



Chapter Eleven

WHO IS FIT TO LEAD?

PLURALITY PRIORITY

When you delegate duties to others, remember to delegate only what you are willing to let go of. And then give the people you delegate the freedom to fail. Don't take back what you have delegated. But teach them when they fail that they need to be quick to learn to make a good second decision. As they learn to do things with excellence, you can delegate more, and do it with confidence.

How do you decide what you are willing to delegate to others? You need to have a clear understanding of your priorities. Your own priorities, not someone else's emergencies, should determine what you do and what you delegate to others. That is what happened in the Jerusalem church.

Luke wonderfully outlined the hierarchy of priorities embraced by the leaders of the early church. The Twelve said,

Acts 6:2-4 (NASB)

²“So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

³Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Notice the three main activities that dominated their energies—prayer, the ministry of the Word of God, and servant ministry—in that order.

Those three activities consumed the apostles' time and efforts, and they are a pattern for church leaders even today. They perfectly outline the main business of the church, and therefore set the agenda for all church leaders. The order is clear. Servant ministry, while crucial, is not to eclipse prayer and the ministry of the Word.

That simple fact seems lost on many these days. Ask the typical pulpit committee what they are looking for in a pastor, and you can practically guarantee that prayer will not be at the top of the list. Even preaching isn't always given a very high priority. Submit a list of candidates to the typical church, and they will probably choose the candidate who is the most affable, gregarious, and sociable—someone who is willing to do lots of visitation and host lots of church socials, rather than a man who devotes himself to prayer and study. Others will look for a man with administrative or entrepreneurial talents, because they think of the church as a secular enterprise. The apostolic priorities have thus been eclipsed by other business in too many churches.



Look at these priorities individually:

Prayer

We're not inclined to think of prayer as work. We tend to think of prayer as inactivity. But it is not. Good praying is hard work, and prayer is the first and most important work of all ministry. All other activities of ministry are utterly futile if not bathed in prayer.

Prayer itself is, after all, an implicit recognition of the sovereignty of God. We know that we cannot change people's hearts, so we pray for God to do it. We know that it is the Lord who adds to His church, so we pray to Him as Lord of the harvest. We know that **“unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain.”** ([Psalm 127:1 NASB](#)).

We can plant, and we can water, but no aspect of ministry can ultimately be fruitful unless God Himself gives the increase (cf. [1 Corinthians 3:6-7](#)).

[1 Corinthians 3:6-7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁶“I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

⁷So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.”

Our efforts can never bear fruit unless they are blessed by God. Jesus said, **“Without Me you can do nothing”** ([John 15:5](#)). Since that is true, isn't it obvious that everything we do ought to be bathed in prayer?

[John 15:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, **for apart from Me you can do nothing.**”

That is why our first and most essential priority is prayer. Paul wrote, **“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men”** ([1 Timothy 2:1 NASB](#), emphasis added).

We are to **“pray without ceasing”** ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)).

We're taught by Scripture to pray earnestly, persistently, frequently, and soberly. Peter said, **“The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer”** ([1 Peter 4:7 NASB](#)). This is the first priority in all our work.

Good praying *is* hard labor—make no mistake about it. It is hard to stay focused. It is no easy task to intercede for others. But the wise leader will not neglect this first order of business. Nothing, no matter how vital it may seem, is more urgent. And therefore we must not let anything else crowd prayer off our already-busy agendas.



My advice is to start each day with a specific time of prayer. Don't let interruptions or appointments distract you from your first business. Go to the Lord when your mind is fresh. Prayer is hard enough work without putting it off until your mind is fatigued. Don't squander your brightest hours doing less-important things.

But don't limit your praying to mornings. “[Pray] with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints” ([Ephesians 6:18 NASB](#)).

The Ministry of the Word

Paul told Timothy, ““Preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” ([2 Timothy 4:2 NASB](#)). This duty, like prayer, is hard work. Devoting oneself to the ministry of the Word means spending time in study. It is a total commitment. “*But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*” ([Acts 6:4 NASB](#), emphasis added).

That may occasionally require the faithful pastor to neglect what seems urgent in order to do what is really essential. That can be difficult, because the demands of ministry and leadership are so great. But we *must* keep this priority straight.

That is precisely why the apostles saw the need to appoint leaders in a support role. The apostles' time was being consumed by legitimate, urgent needs in the church. They were spending so much time serving tables that they were neglecting the more essential, higher priorities of prayer and the ministry of the Word. Something had to change.

Servant Ministry

Notice that the apostles did not regard the task of serving tables as something that was dispensable. They were not willing to leave the distribution of charity undone. And they were not suggesting that waiting tables was beneath them because they had achieved the rank of apostle. But there was too much work for them to do it all without neglecting their more important duties. And so they appointed men in a support role—men who could serve alongside them to meet all these needs.

This is the whole point of servant leadership. We are servants, leading and training other servants; thus, the ministry becomes a self-perpetuating school for servants. Jesus modeled that kind of discipleship during His earthly life, and He always maintained the perfect balance, never neglecting prayer or the ministry of the Word for the sake of meeting mundane needs, but never letting people's needs go unmet.

Following their Lord's own example, the apostles therefore delegated the oversight of the servant ministries to “seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” ([Acts 6:3](#)).



Acts 6:3 (NASB)

³“Therefore, brethren, **select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom**, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

PURITY

Notice that the men chosen to oversee that vital third priority were chosen for their character and reputation, not because of their social stature, their experience in the business world, their raw abilities, or any of the other criteria churches today often employ in selecting leaders. A lowly slave of unimpeachable character is more suitable for spiritual leadership than a business magnate whose integrity is questionable. A man is qualified for this role because of what he *is*, not merely because of what he *does*. The stress is always on character more than ability. Purity, not personality, is the key issue.

Why this high standard? Because whatever the leaders are, the people become. Spiritual leaders set the example for others to follow. As Hosea said, “**Like people, like priest**” ([Hosea 4:9](#)).

Hosea 4:9 (NASB)

⁹“**And it will be, like people, like priest**; So I will punish them for their ways And repay them for their deeds.”

Jesus said, “**Everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher**” ([Luke 6:40](#)). People will not rise above the spiritual level of their leadership.

Luke 6:40 (NASB)

⁴⁰“**A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.**”

The new leaders therefore were to be men of “good reputation” ([Acts 6:3](#)).

Acts 6:3 (NASB)

³“Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of **good reputation**, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

Paul said leaders in the church must have good reputations both inside the church and among unbelievers as well ([1 Timothy 3:7](#)).

1 Timothy 3:7 (NASB)

⁷“**And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.**”