

## **What Is Christian Leadership All About?**

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Powerful Encounters in The Book of Acts

Acts 20: 13- 28

Back in the mid-1600's there was a man named Oliver Cromwell who ruled England for a short period of time and was responsible for executing his king, King Charles I. Cromwell's revolution attempted to remove any aspect the reign of King Charles from the life of England. One of the clear signs of the king's reign was the Anglican Church, because the Anglican Church was totally tied in with the monarchy with the king. And so Cromwell with his troops went around destroying Anglican monasteries and going into Anglican churches and smashing their baptismal fonts where they used to baptize babies. It was a particularly difficult time for a person if they were an Anglican pastor. Some were thrown out of their home, the parsonage that was attached to the Anglican Church. They might be bullied, harassed; even beaten up.

In the midst of this there was a little inscription hidden away in Harold Church in Stoten England. Let me read to you from this church inscription. It said, "In the year of 1653 when all things sacred throughout the nation destroyed or profaned, this church was built to the glory of God by Sir Robert Shirley, whose singular praise it was to have done the best things in the worst times."

To do the best things in the worst times – that's how Joseph Stowell begins his book, "Shepherding the Church into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". Doing the best things in the worst times – that's a job of a Christian leader. Are these the worst times? Well certainly not if we're talking about American economy. We're in a seventh-year of an economic boom; times of low unemployment and low inflation. Now underneath a happy prosperity that we're experiencing in the United States there are some troubling signs. Bankruptcy is at an all-time high. Credit card debt is at an all-time high. Some people worry that if people are experiencing this many debt problems in a prosperous economy, what is going to happen if there is a dip? It may be that the recovery is very broad, but very thin. Are these the worst of times?

Certainly not if you are an African American. There are unprecedented opportunities opening up as American moves past our legacy of slavery and historicism. And yet even here there is some signs of creeping discontent. Some observers believe that the cities are once again going to explode in angry riots in the next five years because just below the surface there is a profound and very deeply held perception of continual consistent abuse by police and courts. You may have heard the phrase recently on the radio talk show, "Driving While Black". But here is a general sense that people are unfairly racially targeted by

the police. That men are pulled over, searched, pushed around for no reason, other than their race.

Are these the worst of times? Not if you're a woman. Not if you're a racial minority in American. And yet, again, just below the surface of our prosperity and opportunity, there are some very troubling signs in our American culture. It doesn't matter what side of the political spectrum you're coming around. It seems that everyone is concerned about the growing coarseness of American culture. Particularly in the popularization of sex and violence.

It is the worst of times if you are an American child. At least in terms of growing up in an intact family. More than forty percent of children will live apart from either their father or their mother during their childhood.

If you, like me, believe that children grow up best and healthiest when they grow up with their natural mother and father – then this is the worst of times for American children.

If you are like me and believe that something terrible happens when people are repeatedly exposed to higher and higher doses of violence and sex, then these are the worst of times in the American media. I have recently been reading a history book on the first few decades of this century and I came upon a little obscure fact as I was reading about the year 1911. Movies were growing in popularity at an amazing rate in 1911. Theatres were crowded all over the United States. Of course, people were watching silent films, but in the year 1911 the city of San Francisco passed a local ordinance, which forbid showing a movie in which one person was seen to strike another. Imagine that! The San Francisco city council was so concerned about what people would be exposed to that 90 years ago they passed an ordinance which forbid the showing in public a movie where one person struck another. Like the old Virginia Slims commercial... 'We've Come a Long Way Baby'.

It's the worst of times if we look at the media. It's the worst of times if you care about marriage. The divorce rates remain plateaued – fixed at an all-time high. It's the worst of times if you believe like me, that abortion is a moral crime; a great sin of murdering our offspring. It's the worst of times if you care about truth – truth in politics; truth in business.

By every measurement that sociologist can employ, it is apparent that truth-telling in business and in politics is at an all-time low, which ought to be no surprise since 70% of the American public do not believe in absolute truth.

It's the worst of times if you think that the Bible is important to know. For church members, according to one major poll – remember this is the church people, not unchurched people. For church people, only 4 out of 10 adults (according to one major survey) will read any portion of the Bible outside of church during the workweek. Only 4 out of 10. Those people who do read will

commit about 1 hour total a week to Bible reading. There is virtually no activity in an individual church member's life that has a lower priority, according to the surveys than reading the Bible – not reading the newspaper, not showering, not TV, not talking on the phone. Even if people do read the Bible, the survey indicates that over the course of a week they'll spend no more than one hour total reading. So if you're beating these you're better than average.

Surveys indicate that church people cannot state more than one-half of the Ten Commandments – can you? Do you know the Ten Commandments? Do you know them in order? It might be good this week to open up your Bible to Exodus 20 and read through the Ten Commandments and memorize them – something you ought to know.

Most people don't know it was Jesus Christ who preached the Sermon on the Mount. When asked about the Book of Thomas, nearly one-half of all adults were unaware that such a book is not in the Bible; the Book of Thomas.

The most-frequently quoted verse in American is "God Helps Those Who Help Themselves". Unfortunately, most people don't know that that is not in the Bible. That was coined by Ben Franklin 200 years ago.

Doing the best things in the worst of times. That is what Christian leadership has always been about.

Now this morning as we continue in this series from the Book of Acts, I want to speak on the subject of what is Christian leadership all about. Let's pray.

## **ACTS 20: 13- 16**

What we have here is a very detailed account by Luke who wrote the Book of Acts of this sailing trip around the Western coast of Turkey and because of the weather and geography, what they were doing was island hopping. They were sailing south and docking in one island and then going further south then docking in another, back and forth around the Western coast of Turkey. But verse 13 says something very interesting to us. We read, "We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot." Now here's the deal...There was this peninsula and Troas was north and Assos was south, about 20 miles south and Paul's team members all boarded a ship to sail the long way around the peninsula, but Paul decided to cut across the peninsula and walk alone those twenty miles to the city of Assos. Why did he do that? Well I think this points out something about what a Christian leader is like and particularly what a leader must be like in the worst of times.

What we see here is Paul's insistence on periods of solitude – of aloneness. 'You guys go ahead, he says, I'll meet you there and I'm going to walk alone.' You see, the great temptation in leadership is to always be with people. There's no solitude. There's no time alone with God. Now I know this is a really novel concept in America – SOLITUDE – ALONE TIME. But anyone who wishes to be a Christian leader absolutely must practice some discipline of aloneness, where there's time taken just to drink in the presence of God. Whether we're talking about out taking a walk in the country or taking a walk on a quiet path in the woods or sitting by a lake, staring at the oceans-waves, just being alone on a bench in a park somewhere. The problem of so many of our so-called vacations is that we spend all of our time running around like lunatics seeing things. Visiting Disney World is not solitude. Having constant stimulation. Driving for a day with little kids in the back seat. Most of us need vacations from our summer vacations. We take weeks getting ready, clearing our desks, packing and when you come back if you're a worker than you're going to be hit with this wave of your desk piled up.

You know, I think many people in our culture run from being alone, from solitude and quietness. We're actually uncomfortable being alone just with ourselves and God because we don't like what we find when we slow down enough to look inside. I think many people run from solitude. They must keep so busy and active and have noise constantly in the background and constant diversion because being alone only reminds them of that great internal hole that's in their soul. Being alone only reminds them of their problems. Being alone makes them conscious of their inner-emptiness. And this is not just for the unchurched and the non-Christian. I think there are many Christians who have never really learned how to find God, to make good contact with God in alone times and find the thought of solitude terrifying.

Let me ask you a personal question. Are you afraid of being alone? I don't mean are you afraid of being alone because you're afraid of being attacked. Are you afraid of being alone because you don't like being alone with your own thoughts? Are you afraid of being alone because your relationship with God is so distant and unreal that you would really be alone when you're alone? You would feel lonely. Do you insist on constant activity and noise and diversions because slowing down scares you?

One like-person recently wrote a book, which talked about the need for us in the West to have margins in our life. He said that the problem in today's world is that we're all running so close to the edge. Everyone is pushed to the edge financially, emotionally, spiritually that if we have a crisis, in the normal run of affairs, a crisis comes up we have no reserve tanks to draw from.

Alone time, solitude, is a time to refill emotionally, spiritually. Alone time is the time when we recharge - when we renew – when we focus. Alone time is a

time when a leader or a person hears the voice of God. You can't hear the voice of God in a crowd. You can't hear the voice of God when the noise-level and stimulation-level around you is at some ridiculous decimal level; when the RPM's are spinning so fast that you can hardly hear yourself think.

I talk to so many individuals who are so frustrated because they say 'I never can hear the voice of God'. What I would ask you, 'How much alone time do you have when it's just quiet?' Just quiet in your house or just quiet where you're by yourself. Certainly this is difficult if you have little ones who follow you into the bathroom, so you're not even alone in the bathroom or alone in the shower. I wonder how many of you young moms or young dads have ever considered hiring a babysitter – not just so that you could go out for dinner together, which is important, or so that you could run errands, which is important, but I wonder how many of us have ever considered that we need a sitter or mom and dad trade off with the kids just so you could be alone with God. Many of us need, more than anything alone time.

Let me bring this down to earth. How many of you spend even one hour a week where you are alone and you're not doing anything other than being with God. Maybe taking some time to personally worship Him, singing some worship songs, perhaps listening, praying. How many of you take even one hour a week where you're not sitting in front of a television set tubing out or not reading a novel to refuel where the headphones are off, where you're not talking with another person on the phone or talking with your mate or boyfriend or girlfriend or friend? Where you're not even studying the Bible, but you're just being with God. Opening up your soul, drinking in His presence.

May I suggest this for you – especially those of you who are really stressed; where you know you're tired inside and especially if you're a leader. How about just one hour a week as a discipline saying, 'I'm just going to be alone.' Maybe with a journal book or a couple of sheets of blank paper. Paul understood that his leadership depended upon the discipline of solitude.

Luke goes on to write from Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. Ephesus was just a few miles to the north of Miletus and we read in vs 18, "when they arrived he said to them, 'you know how I lived the whole time I was with you. From the first day I came into the Province of Asia.'" And in vs 33, "I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak." Remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." You know how I lived among you.

In the worst of times Christian leadership is all about setting an example. You know my way of life. You know how I live. One of the most profound needs in our society right now is the need for role models. You hear all the time, as people talk about what is needed in the inner city, they say, 'boys need some

male role models'. They need to see fathers being faithful to their wives and to their children. They need to see role models of men going to work and being teachers and engineers and government workers. Kids in the suburbs need to see models, role models.

Here's what we do when we get extra change mistakenly in the restaurant. We don't just pocket it and say 'thank God, this must be my blessed day.' 'Here's what we do in the morning with our time, we take time with God. 'Here's what we do with our meals, we pray and bless our food.' We need role models. There is incredible power and encouragement in one live example, someone who communicates to us that this particular activity is possible.

You know, I could talk until I am blue in the face about the capacity of couples who are on the brink of a divorce to be reconciled. I could talk until I'm blue in the face about what Jesus Christ could do with a married couple if both of you will submit to Christ in terms of improving your relationship; taking you from a place of hopelessness, helplessness and unhappiness and restoring your relationship with your husband or wife. But I will tell you what would be more powerful than me talking about the capacity of people to really be reconciled. If you heard from a married couple who's marriage was, in fact, healed; if you met someone who looked you in the eye and said 'here's where me and my husband (or me and my wife) were at. I had already planned a life separated apart from him (or her). We constantly fought. I was so devastated after the discovery of the affair. There was simply nothing that we agreed upon and here is what Jesus Christ did for us. This is where we are now. We actually have a good marriage. Here is how we got there.'

Do you understand the power of even one example to inspire hope? If they did it maybe we could do it. It is powerful to have a role model for single people, for teenagers that says 'I am living sexually pure'. Just one single person standing up and saying, 'Hey, I'm committed to being a virgin until I get married.' Or to meet one person who says to you, 'You can recover from sexual abuse.' "You can recover from being raped or from addiction from alcohol or pornography." People don't primarily need a book or a tape. What they need is a real-life role model and example. Someone who says that 'with Christ's help it is possible to be different.'

Now in what areas is Paul pointing to in his own life where he says, "I am an example." What areas should a Christian leader be exemplary in...be a role model for others? I find it interesting that Paul doesn't point to his holy intercession, 'I want you to know about the 46,000 hours that I spend in prayer, \_\_\_\_\_ angels as an example for you, or I want you to know about my great giftedness and my capacity to heal any disease.'

What is it he points to? Paul often points to very mundane things as tasks of leadership. He points to hard work and his handling of money. He says, 'You want to know whether someone is qualified for Christian leadership and what they ought to exhibit. Well, among other things, somebody who is going to be a Christian leader ought to be a very hard worker and handle their money very well.'

Look again with me vs 33. "I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did I showed you by this kind of hard work we must help the weak." Remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Hard work! The fact is that if you are not willing to work hard then you should never become a Christian leader. Christian leaders are people who do more than their fair share of work. They don't demand from others something that they're not willing to go beyond. Christian pastors ought to work harder than the people in the church. I sincerely believe that. How we ought not just work hard, we ought to pray hard. We ought to parent hard and pray hard. But it is terribly disturbing to me that the pendulum in Christian leadership and in pastoral life seems to have swung way over toward almost a life of leisure. We so reacted to the workaholic pastor that the virtue of hard work that Paul holds up for us has been lost and yet this is a fundamental task of Christian leadership, as is the Christian leader's handling of money.

I love the New Testament practicality. It's not mystical and wildly esoteric in its' criteria for you know, "What should a Christian leader look like?" It doesn't say the Christian leader must have heavenly visions. Or even a Christian leader must be brilliantly innovative, awesomely intelligent. They must be an author of dozens of books. The New Testament says "Look at the person's work habits." "Look at their family." "Do they have a good marriage; a solid marriage?" "Are their kids running wild?" "And how do they handle money?"

Greed, extravagance is always in the New Testament a mark of a false teacher; not a Christian leader. Without judgementalism we have to examine the financial habits of Christian leaders. Paul says that, 'My example is of being a great giver.' You want to be a leader? Are you a great giver? Do you give more than what is expected? More than your fair-share? Friend, I say this with all affection, but you are not a Christian leader until you are a giving leader. If you are a home group, or women's group, a ministry leader, a children's leader, a worship leader and you are not at the very least tithing, then something is desperately wrong. How are you going to lead other people into the Christian life, which is fundamentally a life of giving? Christ gave Himself up for us. How can you lead others into the Christian life if you're not a model giver? And how is your spending?

When we're examining how people live, are you living the life of extravagance in terms of what you wear, in what you drive, in where you live and how you go about doing things? Very, very practical in terms of modeling, isn't it? How does a person work? How do they handle money? How do they spend money? How do they give? And if you're weak here, you don't have to beat up on yourself and say, 'Gee wiz, I'm a horrible person.' Just repent! Which is a good thing. It's a liberating thing when we see something that's wrong in our life. We just say, "God, I acknowledge it. I'll tell you the truth about my spending or my giving habits. And God, give me the strength to really change this area. I make a commitment today to make some alterations in my spending, in my shopping, in my giving habits."

If you're a young person and you're planning on being a future Christian leader; you're married; you get together with your spouse and make a plan for regular substantial financial giving to the cause of Christ. If you're single you can do that just between you and God.

Christian leadership is also about service. Look what Paul says in vs, 19. "I serve the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plot of the Jews. I serve the Lord." One of Paul's favorite statements regarding himself is, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ." What we're talking about is beginning to plunge us into the real gust of how Christian leadership differs from the leadership we see around us in politics, in the workplace, in schools, in many homes. Listen, you know, what's the difference between Christian leadership and other kind of leadership? What makes leadership distinctively Christian?

Can't do better than camp on this word 'serve', because the Christian leader ought to be someone who is not obsessed with his or own significance. The Christian leader ought not to be self-serving or self-promoting or self-enhancing, self-defending. We're talking about the opposite of a grabbing, grasping, needy person who needs to draw people to himself or herself. We build ourselves up SERVICE. What's that about?

A servant is not competing with other people. Now if you're in competition with someone else's ministry or you're competing for the limelight for the recognition, then you're not yet a servant. When I think of servant leadership, I would immediately contrast my mind with domineering, dictatorial leadership. You see, the Bible teaches that true leadership is very strong. The Bible when it speaks about servant leadership, they're not talking about wimpyness, weakness, passivity – you know, a person who has no opinion; and just sort of drifts with the tide with 'what do you think', 'what do you think of the polls', 'I don't have an opinion until I take a poll.'

Servant leadership is not becoming a chameleon. Figuring out what everybody else wants you be and then becoming that. Jesus was a very strong leader. So was Paul. So was Peter. They had very forceful personalities. They



knew their own minds. They could be very tough; very decisive, but they weren't domineering. They weren't tyrannical or bullying. They didn't push people around. They didn't manipulate. They were above board and honest. With Jesus, with Paul it was on the table. No hidden flattery. No secret agenda. No manipulation behind the scenes.

So how do you become really strong and not over-bearing? How do you become someone that doesn't drift with the crowd and yet not domineering? How do you become bold – even out-spoken? And yet, in no way pushy or controlling? I think servant leadership is rooted fundamentally in a clear sense of one's identity in Christ...to the degree that you are rooted in Jesus Christ. To that extent you can be a leader and also a servant.

There is a wonderful phrase in Colossians 2:10 that I think is at the heart of servant leadership. It says, "And you have been given fullness in Christ – or you have been made complete in Christ – Who is ahead over every power and authority." You have been made complete in Christ. When you know – when you believe that you are complete in Christ; that He is your adequacy; He's your fullness; He's your security; He compensates for your weaknesses, for your flaws, for all the stuff that you don't like about yourself; for all your past and all your present and all your future – that Christ fills in all the holes in your temperament. In all the holes in your life. When you consider that you can be complete; filled out by Christ and you live out of his adequacy – then you're freed-up to not be a user of people; not be a domineer of people; not be a taker. When you live out of a place of completeness in Christ, you're freed up to love, to take care of others; to not be constantly be needing and grasping and not demanding and whining. When complete in Christ we can be others-centered rather than my needs-centered. Paul knew who he was in Jesus and so he served and he served with a tender heart with tears.

Now look at the leaders preaching, vs. 20. "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you, but I have taught you publicly and from house to house I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." In vs. 25 "I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the Kingdom will ever see me again, therefore I declare to you that I am innocent of the blood of all men, but have not hesitated to claim to you the whole will of God." Paul says that he preached to Jews and Greeks. Paul says he preached in public and he went from house to house. Paul says that he preached the whole counsel of God; that he didn't hesitate anything that he thought would be helpful to them in building them up spiritually.

What he is saying is, 'I preached to everybody I could find, everywhere I could find them, everything that would be helpful. I tell anyone, anywhere, anything that would be useful.' What is a Christian leader? In the worst of times,

a Christian leader is someone who speaks to anyone, anywhere about anything that would help them – that would be useful to them in their relationship with God.

Let me ask you a few personal questions if I might. Is there anyone at all that would come to mind; anyone at all that you would refuse to talk to about Christ? That you just are afraid to speak to? That you are embarrassed to talk with? Anyone at all. A boss, parent, mother, father, brother, sister, somebody with whom you feel awkward, someone whose respect you would want and you don't want to jeopardize that respect by advertising that you're a Christian, Is there anyone that just really, you know, aren't able to speak to? Is there any place, any setting you refuse to talk about Christ. Some of you are in college; some are in high school. Is your college classroom or high school classroom a setting where you just won't speak up for Christ? Your work place; the neighborhood pool; family gatherings; on a plane sitting next to someone. Is there any place where you would refuse to speak up for Christ? Anyone, anywhere about anything...is there anything that you refuse to say to someone that you know you should say?

You have a friend who is obviously struggling with a drinking problem. You know someone who is claiming to be a Christian and yet is living with their boyfriend or girlfriend. You have a friend who is considering separating from their husband or wife without clear biblical grounds. You're watching someone's kids walking away from God and their parenting methods are just encouraging that. Is there anything you refuse to talk about with someone because it would be again awkward or embarrassing? You would be putting yourself at risk. This is Christian leadership – anyone, anywhere about anything, Paul says unless you live that way, you can't have a clean conscience.

What an amazing statement in vs 26, "I declare I am innocent of the blood of all men. There is nothing that I should have said that I haven't said to anyone." Could you imagine having that clear of a conscience? My conscience is not that clean. I can immediately dial up people who I have hesitated to speak with. I can dial up places and subjects, but I'll tell you what – the model that Paul is holding up is so attractive to me – to be that liberated from people-pleasing. To have that kind of security in Christ that you're able to tell the truth when you need to tell the truth...wouldn't that be nice?

Christian leadership is also about suffering. Look at vs 22. "And now compelled by the Spirit I'm going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given Me, the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prisons and hardship are facing me." There is no such thing as a Christian leader who doesn't pay a price.

You could have a Christian position, but true Christian leadership will always involve some degree of suffering. You see, Paul is teaching a lesson here that following Christ is not dependent on us knowing the future and of avoiding pain. The overriding concern of the Christian is not minimizing future pain. He says, 'I know what the future holds and the future holds for me pain, yet I'm not planning on ways to minimize that.' Many people had as a fundamental demand of life that they manage their futures and they do so in a way to minimize inconvenience and pain.

Now listen to me, when a person commits themselves to Christ, what they are doing at that moment if they understand what the Bible teaches, what a person is doing when they commit themselves to Christ is they're giving God control of their future. They're saying, 'Lord, I'm going to follow You where ever You want me to go and I'm going to trust You to manage the outcome of my following.' Now whenever you see in yourself an unwillingness to suffer to follow God here or there because you don't want to pay a price; what you're saying is, 'God, I am unwilling to allow You to be in control of my destiny.'

Too many of us have to control and manage everything, with our main goal being pain-avoidance. Friend, you cannot be a pain-avoider and be a Christian leader. You can't be risk-adverse. Following Jesus Christ means 'Jesus, I'm going to trust You to manage the outcome of my obedience.' Let me apply this. I have never met a person who was a Christian missionary or a Christian pastor or a nonprofessional Christian leader who had some sense of God's anointing on their life; I have never met someone who was a pastor, a missionary, a leader and who had a sense of God's blessing on their lives who didn't at some point have to make some kind of major financial or career risk.

Some of you, you know, are wondering about your calling into Christian pastoral work or your calling into Christian leadership. Some of you might even be considering world missions or church-planting. Perhaps for you the issue of finances is a real big issue. I say this with all affection, but it is a truth. That if you're a person who feels that you have to secure all financial fronts before you're able to serve Christ you might just as well forget future Christian leadership. If you have nail down your financial future, then Christian leadership is not for you.

See, here is the problem friends. We in America take in the word "suffering" out of our basic understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. If we put suffering in its' proper place; if we understood its' role the way it is taught in the New Testament, we American's would quickly realize that our entire Christian lives are hopelessly out of whack and need to be redesigned. Whenever we talk about God leading us, we are almost always talking about blessing and abundance and prosperity and comforts. We in the United States know nothing about the Holy Spirit leading us into suffering and sacrifice.

Look at Paul's language....vs 22. "Now compelled by the Spirit I'm going to Jerusalem." The Spirit is driving Paul to a place where Paul is going to suffer. He doesn't say, 'Now Satan is bringing me to a place of humiliation and brokenness and suffering.' He says, 'the Spirit of God is pushing me there.' What a sense of God's sovereignty and control; that God's Spirit is pushing us toward suffering.

Let me bring this down to earth. What are we talking about God's suffering being an integral part of Christian leadership – and indeed a part of being a Christian. What do we mean? So often when we talk about suffering we immediately think of martyrdom. We say, 'Well that's probably something that's not going to happen to me, praise God. The message of carrying the cross doesn't apply to me. When Jesus bids me, "Come and die", well, praise God I live in America, That whole, you know, uncomfortable, difficult part of being a Christian and following in the steps of Christ, I guess it doesn't apply to me.' It does apply to you. Christian suffering is there for you and I don't mean sickness or the experience of just the loss of a mate; the kind of things that everyone who lives in this fallen world must go through. There's something distinct about Christian suffering. It's a price we pay because we're followers of Christ like work.

At the lowest level, are you willing to pay the price of inconvenience? Forget the word suffering for a moment. Put in its' place being willing to be inconvenienced. How many of you understand that part of your calling as a Christian is being willing to be inconvenienced for the sake of Christ? Fabulous schedule messed up. Or your plans messed up because of Jesus. For example, are you willing to go to a church service at a less convenient time for you and your family because you're a Christian? Are you willing to be a driver for a bunch of teenagers or a bunch of school children...even when it messes up your schedule? Are you willing to let you car be used by someone else, meaning that you're cutting down on your capacity to drive around or to have two cars as a family, or even one car? Are you willing to serve in childcare or practice hospitality with an out-of-town guest?

Or go out of your way week after week to pick somebody up and take them to church and back because they need to worship?

Friend, at the very least, at the lowest level, Christian suffering means that we allow ourselves to be inconvenienced by the demands of Jesus. That we give room in our life for inconvenient people who have inconvenient demands and inconvenient problems. And we don't chaff at the bit and resent it or feel put upon because we recognize that we're not volunteers as if our life was our own to do with it what we wanted. We're not volunteers. We've been drafted. We're in Christ's army now. Indeed, I think that it is in the absence of this message of suffering and inconvenience that is behind so much Christian writing that I get as a pastor regarding how to reward volunteers. Think of that word...volunteer. But they tell me that, 'You know, churches have to pay volunteers, otherwise they

won't work. They have to pay people to fold bulletins or to work in a café' and you have to throw big parties for them and recognize them and give them plaques and make sure that everybody is acknowledged for everything.'

Now it is all totally right to say thank you and it is totally, totally right to show gratitude and honor, but how about just signing up because it's a privilege to serve Jesus? How about the main and plain lesson of Christianity that, 'hey, inconvenience is part of the game children?' How about if we said, well, in America maybe right now we won't be martyred, but we will be the inconvenienced-ones and we'll allow our reward to come later, when it will really count. Thanks for the plaque, but I'll wait for the 'well done, now good and faithful servant.'

And we have the Christian leader's job description in vv 28- 31. "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God which He bought with His own blood. I know that savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them, so be on your guard. Remember that for three years I never stopped warning you. Each night and day with tears."

Paul uses a number of words to describe a Christian leader. In vs 17 it says, "Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church." The word for elder is *presbuteroi* from which we get the denomination Presbyterian. An elder-led church. The word elder is borrowed from the Jews and I think it refers not only to a person who is old, because Timothy was a young elder. Elder is referring to someone who is spiritually mature – ELDER. Then Paul talks about these people not only being elders, but overseers (vs 28). "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer." Sometimes that word is translated "bishop". It's the Greek word *episkopos* from which the denomination "the Episcopal denomination" is derived because the Episcopal denomination is a bishop-led denomination. *Episkopos* is a compound word. *Epi* means "over" in Greek and *skopos* means to "see". We get the telescope or microscope. A microscope is something that you see through. Epi – over – scopos...see it is the job of the overseer to look over – to watch over Christians. And it is interesting that the first duty that Paul is laying out for the Epi-scopos (the overseer) is watching over yourselves. Before you manage other people be sure you Christian leader manage yourself. That you take care of your own spiritual life and watch over your own heart.

Then the third word that apostle uses is "Shepherd". He calls the Christian leader elder. He calls them "overseer". He calls them shepherds... 'be shepherds of the church of God (vs 28), which He bought with His own blood.' Now we'll explore that in a moment because that's the most common word for a leader in the Bible...shepherd. Or...our English word "pastor". I want to explore that in a moment, but it seems to me very obvious that these words are interchangeable. That they're used of the same people. Sometimes they're

called elders to refer to their spiritual qualifications of maturity; sometimes they're called overseers or bishops to describe something of their function. They watch over people. Sometimes they're called shepherds to describe their relationship to the sheep, but the words are used interchangeably and I think, unfortunately, some churches claim to have a more biblical form of church government because they use one or other of these words. 'Oh, we're more biblical because we don't call our leaders pastors. We call them elders or bishops.' Friend, the New Testament can be used to justify a variety of forms of church government and most of what we see in the contemporary church scene in terms of church government, can be totally explained in terms of the historical and cultural context in which that particular form of church government arose.

Rather than biblical conditions driving a form government, very often it's culturally derived. I think God deliberately makes church government ambiguous in the New Testament so that it can fit a variety of cultures, a variety of ways of understanding authority. But the term that Paul camps on here is "shepherd" and it's the same term, by the way, that Peter camps on in I Peter 5. He says, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood." There is a nice Trinitarian verse.

The Spirit of God makes us overseers. The church is owned by the Father and bought by the blood of the Son, but every Christian leader, from a person who takes care of a few toddlers in our preschool class to the person who is pastor over a church of 15,000 – every Christian leader must have a heart of a shepherd. This term 'shepherd' is used over 100 times in the Bible. Over 400 times in the Bible "sheep" are mentioned. This was a culture in ancient Palestine dominated by shepherding and sheep and when they were searching around for a way to describe leadership; whether the leadership of God or the leadership of an individual, they use the phrase "shepherd" and "sheep".

So we know Psalm 23, "The Lord is My Shepherd, I shall not want." Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd. You cannot be a Christian leader unless you have the heart of a shepherd. A heart for what? A heart for caring for other people. A heart to be intimate with those you lead. To nurture – to protect – to guide – to feed – to lead – to watch over.

They're prone to wonder and they're not very bright. I mean, they can be walking right in front of the sheep pen and not know how to get in. Sheep are dull. They're wayward. They're stubborn. They bite. Now that's not to describe the average church person as dull or wayward or biting, smelly/dirty, but it's not surprising it ought not – it ought not to be a surprise to any Christian leader to have some bit of flack from someone if they are sheep. And the way God relates to us, He calls us "sheep". It is the job of the shepherd moreover to not only care for the sheep, but to ward off wolves. Paul says that 'I know that after I leave savage wolves will come in among you; won't spare the flock. From your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples.'

Shepherds need to nurture the sheep and shepherds need to ward off the wolves.

Now it's unpopular today to say that some people may be wolves because for Americans that sounds too negative. Yet, part of the role of the leader that Paul constantly talks about, and Jesus constantly talked about, is not only to teach the truth, but to warn people about errors. In Titus 1:9 we read, 'The overseer, the elder, must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.' So a shepherd's job is to teach the flock and to refute – to oppose what's false.

You cannot be a shepherd, you cannot be a pastor, a leader and sit idly by while people are affected by false teaching or false prophecy. You are not a good shepherd or a good leader if you say nothing or do nothing when somebody prophesies or says something that's false. Shepherds are always watching over in order to protect the flock; whether it's from New Age teaching or post-modernism or moral slippage. The leaders job description is being a good shepherd.

And finally, Paul talks about a leader's relationships. In vs 36, "when he had said this He knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was the statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship."

Christian leadership, if you want to know what it's about, in every age – but particularly in the worst of times – Christian leadership is about relationships with people you are leading. Look at the tenderness and affection between the leader, the pastor here and those that he's leading. They kneel down together and pray and they all cry. They embrace each other. This isn't, you know, Christian leadership is not being the CEO of a corporation or some manager...just being an administrator. It's about unbelievably tender affection. A heart to heart link, where the leader loves the people and the people love the leader.

I think this kind of relationship springs out of all the things we've talked about. How do you have that kind of relationship? It comes out of being an example; not holding back on the truth. Preaching anything to anyone and anytime from a place of security and serving people and being willing to be inconvenienced for them. Attending & feeding & leading & protecting & working hard & giving & calling people to sacrifice and telling them the truth. Lots of hours in friendship.

I don't believe there's anything that a person could aspire to that would be greater in this world - any privilege that one could be called to - anything nobler

or more worthy of your time or life than that you would be Christian leaders. Let's pray...