

**THE VISIONARY LEADER
THE THIRD FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP**

Terry Calkin and Paul Beasley-Murray



VISION	PASSION	CHARACTER	GIFTING
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**“Set the believers an example in your speech
and conduct, in love, in faith and in purity”**

1 Timothy 4.12

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PREFACE

Terry Calkin is the founding pastor of Green Lane Christian Centre, Auckland, today one of New Zealand's 'mega' churches. Terry has lived and breathed church growth! In 2012 Terry relinquished the role of senior pastor of Green Lane Christian Centre to spend more time exercising a wider ministry amongst churches in Africa and Asia. Before assuming church leadership Terry's background was in business – he was a senior lecturer in management and cost accounting.

Ordained as a missionary in 1970, Paul Beasley Murray began his ministry by teaching New Testament and Greek in the National University of Congo/Zaire; later he was Principal of Spurgeon's College, London. However, for most of his ministry Paul has been as pastor – first in Altrincham, Cheshire, and then in Chelmsford, Essex, where under Paul's leadership significant church growth was the feature. In 2014 Paul retired from pastoral ministry and is now chairman of both Ministry Today UK and the College of Baptist Ministers. He also has a world-wide ministry both as a theological teacher and as a prolific author.

In some ways Terry and Paul are very different people. They come from different ends of the evangelical spectrum: Terry's roots are in the Pentecostal 'Apostolic' churches, while Paul as a Baptist minister comes from a 'mainline' denomination. But when Terry and Paul collaborate, their differences become not a weakness, but a strength. In the words of Prov 27.17: "Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another". Both Terry and Paul have learnt from one another's approach to leadership – but as the reader will discover, there are still times when they disagree with one another. We believe that this book is the richer for the differences of approach.

In recent years, Terry and Paul have become the firmest of friends, sharing a common passion to see churches grow. It is this passion which has brought them together to write a series of books on the four principles of leadership: viz. vision, passion, character and gifting. Or to use the metaphor Terry has developed over the years, there are four 'foundations' or 'corner stones' of 'the house of leadership'. Each is vital: to keep the subsequent building stable, they must all play an equal role in the life of the leader. Only where these four foundational principles of vision, passion, character, and gifting, are in place, will Jesus be able to build his church.

Their first book, *The Passionate Leader*, published in 2015 by the Joshua Press in Arusha, Tanzania, was an over-view of the four foundations with a particular emphasis on passion. It is important to read this first book in tandem with *The Visionary Leader* as also with the *Leader with Integrity* because for the most part we have avoided repetition.

Finally, please note that unless otherwise indicated, the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) of the Bible is used. Other versions used are the *Good News Bible* (GNB), the *New International Version* of the Bible (NIV) *Revised English Bible* (REB). We also quote from *The Message*, a paraphrase of the Bible by Eugene Peterson.

INTRODUCTION: LEADERSHIP DEMANDS CHARACTER

Character is foundational to leadership. John Wooden, a famous American basketball player and coach, said: “Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are”.

Character reflects the inner life of the leader. It is the sum total of all the negative and positive qualities in a person’s life. It shapes the way a person acts or reacts. It is the filter through which a person’s thoughts, values, and motivations come to be expressed to the outside world. What God requires is for the leader to develop character. The development of character involves the exercise of discipline in a leader’s life; and that discipline is shaped by obedience to God’s Word.

Character involves integrity

Character is about doing the right thing when no one else is looking”. A synonym for character is ‘integrity’. People with integrity are ‘whole’ people, who do not pretend to be what they are not. As we sometimes say, “what you see is what you get”. In a world obsessed with style, image, and presentation, people with integrity are not interested in pretending to be what they are not.

In our book, *The Passionate Leader*, we defined leadership as 'the ability to lead with integrity a group of people to a common destination.' The one word which describes successful leadership is the word 'integrity.' All leadership whether it is spiritual or secular, rises or falls on this one word, for integrity is the quality which makes a leader trustworthy. We may well have an outstanding vision, which we engage with burning passion but if our integrity is lacking, in spite of our giftedness our whole mission will collapse, and people will not follow us.

Integrity cannot be faked. We either live it or else you don't have it. If there is a lack of integrity in a Christian leader, that lack will ultimately be expressed.

Sadly, often the lack of integrity is hidden by a leadership banning any questioning and demanding absolute obedience to the vision. But integrity has nothing to hide.

Character involves selflessness

Integrity in leadership is best defined as selflessness. To understand this word we need to compare it with the human condition. Selfishness is the human condition. It is innate in all of us and so therefore innate in all leadership. It is the major issue that all leaders have to struggle with in their leadership. Selfishness comes naturally – selflessness is a much more difficult road to walk but it is the hallmark of all great leaders. And with no exception, all leaders have to struggle with this issue.

Integrity is the ability to lead without personal prejudice or bias or self-interest. The greatest example of a leader we have is that of Christ himself. It was he who said, “No man has

greater love than this, to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15.13). This he did himself, and by doing so exemplified integrity in his leadership and mission in life.

Character involves vulnerability

Because integrity involves no pretence, it inevitably involves openness, which in turn involves vulnerability. Jesus, for instance, in the Garden of Gethsemane, revealed the depth of his suffering to his friends. Jesus did not pretend to be 'super man'. Neither should Christian leaders pretend when the going is tough. Indeed, according to Howard Shultz, the CEO of Starbucks, "when the leader demonstrates vulnerability and sensibility... the team wins". Leaders who are honest about themselves with others, far from losing the respect of others, actually gain trust. Vulnerability allows people into the issues we are facing, and gains their support.

Being vulnerable is vital to successful Christian leadership: it encourages transparency in decision making; as a result leaders are able to defend their decision-making from unfair criticism. Vulnerability is a by-product of the character of a leader.

A way of being

Character is about who we are. It is about a way of being. First and foremost leaders are called to be men and women of integrity, seeking to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3.18). Or in the words of Paul to Timothy leaders in God's church are called to be men and women of God. Timothy, as a "man of God", instead of making money his goal, is to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness" (1 Tim 6.11).

A little earlier Paul had said to Timothy, to "set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim 4.12). Timothy, precisely because he is a "man of God", is expected to be an example to others in the way in which he lived. Indeed, Lesslie Newbigin, wrote: "A true Christian pastor will be one who can dare to say to his people: 'Follow me, as I am following Jesus'. That is a terrible test for any pastor. A true pastor must have such a relationship with Jesus and his people that he follows Jesus and they follow him." Christian leadership involves leadership by example. All too often people don't do what their pastor tells them to do; they watch what their pastor does and then copy it. All the more reason, therefore, for Christian leaders to practice what they preach (see Matt 23.2-3)!

CHAPTER ONE CHARACTER IS FORMED IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER INVOLVES TRANSFORMATION

It is in the context of defending his integrity in ministry (see 2 Cor 1.17), that the Apostle Paul links the issue of character with spending time in the presence of God. In what for us is a somewhat complex passage, the Apostle wrote: “All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord, as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3.18).

‘Glory’ is an Old Testament term for the awesome presence of God. Moses, for instance, when he encountered God on Mount Sinai was overwhelmed by the glory of God (see Exodus 34.29-35). Ezekiel spoke of the day when the glory of God left the temple (Ezek 10.18) – i.e. a day when God turned his back upon his people and was no longer to be found in the temple they had built for him. The message of the New Testament, however, is that God’s glory has now taken human form. In the words of John: “The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory” (John 1.14). Or in the words of the Apostle Paul found just a few verses further on in 2 Cor 4: “The God who said, ‘Out of darkness the light shall shine!’ is the same God who made his light shine in our hearts, to bring us the knowledge of God’s glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4.6 GNB). Paul is here looking back upon his experience on the Damascus Road, when to his amazement he encountered the living Lord Jesus. Not everybody has had a Damascus Road experience. Many of us have come to Christ much more gradually. But whatever our experience or indeed lack of experience, all of us have discovered that Jesus is the means through which God shines his light and makes himself known. Jesus is like a filter through which God makes his glory known. Without such a filter the light of God would blind us permanently. So Paul writes that we see “the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror” (2 Cor 3.18). Jesus, who is “the image of God” (2 Cor 4.4) mirrors the glory of the Lord.

Yes, God’s glory - seen in the face of Jesus - has shone in our hearts. None of us have seen Jesus physically - and yet we have seen him in our hearts. The Lord of glory has been - and continues to be - made known through the eye of faith. And this is the work of the Spirit. “All of us..., seeing the glory of God as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image....” (2 Cor 3.18).

But another translation is possible. The GNB translates: "All of us...reflect the glory of the Lord". Similarly the NIV: “We all reflect the Lord’s glory”. The fact is that the underlying Greek verb has both the meaning of ‘seeing’ and of ‘reflecting’. It could well be that both meanings are present here. I.e. we don’t have to choose between ‘seeing’ or ‘reflecting’. Paul perhaps intended both meanings to be present. For it is as we turn to look at the Lord of glory, we begin to reflect him. We cannot reflect the Lord Jesus if we do not focus on him

Sadly, all too often the last thing we do is to reflect the glory of Christ. The reason that all too often our lives are so full of pride and prejudice is that we have not spent time gazing on Jesus. The reason why our lives are all too often characterised by discontent, by anger, and even by bitterness is that we spend more time looking at others than at him. If we are to reflect Jesus, then we must cultivate our relationship with him. We must spend more time with Jesus

Has anybody ever said to you "You are just like your father"? If so, then it could be that there is something in your voice or in your mannerisms which remind those who knew your father of him. Why? Because of the time you spent in his company. We are influenced by the company we keep.

The Apostle Paul goes on: "That some glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory" (2 Cor 3.18b). Or in the words of the NRSV: "And all of us... are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit". Reflection leads to transformation. Wow! At this point the metaphor begins to break down. For the Apostle speaks of reflecting the glory of the Lord "as though... in a mirror". But the metaphor of a mirror is inadequate: when a mirror catches the sun, it reflects the sun's rays without in the least being changed. But we contemplate and reflect the glory of the Lord "we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (NRSV). In Peterson's paraphrase: "And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him" (*The Message*).

From a grammatical point of view the form of the verb the Apostle uses is highly instructive.

i) the verb is present continuous in tense: "We are being transformed/changed" (not we are transformed/changed). The Apostle Paul has in mind an ongoing process. This ongoing process of change is not to be confused with the decisive turning to Christ which takes place at the beginning of the Christian life – the Apostle is not speaking about conversion. Nor is this ongoing process of change to be confused with the change we shall experience at the end of our life here on earth – the Apostle is not speaking about our final 'glorification'. Rather he is speaking about a progressive and ongoing process which in previous times was termed 'sanctification' - a being 'conformed' to Christ by degrees - an increasing demonstration of his Spirit at work in our lives.

ii) the verb is passive in mood: "we are being transformed". The change is not something we do, but something which is done to and for us as we open ourselves in faith to the Lord. It is the work of the Spirit that transforms, not human effort. There is nothing that we can do to become more loving, more patient, more joyful - all we can do is increasingly to open our life to the Lord.

Terry in one of his sermons pointed out that transformation is a word from which we get the English word 'metamorphosis'. "It is a term that describes change which starts from the inside and works outward. A lot of change today is superficial – outside only. You paint the house, you paint the barn, you paint your face – it is all external. But metamorphosis starts with God's laws being written on your heart, and the mirror we look into is the Word of God". Terry went on to quote some words of James: "For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing" (James 1.23-25)

It is as we spend time with God, that we get changed incrementally, step by step into God's image

CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTER IS FORMED IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER INVOLVES CULTIVATING THE VITAL RELATIONSHIP

Although transformation is the work of the Spirit, it also requires co-operation on our part. We need to discipline our lives so that we make time to be in God's presence. It has been said that, "A spiritual life without discipline is impossible. Discipline is the other side of discipleship."¹ Spending time alone with God and reading his Word is not an option – it is a necessity.

Leaders are almost by definition activists. There are tasks to be achieved, a team to be built, needs of individuals crying out for attention. Yet the message of John 15 is clear: activity is useless unless counterbalanced by an abiding in Christ: "Abide in me as I abide in you... because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15.4-5).

"Beware of the barrenness of a busy life" was the constant refrain of Bishop J. Taylor Smith. However much leaders may feel themselves under pressure, with so many things to do, so many people to see, so many people to attend, the discipline of the spiritual life needs to be maintained. Jesus had enormous pressures on him during his three years of public ministry. A day such as that described by Mark in Mark 1.16-32 would have exhausted even the fittest. Yet Jesus did not succumb to these pressures. Jesus retained his spiritual vitality and authority as a result of a disciplined life of prayer. "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place and there he prayed" (Mark 1.35). The Gospels indicate that this was no exceptional occasion, but rather this retreating for prayer was a regular part of his devotional pattern (see Luke 6.12). Only in this way could Jesus get his priorities right. So, with Matt 4.31-42 in mind, Bruce Epperly draws upon a modern analogy when he writes: "Perhaps Jesus was tempted by the adulation inspired by his success as a teacher and healer to stay in Capernaum. He needed to still every voice but God's voice speaking within his own experience to discern the next steps of his journey. Jesus needed to realign his spiritual GPS". What was true of Jesus must be true of us: we too must pause to discern the direction we need to go.²

We need to make time for prayer and for Scripture

We need to make time to read God's Word – not just for the purposes of sermon preparation, but for the good of our own souls and for the development of character. We too need to be fed by the 'Bread of Life'. We need to steep our minds and hearts in God's Word. Indeed, Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote: "Every day in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God's Word in Holy Scripture is a lost day for me. I can only move forward with certainty upon the firm ground of the Word of God."³

We need to make time for prayer, recognising that prayer is more than asking, but rather is a conversation in which we talk to God, and then listening to what God's Spirit will say to us,

¹ Henri Nouwen, 'An Invitation to the Spiritual Life', *Leadership* XII (Summer 1981) 57.

² Bruce Epperly, 'Finding Your Spiritual GPS', *Alban Paper* 13 April 2015.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word* (Cowley, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1986) 30.

and not least how he will direct us. With Isaiah we need to discover that: “When you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it’” (Isaiah 30.21). In prayer too we find the spiritual sustenance which God alone can give. To quote James Stewart, a Scottish preacher of a former generation: “How shall any man be strong to do Christ’s work today, with the purposefulness and passion and mastery of life that shine on every page of the Gospels, if he neglects Christ’s hidden secret. Chalmers was indeed going to the root of the matter when he declared that most failures in the ministry were due, not to lack of visiting or of study or of organisational activity, but to lack of prayer”.⁴

Prayer and reading the Scriptures are basic to Christian leadership. Much can be delegated, but not the daily disciplines of prayer and reading Scripture. This surely is the lesson of the pastoral crisis which emerged in the early days of the Jerusalem church, when the Greek-speaking members of the church felt their widows were being neglected. The apostles asked the church to appoint seven men to deal with the issue, “while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word” (Acts 6.4).

We need to make time to get our priorities right

Herodotus, an ancient Greek writer and historian, claimed that the most bitter sorrow is to aspire to do much and then to achieve nothing. In fact the most bitter sorrow is to aspire to do much, and to do it, and then to discover that it was not worth doing!

Leadership is not about going in any direction. It is about going in the right direction, in the direction that God wants for our lives and for the churches which we lead. Hence the need for leaders to make time every day to reflect prayerfully on the past, review the present and seek God’s will for the future.

In particular we need to distinguish between the important and the urgent. In this regard Charles Hummel had some wise words to say about ‘the tyranny of the urgent’:

“The important task rarely must be done today, or even this week... But the urgent tasks call for instant action... endless demands pressure every hour and day... The momentary appeal of these tasks seems irresistible and important and they devour our energy. But in the light of time’s perspective their deceptive prominence fades; with a sense of loss we recall the important tasks pushed aside again. We realise we’ve become slaves to the tyranny of the urgent.”⁵

What is the solution to this problem? It is surely a daily seeking of God’s will, as Jesus sought God’s will.

We need to structure our time with God

The precise shape of a disciplined life will vary from person to person. Paul, for instance, seeks to make time for God at the beginning of the day. He believes that to “sustain the weary

⁴ James Stewart, *Preaching* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1955) 176.

⁵ Charles Hummel, ‘The Tyranny of the Urgent’, *Christian Arena* (March 1985) 2-4.

with a word”, then he needs “morning by morning... to listen as those who are taught” (Isaiah 54.4). Terry, on the other hand, is like Bill Clinton, who said, “I get up at 7.30 a.m., but my brain doesn’t wake up till 10 o’clock. So Terry does his ‘quiet time’ at the end of the day. There is no God-given rule: we have to find the time we are most awake, and then discipline ourselves to make time for God then.

Again, how we structure that time will vary from person to person. Paul, for instance, begins the day by using the daily ‘Anglican’ lectionary, with readings from the Old and New Testament as also a Psalm. The lectionary gives him a balanced diet, yet does not over-face him in terms of the amount. As he reads, whenever a phrase or a verse jumps out at me, he marks his Bible – and then, for a shorter or longer period, he seeks to ‘chew over’ what God may be saying to him. From Scripture he turns to prayer. Here too he finds the need for a system: he devised a simple plan for the week, with a number of main categories for each day: my family, my colleagues, my fellow leaders, church activities, life beyond the local church, ‘Yesterday’, ‘Today’, and ‘Special Needs’.

Terry also has a structured approach. In a sermon entitled *Ten minutes that will change your life* he recommended that we plan a definite time. “Start with a 10 minute period of time. Ten minutes is easy to find, especially at the beginning of the day”. Needless to say, 10 minutes is a minimum, rather than a maximum. Indeed, our experience is that the 10 minutes soon becomes 15 minutes, and often a regular 30 minutes.

Terry suggested dividing the 10 minutes (or however long) into parts:

1. 3 minutes - Read a chapter of the Bible
2. 3 minutes - Ask three questions regarding what you have read: What does it mean? What is God saying to me? What must change in my life?
3. 3 minutes – Pray, recognising that prayer is not just asking, but praising and thanking God for his goodness.
4. 1 minute - Let God speak into your heart, as you reflect upon the past day, and look forward to the coming day.

Terry concluded: “Our prayer life is built upon our relationship with God. This relationship is directly proportional to our daily devotions. Build up this relationship by daily coming to him. In the words of an old chorus:

*Come with thanksgiving, come with praise.
Open your heart, submit your days*

CHAPTER TWO: CHARACTER IS DEVELOPED AS WE LOOK TO JESUS

The development of character is a process, as by God's grace we are transformed into his image. It takes time – just as it can take time to restore an old car! The secret to the development of Christian character is to for us to keep looking to Jesus

When Paul was a boy he belonged to a Sunday afternoon Bible class, which had as its motto the phrase 'Looking unto Jesus', words taken from Hebs 12.2: "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus". The race in question is the marathon, which by definition is a long-distance. It's a tough race. Indeed, the underlying Greek word used here (*agon*) is the word from which we get the English word 'agony' – it takes all that we have, and more! It involves not just "determination" (GNB), but "perseverance" – we need to keep going. The way to seek going is to keep "looking to Jesus"; or in the words of the GNB, "let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus". Actually, a better translation might be 'looking alone to Jesus': in the words of one commentator, "The author's appeal calls for concentrated attention that turns away from all distractions with eyes only for Jesus".⁶

LOOK TO JESUS FOR EXAMPLE

Jesus is the ultimate role model. Inevitably, at the beginning of their ministries, younger pastors tend to look to more experienced and more 'successful' pastors. No doubt there is much to be gained from learning from others. But ultimately such models disappoint. Even the finest of leaders are but human and fallible. Jesus alone is the infallible role model

Jesus set an example of service

When we look to Jesus, we see first and foremost that leadership is always servant-leadership. So when his disciples were arguing about which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest, Jesus said: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22.25-27: see also Mark 10.35-45).

Leon Morris made the telling comment: "Jesus is not saying that if his followers are to rise to great heights in the church they must first prove themselves in a lowly place. He is saying that faithful service in a lowly place is itself true greatness."⁷ This comment simply echoed the words of a famous Manchester New Testament scholar, T.W. Manson: "In the Kingdom of God service is not a stepping-stone to nobility: it is nobility, the only kind of nobility that is recognized."⁸ Yes, when we look to Jesus, we see that leadership is always a form of service. So in the light of this John Mott defined leadership as "rendering the maximum of service...; the largest unselfishness...; unwearying and unceasing absorption in the greatest work of the world, the building up of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ".⁹

⁶ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Apollos, Nottingham 2010) 453.

⁷ Leon Morris, *Luke* (Inter Varsity Press, Leicester 1974) 368.

⁸ T.W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1948) 27.

⁹ Quoted by Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Marshalls, London 1967) 25.

This teaching about servant ministry appears to have been a constant theme of Jesus. On another occasion when his disciples were arguing as to who was the greatest, Jesus said: "Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (Mark 10.44; similarly Mark 9.35 and Luke 9.48). Jesus had some harsh words to say about 'mis-leaders'. In Matthew 23 we find Jesus denouncing the Pharisees and the other religious leaders of his day. He condemned those who "love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have people call them rabbi" (Matt 23.6-8). When we look to Jesus we see that there is no room for pride in the heart of the Christian leader.

Jesus not only taught servant ministry, he lived out the life of a servant. Nowhere do we see this more clearly than when he took upon himself the role of a slave and washed the feet of his disciples in the upper room. In the Jewish culture of that day this was unthinkable – it was an act of humiliation. Today's leaders need to look to Jesus and hear him say: "I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13.15).

This emphasis on leaders serving others was revolutionary for Jesus' hearers. Until Jesus came the idea of serving others was not a commonly admired virtue. As far as the ancient Greeks were concerned, serving others was undignified and not worthy of any man with real spunk – rather we should simply serve our own desires. In spite of the Old Testament teaching to love one's neighbour as oneself, the Jews of Jesus' day were scarcely more positive about serving others: for them serving was simply a way of gaining 'Brownie points' from God – and even so, it was felt to be wrong to serve one's inferiors. Jesus, however, reversed all human ideas of greatness and rank, not just in what he said, but in how he lived. For he, the Lord of glory, emptied himself of all that was rightfully his and took the form of a servant (Phil 2.6). In so doing he offered a model not just to Christians in general, but to leaders in particular. It was in the light of this that Bernard of Clairvaux wrote: "Learn the lesson that if you are to do the work of a prophet, what you need is not a sceptre, but a hoe"!

How do things stand in our 21st century society? Thanks to the influence of Christian thinking and teaching down through the centuries, things have changed. Today service is a virtue that is admired. Sadly, however, not even in the church is it always a virtue that is always practised. The old Adam is still rampant. The 'natural' tendency is still to pursue the interest of self.

Terry has defined servant leadership as "where every decision that the leader makes in taking his people on the journey toward the ultimate decision is based on love". Love is best defined as desiring the highest good of another, and is the yard stick by which a Christian leader's character is measured. It means that the leader makes no decision out of personal bias or prejudice or family pressure, but rather makes a decision which is going to most benefit all of his people. A leader's character is thus revealed by his decision making. The challenge for the leader of a growing flock is to continue making decisions which are unaffected by his ego. This is the key to servant leadership

Christian leaders need to look to Jesus as their model. Only the leadership which patterns itself on the Servant-King can truly call itself Christian.

Jesus set an example of 'grit'

Jesus was a man of 'grit', in the sense that his life was marked by 'firmness or character; and an indomitable spirit'; 'by determined perseverance' – to quote dictionary definitions of grit. Jesus didn't allow difficulties to stop him going God's way. He was determined to fulfil God's will, come what may. So Luke wrote that "when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9.51). As Isaiah's Servant of the Lord "set" his "face like flint to the work to which God had called him, trusting that God would vindicate his cause (Isaiah 50.7), so Jesus resolutely went the way that would lead to the Cross.

This aspect of his character comes to particular expression in Hebrews 12, where we are called to keep "looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebs 12.2). The writer goes on: "Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart" (Hebs 12.3). I love Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of these two verses: "Keep your eyes on JESUS, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed - that exhilarating finish in and with God - he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's THERE, in the place of honour, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. THAT will shoot adrenaline into your souls (*The Message*)."

Ministry can be tough – very tough. As a rule of thumb every minister goes through at least one tough period in their life. Ministry is a high calling – but it also involves high stress. Sadly, many Christian leaders fail to survive. The statistics are appalling. Time and again God's church makes a lousy mother. One of Paul's books has the title *Power for God's Sake: the Use and Abuse of Power in the Local Church*.¹⁰ This is the context in which leaders need to look to Jesus. When we look to others, the temptation is to believe that 'success' is the norm; when we look to Jesus we realise that human approbation and acclamation are far from the norm. As leaders we often preach on the need for followers to Jesus to "deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow" Jesus (Mark 8.34), but we do not always draw the consequences for ourselves and our ministry. To go the way of the cross in any meaningful fashion is often to experience sacrifice, apparent failure, and pain. Certainly this was the Apostle Paul's experience: he knew what it was like to be "afflicted" and "perplexed", "persecuted" and struck down" (2 Cor 4.8,9; see also 2 Cor 6.4-10).

Some years ago Paul came across a devotional leaflet entitled *Brokenness*, which he found helpful when he was going through a tough period in ministry. "Sometimes it is asked what we mean by Brokenness. Brokenness is not easy to define but can be clearly seen in the reactions of Jesus, especially as He approached the Cross and in His crucifixion. I think it can be applied personally in this way: 'When to do the will of God means that even my Christian brethren will not understand, and I remember that "Neither did His brethren believe in him" (John 7.5), and I bow my head to obey and accept the misunderstanding, this is Brokenness. When I am misrepresented or deliberately misinterpreted, and I remember that

¹⁰ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Power for God's Sake: the Use and Abuse of Power in the Local Church* (Paternoster, Carlisle 1998).

Jesus was false accused but He “held His peace” (Matt 26.63) and I bow my head to accept the accusation without trying to justify myself, this is Brokenness... When my plans are brushed aside and I see the work of years brought to ruins by the ambitions of others and I remember that Jesus allowed them to lead “Him away to crucify Him” (Matt 27.31) and He accepted that place of failure and I bow my head and accept the injustice without bitterness, this is Brokenness”.

Yes, it takes ‘grit’ to be a leader in God’s church. It takes character. But thankfully, as Hebs 12.2-3 makes clear, there is hope. When we look to Jesus we are reminded that the Cross was not the end of the story: for the Crucified is now “at the right hand of the throne of God”.

But Scripture teaches us that even when life is unfairly tough God is at work. The Apostle Paul, for instance, who experienced not only persecution by the Jews, but also time and again misunderstanding and rejection by his fellow Christians, could write: “We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (Rom 5.3-4). When the Apostle spoke of suffering here, he used a strong Greek word (*thlipsis*) to denote real hardship – he knew what it was like to really ‘go through the mill’. Yet he said: “We boast in our sufferings”. What an amazing statement! Was the Apostle Paul a masochist? Did he suffer from the sickness of finding pleasure in pain? No, he recognised that suffering can prove productive: "suffering produces endurance... character... hope".

Now such a positive outcome is not inevitable. Negatively suffering can produce unbelief. It also often produces anger and bitterness. We can think of people who have become twisted individuals because they failed to get promotion at work, or because a loved one died. It isn't that anger is wrong in such circumstances. There are times when it might be right for us to feel angry - either with God or with others. But if we retain that anger and grow bitter toward the way in which life has treated us, then we will be the poorer. We will become stunted individuals who cease to grow and develop.

By contrast suffering can be productive where it is met with trusting faith. Instead of shouting out: "No God of love would allow me to go through what I am going", faith declares that, whatever else, I know that "in all things God works together" for my good (Rom 8.28). In particular the Apostle Paul saw three positives arising from suffering:-

1. "suffering produces endurance": Suffering can make Christians stronger. It is part of God's toughening up process. Just as young plants, when brought out of greenhouse into cold air, find new strength, in the same way Christians can grow strong in their faith as they learn to face crises successfully. Yes, trouble still hurts - it always will; but misfortune does not have to have the last word (see also James 1.2-4).
2. "endurance produces character". The word translated "character" (*dokime*) is difficult to translate. The underlying Greek word was used of metal passed through fire out of which all impurities purged. Here we have a reminder that the crucible of suffering can be a pathway to sainthood. A parallel is perhaps to be found in Malachi 3.3, where God's messenger is likened a metalworker who refines silver and gold, so the Lord's messenger will “refine” the priests “like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness”. In the same way God can use suffering to make us better people. This may seem like cold comfort when we are going through it. We feel like saying: ‘Lord, let me be a healthy sinner, rather than have to suffer all

this to become a saint'. Yet the fact is that we are called to be pilgrims marching to Zion – the Christian life is all about growing and developing. People who have gone through the mill are often more truly rooted in Jesus than others.

3. "character produces hope". I.e. As we see God at work within us, we develop a fresh confidence in God's purpose for the future. John Stott put it this way: "Our developing, ripening Christian character is evidence that God is at work upon us and within us. The fact that God is thus at work in our lives gives us confidence that he is not going to give up the job uncompleted... He is surely going to bring us safely to glory in the end." ¹¹

There are times when it takes real 'grit' to be a leader. But it is the tough times that prove and test our faith, and produce the character of God in our lives. The tests may or may not come from God. Where they come from is not important. How we react is what is important.

LOOK TO JESUS FOR STRENGTH

Christian leadership can be a draining business – even for the strongest of 'characters'. It involves a constant self-giving to other people – whether through preaching, through counselling, through empathising with people as they go through the crises of life, of whether through the general 'wear and tear' of giving leadership. To survive Christian leaders sometimes need to be incredibly resilient – in the words of a recent book on 'the personal qualities of a priest', they need to be 'Steel Angels'. ¹² How necessary therefore it is for leaders to look to Jesus for spiritual renewal; to open up ourselves to his life-giving and life-sustaining presence; and to so 'abide in him' that the branches draw fresh sap from the vine. Only in this can new strength be found to love and service.

John Perry, a former Bishop of Chelmsford, made the insightful comment: "The hardest lesson to accept and learn about Christian leadership is that it has to be in God's strength and not our own. Other qualifications for leadership are necessary, but the primary qualification is a recognition that God's work has to be done in his way and with his power. This cuts across the accepted attitude, 'I can do this in my own strength'." ¹³

Ministry can often be sustained in the first few years by natural talent. But there comes a point when natural talent no longer suffices. Indeed, natural talent can prove a stumbling-block to the operation of God's power in our lives. Sometimes it takes a real crisis in ministry to realise that the true source of power is in our utter dependence on Christ. This was certainly the experience of the Apostle Paul. When tormented almost to the point of distraction by his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor 12.7), he discovered the truth of the risen Christ: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12.9). The Apostle's weakness was a condition of his experiencing God's power. Self-confidence only acts as a block to the source of divine power.

In other words, when we speak about developing character, it is always in relation to Christ. Strength to lead and minister in Christ's name is found in Christ alone. Our own resources are finite, his are infinite. This was the experience of Carlo Caretto, who described how God

¹¹ John Stott, *Romans*

¹² Magdalen Smith, *Steel Angels* (SPCK, London 2014).

¹³ John Perry, *Christian Leadership* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1983) 10-11.

made him face up to his inadequacy and his need of power greater than his own: “Now I contrast my powerlessness with the powerfulness of God, the heap of my sins with the completeness of his mercy. And I place the abyss of my smallness beneath the abyss of his greatness. God can do everything and I can do nothing, but if I offer this nothing in prayer to God, everything becomes possible to me.”¹⁴

Strength is needed in time of weakness. Strength is also needed in time of temptation. As with all God’s people, the temptations that afflict leaders can be many and various. For instance, ‘success’ in ministry can be a leader’s downfall. According to C.H. Spurgeon, “Success exposes a man to the pressures of people and thus tempts him to hold on to his gains by means of fleshly methods and practices, and to let himself be ruled wholly by the dictatorial demands of incessant expansion. Success can go to my head and will unless I remember that it is God who accomplishes the work, that he can continue to do without my help, and that he will be able to make out with other means whenever he wants to cut me out.” In such circumstances leaders need to look to Jesus for strength to remain humble and faithful.

Equally demanding are those occasions when ‘success’ does not appear to accompany our ministry. The temptation is then to look around, and in looking around become jealous of others. Indeed, in many ways jealousy seems to be the ministerial sin par excellence. Michael Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote that jealousy “is a poison which spreads more easily than you would think. You can be jealous of a man because he has gifts which you would like. You can be jealous of a man because while you think he lacks your gifts, he seems to be more successful than you. You can be jealous of a man because some of the people look to him when you thought of them as *your* people looking to you for spiritual help. In this case your love for people, through its intensity of feeling, can make you jealous, as you think of them as *your* people. Thus complex are the elements which create pastoral jealousy.”¹⁵ All the more reason, therefore, to look to Jesus for strength to serve.

¹⁴ Carlo Caretto, *Letters from the Desert*.

¹⁵ Michael Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today* (SPCK, London 2nd edition 1985) 71-72. See also Paul Beasley-Murray, *Living Out the Call. Book One: Living for God’s Glory* (Amazon 2015, 71-79).who looks at how pastors can be guilty of all seven ‘deadly’ sins: viz. pride, envy, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony and sloth!

CHAPTER THREE: CHARACTER IS SUSTAINED AS WE LOOK TO OURSELVES AND TO OTHERS

Character can take years to build, but can be dissipated in a moment. We see this in 2 Sam 11, where David let his guard down and fell (in every sense of the word) for Bathsheba. R.T. Kendall, a former pastor of London's Westminster Chapel, has listed ten principles for leaders who want to finish well:

1. Put yourself totally under Holy Scripture
2. Be accountable to reliable people
3. Be squeaky clean regarding finances
4. Maintain sexual purity
5. Come to terms with jealousy when you feel threatened by another person's gifting, anointing, or popularity
6. Be willing not to get the credit for what you do
7. Always keep your word
8. Live in total forgiveness
9. Be a thankful person
10. Maintain a strong personal prayer life ¹⁶

It is in this context that we write about the need to sustain character by looking to ourselves and looking to others.

LOOK TO YOURSELVES

Leaders need not only to look to Jesus but also to look to themselves. "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching" (1 Tim 4.16) wrote the Apostle Paul to Timothy. "Keep watch over yourselves" was his exhortation to the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20.28). For leaders there can never be room for complacency.

In some ways the Apostle was only echoing the Book of Proverbs: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov 4.23). Our heart is the key motivator of our life: we need to ensure that we constantly open it up to the scrutiny of God's Spirit. In this regard Terry recommends we take the following three steps every day:

1. Invite the Lord to search your heart. In the words of the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139.23-24). The purpose of having God search our hearts is to discover sin, which in turn leads us to confess our sins. Like a visit to the dentist, often we hope that God won't find a sensitive spot – but it's better fixed than left to decay
2. Recognise the danger of deception. As Jeremiah wrote, "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse" (Jer 17.9). We have been amazed how all too often Christian leaders have been subtly drawn into deception which has eventually destroyed them. They should have recognised it.

¹⁶ R.T. Kendall, *It Ain't Over Till It's Over* (SPCK, London 2016) 188-200.

3. In the words of the Psalmist, pray “set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 14.3). The tongue can do so much damage, and needs to be tamed (see James 3.1-12). Test the past day, and ask God “Is there anything that I have said or done that is not acceptable to you?”

The truth is that we can so easily deceive ourselves in our relationships with others. We need to recognise the following four things:

1. We aren't always right
2. People who hurt us aren't always wrong
3. Opportunities are not always God-ordained, so they need to be handled with care and prayer
4. We need to be careful about spiritual guidance which we think is God-given but is actually contrary to God's Word. Spiritual guidance personally received is best submitted to a spiritual elder of some maturity to help prevent error from coming into our lives.

The Apostle Paul spoke of the Christian life – and of the leader's life in particular – as involving self-discipline: “Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things: they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified” (1 Cor 9.24-27).

Drawing upon his own experience, Gordon MacDonald, a veteran American Christian leader, wrote: “Today there is a tremendous emphasis on leadership themes such as vision, organizational strategy, and the ‘market-sensitivity’ of one's message. It's all great stuff – stuff I wish I'd heard when I was a young pastor. But if it is all about what's above the waterline, we are likely to witness a leadership crash of sorts in the coming years. Leaders blessed with great natural skills and charisma may be vulnerable to collapse in their character, their key relationships, and their centre of belief because they never learned that one cannot (or should not) build above the waterline until there is a substantial foundation below it.”¹⁷

LOOK FOR FRIENDS

Some years ago Norah Coggan, then wife of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, gave an address to clergy wives entitled *Who helps the helpers?* The title was taken from one of Juvenal's satires. Juvenal literally said, “Who is to guard the guards themselves? Who is to watch over those who are doing the watching?” In its original context, this had something to do with a woman who comes to entice the guard. However, the quotation is capable of more general application and Norah Coggan applied it in particular to those involved in pastoral work: “The times comes”, she said, when we [the helpers] have lifted too many burdens and we really are word down, exhausted and depressed. Maybe our faith is cold and also our lives and witness for the Lord. Perhaps we feel we are in a dark tunnel. Depression comes over us.

¹⁷ Gordon MacDonald, *Building Below The Waterline: Shoring Up The Foundations of Leadership* (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts, 2011) 2.

What then?”

What then indeed? The fact is that not even leaders can go it alone. However much they may seek to look to Jesus and to look to themselves, ultimately they discover there is a need for friends. Friends who will people them through dark and difficult patches in ministry. Friends who will strengthen their hand in God (see 1 Sam 22.15)

Partners in life

For those of us who are married, we can and should turn for help to our life partners. That's where, in the first instance, mutual comfort and help are to be found. The words of the 'Preacher' come to mind: "Two are better than one. For if they fall, one will lift up the other, but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two be together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one" (Ecclesiastes 4.9-11). These words can be applied to married life in general, but they can also be applied to the life of Christian leaders in particular.

Yet there are times when partners in life cannot help. It is not that they do not care, but rather they care too much. They, perhaps even more acutely than their spouses, feel hurt and pain. In this not infrequent situation, both are in need of help and support. Together they need to find others who can help them through their crisis

Friends in the church

Although the making of close friends within a church can cause problems – members of the congregation can begin to think that the pastor has 'favourites' – the benefits often outweigh any potential disadvantages. For such friendships can not only meet the social needs of leaders and their spouses, but can also meet their spiritual needs. Some of the friendships may even develop into a kind of 'spiritual growth group', where true openness and honesty can prevail in a way which would not be possible in any other group within the church. Within the confidence of such a group, encouragement might be given, but also on occasion an element of discipline might even be practised. Why should Christian leaders and their spouses be removed from all-round pastoral care?

Howard Clinebell described the kind of relationships we have in mind in the following terms: "Growth stimulating relationships are warm, caring and trustful, at the same time they are honest, confronting, and open. Caring + confrontation = growth. This is the growth formula."¹⁸ Although Clinebell was speaking of growth groups in general, surely this can be applied to close friendships that leaders may have with others in the church. For leaders and their spouses also need to grow. They need to be in the kind of relationship where on the one hand they can be cared for, but on the other hand – where necessary – they can be confronted.

¹⁸ Howard Clinebell, *Growth Groups* (Abingdon, Nashville, Tennessee 1977) 24.

'Soul-friends' outside the church

In order to maintain integrity, there is much to be said for Christian leaders having 'soul friends' or 'mentors' – 'resourceful people' sometimes called 'spiritual directors' – to whom there can be a degree of accountability in terms of our walk with the Lord. The fact is that we do so easily deceive ourselves – even in those times of quiet when with the best of intentions we seek to scrutinise our motives before the Lord. We need help to see ourselves as we truly are. Such relationships can be painful as questions are asked and our 'real person' emerges. But it is only as our inner self is exposed to God's light and love that there is any hope for growth and development in the Christian life. For Paul, the fact that he was accountable to a 'spiritual director' gave his ministry integrity. It meant an end to ministerial 'play-acting', and ensured that the inevitable discontinuity between the public expression and the private realities of his spirituality was kept to the minimum.

In one way or another leaders need to ensure that their Christian character is sustained. Leaders, like all God's people, are called to be men and women of God but, if they fail to live up to their calling, then the rest of their ministry is of little worth – and even counter-productive. In the words of Richard Baxter, the great 17th century pastor of Kidderminster, England: "Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your loves, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours."¹⁹

¹⁹ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (First published in 1656, but later abridged, Banner of Truth Trust edition, Edinburgh 1994) 63.