

'THE IDENTIFYING MARK OF A MATURE  
SPIRITUAL LEADER IS HIS OR HER DESIRE  
TO DEVELOP THE NEXT GENERATION  
OF BELIEVERS AND LEADERS.'

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# **CHAPTER FIVE**

**ENTRUST TO RELIABLE MEN: THE SUCCESSION OF LEADERS**

THE PACE SETTER



*'And the things you have heard me say  
in the presence of many witnesses  
entrust to reliable men who will be  
also qualified to teach others.'*

2 TIMOTHY 2:2

## GOING SEPARATE WAYS

*Paul was setting quite a pace. Silas wondered whether he would be able to keep up. Paul didn't look particularly athletic, but right now it seemed as if he was in training for the Olympic Games. In between catching his breath, Silas was contemplating the recent events in Antioch – and tried to piece together what was driving Paul forward with such urgency.*

*Perhaps it was anger that was motivating Paul. Sharp words had been spoken between Paul and Barnabas. It had caused tremendous heartbreak in the church to see the rift occur between these two previously inseparable men. Almost everyone agreed that Paul would not be the man he was if it wasn't for Barnabas' influence. Yet, as the two had made plans to go and visit the churches that they had planted, the tension between them became palpable. Silas had respected the men for not trying to force the church to take sides. Ultimately, however, their disagreement over the participation of John Mark on the mission team was irreconcilable. Silas recalled the conversations he'd had with Paul throughout this time and how he had sensed that the Holy Spirit had a purpose for him beyond what he'd previously imagined. It was therefore not a surprise when*

*Paul proposed to Silas that he join him on his journey. And no, it wasn't a knee-jerk reaction. Paul definitely sensed God's purposes in this and Silas knew he was praying for Barnabas and Mark as they themselves headed to Cyprus.*

*Even as Paul quickened the pace once more, Silas wondered whether it was anxiety that caused the blood to course through his veins. After all, following short visits to Syria and Cilicia, they were now headed to Lystra where Paul had, just a few years previously, been stoned and left for dead. Although Silas wasn't there, stories of what had happened on Paul's first visit there were now legendary. Silas remembers, as if it were yesterday, the special prayer and praise meeting that was called in Antioch as news reached them of the events in Lystra. There was a tremendous sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit when they had met. A number of prophetic words were given that, although the enemy was seeking to destroy the Galatian churches, many young leaders would emerge who would be strong in the faith.*

*Which led Silas to wonder if there was another motivation for Paul's sense of urgency? When he had heard Paul speak of Lystra and Derbe, there was a special tone in Paul's voice, almost a wistful fondness... or perhaps a cautious excitement. Silas knew that Paul continually prayed that God would raise up leaders and he always got a special glint in his eye when he spoke of the young men he sensed God may be raising up to lead the churches. So, Silas wondered, who is in Lystra that Paul is excited to see? And is that the reason for this exhausting pace?*

## AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW?

The account of the argument between Paul and Barnabas is one of those passages in the Bible that I sometimes wish wasn't there. How could two such godly men, two pillars of the early church and partners in the gospel, have such a sharp falling out? The issue over which they argued perhaps also seems to be rather innocuous. They were planning their second mission journey to encourage the new churches in Galatia and beyond. On their first journey Barnabas's cousin, John Mark, had deserted the team part way through the mission. Barnabas, the personification of mercy and encouragement, wanted to give his young cousin a second chance. Paul would hear of no such thing. Surely a compromise could have been reached? Maybe Paul could have given Mark a probation period? Maybe Barnabas could have agreed that Mark required more time to prove himself? Was it such a serious issue that it meant these two men of God could no longer work together and would be forced to go their separate ways?

If we jump forward about 15 years, Paul is in prison and writing to young Timothy. As the Holy Spirit leads him in the words he's writing to his protégé, Paul's manifesto for mentorship is summarised in a few words: 'And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.' The transference of leadership authority was a very serious matter for Paul which means he carefully weighed the qualifications of those he mentored. When reading this verse we understand why Paul, many years earlier, felt he simply could not continue to have Mark as part of his team. Mark had failed the 'reliability' test. Paul felt he could no longer trust this young man.<sup>2</sup>

I don't think that the Holy Spirit has included a record of the argument of Paul and Barnabas as a precedent for divisions and splits in the church. Yet, quite clearly, there are lessons that God wants us to learn from this account and therefore, we must be grateful for its inclusion in scripture. One purpose may be to demonstrate that Paul was, after all, a man like us and prone to the circumstantial and emotional ups and downs that impact everyone in leadership. Additionally, the passage shows that disagreements among Christian leaders are inevitable; unfortunately, as history shows (and my experience confirms), for Christian leaders to handle them in a godly manner is not!

To me, it's intriguing to ask what might have happened if Paul had compromised and taken Mark with them on the trip after all. If Mark had been with Paul as the junior disciple, would there have been opportunity for Timothy to become part of Paul's team? Would the relationship between Timothy and Paul have been forged in the same way? Would we even have the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy? It's impossible to answer these questions, but certainly God's providential hand can be seen even amidst apparent human failure. With his original team scattered (Barnabas taking Mark and going to Cyprus),

Paul chooses Silas as his companion.

**TIMOTHY DEMONSTRATES  
THE RELIABILITY  
WHICH PAUL SOUGHT  
IN HIS MENTEES**

And, following the pattern of his first missionary journey, Paul now desires an apprentice to travel with him. On arrival at Lystra, Paul hears of Timothy's growth in the faith through

the testimony of the believers. He invites Timothy to join his team and, in the years to come, Timothy demonstrates the reliability which Paul sought in his mentees. Timothy was

someone he could trust to pass the baton on to in line of apostolic succession.

Lance Pierson<sup>3</sup> has developed a timeline for Timothy's life, integrating key events in the life of the early church with Timothy's personal development in leadership. According to his reconstruction, he has Timothy at approximately 16 years old when Paul first visited Lystra which is probably the time when Timothy became a Christian. Pierson, preferring an early date for Paul's authorship of Galatians as just after the Council of Jerusalem (**ACTS 15**), surmises that Timothy had been in one of the congregations that received Paul's letter. Perhaps his visible response to the earlier teachings of Paul was one of the reasons for his growing reputation as a young disciple? Certainly the doctrine contained in the letter to Galatians would have been radically liberating for someone from Timothy's background (being half-Jewish and half-Greek). This is all purely conjecture. However, when Paul returned to Lystra, on Pierson's timescale two years later with Timothy turning 18, the young disciple was someone whom the church 'spoke well of...'. He was already showing the signs of being the kind of reliable man that Paul was looking out for - the kind that would be 'qualified to teach others.'

Being reliable and qualified to teach seem to be key ingredients of what Paul looked for in a mentee. Let's explore these qualities further.

## RELIABLE

Let's face it, reliability is not necessarily considered a 'sexy' quality. They don't write books or make movies about reliable people. Mavericks tend to draw more attention; Hollywood glamorises charismatic and unpredictable personalities. When people think of reliability they may think of their faithful dog that greets them with a wagging tail when they get home no matter what kind of day they've had. Or perhaps the 15-year-old German-made car that consistently chugs along and never breaks down. But reliability, and its related qualities of faithfulness, consistency and stability, is exactly the quality that Paul looked for in emerging leaders. Mavericks may make an immediate impact. Charisma may draw attention. But constant, reliable leaders can be trusted for the long haul.

When I was a teenager I would make my weekly pilgrimage to watch the semi-professional local football team, Stalybridge Celtic. I followed the cultural norm in England of supporting your local team no matter how bad they were. And, every weekend, along with millions of other fans at stadiums across the country, we would loyally sing that our team was 'by far the greatest team the world has ever seen'. Each week I would go behind the goal into which Stalybridge were trying to score and sing with the die-hard fans. Then, at the half-time break, we would swap to the alternative side to continue our attempts at drawing the best out of the players; hoping to have the effect of sucking the ball into the goal. On my way each week I would stop at the half-way point and have a chat with Ken.



Ken was a bit more of a conservative supporter (by which I mean standing with the hand-clappers on the sides rather than with the raucous singers behind the goal). But being 50 or more years older than me, he had been a supporter of Stalybridge for decades. Week in, week out, come rain or shine, there he was at the game. We would analyse the match, discuss the players and wonder (mostly in vain) if this was the year trophies would come to Stalybridge.

A few years later I stopped going to see Stalybridge play every week, and in my early twenties I heard the sad news that Ken had passed away. As I reflected upon our weekly connection, I drew a parallel between our relationship and my relationship with Christ. My teenage years, as for many of that age, were turbulent. During the week I may have experienced ups and downs. My emotions were occasionally tumultuous. I pushed boundaries and often lived for myself. I was grappling with issues of identity and purpose. But no matter what kind of week I'd had, no matter if I'd been towing the line or had been rebellious, through it all, Ken was a consistent presence in my life. I could rely on him being there for me, for the weekly half-time chat. In my conversations with him I never felt judged or condemned. He was completely consistent - in the way he dressed, in how he spoke, and in his outlook on life. This sense of dependability and consistency struck me as an incredibly Christ-like characteristic. I came to think of Ken's influence on my life as being a type of Christ who likewise, through those sometimes turbulent times, never changed, never faltered, and was always there for me when I looked for him.

Even now, some twenty years later, as I reflect on Ken's impact on my life as a pacesetter in his own way, there is one word that comes to mind – *reassuring*. I can understand why Paul so valued this quality. It is incredibly reassuring to be surrounded by reliable people. It can be quite the opposite if we are always unsure of how others will respond. We find ourselves on tenterhooks if we are uncertain when someone is going to explode, lose their temper, or simply not show up. Paul couldn't take a risk on Mark because he ultimately needed assurance to know that his mentees would be utterly dependable. The weight of responsibility he felt to complete the mission God had given him meant he wanted to avoid the distractions of having to be stressed as to whether someone was going to let him down.

**IN TIMOTHY, PAUL FOUND  
AN EMERGING LEADER  
WHO WOULD REMAIN HIS  
COMPANION THROUGH  
THICK AND THIN**

In Timothy, Paul found the antithesis to Mark's inconsistency, he found an emerging leader who would remain his companion through thick and thin, who would be his apprentice, who would listen and learn from him. Timothy is not the stuff of Hollywood movies.

Timothy was entirely reliable and Paul encouraged Timothy to seek out other reliable people whom he could likewise mentor. I suggest that all wise mentors should be seeking mentees who share this commitment to reliability as this can help secure the investment that is being made.

**QUALIFIED**

The second element of trustworthiness that Paul highlights is that the kind of people Timothy should be investing in is

those who are 'qualified' to teach others. In Paul's eyes Mark 'disqualified' himself because he was unreliable. Paul's understanding of what it means to be qualified though may be quite different from many in the church today.

Once I sensed a call to full-time Christian service in my early twenties, I also began what turned out to be a very long road of theological training. Most of this was through correspondence courses, but, for one short period, I took a few classes at a Bible college. I remember sitting in class on one occasion and hearing my lecturer explaining the value of theological education. Her frame of reference was that three years of institutionalised training at this college was what qualified someone to receive the title of 'Pastor', as if some heavenly anointing took place once a student had graduated and this most revered of titles was conferred on them. Now perhaps like me, you've come across individuals who have been through Bible school, have many letters after their names, and on the surface seem to have every academic accomplishment – and yet, absolutely suck at this business of 'teaching others'. I would question whether they are really 'qualified' for serving Christ and others in His church at all. And I certainly don't think Paul would have shared the opinion that being qualified to teach others was the result of being through a stringent theological programme.

In this instance he doesn't give a list of what does qualify someone to teach others. In fact, the previous word 'reliable' seems to be the only qualification he advocates. The following verse perhaps gives the second level of qualification that Paul would look for in an individual, that they can 'endure

hardship'. This isn't glamorous. There is no PhD for reliability or endurance. Yet if we look at the context of Paul's entire life and ministry, we can see that he consistently viewed these as more important than background, schooling, class, wealth, status or anything else. Yes, Paul himself was qualified from an earthly perspective. He could boast about his own accomplishments if he wished although he preferred to boast in the Lord. In fact, Paul claimed that God would use the *'foolish things of the world to shame the wise'* (1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31).

I believe the example and writings of Paul demonstrate that he has a far more holistic view of what it means to be 'qualified'. In his first letter to Timothy he does give a more exhaustive list regarding qualifications for leaders – and academic achievement is conspicuous by its absence! The kinds of qualifications listed can seem quite ordinary and mundane: married to one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable and hospitable. They shouldn't be violent, argumentative drunks, but they should manage their children and family well. Paul does make the point that church leaders should not be new converts. Why? Well, not so they've had time to write books, journal articles or theses. Rather, a new convert may get proud if they rise quickly in the church and not recognise that Christ-like leadership is built on the foundation of humility and service. And secondly, time is required to test their reputation in the community (1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7).

I think one reason that Paul would have a more holistic approach to what it means to be 'qualified' is because he also has a holistic approach to what it means to teach others. This is not the formal lecturing in systematic theology or biblical

exegesis that may lead to a certificate or a degree. Rather, it is doing life together with a more mature Christian who can demonstrate what it means to be faithful to Christ in the challenges that face leaders every day. That's why Paul always worked with a team and sought to include emerging leaders on his mission trips. And in instructing Timothy to do the same, he is once again simply telling him to follow his own example as he followed the example of Christ.

This is not to say that Paul would be against theological discussions and engagement. I'm sure he had great fun discussing and debating some of his more controversial statements in his letters with his team members and protégés! No, the point is that the word 'qualified' needs to be understood in broader terms than has often been over 2,000 years of church history where the qualified clergy and ministers have often been most unreliable and untrustworthy in this awesome task of teaching others. Paul once again brings us back to the vital role of mentorship. He is challenging Timothy to intentionally invest in reliable people because, as they show themselves faithful, so they are proving themselves qualified to teach others. And, in so doing, the faithful transmission of the gospel from generation to generation will be safeguarded.

## **SUCCESSION PLANNING**

This morning I felt unable to go into the office; for a number of reasons I needed some space for retreat, recovery and reflection. When I contacted my PA to tell her, she suggested cancelling the team meeting which was scheduled for this morning. I

responded that it needed to go ahead without me and called one of my emerging leaders to stand in and facilitate the meeting. My comment to my PA was that things shouldn't come to a standstill just because I'm not around. As a leader I must be raising up others whom I can trust to stand on the bridge and take hold of the wheel if I'm unavailable. As my retreat day went on, I was encouraged to realise that my energies had in fact been multiplied. The meeting I would have led happened anyway with an emerging leader taking responsibility, and I was able to get away for a few hours to recharge my batteries and spend some time with the Lord (and sleep quite a bit as well, which can be a very spiritual act in its own way!).

As I reflected on this fairly routine matter of delegation, it caused me to consider what the signs are that, a) someone is ready to 'step up to the plate' in terms of taking on leadership responsibility, and, perhaps more importantly, b) when do we know that an actual generational transfer of leadership responsibility has occurred?

Any wise mentor will recognise that their mentee will go through various phases in their leadership development. The popular mantra to describe the succession process is that leaders must seek to 'do themselves out of a job'. The anticipated culmination of this process is that someone moves from purely accomplishing certain delegated tasks that the leader assigns them, to being able to take the full responsibility of leadership.

But is 'doing yourself out of a job' the right phrase anyway? Is the language of 'multiplication' not more biblical?

Jesus did not simply 'do himself out of a job' – he called and trained up 12 people in whom he invested over three intense years. The disciples were not qualified and at times they were not particularly reliable! However, after his resurrection, he was able to call them together and commission them to go into all the world and become disciple makers themselves. By training the apostles, Christ multiplied his effectiveness as they likewise committed themselves to this process of multiplication. Christ's work wasn't completed when he ascended to heaven. Rather, his capacity was multiplied 12 times – and multiplied exponentially more as the growth ratio of the early church exploded after Pentecost.<sup>4</sup>

**BY TRAINING  
THE APOSTLES,  
CHRIST MULTIPLIED  
HIS EFFECTIVENESS**

Delegating responsibility is a vital step along the road of testing the trustworthiness of emerging leaders and ensuring that those to whom we are delegating are truly 'faithful men'. The impact of the gospel is therefore entirely dependent upon a generational succession of faithful and qualified leaders.

## **LEGACY**

From 2004 to 2010, South Africa was gripped with preparations for the 'greatest sporting event in history'. The FIFA World Cup was coming to Africa for the first time. The country was gripped with football fever as stadiums were built, infrastructure developed, and the country prepared for a four-week party. The eyes of the world were upon the nation and, truth be told, South Africa delivered an amazing event.

One word that became a buzz-word during this World Cup frenzy was the word 'legacy'. For four weeks, the world's gaze was on South Africa. But once the final whistle blew, that gaze turned in a different direction – be that the pending Olympics in London, or the next World Cup in Brazil. The big question for South Africans was, how would hosting the World Cup have a lasting impact upon the nation and her people?

One advertising company pictured South Africa in 30 years' time with old people reminiscing about the glorious event. It pictured bearded old men sitting on their porches casting their minds back to those awesome four weeks, just glad that they had been there to witness it. Yet, if a multi-billion dollar event simply gave some fond memories, then that can hardly be equated to a 'legacy'.

When any word becomes overused it is in danger of having its meaning diluted and I believe this is happening to the word 'legacy'. In our culture of instant gratification, many people want to know what their personal legacy is, or what the legacy from a particular event will be. However, the definition of legacy should allow for periods of time that span from generation to generation. True legacy is only tested over time as the fruit of one generation's labour is experienced by the next. David, as a king and prolific psalm writer, understood this generational responsibility. In *Psalms 145:4*, he states that 'One generation commends your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.' Each generation of Christian leaders has a responsibility to leave a legacy of faith for the next. As David shows, the seedbed of this generational transference of faith begins with the previous generation sharing the stories



of God's faithfulness and goodness with the succeeding generation. This can be greatly facilitated through intentional inter-generational mentoring.

Christ didn't come to leave His followers simply with memories (good or bad). Perhaps in the upper room, on the third day after the crucifixion, the disciples were consoling themselves with their reminiscences while at the same time trying to make sense of the empty tomb. Everything changed, however, when the risen Christ appeared among them. As they recognised him and considered the implications, then the tangible legacy of Christ dawned upon them. They were now not simply disciples or followers but truly apostles. They were custodians of the very message of Christ, the harbingers of good news to be shared from generation to generation. This was reinforced by Christ as he commissioned them:

*'Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you...'*

**(MATTHEW 28:18-20).<sup>5</sup>**

Christ initiated a gospel legacy – a succession of 'reliable men' who would ensure that the message of grace, love and hope would be transmitted from generation to generation.

## LEADERS ARE STEWARDS

Paul was part of that legacy. And he realised that passing on the baton was a key component of his calling. John Stott talks of the apostolic succession: 'From Christ to Paul, from Paul to Timothy, from Timothy to 'faithful men', and from 'faithful men' to 'others also'. This is the true 'apostolic succession.'"<sup>6</sup>

There is a line in the British TV drama series *Downton Abbey* that could help all Christian leaders in understanding their role in this apostolic succession. The Lord of Downton Abbey is surveying his lands and speaking to his heir. 'I am not the owner of these lands,' he says, 'I am merely a steward.' In other words, 'I am the custodian of the legacy for a short time in history and need to ensure that it is passed on to the next generation in a position of strength.' We are again back to this theme of stewardship that we looked at in Chapter 2. It is such an important theme that it is certainly worth reiterating.

We as Christian leaders do not become 'owners' of the gospel or of the church. What we have received from a previous generation is not ours to alter, change, peddle for profit, or pervert in any way. It is not a leadership position we own or are entitled to. Rather we all take our place in the roll call of Christ-followers which, for 2000 years, has formed a grand procession of pacesetters entrusted with the gospel message and heralds that Christ will one day return to call to him those who are his own. When Christian leaders fail in this task, the gospel is compromised and its effectiveness is diminished. The church loses its saltiness and the light is extinguished to the detriment of all people in the world. The Bible is not ambiguous about the

call on Christ's disciples, and particularly upon leaders. We are stewards of Jesus' legacy, and, like Timothy, it is a primary task of leaders to find trustworthy and reliable successors who are qualified to serve as stewards within their generation. These stewards must display the characteristics of trustworthiness, being both reliable and able to teach others.

## **WE ARE STEWARDS OF JESUS' LEGACY**

As Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

*'So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful'*  
**(1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-2).**

## **A MULTIPLICATION PROCESS**

To conclude this chapter, here are four simple keys that can help in this process of leadership succession and mentoring.<sup>7</sup>

**RECOGNISE:** The first key is to identify potential. In this chapter we've seen how Paul has given key ingredients that will help us recognise emerging leaders who have the potential to be effective stewards of the gospel. Reliability and being able to teach can be a litmus test. In particular these undergird other character traits you would no doubt look for in an emerging leader, such as: trustworthiness, honesty and integrity. In Chapter 8, I will add two further

character traits that I look for in potential mentees: that they are both an initiative taker and teachable. The important thing is to prayerfully consider what will make fertile soil for your investment of time, energy and wisdom.

**RESOURCE:** The second key is to consider how you can most effectively resource your budding leader. The other day I had a Skype session with one of my own mentors. About halfway through the session he emailed me a document. He said that he'd been praying for me that morning and felt that this was a document that it would be good for us to work through together and discuss. You can imagine how encouraged I was – both that he'd been in prayer for me and was seeking to effectively resource me for my own leadership development. I had a similar experience with some executive coaching I received a few years ago. The lady who was mentoring me for that period was constantly seeking to send me relevant and appropriate documents. I also appreciated one leader who I worked under who would always send me books that he thought I would find useful. OK – you get the point! Mentoring isn't just about the time you spend together. A good mentor will constantly be considering how they can invest in their protégé to help them be a better leader. These resources could be materials, books, introduction to networks or other people, ideas or finance. Obviously the greatest resource is your time, so you should never skimp on this if you want to be an effective mentor.

**RELEASE:** The third key is to release mentees into positions of leadership that will challenge and stretch them.

My next chapter further examines this point. Paul did not hold back his mentees from opportunities to serve as he knew it would stretch their faith and multiply his effectiveness. Jesus did the same as he sent out the Twelve on mission trips and he shared in their joy when they realised how God could use them – even when Jesus wasn't physically with them. Releasing, rather than restraining, is vital in the leadership development process.

**RELATE:** The fourth key is to maintain relationship. Be available. As has been discussed previously, mentorship is about the long haul. The nature of the relationship will and should change over time. This is seen with Paul and Barnabas during the golden period of their partnership. Initially we see that Barnabas was the more senior person in the relationship and they were known as Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:2). But, as the Holy Spirit and Barnabas released Paul into more prominent ministry, the nature of their relationship changed and Luke starts to refer to them as Paul and Barnabas. I don't want to dwell on whether this was a contributing factor to their eventual disagreement. But, in an ideal situation, even if the mentee becomes more prominent than their mentor, it should not negatively impact a healthy relationship.

This process of Recognise, Resource, Release and Relate provides opportunity for the leadership development cycle to continue and for the succession of leaders to perpetuate the legacy of Christ and the gospel to the world.