

GOD'S LEADER



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CONTENTS

Introduction	7
1. The cross-centred leader (Hebrews 10:1–18)	9
2. The word-centred leader (Mark 4:1–20)	27
3. The loving leader (1 Corinthians 13)	44
4. The wartime leader (Ephesians 6:10–20)	64
5. The lazy leader (Matthew 25:14–30)	83
6. The persecuted leader (Daniel 6)	101
7. The ungodly leader (Judges 13–16)	122
8. The faithful leader (Exodus 32)	142
9. The praying leader (Galatians 4:4–6)	163
10. The confused leader (2 Kings 4:8–38)	180
References	199

INTRODUCTION



This is a book about spiritual leadership. It's meant as an encouragement for those who have some kind of spiritual responsibility, though I hope that anyone could be helped by the material here.

The reality is that every spiritual leader starts with good intentions and plenty of zeal, and yet every leader also faces the daily battle to stay on course. As leaders, we too easily become discouraged. We can lose our confidence in the gospel. We can be tempted in ways we never expected. It's so easy as a leader to lose our way, and so I've written this book to help us keep going. All this material is simple exposition of Bible passages. The assumption behind the book is that what every leader needs is really what every Christian needs: direction, encouragement, correction and refreshment from Jesus through the Scriptures.

My hope and prayer here is that God's word will work in all of our lives to build us up, sustain us and gives us deeper fellowship with Jesus right in the heart of our various ministries.

This book is the fruit of a life lived with others. I need to give big thanks to my loving wife, who patiently listens to me and loves me. She has walked with me in ministry over the last 20 years and taught me more

than she thinks. Also, I have to give a big thanks to the congregation I lead, St John's in Chelsea, London. They have encouraged me and supported me in many hidden ways, as I try to live out life in Christ. Further, it's a privilege as a pastor to be connected into the Co-Mission network in London, and to be learning about leadership together with fellow pastors there. Lastly, I couldn't keep going without my good 'spiritual buddies'. You know who you are, guys.

'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20).

1

THE CROSS-CENTRED LEADER

(Hebrews 10:1–18)

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

*‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;
with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.*

*Then I said, “Here I am – it is written about me in the
scroll –*

I have come to do your will, my God.”’

First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' – though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

*'This is the covenant I will make with them
after that time, says the Lord.
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds.'*

Then he adds:

*'Their sins and lawless acts
I will remember no more.'*

And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.'

If we look forward over the next six months, what would we say is the greatest need in our ministry? I'm sure we can

think of many things. Of course, it would be great to have more knowledge and understanding for teaching. It would be great to have more wisdom for decision-making. It would be great to have more resource-rich people. It would be great to have more money to develop the ministry. We might also think of the gifts that we have (or don't have) in our context – we definitely want more of those! We certainly need more holiness, don't we? And who can seriously think that ministry can be sustained without a living prayer life?

So we need many things and it would be wonderful if we could have as much of them as possible. However, in and of themselves, all of these aspects are insufficient for our next six months. The fact is that we need something more than these important and necessary factors. Above all these things, we need to know the message of the cross. Our deepest need is to know what Jesus has done for us as the crucified Saviour. This is absolutely crucial, because otherwise we're left with a cross-less Christianity, or a Christ who isn't a saviour. A cross-less Christianity is a terrible thing because it can only bring us holiness without mercy and commands without grace. A Christ who isn't a saviour will lead us to do ministry without his own priestly ministry. We'll be forced to evangelise without a Saviour of our own, and to live sacrificially without knowing his sacrifice for us. In disregarding the cross, we'll have stopped living by faith and be now forced to live by works, ministry activity or success. Fundamentally, such a Christianity will end up pushing us to do God's work without enjoying God's rest. This absence of rest can't be replaced with holiday, time off, recreation and good food. Of course, these things are absolutely crucial for surviving in ministry

and are all good gifts from God. But they're not the same as God's rest given at the cross.

The only way to keep going in ministry is to have spiritual sustenance and food to chew on, and we'll never get that nutrition unless we go to Jesus Christ and his cross. What we really need for the next six months is more of the cross. If we keep trying to do ministry without it, we'll implode and self-destruct. Without the cross, we can't help but become hollow and empty. We'll become like a clock that's slowly winding down, or a marathon runner who decides to run the race on an empty stomach. Without the cross, we're all heading towards a bad place, maybe even a breakdown.

We should take a moment to pause and ask ourselves how we actually feel at this moment. We should be as honest with ourselves as we can. Maybe we're weary? Maybe we're discouraged? Maybe all we see in front of us for the next six months are problem after problem? We may feel that we're doing a bad job, or we might even be asking ourselves whether we're really cut out for this kind of work. It seemed promising and exciting before, but now our horizon is filled with the sin and apathy of the people to whom we're trying to minister. Of course, it's never hard to see a lot of sin and apathy in ourselves as well. If that's how we feel, we shouldn't despair. We simply need the cross.

It might be, though, that we actually feel the opposite of all of those negative feelings. We may feel buoyant and confident. We're raring to go. We're full of vision, passion and excitement about ministry. Maybe we've even had some powerful experiences of God using us recently. That's all

very good, but we shouldn't be deceived – we *also* need the cross. It's a strange and ironic thing that ministry and self-sufficiency can often go hand in hand. Obviously, this form of spiritual self-sufficiency is the opposite of the gospel, which is really all about growing dependence, neediness and emptiness. The more we know this dependence, the more we'll naturally go to the cross.

As people in ministry, the danger for us is that the cross can remain a mere doctrine that we expertly exposit and explain, but which has little impact on our emotional reactions. We may know lots about it, but we may have only superficially appropriated it for ourselves. It's amazing how easily we can fool ourselves into thinking that teaching well is the same as living in Christ through his cross. The danger is that the cross becomes like the words of a song that have somehow lost the music. There is content, but no joy or delight. When we get into such a state, we're in trouble – and the people we serve are in trouble. The fact is the people we lead *need* us to *need* the cross. It's vital for their sakes that we're living out of a daily dependence upon all that Christ has done for us.

Now the letter to the Hebrews is written to people who were in danger of neglecting God's great salvation for them (2:3) by returning to the superficial certainties of the old covenant. They were finding their security in the physical rituals of the temple and sacrificial system. They had started to forget the music of the gospel. So this letter is written to point them back to the glory of Jesus Christ and his cross. The writer wants them to rediscover the music of the gospel. In Hebrews 10:1–18 we find an exposition of the cross that can refresh and renew us too.