

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Growing Leaders: Learning the Art from the Master

One day he saw some peasants busily pulling out nettles; he looked at the heap of plants, uprooted, and already wilted, and said, "They're dead; but it would be good if we knew how to put them to some use. When the nettle is young, the leaves make excellent greens; when it grows old it has filaments and fibers like hemp and flax. Cloth made from the nettle is as good as cloth made from hemp. Chopped up, the nettle is good for poultry; pounded, it is good for cattle. Nettle seeds mixed with animals' fodder gives a luster to their hides; the roots, mixed with salt, produce a beautiful yellow dye. And it makes excellent hay, because it can be cut twice in a season. And what does nettle need? Very little soil, no care, no culture; except that the seeds fall as fast as they ripen, and it is difficult to gather them, that's all. If we took a little time, the nettle would be useful; we neglect it, and it becomes harmful. Then we kill it. Men are so like the nettle!" After a short silence, he added, "My friends, remember this: There are no bad herbs, and no bad men; there are only bad cultivators."

—Jean Valjean, in Victor Hugo's classic novel, *Les Misérables*¹

The art of nurturing leaders for Christian ministry begins with a vision of the potential that is within every person, put there by God himself. It continues with an understanding that God is already at work to develop that potential, and that he calls us to join him in his work, taking up the responsibilities he assigns to us.

¹Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. by Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee, Signet Classic, New American Library (New York: NAL PENGUIN, INC., 1987), 165-66.

The Church—in all its myriad local expressions—is the primary environment in which people grow into Christian leaders. The idea of “growing leaders” suggests that the process is more organic and spiritual than organizational and programmatic, though the two dimensions complement each other. An environment conducive to growth in grace is paramount.

Clearing the Boulders

Without a doubt, the single most important person for growing leaders in the church is the pastor. (In the case of multi-staffed churches this would include various staff members in their respective roles, but for simplicity’s sake I will speak only of the pastor.) Ironically, the pastor is important not so much for what he or she can *do*, as for what he or she can *prevent*. Many people must work together to establish and maintain a nurturing environment where people may emerge and grow into leaders through the work of the Spirit. But one person—the pastor—can effectively stifle this process.

This power is a function of the position the pastor holds in the church. Like a boulder fixed in the middle of a field, the pastor may greatly hinder all efforts at cultivating other leaders by simply occupying a position. Pastors may be largely unaware of the inhibiting force they represent.

Positions

Every organization has certain positions of leadership. Positions place into the hands of the persons who fill them certain powers necessary to the organization. When persons who hold positions of leadership in the church understand the power they have, they may use it under the guidance of the Spirit in a way that helps, rather than hinders the development of emerging leaders.

Powers

Positional leaders hold five essential powers in the church: formal authority (sometimes called legitimate power); control over resources; control over rewards and penalties; control over information; and what may be called ecological control (control over the working environment and/or organizational structure).²

²Yukl, (1989), 14.

Formal authority is the power to make decisions that people will accept simply out of respect for the position. “He’s the pastor, it’s up to him.” Formal authority is derived from the legal structure and traditions that define an organization, and so these powers are available to every person who holds the position, regardless of personality, gifts, experience, or credibility. Wise pastors recognize that formal authority does not motivate people nearly as well as it stops them. They learn to use it sparingly.

Control over resources may involve physical assets or budgetary processes. It also involves time and attention—which people and which projects are given priority? Which programs get the spotlight most often? In a church, control over the pulpit is a major power.

Rewards and penalties are controlled symbolically in most churches. Malony points out that some organizations use physical or material means of control, while others use symbolic means. The pastor, by position, is symbolic of the whole church. The rewards and penalties that matter in churches are relational—namely, personal approval or rejection.³ A word of approval or disapproval from the pastor is sufficient in many churches to signal “stop” or “go” on a new project. A careless word may convey to an individual that he or she is unwelcome in the church. Even silence communicates. The failure to say hello or to express encouragement on the part of church members is a problem, but it is an even greater problem when it is the pastor. Words of encouragement, affirmation, and support have enormous power to nurture emerging leaders, particularly when spoken face-to-face.

The pastor also exercises power by **controlling information**. Anyone who works full-time in an organization accumulates knowledge and information about the organization that other people do not have. Sharing information empowers other people to become active participants. Withholding or filtering information manipulates the perception of others and prevents their full and free participation. Does this sound too much like politics? I don’t think so. Church leaders are especially susceptible to “image management.” We are tempted to let people see only what we want them to see so they will think well of us and continue to give their support, but people are more perceptive than we would like to think.

Withholding or distorting information carries a high price. It suggests that a pastor thinks the church belongs to him or her in a way that it does not belong to ordinary church members. If this underlying belief exists, a pastor may effectively exclude church members

³Malony, 104.

from full participation and ownership of organizational goals. If members of Christ's body are not allowed to function as members, the church's organic unity in the Spirit is weakened rather than strengthened. Max De Pree's comments regarding corporate dynamics are applicable to the church as well: "Part of the art of leadership is to see that this common bond is maintained and strengthened, a task certainly requiring good communication . . . relationships within corporations improve when information is shared."⁴

The pastor's **broadest power is ecological control**. It concerns the total environment of an organization. Even in churches with structures that distribute authority, the pastor still exercises a great deal of discretionary power. It is expressed in the form and flavor given to worship services, committee structures and meetings, and in planning. It is seen especially in the tone and quality of interpersonal relationships.

Meaningful participation is especially important. It is within the pastor's control in most churches to conduct staff meetings, elder board meetings, and congregational meetings. Are people invited to participate, or does the pastor's approach effectively shut them out of meaningful participation? Burke states: "Successful managers involve their subordinates in important and relevant decision making and . . . help them to learn about (1) the consequences of their decisions and actions and (2) management itself."⁵ Time spent to thoroughly discuss issues and reach a consensus is not wasted. It is the good earth out of which leadership grows.

Some pastors find it difficult to motivate people. Sometimes the reason is simple—they do not really invite people to participate meaningfully. One willing church member said to her pastor, with obvious surprise, "I didn't think you *wanted* my ideas!" Too many pastors view church members as recipients of ministry, rather than as persons who have a great deal of insight to contribute. To such pastors, the ministry of the laity means "I think up the ideas, and the people do the work." This attitude thwarts the developmental work God is doing in the lives of emerging leaders—most of whom are laypersons.

By virtue of position alone, pastors have great influence over the process of leadership development in a church. If positional power is not used *actively* to foster an inclusive, growth-enhancing environment, *passivity* will stifle the emergence of other leaders. The

⁴DePree, 95.

⁵Burke, "Leadership as Empowering Others," 61.

pastor holds the ball. No one else can carry it as long as he or she occupies the office. Whether positional power is used for good or harm, however, depends ultimately on the person who holds the position.

Personal Issues

People who happen to be pastors hinder leadership development more than help it for three basic reasons: *defensiveness*, *role confusion*, and *lack of knowing how*.

Defensiveness. Some pastors resist the emergence of other leaders in the church because they believe it is their God-given right and responsibility to direct and control the congregation. Spiritual authority is seen as connected to a position within the church, rather than to the development of godly character within a person.

Pastors may fear that they will lose their own leadership role if other leaders are encouraged. Burke suggests that “Many, perhaps most, people believe that power is a zero-sum quantity; to share power, to empower others, is to lose a certain amount of it.”⁶

Sometimes it is argued that the pastoral role cannot be fulfilled by the uninitiated. It is work for experts. As Yukl says, “people sometimes try to protect their expert power by keeping procedures and techniques shrouded in secrecy, [and] by using technical jargon to make the task seem more complex and mysterious . . .”⁷ Seminaries reinforce this tendency if their graduates mistake theological jargon for genuine spiritual insight. Ordinary believers in the pew may know their theology better by heart than the pastor knows it by head.

Defensiveness also shows up in the tendency to take criticism personally. Malony suggests that pastors should expect and even invite honest criticism, and learn how to respond to it rather than react to it.⁸ A pastor who chooses to learn and grow from criticism sets a positive example for emerging leaders.

Role confusion. Pastors wear many different hats. The multiplicity of roles inherent in a pastor’s work creates confusion. Ironically, an emphasis on “equipping the laity for ministry” tends to aggravate, not alleviate the confusion. Does the pastor do the ministry, or facilitate others who minister? Does the pastor direct others toward his goals, or enable them to achieve theirs? Church members may expect the pastor to act like the CEO of a major

⁶Burke, 63.

⁷Yukl (1989), 23.

⁸Malony, 95ff.

corporation one moment and like the groundskeeper the next. I suspect there are many young pastors whose vision for “equipping the laity” deflated when they bumped into parishioners who were not so enamored with the notion. “Equipping sounds like a fine idea, but that’s not what we hired *you* for.” Face with such obstacles, pastors are tempted to shelve their ideals and settle into a routine of filling traditional expectations.

Should a pastor maintain a certain professional distance from church members, or seek a close, personal relationship of mutual vulnerability and accountability? Bob Munger (who died in his nineties in 2001) stated that his generation of ministers were taught specifically to “keep their distance” from parishioners, lest they be accused of playing favorites.⁹

Movements arguing for the importance of close relationships in the church advocate a completely different style for the pastor. As a result, some pastors have found by painful experience that not all congregations are ready to discover that their pastor is a real human being. Uncertainty can make a pastor tentative in every relationship. Sensing it, people wonder if the pastor dislikes them. Pastors who are worrying about whether they will be accepted as they really are have a hard time conveying unconditional acceptance to others.

Finally, a pastor may be conceptually confused about leadership itself. Do I serve God by leading the church, or does God lead me so I can serve the people? Do I (a) serve by leading, (b) lead by serving, (c) both, or (d) none of the above? For pastors who are reflective and philosophical, “paralysis by analysis” lurks near the door.

Confusion inhibits the development of leadership for the simple reason that pastors who feel uncertain about their role tend to operate in survival mode. They attend to urgent demands and activities that give immediate rewards, but neglect processes that take time to show results. Paul Stevens states it well: “The current Christian context focuses on performance, applauds measurable results and encourages a flurry of activity. But the heart of an equipper is to release *others* into ministry. Often this is neither measurable nor pleasurable.”¹⁰ McGregor pinpoints the same phenomenon as a major impediment to managerial development in corporations:

Some managers . . . are more concerned with their own performance and their own rewards and punishments than with the growth of their subordinates. In fact, they are fearful of having subordinates who are too competent—they worry about having their

⁹As heard under Dr. Munger’s wise tutelage at Fuller Seminary.

¹⁰Stevens, *Liberating the Laity*, 155.

own weaknesses shown up. This self-protective orientation creates a climate that hampers rather than facilitates growth.¹¹

Knowing how. Even if a pastor wants to nurture other leaders, knowing how may still be a problem. Warner Burke, describing leadership development in terms of “empowerment,” points out that “one is not born with the skill, or perhaps art, of empowerment. The process must be learned.”¹²

One common pitfall is for a pastor to shoulder the burden of leadership development single handedly. Stevens points out that “No single person in the church can be the omniscient equipper of the laity. Bringing the laity into full liberation is a shared task.”¹³ To develop and maintain an environment in which leaders can grow is enough. To *be* that environment by oneself is impossible. Leadership development is a responsibility for the whole body of Christ to fulfill, not a professional skill practiced by a few.

Two attitudes help address the problem of lack of know-how. First, the art of nurturing leaders can be learned, but as in all things developmental, it takes time and a teachable spirit. Second, pastors must open their eyes to other people in their congregation who may have the gifts for nurturing the leadership potential of others.

Plowing Hard Ground

Change seldom comes easily. It is often resisted in the church by pastors and laity alike (though not necessarily for the same reasons). To develop a church into the productive environment for growing leaders that God intends it to be, three convictions are necessary:

1. That God is actively at work in peoples’ lives to bring their capacity for leadership to full maturity
2. That one person can make incremental differences for the better, if that person is open to the evidence of God’s work
3. That many more people must share the vision of leadership development if a total environment is to be established for growing leaders

Put simply: God is at work. You can make a difference. You cannot do it alone.

¹¹McGregor, *Human Side of Enterprise*, 201.

¹²Burke, 63.

¹³Stevens, 14.

With this in mind, the importance of recognizing God's initiative in growing leaders cannot be overstressed, for it determines whether we look at the churches and people we know with expectation or despair. God is actively initiating, so we need not gaze longingly after eras past, or toward a distant future. Instead we must open our eyes to what he is doing in us and around us right now. That is the beginning.

A second step is to begin talking with a few others about these ideas, not only in the abstract but also by personalizing the discussion. Invite people to reflect on the process of God's work in their own lives. How is it that you came to faith in Christ? What experiences taught you lessons and shaped your commitment? Who are some people who have been particularly influential in your life, and in what ways? What are some things you are struggling with right now? What may God be trying to teach you?

At a recent retreat, I briefly explained some of the basic ideas of leadership development to our elders—that God is at work, that he teaches and shapes our character through life experiences, that he is intentionally developing us for leadership—then asked them to take fifteen minutes to reflect on their own lives and to write down, in the form of a time-line, some of the experiences and people they felt had been significantly influential in their own growth, and which had prepared them for their present leadership role as elders. There was no attempt to be exhaustive about the process, but only to introduce the concepts. Afterwards, I asked them to share in groups of three some of things they had written down.

Admittedly, these men and women are not a random sampling of the total church membership. They are spiritually responsive and already deeply committed to the church. Nonetheless, I was impressed by the power of this simple exercise to illumine the God's work in their lives. The sharing of their stories filled the room with spirited conversations. A few shed tears as they reflected on God's faithfulness. One commented, "This brought back to me things the Lord has done that I haven't thought about for years."

To be told that God can work in other peoples' lives is good. To be told that he can work in your life is better. To *see* his active presence in your life with your own eyes is best of all.

The processes by which God grows leaders should be taught and shared widely in the church, with people encouraged to look for the signs of his working in their own lives. A human-centered approach to leadership development (*you can be a leader!*) easily falls prey

to human pride, but a God-centered approach (consider what the Lord is teaching you) leads to gratitude, humility, and “a harvest of righteousness and peace,” (Heb 12:11).

How Long, O Lord?

There is a close connection between spiritual renewal in the church and a vision for leadership development.

A major responsibility of leadership is the selection and development of potential leaders. Mature leaders should openly and deliberately challenge potential leaders about specific needs and ministry opportunities. A danger sign indicating a plateaued leader is a lack of enthusiasm for challenging and recruiting potential leaders. A growing leader, on the other hand, stimulates the emergence of potential leaders.¹⁴

The clear implication is that church leaders—pastors and lay leaders alike—who give no attention to leadership development create their own stagnation. Attention to leadership development is one key to renewal, because it focuses our attention on the Spirit’s work among us in the present. This principle can be applied to the Church as a whole—it is an *essential* component of the church’s mission to be continually calling people to growth in Christian leadership.

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever, (Heb 13:7-8).

How long does it take to see the leadership potential within a church begin to emerge and bear fruit? This depends, of course, on the situation. Some fields are harder and have bigger boulders to move than others, requiring more time and effort to bring them into production. As McGregor points out,

They are like the differences between the conditions faced by the vegetable grower in the San Joaquin Valley of California and the New Hampshire farmer. Nevertheless, within a given environment, the nature and the quality of the processes of growth can be influenced by managerial philosophy and practice. Successful crops *are* grown in New Hampshire.¹⁵

The farmland analogy, like all analogies, if pushed too far can discourage us needlessly by inferring that worthwhile crops can only be grown in huge, irrigated agribusiness operations. The picture painted by Jesus, however, is quite different:

¹⁴Clinton, *Making of a Leader*, 87.

¹⁵McGregor, 194.

A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:3-9)

The seed goes out, seemingly with no concern for where it lands. Some of it yields fruit, and most does not. What is in view in this parable, as Jesus interprets it for his disciples in verses 18-23, is not a picture of different churches—some productive and some not—but a picture of individuals responding in different ways to the message of God’s Kingdom.

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. That is the seed along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown, (Matt 13:19-23).

Pastors and lay leaders alike are responsible, with God’s help, for sustaining an environment in which God can grow leaders for his purposes. Ultimately, the fruit that comes depends on the response of individuals. Wise leaders accept this reality and give their greatest energy to nurturing and cultivating all the “good soil” they can find. This requires spiritual discernment and humility. Our judgment as to a person’s responsiveness can never be final—the Holy Spirit, after all, can change people.

The basic tools for renewal in leadership development are our eyes and ears. There is power in personal reflection on God’s working and great impact when we listen carefully to the heart longings, concerns, dreams and insights of others. Take these seriously as signs of God’s Spirit at work and a ministry that nurtures leadership is not so far away. It can begin with the next person you meet.

Christian leadership development, then, is essentially a work of nurturing within people the life of God’s Spirit, who centers our attention on Jesus Christ.

Looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith

As Jesus is our supreme example of leadership, so he is also the master developer of leaders. As he practiced the art of nurturing leaders, so we must follow his example.

Jesus chose disciples, instructed them, trained them, sent them into ministry. He evaluated their effectiveness or lack of it, challenged their unworthy attitudes, expanded their vision, restored their confidence, and empowered their ministry. He taught them sacrificial service. The authorities who conspired to have Jesus executed, later marveled at the poise of his disciples. “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus,” (Acts 4:13). This sums up the method Jesus.

Jesus did not establish a school or write a training manual. Instead, he entered fully into the lives of his disciples—fishing with Peter (Luke 5:1-11), dining with Levi and his friends (Mark 2:14-15), worshipping in their synagogues and staying in their homes (Luke 4:31-41). He allowed them access to his life, as well. Jesus’ only solitary moments, as recorded in the Gospels, were when he went out by himself to pray, and sometimes even these were subject to interruption (Luke 4:42). In the process of living, eating, walking, working and worshipping with his disciples, he carried on a dialogue with them, asking them questions and responding to theirs. He explained his parables to them. Most of all, he lived his life in full view before them. They saw him make wine for a wedding, touch a leper, converse with an Samaritan woman, debate intellectuals, heal the sick, confront the demonic, fall asleep from exhaustion, calm a storm, rebuke the arrogant, welcome children, and weep at the death of a friend. Jesus was the leadership curriculum they studied.

It is easy to say that we should follow Jesus’ example, but here is the rub: who among us is foolish enough to believe he really can be what Jesus was? I admire the abilities of a great basketball player like Michael Jordan as he runs and leaps, defying gravity and making shots which should be impossible, but I have no illusions that I can do the same. On the basketball court I am not Michael Jordan, and in the field of leadership development I am not Jesus—infinitely far from it—or in any other field for that matter.

We cannot duplicate Jesus’ actions or his character. He was perfect in thought, word and deed. Duplication is not necessary. Jesus said, “A student is not above his teacher, nor a

servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master,” (Matt 10:24-25). We cannot *be* Jesus, but we *can* be *like* him, by the work of the Holy Spirit who transforms our character after the likeness of Christ. Scripture calls the outcome of this transforming work the “fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control,” (Gal 5:22-23).

To follow Christ’s example means more than a vain attempt to act like him. Rather, we open ourselves to the work of Christ’s Spirit so that his life is revealed through us. This is precisely the miracle Paul has in view when he writes:

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us, (2 Cor 4:5-7).

The capacity to influence others toward God’s leadership development goals for them does not depend on our perfection, but on the presence of Christ in us and the “all-surpassing power” of the Holy Spirit. This is the incarnational principle of ministry. The Lord himself takes up residence within imperfect, but justified, human beings, and makes his presence and reality known through them, despite their being “jars of clay.”

“Be imitators of God”

We have no hope of being “like Jesus” by our own power, but we have God’s own Word to assure us that others will see Jesus in us by *his* power. We learn more specifically what this means by considering more closely the example of Jesus. As noted earlier, service was the controlling principle of Jesus’ ministry—he was God’s servant, totally committed to doing God’s will. We are to be servants like him. To be effective in helping to develop leaders, we must build upon our concept of servanthood and become more like Jesus in at least three ways: in *suffering*, *sharing*, and *staying in step* with the Spirit.

Suffering

Jesus tells us that true disciples must expect to suffer. In fact, everywhere that Scripture tells us to imitate the Lord. or the positive example of fellow believers, imitation involves suffering in some form.

Consider the words of Paul:

to the Thessalonians;

You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. . . . For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, (1 Thes 1:5b-7; 2:14).

to the Corinthians;

we [Apostles] go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children . . . for I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me, (1 Cor 4:11-16).

to the Ephesians;

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life full of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God, (Eph 4:32-5:2).

and again to the Corinthians;

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. (2 Cor 4:8-12).

Everywhere in the New Testament, we find the theme that Christ suffered and those who follow him will suffer, too.

Nurturing leadership in others is costly, and we should not allow ourselves to think otherwise. To influence others so that they become significant influencers-for-Christ, one must pay a price—*suffer*—in terms of time, energy, interruptions, inconvenience, disappointments, misunderstanding, and sorrow. The moment we become involved with people, such things are inevitable. The deeper the involvement, the higher the cost. If we want to make a difference for Christ in the lives of others, we must follow someone like Paul

as he followed Christ: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings . . .” (Phil 3:10).

The suffering of which we speak here is not the morose sorrow of those who constantly imagine that they are victims of persecution, when really they are only victims of their own self-pity. It is also not the kind of self-important suffering found in people who rather enjoy reminding everyone else how much they have sacrificed. Authentic suffering cares almost nothing for its own troubles and never takes the time to be impressed with itself. The person who suffers as Christ suffered hardly is filled with such love for others—and especially for the Father—that even in suffering there is a steady stream of compassion, concern for others, and joy. It is a suffering born out of the power of Christ’s resurrection, that is not consumed with darkness but rejoices in the light and aches with an urgent longing that everyone might share this life.

Sharing

Jesus shared his life with his disciples. He included them in his peak experiences (Transfiguration) and in his darkest hour (Gethsemane). When he wept, he did not hide his tears, nor did he conceal his feelings when he was angry: “Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan!’” (Matt 16:23).

The disciples saw Jesus as he really was—fully human—and they eventually saw him also as God’s Son—fully divine. The miracle of the Incarnation is that God revealed himself in human form. He did not, as the early Docetist heretics held, merely “appear” to be human. Jesus was human in every sense of the word. To nurture leaders, we must open our lives to them so that our humanity is clearly seen. Only then will the presence of Christ within us also be revealed.

I know a church where the secretaries create an environment that is nurturing because it is fully human. In the midst of the busiest workday, there is freedom in this church office to laugh or cry, to be angry or to tell a joke, to gripe or to pray together. Little children visiting the office are welcome to spill toys all over the floor from the basket in the corner. One of the secretaries, or maybe one of the church elders who happens to drop by, will sit with the child on the floor and play, just as Jesus welcomed the little children, so his or mommy can do what she came to do. When someone is frustrated, there is freedom to express it without fear

of being judged or rumors being spread. When there is heartache, people listen and care. Birthdays are celebrated. Deaths are mourned. The real concerns and issues of peoples' lives are shared in a fellowship of friends who really care for one another. Christ shines through.

This is the way of Jesus. He molded twelve strong-willed, dissimilar and sometimes mutually antagonistic individuals into one body, and made them the nucleus of his Church. In the same way, the Spirit of Christ works to integrate us into Christ's body. Among other things, this means giving up our willful independence and learning inter-dependence. McGregor's insights are worth considering:

To be dependent is in some ways satisfying. In other ways it is frustrating. Likewise, independence is satisfying. On the other hand, independence can be threatening. This stems from universal human experiences---we are born into a relationship of relatively complete dependence. Growing up involves a gradual shift out of this state . . . The end product, however, is not independence . . . but rather *inter-dependence*. It is the central characteristic of modern, complex society.¹⁶

It is also the central characteristic of the Triune God we worship, whose inner life has been turned outward and revealed through the giving of the Son and the Spirit. To be like Jesus, we must give up radical independence, embrace interdependence through the Spirit, and freely share the Life that God gives. Then others will see Christ in us.

Staying in Step

In the same passage where Paul writes of the fruit of the Spirit, he says, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us *keep in step* with the Spirit," (Gal 5:24-25). [Italics mine]

Nurturing others toward greater Christian leadership is a Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered endeavor from beginning to end. How do we know whom to select for a particular leadership position? Who needs a word of encouragement, and who needs a new challenge? How do we discover the ministry for which a person's gifts are best suited? How can we know when to "come to the rescue" of someone versus when to let a person struggle through to his or her own solution? The Lord knows the answers to all these questions. The Holy Spirit is present in every step and stage of leadership development, so we must learn to stay in step.

¹⁶Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, p. 26-27.

This is not an entirely mystical process, though the Spirit's voice may be subtle indeed. Seeing and listening are the essential skills—having “eyes to see and ears to hear.” We keep our eyes open for signs of the Spirit's working in a person's life, confident in the knowledge that the Spirit *is* working. We tune our ears to the nuances in a person's expression, listening for the longings or questions or aspirations of the heart, further signals of the Spirit's presence. By attending to these signs, we become aware of those processes taking place in the soul of a person of which Paul speaks in Philippians, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose,” (Phil 2:13).

Growing Leaders

Leadership development is accomplished ultimately by the Lord, and requires a lifetime to complete. God is sovereign over the process of growing leaders. He grows them for his purposes, and therefore grows *within* them the character that truly reflects his nature and brings honor to his name. The process is never easy, but it is good. As Paul writes,

“we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us,” (Rom 5:3-5).

Leaders formed in the image of Jesus Christ become the *means* to God's sovereign ends. He accomplished his purposes through people who share in the likeness of his Son—leaders who serve with the same impassioned loyalty and single-mindedness of purpose as Jesus served his Father. Servants who are willing, like Jesus, to take up their cross and bear it.

The garden where God grows such leaders is the Church, and we are called to work within that garden to help nurture the leaders who are emerging there. This itself is hard work, requiring that we get down on our knees, get our hands dirty, and suffer the scrapes and scratches that are inherent in the work. Some of the emergent plants are very much like the nettles that Jean Valjean saw as full of potential. Others charm us with their beautiful flowers or delicious fruit, yet even the roses have their thorns. People may discourage us unless we focus on the fact that God *is working*. The life force of his Spirit continually flows through his people, and the signs of his presence in the garden give us hope and joy.

Neglect God's leadership garden and it will dry up. Weeds will overrun its walkways and planting beds. When it is well tended, though, it flourishes and brings forth a magnificent

profusion of colors and fruit to refresh and nourish the world. God delights in leaders as they emerge and grow to maturity. He delights in those who nurture them. As the Lord brings us to full bloom and fruitful maturity, we become instruments of his redemptive purposes. He sends us into the world like salt and light, proclaiming truth, upholding justice and bringing peace. He calls us to his Church, to bring still others to maturity. God's leaders, grown in God's way, fulfill God's purposes.

In this way, the Lord leads all his servants to abundant life in Jesus Christ.