

# The Church's Crisis of Leadership

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Date: 03 November 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] Mark Driscoll, Steve Timmis, Ravi Zacharias, Bill Hybels.

The list goes on of highly respected leaders in the Christian church who have been deposed from ministerial office for spiritual abuse.

Today's church faces a crisis of leadership. No denomination, even our own, is immune from the leadership style of powerful men.

Such scandals led a prominent New Testament professor from our perspective, Reform perspective, called Michael Kruger to write a devastating critique of modern management techniques in the church.

He titled this book, *Bully Pulpit*. I would have taken it, but it's on my Kindle. And on our recent holiday in Northumberland, I read and was deeply challenged by Kruger's analysis of the church's crisis of leadership.

[ 1 : 05 ] It confirmed my suspicions that if today's church wants to be faithful to the Lord, it needs to completely reverse its definition of leadership.

My contention is not just that the concept of leaders as we understand it today is absent from the Bible, but that it diametrically contradicts the ministry of Jesus, the teaching of the Bible, and the needs both of the church and the world.

Kruger lists the qualities of the leaders we are seeking to produce in our seminaries. Listen to these.

Powerful, decisive, inspiring, dynamic, vision casting, charismatic, gifted, popular. We've been deceived into thinking that if we only had more leaders like this, we'd be in a better place as the church.

We're sold business management speak, and models of worldly management leadership have almost completely penetrated the Western church. We talk more about the leadership style of Jeff Bezos than of Jesus Christ, and we consult Forbes magazine more than we do the New Testament.

[ 2 : 30 ] What has happened as Reformed Christians to our dependence upon the Bible as our rule of faith and practice? That not only do we believe what the Bible teaches, but that we model our lives and leadership upon the Bible.

Jesus, with reference to the way in which the world views leadership, says in Mark 10, 43, but it shall not be so among you.

We might want powerful, decisive, inspiring, dynamic, vision casting leaders, but what we need in the church are godly, humble, servant-hearted, Christ-like leaders.

In Mark 10, 35 through 45, Jesus lays out for us his vision of leadership. Now, notice here, he doesn't ever mention the word leader, not once.

Does that not bid us at the very least to be careful about the modern church's obsession with a priority of leadership? Well, in this passage, we're presented first with the curse of worldly leadership, and secondly, with the ideal of Christ-like leadership.

[ 3 : 54 ] Let this passage, and especially Jesus' words here, challenge us as to whether the leaders we want are the leaders we really need, and to aspire, in fact, not to be leaders at all, but to be servants.

First of all, then, worldly leadership, worldly leadership. Our passage begins with James and John, two of Jesus' first disciples, approaching him and asking, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.

They proceed to say, Grant us to sit, one at your right, one at your left, in your glory. Their request reveals much about these men, not least of which is their lack of understanding about the kingdom of Jesus.

They thought that Jesus the Messiah would establish an earthly kingdom and sit on an earthly throne. But it's not so much this misunderstanding I want us to focus on, but on what they were asking for.

This passage reveals four aspects of the worldly leadership which is all too prevalent in today's evangelical church, and of which we need to repent. First of all, using others.

[ 5 : 10 ] Using others. So, James and John approach Jesus with a selfish request. We want status. We want power. And they saw Jesus as the means to that end.

Yes, of course, they still recognize Jesus' ultimate lordship, but unwittingly they're using Jesus as a means to their own selfish desire for status in his kingdom. Even though they're talking about the kingdom of God, they're using Jesus as a means of personal advancement.

Perhaps they didn't see it that way, but by asking to be Jesus' lieutenants, they're not bowing to his ultimate lordship. They're using him to further their own. It is entirely legitimate that our employers tomorrow in our workplaces will use us to achieve whatever their ends might be.

Profit, advancement, or success. That's legitimate. But to use other Christians in the church as a means to achieve our ends in the church is sinfully ugly.

To view another Christian as someone we may use for our own purposes, even if we think they are kingdom purposes, is reprehensible. To use other Christians to advance our status in the church is wrong.

[ 6 : 26 ] God does not treat us as objects. He loves us as children. The cross is the proof that he does not seek his own good, but ours. Neither should we view each other as objects we may use for our own purposes.

We may do it unwittingly, or we may, as abusive leaders have been proved to do, do it consciously. We have an ambition for status and power in the church, and we sinfully use other people to get where we think we deserve to be.

On a church committee, a bully will manipulate other members into becoming yes men, so that he can get his way. He'll view them not as equal partners, but as objects he can use to achieve his ends of gaining power and status in the wider church.

He might think to himself, well, I've got the church's best interests at heart, but we need to see it for what it is. Abusive leadership masquerading in holy orders. I do apologize for this cough.

We must be wise toward this. Are we being used by others, in which case we are being sinned against, or are we using others, in which case we're doing the sinning?

[ 7 : 42 ] If you have ever been used by others in this way, it is hard to shake the belittling shame of being used by others.

It's hard to shake it. How grateful we are that God never uses us. He loves us as his children. Using others. Second curse.

Power grabs. Power grabs. Isn't it interesting to note what James and John want Jesus to do for them? When Jesus said, what do you want me to do for you?

Now, we might have expected them to answer, well, we want world peace. We want your name to be glorified. When Solomon was asked by God, what do you want me to do for you? He said, give me wisdom.

But no, their request is for advancement. They want worldly power, not world peace. They want people to praise them, not Jesus. They're trying to grab power.

[ 8 : 44 ] Those men we mentioned in the introduction were guilty of grabbing power for themselves in the church. They loved the limelight, and they used the gifts God had given them to establish their own status and authority.

They may have been outstandingly gifted, great preachers, but you know what? By their bullying behavior, they demonstrated that they were interested not in the glory of Jesus, but in their own reputations.

If anyone dared challenge them, they used their status and power to rip them to pieces. Listen to the Rise and Fall of Mars Hill podcast.

It may have been unwitting. They may have thought that their vision for the good of the church was better than anybody else's, and therefore they had to get to the top. But whatever their intentions at the beginning, power went to their heads, and now they wouldn't tolerate any kind of challenge.

They are power grabbers. While Jesus was busy using His power to build others up, His disciples were using Jesus' power to build their own kingdoms. The Western church is full of those who grab

power for themselves rather than, like Jesus, giving it away.

[10:02] Third curse, top dogs, top dogs. When the other disciples hear about what James and John have asked Jesus, they are angry. They're angry not because of how wrong it was for James and John to have asked Jesus for status, they're angry because they didn't think of it first.

None of them were squeaky clean when it came to their desire for power and status. They all wanted to be top dogs. In our form of church government, Presbyterianism, we believe in the equality of elders.

We may have different roles divided into those who are teaching elders, like me, and ruling elders, those who aren't full-time ministers. But we are all essentially equal in status, and not one of us has more power than another.

It's a biblical form of church government, but because we are human beings, it doesn't always work. In George Orwell's classic book, *Animal Farm*, he famously writes, all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.

There will always be those who want to rise above equality. In another book I read, which Kirk recommended to me, the author calls them ladder climbers, ladder climbers, and says of them that they leave a trail of damaged people behind them.

[11:26] Well, James and John are ladder climbers, standing at the heads of the other disciples to get where they want to go. No wonder the other disciples are angry. Secretive decisions, closed politics, manipulation.

They are the weapons of the power hungry. Transparency and openness are enemies of the ladder climber. Those men I mentioned at the beginning, if you look carefully into the history of their ministries, you will find trails of broken people behind them.

Those they used to get to the top and then destroyed. How grateful we are then for the Jesus who heals the brokenhearted and patches up their wounds with His selfless love and grace.

Well, the fourth curse of worldly leadership, as today exhibited in the evangelical church, control games, control games. At this point, Jesus calls all the disciples to Him and says, you know, or verse 42, that those who are considered rulers of the Gentile lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them.

Of course, Jesus here is referring to the way in which authority is exercised in the world. It consists in lording it over others. That word, lord it over, is literally to have dominion, to have mastery.

[12:54] Worldly leadership consists in knowing one's position in the organization. Those at the top do what they must to keep control. That's what, in their minds, makes them rulers, leaders, and great ones, the fact that they're at the top of the pile.

Worldly leadership is about control. It's about leadership from above. When it transfers into the church, it results in control games and anger. Listen to this.

The genius of the control freak is that to most people, he comes across as genuine and they would never believe he is guilty of spiritual abuse because he picks his targets carefully.

He only goes for those who are a threat to his position so that when they make a complaint about him, they are dismissed by the majority who, because they have never had it lorded over them, cannot begin to believe that he is guilty of such abuse.

Consider, for example, the ongoing inquiry into the leadership culture at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gavin. Whistleblowers have been intimidated, threatened by their bosses.

[14:12] Worldly leadership whether good or bad is about control. Worldly leaders get to where they want to go by being powerful, decisive, inspiring, dynamic, vision casting, charismatic, and gifted.

Are these the kind of leaders we really need in the church? If we want leaders like this, then be sure they will use others, they'll grab power, they'll compete to be top dog and they'll play control games. If that's the kind of leaders we celebrate in the church, and to some extent I believe we do, it's little wonder that we have suffered so much bullying and spiritual abuse at the hands of our senior ministers.

leaders. Do we need the message any clearer than the one Jesus has given us? It shall not be so among you.

The curse of worldly leadership. Well, secondly, let's look at Christ-like leadership. I'm pretty sure you wouldn't. I do apologize for this cough.

[ 15 : 24 ] I'm really sorry. Christ-like leadership. As Christians who hold to the authority of the Bible, it is crucial that we take our models of leadership from the Bible itself.

And most importantly that we take them from the central figure of the Bible, our Lord. In this passage, Jesus lays down three principles of how we are to lead like Him if leadership is a thing in the Bible at all.

First, suffering with Christ, serving like Christ, and saved by Christ. I'll leave it for you to judge how well Jesus' principles mesh with the worldly leadership with which the Western church is so infected.

First of all, if we want to lead like Christ, we need to suffer with Him. To suffer with Him. Earlier, I referred to an author who penned the term ladder climber to describe power-hungry leaders in the church.

It's a wonderful book called The Art of Pastoring. Kurt gave it to me. Earlier in that book, the author himself, a pastor, tells us about a question that he was asked at his ordination exam.

[ 16 : 41 ] It was asked by a professor of theology, a man called Bernard Ram, some of you may have heard of him. And he asked the author what he was being ordained. He said, have you ever suffered? The question was not, can you parse this Greek verb from the New Testament?

Have you ever suffered? In the mind of this professor, suffering is a qualification necessary for Christ-like ministry. Not, what is your vision for leadership?

But, have you ever suffered? After all, how can we possibly identify with Christ-suffering people if we ourselves have never suffered? And how can we point them to the comfort that only the Lord Jesus can give us if we have never been there ourselves?

When James and John asked to sit at Jesus' side in glory, Jesus asked them, Jesus says to them, you do not know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? Or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?

They didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. He was talking about suffering and death. The cup he was to drink was the cup of God's wrath against our sin and the baptism which he was to be baptized with was the baptism of his death on the cross.

[ 17 : 59 ] This is what it meant to be the Messiah, the leader of Israel, not being raised up on a throne but raised up on a cross, not being exalted but humiliated, not becoming a sovereign but becoming a sufferer.

Well, afterwards, James and John will learn all about it. They'll both suffer for their faith in Jesus. James is going to be executed and John's going to be exiled but at this stage they still think power in the kingdom of God consists in status, not suffering.

We might say that the Apostle Paul was the greatest leader of the early church but his life was marked by constant suffering.

The great leaders of the church through the ages have been men and women who have suffered greatly with and for Christ but where does suffering feature in today's vision for leadership in the church?

It doesn't. If any should aspire to follow Christ they should expect to suffer. They should expect to take up their crosses and follow him into the pain of suffering with Christ.

[ 19 : 12 ] Suffering is the mark of authenticity in Christian ministry. Someone once said, maybe someone can tell me who said this but I heard it from someone else.

never trust a leader in the church who doesn't walk with a limp. Never trust a leader in the church who doesn't walk with a limp.

You know, don't you, Barbara? Your husband walks with a limp, I just thought about it. By and large those who have been deposed for bullying and spiritual abuse are not marked by a life of suffering but by a life of ease.

Second blessing of Christ-like leadership, that to which we aspire, serving like Christ. Serving like Christ. One of the Jesus' favorite titles for himself was the Son of Man.

You can see that in verse 45. He's the Messiah, God's King. He's greater than David or Solomon. And yet, in verse 45, he says, the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.

[ 20 : 23 ] If any should aspire to be a Christ-like leader, he is to aspire to serve the people of God, not to be served by them. And then in verse 43 and 44, he says, whoever be great among you must be your servant.

Whoever be first among you must be the slave of all. Slave! Here's the manifesto of the Son of Man.

The service of God's people. Yes, even becoming the slave of other Christians. If any aspire to greatness in the kingdom of God, they must pursue downward movement into service and slavery. They must be willing to be used by God's people and give themselves in the service of God's people. They must have, they must aspire to have power and status grabbed from them.

Like their Lord, they must empty themselves and become a slave. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took off his outer garments and he wrapped a towel around his waist and he filled a basin with water and he washed his disciples disgustingly dirty feet.

[ 21 : 36 ] He assumed the position of a slave, washing the feet of even his betrayer, Judas Iscariot. The Lord of heaven and earth through whom the universe was created became nothing in the sight of his power hungry disciples.

There is no charisma in washing feet. Jesus, what is your vision in doing this? There is no vision here other than to humiliate himself and take the lowest place at the table.

Jesus didn't take first class executive travel to the cross. He walked painfully and fearfully to his death for us.

In our denomination we call our leaders ministers. Now minister means servant. We have not always acted as servants but if we are to minister like our master we are to aspire not for upward but for downward movement in this world's pecking order.

Leadership in the kingdom of God comes not from above but from below which is why I am often struck by the wealth of western church leaders compared to the poverty of Jesus.

[ 23 : 01 ] It is a wake up call to all of us to be more like Jesus and less like the world in an attitude to our fellow Christians. How can I serve you rather than acting the part of a prima donna in front of you?

How can we take the lowest place so that others may receive at our hands the comfort of the gospel of Christ? You see we will never stoop so low as our master Jesus did but to lead like him means not to abuse but to be abused.

Not to stand on other heads to get where we want to go but to let others stand on our heads so that they may know Christ better. the healthy church is full of servant-hearted Christians led by servant-hearted leaders who are passionate not to assert their own rights but to give them all up for the sake of the gospel.

Well lastly the third blessing of Christ-like leadership the third thing we must aspire to be like saved by Christ. Jesus our perfect example of leadership came as Evan said earlier and Ruth said earlier not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

He came to pay the ransom price for our freedom at the cost of his own body. Now none of us can follow him here. We might sacrifice ourself on behalf of others but we cannot pay the price of their sin.

[ 24 : 29 ] We cannot free them from the bondage of their sin. We cannot die to give them eternal life. Salvation belongs not to us but to the Lord. It is through faith in him we are saved not by faith in any other human being.

To be a leader in Christ's church we must never lose our wonder at what Jesus has done for us. We didn't save ourselves. We've been saved through the sacrifice of another.

When we came to faith in Jesus we came in humility understanding that the only thing we brought with us was our sin and our guilt.

We left our worldly status behind us. As the famous hymn puts it so well nothing in my hand I bring simply to thy cross I cling.

Even more powerful the apostle Paul memorably says for by grace you have been saved through faith not as a result of works so that no one may boast.

[ 25 : 33 ] The Christian who is filled with gratitude to Jesus and love to Jesus she lives in humility and she's not making much of herself doesn't want to because she wants to make much of Jesus.

Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever and all the more the light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Humility and bullying do not belong together.

A desire for status in the church cannot coexist with a desire for the glory of Jesus. The question James and John asked strikes at the heart of what it really means to be a Christian.

Whose glory are we really seeking if we use people grab power aspire to be top dog and play control games in Christ's church?

Jesus glory or ours? How many thousands of non-Christians have been turned away from Christ by the bullying and spiritually abusive actions of its leaders?

[ 26 : 41 ] And how many tens of thousands of Christians have had their faith shipwrecked upon the sinful example of human leaders acting like worldly CEOs and executives? Christ's words in Matthew 18 verse 6 form a very solemn warning.

Whoever causes one of these little ones to believe in me to stumble it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.

However let's not judge. our perfect Christ by our imperfect leaders. The Jesus we follow is gentle and meek loving and compassionate sacrificial and self-giving.

We dare not trust in men we trust only in him. The great need of today's western church is to repent of our worldly models of leadership and to resolve to lead like our Lord to serve like our Savior to minister like our Master.

Maybe then those inside and outside the church will begin to really see Christ in us and be drawn to our Savior. to whoever is