

# **Right Use of Power in the Church:**

## **A 10-Part Series**

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# ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH— PART I—15 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AND YOUR COLLEAGUES

SEPTEMBER 13, 2021



Very few church leaders actually endeavor to become that headline that defrocks them and leaves carnage in its wake. Instead, decision-by-decision, step-by-step, as power accumulates (and isn't shared), as congregations desire more to be led than to serve as equals to the pastor, as governing boards abdicate responsibility or have it systematically taken from them, and as leaders begin to believe the "applause" is for them instead of Jesus—power is abused and staff/congregations are left damaged and questioning...and more people leave the church.

What if every church used the following list of questions, regularly asking every member of their staff (paid and unpaid) and leadership team/s to honestly reflect on their own use of power? What if healthy accountability replaced unhealthy worship of a few key leaders?

Questions to ask—quarterly—of all who have power/influence in your church/ministry?

1. Who is holding you accountable? How honest are you and have you been with that person or team? Are they local and do they "get" your ministry/church culture?
2. How are your accountability partners helping hold you responsible for your thoughts, actions, and behaviors?

3. How willing are you to listen to constructive feedback and correction? How receptive would your friends, family, fellow staff members, lay team, and trusted advisers say you are to receiving helpful advice about yourself and your leadership?
4. Are you hearing a theme in comments, feedback, conversations that you should not continue to dismiss or ignore?
5. How closely are you walking with Jesus? What are your current practices to keep yourself grounded in Scripture and regularly talking honestly with God (prayer)?
6. What's your level of burnout? Are others aware of this?
7. What does self-care in this season look like for you? Are others aware and able to encourage this?
8. Is there anything you are currently contemplating that, if acted upon, would put you sideways to the Lord's mission for you/those you are leading?
9. Is there anything you are currently doing that, if it became public or became known to your family, would be embarrassing, hurtful, harmful?
10. Is there something you are doing that is illegal?
11. Is there something you are doing that is perhaps legal but not ethical?
12. If your primary job is "equipping" your congregation for "ministry" that the church (Christ's Body) might be strengthened and everyone grow to "maturity" in Christ—how are you doing this in practical terms?
13. If you left your job tomorrow, what would be your legacy in terms of ministry/church health, discipleship, and equipping longevity? Would there be negative fallout?
14. Take stock of the role of pride and ego in your ministry. How might you institute practices and/or accountability that develop humility and humbleness?
15. What is one thing you will change today as a result of this self-assessment?

In addition, a culture shift to gifts-based every-member ministry (as detailed in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Romans, 1 Peter) can be hugely healthy and helpful. Check out prior and future [Gifts-Calling-Purpose blog](#) entries for much more on this Biblical subject of how to do church.

(For more on gifts, check out the [Resources](#) page at [GodGiftsYou.com](#). Take the [free assessment](#) and see what [gifts](#) God has bestowed on you to contribute to the whole.)

# ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH— PART II—SERVING AT THE PLEASURE OF JESUS CHRIST

SEPTEMBER 20, 2021



Pastors and church staff come and go. By contrast, congregation members, for the most part, can be there for generations. This perspective can help those hired to shepherd a congregation keep their own leadership and power/influence in perspective. All pastors and church staff, by definition are “interim”. They are serving at the pleasure of Jesus Christ and through the church’s calling of them for a season.

Some good questions for pastors and church staff/leadership to ask themselves regularly

- Is your first commitment to Jesus and His church (or to your job and your own success or “kingdom”)?
- Are you dedicated to being a person of love, compassion, mercy, reconciliation, and forgiveness while also being a person of integrity, honesty, humility and care for others?
- Are you dedicated to engaging with God’s work in your midst to exhort those in your sphere of influence to become people of love, compassion, mercy, reconciliation, and forgiveness while also being persons of integrity, honesty, humility and care for others?

Some good questions that congregations and Sessions/Governing Boards can be asking of/about their pastors and staff—on a regular basis—include:

- Are you noting a pattern where only the lead pastor's ideas are the ones that matter and are carried out?
- Are others on the staff/leadership team asked for input and truly heard?
- Where are the rough edges/areas for growth in this leader? Is this person aware of these blind spots? Are they willing to do the work to grow in these places (through therapy, coaching, spiritual direction, receiving and applying constructive feedback...)?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how defensive is this leader when given helpful input (about ideas, processes, goals, or personal correction)? How willing is this leader to apologize for mistakes/errors?
- Would you say that this leader has been harsh, bullying, or abusive in some way in your interactions with him/her? Have you heard from others that this leader has been harsh, bullying, or abusive in some way in their interactions with him/her? Is this a pattern of behavior?
- How affirmed/encouraged do this person's colleagues feel by this leader?
- Are people with gifts of Discernment pointing out leadership patterns that seem easy to dismiss as "nothing"—but, magnified forward, will present a future problem?
- Are people with gifts of Prophecy pointing out leadership inconsistencies that seem easy to dismiss as "nothing"—but, magnified forward, will present a future problem?
- Does this leader have a pattern of favoring certain staff/ministry leaders over others—a Jacob-Joseph—technicolor coat problem?
- Does this leader have a pattern of jealously guarding all "important ministry" for himself/herself instead of focusing on equipping, discipling, and delegating—a Moses-corrected-by-Jethro problem?
- Has this leader not been able to "graduate" from their prior assistant/associate/parachurch/youth ministry/outside-of-church role into their current leadership role? What support/training/accountability might help with that transition/leap?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how safe are staff meetings with this leader in charge?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how safe are leadership meetings with this leader in charge?

Admittedly, congregations can have high (sometimes too high) hopes for a new pastor/staff member. There can be undue pressure on that person to be omni-competent, ultra-gifted, uber-talented in ways that are toxic to both the pastor and the church.

In being aware of these issues and dynamics...and rooting ourselves in God's definition and design for His church (in Scripture)...and relying on the power and guidance of His Holy Spirit, going forward, Jesus' church can be a healthier, flourishing, transformed and transformative, restored and restorative agent of love and life and reconciliation to a world desperate for what Jesus and His people have to offer.

# ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH— PART III—JESUS HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO LEADERS

SEPTEMBER 27, 2021



[In Matthew 23](#), Jesus warns His disciples and the crowds following him against the following things about their leaders (“the teachers of the law and the Pharisees”)

--**hypocrisy**: “do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.”

--**heavy demands and lack of empathy**: “They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”

--**pride**: “Everything they do is done for people to see.”

--**narcissism/ego**: “they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.”

Jesus’ warning extends to us as well—reminding us that He alone is our Rabbi/Teacher/Instructor/Messiah, God alone is our Father, and we are all brothers and sisters. He flattens the hierarchy among us. In this context, talking about leaders abusing their power, Jesus also calls His followers to a *different way* of life and leadership—servant-leadership: “The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Then, Jesus speaks directly to the leaders who are present. It’s past time to speak truth and defend the powerless who do not have a voice. He calls them hypocrites whose leadership prevents people from coming to faith or practicing their faith in God or finding the Lord a refuge. Leadership isn’t about adding burdens to the lives and faith of followers. He calls them blind fools, blind guides. They have rigid practices of obedience in things like tithing (“You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin.”), but Jesus says, “you have neglected the more important matters of the law—*justice, mercy and faithfulness*. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”

Jesus exposes their outer “righteous” practices as being simply a cover-up for their interior lives: “full of greed and self-indulgence” and “full of hypocrisy and wickedness,” and He tells them how to overcome this by paying attention to their blind spots—committing to inner work first.

He calls out their arrogance at saying they would not have killed the prophets—as their ancestors did. However, these are the same leaders who demand Jesus’ arrest and plot His murder to protect and preserve their power. It seems harsh, but He goes on to call them “snakes” “brood of vipers.”

I don’t believe we’re to take from this and other similar passages that we are to call our leaders names. However, I do believe that, just like Nathan the prophet confronting King David with his sins, we are to call our leaders to account for their hypocrisy, lack of empathy, pride, and tendencies toward narcissism. After having inspected the “log” in our own eyes, we can—“speaking the truth in love”—remind our leaders that their primary purpose is to practice “justice, mercy, and faithfulness” with humility, as servants of those they lead.

We see the heart of Jesus for His people to be well-led. The chapter finishes with Jesus agonizing over Jerusalem: “how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” He is the Good Shepherd, the Hen who gathers her chicks. He will defend the powerless and hold abusive leaders to account.

**Reflect:**

- Take stock of your own life and walk with Jesus. Are there areas where you could be called a hypocrite? Do you lack empathy? How prideful or narcissistic are you? Talk with God about these things. Ask Him to show you how to change in these areas.
- Is Jesus your only Messiah? Your primary, above-all Rabbi/Teacher?
- Do you believe that we are all equal in Jesus’ eyes?
- What does servant-leadership look like in your context? How might you more actively practice being a servant-leader? What does it look like to humble yourself and trust the Lord to be the One to lift you up?
- Is there a situation where God is asking you to speak truth to leadership, to defend the powerless, to give voice to the voiceless?
- Where might you be giving the appearance of godliness but have neglected the “more important” matters like “justice, mercy and faithfulness”? What does it look like to practice those three things in your context?
- Where are your blind spots? Ask others who know you well to help you with this. Perhaps engage a coach or spiritual director to assist you as you engage with the truth of your own self-centeredness. We are all susceptible to the undertow of pride.
- Who is boldly calling you to account? Do you appreciate or resent them? How can you commit to hearing the truth of what they are saying—for your own sake and for the sake of your continued effectiveness as a leader?
- Spend some time in prayer asking for Jesus’ heart for those you lead.

# ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH— PART IV—JESUS NEVER INTENDED HIS CHURCH TO BE LIKE THIS!

OCTOBER 4, 2021



A senior pastor shields a family member instead of putting safeguards in place to protect the congregation’s children/youth. A wanna-be-famous lead pastor consolidates and misuses power, minimizing the contributions of staff and laity in the process. A head pastor and executive pastor work together to build their own little kingdom, eventually crossing another line into a sexualized relationship with one another—and minimizing it when caught. A pastor has an affair with a woman he is counseling, blames her, threatens legal action if it becomes public, and leaves his post with additional financial misuse questions also following his exit. A charismatic pastor is winsome to his congregation—from the pulpit—but, behind the scenes is verbally abusive to staff and others who cross him.

And, the list goes on.

Jesus never intended His church—and it’s HIS church—to be like this.

In Scripture there is only the emphasis on Christ as Head (and no mention of a “senior pastor”). There is also no “director” “CEO” language. There IS language that talks about shepherding (pastoring), ministering, appointing elders, equipping the saints for ministry, shared ministry, Jesus as Head of the Body—His Church, gifts-based ministry, the last shall be first, foot-washing (leaders humbly washing the feet of their disciples), discipleship, leaders being held to a high/er standard, and personal accountability. The focus of leadership in the Bible is on Christ alone. He is our model.



Our church cultures—and language—and structures (hierarchies)—are often in opposition to Jesus’ intent for leaders and congregations. Language matters. Culture matters. Structure matters. Truth matters. Accountability matters. How have we gotten so sideways to His intent?

Many churches have lived through one or more of the above scenarios...and carry some of that unresolved “We trusted our leader...how could he/she betray us like that?” into the next leadership round and the next. We stuff down our sense of anger, shock, hurt, betrayal—our grief—as we desperately seek the next “more-perfect” leader. We don’t take the necessary time to tell our stories to one another, listen well, find meaning in our experiences, come to forgiveness, and consider reconciliation or releasing these leaders [credit to *The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World* Paperback, by Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu]. We don’t seem to know how to talk about these things in honest, helpful ways.

When we rush into the find-the-next-pastor process, we typically hire people from outside of our church community—who come and “lead” for a short period of less time than the average member of our congregation stays...and who move on (often taking unhealed and unresolved and unadmitted and unforgiven baggage with them to their next posting).

That said, **WE are part of the problem.** We, like the Israelites in Samuel’s time, want (demand) a king. Now. We don’t like the messiness of submitting to the Lord and to one another in corporate community. We want someone to come in and tell us what to do—to make decisions, to “do” ministry—so that we can have church (faith?) be a side part of our lives, perhaps. A “let’s leave the ministry to the professionals” refrain. We are then surprised (shocked?) when we get Saul as king. Or David (whose leadership and family end in profound dysfunction and decline). Or Solomon who was led into idolatry and led God’s people further that direction.

We also don’t want to do the hard work of working together, submitting to the Holy Spirit’s healing and restoration process—we want to get on with “church” as we know it. We seem to have no interest in reassessing our organizational structure/s, rooting out the unhealth in our culture, shining light into our blind spots, and requiring truth from our leaders.

Power. It can be used for good or for evil. How are we using our own personal power and influence for good in our churches?

Reflect:

- What language does your church/ministry use for its leaders? What language do you use when speaking of your pastors/ministers/church leadership? Does this language reflect language you see in Scripture, especially from Jesus?
- Do you constantly hope for the “perfect” leader? Do you get frustrated with those who have been wounded by the church (your church?) who want to talk about it? How might you engage in/encourage the healing process for yourself and others in your context?
- How are you part of the problem? Where has your devotion to the Lord been sidetracked into devotion to a charismatic human leader instead?
- Where are you using your own personal power/influence for good?

# ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH— PART V—LEADERSHIP VS. SERVANTSHIP

OCTOBER 11, 2021



Looking at Mark 10 is instructive as we think about Jesus and leadership. In the early part of the chapter we see “crowds of people” continuing to come to Jesus...and He keeps teaching them. There are moments when He spars with the Pharisees. The Pharisees are about the letter of the law...and entrapment of Jesus for their own gain. Jesus is about heart transformation, life-change.

When people bring small children for Jesus to bless, His own disciples reprimand these people for doing so. Jesus’ response? “He was indignant.” Angry. Outraged. Incensed. Furious. Then He says to His disciples: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them (Mark 10:14-16). Not dominant, personal-kingdom-building leaders (like the Pharisees) but those who are childlike...those we have a tendency to dismiss for their lack of “importance” to what we think we are doing. Jesus has radically different priorities to the religious leaders of His day—and of today.

The chapter continues with Jesus’ interaction with the rich man. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:21-23.) Mind you, right before Jesus says these things, our text tells us that “Jesus looked at him and loved him.”

Jesus speaks of leaving everything to follow Him. Jesus’ emphasizes sacrifice which challenges our comfort. He’s asking for full commitment. A giving-up. Trusting God to do that which seems

impossible to humans. We, on the other hand, trust in our plans, our building campaigns, our leader's vision. We want God + success, God + wealth, God + fame. Jesus turns all this on its head when He says in v. 31 "...many who are first will be last, and the last first." Again, the reordering of worldly priorities to reflect God's upside-down kingdom.

Right after Jesus tells His disciples—for the third time—that when they get to Jerusalem, He would be arrested, given a death sentence, mocked, flogged, and killed—and rise again three days later, James and John ask that they might sit on either side of Jesus in His glory. Jesus talks of the ultimate sacrifice...submission to the will of the Father...giving up His own life. These two followers talk of jockeying for position...ensuring their status as "favorites" of the teacher...eager to rule, perhaps over others. When the rest of the disciples hear about this shameless play for power, they are enraged. Jesus gathers them all together and says "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your **servant**, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many**" (Mark 10:42-45).

Not "leadership" but "servantship." Not "lording it over" others, but humbly serving one another. Not striving for "greatness," but mirroring our Lord who came to serve—which looked like giving up His own life for others.

The chapter ends with a blind beggar named Bartimaeus shouting through a large crowd for Jesus to have mercy upon him. Many in the throng "rebuked him and told him to be quiet"—simply making him yell even louder. Instead of ignoring this marginalized human, likely used to being reprimanded and reproached, Jesus stops and tells the rebukers to "Call him." We see no rebuke from Jesus but a treating Bartimaeus with dignity and respect. Jesus publicly affirms the faith of this man: "your faith has healed you."

Our model for ministry leaders and for every member of a congregation is Jesus:

- Jesus is about heart transformation, life-change.
- Jesus desires that we come to Him like little children.
- Jesus has radically different priorities than we do.
- Jesus' motivation in all He does is love.
- Jesus asks for sacrifice and total commitment.
- Jesus Himself is all-in.
- Jesus came to serve.
- Jesus sees, hears, calls, and engages (and heals) the marginalized.

Does this list reflect how you lead and how you engage with others in your congregation/ministry?

# RIGHT USE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH— PART VI—SERVE, SERVING, SERVANT...

OCTOBER 18, 2021



The variations on the root word “serve” appear in Scripture nearly 1,150 times (in the NIV).

In dictionary terms, the word “serve” is used in the contexts of religion, law, commerce, sports, military, seafaring, and agriculture. Verb meanings range from perform duties or services for (another person or an organization), to work for, be in the service of, obey or be obedient to, carry out the wishes of, be of use to, help/give help to, assist/give assistance to, aid, lend a hand to, do a good turn to, do one’s bit for, do something for, make a contribution to, benefit, minister to, provide relief, carry out, fulfill, present—or distribute--(food or drink) to someone, provide, supply, make available, attend to, give one’s attention to, be useful, fulfill the function of. In nautical terms, it has the meaning of to bind a rope with cord to make it stronger.

Jesus talks of service and serving often. He calls us to “Worship the Lord your God, and **serve** him only” (Matthew 4:10; see also Luke 4:8 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”). He reminds us that the Lord is to be primary in our hearts, minds, and lives—taking precedence over other things that would tempt us away from that critical allegiance: “No one can **serve** two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot **serve** both God and money” (Matthew 6:24; see also Luke 16:13 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”). He actively humbles Himself (ultimately to foot washing and to death on our behalf), and is clear

when He reminds us that we are not to think ourselves above Him as our Teacher/Master: “The student is not above the teacher, nor a **servant** above his master” (Matthew 10:24).

When God the Father speaks about Jesus, we hear: “Here is my **servant** whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations” (Matthew 12:18). The Father refers to His Son as His chosen, loved servant.

When instructing the Twelve, Jesus not only tells them to be willing to put themselves last, but that they are to pattern their lives after Him—who came to serve: Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your **servant**, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many**” (Matthew 20:25-28; see also Mark 9:35: Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.” Luke 22:24-27 A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But **I am among you as one who serves.**)

As Jesus is preparing for His death, He reminds His disciples (and us) that His kingdom is one of sacrifice and service, modeled by His own complete obedience even in the face of soul-troubling anguish: Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. **Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.**

“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:23-26)

As Jesus continues to prepare His disciples for His death, Jesus—ever intentional—models the lesson of washing their feet. In John 13, we read “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” This passage seems to tell us that BECAUSE Jesus KNEW where He came from, where He was going, and the role He’d been given—by the Father—to play, He was then able to choose the humility of performing the lowly servant task of washing and drying His followers’ feet. His actions are rooted in His deep and abiding trust in God. Of course, Peter resists having His Rabbi/Teacher wash his feet, and it becomes a teachable moment. The passage then goes on to say: When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. **Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them**” (John 13:1-17).

Leaders who serve? Who make serving others their preeminent priority? Leaders who are secure in Jesus and thus in who they are—where they came from and where they are going are the ones best able to humble themselves, putting others first. They see their role as one of shepherd, mentor, coach—helping people grow and become their best selves.

Are you that kind of leader?

# ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH— PART VII--IT'S NOT ABOUT PERFECTION...

OCTOBER 25, 2021



Don't get me wrong. We are all human. Even as those redeemed and being transformed by Jesus, we will still fail. This conversation isn't about perfection, it is about *right use* of power—and, when wrongly applied, a willingness to be held accountable, to admit wrongs, to tell the truth, to be corrected, forgiven, healed, restored (where possible).

Too often, in a misguided attempt to “protect” the church and its reputation, we gloss over our sins and the sins of our leaders, minimizing those errors and failing to take responsibility for our actions, attitudes, and the ripple effects of these failings on others individually and collectively. When we hide, tell half-truths, and downplay the seriousness of offenses, we do more damage than “protection.” We create or perpetuate a culture of mistrust, distrust, lack of safety, and facilitate disconnection and disunity in the very place and among the very people that God calls to fellowship, community, and harmony.

And, while we're on the subject: No idea how or when we began this toxic Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) thing and paying out generous severance packages to those who are leaving in disgrace or under a cloud. I hope it stops. This process is not only unhealthy (hiding/masking the truth, adding to the burden of betrayal, using precious budget resources to “pay off” those who have failed in their leadership, etc.), but devalues the faithful administrative assistants, pastors, custodians, and other staff members who leave on good terms without a severance or NDA. Instead of championing and applauding those who finish well, NDAs and severances emphasize the completely wrong things at the expense of truth and integrity and accountability. We are rewarding exactly the wrong behavior. We are sending the wrong message to staff and congregation by continuing to steward our resources in these ways.

In the list of the things the Lord hates, the following are included:

- haughty eyes,
- a lying tongue,
- hands that shed innocent blood,
- a heart that devises wicked schemes,
- feet that are quick to rush into evil,
- a false witness who pours out lies
- and a person who stirs up conflict in the community (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Christian community, by contrast, is about exhorting each other toward love, service, gathering together, being fully committed to Jesus and to one another: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Reflect:

- How does the Proverbs 6 list convict you or remind you of God’s priorities for living in community?
- What reminders in Hebrews 10:24-25 can help create healthy fellowship?



# RIGHT USE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH— PART VIII—IMITATE CHRIST’S EXAMPLE

NOVEMBER 1, 2021



Why does it hurt so much, individually and community-wide, when a church leader fails by abuse of power or betrayal of trust or worse?

Scripture gives us a clue: In Psalm 55, David is desperately pleading with God for relief. He is “distraught.” And why? He says, “If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me, I could hide. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the house of God, as we walked about among the worshipers” (Psalm 55:12-14).

David always seems—in the imprecatory and lament Psalms he pens—to have enemies, to be running from opposition, to need relief and protection from his foes. But, Psalm 55 is particularly poignant in that David has been betrayed not only by a “companion”, a “close friend”, but by a fellow believer who was part of the worshipping community. We, too, often experience that same visceral reaction to a fellow believer who turns against or actively and unkindly opposes us.

The Apostle John reminds us that our fellowship with Jesus and with one another relies on our truthfulness—on living in the light, not in darkness and cover-up: “If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:6-7). When we have been duped, lied to, or made to swallow the impacts of a cover-up, we experience the grief that comes with that betrayal.

Paul pleads with the church in Corinth to stop favoring one leader over another and to cease their infighting: “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10). It’s difficult enough to have “perfect unity”—but when the pastor or church leader has misused his/her position in ways that are rooted in a self-interested drive, narcissism, vanity and the like, and the truth is not told, it becomes ever more complicated for a congregation to find true harmony, as people begin to take sides depending on what version they have been told or choose to believe.

Ultimately, Jesus is our example—in leadership and followership. As Paul exhorts the church in Philippi (and us), he emphasizes choosing humility, mirroring Christ’s servanthood, and setting aside our own selfish ambitions: *“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,*

*being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself*

*by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

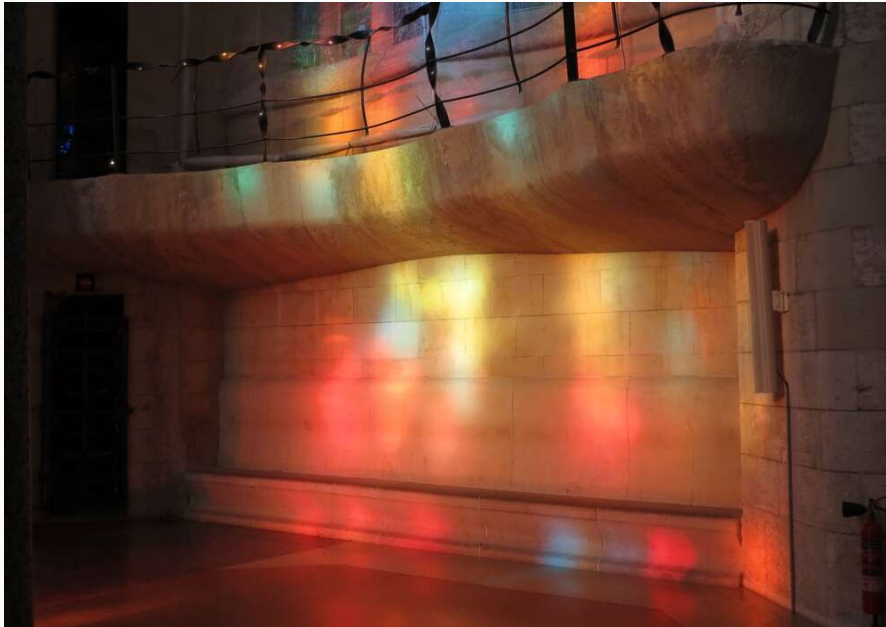
*and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:1-11).*

### **Reflect:**

- How are you contributing to and participating in healthy fellowship and worship with other believers?
- How are you walking “in the light”?
- Are you in danger of favoring a pastor or ministry leader over another? Is there something else you are doing (or not doing) that is contributing to divisions?
- What might “perfect unity” look like in your church?
- Take a moment to pray for that unity today.
- How might you imitate Christ’s example as described by Paul in Philippians 2?

# RIGHT USE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH— PART IX—JESUS' INTENT FOR HIS CHURCH, HIS PEOPLE

NOVEMBER 11, 2021



Continuing to reflect on the question: Why does it hurt so much, individually and community-wide, when a church leader fails by abuse of power or betrayal of trust or worse?

As Jesus prepares for His death and subsequent departure, He prays the following for His disciples (and us as His followers):

- Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.
- Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.
- ...I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.
- My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

- Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.
- My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
- I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.
- I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (John 17:1-26).

Jesus’ intent for us as His disciples is

- To know God, through Jesus, as our primary priority.
- As part of the protection Jesus prays for His disciples, He asks the Father to engender oneness among believers. Somehow, unity and our protection from the evil one are interconnected in some holy way.
- Jesus’ desire for us includes joy—“the full measure” of His own joy—within us, meaning that He intends these instructions to be less onerous and more wonderful.
- He asks God to sanctify (purify, consecrate, make holy) us by the truth of His word. Veracity, integrity, truth-telling are non-negotiables for God.
- When Jesus specifically says He is praying for us (“those who will believe in me”), He asks that ALL OF THEM MAY BE ONE. A oneness that mirrors the inseparable unity of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). He says that this visible, living harmony will be how the world believes Jesus is the Son of God.
- He repeats the prayer that we may be one as God is one—and adds “so that they may be brought to **complete unity**.” Again, He says, in case we missed it—“then the world will know” not only that Jesus came from God but that God loves us as much as He loves His own Son, Jesus.
- Jesus prays that we would be filled with the love that comes from God.

Love. Interconnectedness. Joy. Truth. Oneness. Harmony. Complete Unity. Love.

Jesus’ desire for His Church is that we be a living model of His love to one another and to the world. That we live in stark contrast to worldly factions. That we be Spirit-led and Spirit-filled champions of “complete unity” in our midst. Not uniformity, but in agreement about the important things like Jesus is Lord. About love for each other. About shalom.

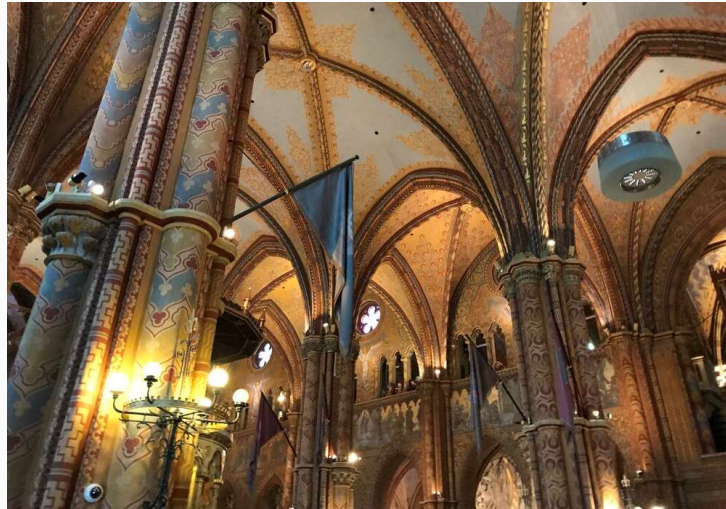
So, when we in our churches experience what feels to be the opposite of this Jesus prayer, we are rightly upset, shocked, feel betrayed, traumatized, etc. If we are “one”, then what happens to anyone in our midst affects and impacts all of us.

**Reflect:**

- Take time to read all of John 17.
- Pause and use it as a prayer—for yourself, for your church, for the global Church.
- Is knowing Jesus your primary priority? How are you maintaining your relationship with Him? In what way/s are you growing in this season?
- Of what significance is church oneness/unity to you?
- What do you think the “full measure” of Jesus joy would be like?
- What recent experience have you had where God seems to be sanctifying/purifying/making you holy through His Word/Truth?
- How might a church that lives out complete unity/harmony be an attractive example to the world? How is the opposite true?
- End with a time of prayer asking God to fill you with His love—to extend to others in your church, your community, the world.

# RIGHT USE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH— PART X—WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE EARLY CHURCH?

NOVEMBER 15, 2021



The pattern of the very early church was described in Acts 2 as “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

Here we see commitments to gathering and learning and sharing and generosity. We see Spirit-empowered gifts at work and genuine risk-taking to ensure needs are met. We see gladness and praise of God, and joy. Growth becomes another hallmark of God’s people gathered in these ways.

Perfect? Not by a long shot. The letters of Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude, and the writer of Hebrews detail missteps, needs for correction, a call to correct theology, and emphasis on healthy practices for life and faith. Issues addressed include disunity, factions, faith and works, inclusion, idolatry, morality, competition, immaturity, false teaching, troublemakers, and the role and health of the church and its leaders.

Although there are various writers and issues addressed in these letters, the overarching theme is always to honest and respectful conversation, mutual submission, good leadership, unity, generous inclusion, accountability, and a posture of learning and growth. We are called to the same today—ultimately “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Ephesians 1:7-10). Always in love.

Some examples of the call to unity in the Body of Christ:

(Unity and Maturity in the Body of Christ) As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.** There is **one** body and **one** Spirit, just as you were called to **one** hope when you were called; **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism; **one** God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:1-6).

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, **so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, **speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work** (Ephesians 4:11-16).

(Closing Appeal for Steadfastness and Unity) Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, **stand firm in the Lord** in this way, dear friends!

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to **be of the same mind in the Lord.** Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life (Philippians 4:1-3).

Therefore, as **God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.**

**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,** giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:12-17).

**May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all** (2 Corinthians 13:14).

James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, **gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed** that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised (Galatians 2:9).

My goal is that they may be **encouraged in heart and united in love**, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order **that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ**, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:2-3).

**Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.** Do not be conceited (Romans 12:16).

“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and **be at peace with each other**” (Mark 9:50—Jesus speaking).

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, **live at peace with everyone** (Romans 12:18).

**Reflect:**

- How can you be “completely humble and gentle”, “patient”, “bearing with one another in love”?
- What is a recent example in your life when you made “every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” with someone in your church community?
- If the ultimate goal of church leadership is “to equip” God’s people “for works of service” “so that the body of Christ may be built up” and we “reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge” of Jesus and “become mature”, how are you as a leader equipping others? How are your leaders equipping you?
- What is a recent example when you spoke “the truth in love”—with the goal of exhorting someone to grow toward maturity in Christ?
- How deeply do you believe that the church (“the whole body”) is made up of people who each (all, everyone) have important “work” to do as we grow and strengthen as a unit—in love?
- What might it look like for all at your church to “be of the same mind in the Lord.” What might it look like to help others get to unity, harmony, and shalom?
- Take a moment to bask in the truth that you are “chosen” by God, “holy and dearly loved.
- How might that truth help you “clothe” yourself with “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience”?
- Is there something that you need to forgive, following the example of Christ, in love? How might forgiveness lead to unity?
- What does it mean to “let the peace of Christ rule in your heart”?
- What does it look like to “be at peace with each other”?

This 10-part series was written and compiled by Shirley Giles Davis, author of the *God. Gifts. You. Your Unique Calling and Design* workbook, *Your Unique Design Class Guide*, *Your Unique Design*



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The original blog posts may be found here:

[ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—PART I—15 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AND YOUR COLLEAGUES](#)

[ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—PART II—SERVING AT THE PLEASURE OF JESUS CHRIST](#)

[ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—PART III—JESUS HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO LEADERS](#)

[ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—PART IV—JESUS NEVER INTENDED HIS CHURCH TO BE LIKE THIS!](#)

[ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—PART V—LEADERSHIP VS. SERVANTSHIP](#)

[RIGHT USE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—PART VI—SERVE, SERVING, SERVANT...](#)

[ABUSE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—PART VII--IT'S NOT ABOUT PERFECTION...](#)

[RIGHT USE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—PART VIII—IMITATE CHRIST'S EXAMPLE](#)

[RIGHT USE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—PART IX—JESUS' INTENT FOR HIS CHURCH, HIS PEOPLE](#)

[RIGHT USE OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—PART X—WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE EARLY CHURCH?](#)

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