

Philosophy of Ministry Part 2: The Backbone of Ministry

It goes without question that church leadership is the backbone of ministry. Thus, a philosophy of ministry necessarily hinges on solid, nurturing leadership.

The Function of Leadership

- The church rises or falls on the shoulders of its leadership.
- John Piper defines *spiritual leadership* as “knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to get them there by *God’s* means in reliance on *God’s* power.”¹
- Three things must be in place in order to have a biblically functioning and faithfully effective leadership: **positions**, **people**, and **priorities**.

1. First, a church must have the correct **positions**, or offices. There are two offices appointed in Scripture: elders² and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13).

- Scripture confines elders to be spiritually mature males who are primarily responsible for the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4), shepherding the flock through oversight and pastoral care (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3), ruling, preaching, and teaching (1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17), and “*equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ*” (Ephesians 4:12).

¹ John Piper, *Brothers, We are not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville, TN.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 11 (emphasis Piper’s).

² In the New Testament, the terms elder (Greek: *presbuteros*), overseer (Greek: *episkopos*), and pastor (Greek: *poimen*) are used interchangeably (e.g. Titus 1:5, 7). The three terms accentuate different aspects of the office. Sometimes vocational elders are referred to as “pastors” or “teaching elders” while non-vocational elders are referred to as “elders” or “lay elders” or “ruling elders.” This is primarily a matter of convenience.

- Deacons are “responsible chiefly for the ministry of mercy and stewardship”³ of church finances and property (Acts 6:1-6).
2. The second thing that must be in place for biblical leadership is **people**.
- Scripture details the qualifications necessary for one to serve in the offices of elder and deacon.
 - It is essential for called and qualified individuals to be appointed to these offices.
3. Third, leaders in the church must have biblical **priorities**.
- Since people depend on and are directed by their leaders, and leaders set the bar for the health, life, and function of the church, these priorities become the focal areas of the church.

Vision and Mission

- It is imperative for men who lead the church to do so on the basis of biblical vision and direction rather than opinions, preferences, feelings, traditions, cultural fads, corporate strategies, etc.
- To this end, D.A. Carson wrote,

For the better we know God, the more we will want all of our existence to revolve around him, and we will see that the only goals and plans that really matter are those that are somehow tied to God himself, and to our eternity with him.⁴

³ “The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America,” <http://reformedpresbyterian.org/images/documents/constitution2010.pdf> (accessed Feb. 1, 2011), 173.

⁴ D.A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1993), 33.

- Two important principles:
 1. Christ is building His church (Matthew 16:18) and using her to continue the advancement of His kingdom
 2. Believers are to do God's work in God's way (1 Corinthians 1:17ff)
- Although the terms vision (where you are going) and mission (how you plan to get there) are not taken from the Bible, the concepts are important for the church to have a clear direction regarding how God desires her to serve Him.
- It is tremendously useful for a local church to have clearly defined vision (i.e. overall direction) and mission (i.e. ministry objectives) statements.
 - These will serve to unite the body in both purpose and accountability.
 - Vision and mission are specific to individual churches (i.e. ministering biblically within the time, place, and circumstances in which we find ourselves).
 - Although much of what he writes is theologically eschew, George Barna correctly notes, "Each church has been called into existence to reach a different group of people and to have a unique influence on the culture in which it ministers."⁵
- The vision and mission of the church, as defined by Scripture, needs to be clearly articulated and communicated by the leadership to the church body.
- It is vital that the church body be united in believing in and standing behind the vision/mission of the church.

⁵ George Barna, *The Power of Vision: Discover and Apply God's Vision for Your Ministry* (Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, 2003), 48.