

The Life And Power Of Christ

We can truly become like Jesus only by the awesome, inward work of the Holy Spirit (2Cor 3:18); by the life of Jesus “filling” every part of us. We cannot change our human nature on our own. But we can choose to open our hearts and lives to the work of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit working within us – and our yielded, obedient response – that will form the “fullness of Christ” within us.

We can find true “**Christ-likeness**” only as we open ourselves to “**Christ-fullness**”. We must be willing to die to our own life and self-interests, in order to gain Christ (Gal 2:20). Just as John the Baptist spoke, “*He must increase, but I must decrease*” (John 3:30).

If our lives are filled with Christ’s presence and Spirit, we will be more loving, wise and gracious leaders. We will love God more, love His Body more and reach out to the lost like Jesus would. We will know God as our heavenly Father and be better equipped to respond to and obey Him. Our hearts will be filled with God’s desires, to know and do His will. We will be far more effective in what we do, because of Whose likeness we are revealing – Christ’s.

Even during times of great trial and adversity, we are to live in a way “*that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body*” (2Cor 4:10).

For truly our desire is to say, “*...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*” (Gal 2:20). Hallelujah!

How desperately the Church needs to rise up and reach to this dying world – with both the holiness and purity **and** the life and power of Jesus Christ. The world needs to see the beauty and character of Christ **in** His servants; and they need to experience the life and power of God ministered **through** His servants.

A Stern Warning

Some people have a following or a “successful” ministry. This does not necessarily mean that they are serving God with their leadership gifts.

Just because their “gifts” still function, it does not mean that leaders are living according to the standards of Scripture. They may be living in rebellion or blatant disobedience to God. They may be teaching error, compromising the truth to draw a crowd. Yet they have been deceived into believing this is acceptable, just because they have the appearance of “success”.

It is a ***grievous error*** to think that God will excuse such lawlessness just because ministry gifts still function. Leaders living in this deception are hurting themselves and those they lead. They dishonor God and His Word. They are being led astray, and will cause others to miss God’s best for them.

There are serious consequences for such misbehavior (Matt 18:6). The leader is in great danger of himself being “*disqualified*” (1Cor 9:27).

God uses people. People, who are sinners by nature, will fail (Rom 3:23). But a stumble into sin, followed by sincere repentance, is far different than living in blatant rebellion and sin while still ministering.

God is not mocked or fooled (Gal 6:7,8). Just because ministers seem to be “getting away” with unrepentant sin, **God is never deceived**. The Bible teaches us that many who “minister” will one day say, “*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?*” They seemed to be gifted leaders; yet they did not pursue knowing Christ and being conformed into His image.

They will not have fooled Christ. He will speak those terrible words, “*I never knew*

you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matt 7:21,22).

Our gifts and calling are not given so that we may serve our own selfish pursuits. God gives gifts to be used to serve our highest priorities: to know and glorify God; to be conformed into the image of Christ; and to equip the saints for Christlike ministry.

D. Yielding To God Daily

Scripture refers to God as “the Potter” and His children as “the clay” (Isa 29:16; 64:8; Jer 18:1-6; Rom 9:21). God is at work to mold us and shape us according to His will. This can be a painful process at times; but we must remember that the Master Potter loves us and always has our best and His highest in mind.

Transformation is a **lifelong process** (2Cor 3:18); **even mature church leaders must yield to God** and His dealings. The Holy Spirit is continually prompting us toward God’s will and His highest purposes for us. But it is our duty to respond to the Spirit’s conviction, and seek out God’s purposes – every day!

Do you want to be the most effective servant of God that you can be? Then commit yourself to becoming more like Christ. God’s shaping work, His Word and His anointing power are the key to a truly effective and godly ministry.

III. The Path To Leadership

The spiritual transformation of **Christ being formed in** us happens over a lifetime. However, there can be specific seasons of intense shaping or preparation prior to a new ministry responsibility. The most life-changing of these shaping times occur during trials or great adversity.

Joseph was a man who experienced many long years of trial and preparation before he was released into the calling God had revealed to him. Examining the life of Joseph can help us understand some of the hardships we might face as the Lord shapes us for His use.

Many well-seasoned ministers of the Gospel have had experiences that are quite similar to Joseph’s. They may not have realized during a trial or hardship that God was using those circumstances to shape or lead them. But they came to understand later why God had chosen that particular path for them.

NOTE: Before we examine Joseph’s life, stop now and take time to read Genesis 37-49 in your Bible (see also Psalm 105:16-24).

A. An Early Call

Joseph was the firstborn son of Jacob with his favorite wife, Rachel. Jacob had prior children, but Joseph was favored over them all.

When Joseph was still a young man, God gave him a series of dreams (Gen 37:5-11). These dreams indicated that Joseph was intended to have a position of prominent leadership. This key role would help many people and preserve God’s chosen people, Israel, through whom the Messiah [Christ] would come (Gen 45:5-7).

Perhaps Joseph would have been wiser to just ponder these things in his heart. But in his zeal, Joseph shared the dreams with his family. He went so far as to say that they would one day bow before him. His father rebuked him; his brothers were jealous and hated Joseph (Gen 37:10,11).

Joseph ended up being betrayed by his brothers. They sold him as a slave, and led his father to believe he had been killed by wild animals.

This time in Joseph's life must have been as confusing as it was difficult. God had given him dreams of the great things he would accomplish. Joseph had a sense of the call of God upon his life. But his experiences thus far were rejection, disappointment, betrayal and pain. He was now separated from his family and working as a slave in a pagan land. How could this possibly be part of God's great plan for his life?

B. God Never Leaves Us

Joseph was purchased in Egypt as a slave by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. At this point in the narration, the Bible reveals a profound truth: "*The Lord was with Joseph*" (Gen 39:2). If the Lord was with Joseph, why had he been despised and betrayed by his brothers? Why did he have to suffer such hardship?

Only God can truly answer those questions. God sometimes delivers us immediately from trials and affliction; sometimes He allows us to experience them for a season before He delivers us. God is sovereign, loving and just. When our lives are submitted to Him, He alone decides the course our lives may take.

When circumstances become difficult, we may question whether God's presence is still with us. Be assured that trials do NOT mean that God has left you! God has promised to never leave you nor forsake you (Deut 31:8; Josh 1:5; Matt 28:20; Heb 13:5). Just as He was with Joseph, so will He be with you.

C. The Path May Seem Strange

Though God spared Joseph's life, He did allow Joseph to suffer betrayal and hardship. We can only conclude that God had a very special plan for Joseph that only God understood at the time.

There was a time when things began to get better for Joseph. He was allowed to be in charge of all of Potiphar's house and possessions.

This was a great responsibility, and Joseph was faithful (Gen 39:1-6). But just as things began to go well, an even greater trial was looming.

The Bible tells us that Potiphar's wife noticed Joseph, and tried to entice him into an immoral relationship. God never tempts us with evil (Jas 1:12-16); thus, this may have been an attempt by Satan to destroy God's plan for Joseph.

But Joseph remained faithful to God and refused Potiphar's wife. In her bitterness, she falsely accused Joseph (Gen 39:6-18). Potiphar believed his wife's deception and, in his anger, had Joseph thrown into prison.

Joseph had served diligently and resisted temptation. Yet the outcome of his faithfulness was false accusation and prison! How strange the path upon which God may take His chosen ones.

D. Faithfully Serving

The Lord continued to be with Joseph in prison and gave him favor (Gen 39:21). Amazingly, we do not read that Joseph became embittered, even after years of imprisonment. He served diligently in whatever circumstances he found himself. Thus, he was given more leadership responsibilities to grow in (vs.22,23). The time was not being wasted. God's purpose was still unfolding for Joseph's life.

Joseph was, however, aware that he had been unjustly imprisoned. He even tried to change his circumstances, but to no avail (Gen 40:14,15,23).

Joseph remained in prison as more years passed – more than ten years in total. He

must have had moments of frustration, despair and even hopelessness. God's call to rulership must have seemed impossible.

E. Tried And Purified

Even though the officer of Pharaoh forgot about Joseph for several years, God did not forget. At the right moment in time, Joseph was remembered by the officer and brought out of prison before Pharaoh (Gen 41:9-15).

God enabled Joseph to interpret the meaning of a significant dream of Pharaoh. This dream foretold a season of plenty, followed by a season of famine for all of Egypt. God also gave Joseph the wisdom to develop a plan of action that would save Egypt – and God's people – from much loss and devastation (Gen 41:28-36).

Pharaoh recognized that Joseph was a man full of the Spirit of God (Gen 41:38). He placed Joseph in authority over all the affairs of Egypt. Only Pharaoh himself would have greater authority (Gen 41:40-44).

When Pharaoh praised Joseph for his skill in interpreting dreams, Joseph knew the source of his wisdom: *"It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer"* (Gen 41:16). Joseph **gave God all the glory** – a model for us all when God uses us to minister effectively.

So what was the result of Joseph's many years of betrayal, disappointment, hardship and imprisonment? **Joseph emerged from prison as a man full of the Spirit of God, and full of wisdom!** He knew that His source for everything was God alone. Joseph's character had been tried and purified. He had been prepared to receive much responsibility and authority, and to serve with righteousness and integrity.

F. God's Sovereign Control

The time came when Joseph was eventually restored to his brothers, and even to his father (Genesis 42-49). Joseph had suffered many years of hardship because of what his brothers had done to him.

And yet, when Joseph saw them again, he said to them, *"But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for **God sent me** before you to preserve life"* (Gen 45:5). Joseph held no bitterness against his brothers. He freely forgave them. How could this be?

Joseph later said to his brothers, *"...you meant evil against me; but **God meant it for good...**"* (Gen 50:20).

Joseph had learned an extremely important lesson: God was the One Who was in charge of the circumstances of his life. Joseph said to his brothers, *"for **God sent me...**"*. The Bible says again in Psalm 105:17 that *"He [God] sent"* Joseph as a slave to Egypt.

God sent Joseph? Didn't his brothers conspire to kill him, and then sell him as a slave? Yes, they did. But it was God, Who is greater than any circumstance, Who was in the midst of Joseph's life. God used Joseph's circumstances to uniquely **preserve him** and **prepare him** for a greater purpose. God turned the evil deeds done against Joseph into eventual good.

Church leader: Please know that when trials, rejection, misunderstanding and injustice come into our lives, God is there with us! If we are submitted and obedient to God, He will orchestrate circumstances in order to transform us for His use – even trials of

fire (Deut 4:20; Isa 48:10,11).

God does not cause calamity or misery for us, to somehow “teach us a lesson”. Instead, **He meets us** – when calamity strikes or in the dark and shadowed valleys of life (Ps 23:4) – to walk with us and cause something useful to come from the trial.

We may have suffered terrible pain, abuse or rejection in our lives. Only God can take all that the enemy meant for harm and destruction and turn it into something good. Our God is the Great Deliverer, Who heals, redeems and restores.

God has not forgotten you! God will never leave you! He alone can make all the things that seem to be against you work out for your good and the good of others, to His glory and honor! Christ’s blood can cleanse you, His power can redeem you, His love can heal you, His Word can free you!

You can rejoice! As you daily yield to God, He is transforming you and preparing you – to make you more like Christ Jesus!

G. The Hope Of Glory

Joseph remained faithful to God, no matter what. Joseph was eventually key to preserving God’s people and furthering God’s purposes.

We, too, must remain faithful, thanking God for His guiding and preserving presence in our lives (Matt 5:11,12; see also Proverbs 2:8; John 14:16-18). We must continue to trust in God, no matter the circumstances (Prov 3:5,6). We must choose to forgive those who have wronged us, and love those who persecute us (Matt 5:44-48). We must not repay evil for evil (Rom 12:17-21). These things are difficult to do on our own; but we can do all things “*through Christ*” by God’s great grace.

We can live this life with faith, assured of this: God is with us, He loves us, and He will use everything in our lives for His highest good.

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1Cor 15:57,58).

Remember this: We are honored to serve God in this life, and to give Him our lives for His use and glory. But a day **is coming** when those who have forsaken all to follow Christ in this temporal life will go on to their eternal reward. There will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more tears (Rev 21:4). The temporary light afflictions of this life will be past (2Cor 4:17,18; Rom 8:18); we will be with our Beloved Savior! We shall rule and reign with Christ, forever and ever (2Tim 2:12). Hallelujah!

IV. How God Uses Trials

Many mature church leaders can testify of times in their lives when all hope seemed gone. The circumstances and challenges had been so difficult, they almost lost all faith in God. They may have even given up on the dreams God had given them, allowing them to die in their heart. But out of their despair and ashes arose the purpose of God.

God had sustained them by His grace, and preserved them for His purpose. As they remained faithful, God used their trials to strengthen and prepare them for His use, just as He did with Joseph (Gen 49:24).

Every person whom God desires to use seems to face trial and adversity. The

Scriptures recount to us their stories. **Noah** endured much scoffing and mocking. **Abram** faced many, many difficulties and tests of faith. **Moses** had to overcome adversity almost from the time of his birth. The **prophets** of God endured great persecution and hardship. **Jesus' disciples**, the Apostle **Paul** – none escaped great challenge and trial.

Yet God used every one of them as a participant in His grand plan of the redemption of mankind. Each of them was part of preserving God's people; ushering in the Savior; proclaiming His salvation to the ends of the earth; making disciples; equipping the saints; and more.

You may very well have your own experience of God's preparation through trial and adversity. Or you may be in the middle of a great trial right now.

A. Sources Of Trials

Where do trials come from? Some trials are the dealings of God. Some are self-induced through our own sin or rebellion. Some are direct attacks of Satan.

Many trials are simply the result of life in this broken world. Those can include:

- Civil or governmental **oppression or persecution**, just because we believe in Jesus Christ.
- **Family members or others who betray us** or despise us for our faith.
- Great **challenge to our ministry call**. Things may be especially difficult, and we may feel isolated or alone in our struggles. These attacks might come through other people, but it is actually evil forces that are at work (Eph 6:12). The devil would like nothing more than to snuff out the fire of your passion for Christ or your zeal for serving Him.
- Great **physical trial to us or to someone we love**. Someone near and dear to us may even die. The agony and grief that accompany such suffering or loss can be the darkest of oppressors.
- The **natural circumstances of this broken and sin-filled earth** can bring tremendous hardship. Famine, disease, pestilence, severe weather or natural disasters all bring with them great trials indeed.

B. The Importance Of Perseverance

God does not promise that our lives here on earth will be lived in ease and comfort, or that He will keep us from pain or hardship.

This life is very short compared to eternity. It is temporary, and we are not to set our affections on this world or what it can offer (Matt 6:19-21; Col 3:2). This is not our permanent home; we are but sojourners here (Phil 3:20; Heb 11:13; 1Pet 2:11).

We are told that as believers in Jesus Christ, we will be opposed in this life (1Pet 5:8,9). We will face tribulation, persecution and hardship (2Tim 3:12; see also Mark 4:17; Romans 8:35,36) for Jesus' sake.

Scripture teaches that it will take much work and perseverance to successfully "finish the race" of this life (2Tim 4:7). We are told that we must "endure" to the end (Matt 10:22; 24:13; 1Cor 4:12; 2Thess 1:4; Heb 3:14). These verses imply holding fast to faith in Christ, even in the midst of severe difficulties.

Christ's own apostles faced beatings, imprisonment, lack and hardships (2Cor 11:23-

33); they all, save one, died as martyrs for Jesus Christ. Many people in Old and New Testament times suffered at the hands of those who were opposed to God or the Gospel of Jesus Christ (e.g., John the Baptist – Matt 14:1-12; also read Hebrews 11).

This life does hold great victories and joys for the believer in Christ. But those times of being “on the mountaintop” are mixed with the times when we must also walk through valleys of trial.

C. Trusting God In Trials

God may not be the direct cause of our suffering and trials. He may or may not deliver us immediately from them.

But we do know this about trials: **God will either deliver us from them, or give us the strength and grace to endure them.** And God promises to use everything in our lives – the good and the bad – to shape us more and more into Christ’s image for His purposes (Rom 8:28,29).

D. What Is The Purpose of Trials?

The Bible teaches us that trials are necessary for our spiritual growth. James put it this way: *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience [endurance]. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”* (Jas 1:2-4).

The word “**perfect**” here means “maturity, wholeness” (it does not mean sinless perfection, as only God is perfect). Believers are strengthened in endurance and spiritually matured through trials.

There are many, many more things that trials accomplish for believers. Let us look at just a few of those now:

1. Trials Test Our Faith

The Bible describes the preparation in Joseph’s life as a time *when “the word of the Lord tried [refined] him”* (Psalm 105:19 kjv). Peter exhorts us: *“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try [test] you”* (1Pet 4:12a). God often allows our faith to be tried and tested with the fire of difficulty.

David wrote: *“For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds [inward parts]”* (Ps 7:9). God knows everything, so He already knows what is in our hearts. But His tests reveal to us what is in our **own** hearts. We need to know the strength (or weakness) of our faith in God.

For instance, during trials are you anxious? fearful? angry? impatient? If so, that reveals areas of weakness in your faith, areas in which you are not trusting in God. These can become a great hindrance to God’s work through you in the future. Recognizing where our faith is weak helps us to face it, repent of it, and turn to God for His strength and help.

The Lord also tests our motivations. Do we love and serve God selfishly, just to get His blessings? Satan accused Job of such a thing. Job proved Satan wrong, and remained faithful to God, in spite of losing everything (read the Book of Job).

The Lord tests us to help us see whom we really love (Deut 13:3). Do we love God more than anything or anyone, no matter what? Is following Him more important to us than anything else? (Read Luke 14:26-33.)

“The Lord tests the righteous” (Ps 11:5). Trials are a test that we can pass or fail. If

we pass, we move ahead to greater strength in God. If we fail, we see where we need to still grow and learn from our failure.

2. Trials Purify Us

When you purify gold, it needs to be heated to very high temperatures. Only in this way can the impurities in the gold rise to the surface so that they can be removed.

Sometimes it takes great heat and pressure in our lives to reveal impure thoughts, motives and actions. As they rise to the surface, we then have opportunity to confess and repent before God. He will cleanse us from our unrighteousness (1John 1:9), purifying and preparing us to do the will of God (1Pet 4:1-3).

3. Trials Teach Us Dependency And Humility

Mankind does not automatically go God's way; it is usually quite the opposite (Isa 55:8).

However, trials oftentimes reveal the error of our own ways and lead us to a place of greater dependency upon God.

As we are humbled, we tend to seek the Lord's way more diligently. We are more willing to cooperate with Him and yield to Him. We recognize how desperately we need to depend upon Him – and upon His strength, wisdom, leading and power.

God tests us and humbles us through trials (Deut 8:16). But He also uses the hard times to remind us that **all** good things, **all** success, **all** fruitfulness are only because of God's grace, love and power (Deut 8:17,18; Jas 1:17). Let us remember these things, lest our own pride ever cause us to think that our success in ministry is of our own doing.

Paul was used mightily by God. But he was given a physical trial to ensure that he would not think too highly of himself, or be "*exalted above measure*" (2Cor 12:7-10).

As God does mighty works through us, trials remind us that we have no true spiritual strength apart from God's great grace and enablement.

4. Trials Release God's Power

During times of great trial, our weaknesses are revealed. This is not to discourage us. It is to teach us to lean upon God and receive from Him. For God "*gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength*" (Isa 40:29).

When Paul was weak, Jesus said to him: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness*" (2Cor 12:9).

God is not limited by our weakness, for He sees what we can do and be **with His help and power**. God called Gideon a "*mighty man of valor*" (Judg 6:12). But at the time, Gideon was terrified and hiding from the Midianites (v.11). God called Gideon anyway, and later enabled Gideon to fulfill a great purpose (read Judges 6-8).

"We have this treasure in earthen [weak, fragile] vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2Cor 4:7).

We can thank God for trials that reveal our weakness and inadequacy. Though trials are hard on our flesh (human sin nature), they strengthen our spirit – pressing us to a greater dependence upon Christ and His strength. "*Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me...For when I am weak, then I am strong*" (2Cor 12:9,10b).

5. Trials Strengthen Us

There can be no victories without battles. Trials teach us to use our spiritual armor; they strengthen us in our spiritual “combat skills” (Eph 6:11-18). We learn about spiritual warfare and intercession, and grow in overcoming faith (2Cor 10:3-6; 1John 5:4).

As we go through trials, our “spiritual muscles” are exercised. We become stronger for the next trial. We can then face an even greater foe. Then we become even stronger. As we do, we become more useful and develop endurance (Rom 5:3,4; Jas 1:3). God can then use us in even greater ways. We go from “*strength to strength*” (Ps 84:7) and from “*glory to glory*” (2Cor 3:18).

In the midst of such battles, we might be tempted with self-pity or fear. But we must resist such thoughts, and instead throw ourselves on the mercy of God in prayer. We can admit to God that we truly are but flesh – and then, in our weakness, cry out for God’s help and strength. When we pray, “I need you God! I cannot do this without You!” – God will respond. For truly we can do nothing without Him (Matt 19:26).

6. Trials Teach Us To Wait

Jeremiah lamented his trials and afflictions. But when he remembered the Lord’s mercies and faithfulness, he resolved: “*It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord*” (Lam 3:26; read Lamentations 3).

Isaiah also taught us that God gives power to the weak, and renews the strength of those who **wait upon Him** (Isa 40:28-31).

To wait upon God means to come into His presence with worship and prayer. It is to humble ourselves before Him, and take time to receive what we need from Him.

The Bible teaches that there are times and seasons for everything (Eccl 3:1-8; Acts 1:7). God may have **called** us, but it may not yet be His time to **send** us into the next phase of ministry. We may need to wait, and endure a shaping and growing season first.

As we submit our lives to God, we must wait upon Him for His perfect timing, even during trials. As we do, He will save us, strengthen us, direct us and help us to endure.

7. Trials Prepare Us

Suffering can actually spur spiritual growth and further our preparation: “*But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, **perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle** you*” (1Pet 5:10). God uses trial and suffering to **perfect** [prepare, complete] us, and strongly establish us in His ways.

Joseph was a young man when God gave him the dreams of his future. In order to fulfill such a great calling, Joseph needed time to develop godly character, wisdom and maturity.

8. Trials Change Our Perspective

During trials, we may reach to worldly temporary things for relief, such as possessions, money, traveling, or alcohol or other things. But we soon realize that these earthly things provide no lasting help, relief or comfort.

Trials reveal what has become our source for help and strength in time of need. Do we reach to God, or to something else?

Trials also lift our eyes toward heaven. When we lose a loved one, or face severe challenge, our hearts are turned toward our eternal hope. Heaven seems so much sweeter when we have a loved one there. Trials help us to realize that this world, along with all that is in it, is passing away. Eternal values and the will of God become much more real and important to us (2Cor 4 & 5; 1John 2:15-17).

Trials show us the emptiness of human resources. As we suffer, it stirs within us a hunger for the glory of God. “...*if indeed we suffer with Him [Christ], that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Rom 8:17,18).

Though God works all things for good – Christ’s image shaped within us – He is also preparing us for the day when He will reveal His glory through us, and we will be glorified with Christ! Hallelujah!

E. Safe In God’s Love – Even Amid Trials

God uses trials and tests to **prepare** us, not to point out our failures or to condemn us (Rom 8:1). Remember: God wants us to **succeed** in fulfilling His calling. He wants to purify us so that our future will be fruitful. God is for us, not against us (Rom 8:31).

God is vast and great, and His perspective is eternal. He sees and understands **everything** – so much more than we ever could! He has an eternal, Kingdom purpose to fulfill. We can choose to be a partner with Him in fulfilling it. But we must trust Him for whatever role He would give us to fill.

God also promises to never leave us nor forsake us, to be our Helper so we need not fear (Heb 13:5,6). Just as He was with Joseph in the midst of his trials, God is also with us, no matter what. We can never be separated from His great love (Rom 8:38,39).

You may have suffered for your commitment to Christ. But hear Peter’s encouraging words: “...*rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you*” (1Pet 4:13,14).

F. God’s Chastisement Shapes Us

It is important to remember that Joseph had not done anything to bring hardship upon himself. The Bible does not tell us that Joseph rebelled or sinned against God. Sometimes our own selfishness or sin can bring trial or difficulty into our lives. This is NOT the same thing as suffering in Christ. There will be no reward for the type of suffering that we bring upon ourselves through sinful choices or actions.

When Miriam spoke against Moses and was struck with leprosy, this was not suffering for God (Numbers 12). When Jonah spent days in the belly of a great fish, this was due to his own rebellion (Jonah 1). When Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead, this was a direct result of their deceptive actions (Acts 5:1-11).

If we are rash or disobedient, or grasp for positions or power for which God has not called us, we will suffer by our own doing. If our lusts or passions override our good judgment, or if we attempt to exalt our self-will over the truth of Scripture, we may find ourselves in terrible trouble.

We are warned in Scripture to be careful, lest we suffer for our own wrongdoing:

“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters” (1Pet 4:15).

However, even when we have willfully sinned against God, all is not lost. God can still deliver us when we have sincerely repented [renounced our sins and turned from them]. Our failures may bring needless suffering upon ourselves or those near to us. But God can use even the worst failure in our lives to help shape and transform us. His chastisement and discipline, and our response, will also shape us (Deut 8:5; Prov 3:12; Heb 12:7,8).

God can redeem and use even our failures. He is worthy of all praise, for His great forgiveness and redemptive grace!

G. How Should We Respond To Trials?

Trials will come to all of us. Jesus said, *“In the world you will have **tribulation**...”* (John 16:33). The meaning of the word *“tribulation”* includes “pressure, oppression, stress, anguish, crushing, adversity, affliction, distress”. It represents that which is free and unfettered being put under a lot of pressure.

We are free in Christ. But this world brings the pressure of tribulation and trial. How can we make it through trials, and grow from them? Here are some guidelines:

1. Pray!

Prayer is **essential** for successfully enduring trials. We must continually be in prayer, asking God for strength, grace and wisdom. We must ask Him to sanctify the trial to us, using it for His glory and our good. We must search our hearts, and allow God to cleanse us of impurities. We must relinquish pride and self-effort, crying out to God in humility for His help and power.

We need to have a believing heart. We must trust that God has a purpose in the trial, and that He will supply everything we need to endure. He will give us wisdom as we ask (read James 1:2-8), so that we will know what to do in response to the trial. God WILL meet us, teach us, comfort us and help us.

a. Pray In The Spirit

Trials can be discouraging, even overwhelming. We sometimes cannot find the words to even pray. It is in these times that we can – we **must** – pray in the Spirit. When we do, the Holy Spirit helps us, praying according to the will of God (Rom 8:26,27). Praying in the Spirit is also a powerful and effective way to build our faith (Jude 20).

Trials can sometimes be direct attacks of Satan or demons. In such cases, we must submit to God and resist the devil (Jas 4:7); and contend in prayer and supplication (Eph 6:10-18).

b. Pray With Fasting

Fasting helps to quiet our fleshly impulses and sensitize us to the Holy Spirit’s voice. As you fast, make sure you are praying often. Also, take time to quietly wait upon God. Allow Him to minister to you and speak to your heart.

2. “Count It All Joy!”

Paul and Silas had just been severely beaten and thrown into prison for preaching. Yet that very night they were praying and singing hymns to the Lord (Acts 16:22-25).

The Lord, in His faithfulness, had put within their hearts *“songs of deliverance”* (Ps

32:7). As they sang, an earthquake shook them free, along with all the other prisoners. Even the jailor was converted. A strong church was established in Philippi as a result.

How could Paul sing during such trial? Because Paul was humble and yielded to God. Paul trusted that God was in charge of his life. Paul recognized God's hand at work in every trial and challenge. What faith and grace God gives!

God is **always** worthy of our praise. As we worship Him, our eyes are raised and our spirits are lifted. His hope and joy fill our hearts, giving strength for the trial.

We can have joy and thanksgiving in the midst of trials (John 16:33; Jas 1:2). We know that God will use them for our good and His glory (Heb 12:3-11).

We can even triumph through trials if we will turn our hearts toward God in humble praise: "*Now thanks be to God who **always** leads us in triumph in Christ*" (2Cor 2:14).

3. Do Not Run

When you are being severely tried, you may want to run from God, from ministry or from your situation. This is a serious mistake! (Of course, this presumes that you are facing trials because you are obeying Christ's call.)

You may feel, "God, if you don't do something about this, I'm leaving!" But a much better prayer would be, "God, until you release me or send me to another assignment, I am staying right where I am. Help me to persevere, to be faithful to your call!"

It is only as you are proven faithful in one situation that you are prepared for a greater assignment (Luke 16:10; 19:17). Most often, God does not lead us to leave one assignment **unless** He is clearly leading us to our next assignment. If we move on prematurely, we will likely miss God's intended purpose for us. Or God may have to intervene in order to get our attention (read the first two chapters of Jonah for an example).

4. Obey ALL That God Says To You

It is important in trials to listen to God – then obey! His shaping path for you is unique. You cannot mimic what you see others doing. You must find out what God wants you to do.

It is necessary to be submitted in your heart to God. We must **let** the trial be used by God to accomplish its purpose (Jas 1:2-4). If we need wisdom, we can ask God for it. He desires to give us wisdom with liberality (Jas 1:5).

Obedience requires much prayer, perhaps repentance, searching the Scriptures – and waiting, waiting, waiting upon the Lord! Be quick to respond to God, and obey Him.

5. Keep Your Heart Right

Only you can choose your response to a trial. You can allow yourself to get angry, fearful or bitter. Or you can choose to receive God's forgiveness, peace, grace and strength.

These are not always easy choices to make. Our grief or disappointment can be great. The attacks against us may be many. We may fear putting our full trust in God. It can take time to work through the challenges to our faith that arise during trials.

We must keep coming to God with our anxieties, fears and concerns. We can be honest with Him, for He already knows our hearts. We must submit our concerns to

Him, asking for His help and grace.

Only we can decide to keep turning to Him and choosing His ways – for only He can make us effective leaders in His Kingdom. In Part Two, we will study in more detail some of the ways in which God accomplishes this.

Part Two:

The Biblical Pattern For Leadership Multiplication

by Frank and Wendy Parrish

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1Pet 5:2-4).

In this eloquent passage the Bible sets forth timeless principles of godly church leadership. But how can we most effectively put these principles into practice? As always, Scripture itself supplies us with clear, specific, practical instruction.

Exodus 18:13-22 calls attention to some common problems in leadership and offers highly effective, God-honoring solutions.

Depending Upon God

As Moses began to lead the people out of Egypt, it was not long before he fell into a common leadership trap: He tried to be the only leader of a group of people. Moses might have assumed that since God had called him to do a task, he was supposed to fulfill the task by himself.

Fortunately for Moses and the children of Israel, God sent a wise servant – Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law – to counsel Moses. Jethro recognized the problems that were being created by the independent leadership style of Moses.

When Moses began to face challenges in his calling, God used Jethro to wisely instruct Moses as to how to fix the problems. Let us now read portions of the Bible passage that tells that story:

*“And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. So when Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, ‘What is this thing that you are doing for the people? **Why do you alone sit**, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?’ ... So Moses’ father-in-law said to him, ‘**The thing that you do is not good.** Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; **you are not able to perform it by yourself**... Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you.... select from all the people able men...for **they will bear the burden with you**’” (excerpts from Exodus 18:13-22).*

Jethro pointed out a serious flaw in Moses’ leadership: Moses was trying to do the work God had called him to accomplish **by himself**, without the help of others. One who gets caught in the trap of being an independent leader will limit himself, and **never fulfill his complete purpose** as a church leader.

Jethro gave Moses wise counsel about how to solve the leadership challenges he was facing. Jethro submitted his counsel to Moses, and wisely referred Moses to God for confirmation of his counsel (Ex 18:23). Moses was humble and wise in receiving and acting upon Jethro’s counsel (Ex 18:24). They had a good relationship, one of mutual trust and respect (Ex 4:18; 18:7).

Let us now study Jethro’s instructions in more detail.

I. FIVE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO MOSES

A. Stand Before God For The People (Ex 18:19)

“Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God” (Ex 18:19).

Moses was spending most of his time “sitting before the people” (vs.13-16), trying to solve their problems for them. This represents a temptation all leaders will face.

It is flattering when people look up to you as a leader and ask for your help. You may have some understanding of God’s Word and ways, so people want your input or counsel. That is acceptable, but only in a limited way.

This is NOT acceptable when you as a leader find yourself feeling responsible – even obligated – to solve everyone’s problems. This serious mistake can cause people to depend upon you, instead of maturing and learning to go to God for themselves.

Moses was following the Eastern custom of rulers who would sit at the gates (places of authority) to dispense justice to their subjects. Moses had good intentions. But he could never meet the demands or solve the problems of millions of people by himself.

Jethro recognized that Moses was spending too much time trying to solve the problems of the people and not enough time **going to God** for the people. He told Moses, *“The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; **you are not able to perform it by yourself**”* (vs.17,18).

Jethro offered several solutions to this challenge. But they required Moses to change the way he was spending his time.

Jethro first instructed Moses to *“**stand before God for the people**”* (v.19). Moses did not need to listen to and solve everyone’s problems. Moses’ first responsibility was to **pray for the people**. Moses was to come before God and lift the difficulties of the people to the Lord in prayer.

Coming to God **first** with the needs of the people:

- relieved Moses of the tremendous burden of trying to solve so many needs (read Psalms 37:5-7; 55:22; Proverbs 3:5,6; 16:3; 1 Peter 5:7);
- invited God to move on behalf of His people and their needs;
- allowed Moses the time to hear from God about what he should do to properly lead the people.

The first responsibility of a church leader is to **pray for the people God gives him** (1Sam 12:23; Rom 1:9; Col 1:9). Then he must take time to listen to what God tells him to do – and then do it!

Moses learned this lesson, and his intercessions for the people became very important (Ex 32:30-34).

Discipling, Not Problem-Solving

In the Old Testament, God’s appointed leaders acted as mediators between God and the people, telling them what God expected of them. The leader stood before God on behalf of the people.

However, Jesus is the final Mediator between God and mankind (1Tim 2:5,6). His sacrifice and forgiveness for the sins of mankind make it possible for every repentant person to be restored to God. Every believer in Jesus Christ can now have his/her own direct relationship with God!

God also provided the Church with His Word – the Bible – so that we would know what God expects of us. Jesus also gave us the Holy Spirit. Now *every* believer in Jesus Christ can and should pray directly to God. Each believer can be led by God, hear answers from God and receive power from the Holy Spirit for Christian service.

However, it can take time for new believers to mature to the point that they can receive what they need from God on their own. **That is why God raises up and appoints leadership in the Church** (Eph 4:11-16). Leaders need to disciple young believers, teaching and equipping them in the Scriptures and the ways of the Lord. Immature believers need help to know how to obey God, walk with Him and be led by Him.

It is necessary for you, as a church leader, to stand before God and pray for your congregation. You must pray for them in order to effectively minister to them! But **you must also teach people** how to go to God in prayer on their own, how to hear His voice, and how to search His Word for the answers they need from Him.

It is wrong for you as a church leader to think that you alone must have all the answers and solve all of the problems for people. If you do, the needs of the people will begin to occupy most of your time. This serious mistake can quickly misalign your ministry priorities – and lead you into the common leadership trap of pride and self-reliance.

B. Teach The People (Ex 18:20)

Jethro then gave Moses another point of instruction for the people – “*teach them*” .

Moses was responsible to lead a great multitude of people. These people had been slaves in the sinful culture of Egypt all of their lives. They were pagan and superstitious, ignorant of God and His ways.

When they left Egypt, the people brought idols with them (Ezek 23:7,8). They fell into such severe idolatry along the way (Exodus 32) that God judged them harshly. God is a jealous God (Ex 20:5; 34:14; Jas 4:4,5) and will not long tolerate the affections of His people being set upon worthless idols or other gods. We are to worship God alone and serve Him only (Ex 20:2,3; 1Sam 7:3).

God told the people how to live when He gave them commandments to guide them (Ex 20:1-17). However, the people needed additional instruction to help them apply these commandments to their daily lives. Thus, Moses was to “*teach them*” (Ex 18:20) both the commandments and how to walk in obedience to those commandments.

This same situation exists in many countries and cultures even today. When people are saved and come out of a pagan religious background, they do not know how to live in a way that is obedient and pleasing to God.

Searching Out Truth

Through Jethro, God gave Moses three general areas for teaching in order to help the people live in faithful covenant relationship with a holy God.

1. Teach People The Statutes

And Laws Of God (Ex 18:20)

Moses had already been using God's statutes and laws to issue just decisions (Ex 18:16). However, Moses was only solving individual disputes and problems. He had not gathered the people together to instruct them *all* in God's ways.

It is God's desire that His people know Him. They must also know the laws and principles He has given them through His Word (Ps 119). Thus, people need to be taught what is in God's Word *and* how to study God's Word for themselves.

In Acts 17:11, the people of Berea, upon hearing the Gospel, "*searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*" As a result, "*many of them believed...*" (v.12). The Bereans knew how to search out truth and confirm it **in the Word of God**. This was a protection to them from being led astray by false teaching. When a church leader teaches his flock the Word of God accurately, this will help protect them from deception, false religion and the lies of the devil.

Bible Teaching:

Top Priority For Every Church Leader

A diligent church leader will teach his flock the statutes, laws and doctrines found in the Word of God. The committed leader will:

- study God's Word to the best of his ability (2Tim 2:15);
- spend time praying and meditating on God's Word, allowing God to give him insight and understanding;
- use any reliable research tools he has available to help him study (such as ACTS Magazine);
- do all that he can to see that his flock is instructed with the wisdom and truth of God's Word (1Tim 4:13,16).

God puts a high value on the study and teaching of His eternal and unchanging Word. God has even appointed one of the five major ministry-equipping gifts as "*teacher*" (Eph 4:11). God has instructed that the wise elders and leaders "*who rule well be counted worthy of **double honor**, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine*" (1Tim 5:17). This is why God puts a stricter judgment on those who teach the Word of God (Jas 3:1).

Teaching the Word of God to his flock is a leader's top priority. Paul taught Timothy to "*give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine*" and to "*meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them*" (1Tim 4:13,15; see also 2 Timothy 2:15).

2. Teach People The Way To Walk (Ex 18:20)

People must do more than just memorize statutes and laws. They must also learn how to **apply the Scriptures** to their lives by living in obedience to the God Who gave them.

God gives us His Word to teach us Who He is and what is required to walk uprightly before Him. We must learn how to walk with God daily, loving Him even as He loves us (Deut 6:5; 7:6-9). God's desire – from the time of His original creation, through His covenant with Abraham, through the sending of His Son for us, and even now – is

to have a **loving, personal relationship with all of humanity** (Gen 1:26-28; 12:1-3; John 3:16; 1Tim 2:4).

A Life Pleasing To God

Moses was leading a pagan group of ex-slaves who knew nothing about God. They did not understand what it meant to love God, obey Him or serve Him and others with their lives. They needed to be shown how to apply and walk in God's laws in daily practical life. This type of discipling accomplishes several important things:

- As people live in ways that please God, their obedience helps them draw closer to God. God draws near to them in return, and is pleased by their actions (see James 4:8).
- As people learn to live by the principles of God's Word, they are kept from sin and disobedience. They no longer participate in behavior that is destructive to them or to others. Their lives become better and they grow wiser. They do not need to go to a leader for every little dispute or question that arises.
- As people begin to be *doers* of the Word and not just *hearers* (Jas 1:22), they live more fruitful lives. They begin to align themselves with God's purpose for them and His Church. They learn to evangelize, minister and serve others through acts of mercy and kindness.

How To Teach God's Word

There are two parts to properly teaching God's Word.

- The first is to teach exactly what is in the Word of God.
- The second is to help people understand how the Word of God is to be applied in their daily lives.

Let us now look at an example of how this can be done.

A Sample Bible Teaching

Matthew 5:48 says, "*Therefore you shall be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*" At first glance, this verse spoken by Jesus seems impossible to fulfill, and thus can seem condemning.

God knows that we, as human beings, are **not capable of sinless perfection** in this life. But what then is meant by the word "*perfect*" in this verse of Scripture?

The original Greek word translated as "perfect" in this text is "*teleios*". This word means to be completed or **fully mature**, like a grown adult compared to a child. But it also carries meaning from its root word "*telos*", which means an end, purpose, aim or **goal**.

The Greek ideal for perfection also involved **function**, or how something could be useful. It is like a tool that fits *perfectly* into our hand and is *perfectly* useful to fulfill what it was designed to do.

So we can understand Matthew 5:48 to mean that we are to press toward the goal of being fully mature in Christ and useful in God's hands to fulfill the purpose for which He created us.

Our Father in heaven is fully complete. We see from other Scripture references that God is committed to assisting us to be more complete – more Christlike – and to help us fulfill our purpose in Him (Heb 12:3-11; Phil 1:6; 2Cor 3:18; Rom 8:27-30).

For more insight into Matthew 5:48, we can look at the surrounding verses in Matthew 5 as well. Jesus reminds us to be fully mature and function in our purpose in regard to loving others, even those who are cruel or spiteful or who treat us badly (Matt 5:38-48).

Our Father in heaven is always completely loving. He is fully mature – *perfect* – in love. Our heavenly Father always chooses our highest good, even when we reject Him or treat Him badly. “*God is love*” (1John 4:8) and “*God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*” (Rom 5:8).

There are many more verses in the Bible that confirm God’s faithful and unchanging lovingkindness toward us.

Jesus commands us to “*be perfect*” in loving our enemies, just as God is perfect in loving His enemies. In Matthew 5, Jesus even gives real-life situations of how this truth can be applied in our daily lives:

- Do not take vengeance or strike back at those who abuse you (vs.38,39). This can be confirmed in Romans 12:19, where it is clear that judgment is God’s responsibility.
- Go beyond what people might demand of you and do even more for them (vs.40-42). God promises that as we give, He will give back to us even more (Luke 6:38).
- We are to love *all* people, even our enemies. We do this by praying for them, forgiving them, and blessing them even when they are unkind (vs.43-47). This radical, God-inspired kind of love will let the whole world know that we are true followers of Christ (John 13:35).

A Diligent Worker

Here we have taken a difficult passage of Scripture and more clearly opened its true meaning. We also looked at the surrounding verses, and confirmed the truth with additional verses from the Bible. Yes, it took time to study the Scriptures, research and prepare. It takes a diligent worker to rightly teach God’s truth (2Tim 2:15).

This also demonstrates how you can both teach the truths of the Word of God, and help people know what is expected of them in response. They can then be more than just hearers of God’s Word, but doers also (Jas 1:22-25).

The Word of God is “*living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Heb 4:12). The Word of God brings conviction of sin. Knowing the Word of God and understanding how to apply it helps one to live in obedience to God. It also gives one a usable knowledge of the truth (1Tim 2:4).

3. Teach People The Work To Do (Ex 18:20)

Most of the people who left Egypt with Moses were Jewish by race. However, they were not a unified nation or body of people. They were more like the Jews of Jesus’ day, “*weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd*” (Matt 9:36).

It was from this desperate, selfish, sinful group that God wanted to build a *covenant people*. They were to become a special people who would walk with God as a nation, and the instrument through which He would bring the Messiah.

These people were former slaves. Most did not know how to work without a harsh taskmaster commanding their every move. Yet there was much work to be done if more than two million people were to get from Egypt to their Promised Land! Everyone would need to contribute their talents and strength. Many would have to learn new skills and develop abilities that they did not know they had.

God, through Jethro, told Moses how to organize the people for work so that they could help bear the burden of getting to the Promised Land. This is a powerful foreshadowing for the New Testament Christ-follower involved in present-day Church life! Let us now look more closely at this.

Nurturing New Believers

Just like the Israelites coming out of slavery, so were we when we first came to Christ. We were “*slaves of sin*” (Rom 6:17), living selfishly and in disobedience. Our whole outlook on life was worldly and selfish (Eph 2:1-3).

As church leaders, we should not be surprised or discouraged by the spiritual immaturity of “newborn babes” in Christ. They can be selfish, even acting foolishly at times. But it is our privilege and responsibility to give them the “*pure milk of the Word*” (1Pet 2:2). This “pure milk” is **the basic Bible truth needed for healthy spiritual growth and maturity**.

Some examples of basic, “pure milk” topics to teach new believers include:

- Knowing God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit
- Baptisms – water and Holy Spirit
- Reading, understanding and obeying the Bible
- Praying every day and hearing God
- Repentance and forgiveness (saying “no” to sin in their life)
- Salvation by faith, not works
- Fellowship with other Christ-followers
- Generosity
- Worship
- Service

Every Believer’s Gifts

Teaching the new “babes” is important. But it is also important to give them tasks to do as part of the Body of Christ. **Every person** has an important role to fill if the Body is to grow and function in health (Eph 4:16). These roles can start with small things, and increase as the new believers mature and prove to be faithful in those small things (Luke 19:17).

The Apostle Paul makes it clear that the “*work of ministry*” (Eph 4:12) is to be done by ALL those who are part of the Church, not just a chosen few. Every Christ-follower has God-given gifts (Rom 12:4-8; 1Cor 12). God desires that these gifts be used for the edification (building up) of His Church (1Cor 14:12).

A very important role of the church leader, pastor or elder is **to help every believer identify their gifts and find a place to use their gifts in ministry**. Not all believers are called to full-time ministry assignments. However, all disciples of Christ are

meant to be **ministering** people. They can and should serve in some type of ministry to the Body of Christ and to the society around them.

Equipping People For Work

Moses brought a group of lifelong slaves into sudden freedom. They were not accustomed to taking initiative, or working beyond the minimum requirements. Many had never had an opportunity to develop a skill or trade.

In the wilderness, God provided them daily food from heaven (Exodus 16). But this would not always be the case. God knew that in the future, these slaves would have to fight in battles, raise their own food and develop skills to survive on their own.

God also understands human nature, and the importance of having work to do (Prov 10:16; 22:19; 27:23; Eccl 9:10a). Work is part of God's plan for mankind; this has been true from the beginning (Gen 2:15,20). So God commanded Moses to give the people work they must do in order to eventually live and prosper in the Promised Land.

The Apostle Paul encountered a similar problem with the church at Thessalonica. People were getting saved and delivered from bondage to sin. But they were so excited about their new-found freedom that they quit working. They began to just sit around and wait for Christ's Second Coming! They were worried that if they weren't watching, they might miss Jesus when He came again. But Paul reassured them that there would be no way to miss Christ's return to earth (1Thess 4:16-5:6; 2Thess 2:1-5).

Paul also reproved them, pointing out that each person should be working and living life in an orderly manner (2Thess 3:6-12; see also 1 Thessalonians 4:11). Otherwise, in their idleness they could become disorderly and busybodies. Paul cites his own life and conduct, and the life and conduct of his leadership team, as an example of working to support oneself and taking care of responsibilities.

There are times and places where good jobs are hard to find. But productive work of some kind can usually be found everywhere. Labor is always profitable (Prov 14:23). Church leaders must encourage people to be productive in their lives. The fruit of their labors, no matter how small, will help provide for their needs. They will also be blessed by God as they give a tenth (a tithe) to the Church (Mal 3:8-11), and have extra resource for other good works (Eph 4:28).

A Special Word to Pastors, Evangelists, Apostles, and other church leaders:

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul makes it clear that those who labor spiritually have the God-given liberty to receive financial support while they labor in ministry (1Cor 9:1-11,14; see also Romans 15:27).

However, Paul is quick to also say this: *"Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ ... But I have used none of these things [the right to receive material support from those to whom Paul preached and ministered]"* (1Cor 9:12,15).

Paul worked as a tentmaker **to support himself so that he would not be a burden to the churches** (Acts 18:3; 20:33-35; 2Thess 3:8,9). He did not receive support from the people of a local church. Paul gives us three reasons why he labored with his own hands to support himself in ministry:

- So the Gospel would not be hindered in any way (1Cor 9:12).

- Paul worked for an eternal reward, not an earthly one. Paul was exceedingly careful to not abuse or misuse his “*authority in the Gospel*” for selfish reasons (1Cor 9:18).
- By supporting himself, Paul was free from men’s judgments and opinions; this made him a more effective servant to all, that he might win more to Christ (1Cor 9:19-22).

What is the correct balance between receiving support for ministry and paying for your own needs through another job?

In some cases, the church leader does not have a choice in the matter, as he must labor to support himself. Or the responsibilities of the church may not require his full-time attention; he can then give his extra time to work at a job so as not to burden the church with his support. This is a way, as with Paul, to show love and a commitment to serve others. This is also a powerful testimony to a community that you are there to give and serve, not to take from them.

In other cases, a church is large enough to support the pastor with finances. But is it wrong or less “spiritual” to receive wages from a church? No, it is not. **It is acceptable to receive a wage as a fulltime pastor or church leader.**

Each church leader *must often examine his own heart* to insure that it is set on the right priorities (Col 3:1-7). For instance, would you continue to serve as the elder or pastor if you were receiving no financial support from the church at all? Or do you have extra time to work at another job, so as not to burden the church with your full support?

Paul strongly declared and applied self-discipline in order to obtain the “*imperishable crown*” of God’s approval rather than be disqualified (1Cor 9:24-27).

In Peter’s first letter to the churches, he, too, addressed a leader’s attitude in church service:

*“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, **not for dishonest gain** but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away”* (1Pet 5:1-4).

The role of every church leader is to **serve** the flock God has given him. The flock is not there to serve the leader. The people you lead are NOT there to meet your needs or help you “succeed” in ministry. They are there so that you may love them, serve them, shepherd them in God’s Word and ways – and see **them** matured and trained to do the work of ministry (Eph 4:12).

The Leader’s Attitude Toward Wealth

Some in the Church today use ministry for material gain. Jesus revealed that such “shepherds” are not committed to the well-being of the flock (John 10:12,13).

Others think that wealth is a sign of God’s blessing and approval on their ministry. This is not true (Luke 12:15; Jas 2:5) – and leads us to put our affections on material, earthly things rather than on incorruptible spiritual things (Matt 6:19,20; 1Pet 1:4).

If wealth were a sign of God’s approval and blessing, then both Jesus and Paul would

have to be seen as horrible failures! So too would most of the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament.

However, poverty is not a sign of spirituality either. **Neither abundance nor lack of it is necessarily a sign of our obedience to God, our spiritual state or God's approval of us.**

Rather, God has called us to obey His Word and to **trust in Him** at all times and for all of our needs. There are times when God may supply much more than we need; thus we will have an abundance to give away to His Kingdom work. At other times, it may seem like we barely have enough; this is our opportunity to grow in faith and trust in God to supply our needs (Phil 4:19).

The Holy Spirit, through Paul, teaches us just the right balance: *"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased [live humbly], and I know how to abound [live in prosperity]. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need"* (Phil 4:11,12).

How could Paul live in such a peaceful and contented state? He tells us in the next verse: *"I can do all things **through Christ** who strengthens me"* (v.13).

Paul understood that to put our trust in material things or work solely for earthly gains is foolishness (see 1 John 2:15-17; see also 1 Timothy 6:3-10; Hebrews 13:5).

Christ will help us and give us what we need to accomplish His purposes, with or without wealth! So, then, whether in wealth or in poverty, our trust is to be in God and His provision for us – **looking to Him to provide ALL that we need** for life and godliness (2Pet 1:3).

C. Train Others To Help Lead (Ex 18:21)

God spoke much wise counsel to Moses through his father-in-law, Jethro. One very important instruction is found in Exodus 18:21. In this verse, Moses was urged to **build a team of leaders to help him lead** the people. These leaders were to help bear the burden of the ministry **with** Moses (18:22).

Moses was a wise and gifted counselor, familiar with the laws of God. Before receiving Jethro's counsel, Moses dispensed justice to the people and solved their disputes, as was the custom for rulers in his day. Moses was well intended. But he could never meet the demands of leading millions of people in such a manner.

As leaders, we may also be well intended in our ministry efforts. However, we may find ourselves exhausted or in poor health; or perhaps our spouse or family are not receiving the attention they need. It is possible to "overdo our well-doing".

As leaders we should be willing to work hard and not be lazy. However, we must also not be over-zealous with that which is beyond our strength, ability or calling.

Independent leaders – those who try to do the work of ministry alone – are more susceptible to deception, pride, error or exhaustion. They have not learned to properly partner with others. They also have a difficult time keeping their ministry priorities in order. They may be tempted to quit ministry or become angry at God for calling them. Their marriage or family may suffer the results of neglect. Leadership is not easy; even Moses felt overwhelmed at times with the many responsibilities of leadership (read Numbers 11:14,15).

One safeguard for not becoming an independent leader is to raise up godly leadership

who will serve alongside you. Every church leader needs help; and every believer needs the opportunity to use their gifts and serve the Church of Jesus Christ.

By building leaders to serve with him, a church leader can also fulfill one of his primary responsibilities: **to train and equip others to be ministers**. In his second letter to young Timothy, Paul instructs Timothy: *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”* (2Tim 2:2).

Aligning Our Priorities

The importance of team leadership and keeping right priorities in ministry is seen in the first century New Testament Church.

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

“Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ ... Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (read Acts 6:1-7).

There are several key points to consider in this passage:

1. The Priorities Of The Apostles

The apostles had walked with Jesus for more than three years and, since His death and resurrection, had been working very hard. They were teaching and preaching, serving tables, feeding the hungry, helping the needy, etc. But now the number of disciples was multiplying rapidly, too quickly for the apostles to adequately serve them all. When problems began to arise, this led the apostles to evaluate their priorities.

The apostles were not trying to avoid work. But they realized they needed to give most of their time to their primary calling:

- **prayer;**
- **the teaching of God’s Word; and**
- **leading the people.**

These were the same primary roles Moses was to fill (Ex 18:19,20).

2. Leadership Involves Godly Partnership

The Holy Spirit once again affirmed the biblical pattern, as He did with Moses. The apostles were to involve other people in the day-to-day leadership responsibilities.

It is vital to understand that those who prayed and taught the Scriptures (the apostles) were no more important or spiritual than those who were to *“serve tables”* (Acts 6:2). The qualifications for those who would assist the apostles through service were: *“men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”* (v.3). They even had hands laid upon them in prayer before they began their service (v.6) – in the same way as those who were going out to teach had hands laid on them (Acts 13:3).

Two things come to our attention:

- These seven mature men did not think it was “beneath them” to serve tables. They recognized that **ministry** to others always involves **serving** others.
- The apostles appointed people to help when it became clear that the apostles could no longer keep up with all of their growing responsibilities.

3. Partnership Multiplies Ministry

The **result** of dividing the work among other appointed leaders was: “**Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly...**” (v.7).

Prior to this Spirit-led move of **multiplying leaders**, the Word of God was spreading – but not as quickly as it could have. Once the primary leaders devoted themselves to prayer, teaching and leading, many more people were reached and saved. As other leaders helped serve the people, many more needs were being met.

Both areas of ministry needed proper attention: the teaching of the Word **and** the practical caring for people’s needs (Mark 16:15; Jas 1:27). Neither area was more or less important than the other. When either area was neglected, the ministry was hindered.

4. Multiplied Fruitfulness

The counsel of God to Moses, given through Jethro, was **not given so that Moses would have less work to do**. It was to help Moses work more wisely – to have right priorities about his time and ministry efforts. Moses needed to give proper attention to hearing from God and communicating God’s Word to His people, just as did the apostles. (We will study this later in this article.)

Sharing the leadership responsibilities also produces other benefits:

- It allows many other people to use and develop their gifts while giving them an opportunity to serve.
- More people will learn about leadership and be better prepared for additional ministry roles by practically serving others.
- People tend to take more responsibility for the ministry outreach – and support it – if they are personally involved.
- Those who are younger, or less mature spiritually, will have a goal to grow up into.
- Multiplying leadership allows God to multiply fruitfulness, such as: souls saved; the Church grown and matured; new churches planted; good works as a witness to society; a testimony to the glory of God and the validity of salvation through Jesus Christ and His power to transform human lives.

Life Begets Life

The pattern for effective leadership throughout the Scriptures is to “spiritually reproduce” **more leadership**. Leaders must pass on to others what God has taught them. Among their other responsibilities, leaders must always invest time, prayer, gifts and resources into raising up another generation of faithful leaders.

Raising up another generation of leaders includes winning new converts to Christ, discipling people, and leading and teaching by both word and example. However, **a good leader should also make specific effort** to invest time in those who show

leadership potential.

RAISING UP CHURCH LEADERS

Partnership in leading involves the biblical principle of sowing and reaping (2Cor 9:6). When we sow bountifully of our time into training other leaders, we will reap bountifully in the fruits of ministry (which are more people saved, churches planted, disciples matured, needs met, etc.).

Paul explained this to young Timothy: “*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” (2Tim 2:2).

Paul’s principle of training others will lead to the Gospel spreading much more quickly.

Paul addressed four groups of people. First, there was Paul himself. Second, there was Timothy, Paul’s disciple. Third, there were the “*faithful men*”. Fourth, there were the “*others*” who would be taught by the faithful men. Paul’s investment of time and teaching into just one life, Timothy, would have a far-reaching impact on many, many people!

Great multiplication can happen if a church leader would take even ONE faithful person and spend ONE year training that person for ministry. In the second year, each one would train another person for ministry; and so on. Some call this the “each one, teach one” principle. At the end of 20 years, 1,048,576 people would be trained!

There are also other methods for training leaders. Jesus took twelve men and spent more than three years teaching them and working with them. They watched Him pray, minister and teach almost daily. He taught them principles, then sent them out to put those principles into practice. If they failed, He would instruct them (read Luke 10). Those twelve disciples were well trained. Then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they changed their world and the entire course of history!

Other leaders have had great success in setting up Bible training institutes, where many students at one time can learn from several instructors. In order to be effective, this method must use the Bible as its main study book. It must also include “hands on” training, which allows students to actually *do* the work of ministry as they are learning about it.

No matter the method, it is clear that ***the biblical pattern for effective, lasting ministry must include the training of new leadership.***

What Do I Have To Say?

You may feel that you have nothing significant to teach other potential leaders. In one way, this is true of *every* leader. Men have nothing of eternal value in their own wisdom to teach to others. However, God still wants to use us to teach others from His deep wells of wisdom.

God will give you insight and understanding as you seek Him and study His Word. He will help you to know what you should teach to others. God will pour His wisdom and life into you, for you to then pour into others.

God will also use your understanding of Him, your ministry experience, your education, your knowledge of the Bible – all of this will help you to train those whom God gives you. You may have access to good training materials, such as ACTS

Magazine or *The Shepherd's Staff*.

God may bring to you people who are already skilled or knowledgeable in certain areas. They may not need as much training. Perhaps you are to simply recognize their gifts and what they can offer to serve God's purposes, and then encourage and release them.

Where Do I Begin?

God wants to use every church leader to train even more leaders. But how is this accomplished?

Start by asking the Lord to give you a "Timothy". It may be a friend, a member of your church, or even part of your own family. Be careful to not look just on the outward appearance or at the obvious giftings. Ask God to help you see your "Timothy" as He sees him. Remember, *"For the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"* (1Sam 16:7).

Your "Timothy" may be someone with a very broken past who needs lots of help from God. That is not a problem for God. The Bible teaches us that those who are forgiven of much also love much (Luke 7:27). A person with **a heart that is loyal to God**, who loves Him and wants to serve Him, is a better choice than someone with merely an acceptable outward appearance.

Jesus chose His leadership team by **first praying**: *"Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles"* (Luke 6:12-14).

After an extended time of prayer, Jesus chose twelve out of those closest to him to become His apostles. During His remaining time on this earth, Jesus trained, disciplined, taught and sent out in ministry these twelve people. They were not "natural born leaders". They were just ordinary men from many different walks of life, including fishermen and tax collectors. Some were well-educated, others were not. But they all had in common a deep desire to serve the Lord and make His truth and salvation known to all men.

So pray for God to provide those whom He would have you train; and pray that God would help you to see them as He sees them.

Qualifying For Leadership

God can use anyone He chooses to perform his will, even a donkey (Num 22:20-35). However, God can be most effective through people who obey Him and will do things His way. Thus, the Bible gives us keys to help us recognize good potential leaders. These keys include the characteristics that should be a **growing part** of the life of every potential church leader.

Moses needed men who were ready to take on leadership responsibilities immediately. Thus, the standard of requirements was higher than it might be for those still training for leadership.

It was likely that Moses did not personally know most of the people he led. So he left the selection of the leaders to those who knew them best: the people with whom they lived in community (Deut 1:13). This example was also followed by the apostles (Acts 6:3).

There are additional qualifications for elders and leaders listed in the New Testament (1Tim 3:1-13; 4:12-16; 2Tim 2:15-26; Titus 1:5-9; 2:7,8,11-13; 1Pet 5:1-4). **Take time to read and study these verses of Scripture.** It is clear that the biblical requirements for the character of a church leader are indeed challenging!

Many young potential leaders need time to mature and grow in their character before they can meet these qualifications. Learning what God expects of them as leaders should be part of their training.

The biblical character traits of godly leadership should be:

- taught and modeled to young potential leaders; and
- lived as a daily lifestyle by more mature leaders.

It is important to remember that Christlike character can take years to develop. The following leadership qualifications are goals to work toward. There will be mistakes and failures along the way, just as with Jesus' disciples (Matt 14:22-33; 16:21-23; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:49-51). The important thing to look for is a heart that desires to serve the Lord and will quickly repent for failure, pressing on to be all that God desires.

5. Necessary Character

Traits For Church Leaders

Let us now examine the instructions God gave Moses about the type of person to choose for church leadership responsibility: *“Moreover you shall select from all the people **able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness**”* (Ex 18:21).

a. “Able men” (Ex 18:21)

The biblical meaning for able includes: strong, virtuous, moral strength, good sense, bold, not man-pleasers, truthful, discerning, unselfish, wise, of the best character. These are some of the characteristics that good leaders should already have; they should also be the goals for new leaders in training.

The list above is worth taking time to study thoroughly. As a leader, can these things be said of you? Are you striving to live as an example of truth, wisdom and virtue? Are the people you are training for leadership learning to live out these important character issues as well?

In addition to the above-mentioned traits, there are also three additional things to recognize in those who are “*able men*” with godly leadership potential:

1) Those Who Serve Others With A Willing Heart

Look for people who will do whatever needs to be done with a good attitude. They are humble and willing to do lowly tasks (John 13:3-17). They will also boldly step into a situation when leadership is needed (2Tim 1:7). Able leaders are not interested in being served or “being in charge”; they want to serve others and see a job accomplished. A good leader thinks of the needs of others before his own needs. This is godly leadership in action – **humble service** (read Matthew 20:25-28.)

2) Those Whom Others Will Follow

This may seem obvious, but potential leaders should be the kind of person that people will follow. They should be able to inspire and motivate others, and get along well with other people. But they must be taught to lead people in the right direction –

toward the Lord and His ways.

3) **Those Who Are Willing To Work Hard**

Serving others in leadership requires much hard work. A potential leader must be willing to both labor with his hands, and be just as diligent in studying the Bible. They must be faithful in the work of prayer, and also willing to help meet practical needs of their flock. Look for those who work willingly with their hands, but who also pursue the things of God with equal diligence.

b. **“Such as fear God” (Ex 18:21)**

The second qualification Moses was to look for in leaders was a healthy fear of God. But what does it mean to “fear God”?

Those who fear God fully believe that there is a God over them. They know that every action is seen by God, and that they are accountable to Him. They understand that God is righteous and just, and they will stand before Him in judgment one day (Gen 18:25; 1Sam 2:10; 1Pet 4:5; Rev 20:11-15).

Godly leaders who fear God are conscientious, and would not willfully sin, even in secret. They seek to know and understand the Word of God, and obey it. They might have an occasional failure or succumb to temptation, as all people will. However, their fear of God will quickly bring them to repentance and confession, and into accountability with others.

Those who fear God will revere Him, honor Him and worship Him in spirit and in truth. They act and speak in ways that reflect their deep reverence for, and awe of, the holy and supreme God of all creation.

There are three important characteristics to look for when seeking a leader who “fears God”:

1) **A Heart Of Humility**

In Micah 6:8, the Bible instructs: *“And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”*

Those who fear the Lord desire to obey Him. They will do what is just and be merciful to others. They will also walk humbly with God.

Humility can be defined as: modesty; lowliness; having an unselfish concern for the needs of others. Humility is the opposite of arrogance, pride or selfishness. A humble person is not looking for what he can gain, but for what he can give. A humble person does not use people for his own gain, but desires to serve others for Jesus’ sake.

Humility is the key to maintaining love and unity in the Body of Christ (Eph 4:1-3). Those who are truly humble can get along with other people, finding common ground for fellowship and unity.

Humility is not self-hatred or pretending to be meek; it is not “false martyrdom” or acting “spiritual”. True humility is a healthy acknowledgement that **God alone** has all wisdom, power, glory and honor. Humility expresses itself in obedience to God, trusting Him for everything that is needed in life and ministry.

Humility is seen in a willingness to be a servant and take the lowly place (Luke 14:7-11). Those who are truly humble have a genuine love for others, and a servant’s heart toward them. They do not judge others or consider themselves superior. They are not harsh or critical; they are not proud or haughty.

Our measure of true humility is Christ Himself. *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross”* (Phil 2:3-8).

The “Leader-Laborer”

Christlike humility is seen in those who are willing to serve, with faithfulness and diligence, in any task assigned to them. They will do a small task as carefully as they would do a larger task.

In God’s Kingdom, He often starts us with small responsibilities to help strengthen our character and teach us faithfulness. As we are diligent and faithful in little, God then releases more to us (Matt 25:21).

Jesus said, *“The harvest truly is great, but the **laborers** are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out **laborers** into His harvest”* (Luke 10:2,3). The Lord is looking for those who will **labor** in His harvest. He needs “leader-laborers”, people who are willing to do more than the minimum.

The Lord desires those who will: wait and pray when others are unwilling (Ex 33:11; Matt 26:40,41); diligently study God’s Word as a worker (2Tim 2:15); be just as diligent in teaching a Sunday school lesson to children as they would to a large crowd (Luke 19:17); put their full trust in God, while being boldly obedient to the Holy Spirit’s promptings (Rom 8:14; 2Tim 1:7).

A fruitful leader-laborer will pick up trash or set up chairs with as much praise and worship to His Lord as if miracles were being performed through his hands. This is possible because a godly leader-laborer knows that **ALL** that he/she does is for the glory of God and therefore worthy of his/her best efforts (Col 3:17,23).

2) A Teachable Attitude

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov 9:10); *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction”* (Prov 1:7).

The mark of true spiritual maturity is a growing recognition of how little you know and how much you still need the Lord. Good disciples are those who are willing to learn, and who **continue learning throughout their lives**. They recognize the unsearchable riches of God and His ways (Rom 11:33-35). They continually devote themselves to knowing more of God (Phil 3:7-14).

A teachable person is willing to be taught and shaped by God’s hand, regardless of their age or experience. God does not require that leaders be brilliant; but they do need to be willing to learn and obey whatever God instructs.

When considering a potential leader, watch how they respond to instruction and loving correction. Do they recognize their need to learn? Are they humble enough to admit their mistakes? Do they receive biblical instruction and act upon it?

As leaders who disciple others, we must exercise caution about what we are teaching (Jas 3:1). We must not take advantage of those for whom we are stewards (1Pet

5:2,3). The best teacher leads his students by loving, patient example – striving to live out each day the principles that he is teaching!

3) **High Moral Character**

Paul emphasized the importance of moral purity and integrity when writing his first letter to Timothy. “*Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (1Tim 4:12). This verse tells us that we should strive for – and teach young disciples about – pure living in speech, actions, relationships, attitudes, our walk with Christ and our heart toward God and others.

The pure example we set as a leaders will give much glory to God, and help others know how to walk as Christ-followers.

In this same letter, Paul also cites the qualifications for elders and deacons in the church (read 1 Timothy 3:1-13).

It is clear that biblical leadership in the Body of Christ **requires** high moral character. None of us will be perfect or sinless in this life (Rom 3:23). However, we – especially those in leadership – are called to **pursue** righteousness (Matt 5:20; 1Tim 6:11; 2Tim 2:22). We must live a life of purity **to the best of our ability**. We are to be examples to the flock of the character of Christ.

As leaders, if we fail or stumble, we need to be **quick to repent and confess** our failure to another trusted leader. We need to be humble enough to admit our weakness, ask for prayer, receive forgiveness and be restored.

Leaders must strive for integrity in even the smallest things that no one else may see. God sees us at all times. God is waiting to release more of His purpose to us as we are faithful and upright with what He has put in our hands to do.

The sons of Eli the High Priest did much evil and used their leadership position for selfish gain. God brought judgment upon them, and upon Eli’s entire house (read 1 Samuel 2-4). Ananias and Sapphira acted hypocritically and lied to God, and God’s judgment fell upon them (Acts 5:1-11).

From these examples of failed leadership, we learn that Satan will try to tempt leaders to compromise their morals and integrity. We must allow the devil no place (Eph 4:27). We **must** also:

- live open and accountable lives before others (Eph 5:21);
- renew our minds in the Word of God daily;
- continually welcome the Holy Spirit’s conviction and power into our lives (Rom 12:1,2; 2Cor 10:4,5; Eph 5:17-20);
- fear God, to whom we will one day give an account (Heb 4:13); and
- teach young leaders the importance of purity and integrity before God, living as an upright example to them.

c. **“men of truth” (Ex 18:21)**

The word truth in this verse means, “true, faithful, trustworthy”. This speaks of men who are honest and true in their lives, who speak the truth, and who would judge matters according to the truth.

To know what is true, we need a source for truth. Jesus said, “*I am the Way, the*

Truth, and the Life...” (John 14:6). When we know **The** Truth – Jesus Christ – we will better know the truth. The more we come to know Jesus – Who is **The** Truth – the better we will understand what is right and true.

We have also been given the Word of God, the Bible, to teach us what is true and right (John 8:31,32). Thus, **the most important ministry training we can give to potential leaders is to teach them what is in the Bible.**

There are many, many books in our world, but only ONE contains the eternal words of God that are living and powerful – the Bible! The Holy Scriptures **must** be our first source for discipling people and training new leadership who will be people of truth. Any other resources we use for training in ministry must also be based upon the truths of Scripture.

1) A Living Book!

The Bible is not a book of “religious information”. It is the **living** Word of God (John 6:63; Heb 4:12). It is able to bring conviction, discern our thoughts and expose the intent of our heart. It teaches us Who God is, and what our place is in His eternal purposes.

Paul taught us that “*knowledge puffs up* [makes arrogant] *but love edifies* [builds up]” (1Cor 8:1). Yes, we need to know the Scriptures; but we must do more than just know in our minds what the Bible says. We must also let the Word of God penetrate our hearts and change who we are and how we live.

Jesus had the worst problems with those who had the greatest **knowledge** of the Scriptures – the Pharisees and Sadducees. What was the problem?

Jesus said of them: “*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life*” (John 5:39,40). It was not enough to just know the Scriptures. The Scriptures are intended to reveal God the Father and God the Son. The Pharisees knew **about** God; but they did not **know** God! And they refused to accept God the Son and come to know Him.

If the Pharisees had allowed the Word of God to lead them to God – to an intimate, personal relationship with Him – then they surely would have embraced Jesus, God’s beloved Son (John 8:19).

2) Matters Of The Heart

The problem with the Pharisees was not their knowledge of the Scriptures. Their failure was in allowing that knowledge to only be “head knowledge”, and not touch them deep in their hearts. Their knowledge of the Scriptures touched only their outer man, but did not transform their inner person (Matt 23:27,28; Rom 12:1,2). They did not pursue knowing God, and receiving a heart revelation of Him (see also 2 Timothy 3:1-9).

Jesus is not against education or knowledge. Luke was a highly-educated physician, as were some of the other disciples. The Apostle Paul was an extremely learned man. Yet Jesus also chose some disciples who were men of little education.

What they all had in common, however, was **surrender**. They unreservedly surrendered their talents, abilities, gifts, backgrounds, education – ALL of who they were – to the King of kings. Thus, He empowered them with His Spirit and used them for the glory of God. You can read of Paul’s personal declaration of this heart attitude

in Philippians 3:3-16.

These men held nothing back, but gave everything to Jesus for His use. What we can learn from them is that God wants **our hearts** to be fully surrendered to Him. *“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose **heart** is loyal to Him”* (2Chr 16:9).

Once God has our hearts, He can shape us and use us and show Himself strong through us. When we rely upon and trust in the Lord God Almighty, then the resource and awesome power of heaven and our resurrected Lord will do the impossible (Matt 19:26). He will give us much fruitfulness that remains (John 15:16).

The prophet Daniel revealed, *“But the people who **know their God** shall be strong, and carry out great exploits”* (Dan 11:32b). When we know God, He adds something to our lives that we cannot get from any other source: *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were **uneducated and untrained men**, they marveled. And they realized that **they had been with Jesus**”* (Acts 4:13).

It was not important how much education or knowledge the apostles had or did not have. What made the difference was that they had been with Jesus, they knew God, they were empowered by the Holy Spirit, they were fully submitted to Christ’s Lordship – and they turned the world upside down (Acts 17:1-6).

Thus, when we are teaching and discipling the “Timothys” that God gives us, we must be careful to not just give them facts about God and His Word. We must instill God’s Word in a way that directs, urges and encourages them to a deeper hunger and relationship with the God Who formed them and Who desires to know them!

d. “*hating covetousness*” (Ex 18:21)

Among the qualifications for leadership that Jethro gave to Moses, “hating covetousness” is critical for church leaders and pastors to understand. Covetousness can destroy ministries, families, even churches. It can cause otherwise godly people to become imbalanced or even deceived, leading many astray with them.

Covetousness is a broad arena of human failure that is dealt with extensively in Scripture. God hates covetousness and has pronounced severe judgment upon it and those consumed by it (1Tim 6:3-10; 1Peter 2).

God is **not** opposed to wealth or physical possessions. But He is strongly opposed to the desire for gain becoming our priority. God has given us many blessings in this life to enjoy (1Tim 6:17). However, God is displeased when His provision and blessings become more important to us than Him or His work.

1) Defining Covetousness

The sin of covetousness involves **much more** than just an unrighteous desire for material wealth. We can covet any goal, object or position.

In Scripture, the root form of covet is “to desire or to take pleasure in”. Desire is not wrong in itself. And it is not wrong to receive pleasure from the good things that God provides.

But the sin of covetousness goes well beyond simple desires. In the New Testament, the words for *covet* and *covetousness* **reveal the steady progression** of a covetous attitude:

- *pleon* – “to desire more, either in quantity, quality or number”;

- *pleonekto* – “to grasp for more, to overreach”;
- *pleonexia* – “avarice or greed”;
- *pleonektes* – “a desire so greedy for gain that it will use deception, extortion, manipulation or theft in order to gain the object of its lustful desire”.

The tenth commandment in Exodus 20:17 clearly reveals that desiring the wrong things is sin. When we act upon our covetous desires, we are no longer submitted to God or the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives. Instead, we are led – even controlled – by our unrighteous desires. Eventually our covetous desires will begin to rule our behavior and entice us to sin.

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (Jas 1:14,15).

The Bible describes what can occur when covetousness is pursued – “*contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, envy*” (Gal 6:19-21). We also see the same characteristics of covetousness described when worldly human wisdom is contrasted with God’s wisdom (Jas 3:13-18). We are even warned by the Spirit of God that a heart set on selfish pursuits will ultimately become an enemy of God (Jas 4:1-4).

Church leader, be warned! The bondage of covetousness can overtake anyone. It always begins gradually, with simple desires for what others have (Ex 20:17). But those desires can quickly become enticement to sin, which eventually leads to death.

2) **Beware Of Idolatry**

Church leaders can easily fall prey to a specific type of covetous behavior. This usually manifests in self-importance, or desiring position or the praise of men. Jesus strongly rebuked this attitude in the Pharisees (Matt 6:1-6, 16,17; 23:5-12; John 5:44; 12:42,43).

When we covet or lust for a position, a title, a larger ministry or undue notice from people or other leaders, these are sinful desires. We make them the goal that is placed before our eyes, instead of looking to the Lord and His desires for us. We begin to serve our own desires instead of God’s purposes.

Anything that we lift up and serve as more important than God or what He desires for us is a form of idolatry. God commanded us to put NO false image or idol before Him (Ex 20:3,4). Otherwise, it is compromise and sin. When our eyes are full of our own goals and “idols”, how can we possibly look to God and see what He desires for us? How can we fully serve God, when we are actually serving our own desires or lusts? Can we truly please God when we are more concerned with pleasing or impressing other people?

We must be aware that covetousness is a demon-inspired form of idolatry (Col 3:5). We can – and **must** – protect our heart from wrong desires that lead to covetousness. Our desires must begin, and always remain, at Jesus’ feet. We must have a simple heart that is satisfied with worship of, and obedience to, our Lord and Master, Jesus.

We must prayerfully ask in every situation, “**Lord, have You given me this desire in my heart?** If you granted me this desire, would it add to my love for You and assist me to serve you? Or would it lead me into other desires and pursuits that would take away from Your purposes for me?”

In Psalm 37:4-5, we are given more insight: “**Delight** yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. **Commit** your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.”

To “delight in the Lord” means to find our true joy and satisfaction in our relationship with Him – in His Words, deeds and presence. If He is our delight, then the desires that form in our hearts will more truly align with His desires for us.

To “commit our ways to God” means to fully surrender all things to God and His will for us; to trust Him to fulfill His desires for us. When we do this, He will bring to pass His will for us.

God can truly grant “*the desires of your heart*” to the surrendered and devoted servant. If our hearts are set upon God and our delight is to do His will, then our hearts will more fully desire what He wants for us.

Jesus also teaches us this principle when He says: “*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you*” (John 15:7). As we abide in the Lord’s presence, and meditate daily upon His Word, His desires will begin to fill our hearts. Then we can pray and ask the Lord to fulfill those desires, and He will do it – because our hearts are in agreement with what He desires for us.

God wants our complete and undivided loyalty to Him (2Chr 16:9), to show Himself strong through His devoted servants. Our hearts are wicked, and may try to deceive us (Jer 17:9). However, we can, like David, invite the Lord to search our hearts and convict us of unrighteous motives and desires (Ps 139:23,24). We can then submit wrong desires to God in repentance.

3) **Covetousness Destroys!**

The Bible gives many warnings regarding the sin of covetousness. It is an insidious and destructive force to the men and women of God. Take time to read and study the following scriptures. Pray over them and ask the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and shine the light of God’s truth into any dark areas of covetousness that may be hidden in your heart: Exodus 20:3-6,17; Numbers 22-24; 31:8,18; Deuteronomy 8:1-20; 23:4,5; Jeremiah 6:13; 8:10; Micah 3:5-12; Matthew 6:19-34; Mark 4:19; Luke 12:15-21; John 10:10; Acts 5:1-5; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5; 1 Timothy 3:3,8; 6:3,5,9-10; Titus 1:11; James 5:1-6; 1 Peter 5:2; 2 Peter 2; 1John 2:15-17; Jude 11; and Revelation 2:14; 22:14,15.

The Bible reveals the deceitfulness of possessions or wealth. The desire for “more” can fill our hearts and smother the flame of our love and zeal for God.

God knows our needs and promises to be our Provider. But His judgment will fall upon those who use Him or the preaching of the Gospel for their own selfish gain.

4) **The Cure For Covetousness**

We can learn from the Apostle Paul how to guard our hearts against the destructive evil of covetousness: “*Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Phil 4:11-13).

Paul combated the sinful trap of covetousness with **contentment** (Phil 4:11-13). The Greek word for “contentment” means sufficient in every situation. Paul knew that he

was not sufficient in himself for his needs and ministry. He understood that his true sufficiency came only from God. *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God”* (2Cor 3:5).

In Paul’s extreme weakness, through his “thorn in the flesh”, Jesus teaches Him: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2Cor 12:9).

Paul reveals a truth to us that can liberate us to live every day, regardless of circumstances, with joy, peace, faith and hope. Paul did not focus on his needs, his lack or his weakness. He did not trust in this world’s wealth or provision to meet his needs. He did not strive for position or notice. He did not set his heart upon passing, temporary things. He did not selfishly pursue his own lusts or desires. Instead, Paul set his trust and faith on **Christ, Who is sufficient** for everything he needed!

Paul put this world’s possessions and goals into proper perspective with eternity’s call. He taught Timothy, *“Now **godliness with contentment is great gain**. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content”* (1Tim 6:6-8).

Paul’s life, mind and heart were consumed with a burning desire and passion to fully know Christ Jesus His Lord (Phil 3:10-14), and to make Christ known to every person (Col 1:25-29). Paul trusted in Christ and His sufficiency for meeting all of life’s needs and challenges. Because of this, Paul was able to boldly declare that he could *“do all things through Christ”*.

Paul knew by revelation that even when he was destitute of this world’s possession, he was still rich beyond anyone’s wildest dreams. *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich [in heaven’s glory], yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich”* (2Cor 8:9).

Those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and follow Him faithfully are rich beyond measure! They are rich in love, grace, forgiveness, freedom, peace, glory and strength. This is true prosperity, which is eternal and cannot be taken away. No earthly wealth or title can give this to us. Only through Christ are we sufficient for every moment in life.

Christ’s super-abundance of life that is poured into our lives is the source for our contentment. We must hold very loosely to earthly possessions or positions, for they cannot provide what we truly need. This critical lesson of godly contentment and avoiding covetousness is a primary lesson that must be taught to every leader-in-making.

D. Give Each Leader Specific Tasks (Ex 18:21)

Let us now look at the next instruction given to Moses by God through Jethro in Exodus 18:21: *“and place such over them [the people] to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, rulers of tens.”*

It was not enough just to choose leaders, to give them titles, or even to train them. The next vital step in raising up church leaders is releasing them to do the work of ministry.

All leaders (and potential leaders) need to begin “exercising” their abilities. **They need to be given specific tasks and assignments to fulfill.**

Learning facts about a subject is helpful. But true students will never grow in their abilities until they begin to actually **do** what they have been trained to do!

1. Pray For The Discernment Of Gifts, Abilities And Potential

Some people may want to be leaders. But they may not have the gifting, calling or ability to lead others. It would be better for those people to serve in a supporting role, with someone else who oversees and directs them in their service.

There are many different types of leaders. The Bible reveals that there is a wide variety of gifts, abilities, callings and ministries for leaders (Rom 12:3-8; 1Cor 12:12-31; Eph 4:11).

No one gift or calling is more important than any other. The Bible likens the Church – all believers in Jesus Christ – to a “Body” (1Cor 12:12-31). Each individual body part is important to the health and function of the whole body. If one body part is weak or damaged, the whole body suffers. If another body part doesn’t fulfill its function, the rest of the body is hindered.

We need one another. We need the gifts and callings of every believer to be activated, in order for the body to function properly.

That is why it is so **important** for church leaders to help people identify their gifts and callings, and to train them to do their part in the Body of Christ. As a church leader, pray for God to help you discern the abilities and gifts of those whom you serve.

Also pray and ask God to assemble and raise up a variety of gifts, callings and ministries within your church. Begin to pray with and for those believers whom God gives you to disciple and train. Pray for their gifts to be revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. Then train them and encourage them to use their gifts. Make room for them to do their part in the proper functioning of the body.

Help them to mature in their gifts and grow in their Christian character. Encourage their study of the Bible and participation in the church. When they are strong and stable believers, gather the elders and lay hands on them and confirm their gifts and calling as the Holy Spirit leads (1Tim 4:14).

2. Involve New Leaders In Ministry Assignments

Teaching and training are important to a student. But there is no greater “teacher” than **experience**! You must give your new leaders ministry assignments.

For example, if you are training leaders in how to evangelize, be sure to send them out soon to share and preach the Gospel to the unsaved. Or perhaps you are teaching your disciples how to study for and prepare a sermon. Soon after, allow them to teach a class or some other group in order to practice what they are learning. You may even want them to preach a sermon for the church.

After their ministry experiences, allow your disciples to ask you questions and talk about their successes and failures. Instruct and encourage them, and send them out again. This was a teaching method Jesus used with His disciples for more than three years. Jesus taught His disciples from the Scriptures, demonstrated what His disciples should do, then sent them out to do the same things He did. He then talked with them and gave them even more instruction (see Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:1-61; 10:1-24).

This process of **learning then doing** will enforce the lessons in your students’ hearts and minds. It will also help them realize how much they still need to learn!

Actually *doing* the work of ministry will lead disciples to their deep and profound need for the power of the Holy Spirit. They will soon realize how much they need to be anointed, empowered and led by the Spirit of God. This will also encourage their complete dependence upon God for all that He is calling them to fulfill.

3. Keep Your Training Balanced

It is important to always balance knowledge of the Scriptures with practical application. There is no question that a thorough knowledge of the Bible is critical for every believer. This is especially true for those who want to be church leaders. The Bible is important for their daily life, and a cornerstone for effective ministry. Therefore, we must teach potential leaders primarily from the Bible.

But this knowledge of Scripture and doctrine should be balanced with hands-on training and experience. The goal is to train both the **head** and the **hands**! Also encourage them to allow the Holy Spirit to deal daily with what is in their **heart** (character issues).

This balance of training the “head, hands and heart” will help a potential leader be fruitful and productive for Jesus’ sake.

4. How Much Training Is Enough?

The length of a training program does not need to be excessively long. Jesus taught, trained and modeled the truth for more than three years with His disciples. But many of them did not truly understand what Jesus was teaching them until they were filled with the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-15).

Fortunately, we already have the Holy Spirit to lead, guide and teach us as we mature in Christ. And ministry training is not completed in one season of time. Disciples of Jesus Christ and ministers should be learning, growing and being transformed **throughout their entire lives**. John exhorts us in this lifelong process of spiritual growth (1John 2:12-14).

However, it is also wise to have **a specific training period for every potential minister**. Good judgment should be used in determining the length of training. Some believers might already have a Christian background or Bible knowledge to draw upon. They may progress more quickly, and be ready for leadership responsibilities sooner. Others might need much more time to mature in character, and grow in knowledge and experience in the things of God.

Regardless of the length of training, it should be primarily Bible based. Every training program should also emphasize:

- dedication and commitment to Christ (Gal 2:20);
- purity of character, life and relationships (1Cor 9:24-27);
- faithfulness in the study of the Word and prayer (2Tim 2:15; Eph 6:18);
- a strong dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 4:20; Col 1:28,29);
- practical, “hands-on” training [immediately doing what is taught] (Luke 10:1-17).

As we raise up new church leaders, we can stand confident upon Christ’s promise, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father”* (John

14:12). His Word is true! We can, by His grace, be abundantly fruitful in ministry – and our fruit will remain (John 15:16).

E. Let The Leaders Lead! (Ex 18:22)

Jethro's instruction to Moses continues: "*And **let them** judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you*" (Ex 18:22).

Faithful church leaders must follow the scriptural pattern of training others for leadership. "*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*" (2Tim 2:2). We must teach them from the Bible, lead by example, and give them opportunities for hands-on training.

But the final step is the most important in the process: **let them lead!** We are to identify potential leaders, equip them for ministry, and **then release them** to do the work of ministry. If we do not release and trust others to handle responsibilities in ministry, we will cut short their growth and rob the Body of Christ of their contribution.

1. Transfer the Burden

As we release others to lead, we are *transferring the burden* of ministry. We learn from Moses' experience that there are two distinct areas of burden to share with other leaders:

a. Sharing the burden of *ministry tasks* (Ex 18:22)

There are many practical details and tasks that need attention for a church or ministry to function properly. The pastor or primary church leader cannot always handle all of these details alone. These can include things such as: coordinating the worship team; counting and recording the offerings; caring for the poor or sick; teaching the children; setting up chairs or equipment; cleaning the church; preparing bulletins or handouts; and many, many more practical concerns.

Look for those who are willing to take on these kinds of responsibilities. Give them the training they need to do the work, and then release them to do it.

b. Sharing the burden of *spiritual responsibilities* (Num 11:14-17)

The spiritual burden for leading the people was also too much for Moses to carry alone. Therefore, God had Moses select 70 spiritually mature men from the total leadership group to be elders. Their ministry was to help bear the spiritual burden of leading the Israelites (Num 11:17).

Pastors need the help of mature leaders to share in the burden of prayer, vision and ministry to the church. Their responsibilities can include: prayer and vision; teaching classes; preaching; leading worship; leading evangelism teams; praying for the sick; counseling; discipling new believers; and many other spiritual responsibilities.

A wise pastor will also form an intercessory team, led by him or someone else. The primary focus of this team is to pray for the leadership and for the church. The appointed elders of any given church should participate in some way in this spiritual burden of intercession.

Some people may carry both types of burdens, both practical tasks and spiritual

matters. Or they may function better in just one area. But both kinds of “burden-bearers” are necessary to the healthy life and development of the church.

2. The Role Of The Senior Leader

The primary responsibility of the senior leader is to train others for the work of ministry, **then release them** to do it. As Jethro told Moses, “*and let them judge the people...*” (Ex 18:22).

Some misguided people think that a great leader is someone who does everything himself. That may be true from a worldly way of thinking. But in God’s Kingdom, just the opposite is true.

A truly great and godly leader will train, equip and release others to do the work of ministry. He will fulfill the scriptural directive, “*...equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ*” (Eph 4:12).

This means the releasing trainer must **trust** those he has trained; trust God to help them; and trust the Holy Spirit to anoint and empower them. New leaders will probably not do everything correctly, especially at the beginning. But as they apply themselves, they will grow in ability and faithfulness.

Be An Example Of Humility

Some of those we train may do a better job than we do in some things. That should never be a problem for us. Release and encourage your students to be the best they can be, for the glory of God!

The only reasons we might have for not fully releasing those we train are our own pride, insecurity or fear. None of those reasons is godly; it is much better for us to crucify those fleshly motives anyway (Rom 13:14). Our goal should be to raise up leaders who can stand upon our shoulders, and go further in God than we ever could have. That takes humility; but God takes pleasure in, and promises to bless, the humble.

We must also remember that the church or ministry we lead **does not belong to us**. We are simply stewards of a portion of Christ’s Body, the Church He is building. Believing otherwise leads to self-importance and the desire to control “our” ministry. That will become a place where the deadly sin of pride will try to enter in. Humble yourself before God and resist the devil’s trap of pride!

As church leaders, we must adequately train others and lead them by example. We must then give them specific tasks to accomplish or roles to fulfill. We must be available to help them while they are still learning. And we must release them to do the work of ministry!

3. Dealing With Failure

Not one of us is perfect. This is not a new revelation! However, we must remember this as we release new leaders into ministry positions. They will have points of struggle, even failure. They may not properly carry out their ministry assignments. They may even fall into temptation and sin. This does not have to happen; but it might in some cases.

Failure in God’s Kingdom can be of great use in the process of growth and shaping. Jesus sent out His disciples on several occasions, **aware that they might fail**.

In one instance, they could not cast out a demon (Mark 9:14-29). Jesus did not reject

His disciples for their inabilities or failures. Rather, He used those times as teaching opportunities. “...*His disciples asked Him privately, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ So He said to them, ‘This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting’*” (Mark 9:28,29).

The disciples asked Jesus a question. His answer brought them correction and instruction. He taught them that they must be spiritually prepared for encounters with the demonic.

As one who trains others, remember this: In God’s Kingdom, ***correction is NOT rejection!*** God corrects us ***because*** we are His children (Heb 12:3-11). We must show love and patience with those we are training. We can use their failure as an opportunity for encouragement and further instruction.

A Leader Who Falls

There are unfortunately some failures that require removal from ministry for a season, or even permanently. This is not for failing in a responsibility or improperly fulfilling a ministry assignment. Those types of failures involve correction, teaching and encouragement. The kind of failure that disqualifies one for ministry involves sin and direct involvement in “*works of the flesh*” (Gal 5:16-23). This includes adultery, fornication, stealing, lying, divisiveness and other grievous sins.

If this type of behavior occurs in one who is in ministry (or training for ministry), **it must be confronted**. They must be removed from ministry responsibilities for a goodly season (this can be years) to allow time for deliverance, healing and the restoration of damaged relationships.

The leader must also bring forth fruits of godly repentance (2Cor 7:9-10). They must make sincere confession and accept responsibility for their failure. They should willingly relinquish their ministry responsibilities. They should also be willing to submit to church leadership (or a group of fellow pastors to whom they can be accountable) for a season of restoration and healing.

They must exhibit a consistent track-record over time of godly behavior without similar failures before taking up leadership responsibilities can be considered. This is for the protection of the flock, **and** the true and full deliverance of the person who failed.

If further instances occur of a similar sin, then perhaps more long-term discipline and correction are needed (see Matt 18:15-17; 1Cor 5:1-8; 2Cor 2:5-11; Gal 6:1; 1Tim 5:1,2).

There may even be cause for permanent removal from ministry if no true repentance or change is evident, or failures continue to be repeated.

A church leader must use discernment and wisdom from the Holy Spirit to apply proper and loving correction in each situation. Some failures are grievous sins and must be dealt with strongly. It can take up to several years for full restoration and healing to occur. Others might be less severe, and restoration may be sooner, but they still require confrontation and correction.

All correction and discipline should follow the biblical instruction to “*speak the truth in love*” (Eph 4:15).

God understands our human frailty and weakness. We have all sinned and fallen short of God’s highest good for us (Rom 3:23). But **God’s will is always to redeem our**

purpose and restore relationship with Him and others. God does this in response to our genuine repentance and full submission to His Lordship in our lives (2Cor 7:1-10).

Therefore, as church leaders, **let us bring the truth to bear upon our own lives first.** Let us be living examples of those who are humble, devoted to Christ and obedient to God's Word. Then we can help direct the lives of those we disciple. In this way of gentle and humble confrontation (Gal 6:1; 2Tim 2:24-26) we continue to model the character of Christ to those we are training.

II. Benefits of Multiplied Leadership

As we raise up leaders and transfer the burden of ministry, there will come much fruit. There will be a **multiplication of ministry.** More people will be effectively reached with the Gospel and more fruit will be gained for God's glory. Those you lead will find their gifts and callings, and begin to contribute to the health and growth of Christ's Body.

God gives Moses three promised benefits of multiplying leaders and sharing with them the burden of ministry (Ex 18:22,23).

A. It Will Be Easier For You

First, "*...it will be easier for you*" (Ex 18:22). Shared responsibilities, mutual encouragement and not being alone in leadership make the burden lighter. We can live in Christ's promise that, "*My yoke is easy and My burden is light*" (Matt 11:30).

B. You Will Be Able To Endure

Second, Moses is told that raising up leader-laborers will cause him to "*be able to endure*" (Ex 18:23). Oftentimes, church leaders become weary in the task. They may feel overwhelmed, worn down or discouraged. They may become ill or overcome by temptation. They may even be tempted to quit the ministry. In order to endure to the end, church leaders need help. Moses had Aaron and Hur (Ex 17:8-13), and heeded Jethro's counsel to raise up even more leadership.

C. All The People Will Benefit

Third, all the people will benefit and "*...go to their place in peace*" (Ex 18:23). The sheep in the Body of Christ need to be taught, cared for and ministered to. If they are neglected, they may go astray. They may develop problems that the devil will use to lead them into error or sin.

No one person can care for all the needs represented within a church body – and they are not supposed to! God has designed His Body so that we will be mutually dependent (1Cor 12:12-27). The participation of each member is necessary, that we might "*all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph 4:12-16).

We can avoid the problems that come with being an "independent leader" by equipping and releasing the saints to do the work of ministry with us (Eph 4:12). As we follow the Bible way of multiplying leadership, we will see multiplied fruitfulness. A new generation of leaders will be raised up to carry on the work of the Lord!

We can model the biblical principles of leadership to those we are training so that they will do the same. Thereby, God will never lack for someone He can use (1Ki 19:18; 2Chr 16:9) and the Body of Christ will be effectively led and shepherded!

SERMON OUTLINES FOR “THE EFFECTIVE CHURCH LEADER”

Part One:

God Shapes His Leaders

I. DEPENDING UPON GOD

- A. We All Need Shaping
- B. God’s Ability – Not Ours

II. CULTIVATING CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER

- A. Christlike Character:
 - The Leader’s First Calling
- B. What Is Christlike Character?
 - 1. Reverence For God
 - 2. Servant-Heartedness
 - 3. Repentance
 - 4. Changed Behavior
- C. More Than Character
- D. Yielding To God Daily

III. THE PATH TO LEADERSHIP

- A. An Early Call
- B. God Never Leaves Us
- C. The Path May Seem Strange
- D. Faithfully Serving
- E. Tried And Purified
- F. God’s Sovereign Control
- G. The Hope Of Glory

IV. HOW GOD USES TRIALS

- A. Sources Of Trials
- B. The Importance Of Perseverance
- C. Trusting God In Trials
- D. What Is The Purpose Of Trials?
 - 1. Trials Test Our Faith
 - 2. Trials Purify Us
 - 3. Trials Teach Us Dependency And Humility
 - 4. Trials Release God’s Power

5. Trials Strengthen Us
6. Trials Teach Us To Wait
7. Trials Prepare Us
8. Trials Change Our Perspective
- E. Safe In God's Love – Even Amid Trials
- F. God's Chastisement Shapes Us
- G. How Should We Respond To Trials?
 1. Pray
 - a. Pray In The Spirit
 - b. Pray With Fasting
 2. "Count It All Joy"
 3. Do Not Run
 4. Obey ALL That God Says To You
 5. Keep Your Heart Right

Part Two:

Biblical Pattern For Leadership Multiplication

I. FIVE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO MOSES

- A. Stand Before God For The People (Ex 18:19)
- B. Teach The People (Ex 18:20)
 1. Teach Statutes And Laws Of God (Ex 18:20)
 2. Teach The Way To Walk (Ex 18:20)
 3. Teach The Work To Do (Ex 18:20)
- C. Train Others To Help Lead (Ex 18:21)
 1. The Priorities Of The Apostles
 2. Leadership Involves Godly Partnership
 3. Partnership Multiplies Ministry
 4. Multiplied Fruitfulness
 5. Necessary Character Traits For Church Leaders
 - a. "Able men" (Ex 18:21)
 - 1) Those Who Serve Others With A Willing Heart
 - 2) Those Whom Others Will Follow
 - 3) Those Who Are Willing To Work Hard

- b. “Such as fear God” (Ex 18:21)
 - 1) A Heart Of Humility
 - 2) A Teachable Attitude
 - 3) High Moral Character
 - c. “Men Of Truth” (Ex 18:21)
 - 1) A Living Book
 - 2) Matters Of The Heart
 - d. “Hating covetousness” (Ex 18:21)
 - 1) Defining Covetousness
 - 2) Beware Of Idolatry
 - 3) Covetousness Destroys
 - 4) The Cure For Covetousness
- D. Give Each Leader Specific Tasks (Ex 18:21)
 - 1. Pray For The Discernment Of Gifts, Abilities, And Potential
 - 2. Involve New Leaders in Ministry Assignments
 - 3. Keep Your Training Balanced
 - 4. How Much Training Is Enough?
- E. Let The Leaders Lead (Ex 18:22)
 - 1. Transfer The Burden Of:
 - a. Ministry Tasks (Ex 18:22)
 - b. Spiritual Matters (Num 11:14-17)
 - 2. The Role Of The Senior Leader
 - 3. Dealing With Failure

II. BENEFITS OF MULTIPLIED LEADERSHIP

- A. It Will Be Easier For You
- B. You Will Be Able To Endure
- C. All The People Will Benefit