

PHILIP GREENSLADE

AUTHOR OF *LEADERSHIP*

MINISTERING

ANGLES

*How to minister*

**WHEN 'HOW TO' BOOKS FAIL**

FOREWORD BY GREG HASLAM

Copyright © CWR 2009

Published 2009 by CWR, Waverley Abbey House, Waverley Lane, Farnham, Surrey GU9 8EP, UK. Registered Charity No. 294387. Registered Limited Company No. 1990308.

The right of Philip Greenslade to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, sections 77 and 78.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission in writing of CWR.

For list of National Distributors visit CWR's website: [www.cwr.org.uk](http://www.cwr.org.uk)

The author has added his own italics for emphasis in some Bible quotes, and in quoted material from other sources.

Whilst every effort has been made to trace sources quoted, some have not been found, and for this we apologise.

Lyrics on page 221: 'God's Own Fool', Michael Card. Copyright © 1985 Mole Ene Music/Birdwing Music/EMI CMG/Small Stone Media. Administered by Song Solutions Daybreak, 14 Horsted Square, Uckfield TN22 1QG. [info@songsolutions.org](mailto:info@songsolutions.org)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible: New International Version (NIV), copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society.

Other versions used:

ESV: The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, published by HarperCollins Publishers © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission.

All rights reserved.

*The Message: The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Concept development, editing, design and production by CWR

Printed in Finland by W.S. Bookwell

ISBN: 978-1-85345-522-3

When it comes to talking sensibly about the call and task of Christian ministers today, Philip Greenslade's is one of those voices to which I give serious attention. This book represents a wealth of good theology and genuine insight born from experience of ministering in church leadership and out of continuous reflection on this task. It distils living wisdom in a way that makes massive sense to me, theologically and existentially, and will do to many others. I recommend it wholeheartedly to those who are looking for a mature and Christ-centred perspective on Christian ministry.

Dr Nigel G. Wright  
Principal, Spurgeon's College, London

How Christian is your ministry? Philip Greenslade brings extensive biblical exposition and wide personal experience to bear as he presents a gentle but insistent call for ministry that is Christ-centred, cross-shaped and culturally critical.

Dr Jeremy Thomson  
Director of Higher Education at Oasis College

This is not a 'how to' book. In terms of ministry it is more of a 'why to' and 'what to'. It provides a theological undergirding of the very essence of ministry motivation – servanthood!

This book provides an excellent theological overview of the biblical culture of servanthood. Philip Greenslade writes with a hand in heaven and with both feet on the ground. He provides great study with earthy application. Philip reminds us that in the Person of Christ we see lordship demonstrated through servanthood and we see followership and leadership finding their zenith through this great heart motif achievable only in real relationship with Him.

Finally a book that provides a working theology of ministry that helps redress the balance of assumed positional power. It places the emphasis firmly on those Christlike characteristics of servanthood that are so often overlooked. This is a 'must read' for leaders looking to be effective in all they seek to do in ministry.

Colin D. Buckland  
Director of Claybury International

Philip Greenslade writes on church leadership with an authority grounded in his professional practice of ministry, in his experience of training ministers, and in his deep commitment to the God revealed in Scripture.

Revd Canon Professor Leslie J. Francis, Professor of Religions and Education  
University of Warwick

In a world of celebrities, statistics and quick-fixes, *Ministering Angles* is an urgent and prophetic call back to the downwardly-mobile path of taking up one's cross and following Jesus into the mess of ministry. By definition, it won't be popular!

Rev Dr Ian Stackhouse  
Senior Pastor of Millmead, Guildford Baptist Church

# CONTENTS

Foreword	9
Preface	11

---

## SECTION ONE

### **An angle of vision that is ... *characteristically Christlike* (Jesus and the 'servant songs' of Isaiah)**

1. Seeing Things from His Point of View	16
2. Ministering Grace to Establish Justice	36
3. Making a Secret Life Count for Public Ministry	46
4. Being Tough-minded and Tender-hearted	55
5. Bearing Wounds that Bring Wholeness	63

---

## SECTION TWO

### **An angle of vision that is ... *paradoxically cruciform* (Paul and the Corinthians)**

6. Cross-eyed Visionaries	74
7. Servant-leaders	93
8. Competent Inadequates	106
9. Wounded Healers	119
10. Treasure in Clay Pots	131
11. Undiminished Flames	141

---

## SECTION THREE

### **An angle of vision that is ... *culturally critical* (Jeremiah and Paul)**

12. Idolatrous Relevance	160
13. Prophetic Untimeliness	179
14. Premature Ambassadors	193
15. Only Fools and Martyrs	207

---

## REVIEW

16. Through a Glass, Darkly	224
17. Face Value	240
18. Second Sight	246
Notes	250

# FOREWORD

In Charles Dickens' classic novel *Great Expectations*, the lovelorn longings and changing fortunes of young working-class hero Pip Pirrin are depicted. Pip is invited by the aged, wealthy and embittered spinster Miss Havesham to visit her secluded mansion and to befriend her beautiful young niece Estella, whom she has coached in the art of vengeance upon all men. Pip is to be her first victim. The long-jilted spinster sits in the sinister, darkened, cobwebbed chaos of her self-imposed prison cell. She morbidly preserves the decayed remains of what was once her wedding banquet, now a heap of dirt. The self-confessed old hag of 'yellow skin and bone', worn down by 'sharper teeth than teeth of mice' gnawing at her, cruelly implements her plan to destroy Pip. Her bitter, vengeful spirit has corrupted even the beautiful Estella, who emulates her aunt's man-hating and loveless attitudes amid the gothic mausoleum of Miss Havesham's shattered dreams.

Years later, his fortunes completely reversed, Pip returns to the dilapidated mansion intent upon rescuing his beloved Estella and snatching her from the accursed and empty house. He enters that same filthy, haunted room where he met the twisted spinster and now occupied by the adult Estella. Outraged, Pip begins to tear down its ragged and dusty drapes to let in the sunlight, sweeping away the rotten remnants of Miss Havesham's grief and faded dreams. He breaks the spell hanging over Estella with passionate revelations of his life-long love for her, and finally draws a line over years of hatred and pain, as the reunited couple leave this 'dead house' and emerge into the radiant light of a glorious new day.

Something very much like this has to happen in the experience of many jaded and faded pastors and churches today, if the people of God are to rediscover Christ's love for His Bride and His passion for lost people everywhere. For this to happen, Christian leaders must display something of Pip's courage, defiance and radical resolve to effect drastic change, renewal and restoration, stopping at nothing less than their Master directs them to do in His desire to awaken His Church from her gloom, to realise her glorious future destiny.

Pastors come in all kinds of shapes and gifting. Some appear to be more exciting than others. Apostles, evangelists and prophets are the most colourful, and usually attract the greatest attention. Some rise to become minor celebrities in the Christian world. But pastors and teacher-theologians are usually ranked somewhat lower. This is a great mistake. Philip Greenslade is one of the finest teacher-theologians I know, and an extraordinarily gifted thinker, speaker and writer. I have known him since I was a young pastor, meeting him at a time of stressful transition whilst trying to lead a very difficult church. I was struggling with the frustration of unfulfilled and desperate longings, alongside the challenge of much needed change, while I was also wrestling theologically with controversial issues related to spiritual renewal and the proper integration of Word and Spirit in the church's life. At that time, Philip was truly a God-send to me, and he still is. He offered me significant help, biblical insight and massive personal encouragement. He literally saved my life spiritually speaking, and helped clarify fresh vision and direction for many years to come, largely due to his own biblical integrity and hunger for spiritual reality – a hunger that still remains. I should add that he is also very prophetic and abounds in rich spiritual insights, in that he has the ability to expound and apply God's unchanging Word to the current situation with an uncanny sensitivity and timeliness. Such prophetic skill is abundantly displayed in its finest form here in Philip's new book, *Ministering Angles*.

Books on leadership have been queuing for our attention for decades now, clamouring for space on our already heavily-laden bookshelves and access to our over-stuffed minds. Most of these books echo the world's entrepreneurial wisdom, and many urge us to advance the success of what we might call 'God's Fortune 500 Mega-church' culture that much of the Church longs to join. And yet, valuable as much of this material undoubtedly is, somewhere along the way anxious, competitive and over-ambitious pastors can mislay their souls in the quest for the Christian equivalent of the mediaeval alchemist's Philosophers' Stone that will turn everything into spiritual gold, thus lining both their pastoral pockets and empty pews with financial prosperity, vast numbers and visible success. Some of this quantitative growth and material prosperity may not be 'success' at all, as Christ Himself defines it to be.

The high incidence of pastoral moral failure, public scandals, and the frequent exposure of money-grabbing evangelists, soberly warns us that all is not well in some places. Add to this the high incidence of spiritual ‘burnout’ among once fruitful ministries and the wreckage this leaves behind in all-but-destroyed churches, and we have reasons to pause for thought. Often, our driven-ness, man-centred ‘vision’, relentless abuse of Christ’s people, ruthless dealings with perceived rivals and increasing loneliness and isolation, fuelled by our widespread failure to ‘produce the goods’ even in our own estimation, clearly points to the very real possibility that somewhere along the way many leaders have simply lost their way.

The real tragedy here is that most of these pastors were genuinely called by God to the glorious work of shepherding God’s flock. But the world, the flesh and the devil have robbed them of God’s presence, His Holy Spirit’s aid, and as a result they’ve mislaid God’s agenda. No wonder some leaders finish their race an exhausted shadow of their former selves. Some morph into characters who are just as bitter, disillusioned, twisted, hate-filled, exploitative and unfit for service as Miss Haversham. They may eventually die as faded ‘has beens’ amid the rotten debris and detritus of a failed ministry, their reputation burnt to ashes by the consuming flames of public exposure, unspeakable shame and inconsolable regrets.

Losing our way is a real possibility for us all. Finding guides who will keep us on track is much harder. But Philip Greenslade may well prove to be something of a ‘Pip’ to our dusty, cobweb-covered, jaded or disillusioned lives. Philip honestly acknowledges that he is no stranger to failure, pain and disappointment himself, but we can also see that he has been re-visited, re-commissioned and restored by Christ, experiencing the joys of renewed grace and God’s high calling upon his life. This has obviously enabled him to ‘search out the old paths’ and walk an entirely different road than many of his contemporaries who crashed and burned long ago, and whose once successful ministries are now only faded memories. Philip has given years of his life to the extensive study of God’s Word and the greatest of the Church’s most gifted theologians. He is a man of profound thought, tireless labour and a captivating writing skill – a prophetic teacher par excellence. I have followed his writings and published ministry for many years, and count him among

my most inspiring personal mentors. His insights are always fresh, penetrating, prophetic and incandescent with great truths about God, Christ, salvation and the kingdom, along with the central ingredients of effective ministry as Christ and His apostles define it to be.

This present work is no 'run of the mill' collection of predictable platitudes and clichés but, rather, a high vitamin and invigorating tonic for jaded souls and struggling pastors. Philip calls us back to the core realities of our high calling. He rediscovers the old paths that lead us out of the desert wildernesses and into the oases and grand vistas of God's plans for His people. Above all, we are enabled to recover fresh glimpses of Christ Himself, as we hear Christ's voice again gently teaching us, and receive timeless wisdom for the pursuit of a truly Christ-honouring and world-changing ministry. The bedrock realities of Christ's 'upside-down' kingdom are here unfolded in such a way that we may all be turned 'right way up' again.

Another prophet of a former generation, the great American preacher A. W. Tozer, once advised, 'Listen to the person who listens to God'. Philip Greenslade has listened to God, and we can overhear his report of what God told him. No attentive reader can fail to be moved by these studies and then resolve to change in many vital ways. This is one of the very best books on Christian leadership I have read in a long time. It is destined to become a classic. I am so glad that I had the privilege of reading it at a time when I most needed its wisdom, inspiring perspectives and profound help. It has restored my soul, and renewed my conviction that to serve Christ and His people in the ministry of God's Word is the highest calling and privilege any man or woman could possess. This book can help us all to find our true bearings in leadership, whilst warning us against the dangers of hidden rocks and potential shipwreck in ministry. Above all, it offers us the chance to experience the joy of imbibing the very best theology in order to nourish our sometimes starving and depleted souls, souls that need more than spiritual candy floss and high calorie desserts if they are to become fit for the fight that we call Christian leadership today.

Greg Haslam  
Minister, Westminster Chapel, London

# PREFACE

Pulling into a car space at a roadside diner, I glimpsed through a gap in the trees a patch of green and a man wielding a white stick. A blind man, perhaps, deftly groping his way forward? Or a park-keeper, maybe, spearing up leaves and litter? Moments later from the window-table in the diner I saw a golfer lining up a putt on the ninth tee. Angle of vision is everything.

This book is written out of a concern that the Church has been looking in the wrong direction for its models of ministry, drawing them, too uncritically, from the worlds of business studies, management theory, therapeutic practice – and, increasingly, entrepreneurship and entertainment. I am convinced that we need to shift our standpoint to one which is more biblical, more prophetic, more apostolic, more gospel-driven<sup>1</sup>; we need to adopt angles of vision which are more Christocentric, cross-shaped, and culturally critical. Of course, these are *my own* chosen angles of vision and are meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive, a personal point of view on how we do ministry today.

The title of the book is a slight play on the idea of ‘ministering angels’ (Heb. 1:7,14). This is not another book about celestial beings even though no doubt I have entertained some unawares. Neither we nor our pastoral constituency are angelic but made of the same flesh and blood reality which the Son of God chose to embrace in incarnational identity with us (Heb. 2:14). The title also, quite unwittingly, echoes Eugene Peterson’s book *Working the Angles* (Eerdmans, 1987) which no doubt sowed a seed in my mind. No one has reshaped pastoral theology in my generation more than he has, and so I hope he will forgive the unconscious borrowing as a tribute to his significance for my own thinking. In any case, I think I may be reflecting Peterson’s sympathies in being drawn to the notion of ‘angularity’ with its connotations of awkwardness, of being a bit sharp-edged, rough-hewn, *unsmooth* – characteristics of a certain ‘out-of-syn-ness’ or ‘against-the-grain-ness’. Given its Spirit-enabled outworking in sacrificial love, tough grace and faithful tenacity, such a stance may well appear otherworldly, even angelic.

Christian ministry is but a focused and intensified expression of the essential paradoxes inherent to Christian existence: honour through humility, power through weakness, life out of death.

As for the subtitle of the book, it sounds a trifle pretentious to me though I adapted it from Donald McCullough's splendid *The Power of Realistic Thinking* (1988). So I have let it stand, if only because it represents the kind of book I would like to have written. Whether this is that book, I leave you to judge. What I am trying to insist on is that the question of Christian ministry is not 'answered' by acquiring new techniques or skills (valuable as these may be) but by raising older questions about 'why?' we do ministry and about the 'who?' of the persons doing it, and 'in what manner?' it is carried out. This book aims to be *that* kind of 'how to' book.

The substance of this book consists of revised and expanded versions of addresses delivered at various conferences, programmes, and graduation events over the past decade. I have tried to eliminate repetition but hope to be forgiven if any remain.

I put on record my indebtedness:

to the late Selwyn Hughes, much-loved founder of CWR, for inviting me to share platforms with him at leadership conferences in Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, Australia, New Zealand, and at Waverley Abbey House in the UK; to the Evangelical Alliance and its then UK Director, John Smith, for co-hosting with CWR a series of leaders' events in London;

to Terry Virgo for asking me to address leaders at the New Frontiers International Conference at Brighton over a number of years;

to Professor Leslie Francis (then of the University of Wales, Bangor, now at Warwick University), Dr Paul Rolph, Dr Jeremy Thomson, and Mick Brooks, CEO of CWR, for superintending and supporting my oversight of CWR's first, postgraduate professional development course for clergy, pastors and church leaders, and to those in ministry who came on the course (how good it is to make new friends);

to David Coffey, long-time friend, and erstwhile President of the Baptist World Alliance, who, as Conference President that year, honoured me with an invitation to speak at my alma mater, Spurgeon's College, on the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the college by the famous Victorian preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon;

to my friends, especially Trevor Martin, Stuart Reid, Keith Arscott and Ian Stackhouse for keeping me sane by their generous encouragement and good humour; to Greg Haslam for his generous Foreword; to Lynette Brooks and the superb editorial and design team at CWR; to Kathy Overton for administrating my work so efficiently and cheerfully; and, above all, to my wife, Mary, for her perennially positive take on life – where would I be without her?

A friendly critic of my earlier book on leadership, along with generous comments, complained that it lacked jokes. Point taken: though those who know me might find the comment funny. Not least because representing God in any way must in itself be considered one big practical joke, a hearty participation in what the medievals called the long great Easter laugh. Not every one gets the point, though. The esteemed American novelist, Frederick Buechner, who began life by training as a Presbyterian minister, recalls a fashionable dinner party at which a woman leaned towards him down the table and said: ‘I hear you are going into the ministry: Was it your own idea or were you poorly advised?’

As for the relationship between this book and my first published attempt to reflect on the topic over twenty-five years ago, I can only hope that a fresh angle of vision may undergird not override what I wrote before. Much water has flowed under the bridge since then, some of it so turbulent as almost to sweep the bridge away with it. But I survive to reflect again on Christian ministry tempered by experience.

My contemporaries and I set out on the road with high hopes and great – perhaps grandiose – visions of the renewal that was coming to Christians, the restoration of the Church, and the revival that was around the corner for the nation. I have seen stunning glimpses of these glorious possibilities and I thank God sincerely for every one of them. I salute the brave pioneers who ‘followed the Spirit’ in the seventies and eighties and honour those who have lasted the course better than I have.

Realism forces me to say that we have not seen all that we hoped to see. Yet, even conceding this, I am not disillusioned. For one thing, the Light that has dawned on the world can never be eclipsed by anything that is still to happen. ‘Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it’

(Luke 10:23–24). This was a secret shared between Jesus and His disciples, but true nonetheless. And privately and personally, I am helped by Moses' experience who, when he desired to see the full glory of God's face, was told to enter a cleft in the rock: 'and while my glory passes by I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen' (Exod. 33:22–23, cf. 34:6, ESV).

So by analogy it is with us. We so want to see the full glory of God in our day and at every point along the way but are denied such an experience. Remarkably – as with Moses – what covers our eyes to obscure that glory is not our failures (to be regretted as they are) nor the opaqueness of tragic events (from which God seems absent) but *God's own hand*. Later in retrospect, we see not God's face but *God's back*. And with this angle of vision, seeing God's back, we realise that the glory that has passed us by was gracious and compassionate all the while and that goodness and mercy have surely followed us all the days of our life.

At a recent memorial service, I heard moving tributes paid to an old friend who had been a deacon at the small Baptist church where I arrived as the 'rookie' pastor. It was to him I served my first communion and as I handed him the bread and wine, I noticed his grease-stained hands and blackened fingernails – which were to be expected of a car mechanic. Then I knew, if I had not known it before, that pastoral work had to do with serving working men and women, and with helping them in some small way to become 'saints in ordinary', which Wally was. Nothing has brought me greater joy and satisfaction.

So, to all those I have pastored or ministered to over these past forty years, especially to those I have avoided damaging too much or whose lives I somehow enriched – I dedicate this book to you, in the knowledge that I no doubt received from you more than I ever gave.

Thanks be to God.

Philip Greenslade  
CWR, February 2009

# SECTION 1

An angle of vision that is ...  
**... CHARACTERISTICALLY  
CHRISTLIKE**

*whoever would be great among you must be your servant ... For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve ... (Mark 10:43,45, ESV).*

# 1

## SEEING THINGS FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW

*We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from his point of view ... (Colossians 1:9, J.B. Phillips; Mark 10:32–45)*

Jesus is God with us; when He acts, God acts God for us; when He speaks, God speaks God to us. As we are drawn to commit ourselves to Him, to follow Him and to listen to Him, we are taught to see things from God's point of view. To find a true angle of vision on ministry we must begin with Jesus Himself. My starting point is a vivid image of Jesus freeze-framed by the evangelists: 'They were on their way up to Jerusalem, *with Jesus leading the way*' – 'and Jesus was *walking ahead of them*' (ESV) – 'And they were amazed, and those who followed were *afraid*' (Mark 10:32, ESV).

'How long have you known Jesus?' I am occasionally asked. Since childhood, I can reply, when my parents introduced me to Him, and when as a curious seven-year-old I opened my heart to him in a small Pentecostal church. The preacher that day was William Booth-Clibborn, a descendant on the American side of the family of General William Booth, who seemed then, in grey, post-war, pre-Billy Graham Britain, an extravagantly flamboyant evangelist in his use of dramatic visual aids to press the case for conversion. In respect to my pietistic heritage which claims a personal relationship with Jesus – much as one has a personal tailor – I would like to say that I have grown to know Him better down the intervening years as I progressed from university student, to Bible seminary (Spurgeon's College), through Baptist pastor and charismatic church staff member, and as I practised my craft as preacher, writer and Bible teacher.

And yet, I have to say, this text resonates with me: because the older I get, the *less I feel I know who Jesus really is*. He seems more scary, much less the cosy figure I trusted as a small boy. The more I get to know Him the more He seems to be striding ahead of me so that I feel, like the disciples, amazed and fearful because He's out there in front with an agenda all His own which I know so little about.

It is some consolation to me that one of my all-time Christian heroes, Oswald Chambers, recognised the same feeling:

There is an aspect of Jesus that chills the heart of a disciple to the core and makes the whole spiritual life gasp for breath. This strange Being with his face set like a flint and his striding determination strikes terror into me. He is no longer counsellor and comrade. *He is taken up with a point of view I know nothing about*, and I am amazed at him. At first I was confident I understood him, but now I am not so sure. I begin to realise there is a distance between Jesus Christ and me; I can no longer be familiar with him. He is ahead of me and he never turns round; I have no idea where he is going and the goal has become strangely far off.<sup>1</sup>

It is this 'point of view' which we 'know nothing about' that astonishes and frightens the following disciples then as now. The reason why this perspective is unsettling is that Jesus is showing us reality from God's point of view, showing us the way things are in His Father's kingdom. This may not be the way things are now, but this is the way it is in God's kingdom. This is profoundly disconcerting because from our perspective, the Father's is an upside-down kingdom. When the rule and reign of God break into human affairs again in a decisive way, all the social values of society are drastically upturned, all cultural norms reversed; the least shall be greatest, the lost found, the last first, the losers shall be the winners. And so it was with every notion of what a leader looked like and how a leader behaved.

It was His preaching of this upside-down kingdom of His Father that caused Jesus to clash with the established leadership of His day in Israel. His passion predictions single out the current leaders of Israel as chief opponents and persecutors: 'He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders,

chief priests and teachers of the law ...' (Mark 8:31). It is sobering to recall that it was religious leaders, senior priests, and Bible teachers who led the attack on Jesus. For His part they were the major target of His prophetic rebuke; He denounced those He saw as *misleaders*, as *misrulers* of God's people – descendants of the false shepherds Ezekiel had exposed so severely (Ezek. 34). Not surprisingly His fiercest and final warnings were against these 'misleaders' of God's people (Matt. 23:1–11).

Reflecting on Jesus' critique, I see Him warning against:

- a *professionalism* that burdens the people with demands and revels in the social status leadership bestows
- a *paternalism* that plays God and dominates people's lives so that they become dependent on leadership
- a *personality cult* that attracts people to its leadership but distracts them from following Jesus.

Jesus warns against:

(i) *professionalism* – or reliance on an authority that derives only from official status: '... you are not to be called "Rabbi" for you have only one Master [or teacher] and you are all brothers' (23:8). Professionalism is always a danger in Christian ministry, especially if we are paid and set apart for it. To criticise 'professionalism' is not to criticise skill or knowledge, training or efficiency or expertise. What is under scrutiny here, I believe, is an *attitude of heart*, and a *style of living*, which turns ministry into something self-regarding and self-inflating. It is that tendency because you are 'the pastor' or 'the priest' or 'the minister' to stand apart from the people in a vaguely superior way; the result, as in Jesus' day, is that such people urge others to practise what they preach but don't practise it themselves (23:3).

Such leaders tend to be so obsessed with managing an organisation, or so taken up with running a programme, that in order to make it work they heap more and more burdens onto the people (23:4). This can take the form of that straightforward legalism which puts people under the lash of the law or that grinding moralism where we reduce the gospel to exhortations and end up constantly burdening people with another 'ten *demandments*' of what they must do to be effective Christians. Sometimes it can simply be the pressure we apply to people to do more

for the church in a way that eventually wears them down and wears them out. At its worst we can become obsessed with image rather than substance (cf. 23:25), with how things are presented rather than with the quality of the reality behind them; or – even worse – we are taken up with our own status and position in a way that feeds our ego (23:5–7).

The antidote here is to remember that we are ‘all brothers’ – which democratises everything, relativises hierarchies, and means that leaders are only serving other servants by leading them in the one family of God. From this we might well draw the conclusion – well established elsewhere in the New Testament – that leadership is a ‘collective noun’ and should always be done in a plural form in a team.

Jesus warns against:

(ii) *paternalism* – or a false way of dominating people: ‘And do not call anyone on earth “father”, for you have one Father, and he is in heaven’ (23:9). In other words, as a leader don’t be tempted to ‘play God’. It is easy to do this in some settings – especially in the West or if you’re under American influence; even to sit behind a desk or behind the closed door of an office can carry its own dangers – subtly, over time, convincing us that we are a somewhat ‘godlike’ figure to whom people come for the answer to all their problems, and for us to dispense spiritual medicine and ‘cure-alls’. Psychologically this is called transference – where people begin to live their lives through us as leaders and end up unhealthily over-dependent on us: and we must *not* let it happen.

Henri Nouwen is worth quoting at length here:

Real theological thinking, which is thinking with the mind of Christ, is hard to find in the practice of the ministry. Without solid theological reflection, future leaders will be little more than pseudo-psychologists, pseudo-sociologists, pseudo-social workers. They will think of themselves as enablers, facilitators, role models, father and mother figures, big brothers and big sisters, and so on, and thus join the countless men and women who make a living by trying to help their fellow human beings to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday living ... But this has little to do with Christian leadership ... The task of future Christian leaders is not to make a little contribution to the solution of the pains and tribulations of

their time but to identify and announce the ways in which Jesus is leading his people out of slavery, through the desert to a new land of freedom.<sup>2</sup>

Our servant ministry is to accompany people on that journey through what is often a pitiless and barren landscape if only that, like the Baptist, we may prepare them to meet the Lord in it. As Oswald Chambers said: ‘The lure the servants of God are made but attracts men to a wilderness where God woos men to himself.’<sup>3</sup> Jesus is striking a very radical and deep note here. What He says should not be minimised as applying only to the holding of clerical titles or status in a superficial sense – in which case those outside the Catholic tradition might feel superior at this point. Nor should these words of Jesus deter us from revering our forefathers in the faith, especially those we call the ‘Early Church Fathers’. And it certainly has nothing to do with an arrogant refusal to listen in humility to those older in Christ with much wisdom and experience to offer us.

What we are intended to hear as Jesus’ antidote to the failure of leaders in first-century Israel is that we are equal members of the family of God, that He is Father of us all, ‘our Father’, not just ‘my Father’. When John sent his remarkable revelation and prophetic vision as a pastoral letter from Patmos to the seven churches he was overseeing he didn’t pull rank but said: ‘I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus ...’ (Rev. 1:9).

Now to the third statement of Jesus; what He is criticising here is (iii) *personality cults* – where following the leaders becomes more important than following Jesus: ‘Nor are you to be called “teacher” [καθηγητης, leader] for you have one “teacher/[leader]”, the Christ’ (Matt. 23:10). Leadership can degenerate into a power game. Leaders can make people psychologically dependent on them, by constant promises, or by ‘dangling the carrot’ about the next revival just around the corner. Subtly and over time we can make people whose primary loyalty is to us.

As has been said, it is a sad thing when men of ideas give way to men of emotional power. Too often contemporary leaders rise to the top of the pile in the Church purely on the strength of their personality. They drive the Church by constant motivation rather than leading by example and

truth. They stir with 'hype' rather than steady and consistent hope. They set endless goals and produce new envisioning but usually without any later assessment or evaluation. When exhortation tires, they may even resort to manipulation, a final appeal to 'trust me' or 'feel sorry for me because I'm under attack'.

Anyone acquainted with Pentecostal or charismatic churchmanship will know that in order to stifle disquiet and dissent, however legitimate, the last resort will be: 'Touch not my anointed.'

Gordon Fee comments sagely:

Surely one of the ironies of my own tradition, the American Assemblies of God ... is that every criticism of the ministry in any of its forms, including very bad preaching, was always challenged on the basis of 1 Samuel 24:6. Although Pentecostals might argue that the New Testament analogy of the 'Lord's anointed' is the one who speaks by the Spirit, in fact this becomes a tacit elevation of the 'ordained ministry' to the position of the untouchable king. No wonder the history of such movements, and even more so of independent churches, is fraught with stories of ministerial moral failure. Kings play by a different set of rules and the structures of accountability are seldom in place.<sup>4</sup>

It has been rightly said that none of us is good enough to survive our own unchallenged authority. Believers are sheep, but *His* sheep; *He* is the Chief Shepherd of the flock; we are only under-shepherds. The Church is God's flock, not ours. They are not 'our' converts but 'His'. Spurgeon was once rebuked by a lady who said: 'I know one of your converts, Mr Spurgeon, and he's always drunk and disorderly.' 'Then, Madam, all I can say, is that he must be one of *my* converts because he's obviously not one of the Lord's!'

Oswald Chambers had some perceptive words on this too:

The servants of God in the Bible never stole hearts to themselves, but handed them over to God ... Oh for that man of God who will hand over to God the hearts God has called through him. It is not you who awakened that mighty desire in the heart; it is not *you* who called forth that longing in that spirit; it is God in you. Are you a servant

of God? Then point them to him. Down on your face, down in the dust, oh man of God, if those arms clasp you and that heart rests on you! If that longing, loving heart awakens and finds you instead of God, what a passion of despair will blight you with the curse of solitariness and silence.<sup>5</sup>

‘My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, *so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power*’ (1 Cor. 2:4–5).

To make an even larger point here, I agree with George Hunsberger that so much of our evangelical understanding of truth and the gospel has been post-Easter and neglectful of the ministry and actual teaching of Jesus. I am reminded of Garrison Keillor’s barbed comment: ‘Stop being a good Christian and start following Jesus!’ Hunsberger says on this larger point: ‘Proclaiming a gospel *about* Christ that is not shaped by *the gospel Jesus preached* distorts the gospel by proclaiming only part of its meaning.’ This entails the loss of the dimension of the kingdom of God as Jesus declared and embodied it. ‘The absence of the gospel Jesus preached’, Hunsberger goes on, ‘has woefully impoverished the church’s sense of missional identity.’<sup>6</sup> Distorted perceptions of how ministry operates are just one symptom of this ‘absence’. Only that teaching that leads people to the feet of Jesus is worthy of the kingdom. If the commission is to make disciples, it is not to make them ‘*our* disciples’ but His, and to teach them whatever *He* commands.

There is one teacher of the Church – now known to us as the Holy Spirit Himself: the teachers in the Church are His students.

There is only one Father: leaders in His family are also our brothers and sisters.

There is only one leader, and whatever our gifts, calling, and ministry, we are all following His leadership.

To recognise this is to take to heart the words of St Augustine, the great father of the Western Church, to members of the Church in Alexandria:

When I am frightened by what I am *for* you, then I am consoled by what I am *with* you.

*For* you I am a bishop; *with* you I am a Christian.

The first is an office; the second a grace;  
The first is a danger; the second is safety/salvation.  
If I am happier to be redeemed *with* you than to be placed *over* you,  
then, I shall, as the Lord commanded, be more fully your servant.

This takes us right to the heart of what Jesus is up to here.

What did Jesus do with leadership?

He prophetically critiqued it in the light of the dawning kingdom of God.

What did Jesus do with leadership?

He drastically redefined it in the light of His Father's upside-down kingdom.

Not that there weren't alternatives: but Jesus refused them and offered to lead God's people in an entirely new direction –

- *not the way of the Pharisees* who promoted holiness by keeping the Law more rigidly and more exclusively: Jesus was a 'boundary breaker' who interpreted the Father's 'be perfect as I am perfect' to mean 'be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful'.
- *not the way of Sadducees and priests* who made Jerusalem and the Temple ritual the be-all-and-end-all of being God's people: Jesus threatened the dominance of both city and Temple.
- *not the way of the Qumran Covenanters* who withdrew from society to be purer than anyone else: Jesus entered the desert but did not stay there and through His 'table fellowship' gained a dubious reputation as the 'friend of sinners'.
- *not the way of Barabbas – and the later Zealots* who advocated armed and violent revolution: Jesus forbade the sword, preached non-violent resistance and was a peacemaker.

If we ask: 'What did Jesus do with leadership as He found it?', one answer is that He prophetically critiqued it in the light of the dawning kingdom of God and supplanted it with leaders of His own choosing. Then, if we pose the question another way: 'What did Jesus do with the whole idea of leadership?', the answer is that He drastically redefined it in the light of His Father's upside-down kingdom.

*And servanthood was His preferred model for leaders* (Matt. 23:11–12). Without downplaying leadership, says Gordon Fee, 'for me the great

problem with a single leadership is its threefold tendency to pride of place, love of authority, and lack of accountability. Whatever else, leadership in the church needs forms that will minimise these tendencies and maximise servanthood.<sup>7</sup> And if we then ask: ‘Why “servanthood”?’ our texts invite us to draw at least three main conclusions:

**1. Leadership takes the form of servanthood because Jesus Himself assumes the role of servant.**

‘*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve ...*’ (Mark 10:45); ‘*But I am among you as one who serves*’ (Luke 22:27).

When Jesus speaks of an alternative kind of leadership He is not suggesting a few new techniques or strategies to be added to the expertise or management skills we already have. He speaks and acts out of His wider mission to restore Israel as the true people of God, to reconstitute Israel by embodying the true servant role Israel was meant to occupy. This was enacted in His baptism when the servant–kingship was bestowed on Him as His vocation: ‘*You are my Son*’ which was the earliest designation of Israel as a people (Exod. 4:22–23). The epithet was later applied to the king who represents both God and people (cf. Psa. 2:7). The statement about sonship is then conflated with the words ‘*with him I am well pleased*’ which are taken from the first ‘servant song’ (Isa. 42:1). So the word of Jesus ‘I am among you as one who serves’ is not a scrap of wisdom, a useful tip to go alongside that of other gurus (as if He were a Tom Peters or Steven Covey); not a handy hint offered to us to make our ministry marginally more effective. It is, as John Yoder says, nothing less than ‘a capsule statement of Jesus’ own key self-definition’.<sup>8</sup>

When Jesus warns the disciples about the way others exercise leadership, distribute patronage or wield power, He is describing temptations He had Himself faced and successfully resisted. ‘I am among you as one who serves’ describes the *choices He Himself had made* all along the way from His baptism onwards. The choice *not* to win our hearts by turning stones into bread and meeting our every economic need; *not* to make a name and reputation for Himself as a daring man of faith by leaping off the Temple pinnacle presuming on God’s Word to save him; *not* to snatch

the kingdoms of the world by selling His soul to the devil: this was His personal appropriation of the ‘not so among you’ principle He urged on His followers. This was His chosen way all through. Whenever another path was offered, He avoided it. After the people saw the feeding of 5,000 ‘they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself’ (John 6:15).

Matthew was reminded of Isaiah’s servant figure when he reflected on how Jesus healed the sick: ‘*This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases”*’ (Matt. 8:17; Isa. 53:4). When Jesus healed people, He warned them not to tell anyone who He was – quite the opposite of what we do with healing testimony – and when Matthew reflected on that he knew he was catching another glimpse of Isaiah’s amazing servant: ‘*This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight ... no one will hear his voice in the streets ...”*’ Jesus Himself has come to His own conclusion very early on, I suspect.

There is more at stake here than perhaps we first realise. In John Yoder’s words, ‘What we learn from Jesus is not a suggestion about the strategy or skill in the discharge of those particular leadership responsibilities ordinarily associated with the pastorate ... The difference is not simply between ways to run a battle’ – and, we might add, manage a company, organise an event – ‘or ways to be socially responsible. It is between *definitions of salvation.*’<sup>9</sup>

Jesus, it seems clear, had seen, in the moving scriptural portrait of the servant of God painted by Isaiah, His own destiny. That strange and compelling biblical image of the servant Israel was meant to be, and was not, the servant that Israel needed to be served by because she was not – it was that image which He deliberately chose as the model for His own life and vocation. Jesus was not, said George Caird, ‘the architect of his own destiny, but as a master builder, he followed faithfully the blueprints which he found in the writings of the scriptures’.<sup>10</sup> It is along these lines, I believe, that we can best understand with Matthew what it means ‘to *fulfil* what the prophet Isaiah had spoken: it was not the