

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A Theological Foundation for Leadership in Ministry

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## A Theological Foundation for Leadership in Ministry

### Introduction

The goal of this paper is to produce a theological discussion dealing with the theological foundations of leadership in ministry. Specifically, we will address this topic of a theology of ministry by asking ourselves this two-fold question, “When God looks at his Church what does he see and what does he want to see in regard to the leadership of his Church?” This paper will attempt to answer this two-fold question by looking at leadership in ministry in light of the creative and redemptive purposes of God as is revealed in the progressive revelatory process of scripture.

It is the conviction of the author of this paper that current leadership in the Christian church must rediscover and re-anchor itself upon the biblical paradigms of leadership as set forth in every epoch of scripture’s redemptive history. Every historical era of God’s dealing with mankind is centered around dynamic leadership personalities. Whether for good or bad, these leaders provide examples of what God desires for his church in regard to leadership. Outside of the initial creative process of the universe as described in the first chapters of Genesis, God rarely moves among his people apart from human involvement. This fact forms part of the basis for Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 3:9a, “For we are God’s fellow workers...”<sup>1</sup> God chooses to move among his people through specific humans whom he equips for leadership in his church. Therefore, a biblical theological paradigm for leadership in ministry is crucial for our generation. Because of this crucial aspect in regard to our generation, we must do more than merely present a historical theological perspective of leadership. We must move from theology to praxis.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references will be taken from the NASB.

Hopefully, this treatise will enlighten our understanding of what that leadership paradigm should look like and will encourage us to institute that paradigm in the church today.

### The Creative Purpose of God in Regard to Leadership in Ministry

Based upon an understanding of the fundamental doctrine of the omniscience of God, we must understand that all the church is, does, and should be was in the mind and understanding of God at the time of creation. The above statement includes the fact that, within the creative process of God, God's initial purpose for leadership is found. We must, therefore, ask ourselves the question, "What is the initial creative purpose of God in regard to human leadership?"

When God created the heavens and the earth, he did so with purpose. Part of that purpose, according to the account found in Genesis 1, was to bring order out of chaos, form out of formlessness, and fullness out of voidness. However, to ensure that order, form and fullness continued, someone was needed to oversee God's earthly creation. According to Genesis 1:26, mankind was created in order to rule over creation. The exact nature of this aspect of man as ruler will be dealt with later in this paper, however, for our purposes here it should be noted that the Hebrew word translated *rule* in Genesis 1:26, רָדָה, carries with it the idea of dominance or dominion.<sup>2</sup> In Genesis 1:28, רָדָה is coupled together with the term כִּבֵּשׁ, translated *subdue*, which means to bring into submission by strength if necessary.<sup>3</sup> Elmer Martens states that this is part of man being created in the image of God: "That image is best understood as consisting in the ability of man to relate himself significantly to others, notably to God; and, like God, to exert

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<sup>2</sup> William White, "2121 רָדָה," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> John N. Oswalt, "951 כִּבֵּשׁ," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

dominion over forms of life lower than himself.”<sup>4</sup> Thus it becomes clear that man is created, at least in part, to give guidance, oversight, and correction to God’s original creation. Since guidance, oversight, and correction are main components of the process of leadership, we must understand that human leadership capabilities and responsibilities are direct outgrowths of the creative process of God.

As the above argument demonstrates, the leadership role of man is indeed a part of the creative purpose of God. Man is created, at least in part, in order to provide leadership to God’s creation. However, we must follow the stream of revelation to determine the extent and the characteristics of this God-ordained leadership function.

#### The Adamic Epoch in Regard to Leadership in Ministry

Man, according to the Genesis account, is created to both rule and subdue God’s creation (Genesis 1:26,28). If we were to solely understand man’s leadership role in regard to creation from these two verses, we would be forced to conclude that God’s design for leadership is one of dominance and forced compliance by means of strength. Indeed, for many in leadership roles, this style of leadership is their standard mode of operation. However, we must couple the account of Genesis 1 with its parallel account in Genesis 2. Genesis 2:5 indicates that God retarded natural vegetational growth in the beginning of creation due to the fact man had not yet been created and thus there was no one to *cultivate* the ground. The Hebrew word translated *cultivate* in the NASB is עבד which literally means to work or serve.<sup>5</sup> Since this work or service

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<sup>4</sup> Elmer A. Martens, *God’s Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 33.

<sup>5</sup> *Online Bible*, ver. 8.00.02 (Winterbourne, Ontario: Timnathserah, Inc., 1999).

is in regard to the ground, it is translated cultivate, hoe, or till the ground.<sup>6</sup> This concept is demonstrated once again in Genesis 2:15 where עֲבַד is coupled together with שָׁמַר which means to keep, guard, or even protect.<sup>7</sup> From the above discussion, it seems that although man is created to rule over creation, God’s intent is for man to execute his creative purpose by being a servant and a guardian. Reyburn and Fry suggest that the word שָׁמַר means “to be in charge of” but in the sense of “tending or taking care of sheep.”<sup>8</sup> A servant or pastoral role is suggested as the paradigm for Adam’s leadership role. Walter Kaiser says:

...the divine mission to “subdue” and to “dominate” was no license for mankind to abuse the creative orders. Man was not to be a bully and a law to himself. He was only to be God’s viceroy and therefore accountable to Him. Creation was to benefit man, but man was to benefit God!<sup>9</sup>

And it seems that the way man best benefits God is by taking the role of a servant and a guardian.

Servant-leadership, therefore, seems to be the embryonic style of biblical leadership. Servant-leadership implies that although a person has the position of dominance and rulership, that person executes his positional authority by virtue of service and not control or manipulation. This is the role that God asked Adam to fulfill in regard to creation.

In view of the above paragraph, some would argue that this role of servant-leader may apply to Adam’s relationship with creation but not to Adam’s relationship to Eve. This argument is based on God’s statement to Eve found in Genesis 3:16 when , after the fall, God tells Eve, “...yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” However, it should be

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<sup>6</sup> William D. Reyburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 62.

<sup>7</sup> *Online Bible*.

<sup>8</sup> Reyburn, 69.

<sup>9</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 76.

noted that the Hebrew word translated *rule* in this passage is מַשַּׁל which can be as easily translated *to be like*. Reyburn and Fry have this to say:

Although all modern translations understand *rule over* as the man dominating or controlling the woman, some scholars argue that this text, and the Old Testament generally, do not support that interpretation. The Hebrew word rendered *rule over* is *mashal*, which can also be understood to mean “to be like.” Accordingly some interpreters understand that the man will “be like” the woman in wanting to be with her just as she desires to be with him. With that in mind we may translate the last two lines of RSV as “you will want to be with your husband just as he likewise will want to be with you” or “your desire will be for your husband, just as his desire will be for you.”<sup>10</sup>

Although the author of this paper is not qualified academically to go against the stream of conventional interpretation, it does seem incongruent that Adam would be asked to be a servant to creation and yet an autocrat to his wife who also was created in the image of God. It would be more congruent to believe that Adam and Eve were bound together in mutual desire in order to serve God’s original creative purposes.

If the argument posited above is indeed correct, it appears that in all of Adam’s relationships he is called upon to be a servant-leader. Thus, we once again state that in the Adamic Epoch, servant-leadership seems to be the biblical paradigm.

#### The Noahic Epoch in Regard to Leadership in Ministry

We must now ask ourselves what the era of Noah has to say concerning our topic. Leadership can be broadly defined as the ability to exert influence over others. Leadership can also be characterized by the fact that a particular person has a followership. In order to evaluate what the leadership paradigm of Noah’s generation is, we must first determine if anyone in Noah’s generation is a leader according to the above definitions.

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<sup>10</sup> Reyburn, 93.

That Noah found favor with God and was a righteous man is without question according to Genesis 6:8-9. But did Noah influence or lead his generation? Did Noah have a followership in his generation? It appears the only followers Noah had, the only ones over whom he held an influence, were his own immediate family. However, Noah's leadership within his own family resulted in their salvation. Thus, it does appear that Noah indeed was a leader in his generation. David Hildebrand states, "In the earliest days of the Old Testament, leadership of the people of God was by the family head or patriarch, to whom God spoke his messages."<sup>11</sup> Noah absolutely fits this description.

But what type of leadership paradigm did Noah exhibit. Obviously, he could have coerced, cajoled, or manipulated his family into the ark. Yet the scripture does not record such a leadership paradigm from Noah. Noah evidently lead his family by example and his example was one of obedience to the commands of God. Genesis 6:22 states, "Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did."

Based on the above it appears that the leadership paradigm for Noah's generation is one of obedience. The obedient-leader, however, is closely akin to the servant-leader. To do the will of God is basically synonymous with serving in the will of God. Noah influenced and provided a means of salvation to his family by the lifestyle of an obedient-leader, serving the Lord's will and commands.

However, in order to be true to the biblical record, we must touch upon the fact that disobedience also has an effect upon one's influential leadership ability. Genesis 9:20-27 records the sad scenario of Noah's drunkenness which resulted in the curse upon Ham and his descendants. Although personal responsibility rests foursquare upon the shoulders of Ham for

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<sup>11</sup> David Hildebrand, "Leadership," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand

this grievous sin, it still must be noted that had Noah acted more responsibly, perhaps this sin on Ham's part would not have occurred. It is evident from Noah's life that leadership is a full-time occupation and cannot be abdicated even for a moment of personal revelry.

### The Abrahamic Epoch in Regard to Leadership in Ministry

As we move along in the progressive revelation of God to his people, we now look at our topic in regard to the generation of Abraham. Just as Noah before him, Abraham's primary responsibility of leadership is mostly seen in his relationship to his immediate family. However, if we move outside the sphere of pure biblical theology and take into account the record of the rest of scripture, Abraham's influence is felt all the way into the New Testament and beyond.

Warren Bennis states that one of the primary characteristics of leadership is character.<sup>12</sup> Character is extremely important when almost absolute authority is processed by an individual.

J. Oscar Boyd states:

Over this entire establishment [the patriarchal family] Abraham ruled with a power more, rather than less, absolute...because Abraham was independent of any permanent superior authority, and so combined in his own person the powers of the Babylonian *paterfamilias* and of the Canaanite city-king.<sup>13</sup>

With so much power and authority within his own family, Abraham affords to us a good study of biblical leadership style.

Our first snapshot into Abraham's leadership style offers cause for concern. With respect to how he treated Sarah, his wife, in regard to a perceived personal threat by the Egyptian

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Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Warren Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1989), 30.

<sup>13</sup> J. Oscar Boyd, "Abraham," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956; reprint, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996).

Pharaoh (and later repeated with Abimelech), one would wonder if Abraham was a man of character at all.

However, Abraham's life, for the most part, is characterized by faithful obedience to the word and will of God. That Abraham demonstrates leadership abilities is seen by the manner in which he approached the disputes between himself and Lot (Genesis 13), which is the first real leadership scenario that we see in Abraham's life. It could be argued from this scenario that Abraham was not a leader at all, but rather, demonstrated severe weakness in his ability to face conflict. However, if Abraham's leadership ability is viewed from the paradigm of a servant's heart, then his dealing with the above mentioned conflict comes from an attitude of humble and loving service to others, preferring others above himself. That Abraham was the absolute ruler of his family and yet treated Lot with such magnanimity speaks well of his godly character.

Also, in response to the above negative view of Abraham's leadership capability in regard to facing conflict, one must consider the next snapshot of Abraham the leader which is found in Genesis 14. In this episode of Abraham's life, he did not hesitate at all to take immediate action when Lot and his family were taken captive by hostile armies and lead even in the fact of danger and peril. Once again this points to the heart of Abraham the servant-leader, willing to sacrifice himself in order to be of service to others.

This same leadership dynamic is seen in one of Abraham's descendants of the patriarchal age, Joseph. However, with Joseph we move the leadership paradigm beyond the sphere of one's immediate family into the sphere of political and societal influence. Joseph, within the providence of God's will, presents to us the scenario of a man capable of near absolute control over thousands of lives, including the lives of those who sought to destroy his own.

That Joseph was endowed with leadership capabilities can hardly be disputed. Although his brothers doubted or rejected Joseph as a leader and subsequently sold him into slavery, in slavery we see Joseph's leadership traits recognized by those whom he influenced. From Potiphar's household to Pharaoh's courts, Joseph distinguishes himself as a capable leader. Joseph is given absolute control over the nation, yet rather than becoming despotic, Joseph's leadership paradigm is built on godliness and compassion which results in a servant mentality. When reassuring his brothers of his forgiveness concerning their sin against him, Joseph's words are most telling:

...Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid, I will provide for you and your little ones.... (Genesis 50: 19b-21a).

Even though in his culture Joseph could have justly been punitive to the point of requiring his brother's lives, Joseph sees himself as nothing more than a servant in the overarching program of God for his people. Joseph dared not usurp God's authority over his own life and the lives of his brothers. M. G. Kyle points out this about the leadership character of Joseph:

Joseph stands out among the patriarchs in some respects with preeminence. His nobility of character, his purity of heart and life, his magnanimity as a ruler and brother make him, more than any other of the OT characters, an illustration of that type of man which Christ was to give to the world in perfection.<sup>14</sup>

Kyle is simply stating that Joseph is an Old Testament example of Christ's perfect example, an example, as we shall see, which included a perfect leadership paradigm based on servanthood.

Before moving past Joseph's life, one more thing needs to be pointed out in relation to our topic of a biblical theology of leadership. For the first time in scripture, the account of

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<sup>14</sup> M. G. Kyle, , "Joseph," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956; reprint, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996).

Joseph specifically links one's ability to lead with the involvement of the Spirit of God in one's life. In the account of Joseph we have a direct correlation between the Spirit and one's recognition of leadership abilities. After Joseph's revealing to Pharaoh the meaning of his dreams and advising Pharaoh on the course of action he should take toward averting a catastrophe because of the upcoming famine, Pharaoh states in Genesis 41:38, "...Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"<sup>15</sup> Although this is the testimony of a pagan king, it correctly assesses the fact that Joseph's ability to interpret dreams and render advise is based on the רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים (Spirit of God). Even though Pharaoh may not have had a complete and informed understanding of the matter, Joseph certainly did for he had already informed Pharaoh that only God could give a favorable answer (Genesis 41:16).

From this point on in scripture, as we shall see, leadership ability is dynamically linked to one's involvement with the Spirit of God. Thus, in developing our theology of ministry as it regards leadership, we must conclude that not only is the biblical paradigm of ministry based on obedient servanthood, it also becomes a direct outgrowth of one's relationship with the Spirit. It is important to understand that as early as the Genesis record we see a relationship between biblical pneumatology and the servant-leader.

### The Mosaic Epoch in Regard to Leadership in Ministry

Hildebrand describes Moses as "the Old Testament leader par excellence."<sup>16</sup> Moses' leadership, as did Joseph's, moves beyond family influence into the more modern sense of leading a contingency of people. However, Moses' leadership is characterized by three things. First, Moses is consistently referred to throughout the narrative of the Pentateuch as the *servant*

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<sup>15</sup> This translation is taken from the NIV. NASB translates the last part of this verse by using the terminology "a divine spirit." However, the actual Hebrew is best translated "spirit of God."

*of the Lord*. Second, Moses is described as the most *humble* man upon the earth (Numbers 12:3). Third, Moses' leadership ability is directly linked to the *Spirit of God*.

The narrative of scripture indicates that Moses attempted to begin his leadership career in a somewhat forced manner (Exodus 2:11-15) which resulted in utter failure and led to a fugitive existence. But Moses' failure led to his dependency upon God and God established him as the spiritual and physical leader of Israel. However, as leader of Israel, Moses is referred to as the *servant of the Lord*. The Hebrew word, as we have already seen in the verb form, literally means to work or serve. As a noun, this word basically carries the connotation of a slave. However, in Hebrew thought, this status of slave carries with it some rights and often carries with it positions of trust.<sup>17</sup> In Numbers 12:7 God directly refers to Moses as his servant and directly links Moses' servanthood with faithfulness indicating that he has a position of trust. This trust is built upon Moses' obedience to the things of God, a trust that was later marred and prohibited Moses from entering the promised land. Thus Moses' leadership has a direct corollary with Adam as a servant and with Noah and Abraham as obedient leaders.

Numbers 12 deals with the episode of Miriam and Aaron challenging the leadership of Moses. In this passage, God endorses Moses' unequivocal leadership position. Such an endorsement and such a position of authority could lead one to an exalted state of mind and attitude. However, Moses is referred to as *humble*. The Hebrew term עֲנָו, translated humble, "expresses the intended outcome of affliction: humility. Moses' description of himself ...as such a man is no proud boast, but merely a report of his position: absolute dependence on God..."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hildebrand, 474.

<sup>17</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, "1553 עֲבָד," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> Leonard J. Coppes, "1652 עֲנָו," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

This dependence on God by Moses results in a gentle spirit. In the scenario of his leadership being challenged, Moses does not retaliate or defend himself. Rather, “Moses was prepared to submit to this unprovoked and hurtful attack by leaving his vindication to God. This selfless, trustful, nonassertive attitude to life is thus characteristic of the virtue [humility].”<sup>19</sup> Because of God’s unequivocal endorsement of Moses as the leader of his people, we must conclude that leadership, at least in Moses’ day, is incumbent upon an attitude of humility. To put it in an even larger scope, Moses’ attitude of humility is “paradigmatic for Israel”<sup>20</sup> in the sense of future generations as well.

The account in Numbers 12 also couples Moses’ attitude of humility with an attitude of loving intercession. Moses contends with God over the punishment dealt out to Miriam because of her challenge to Moses’ leadership. Not only is Moses willing to leave his reputation and authority in God’s hands, he is also willing to pray for those who spitefully use him. Rather than wielding his authority to gain control of and overcome oppositions and threats to his leadership, Moses’ leadership is built upon a trust that God is the ultimate source and authority of one’s leadership calling and ability. This is very similar to the attitude that characterized Joseph as a leader, a non-punitive attitude of servanthood.

Also, as with Joseph, Moses’ leadership is directly linked to the involvement of the Spirit of God in his life. In Numbers 11 Moses complains to the Lord concerning his weariness of leadership responsibilities. God’s advice to Moses is to gather seventy elders of the people and he will empower them for leadership (Numbers 11:16-17). This pericope gives insight to the fact that “as the political and spiritual leader of Israel, Moses has the Spirit upon him...Moreover,

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<sup>19</sup> W. J. Dumbrell, “עֲנִי 6505,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 3, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

when he divides his responsibilities with the seventy elders, the Lord puts his Spirit upon them as he had put it upon Moses...”<sup>21</sup> Thus Moses continues, and transfers to others, the paradigm first seen in Joseph’s life concerning biblical leadership being a direct outgrowth of the Spirit’s involvement in one’s life. It begins to appear as we move theologically through the scripture that biblical leadership is a gifting of the Spirit.

Before moving to our next epoch of salvific history, we should note that Joshua’s leadership is squarely based upon the Mosaic paradigm. God’s words to Joshua in Joshua 1:5 indicate that God would be with him just as he had been with Moses. This promise, however, was predicated upon an attitude of obedience (Joshua 1:7-9). Joshua is referred to by the title *servant of the Lord* in the same way it is applied to Moses (Joshua 24:9, Judges 2:8). And Joshua also is a man of the Spirit (Numbers 27:18, Deuteronomy 34:9). In the progressive history of Israel, young as it is at this point in scripture, the paradigm is being entrenched that leadership involves obedient servanthood and that leadership is incumbent upon the Spirit’s involvement in one’s life.

#### The Davidic Epoch in Regard to Leadership in Ministry

As we approach the period of the Israelite monarchy, we must discuss the role of the judges in regard to our topic. The judges were leaders in the sense that they gave supervisory and/or military leadership to the people of God. The predominate characteristic of these leaders is the fact that they were directly raised up by God (Judges 2:16) and, for the most part, they are charismatic or Spirit-empowered. Stronstad states, “These Judges, then, are charismatic warriors

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<sup>21</sup> Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1984), 15.

who have received military prowess through the gift of the Spirit.”<sup>22</sup> The term *servant* is rarely seen in connection with the Judges.<sup>23</sup> It appears that the accounts of the individual judges tend to serve as negative examples of proper leadership. In speaking of this collection of the accounts of the judges’ lives, Raymond Dillard says:

A better way to describe it would be as a “downward spiral”: it is not that each cycle is more or less a repeat of the earlier ones, but rather that there is a deterioration in the quality of the judges and the effect of their leadership.<sup>24</sup>

Dillard goes on to say that “leadership like that of these judges would not secure the land for Israel.”<sup>25</sup>

Samson is a prime example of the type of leader that Dillard refers to above. Proud, arrogant, self-indulgent, and vindictive, Samson is a good *bad-example* of how God’s leaders should not act. Even being moved upon by the Spirit is no substitute for a servant’s heart.

Because of the poor state of leadership in Israel during the era of the judges, and specifically toward the end of Samuel’s life, Israel begins crying out for a king (1 Samuel 8). Scripture indicates that God foresaw this development in the history of people. In Deuteronomy 17:14-20, God predicts that Israel will indeed want a king like the nations around them, but Israel’s king is to be different than the kings of the *goyim* or *gentiles*. Israel’s king is to be chosen by God, he is to adhere strictly to the teaching of *torah*, and his heart must not be lifted up above his countrymen. This is God’s perfect desire for leadership in regard to kingship.

Basically, according to J. Robert Vannoy, the:

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> It appears that Samson is the only Judge referred to by this title (Judges 15:18) and Samson, at best, is a bad example of obedient servanthood.

<sup>24</sup> Raymond B. Dillard, “Judges, Theology of,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Kingship was subordinated to covenant. Israel's king was to be a covenantal king. He was not autonomous. He was always obligated to submit to the law of Israel's (and his) Great King, Yahweh...as well as to the word of the prophet...<sup>26</sup>

David becomes the paradigmatic king in the Old Testament. Although David fell short in many areas, he is seen as fitting the pattern set by God for covenantal kingship.<sup>27</sup> Throughout scripture David is referred to as the servant of the Lord. David is also known as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22). This aspect of David's devotion to God is in direct contrast to Saul's devotion. God rejects Saul because Saul's heart refuses to obey God. David, even though he sins, is willing to repent when confronted with his sin, and return to obedience to God's word and will. Thus the paradigm of David's kingship is built on obedient servanthood to God and God's people.

Also, David is a man of the Spirit. Whereas Saul rejected God and God's Spirit was taken from him, the Spirit of God rests upon David until the end of his life (1 Samuel 16:13). David's influence is understood to be incumbent upon the Spirit's indwelling his life for, after his sin with Bathsheba, David pleads with God not to remove the Holy Spirit from him (Psalm 51:11). If God acts favorably to David's prayer, then David declares he will still be able to lead others in the ways of God (Psalm 51:13). David had seen the consequences of having God's Spirit removed in the life of Saul and he earnestly desires for that not to happen to him. Wilf Hildebrandt states:

Without the *ruach*, David knows that his reign as king will not only be fruitless and unsuccessful, but his ability to reign as vice-regent with Yahweh will be over...The leadership of the kings shows that the necessary ingredient for kingship is the anointing and reception of the *ruach*. Yahweh elects his

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<sup>26</sup> J. Robert Vannoy, "King, Kingship," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

representative, has him anointed, comes on him with the Spirit, and empowers him for rule in his kingdom.<sup>28</sup>

Because David's kingship is viewed as paradigmatic, it becomes obvious from the above presentation that kingly leadership in Israel follows the pattern that we have seen from creation. The king is to be a servant-leader, obedient and amenable to God, and empowered by the Spirit. Furthermore, the king must be an example for others to follow. Unfortunately, many of the kings of Israel, from both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, did not adhere to the paradigm set by David.

### The Pre-Exilic and Exilic Epochs in Regard to Leadership in Ministry

Because of the above mentioned failure of subsequent kings to follow David's example, God forcefully used the office of the prophet to give guidance and direction to both the king and the people of the kingdom. Because of their crucial role in giving guidance, warning, reproof, and hope to the people, the prophets acted in a role of being both a servant of God and a servant to the people. Although the term prophet, **נביא**, basically carries with it the connotation of one who "is an authorized spokesperson for God with a message that originated with God and was communicated through a number of means,"<sup>29</sup> the prophet is referred to by other titles as well. Prophets in the Old Testament are referred to as *servants of the Lord* (1 Kings 14:18, 18:36; 2 Kings 14:25, 17:13; Jeremiah 7:25, 26:5) and are called *shepherds* and *watchmen*.<sup>30</sup> By these titles prophets are designated as servant-leaders responsible for influencing and overseeing the spiritual progress of others. Obedience is a requirement as is evidenced by the call of Isaiah in

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<sup>28</sup> Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 127.

<sup>29</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, "Prophet, Prophetess, Prophecy," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

Isaiah 6. Even though the people will not listen to him, Isaiah is still required to faithfully give the word of the Lord.

Even though the prophets were faithful servants of the Lord, God's judgment falls on both kingdoms of Israel and the people go into captivity. However, even in captivity, God's prophets continue their role of faithfully giving to the people the word of God. The servant-leadership of the prophets is even more crucial during this time due to the fact that no visible king or leader is evident.

Throughout the Old Testament literature concerning the prophets, the Spirit of God is seen as an active agent. Hildebrandt states, "The whole of Elijah's ministry was characterized by the *ruach yhwh*."<sup>31</sup> This same characteristic can be applied to all those holding prophetic office in Israel. Thus, not only were the prophets obedient servants but they were Spirit-filled and Spirit-led servants as well.

#### Excursus on *The Servant of the Lord*

Although the prophets faithfully warned the people of God concerning righteousness and judgment, both Northern and Southern Kingdoms fell under the awesome wrath of God. Yet God had promised an enduring kingship to David. Through the prophets, God makes it clear that he is not yet through with Israel. This becomes especially clear in the writings of Isaiah. However, Isaiah's hopes become centered upon one he refers to as *the servant of the Lord*.

Herbert Wolf's comments on this subject are especially crucial to our discussion:

A careful reading of the four servant songs [of Isaiah] has nonetheless led many scholars to argue that the servant refers to an individual who fulfills in himself all that Israel was meant to be. This individual was the ideal Israel, a righteous and faithful servant who suffered unjustly and died to atone for the sins of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Hildebrandt, 140.

humankind...In some respects the servant can be compared with the Davidic messianic king...The Spirit of God would empower both the king and the servant...and ultimately the suffering servant would be highly exalted...and given the status of a king.<sup>32</sup>

The above discussion is highly germane to our topic. God's desire for the one to ultimately lead his people is that he be referred to as a servant, willing to suffer for the benefit of others, and empowered by the Spirit. That this servant is exalted to kingship (much like the scenario of Joseph) indicates that servanthood is a prerequisite for rulership in the kingdom of God.

#### The Post-Exilic Epoch in Regard to Leadership in Ministry

After the return from exile, the prophets were joined by appointed civil leaders in giving leadership to the people of God. Nehemiah stands paramount among these civil leaders. Nehemiah's relationship to God is that of a servant (Nehemiah 1:6&11) and his relationship to the people of God is one who leads by example (Nehemiah 4:21-23). In speaking of the leadership qualities of Nehemiah, Cyril Barber says:

In the final analysis, a leader must lead by example...Nehemiah is in the forefront setting us an example...He was not greedy for possessions... nor was he anxious about prestige and the splendor of his court. He set an example of godliness...for others to emulate...Possessed of these qualities, it is not surprising that Nehemiah was an effective leader.<sup>33</sup>

Nehemiah's leadership follows the same basic pattern of Old Testament leadership in general. Nehemiah considers himself to be a servant to the Lord and to the Lord's people by way of example. The one element of the Old Testament leadership paradigm that seems to be missing in the account of Nehemiah is the role of the Spirit in the leader's life. However, during the great

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<sup>32</sup> Herbert M. Wolf, "Servant of the Lord," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

time of confession and repentance described in Nehemiah 8, the people are made to understand that it is the Spirit that instructs in the ways of righteousness (v. 20) and it was a refusal of the Spirit's words of warning spoken through the prophets that had brought judgment upon them (v. 30). Surely Nehemiah understood the crucial work of the Spirit necessary to make Israel God's people and sought the leadership of that Spirit day by day.

### Excursus on the Leadership Role of the Priesthood

Overarching most of the Old Testament is the role of the priest among the people of God. The priestly office was initially held by the patriarch of the family. Once Israel became a nation, a professional priesthood was established to give religious leadership to God's people. The priest are not referred to as the servants of the Lord but their position is definitely one of service to both God and the people. Hildebrandt says:

The leadership role of the priests preceded the office of both prophet and king and lasted beyond their services. Yet, the goal of all three of these positions was the maintenance of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel.<sup>34</sup>

The priests maintained the covenant relationship by serving as the mediator between God and the people, by representing through person and dress the holiness of God to the people, giving spiritual discernment by use of the Urim and Thummim to the people of God, and to instruct the laity concerning the words of God.<sup>35</sup>

### The New Testament (Jesus and the Gospels) Epoch in Regard to Leadership in Ministry

As we bring to a close our biblical theological journey of the Old Testament understanding of leadership, it will be interesting to see how much continuity exists between the

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<sup>33</sup> Cyril J. Barber, *Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1976), 185.

<sup>34</sup> Hildebrandt, 145

Testaments concerning this topic. The Old Testament paradigm of leadership is basically one of an obedient servant, empowered by the Spirit, and serving as an example of godliness through word and action for others to emulate. Added to this is the understanding that the *Servant of the Lord*, portrayed in Isaiah's prophecy, is willing to sacrifice himself for the people of God. Does the New Testament build on this paradigm or will we find discontinuity instead of continuity?

As we move into the era of life and ministry of Christ, we not only change the language of scripture from Hebrew to Greek, we also change the style of theological presentation from a predominately narrative format (Old Testament) to a format largely presented in didactic form (New Testament). Although the Gospels (and Acts as well) are presented in a narrative form, we will be able to focus our attention on specific didactic teachings in regard to our topic of a biblical theology of leadership.

The New Testament paradigm of leadership is clearly taught by Jesus in parallel passages found in Matthew 20:20-28 and in Mark 10:35-45. The occasion of this teaching is precipitated by the mother of James and John. This concerned mother wants her sons to have places of honor in Christ's kingdom. Jesus uses this occasion to give a homily on the qualifications of leadership among his followers. Jesus compares the natural tendency of world leaders with the paradigm that he wants exhibited in his followers. The disciples are told that world leaders like to "exercise authority" over others (Matthew 20:25). The Greek term translated "exercise authority" is *κατακυριεω*. This term carries with it the sense of ruling to one's own advantage.<sup>35</sup> But, according to Jesus, the world's paradigm of leadership is not to be so with Christ's followers. To achieve first place or greatness among Christ's followers necessitates

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<sup>35</sup> Hilderbrand, 475.

<sup>36</sup> W. Foerster, "katakuriueuo," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey w. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985).

becoming a διακονος or δουλος to each other (Matthew 20:26-27). The term διακονος basically means a servant but Jesus, in his teaching in John 12:25-26, broadens the term to include sacrificial service even to the point of death.<sup>37</sup> The term δουλος means slave and implies the relationship of service and constriction of self-centered ambition that Christ's followers should have one to another.

Based on the above, in Jesus' scheme of things, leadership is contingent on servanthood. Those who wish to be recognized as first or great in ministry must be a servant or slave to all. Furthermore, this attitude of servanthood must carry with it the risk of sacrificial service.

However, we must note that Jesus did not just teach a paradigm of servant-leadership. Jesus modeled this paradigm as well. In Matthew 20:28, Jesus states the fact that the type of servanthood he has obligated on his followers is exactly the kind of servanthood that he is performing. He also states the fact that his servanthood will result in sacrificial martyrdom.

Perhaps the best illustration of how Jesus modeled his teaching on being a servant-leader is found in John 13:5-16. On the eve of his crucifixion, during the celebration of the Passover, Jesus took the place of a common household slave and washed his disciples' feet. Jesus then explains to his disciples that even though he is legitimately their διδασκαλος (basically a teacher) and their κυριος (one of great importance and authority), yet he is willing to gird about himself a slave's towel of humility and perform for his disciples the base act of washing their feet, an action reserved for the lowest of slaves. He then informs his disciples that they must be willing to do the same for one another because "a slave is not greater than his master" (John 13:16b).

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<sup>37</sup> H. W. Beyer, "diakoneo," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey w. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985).

The leadership paradigm taught and modeled by Jesus is one of sacrificial servanthood. This type of servanthood is characterized by humility and a willingness to prefer others ahead of oneself. Of course, this ultimate form of servanthood culminated in Christ's death on the cross. Thus Jesus fulfills Isaiah's paradigm of the Suffering Servant of the Lord. Both the words and actions of Christ are clear concerning his paradigm of leadership. Those who would be leaders in his community of disciples must be humble, self-abasing, self-sacrificing servants willing to be obedient unto death. Tom Marshall's words on this subject are especially enlightening, "The servant leader is first and foremost a servant by nature, it is what he is, not merely what he does. Servanthood is the motivation that drives his behavior, and motivation is all-important in a servant."<sup>38</sup>

Before leaving this epoch of history, it should also be noted that Jesus, in his earthly ministry, is both full of the Spirit and led by the Spirit (Luke 4:1). He is the anointed of the Lord, the Messiah (Luke 4:18). He ministers in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:18-19). And he commanded those who were to lead his church to wait for the power of the Spirit to come upon their own lives in order to equip them for effective servanthood (Acts 1:4-5).

Based upon the above, it seems clear that there is great continuity between the Old Testament paradigm of servant-leadership and the teachings and example of Jesus. Thus, we may conclude that the creative purpose of God for leadership among his people did not change between the Testaments. If anything, in the teachings and example of Christ, the paradigm of obedient charismatic servant-leadership became more entrenched and enhanced.

### The New Testament (Apostolic Period) Epoch in Regard to Leadership in Ministry

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<sup>38</sup> Tom Marshall, *Understanding Leadership: Fresh Perspectives on the Essentials of New Testament Leadership* (Lynnwood, Washington: Emerald Books, 1991), 68.

After the ascension of Jesus, the mantle of leadership for Christ's newly created church fell upon the apostles. These men had been hand-chosen by the Lord. Their initial qualifications for apostleship are known only to God. However, Acts 1 indicates the apostles themselves understood their qualification as an intimate knowledge and relationship with the earthly Jesus. Obviously, that criteria for leadership is no longer valid.

Outside of the original twelve apostles,<sup>39</sup> leadership in the early church seems to center around three groups of people referred to as πρεσβυτερος, επισκοπος, and διακονος. Respectively, these three Greek terms are translated elder/presbyter, overseer/bishop, and servant/deacon.

The designation of men as elders/presbyters in the early church is probably a carry over from the church's Judaic roots. In Acts 11:30, 15:2, and 21:18 these elders/presbyters are associated with the church at Jerusalem and seem to share responsibilities for the church along with the apostles.<sup>40</sup> They seem to function somewhat as a supreme court for the church,<sup>41</sup> much like a synagogue council or the Sanhedrin did for Judaism.<sup>42</sup> Other than the fact that the term πρεσβυτερος suggests that a person should be seasoned or mature, we have little suggestion from scripture as to the qualifications of those who served in this specific office of the early church. However, James the brother of Jesus is considered to be the chief of these Jerusalem elders in the early church.<sup>43</sup> Although both James' genealogy and office give him great influence and authority, James considers himself to be nothing more than a δουλος (slave or bond-servant)

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<sup>39</sup> I am including Matthias in this number as a divinely elected substitute for Judas.

<sup>40</sup> G. Bornkamm, "presbyteros," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey w. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985)..

<sup>41</sup> Hildebrand, 476.

<sup>42</sup> Bornkamm.

<sup>43</sup> C. M. Kerr, "James," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956; reprint, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996).

of both God and the Lord Jesus Christ (James 1:1). Whether this attitude of servant-leadership is shared by all of the Jerusalem elders of the early church we do not know, but it is certainly a basic characteristic of its chief elder.

Outside of Jerusalem, elders/presbyters were established or recognized in local churches (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5). However, these elders/presbyters outside of Jerusalem are understood, at least by Paul, more in view of their function rather than their office. The church is enjoined to obey them and follow them due to their ministry and giftings rather than due to their status.<sup>44</sup>

In Acts 20:17-35, Paul addresses the Ephesian elders and in so doing gives some insight into the character of those who fill this function in the church. Due to the influx of evil that is approaching the church, Paul charges these elders to ποιμαίνειν (shepherd) the flock of God. This designation of shepherd carries with it the basic idea of care and protection.<sup>45</sup> The great example of this type of care and protection is the Great Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep. Thus, it appears the elder/presbyter is characterized by loving, faithful, and sacrificial service to the people of God. This aspect of service is also emphasized by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:17. Paul, speaking concerning elders/presbyters, indicates they should be about the business of teaching and preaching which he characterizes as hard work. This idea of hard work is taken from the verb κοπιᾶω, and basically means *manual labor*.<sup>46</sup> To be a leader in the church of God is not a position of ease but of hard and strenuous labor. Only those who are willing to be servants need apply.

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<sup>44</sup> Bornkamm

<sup>45</sup> J. Jeremias, "poimen," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey w. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985).

<sup>46</sup> F. Hauck, "kopiao," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey w. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985).

The designation of men in the early church by the term *επισκοπος* (overseer/bishop), speaks to the role of leaders as shepherds (1 Peter 2:25, 5:2) or guardians.<sup>47</sup> Paul, in 1 Timothy 3, gives the qualifications for those who function in this calling and office of the early church. The overseer/bishop, among other things, must be gentle, uncontentious, and free from conceit or highmindedness. The image of Moses' style of leadership, a leadership based upon humility and gentleness, seems superimposed upon Paul's admonition here. Paul's indication is that the office of overseer/bishop is based upon service rather than power.<sup>48</sup> The chief example of this office, according to 1 Peter 1:25, is Jesus. Furthermore, in following the example of Jesus, overseers/bishops must be willing to suffer for the flock of God and not lord it over those whom they are leading (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Because *επισκοπος* and *πρεσβυτερος* appear to almost be interchangeable in some passages (Acts 20:17-28, Titus 1:5-7), we can conclude that both of these offices/persons in the early church have the same qualifications: sacrificial servant-leadership based upon the paradigm of Jesus. Also, as Acts 20:28 points out, both *επισκοπος* and *πρεσβυτερος* are commissioned and presumably empowered by the Holy Spirit for service and function.

The *διακονος* (servant/deacon) is the last term we will discuss in reference to New Testament church leadership. By its very definition, *διακονος* refers to a position of service since the term, in normal Greek usage, means "to wait at table."<sup>49</sup> This understanding of "waiting at table" forms the foundation for the establishment of the first office or designation of deacon in the early church (Acts 6:2-3). The men chosen in Acts 6 are chosen in order to fulfill a task. The men chosen for this task are those of good reputation and full of the Spirit of God.

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<sup>47</sup> H. W. Beyer, "episkopos," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey w. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Their task is to serve the church in order to allow the apostles time to devote themselves to their tasks. The office of deacon is subsequently found through the New Testament churches.

Deacons are instructed to be above reproach, people of faith, and good managers (1 Timothy 3:8-12). However, basically, deacons are characterized by service (1 Timothy 3:13).

Although, as the above paragraph indicates, the scriptural record indicates a clear office of *διακονος*, this term is also found in reference to a variety of people throughout the New Testament not necessarily fulfilling the office of deacon. The original apostles referred to themselves as having this type of servanthood (Acts 1:17). Paul speaks of himself and Apolos as servants/deacons of the gospel and the church (1 Corinthians 3:5). Even Christ himself is referred to as a *διακονος* (Romans 15:8). Thus it appears that overarching the entire New Testament church is the understanding that servanthood is basic to those who would lead.

### Summary of a Biblical Theology of Leadership in Ministry

In dealing with leadership problems within the African church, Gottfried Osei-Mensah makes these statements:

But the model of leadership that the Scriptures consistently commend to the people of God is instead what we may call the “servant-leader”... We find this model applied to all legitimate leadership in the Bible. In both the Old and the New Testaments those who are qualified for appointment as leaders among the people of God are always appointed to *serve*. Whether appointed as prophets, priests, or kings, they are not to lord it over God’s people but to serve them.<sup>50</sup>

Our biblical survey lends validity to Osei-Mensah’s remarks. Throughout Scripture the paradigm of obedient servant-leadership, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is the paradigm that God espouses as incumbent upon those who would lead his people. . A proud, arrogant, self-

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<sup>49</sup> Beyer, “*diakoneo*.”

<sup>50</sup> Gottfried Osei-Mensah, *Wanted: Servant Leaders* (Ghana, West Africa: Africa Christian Press, 1990), 8-9.

indulgent, and vindictive leadership style is in no way espoused as a proper leadership style for those who would lead in the household of faith. Jesus is the paramount leadership example and his example is built upon sacrificial servanthood. New Testament leaders, from apostle to deacons, consider themselves as merely servants, servants following the footsteps of Jesus and whose calling and equipping came from the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Conclusion

As we conclude this theological journey, we must return to our initial two-fold question: “When God looks at his Church what does he see and what does he want to see in regard to the leadership of his Church?” This question now solicits us to move from theology to praxis.

What does God see among the leadership of his church today? Paul Cedar says:

The temptation, even among church leaders, is to go on an ego trip and to work at building our own kingdom rather than the kingdom of God. Such leaders are more concerned with their own agenda than God’s. They seem to enjoy controlling the lives of other people more than setting them free through faith in Christ.<sup>51</sup>

Having spent almost thirty years in ministry, the author of this paper has seen many within church leadership who have fallen prey to the above temptation. As God looks at his church today, in some circles (perhaps many circles) he undoubtedly sees a leadership paradigm diametrically opposed to that espoused in his Word.

But what does God want to see in regard to leadership when he looks at his church. Based upon our study of scripture, it seems God wants servant-leaders who fulfill a redemptive and incarnational role within the church. God wants servant-leaders who model Jesus Christ to the world and who minister as Christ ministered. Cedar says, “Servant leaders are called to

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<sup>51</sup> Paul A. Cedar, *Strength in Servant Leadership* (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publishers, 1987), 68.

minister to broken, hurting, incomplete people by building, healing, and encouraging them with the grace and love of Jesus Christ.”<sup>52</sup>

In the final analysis, God wants to see his church led by people who are more intent on serving than on being served. God wants to see the 21<sup>st</sup> Century church model the leadership paradigm found throughout scripture, the paradigm of obedient servanthood. In the words of Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, “The desire to serve others must be stronger than the desire to lead - so that leadership becomes a means of serving.”<sup>53</sup> This is the attitude and paradigm that God desires to see in his church today.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>53</sup> Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Leading the Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 35.