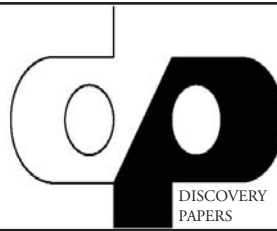


# SHARED LEADERSHIP

*SERIES: A CONSIDERATION OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP*



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Acts 13:1-3, 1 Peter  
5:1-7  
2nd Message  
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After twenty years, Indiana Jones is back in the theaters. The enduring quality of the Indiana Jones legend is due, in part, to the fact that it mirrors something that we see in the story of the people of God. There are deep secrets and great adventures; ordinary people act heroically in the battle against evil, and the world is saved.

Likewise, the people of God are engaged in the battle against evil. We are called to touch lives with the message of salvation for the whole world. Ordinary people get to do the most extraordinary things. The world pays little attention to God, yet the things of God are the most important things going on at any time in history. And though we don't often think of it that way, what it means to be Jesus' church is to participate in the most glorious adventure of all.

This is the second of four messages in a series that examines the nature of Christian leadership. We are discussing leadership as a way to think about who we are as the local congregation known as Peninsula Bible Church as well as who we are as part of Christ's church in the world. The Lord insists that his followers be not like the world in which the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over those allotted to their charge. Mark 10:43-44 says, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be slave of all."

Our focus today is the importance of shared leadership in the body of Christ. All believers have one common relationship with the Lord and the same status in relation to God. Significance and authority are not reserved for a special class. Leadership is not concentrated in the hands of a few. There is no hierarchy among Jesus' followers, no pyramid with a CEO at the top and layers of management and workers arranged below. There are no priests whose prayers carry greater weight. All are united with Christ, indwelt by the same Spirit, embraced by the same Father.

In Matthew 23:6-8, Jesus again contrasts what should be true among his followers with what is true in the world. "They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers." We are all on the same plane in relationship to Christ.

Here at PBC, we use three New Testament terms to designate groups of leaders among us: elders, pastors, and deacons. In each case, there is a common life among all who share any of those designations. There is no head elder, no senior pastor, no chief deacon. When we serve

together in leadership, we work shoulder to shoulder with one another, not ranked one above the other.

We will look at two New Testament passages today, neither of which is intended as instruction on how to "do church." Instead, they are descriptions of believers in settings where the Lord exercises his authority, and they offer a helpful perspective on Christian leadership.

Let's turn first to the book of Acts, chapter 13, verses 1-3:

**In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.**

This brief account describes a pivotal event in the life of the church. Prior to this, Christian witness consisted primarily of believers answering questions from others who were interested in the actions of God. Sometimes knowledge of God would spread as persecuted Christians were dispersed to new lands. But here, for the first time, the Spirit of God told the believers in Antioch to set apart missionaries who would intentionally and purposefully go out to spread the gospel. They were to do so not out of obligation but out of love and recognition that the church of Christ is to be a missionary church.

The five individuals named here are most likely serving as leaders in the church, and they almost certainly represent both Jew and Gentile. They come from varied areas of the Roman Empire—Simeon called Niger was probably a black man from sub-Saharan Africa, and Lucius was from Cyrene, an area of northern Africa. Barnabas and Saul were Jews from different regions. This community of believers in Antioch was a diverse community because God had called different people together.

It is significant that the Holy Spirit spoke to them as they were worshipping and fasting. They weren't planning strategy; they were worshipping God, and in the midst of attending to God through fasting and listening and worshipping, they were given a work to do.

We are told that the Spirit spoke to them, but we

don't know by what means the Spirit made his word known. However, we can be sure that no one who was present would have reported "We came up with a terrific idea." They would report that the Spirit told them. God spoke.

So the leaders laid hands on these two men and then sent them off to do their ministry, and even though two were given the responsibility, all would be joined with them in it.

The church at Antioch took God seriously, and they were given an opportunity that would change the course of world history. Diversity, direction, confidence, calling—all of these things flowed from their attention to God.

But while churches like the one in Antioch talked about Christ, contemporary churches often speak about themselves. We market our congregations and invite people to be one of us. Yesterday's paper contained a full-page advertisement for a church. The ad didn't say, "Come hear about Jesus." Instead, it said, "Come join us because we don't have the same problems your church does. We do church better!"

Now let's look at First Peter, chapter 5. Probably two decades have passed since the first missionaries were sent out from Antioch, and church structure has become more organized. The church has identified elders who have specific responsibilities, and it is to these men that Peter is writing.

Verses 1-7:

**To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.**

**Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,**

**"God opposes the proud  
but gives grace to the humble."**

**Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**

Peter was the most widely known of all the apostles, yet he did not write, "I, Peter, write to you as an apostle and tell you what to do." He wrote instead, "I appeal you as your fellow elder." He could have issued commands, but he chose to identify himself with the recipients of his letter.

I want to make three specific observations about this text. First, note that Peter cannot talk about the church without talking about Jesus. He encourages good leadership and offers correction, but throughout these verses he refers to the place and power and glory of the Lord Jesus. Remember Christ's suffering, anticipate his return, be confident of his reward, trust in his mighty hand. The only way to talk about being the church is to talk about the Lord.

Second, Peter focuses on motives in ministry. His concern for leaders is not primarily about their skills or experience or training. His concern is for the motives with which they undertake their leadership responsibilities. They should be willing instead of compelled, eager, open to examination, not greedy. Those who would take the mantle of leadership must be led by motives that honor the Lord.

Third, there is a hinted reference to generational difficulties. He addresses elders, who are named leaders in the church and represent an older generation. Then in verse 5 he addresses the young men, saying "in the same way be submissive to those who are older." And all are to clothe themselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

It has been true since the beginning that differences between generations are hard to live with in the church, but Peter says here that the key to getting along and overcoming difficulties between generations is humility. It is to let God raise up who he will raise up when he chooses to raise them up.

Both of these texts suggest a way of looking at the world and what it means to be Christian that is consistent with the fact that the Christian life is genuinely an adventure. But they also share a perspective that distinguishes Christian experience from what we find in the world. I want to close with three principles that I think we can distill out of this.

**1. Listening comes first.** The primary responsibility of a leader is to be a listener, one who actively, regularly listens to the voice of the Lord. A Christian leader must also listen to other people, even those who have different experiences and perspectives. Listening comes first, before talking, before deciding, before complaining, before directing. To serve the Lord well, one must listen well.

In the process of identifying elders, pastors, and deacons here at PBC, we ask, "Has the Lord created this person for this responsibility? Does this person listen to Christ? Is this a person that fires off in all directions or one who can take orders from the Savior?" For elders, pastors, deacons, or anyone else in leadership, the ability to hear others and hear the Lord is crucial.

**2. “It,” whatever “it” is, is not someone else’s responsibility.** Most of us, if we are honest, would prefer to let someone else do the hard work while we take most of the credit. We want to pass the buck and shift lines of responsibility and enjoy recognition without engaging difficult things. But the Scriptures make it clear that the question to ask is not “who is responsible?” but “Lord, what is your direction for me? What is my calling?” We eagerly look for ways to use our gifts and opportunities because we serve Jesus, not the organization. There is ideally no concern at all for who gets the credit. In the vast majority of things that we do for the Lord, no one needs to give us permission; we hear from him, we respond to him, and we are honored by him.

**3. Consensus and conformity are not the same thing.** We place a high value on consensus at PBC. Elders make important decisions unanimously. There is an ethos of trying to achieve consensus in most of what we do, but there is a wrong way and a right way to go about it. You can select a group of people that share the same background, age, and life experiences, and you can pretty well predict that they will seldom have differences of opinion. Or, there could be a subtle undercurrent of manipulation so that people appear to agree when in fact they have been coerced.

Or we can wait for God to speak. If the Lord has a plan, then let’s ask him to speak to all of us. If he speaks and we all hear him and we agree in Christ together, not with coercion or forced consensus, then glorious things happen. And when everybody is genuinely in agreement, through the work of the Holy Spirit, then there is no back-biting or disgruntlement or attempts at undermining because we have already seen together what the Lord is up to. We are in agreement and moving forward together. Consensus is critical, but it can only come genuinely if God grants it.

The adventures of Indiana Jones have lasting appeal because most ordinary people want their lives to be significant. We want to be a part of something important, to face down evil and make a difference. We want that because God made us to want it. And that’s what it means to be the people of God.

*Let’s pray. Lord, we thank you for the Scriptures. We thank you for the Antioch church and their listening ear. Thank you for the privilege of serving you. Thank you for the community that we belong to. We ask that you will make things that we cannot see with our eyes ever more real to us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

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