

52
Devotions
for
CHURCH
LEADERS

52
Devotions
for
CHURCH
LEADERS

Robert H. Ramey, Jr.



to
Jane Robbins Ramey
1930–1983
who
embodied
Christian leadership,
the purpose
of this book.

Contents

Introduction	ix
Part 1—Foundations of Christian Leadership	
Called by God	2
Chosen to Serve	4
Rooted and Built Up in Christ	6
Empowered by the Spirit	8
Connected with the Body of Christ	10
Enriched by Fellowship	12
Surrounded by Witnesses	14
Devoted to Prayer	16
Guided by Scripture	18
Motivated by Love	20
Focused on the Kingdom of God	22
Endowed with Faith	24
Urged on by Christ's Love	26
Part 2—Characteristics of Christian Leaders	
Doers of the Word	30
Forgive Each Other!	32
The Good News about Jesus	34
Overcoming Evil with Good	36
In Whom There is No Deceit	38
The Joy That Christ Gives	40
The Peace of Christ	42
The Conviction of Things Not Seen	44
Hope That Does Not Disappoint	46
Diligent or Lackadaisical?	48
Mature, Yet Immature	50
A Leader is... Trustworthy	52
Faith, Hope, Love: And the Winner Is...	54

Part 3—Christian Leadership Skills	
God’s Servants, Working Together	58
Sober Judgment	60
Learning to Delegate	62
Listen to Me!	64
Bearing Burdens	66
The Encourager	68
Expecting Excellence	70
Where There is No Vision	72
From Vision to Mission	74
Decisions, Decisions!	76
Gathering Input to Discern God’s Will	78
Reconciliation: Ministry and Gift	80
Abused but Not Abusive	82
Part 4—Issues for Christian Leaders	
No Conflict in the Church?	86
The Church: A Body, A System	88
Do It My Way!	90
Love Is Not Touchy	92
Tending the Flock of God	94
God’s Faithfulness and Ours	96
The Misuse of Power	98
Slow to Anger	100
When Jealousy Rears its Ugly Head	102
Dealing with Difficult People	104
Are You a Workaholic?	106
And the Walls Came Tumblin’ Down	108
The Greatest	110
Appendix: Discussion Questions for Each Devotional	113
Notes	123
Bibliography	125

Introduction

For many years I have reflected on church leadership, first as a pastor, then as a professor. Leadership is a fascinating and absorbing subject, but the more I study it, the more complicated it becomes. Still, certain abiding truths have emerged from my studies over the years, and I would like to share them with you in devotional form. By no means are most of these insights original—I have learned from many teachers and students.

I have arranged these insights to include the foundations, characteristics, and skills of Christian leadership, as well as its varied problems. I have written these devotionals specifically for church boards, staffs, and committees to use in their meetings. I hope you will share one at every meeting. If time permits, you can discuss the devotional for a few minutes, employing the questions provided in the Appendix. Pick and choose devotionals from each section, if you wish—they are not necessarily sequential.

More specifically, church boards may read one of the devotionals each time they meet. If they choose, they can alternate and select one from a different section. Boards that meet monthly will have enough material to cover at least four years of meetings.

Church staffs can work with one of the devotionals weekly when they meet. They will have sufficient material for a year of staff meetings.

Church committees and other groups can simply use the book as needed. All who chair a committee may wish a copy.

Also, newly installed members of boards, staffs, or committees can read the book for fifty-two days following their installation to office. Pastors, especially, may want to follow this plan when moving to a new pastorate.

However you use the material, may these brief pages help you become a more faithful and effective Christian leader. That is my greatest hope.

Robert H. Ramey, Jr.
March 1998

PART 1

**Foundations
of Christian
Leadership**

Called by God

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you’” (Gen. 12:1). *Read Genesis 12:1–9.*

God called Abraham—then known as Abram—to go from his country and his people to a new land. God also promised him not only land, but also descendants, and a blessing. And Abraham obeyed God’s call, packed up his family and possessions, and headed out, not knowing where they would go. What an improbable but incredible story!

God also has called *you* personally in several ways. God called you to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. God also called you to your job in the world. Whether you are a student, homemaker, computer programmer, CEO, or salesperson, God called you. And God further called you to serve in the church as a pastor, elder, deacon, council member, teacher, musician, or rank-and-file member.

Our awesome God works mysteriously “his wonders to perform.” As we meditate upon God, or God’s work of creation or redemption, or God’s law, we hear God calling us. As we reflect on God’s grace and our need, we hear God calling. As we consider the world’s cries for help and our ability to respond, we hear God calling. *In the innermost recesses of our hearts we hear God calling.* God calls us personally.

It's crucial to understand that *you* have to decide every facet of your call. Oh, I know. Sometimes people say, "This is what you ought to do." Do they ever really know what you ought to do? Do they know exactly what it's like to be you, to feel as you feel, to think as you think? And since when should anyone else take responsibility for your life? Of course, it's important to listen to the shared wisdom of others—they can help us immensely. Yet they cannot and should not make our decisions for us.

So, God calls you personally as God called Abraham long ago. In that respect you travel alone. As you may have heard, "No one can hitchhike on another's spiritual journey!"¹ Sure, we need companions along the way, as did Abraham. And we in the church of today belong to a community of faith.

But others cannot live our lives. My call and your call are personal. And we can thank God for that. Does it not show how much God values and respects each one of us?

Chosen to Serve

“You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit...” (John 15:16a). *Read John 15:12–17.*

How did you begin to serve the church? I am inviting you to retrace your steps to your present position whether you are a minister, board member, or other leader.

Did your journey not begin when you heard Jesus’ words, “You did not choose me but I chose you”? You realized that you had been called to follow Jesus, to be his disciple.

Then did you have a desire to serve Jesus in a particular way? Perhaps you wanted to become a minister or to serve the church as a leader, so you began to pray toward that end. In secret you nurtured your emerging call.

Or maybe someone in your church came to you one day and said, “Have you ever thought about becoming a minister?” or, “We would like for you to consider serving as a board member,” or, “Would you think about using your gift of leadership to chair the worship committee?” Awed and humbled by the gifts they saw in you, you prayed for God to guide you further.

But then the church participated more directly in your call. If a minister, the church guided you in your preparation for ministry. If a board member, the church trained you for your job. If a committee chair, the church prepared

you to take over the reins of leading the committee. But in every case the church was vitally involved in your call to service. The position you took was far more than an *inner* call; an *outer* call from the church was also necessary. You did not suddenly appear in church one day and announce that you were going to assume a certain leadership position.

Chosen originally by Jesus to follow him, you as a leader have also been chosen by the church. Don't take that lightly, even though you know how flawed you are. Again and again persons have said to me, "I am not worthy. I've got a lot of faults." To which I reply, "So do I. We were not called because we are perfect, but because Christ and his people want us to serve. Remember this: Your fellow Christians see in you a person who has the qualities they want in a leader." That's humbling, but also empowering. To think that God uses weak, earthen vessels like us to perform Christian service!

Rooted and Built Up in Christ

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith...” (Col. 2:6, 7). *Read Colossians 2:6–19.*

Is there really any other place for Christian leaders to ground their work except in Christ Jesus? Surely not, yet we are tempted to look elsewhere for our grounding. Are we not tossed to and fro by everything from consumerism to New Age teaching, from permissive morality to strident nationalism?

So it has been for a long time now, ever since Paul wrote to an imperiled little band of Christians in Colossae. Their environment tended to corrupt the pure gospel Epaphras taught them as he had learned it from Paul. Colossian Christians, for example, were embracing strange teachings, including certain ascetic practices. They might even have forbidden marriage, saying, “Do not touch” (Col. 2:21b). Even more, gnostic teaching was infiltrating the community. Gnostics taught that human beings leave the material world behind and climb a spiritual ladder if they want to make contact with God. Somewhat similarly, in 1997 the Heaven’s Gate suicide cult in Rancho Santa Fe, California, decided to leave their “human containers” behind when they poisoned themselves, hoping to go to the Father’s kingdom.

As for Christ, the false teachers in Colossae relegated him to a *high*, though not *supreme* place. Perhaps the Colossians thought the gospel they had learned was too simple and needed asceticism and gnosticism to make it better. Yet Paul would have none of it. “Hold fast to the faith Epaphras taught you,” he said. “Continue to live in Christ, relying on him as your daily companion.”

That’s timely advice for Christian leaders today. We need no modern “add-ons” like New Age teaching, or the occult, or the ascetic to make our faith more complete. For the tradition we have received has stood the test of time and resisted every assault upon its integrity. Now, Christians are not opposed to new truth. In fact, Jesus said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...” (John 16:13a). Even so, Jesus added, “He will glorify *me*, because he will take what is *mine* and declare it to you” (John 16:14, italics mine).

Let’s build our work together on Christ, the sure foundation, the source of truth. Any other foundation will eventually collapse.

Empowered by the Spirit

“Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit...” (Acts 6:3).
Read Acts 6:1–6.

Strange, isn't it, how we sometimes select people to serve on our church boards, staffs, and committees? If they are *active*, or have *stature* in the community, or are *popular*, or are *go-getters*, we pick them. Of course, each of these qualities can help any leader. But when selecting leaders, are we not missing some key ingredients for faithful and effective leaders?

When the Twelve felt burdened by serving meals, they asked the infant Christian community to select seven men to take their place while they prayed and preached. And what were the criteria for their “search committee” to follow? The apostles told them to select seven men “of good standing, *full of the Spirit* and of wisdom...” (Acts 6:3, italics mine). They chose Stephen, “a man *full of faith and the Holy Spirit...*” (Acts 6:5b, italics mine). One emerging criterion for leadership was to be full of the Spirit.

Stephen evidently possessed the required criteria, including being full of the Holy Spirit. Not just the spirit of good will, not just the spirit of friendliness, and not just community spirit, but the *Holy Spirit*. A leader could

possess all those other spirits, yet not be full of the Holy Spirit. And a crucial dynamic would be missing.

Oh, I know, we can keep the lights burning in our churches with these other spirits, but we lack real power. When leaders are empowered by the Holy Spirit, they look different, they act differently. They do what Christ wants, not what culture dictates. *In a word, they live and make decisions in the power of the Spirit.*

No wonder that “Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8). Also, just before his witness cost him his life we read: “*But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God*” (Acts 7:55, italics mine). Amazing! Stephen began his ministry full of the Holy Spirit; he ended it the same way.

Not that any of us modern leaders long for martyrdom, but shouldn't we also tap into the power that changed the world, *the power of the Holy Spirit?*

Connected with the Body of Christ

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...” (Rom. 12:4–6a).
Read Romans 12:3–9.

We Americans are rugged individualists, right? Well, let’s see.

I admire the frontier spirit that left such a legacy in our history. At times our ancestors confronted more obstacles in a week than we have to face in a year. And they often had no one else to depend on; it was either sink or swim.

Also, I respect CEOs who sometimes have to make quick, tough, lonely decisions. To some extent are they not the modern counterpart of people on the frontier? So we do have a history of rugged individualism in this nation.

Thus it’s hard for us to change gears and understand what it means to belong to a *body*. Yet when we became Christians we also became members of the church, Christ’s body. *In other words, we were baptized into Christ and into his body.* And that’s radically different from seeing ourselves as rugged individualists upon whom rests our well-being and security.

Now we see that we belong to Christ and his body, not to ourselves. Of course we have different functions in the

body. I am a minister, while you may be a music director. But though we possess different gifts, we all use them for the common good, for the community. We stop thinking that we, individually, must do it all and don't need anyone, anywhere, any time. Rather, I use my gifts for the community, and you contribute yours. I preach, for example, and you sing. (You surely don't want *me* to sing—I can only make a “joyful noise!”) Yet both music and preaching are essential gifts in every church.

Christ's work, then, doesn't depend on us alone. Is not Christ the head of the church? And are we not “members of one another”? But we do have functions to fulfill and gifts to use for the community. So, as Paul says here, the leader should be diligent in using those gifts. (See Rom. 12:8.)

Enriched by Fellowship

“We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). *Read 1 John 1:1–10.*

Don't most of us long for fellowship? for companionship with people who help us to be ourselves? for friendship with others who share our core values? for togetherness with persons who help us celebrate the sheer joy of living?

Some of us not only long for fellowship, but thrive on it. We delight in people so much that we can hardly stand to be alone. Others, however, are quieter, preferring only occasional forays into the world of human companionship. Either way, all of us must find it or live more and more isolated from people.

Do not church leaders also need fellowship to carry out their jobs? So we join staff members at a coffee break, or play softball at a board retreat, or have a picnic with the choir. Such occasions help us relax and enjoy one another.

Beneath all church fellowship lies a deeper reality: our faith. Our fellowship is “with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” *That* fellowship makes possible our deep friendship with one another. *Divine* fellowship enriches *human* fellowship. They are interrelated, of course, for human fellowship may initiate our relationship with God.

Can we be devoted and competent leaders without fellowship? Hardly, though I've seen many church leaders try. They are either too busy or too serious about their work. But God did not intend for us to live alone. God has provided a way for us to overcome our isolation and loneliness and to find the friendship we need. If we truly have fellowship "with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ," we will also have fellowship with one another. And as we do so, we may discover that our relationship with God is enriched.

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love.
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.²

Indeed it is!

Surrounded by Witnesses

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely...” (Heb. 12:1). *Read Hebrews 12:1–11.*

To lead a church is often lonely. We never know whether the plans we make now will work out. And we cannot prove scientifically that the faith we proclaim is even valid. The world may scoff at core ideas of faith like Christ’s saving death on the cross and his resurrection. Thus exercising *Christian* leadership can be daunting for even the most courageous among us.

Though lonely, we are not really alone, unless we are foolish. God has not left us without witnesses to God’s love and power. Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Rahab, Gideon—on and on goes the list in Hebrews of those who served as witnesses to the reality of God. They did not even receive what God had promised, but they lived by faith in God’s promises.

And how those faithful witnesses strengthen us on lonely days when we become discouraged! More than mere spectators of our struggles, they also serve as witnesses to a faithful God who keeps promises. Looking at their strong witness helps us stand firm in our faith when our knees tremble and our hearts grow faint. Moreover, their strong witness helps us lay aside every sin and “run with perseverance the race that is set before us...” (Heb. 12:1b).

So on troubling days, when storm clouds gather ominously, remember that great cloud of witnesses from the roll call of faith in Hebrews. But don't stop there. Look at the witnesses in your own denomination whether Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Thomas Cranmer, Alexander Campbell, or Roger Williams. Look at the heroes and heroines of the Roman Catholic Church, whether Teresa of Avila, Francis of Assisi, or Teresa of Calcutta. All of them witnessed to a faithful God.

Also look to Jesus, "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith..." (Heb. 12:2). By faith he trusted God even though he was nailed to a cross. Jesus is the supreme witness to a faithful God, for God raised him from the dead.

Alone, yet not alone, we put our hands to the plow—or computer—once more. And surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses—and looking to Jesus—we will not fail.

Devoted to Prayer

“Therefore, friends, select...seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom...while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and serving the word” (Acts 6:3,4). *Read Acts 6:1–4.*

How often do you pray in your church meetings? And when do you pray? Unless you are different from most churches you probably engage in “bookend prayers.” You open your meetings with prayer and close them with prayer. In between those prayers you conduct business. But does not prayer sometimes become a mechanical custom to follow?

Not so with the early church! The Twelve wanted the Christian community to select seven men to serve tables so that they could devote themselves to prayer and serving the word. Praying was an integral part of their job description, not a routine practice.

A long, conflicted board meeting was trying my patience and causing knots in my stomach. Right in the middle of our muddle, an elder said, “I think we ought to stop and have prayer. We’re going in the wrong direction here.” I’ll admit I was irritated. “He’s uncomfortable with the debate so he’s attempting to divert us,” I reflected. But how could I oppose prayer? As we prayed, I began to calm down. We then carefully devised a plan of action to lead us toward resolving our conflict. And in time we resolved it.

With the apostles, I now clearly see that we, too, need to devote ourselves to prayer. Do we think we can govern our little church domains without praying often and sincerely? Do we know something that the apostles didn't know? Hardly. They *knew* what we must *learn*: To lead well we must offer ourselves to God in prayer. Only as we do so can we unlock the tremendous power that flows from a dynamic relationship with God. When we pray, we receive insights we had not seen before. And we see one another as children of God, who are our friends in Christ, searching for God's will in whatever we do.

Pray, therefore, at the beginning of a meeting. Then appoint persons to pray silently, on a rotating basis, for fifteen minutes at a time during the meeting. And when you get stuck, as you most certainly will, stop and pray about it as a group.

One other idea: Begin to pray for the next meeting long before it starts!

Guided by Scripture

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...” (2 Tim. 3:16). *Read 2 Timothy 3:10–17.*

Here we are again, reading a passage of scripture and focusing on yet another text. We ordinarily engage in this practice in our church meetings. Often we base our services of worship on scripture from the call to worship to the benediction. When we want to know the will of God, we search the Bible for clues to God’s will. Is not scripture indeed powerful and helpful for living the Christian life? And leaders, of all people, need to be guided by it.

As we ponder this text, we cannot be as clear as we would like. For example, does “all scripture” include the New Testament as well as the Old? Scholars differ. Does “inspired by God” mean that God dictated every word and concept, including scientific viewpoints? How you answer these questions depends upon your own perspective and denomination. More important here is for us to see that leaders in the church are to be guided by scripture. Have we not found it “useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”?

But so much for the principle—what about our practice? Are we conscientiously studying scripture so that it can be useful? Scripture can hardly be a valuable authority for us if our Bibles are gathering dust!

No matter how guilty we may feel about our practice, our situation is by no means hopeless. You can start by reading some scripture everyday. Read it privately, read it in a group. Gradually you will read through an entire book, even a testament. Apply what you read to your own life. Brood over its meaning. And do you know what will happen? As you steep yourself in God's Word, you will find it guiding you more and more. You will use scripture in leading the church, as well as in growing in grace. You will discover that "the sacred writings...instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Strange, isn't it, that we neglect to read and study the Bible, the Church's book? But you can begin again. Without wallowing in guilt, simply start today.

Motivated by Love

“...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Mark 12:30). *Read Mark 12: 28–34.*

An old song asks, “What’s it all about, Alfie?” In other words, what is the meaning and purpose of life? A lot of people would like to know! In a recent poll of the spiritual needs of Americans, 70 percent said their number one need was to find meaning and purpose in life.

A scribe—a teacher of the law—asked Jesus one day which commandment was the first of all. Jesus replied, drawing upon the “Shema” in Deuteronomy 6 and reiterating that to love God with your whole being is the greatest commandment. He went on to add that the second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.

In a nutshell Jesus identified the gospel’s answer to the question put to Alfie, “What’s it all about?” Love God with your whole being and your neighbor as yourself, and your life will have meaning and purpose. Every single time.

I’ve taken three paragraphs to specify that church leaders need to love God and neighbor. You may have already assumed as much.

But I want to stress the obvious. *If we are leaders in Christ’s church in any capacity, we have to be growing in our love for God and neighbor.*

Now we wouldn't lay this requirement upon a leader in business or industry. (Even if we expected it!) But loving God and neighbor is part of the foundation for any Christian leader. The purpose of the church and its ministry, H. Richard Niebuhr contended, is "the increase of love of God and neighbor."³ This is the only way members will find meaning and purpose in their lives. And leaders must show them the way. They can't expect others to follow a road they haven't traveled themselves.

So do a spiritual audit. Ask yourself, "Am I growing in my love for God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength? Do I love my neighbor as I love myself?"

Of course, you fall short of perfection, but are you at least *growing* in your love for God and neighbor? If not, this text may drive you to your knees in prayer. But what better place to begin than to pray that God will help you become more loving as you seek to lead others to love.

Focused on the Kingdom of God

“But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33). *Read Matthew 6:25–34.*

Recently I tried to identify the most faithful and effective Christian leaders I had ever known. Several people came to mind at once. Then I asked myself, “What were they like? What distinguished them from everyone else?” In each case I concluded that they put the kingdom of God *first* in their lives. Not second or third or fourth behind job or nation or even family, but first. Now, they all did their jobs well, loved their nation, and cherished their families, but they were focused on the kingdom of God. And therein lay the secret of their amazing effectiveness and influence in every area of their lives.

Such leaders knew that God’s rule or reign was at the epicenter of the message and ministry of Jesus. Moreover, Jesus himself, as crucified and risen Lord and Savior, was at the epicenter of the kingdom. Thus the kingdom of God became the kingdom of Christ. To say that these leaders put the kingdom first meant that they focused on Christ. He was at the epicenter of their lives.

Yet the temptation before all leaders—and Christians as well—is to fall prey to the “what if” syndrome. What if all these plans we’re making fall flat? What if we don’t have

enough money to finance our hopes and dreams? What if we can't enlist enough volunteers to do the job? Do we not almost "what if" ourselves to death?

Jesus said such worry is fruitless. Clothes, food, drink—the necessities of life—preoccupy us constantly. But according to Jesus, God knows our basic needs and will supply them. God also cares about all of our other worries, certainly these "what if" thoughts that plague us in church work.

Yes, God cares about us and provides for our needs. But Jesus teaches us to strive for the kingdom of God first. Let concern for the reign of God be at the heart of every dream we have, every decision we make, every conflict we seek to resolve.

A worry-wart like me needs to remember Jesus' counsel. For if there's a way to imagine that something will go wrong, I can usually think of it! Then I have to stop and reflect on the most faithful and effective leaders I have known. Their memory steadies me and helps me focus once again. Maybe this exercise will help you, too.

Endowed with Faith

“...for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24). *Read Acts 11:19–26.*

When the twelve apostles were casting about for seven men to wait on tables, they chose Stephen first of all. Stephen was *full of faith*. Later in the book of Acts, it was also said about Barnabas that “he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and *of faith*” (Acts 11:24, italics mine). Paul himself said, “And the life I now live in the flesh I live *by faith* in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Are we on to something here? Let’s see.

Apparently, one of the defining characteristics of early Christian leaders was their faith in the Son of God, who loved them and gave himself for them. Faith in Jesus as Lord, who ushered in the reign of God and at whose name “every knee should bend” (Phil. 2:10). Faith in Jesus as Savior, who came to seek and to save the lost. Thus can’t we conclude that faith in Jesus Christ was an indispensable quality of Christian leadership? It was, and it still is!

Why is it so essential for church leaders to have faith in Jesus Christ? Isn’t it enough for them to be successful in business? to be leaders in the community? to possess energy and imagination? Unfortunately, the answer is No. *The perspective that faith in Jesus Christ gives is an absolute requirement for Christian leaders.*

Faith in Jesus Christ informs the *purpose of your work*. You will seek “the mind of Christ” in all that you do.

Faith in Jesus Christ informs *how you spend the church’s money*. If a wealthy member dies and leaves the church \$100,000 in her will, you will use that money to best serve Jesus Christ and “the least of these” for whom he died.

Faith in Jesus Christ informs *the spirit in which you serve*. You will not use your leadership position to lord it over others, but to serve as did Jesus who “came not to be served but to serve...” (Mark 10:45).

Faith in Jesus Christ informs *how you look at culture*. Instead of automatically embracing whatever is new and trendy, you will ask, “How does this fit with the gospel?”

So add faith in Jesus Christ to the essential qualities for Christian leaders. May all of your church leaders be endowed with such faith.

Urged On by Christ's Love

“For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died” (2 Cor. 5:14). *Read 2 Corinthians 5:11–15.*

Church work, as fulfilling as it often is, can puzzle, discourage, and exhaust the best of us. Some of you may say, “That’s the understatement of the year.” Others who are new in the work of the church may not understand my statement at all. You haven’t yet experienced the truth of a late medieval manuscript that said: “The church is something like Noah’s ark. If it weren’t for the storm outside, you couldn’t stand the smell inside.”⁴

But why even make the point? Because any who would lead the church must be firmly grounded in the love of Christ. Paul probably refers here to Christ’s love for us, not our love for Christ. *That love urges us on when the going gets tough.* It’s love that is willing to be vulnerable. In the person of Christ, it took hostility in the form of taunts and jeers. It absorbed spears and nails. And it even died forgiving those who inflicted the pain! Only a love like that can be strong enough to help us when we face discouragement and pain.

And those difficult days inevitably come. I just talked with a friend who has been bitterly hurt by the church. She will rise again to serve the church and take on the world. But how? Because the love of Christ urges her on. She knows it’s a love that will never let her go.

Thus we rest our leadership upon the love of Christ.
Any other footing is likely to fail us when life crashes in
upon us.

Can money provide staying power?

Can popularity keep us steady?

Can a good track record of service anchor us?

All such ballast is too weak for dark and difficult days.

Only one rock will keep us secure: the love of Christ.

So back to the tasks that Christ calls us to perform.

Back to the burdens he wants us to bear.

Back to the wrongs we must right.

For the love of Christ urges us on.