THE LEADERSHIP DYNAMIC

A Biblical Model for Raising Effective Leaders

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CROSSWAY BOOKS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS
If I were to begin my ministry as a pastor tomorrow knowing what I know today, there is one commitment that I would elevate in terms of priority and attention. That one commitment is leadership. Specifically I would commit myself to defining with greater clarity the biblical concept of a leader. Then, I would commit to investing more time and focus in developing leaders committed to that biblical concept of leadership. Finally, I would seek ways to deploy them not only in the church and their families but into every honorable sphere of influence in our culture. If I could begin my ministry again, I would certainly seek to be more consistent in intercessory prayer and more effective as an expositional preacher of the Word, and in fact, I do not know of a single area of ministry priority where I would not desire to grow in faithfulness and competency. But, the one thing that I would elevate on my priority list is what I am calling in this book Three-D leadership: defining, developing, and deploying Christian leaders who are capable of transforming society through their Christ-centered and gospel-driven lifestyle and leadership and who will intentionally multiply themselves.

I believe this is a biblical strategy that our Lord clearly prioritized in his three-year public ministry. It is also clear that the great movements of history in general and the movements of God’s kingdom in particular have always been driven by multiplica-
tion leadership. God’s Word is replete with a multitude of such examples. Consistently, whenever God decided to do something he called grace-driven, character-based leaders to initiate his mission, and they in turn unfailingly multiplied themselves through other leaders.

Furthermore, this is an unbelievable moment of opportunity throughout the cultures of this world. The moment has been created by a vacuum of good leadership and a simultaneous phenomenon of cynicism and discouragement concerning leadership, which the present leaders and concepts of leadership dominating our world today have produced.

The burden of this book is simple. Let’s return to the mandate, the mission, and the biblical model of Christian leadership and intentional leadership multiplication. If we succeed, then the church again will become a leadership factory and distribution center. Join me as we anticipate God’s answers from his Word as to how our God would do this through us to extend his glorious kingdom, redeem lost men and women, and transform the landscape of our world.

I would like to thank my Lord and Savior for allowing me to know him savingly and personally and to serve him vocationally. In that relationship, this entire vision for the leadership dynamic has been birthed throughout many years. May our Lord be pleased to bless this effort as I gratefully thank him for the enormous blessing of serving the Triune God and his church and proclaiming the gospel of his kingdom.

I would like to thank Crossway Books, Allan Fisher and his entire team, and Rod Gragg who significantly assisted in the writing of the manuscript. To Briarwood Presbyterian Church I am grateful for the privilege to serve the Lord with you and for the encouragement of not only our members but also our elders, deacons, and pastoral staff—without whom this effort could never have been accomplished.

I owe an enormous thanks to the diligent labor and untiring efforts of my ministry assistant, Marie Gathings, the consultation
of Tara Miller, and the preliminary editing of Linda Waugh. To my family, I am forever grateful. My sisters Vickie, Amy, and Beth along with their husbands have been a constant encouragement and prayer support. I praise the Lord for my children Jennifer, Ike, and Abigail, her husband Ryan, and our grandchildren, Brianna, CJ, Mack, Matthias, and Taylor. To Cindy, my precious wife, who is my ever present inspiration, encouragement, and counselor, I wish to especially dedicate this effort. Perhaps more than anyone else she manifests the biblical concept of servant leadership. I also wish to acknowledge my dad and mom who now reside in the presence of their Lord and who taught in precept and practice much of what I later learned to know as Christian leadership.

In conclusion, to all of the pastors who desire to serve the Lord, proclaim the gospel, equip the saints, fulfill the Great Commission, and see a gospel-driven transformation of their church, their community, and their world, this book is especially dedicated. May our Lord bless you as you seek to first be faithful, by God’s grace effective, and for God’s glory influential for the preeminence of Christ. May our Lord allow you to lead his church, founded upon the ministry of prayer and the Word, to be a leadership factory and distribution center and together may we hear again, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also” (Acts 17:6).
GOD’S MODEL FOR LEADERSHIP

“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.”

ACTS 17:6

Why do we do it?

Why do Christians want to learn leadership from the world’s models when we know that “worldly wisdom” inevitably conflicts with the Word of God and brings chaos and despair? Genuine, effective leadership must be learned from God’s Word, developed through disciple making, nurtured in God’s church, and then transported into the world. When this happens, we can anticipate a consistent reproduction of multiplication leaders who have been transformed by biblical leadership. It’s God’s chain reaction. A transformed leader produces more transformed leaders—leaders who have been mentored within the church, then sent out to impact the world. By God’s grace they will become change agents, and the process will continually repeat itself just as God intended. By faithfully applying the model of leadership revealed in the Word of God, the church can
again turn the world upside down. At the moment, however, we face a cultural meltdown.

The Contemporary American Model

The American church is standing at the brink of a self-inflicted death spiral accelerated by worldly leadership. God’s people are the “salt” and “light” of surrounding culture, so when the church begins its free fall, all of American culture will soon follow. What’s the poisonous elixir that the contemporary American church seems so determined to consume? The answer: the leadership model now practiced and promoted in the boardrooms of American big business. What? Is traditional American capitalism wrong? Unbiblical? Dangerous? The answer is no—traditional capitalism is not the problem. The leadership model that is infecting the church today—with disastrous results—is a product of contemporary capitalism, which is a greed-based, wealth-consuming mutation that has replaced the historically Christian-influenced system of capitalism that created the wealth upon which our nation thrived and blessed the world. Today’s self-promoting, infected corporate leadership is a deadly potion that countless churches are drinking as they thoughtlessly imbibe the contemporary corporate leadership models of the day.

Christian-influenced capitalism was put to work immediately on American soil, and helped to shape our nation in a powerfully positive manner. The fresh influence of the Protestant Reformation spilled into America’s English colonies, forging American law and culture based on the Judeo-Christian worldview. Our nation was founded on that biblical consensus and flourished with it as it kept improving ethically and practically—until the American worldview completed its shift to secular humanism in the late twentieth century. The biblical worldview holds that God is the authority over all things, and that pleasing him should be the foundation of every endeavor. Secular humanism proclaims that man, not God, is the final authority and that everything exists for personal pleasure and affluence.
Historically, the influence of Christianity on American capitalism produced a huge and generally prosperous middle class that provided economic and cultural stability for the nation. Influenced by Christian leadership, traditional American capitalism increasingly promoted a lofty goal—that corporate success is not the *consumption* of wealth but the *creation* of it. It was not greed that was good, but doing good was good. The foundational ethic of traditional American capitalism—as influenced by Christianity—was not simply to “do what is good for business” but to “make it your business to do good.” Through the ages, Christian-influenced traditional American capitalism kept producing more and more extraordinary business leaders who also excelled as philanthropists by creating jobs, investing in the community, assisting the needy, providing meaningful public service, supporting the church, and in other ways making communities better. Surely there were a number of greedy business leaders, but they were marginalized, and certainly they were not celebrated as they are today. Historically in America, God’s people—the church—influenced American capitalism to practice a biblical model of servant leadership. Today, contemporary capitalism is influencing the church to practice a model of self-absorbed leadership. Yesterday the church produced effective servant leaders for the world of business. Today the world produces self-promoting leaders who are infecting the church.

Just as the biblical worldview affected all aspects of culture for most of American history, secular humanism today influences our bedrock institutions: law, government, education, healthcare, media, the arts, and the business community. This repackaged paganism embraced by contemporary American capitalism has rejected the influence of biblical truth in order to embrace a self-absorbed leadership model that promotes self-worship. Yet—alarmingly—much of the American church today is either thoughtlessly or pragmatically employing a humanistic model of contemporary capitalistic leadership. And the model is not only unbiblical but its ability to permeate the culture is ultimately destructive.

Recently the evidence of this downward spiral in contemporary corporate America was manifested by entire corporations falter-
ing and closing, not because of problems on the ground floors but because of moral failures in the executive offices of leaders acting on their personal and greedy quest for wealth and power. This produced a staggering loss of jobs, obliteration of countless individual retirement packages, untold numbers of divorces and wrecked families, widespread erosion of respect for the business community, the demise of the dreams of many, and a general loss of respect for the American free-enterprise system. Business leadership today is too often not about leadership but about the leader—his or her power, portfolio, and profits. The lack of biblically based leadership in American culture has left our society reeling like a boxer on the ropes after a knockout punch.

Modern corporate leadership is rooted in self-absorbed concepts of success, ego-driven desires for power, and what is now a socially approved expression of greed that a century ago would have been decried as evil. This self-worshiping, man-centered model of leadership is promoted anew every semester through collegiate MBA programs. American educational institutions are the front line of the culture war as the typical university is militantly intolerant to any idea that would propose ethical absolutes in any degree program. Few university MBA programs today instruct future business leaders in the traditional, biblically based ethic of sacrificial servant leadership. In fact, only a pitiful few MBA programs retain a course on business ethics. Traditional American capitalism, along with the Judeo-Christian worldview on which it was based, is fiercely rejected at today’s typical university. What’s being taught instead? Pragmatism rules. The end justifies the means. Ethics are not absolutes to be obeyed, but obstacles to be overcome. And now, voraciously, this humanistic, greed-driven model of leadership is being adopted and absorbed by churches throughout our nation. Yet greed destroys. This popular new model of corporate leadership will eventually destroy the American church if unchecked and if continued as the primary source of leadership models and/or leaders themselves. What can be done to stop this deadly plunge into a black hole of destructive leadership? Can the church profit from certain aspects
of how to do business from corporate America? Certainly. But the church is not a business. We do not produce a product to be bought; members are not customers. Pastors are not CEOs, and leaders are not a board of directors. Secondly, the church certainly cannot imbibe the diving dynamics of death from today’s greed-based and self-promoting culture-destroying leadership found in many executive offices of America’s business world. The church must escape the swamp of greed-driven leadership prevalent in contemporary corporate America and ascend the high ground of gospel-driven leadership described in God’s Word.

The Biblical Model

Regaining lost ground won’t be easy, but the solution is simple: the church must follow the Bible’s model for defining, developing, and deploying leaders while simultaneously rejecting the world’s leadership models and standards. Simply put, the American church must define leadership and then develop and deploy leaders who can transform the world for Jesus Christ. How do we do it? Obviously, raising leaders for such a time as this will require more than a couple of officer training classes or a few sermons on Christian leadership. The Christian church must become a leadership factory and distribution center for the world, and by the grace of God, it can—if we return to both the biblical definition of leadership and the biblical method of producing leaders for the church and the world.

The first step for the church, from denominational headquarters to pastors facing the pews each Sunday, is to clearly define the biblical model of leadership. Initially that will require turning away from the unbiblical models of leadership that have infiltrated denominational literature, popular leadership manuals, and local church leadership training classes. Take a close and honest look at what is passing for leadership training in many modern American churches. First, promoting personal self-esteem is seen by many as the key call of the church. How wrong is that? A self-centered life is exactly the opposite of Christ’s call to a God-centered life.
and the essence of Christian leadership, which demands a servant heart and sacrificial life. Today’s focus on self-esteem is profiled not by Scripture, but by the current preoccupation with narcissism. It is “all about me,” therefore Christianity is being repackaged and redefined as a self-absorbed system of self-esteem. Sadly, the love of self is deeply embedded in contemporary American culture, including the church, because we have embedded the leaders of the culture into the leadership of the church. We now face a generation of church members—and leaders—who are encouraged to constantly ask themselves, how good do I feel about myself? how good do you make me feel about myself? how good does the church make me feel about myself? and, by the way, how good does Jesus make me feel about myself? The church has succumbed to the secular cultural pressure of promoting self-esteem, instead of sharing the gospel call to die to self through a God-centered life, and if you miss the gospel-driven Christian life, it is impossible to produce Christian leaders.

This counterfeit leadership training also encourages absorption with physical and material prosperity that easily becomes idolatry. The salvation offered by Jesus Christ is thus perverted into a “prosperity gospel,” defined by self-centered materialism that assures true believers that they will become healthy and wealthy if they only “confess it and possess it,” “name it and claim it,” or “believe it and receive it”! Where did this perversion of Christianity come from? Certainly not the Bible. The Word of God firmly promises that our God “will supply all your needs” (Phil. 4:19, NASB) in Christ Jesus and, “I can do all things through him [Christ] who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13, NASB). Why? So that I can be “poured out as a drink offering” (Phil. 2:17) and embrace the call of our Savior—“for me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21) and “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Through the self-absorbed teaching now passing for gospel truth in our churches, the true gospel of grace is blasphemously perverted. The result is that most Christians in contemporary culture have no concept of the biblical call to embrace suffering, sacrifice, and self-denial—which is not only a part of the Christian
life-walk but, according to God’s Word, is a gift and calling from our Lord to us. “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake” (Phil. 1:29). When such basic elements of the gospel life and Christ’s calling are perverted at worst and remain untaught at best, how can the church possibly respond effectively to the challenges of today’s world, and how can it possibly develop leaders who lead as servants and who willingly sacrifice themselves for others? Finally, as misguided church leaders follow a worldly, self-directed model of leadership, the spiritual depth of believers and the stability of their local churches are steadily eroded. In the pulpit, “tips for living” talks now replace gospel-driven and Christ-centered sermons. Personality traits trump character, and happiness trumps holiness. Perception trumps reality, and even the most sacred calling of the believer, divine worship, is replaced by personal entertainment. The congregation becomes the audience of spectators at the worship event. They arrive for the worship experience provided by the preacher and worship leaders, who are the primary actors, with God fulfilling the role of the set-up man. Not long ago, the church would have called this blasphemy. Today, we call it seeker-centered worship.

In contrast, true worship has an audience of One—the triune God. But not only does he receive our worship, he enters into it by providing the presence and power of the Holy Spirit who enables us to worship with passion for the praise of God. Too often today the biblical mandate to “worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23) is being replaced with a self-directed question: “How did that worship experience make me feel?” The result is that the divine service of worship has now become the human service of entertainment, and the focus is on the worshiper rather than the One who is to be worshiped. In reaction to this worldly trend, other congregations have descended into thoughtless traditionalism—steadfastly devoting themselves to comfortable, traditional worship practices with an exclusive fierceness that unwittingly promotes form over substance. Knowing how to worship God in spirit and truth while embracing seekers, teaching new believers,
and encouraging mature Christians requires godly leadership and is necessary to produce more godly leaders. Godly leaders are grown from the Word of God empowered by the Spirit of God as an inevitable result of God’s grace—but they will not be raised up from today’s corporate model of leadership, which has been baptized into the church.

To regain a biblical vision of leadership we must first regain lost ground by repenting of the thoughtless infusion of popular culture into the church life and leadership and also repenting of the absence of a biblical response to it. We must step back and turn away from popular trends and man-centered preoccupations while seriously surrendering to God’s model of leadership found in Scripture. We have allowed the valid need of cultural contextualization to descend into cultural capitulation. The Word of God is not silent on leadership or how to develop and deploy leaders. God’s Word is clear, and we must embrace the biblical vision, reclaiming the church as a leadership factory and distribution center by prioritizing the disciple-making task of defining, developing, and deploying Christian leaders in the American church.

**An Immodest Proposal: 3-D Leadership**

How do we begin? When we’ve repented and turned away from all the worldly models of leadership and the thoughtless imposition of man-centered leaders and leadership, what do we do next? How do we identify and implement biblical leadership in our denominations and local congregations? The answer: instead of following the whims of the world and the “spirit of the world” (1 Cor. 2:12), we must intentionally pursue a strategic commitment to three initiatives drawn from the timeless truth of God’s Word and verified throughout history. I call these initiatives the “Three Ds” of biblical leadership: first, we must clearly define biblical leadership; second, we must develop godly leaders; and third, we must strategically deploy those leaders in the church and around the world.
Having “put off” unbiblical worldly leadership we are now positioned to “put on” biblical leadership within the church. So let’s define biblical leadership. An easy task, right? Actually, this is no small challenge because the truth of God’s Word on leadership has been ignored, muted, or discarded in recent decades. A century ago—maybe even a generation ago—such biblical concepts as “many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:31) were instantly understood and acknowledged by the people in the pews. No more. A lack of sound, systematic, biblical disciple making has produced contemporary congregations that are shockingly illiterate biblically. Thankfully, many want to be taught; many have a zeal and hunger for the truth. Furthermore, there is a hunger and longing for authentic leadership not only in the church today but also in the world. So the challenge is also an opportunity; existing leaders who have a passion for faithful and effective genuine biblical leadership can transform their congregations into leadership factories and distribution centers.

Doing so will no doubt demand a thoughtful and patient commitment. Biblical leaders must be sacrificial leaders, servant leaders, courageous leaders, beneficial leaders, nurturing leaders, combat leaders, compassionate leaders, and visionary leaders. They must be all of this—and through the sovereign grace of God, they can be. And when they put that kind of biblical leadership into practice, hearts and minds in the church will change. It’s the “body of Christ”—that’s how Scripture primarily pictures the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:27)—and the church will respond to the call of leadership reformation. The response will be a renewal of authentic unity—a unity of calling, a unity of salvation, a unity of the inspired Word of God, a unity in one Lord, one faith, one baptism. And this renewal of unity will also encourage a harmonious diversity of callings, passions, gifts, and abilities within the body of Christ.

There are two Greek words for time used in the Bible: kairos and chronos. Chronos denotes the chronological passing of time.
while *kairos* denotes a season or opportune moment of time. The *kairos* leadership moment is now, and the church must not falter. As we define biblical leadership in the church, we should move simultaneously and strategically to define it for the world. We need to fully reverse what we have been doing. Instead of receiving the world’s leaders defined and developed by worldly leadership models, the moment has arrived to define godly leadership for a cynical world and develop godly leaders who can be thoughtfully deployed into the world according to their God-given passions and desires. This is the moment to regain lost ground. There is a vacuum of good leadership, and a despair and cynicism about leadership. Notice, I did not say there is a vacuum of leadership but a vacuum of *good* leadership. God has called us to produce and propagate leaders who will be salt and light and bless society with courageous, trustworthy, and beneficial leadership. It has happened in history and has been demonstrated by the American church in centuries past. We must not drop the baton of biblical leadership disciple making that overflows into society, penetrating it with grace and truth.

*Develop*

When the biblical model of leadership is defined in our churches and denominational headquarters, then a new generation of leaders can be developed by disciple making. As the American church again comprehends what God expects of leadership, a new wave of leaders will arise—leaders who have been transformed by a biblical understanding of their task. And because biblical leaders by definition are multipliers, they will develop more leaders—leaders who have been mentored in God’s church for distribution into the world: transformed leadership transforming others just as they themselves have been transformed, with each one multiplying and reproducing again and again and again. That’s how God’s leadership model works. We must reclaim this model again, and we must do it now.
Deploy

After the church has defined the biblical model of leadership and has begun developing leaders based on that model through leadership disciple making, then the church must be ready to deploy these emerging leaders into the world. Every institution of our contemporary culture should be influenced by these transformed leaders, who will be armed with the gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth of God’s Word, and the love of Christ. If the biblical model of leadership disciple making is followed, Christian leaders will of necessity be deployed into every honorable sphere of society. These Christian leaders will be deployed according to their God-given gifts, talents, and passions. If some of these new leaders are in business, they will become Christian business leaders. If some are parents, they will produce Christ-centered families. If a leader is a husband, he will be the spiritual leader of his wife in Christ. Leaders in law enforcement and the military will understand how to protect those in their care and carry out their responsibilities with a biblical perspective. Christian attorneys will be prepared to advocate the cause of justice based on the historical Judeo-Christian worldview and will strive to restore a once-noble calling back to a position of respect. Elected officials and other officeholders will be equipped to exercise biblical leadership for the general welfare of society, and thankfully statesmen will replace politicians.

Contemporary culture would be transformed in an amazingly rapid span of time. The twentieth-century shift in American worldview from God-centered to man-centered could be reversed. What an exceptional gift of grace—from the risen Christ through his church. But we cannot have it both ways. Either we lead according to the world or we lead according to the Word. Those are our only choices. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed . . .” (Rom. 12:2). The American church can step back from the edge of oblivion and avoid the deadly free fall that now faces us. Or not. By the grace of God, we still have time, and it is an opportune moment in time. An open door is
before us. The failure of worldly leadership has demoralized our culture—so the church today is being offered a marvelous opportunity. By the grace of God, we can and we must seize the moment.

The book of Acts tells us that when Christian leaders such as Paul and Silas carried the truth of God’s Word into the heart of the first-century Greco-Roman culture, they were met with this cry: “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also” (Acts 17:6). How I would love to hear those words said one more time. Our problem, observed C. S. Lewis in *The Weight of Glory*, is that “Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak.”¹ The Word of God drives home that point with even greater simplicity in Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me.” Through the love of Jesus Christ, we are called by the God of the Bible to wrestle to the ground the death and decay that now cloak our culture. And his leadership manual stands ready and available. The cultural death spiral can be stopped, reversed, and transformed by gospel-driven and Christ-centered Christian leaders.


Now, what would these world-shaking leaders look like, where would they come from, and what would they do?
NOTES

Chapter 1: God’s Model for Leadership

Chapter 4: Defining the Leader

Chapter 6: What Is Leadership?

Chapter 7: Thermometer or Thermostat?
  3. Ibid.