

# COURAGE FOR LONG-TERM SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

## WHY IS LEADERSHIP ALWAYS CHALLENGING?

Leadership always means **managing change**, requires **energy** and the long-term commitment **not to walk away** when the going gets tough in a way that other people haven't. Most leadership related to people and God's kingdom has a **never-ending horizon** – there is always more to be sought.

## WHAT ARE SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FOR SERVANT-LEADERS?

Hardship and sacrifice. Hard work. Disappointment with others. Because they let us down. Because they leave us. Because their progress is slow. Disappointment with God. Opposition/persecution as normal. Spiritual attack as to be expected. Loneliness or lack of privacy. People's attachments/expectations/projections. Criticism and disagreement. Twenty-first century context: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. "Yesterday's maps are outdated, and today's will soon be too." Dealing badly with power or success. "Power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people."



## WHAT CAN THIS LEAD TO?

### **Burnout.**

"Death by a thousand paper cuts"

### **Defendedness.**

Rather than open up to others and empower them, we can increasingly "manage" ourselves and others.

### **Denial.**

We can lack the courage or skill to take responsibility for dealing with issues, allowing long-term problems to develop.

Which of these issues and reactions am I experiencing?

What are the signs I am noticing?

## AVOIDING BURNOUT BY HAVING THE COURAGE TO "LEAD OURSELVES" BEFORE WE LEAD OTHERS.

**Being disciples first.** Being the leader is being the first follower. "A leader can never take others further than they have gone themselves, for no-one can travel without unless he or she has travelled within."

**Our inner life and character.** It is the attention given to what is under the ground that makes all the difference. It is only as we win our internal struggles over fear, loss, and our willingness to embrace cost that we are able to fight the more public battles we face.

Our characters are shaped by our **minds being renewed**, our hearts (the place of our deepest desires and motivations) **becoming more influenced by God's Spirit** and our lives are supported in an **environment of community**.

**Getting our significance outside of ourselves.** We need a source of approval that is not put in danger by how we perform. We work from acceptance, not in order to get it.

**The habit of being able to do nothing.** We need to get to the point where we surrender our desire to fix everything and our sense that we are the solution to our lives.

How is my mind being renewed? What are the practices that enable God's Spirit to change me? Where is the environment of community in which I am being supported and challenged? How do I receive my significance from God? How do I practise being able to not be needed?



## AVOIDING BECOMING "DEFENDED".

**Letting ourselves be seen.** Courage means "coming from the heart". To be truly courageous is to tell the whole story of who we are with our whole heart. While we might hope to impress people with our strengths, but we will connect with them through our vulnerabilities.

**Being comfortable with setting boundaries.** "Knowing what I am to own and take responsibility for gives me freedom." It is the only way to keep focussed on our main calling. They keep us from resentment. They model a healthy lifestyle to others. "Do I have a lifestyle I would want others to imitate?" Boundaries create respect for others.

**Risking failure.** 95% of success is said to be built on failure. The first 50 years in the life of Winston Churchill have often been called 'A study in Failure'.

**Dealing with criticism well.** Always asking, "What is the 1% of truth in this criticism which I need to pay attention to?" Pausing. Avoiding responding by email or text. Welcoming "the Lord's discipline." Coming against things in the opposite spirit. Processing with others. Praying before responding.

**Forgiving ruthlessly.** Like Jesus in order to forgive we will have to experience a death, before resurrection.

How can I be vulnerable in my leadership? Where do I struggle to set boundaries and why? Am I secure enough to take risks? How do I deal with failure? How do I process criticism? How realistic am I about the need to forgive others?



## RESISTING DENIAL

### GAINING CONFIDENCE IN TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR HANDLING INEVITABLE DIFFERENCES OR CONFLICTS.

Conflict is unavoidable in any community. "A weak person only goes where he is smiled at." Strong leading includes the initiative to serve by refusing to collude with difficult or unhelpful situations, and instead working to bring healing. "The term 'confront' literally means: 'to put face to face; to cause to face or to meet'."

Common starting points:

- Recognising our own temptations in the face of conflict.**
- Acknowledging from the start that it is impossible for conflict-resolution to be pain-free.**
- Praying for (and if possible with) all concerned before, during and after the process.**
- Asking myself what outcome I am hoping for.**
- Agreeing the ground rules for how the conversation should be handled.**
- Engaging a mediator, if helpful, who is trusted by all parties.**
- Avoiding unhealthy triangles.**
- A good negotiation might start with:**

- Clarifying the outcome we want.
- Giving a chance for each side to state their position.
- Making some proposals about how to move forward.
- Seeing what "give and take" each side is able to offer.
- Coming to an agreement.

- Using "I" language in discussions.**
- Showing I have listened well.**

**Recognising that perfect resolution may not always be possible.**



What will help me have the courage to confront conflict? What are the reactions I have to conflict which affect the way I manage it? What skills do I need to develop to handle conflict well?

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you."

(2 Corinthians 4: 8-12)