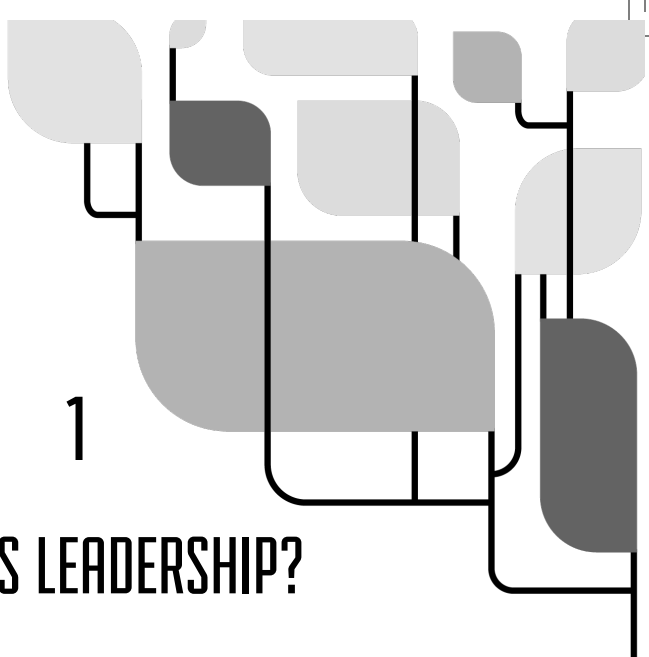




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WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Why would I intrude into another's life trying to effect change? Shouldn't I just mind my own business?

To our culture, the answer is a robust, "Hell yes! Mind your own business!"

But when we open the Scriptures—especially the New Testament—we see a different answer. There, we learn that believers are not to be autonomous islands—individuals living apart. Instead, we are joined with fellow believers in the so-called "mystical union." As Paul described it, "We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Romans 12:5). It's a real fusing of our spirits with Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:17), and hence, with one another.

Because of this spiritual union, God calls and enables us to come together as his people and to live in community at a level deeper than previously possible. Living under his direction gives us the framework for building up one another as the Holy Spirit pours out God's love in our hearts (Romans 5:5).

God didn't create us to be passive spectators. We were created to be powerful agents of change in our own lives, but also in the lives of others. God calls his people to build up the other members of the body of Christ. When Paul says, "Let all things be done for

edification” (1 Corinthians 14:26), he means for the building up of other believers.

Growing believers are committed to each other’s character development. They view the time spent with their friends as opportunities to relate, discovering what’s happening inside and at times offering godly advice and help.

Whenever we try to influence others for good, we are exercising leadership. The guidance we give our children is also leadership. Leadership is not limited to formal leadership positions. It’s a needed skill for every believer.

WHO SHOULD LEAD?

Viewed this way, leadership is not for the few. Ephesians 4 contains one of the best passages on every-member ministry (including every-member leadership). Paul first points out that the leaders in a local body are provided “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (v. 12). “Saints” is a New Testament word used for all believers. So, the members in a fellowship are the main ones that build up the body—not the leaders. An explanation follows:

[This building up continues] until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

The beginning words, “we all,” are important, because throughout the passage the subject and the object are the same—we all. The process Paul describes is for all believers, not for a pro elite. You can also see in this verse that he has in mind the goal of substantial spiritual maturity:

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ. (Ephesians 4:14-15)

Here Paul describes the work of building up the body of Christ using the words “speaking the truth in love.” To speak the truth in love, believers learn to share God’s word, the truth, in the context of loving relationships. It’s clear that, according to this passage, such speaking can make a lasting difference in people’s lives.

Finally, Paul further insists on every-member ministry:

The whole body, being fitted and held together by what *every joint* supplies, according to the proper working of *each individual part*, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:16, emphases added)

Paul uses emphatic and specific language to drive his point that average believers are to be the agents used by God to build up the body of Christ. It’s each and every believer who participates.

A healthy, believing community is based on a network of friendships that grow and evolve over a period of years. These friends help, admonish, and encourage each other as they move forward together. They welcome new people, pray, and study the word of God together. Some of them consciously seek to have a positive influence on others. These are the leaders.

This picture doesn’t describe behavior in a large congregation of hundreds or thousands. Those have their place. This passage in Ephesians describes smaller, room-sized communities where people can get to know each other and become friends. Of course, a network of such house-based groups could number in the thousands.

So, as you build friendships, you should look for ways to make a difference in your friends’ lives. When you influence friends, you

are, in effect, leading them. Of course, at times it's their turn to influence you.

Further up the line are those who are recognized as effective leaders. They may be designated as home church or small group leaders. They may lead ministry teams.

To lead the larger church, the New Testament calls for a group of elders. We'll look at these roles later.

So we learn a happy lesson in Ephesians 4: God puts no prerequisites on leading others! Naturally, brand-new believers are less likely to feel comfortable advising older believers, but they are often very effective in leading their non-believing friends to Jesus.¹

THE MAIN BARRIER

When churches don't teach or believe in every-member ministry or leadership, the biblical picture never takes shape. People see the ministry as something for seminary-trained professionals. Lay people might qualify for teaching Sunday school classes or serving in service roles, but not for sophisticated teaching, counseling, or leading groups.

As a result, few if any members are seeking to achieve group leadership roles or even one-on-one roles. It's nothing that good Bible teaching and persuasion can't fix.

To lead under the biblical picture, you need to make the case for every-member ministry detailed carefully from Scripture. This is a lengthy project. Realistically, leaders would do well to gather a small group of influencers who will help spread the case and the practice to others in the community.

LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY

In the biblical picture, leadership and authority are not the same thing. Most leadership interactions have nothing to do with

1. Ephesians 4 is not the only passage on every-member ministry. It's also taught in 1 Corinthians 12-14, where we read that "to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit (spiritual gifts) for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7), Romans 12, 1 Peter 4:7-11, and many other passages.

authority. Biblical leadership isn't ordering people around. This kind of leadership involves influencing others, not commanding them.

Leadership doesn't come from being in authority. Rather, being in authority could come from being a good leader, as we'll see.

In the New Testament, a group of elders led local bodies. Elders have legitimate authority, but only over a specific sphere, namely, the organization and operation of the local church's ministry. Where and when meetings occur, who teaches what, where the church's money will be spent, and a host of similar questions should be decided by a group of godly elders. They can delegate some of this decision-making to others, like ministry team or house church leaders, but those delegates are still accountable to the elders.

They also have a distinct role as teachers of the word and visionary speakers, so they do lead.

But in the flux of personal interactions involved in building up the body of Christ, authority doesn't come into play. Formal leaders, like elders, can build in with others, but so can everyone else. In body life, formal leaders take off their leader hats and put on their brother or sister hats.

In body life, the only authority believers have is their compelling character, their love, their persuasiveness, and God's word. Change happens in community because people want it, not because they were ordered to change.

But leadership and authority are connected in a different way. As the community of God's people interacts, some members stand out as servant leaders at a high level. This becomes evident because of the godly fruit they bear in ministry and the reputation of their good character.

These are the ones the local body should call into higher levels of leadership. The existing leaders declare they are recognizing a new leader as a formal leader. They may have a confirmation vote as well. The thought is that God's hand is on the person, and therefore God wants him or her to lead.

This explains why leadership doesn't come from being in authority, but authority comes from being a good leader.

THE FRUIT OF GOOD LEADERSHIP

When a local body of believers buys into the vision of every-member ministry and the picture of widespread leadership that comes with it, big changes are at hand. In a home group where people believe in every-member ministry, the members are all looking for the same thing—an opportunity to build someone up.

Before a gathering of God's people, members in such a group typically pray that God will guide them to someone they can build up. Then, after meeting, the group socializes and enjoys larger and smaller conversations where friendships can begin and members can build each other up. This is also a venue for catching up with friends as the members build into relationships.

Motivation is high in groups with effective leadership. The members set about practicing the so-called “one another passages.” These instructions, littered throughout the New Testament, create a picture of how active fellowship works.²

From the way these passages are scattered in every book, and from the “one another” language, you can tell these imperatives are addressed to all God's people, not just formal leaders or specific groups. And when a group of believers takes them seriously, that group will become dynamic and edifying.

MOVING TOWARD LEADERSHIP

Becoming a good leader takes time, but even while learning, members can have a significant impact. Young believers who come to believe in the notion of every-member ministry realize they need training. They need to be equipped in God's word, and they need to acquire relational and ministry skills. Whether it's through classes,

2. Here is a fairly full list of the one another passages for further study: John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10, 16, 18; 13:8; 14:13, 19; 15:5, 7, 14; 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; Galatians 5:13, 14-15, 26; 6:2; Ephesians 4:2, 32; 5: 19-21; Philippians 2:3-4; Colossians 3:9, 13, 16; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9, 18; 5:11, 13; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25; James 4:11; 5:9, 16; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:9; 5:5; 1 John 1:7; 3:11, 16, 22; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5.

one-on-one mentoring, or field training, the group needs to get busy equipping its younger members for the work of ministry.

In place of the weary feeling that “I don’t know what I could do,” comes the realization that God has a plan to use all his people in his service. Paul explains, “We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10 NIV).

Groups where most people are looking for opportunities to speak the truth in love become very relational. People feel gratified that they are not lonely because the members actively engage with each other’s lives. Through such relationship building, friendships deepen because people are open and engaged. They know that building relationships is the pathway to effective ministry, including leadership.

Well-led groups also have a clear vision and know what their mission is. That results in a gratifying sense that they are part of something bigger than themselves. It gives them purpose. As a result, well-led groups usually grow—maybe not as much as they wish, but the positive outlook will attract new people.

Like Paul, well-led groups “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). Over time, true community forms. The group begins to feel like a family. Visitors notice the difference between the isolation of postmodern culture, and this warm, purposeful group.

Close-knit community isn’t formed in the group’s larger meetings or worship services. It’s essential that the larger congregation also adds smaller meetings at different times where members can apply themselves to building up the body of Christ. Most of the one another passages only make sense in a smaller group setting. Whether you call them small groups, life groups, mini churches, house churches, or any other name your group might use, the point is that the groups are small enough to make friendship building possible.

But the house church is not an end in itself. Eventually, the house becomes crowded and it’s time for the next phase—planting

a new group. Achieving this goal typically takes years. It includes raising up a new team of formal leaders and a full-sized group of active, informal leaders.

THE BIG PICTURE

If only we could see this kind of community come fully into being, body life would be a delightful experience. Of course, there are negatives as well. None of this is easy. In the rest of this book, we will look at how to build in the positives and how to address potential negatives.