

IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU

I was young and foolish. (Is it my imagination, or do those two often go together?) Felicity and I had been involved in church planting in the East End of London. The Lord was blessing, with many being saved and new home churches beginning to emerge all over that part of London.

John and Peta, the local couple who had first knocked on the door of our home, having seen the “Smile, Jesus loves you” sticker on our car (this was the 70’s), were actively sharing in the lead with us of this new group of churches. John, a local contractor, was as down to earth as they come. He was not a natural preacher (understand this to mean not very academic!!), but so caring of all involved, that all naturally looked him up to. However, I never really looked up to him.”

You see, I was the “natural” leader. I had led everything that I had ever been involved in. I was the captain of my high school soccer team. I had been elected student body president in my senior year. Why, at the graduation ceremony from high school, I was even voted by my class to receive the coveted “Most Likely To Succeed” award! So when I told John that I did not feel he should be doing the teaching at our Sunday celebration meetings when all of the home churches came together, he was hurt. Yet, he was willing to “submit” to the leadership that I had given in starting the church.

Looking back on this 25 years later, I can only confess how wrong I was. Leadership isn’t education. It isn’t natural ability. It isn’t how

articulate you are, or how charismatic your gifts. In the body of Christ, it is measured by your servant heart and actions. John would do anything for anybody, and didn't mind who got the credit. He not only worked long hours in his business, but he then came home and gave endless hours to being with people, to counseling them, to searching the scriptures with them. If someone's door was broken he could fix it. If someone's marriage was falling apart John and Peta would take the time to listen, to pray, and to bring that couple into their home to see how a loving marriage should really work. John and Peta were (and are) true leaders.

In James 1: 27, we see that true religion is "looking after widows and orphans in their distress, and keeping oneself from being polluted by the world." Nowhere does this pollution show itself more clearly than in how the Christian church has turned upside-down everything that Jesus taught us about leadership. Jesus clear teaching in the gospels was that leadership was not just measured by, but actually lived out through, a life of service. You don't only earn the right to be a leader by putting out the chairs and washing up at the end of the meetings (meetings!!), but you actually demonstrate what leadership is all about. We don't graduate from service to leadership, but from service to the opportunity to further lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Most of the articles in this issue look at questions surrounding the area of leadership. Leadership in an emerging church movement is crucial. It is clear from any study of church history, or even just of human nature, that the tendency is always to begin in the Spirit but to end up in the flesh (see Gal 3:3). It is not that it is wrong or

unspiritual to aspire after leadership, but rather the question is, “[Who] shall have the preeminence?” If your heart is to serve, then the answer to that question is anybody but the leader! There is a fascinating verse in 1 Cor. 12:24 where it says, “But God has given the greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body.” If that is the way God handles honor, why would we want to do things so differently?

Hierarchical leadership is a Biblical oxymoron. When I pulled rank with John in that first group of churches we planted, I was not acting as a Biblical leader. This is one of the reasons that scripture so clearly teaches a plurality of leadership rather than a “one man band.” There is safety in numbers. Arrogance gets checked at the door when no one person is preeminent.

Nearly every article in this issue comes back to these core questions on leadership. Without leadership, churches or any other grouping of people will tend to go nowhere. It is still true that without vision the people perish. We desperately need people of vision, and with the courage to go for the dreams that the Lord gives them. It was a part of His promise that in the last days even the “young men will see visions” (Acts 2:17). But how are these “visions” that inspire leadership to be translated in reality? It is not through sheer force of personality, or through our own maneuvering. But rather, like Jesus, we need to learn to lead not by being served, but by serving.

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. NOT SO WITH YOU.”