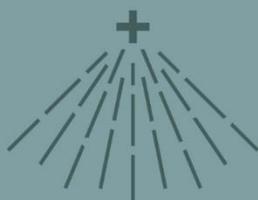




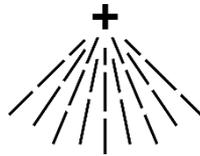
THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

# SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE



SAM KOO

SERVANT  
LEADERSHIP:  
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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
PART I: ENJOYING GOD'S WORD.....	7
PART II: COMMITTING TO GOD'S CHURCH.....	13
PART III: TRUSTING IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE.....	19
CONCLUSION.....	26
END NOTES .....	28



# INTRODUCTION

## ***Leadership and influence.***

When you ask what does leadership mean, what comes to mind?

For me, especially living in Washington D.C., my mind immediately jumps to politics. I think people who write speeches for powerful politicians, appear on news channels, or manage hundreds of people. Some draft bills, create peace treaties with countries around the world, and make decisions that will affect millions of lives. But maybe your mind doesn't go to politicians. You may think of people on social media. In many parts of the world, the title "influencer" carries more weight than a politician or a professor. These leadership examples prove that leadership and influence take many forms—sometimes they look like a stern figure who wields authority and sometimes they look like someone with millions of followers.

But these aren't the only form of leadership. Normal people (normal Christians like you and me!) influence friends and family around us. Christian leadership isn't reserved for the elite. If you're a parent, you have a small (quantity) but very important (quality) influence over those God has given you to care for. You also might be in a leadership position at your church or at work. While it might not be hundreds of people, your role as a Sunday school teacher, or a deacon, or a member forces you to think and care for people under you. Influence may vary in sizes, but its impact is important, whether it's global or personal.

In other words, we all influence. We all lead.

While the answer to "who is a leader?" can look different from person to person, we all know the temptations and pitfalls that follow leaders. The most obvious way to misuse influence is to lead with pride and for self-gain. Pride warps authority. Pride slowly but surely enlarges self-

## FIELD GUIDE

perception and chokes out servant leadership. It takes for self, rather than giving to others; it wounds, rather than heals; it tears down, rather than build up.

Unfortunately, this kind of tragedy doesn't just stay among the worldly leaders. Misuse of authority and proud leaders are not only out there in the secular world, but it also runs rampant in our churches. Pastors and leaders constantly make headlines using their influence for ungodly gains. Not only pews are filled with proud leaders, so are the homes. Abuse is sadly common as spouses or parents misunderstand who they are and misuse the authority that God has given.

None of us want bad leaders over us. Who wants to be coached by being yelled at? Who wants to be taught by a corrupt professor? Who wants to go home to a spouse who don't listen?

What about you? Whether you're a pastor, or a parent, or a president of a company, we all need guidance on how to steward influence, lead without pride, and serve others in humility. We need to know what makes a great leader. So, how can we do that in a way that glorifies God?

Drawing from Bible verses about leadership and examples around me, I want to show you three leadership qualities that characterize Godly leaders. Of course, there are more qualities to be named. But I focus on these three traits of good leaders because these are most apparent in the spiritual leadership I have in my life. These aren't random qualities; I see names and faces of Godly leaders who exemplify with their lives what we're going to discuss.

So what are they? First, we'll see that humble leaders find joy in God, specifically learning about Him in His Word. Next, godly leaders ground themselves and commit to God's church. Lastly, they trust in God's providence in all areas and aspects of life, including suffering.

His Word, His church, and His providence.

This guide isn't based on quick tips or a secular situational leadership model. In fact, there are no quick ways to being a humble leader. A leader is slow-cooked and tested by trials that will fortify them, not only producing tough skin, but also a tender heart. Stewarding influence requires God-

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE**

centered wisdom, environment, and dependency. I hope, by the end of this guide, you can see that stewarding influence and leading without pride doesn't come naturally to us. We can only lead in a Godly way when we enjoy, submit, and trust the Lord.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

1. In what areas are you seeing your influence being exercised?
2. What are some good/bad examples of influence?
3. Before you start, what are some other foundations of godly leadership?

# 1

## ENJOYING GOD'S WORD

What are you enjoying these days?

Recently, I've been enjoying making a good cup of coffee. I boil my water exactly to the desired temperature, drop my new light roast beans into my grinder, and pour the water at the right time and to the right amount. When the cup doesn't turn out to my liking, my wife catches me watching YouTube videos on how to make it better.

But that's not the only thing I enjoy. I love talking about coffee with other people. So, one Saturday, I invited some of my friends to my house and had an informal coffee tasting competition. We showed each other how we make a cup. My friends shared what coffee beans they bought, how they've been brewing their coffee at home, and what kind of flavors they've been able to extract.

Making coffee isn't just about coffee. Yes, I need the caffeine! But what I really appreciate is good craft and building friendships and community by talking about it and enjoying it with others.

So what are you enjoying these days? This is important because what we enjoy *shows* and *shapes* who we are. Just like a well-brewed cup shows my appreciation for good taste and craft, what you enjoy shows what you appreciate and value. Maybe you like different types of food and that points to your appreciation for diversity and learning about different cultures. And like how good coffee shapes me to find opportunities to talk and share, the thing that you admire will shape your money, time, and day-to-day.

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE**

So, how does this relate to stewarding influence? A constant threat for those who hold leadership responsibility is falling in love with the fact that we indeed have influence over others! The temptation is both common and serious. It's common because we all want to be in control. We want to be recognized. We all want to be the person who others come to listen to. But it's also serious because loving influence for itself ultimately blinds us. It leads to dangerous stewardship and, if unchecked, we end up using our influence to control, manipulate, and harm those under us.

This temptation characterized the sinful religious leaders during Jesus's days, providing us with negative leadership examples to avoid.

They [the Pharisees] do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! (Matthew 23:5-7, 23-24).

If we want to steward our influence in a Godly manner and practice true Christian leadership, we need to enjoy something bigger than ourselves. We need our tastebuds changed so that we crave the joy that comes from outside of us. And the primary source of joy is God's Word. We can lead well by being reminded of the joy that comes from belonging to Christ. We fight pride as the Scripture confronts us and we submit to it. That's what we'll discuss in the rest of the chapter: we enjoy God's Word as we study and submit to it.

### ***Enjoying God's Word as we study***

First, studying God's Word increases our joy in it. Whether it's gaining new insights that we haven't seen before or being reminded of the truth we've long known, studying God's Word is the key that unlocks the joy that's hidden in the pages of Scripture. But what joys are relevant to humble leadership and leading without pride?

## FIELD GUIDE

As we study the Scriptures, we are especially reminded that we are righteous and justified because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. No work – including possessing impressive leadership qualities or humility before others – can save us from our sins. “You are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift – not from works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Not only are we declared righteous before God the Judge, we're adopted into the family of God the Father. One pastor said, “When God hits the gavel to acquit you, he also hands you an adoption paper to become his child.” Paul tells us that the doctrine of adoption is a display of God's eternal and voluntary love for us. We didn't do anything to deserve it but God “predestined us” to be his children “according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:5-6). Page after page, the Bible speaks of God's infinite, vast, and rich mercy to sinners like us. Even though we were dead in our trespasses and sins, God saved us because He loves us.

So what do justification and adoption have to do with spiritual leadership and pride? Both doctrines wipe away any kind of pride within us because it reminds us that we didn't do anything to deserve being called children of God. We have the joy in knowing that our standing and status in Christ is freely given to us because of His abundant love for us. And this joy leads to humility because it shows that the greatest dilemma – our need to be forgiven of our sins – has been taken care of.

At the same time, these doctrines also strengthen us as leaders to withstand both praises and criticisms. How? Because they remind us that we have been accepted and validated by the God of the universe. If we wish to not be swayed by the opinions of men, we must stand on the firm foundations of God's Word, understanding the vital connection between the Bible and leadership. Men's praises are addictive. When it's unchecked, you'll live to please men, not God. What we need, then, is to remember that what God says about us is what's most important.

When the Bible lays out clearly the greatest news that we are justified and adopted by God, the right response is to revel. I wonder if you know people who revel at God's good news? Even though they are leaders, what matters most to them is not what others think but ultimately what God thinks about them. They are both so humbled and joyous because of the

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE

truth of the gospel experienced in their lives that they're able to receive criticism and praise. They are able to steward influence well, exemplifying Godly leadership, because their identity is not in what they do, but who they are.

While studying the Scriptures can offer us joy, there's another step that we can take in experiencing fuller joy. If we want to be truly captured by God's Word, not only should we study it, but we should also submit to it. This is a consistent theme when we look at leadership in the Bible.

### ***Enjoying God's Word as we submit***

For most people, enjoyment and submission don't usually go together. How can one feel free and happy if you're under someone else's authority? Submission, if anything, feels like it hinders and prevents joy. But in Christian leadership, we know that true joy doesn't come from being free from any authority; it only comes through submission to what God says. In other words, submitting to Scripture is the only way to the joy that allows us to lead others well, truly leading by example. Consider Psalms 1–2. Scholars often note that these two psalms should be read together<sup>1</sup> and while there are many reasons for it, one worth noting is the way to true happiness and blessing is by meditating on the instruction of the LORD *and* submitting to the Son (Psalm 1:1-2, 2:12).

And this happiness isn't only about that we'll experience in heaven. No, it can be experienced right now. Following Jesus's words and submitting to them will lead to joy *today* as we experience his goodness in both blessing us or sustaining us in our trials. John Webster writes, "God's law is... God nurturing us by educating us into the true form of human flourishing. If we would be, and if we would flourish, this is what it means to live joyfully from, with, and under God"<sup>2</sup>

And who is this God that we're submitting under? He isn't some distant figure that tells us what to do. He ultimately shows us how to submit to His Word as he condescended to take on a human flesh. We submit to Jesus as a servant leader, who came "not to be served but to serve" by ultimately giving up his life for sinners like us. We serve Him, who condescended to

## FIELD GUIDE

us “by assuming the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7), the perfect model of Biblical servant leadership. We can be sure that there is joy in obeying God’s Word as Christ himself submitted to his Father’s will, leading the way for us.

Were you surprised as you read this section? “I thought this was going to be about servant leadership examples, not the Bible and the gospel.” “I know those are important but tell me how to be a good leader at church or at home!” Too many of us are tempted to think that we can learn more about what makes a great leader, leadership skills, church dynamics, and team management in secular books. There is some truth in that idea. We need good books on those topics, and I even hope this booklet will be helpful for you!

But, in Psalm 119, the writer declares that he has more wisdom than his enemies, and more insight than his teachers because he meditates on Yahweh’s instructions (Psalm 119:98-99). And what were those instructions? Most likely, the instructions that he’s referring to were reminders of who God is, who they were as his covenant people, and what happens when they obey his commands. The Psalmist was more concerned about the link between the Bible and leadership—what God had to say—rather than anyone else.

We should also acknowledge that the Scriptures also teach us about faith in leadership, not first by telling us the practical side of the subject but by reminding us of our identity. Stewarding Influence in leadership well and leading with humility is a result, first and foremost, of spiritual growth, not skill management. The Scriptures remind us to soak and revel in the eternal joy in the gospel that shows and shapes us to be children of God. That joy, and only that joy, is the foundation of the humble and influential leader.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

1. Where is your source of joy? Has it been something that you do or where you’re found? (Luke 10:20)
2. What have you been learning about God and yourself in the Word and how has that been affecting how you influence those around you?

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE**

3. What has God been convicting or correcting you and how has that been affecting how you influence those around you?
4. What other doctrines can help you lead those under you? What about the doctrine of image of God? Or the doctrine of sin?

## 2

# COMMITTING TO GOD'S CHURCH

There are three people that I want you to meet.

First is John. He follows Jesus but he's not really into organized religion. He thinks church leadership roles always end up abusing their authority. So, John feels he worships God best by going for a hike on Sunday.

Next is Leann. She's fine with going to church, but she rather than commit to one, hops from church to church every week. She's at First Baptist Church for a little bit and then starts attending Grace Calvary for a while. Leann is at church every Sunday. The only problem is that it's a different church every time.

Lastly, there's Matt. Matt loves the preaching at his church, but tends to slip out right afterward. He doesn't feel like he needs to connect with the people there. Why should he? Isn't the Bible and preaching the most important thing about being a Christian? And since he enjoys the preaching, he never really thought about joining as a member. What's the point in that? These attitudes reveal a misunderstanding of the vital importance of leadership in church.

What do these three people have in common? To begin with, we trust that they're genuine Christians. All three want to follow and love Jesus. And yet, another similarity between them is that their attempt to follow Jesus is disconnected with the local church. Their version of Christianity is more individualistic than the picture offered us in Scripture.

But how does the Bible view Christian living? From the Old Testament to the New, when God saves an individual, He saves them into a people. Faith is always personal, but never private. The Christian life isn't just about you

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE**

and Jesus; it's about locking arms with other believers. So whether you're a leader or not, God commands all Christians to be a part of a church, integrating their faith and leadership within a community.

But what does joining a church have to do with stewarding influence? In this section, I will attempt to show that the church fosters healthy leadership because the church is where healthy leadership is publicly displayed. Specifically, we'll see that a local church is a place where humble leadership is taught and modeled. I hope by the end of this section, you'll see that God's church is important in cultivating and sustaining the Christian leadership that bears the fruit of the Spirit.

### ***Leadership Taught***

What do I mean that healthy leadership is taught in a local church? Well, I mean that a local church is precisely where Christians disciple one another by becoming accountable for the other person's spiritual health which includes how you steward influence. This is the essence of accountability in leadership. The way that you lead—whether in your family, business, or school—now become open books for others to help. Biblical leadership is often taught and corrected in church membership.

Here's what one pastor says about membership: "Biblical membership means taking responsibility. It comes from our mutual obligations as spelled out in all of Scripture's 'one another' passages—love one another, serve one another, encourage one another."<sup>3</sup>

People often see this responsibility as involving meaningful relationships where people ask good spiritual questions to other members of the church. An overlooked responsibility, though, is not only asking questions, but being truthful and open about your life. Opening up your life and inviting accountability in a local church is one of the best indicators that you are growing in leadership and humility. This practically looks like developing friendships that create opportunities for encouragement and criticism.

I remember going out for lunch with Nate from church. Nate had been observing how I parent, work, and live out my life as a Christian and I trust him deeply to speak into my life with love. Trust in leadership—even peer

## FIELD GUIDE

leadership—is built on this kind of vulnerability. And I asked him, “Is there any area that you see me needing to grow?” Nate thought for a few minutes and offered a correction. He shared how he’s seen me handle sensitive information in a way that could’ve been interpreted as gossiping. Nate was kind and, more importantly, he was right. I immediately saw what he was talking about and agreed—I didn’t steward private information well.

Do you have a friend like Nate? A real leader who isn’t afraid to speak the truth?

Nate was keeping the church covenant that he and I signed when we joined our church as members. If you want to be a member at my church, you’ll have to sign that same church covenant. One of the promises that I made with all my church members is “we will exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require.” Church membership gives you an opportunity to teach and learn from others how to lead. It creates space for others to speak into your life.

So, where do you hear feedback in your life? The more important question might be, *are you* hearing any feedback in your life? Are you closed off from hearing how you’re doing as a father or a husband? Do you have older people who you can go to with questions and for correction? How do you respond when someone corrects you? Is it defensiveness or excuses? Not only is it widely accepted by secular leaders that constructive criticism is important, but also in God’s Word. The book of Proverbs comments, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:6).

Do you have anyone that can be faithful to you by speaking the truth? If you want to demonstrate leadership and wish to be a good one, this is a must! If you don’t have anyone speaking the truth, then pray! Pray that the Lord would bring someone into your life that would love and care for you by telling you the truth. It might be easier for you to not have someone giving you feedback for how you lead at home, but how would you know that you’re doing it right if there’s no one to observe and comment? After you pray, ask. Ask your pastor to disciple you. Ask your pastor if they know of anyone who wants to disciple others. Seek out mentorship in leadership.

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE

One of the dangerous lies that we can believe about ourselves is that we don't need accountability, that we are wise and smart enough to do things on our own. But as Proverbs warns, "Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). The destruction might not immediately arrive, but it might be on its way.

Not only is leadership taught in the church, it's also modeled in it through consistent leadership modeling.

### ***Leadership modeled***

The Apostle Paul was not proud or egotistical when he told his friends to imitate him (1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1; Philippians 3:17). God designed the Christian life in such a way where mature believers are meant to be put on display and held up as a leadership model. Of course, Jesus as a leader is the greatest example that we should follow. But the Bible also exhorts Christians to look up to the leaders, especially elders, for examples of what a Godly, mature, and steadfast walk looks like. They demonstrate faithful leadership, embodying the truth that a leader is one who knows the way and walks in it.

Currently, authority in leadership (and those who have authority) is met with skepticism and resistance. In part, it makes sense. Abuses run rampant. The injustice caused by those who are supposed to protect and care is especially grievous and damaging. Yet, the answer to bad authority isn't no authority but good authority.<sup>4</sup> We need to see good authority exercised and exemplified.

If you belong to a local church, one of the examples that God gives to you is your pastor(s). Your spiritual leader is supposed to show what maturity and Godliness looks like. You should be able to point to your pastor and say, "I want to be like him. I want to lead a family/a church like he does." I don't know about you, but I'm blessed to have my pastors. They shepherd, lead, and influence in a way that's pleasing to the Lord. Here are some servant leadership examples and ways that I've seen them lead:

### ***Distributing Influence: Instead of hoarding influence, my pastors distribute it.***

- They are generous with giving other guys teaching opportunities.

## FIELD GUIDE

- They constantly remind the men in the congregation that they must steward their **influence through leadership** by discipling other men, serving the family, and taking opportunities to teach.
- The pastors deliberately seek out men to raise up as other elders in the church. They will ask difficult questions like how their relationship with others are going, how they're treating their family, what sins have we confessed this week, etc.
- The pastors trust the members to do the work of the ministry. This means that they have oversight, but they don't micromanage people.

### ***Building Up: The pastors use their leadership in church to encourage the body.***

- They use their leadership to highlight the gospel. Their teachings, encouragements, and corrections all flow out of the Word of Christ dwelling richly in them.
- They are slow to use their preferences as the standard, and quick to use the Bible to set the record straight.
- The pastors spend enormous amount of time in elders meetings praying for various members. They pray for the marriages, unity among the members, and weak and vulnerable sheep that God would strengthen and protect them.
- They disciple and counsel members in the church, before or after their work hours.

### ***Submits to other authorities***

- The pastors submit to other pastors. This means that they are content when they lose votes during elders meeting, demonstrating leadership and humility.
- Because the pastors know that they are also under the congregation's authority, they do their due diligence in preparing for the members meeting to present to the congregation how they should think and vote.
- The pastors are committed to weekly "service reviews" where other pastoral staff and lay members can offer godly encouragements and godly criticisms of what they taught on Sunday.

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE**

- My senior pastor involves a group of staff members to decide what other preaching opportunities he should consider in the future (other churches, conferences, etc.). He submits to other staff/pastors by encouraging them to give their thoughts on if it's wise to miss Sundays.

These are few ways that I've seen Godly pastors around me exercise traits of good leaders well. And, by God's grace, it's bearing much fruit. It's bearing fruit in my life as I sit under this leadership that equips and models for me what I should be like at home and work. It's bearing fruit in the lives of others, as I get together with friends and share what we're learning from church. Our conversation not only revolves around what we're learning, but also who we're learning from. The elders are live motion pictures of Biblical servant leadership and what humility should look like in all areas of life. As they steward their influence well, so are we called to learn and imitate them.

If you want to lead in humility, commit yourself to a local church.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

1. Do you have someone in your life that can encourage and teach Godly leadership?
2. How have you seen your church leaders model godly leadership?
3. Do you open up yourself to godly criticism? If not, how can you do so this week?

# 3

## TRUSTING IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

My first ministry job was a wake-up call.

I was newly married and about to be done with my classes in seminary. My wife and I were at a great church near our home and felt like we were ready to fly the nest. After all, I've been preparing the last four years to be a pastor! Through friends, I found out about an exciting opportunity that, after many conversations, my wife and I both felt great about. It felt like a perfect role at a great church, an amazing city to start a family, and a good pastor to learn from and work with.

But, soon after we got there, it started to unravel. Miscommunication and insecurities took over. Pride and blame came next. And finally, accusations and resignations arrived.

I was out of work in less than a year.

We sold a bunch of newlyweds stuff that we bought, hoping that we would be here for a long time. And with our 1-month-old firstborn and a trunk full of books and clothes, I drove back to my in-laws. What I was hoping to be a long-term place of service ended up being more like a flameout.

A wave of different emotions came. At the time, I was frustrated, disappointed, ashamed, and anxious, just to name a few. *"How could this happen to me? I deserve better"*

But after almost 5 years, I look back with thankfulness. You might think it's strange that a shattered dream and failed ministry attempt would produce gratitude. Bitterness or resentment seem more natural. And I don't mean to say that I was perfect. I wish I was more patient, forgiving, and humble, both during and after what happened. But I look back with thankfulness

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE**

because I can see some of the things that God has done for me through that experience.

God strengthened my marriage, teaching me about leadership in the home. There's nothing that bolsters and fortifies marriages than going through trials together, and our trial made us cherish and trust one another even more. He also sustained my faith. The promises of God shine the brightest in dark clouds and there was nothing that was more comforting than knowing that He sees and knows what I'm going through. This trial was a crucible for faithful leadership. He sanctified my heart. Not only did I learn more about God, I learned more about myself. There's nothing more humbling than planning your life and being totally redirected. I've seen the ugly side of me and saw how God was exposing my sins to correct me.

I'm also thankful because I would not be where I am today if it weren't for that experience. We wouldn't have moved to Washington, D.C., moved to a great church, met friends who we quickly bonded with, sat under good preaching and leadership, and started working at a church that I love.

My first ministry job was a wake-up call. I didn't know what God was doing at the moment. Yet, as time went on, God was quietly and purposefully working in me, through me, and for me in ways that I wasn't aware of. He used people and situations to sanctify and humble me. God woke me up to show me his providence.

In the previous sections, we saw different ways we can grow in stewarding our leadership and influence. Whether that influence is in a political party or in the pews, all Christians mature in how they lead with humility by enjoying God's Word and committing to God's church. We'll discuss in this chapter another ingredient that makes a humble leader. A leader is ever so humble only by trusting that God has ordained everything in their lives, including leadership and influence. Knowing that whatever they have—the good and the bad, the small and the big—are all from the hands of our loving Father. This is the key to Humble leadership.

Before we dive in, we need to have a think about what providence actually is. This concept is foundational to Godly leadership. There are many

## FIELD GUIDE

helpful definitions that theologians have come up with. Here's one from the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. God's providence is his almighty and ever present power, whereby, as with his hand, he still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.

You really can't define it better than that! But let's note a couple of things. First, God's providence is active. His "almighty and ever-present power" doesn't set the world in motion and then back off. Instead, God "still upholds" and "governs" the world as we move and live. Even while we're sleeping, he is working.

Second, God's providence is all-encompassing. God upholds and governs *all* things, whether it's animate creatures like ravens and mountain goats or inanimate things like seaweed or stars. God does not lose sight of any of them. No matter what they are and where they are, God's providence reaches to all things in the universe. Nothing or no one is outside of his control.

Third, God's providence is ongoing. Notice how God's providence is active and present in both the good and bad seasons. Both rain and drought; fruitful and barren; health and sickness; riches and poverty. God isn't in control only when things are going well. No, both good and bad are from God.

Lastly, God's providence is affectionate. In the beginning and end, God's providence is described as being swayed by his "hand" There is something personal about using your hand, rather than a blunt instrument. You can control with a rod or rule by a sword. But God's rule is with his hand. And not only is it described as his hand, but as his "fatherly" hand. Whatever God ordains in our lives, it only comes from and through his fatherly affection and care for us as his children. God's providence is what the father does for the good of his children. Jesus is the leader who perfectly trusted this fatherly hand.

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE**

God's providence is active, all-encompassing, ongoing, and affectionate. How does that apply to our topic and our understanding of what do you mean by leadership?

### ***Providence in People***

If we believe that God is in control, we should also trust that God placed specific people in our lives. From the earliest days of our lives to today, God governed and is still governing all of us in such a way that's purposeful. This truth is vital for understanding our leadership and influence.

This has been an ongoing truth that I need to remind myself of as I parent my children. Taking care of kids can be tiring and burdensome. Sometimes, you have to stay up all night. Sometimes they get hurt and totally disrupt your day because you have to go to the emergency room! It's easy to think that parenting slows you down or prevents you from taking advantage of other opportunities. But the doctrine of providence reminds us that God has placed our kids in our lives for a reason. Mainly, it's to sanctify us. Parenting is a high leadership responsibility that quickly exposes the dark areas of our lives and helps us realize that we're less patient and less gentle than we thought we were. We're also made aware of the fact that we're often weak and fickle while God is our steady and perfect heavenly father who leads us for our good and his glory.

What about those who are influenced by us? This brings us to leadership in the workplace. Your coworker might be contrarians, or hard to work with, or not easy to get along with. They might even slander or undermine your authority. You might feel pricked and annoyed at those who you are called to manage. Or what about a member of your church? I know we're called to love our brothers and sisters... but sometimes they get on your nerves. They might disagree with you on politics, education, or social issues which have them feeling more like enemies than siblings. But even they are sovereignly placed in our lives by God. He knows what he's doing and he does it for our good.

Trusting in God's providence will affect how we lead others and dictates our faith in leadership. We are less likely to see them as problems, but more as means that God is using to make us more like Jesus. We lead with

## FIELD GUIDE

humility and love, trusting that God has placed them under our care, not only for our sake, but for their sake too. As we are tempted to complain about certain people in our lives, we can remind ourselves that God “governs” all things in this world as to mature us and help us grow. Providence calls for trust and trust results in humility.

### ***Providence in Situations***

God’s providence not only includes relationships but also situations. Like we saw in our definition of providence, both the good and the bad is under the umbrella of God’s sovereign control. You might be thriving at your work; your high performance is being acknowledged and praised by your superiors or you’re really liked by your coworkers. Or your home might not be a place of comfort and peace; your marriage might be in a rut or you’re really at your wits end when it comes to parenting. Whatever situation you might be in, the Lord hasn’t abandoned you or lost control. He knows exactly what He’s doing.

Missionaries don’t often have the easiest life. Adoniram Judson, a missionary to Burma, certainly didn’t have it easy. He lived a God-glorifying and devoted life, translating the Bible into the Burmese language, planting churches, sharing the good news with all classes of people—a true example of faith and leadership. But his life was full of misery and death. He lost multiple children to disease. He even lost his beloved wife, Ann, who traveled to Myanmar and took care of Judson while he was wrongly imprisoned for many years. To make matters worse, he preached for six years before he finally saw his first convert.

Pastors like Charles Spurgeon suffered too. Not only was he known as a lion in the pulpit—a powerful spiritual leader—but he was also public about his depression that sometimes crippled him from his ministry and cast a dark shadow on his life. The chronic illness that he endured, as well as the infamous Surrey Gardens disaster that killed 7 people, made him acutely aware that, though God was in control, he doesn’t always remove suffering from the lives of his people.

Charles Spurgeon once preached on God’s providence from the book of Ezekiel. Spurgeon likened God’s providence to a wheel. Just as different parts of the wheel are moving up and down, changing positions, not

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP: LEADING WITHOUT PRIDE

knowing when it will be up or down again, so it will be with different seasons in life. Some will be better than others. Some seasons will be defined by rain, and some will be by drought.

He says, offering a perspective that helps us demonstrate leadership even when life feels unstable:

You know that, in a wheel, there is one portion that never turns round, and that is the axle. So, in God's providence, there is an axle which never moves. Christian, here is a sweet thought for thee! Thy state is ever changing; sometimes thou art exalted, and sometimes depressed; yet, there is an unmoving point in thy state. What is this axle? What is the pivot upon which all the machinery revolves: It is the axle of God's everlasting love towards his covenant people. The exterior of the wheel is changing, but the center stands for ever fixed. Other things may move, but God's love never moves, it is the axle of the wheel; and this is another reason why Providence should be compared to a wheel.<sup>5</sup>

During moments of trials, leaning into pride will make you feel like you deserve better but you're getting the worst. You'll feel like you deserve friendlier coworkers, or more obedient children, or a better spouse. Instead, you feel like you're stuck with what you have. Pride will blindfold you and let doubt creep in and prevent you from seeing who God is and what He is doing.

But trusting in God's providence turns your gaze upward. While trials themselves might not disappear, you see that suffering comes with affection and purpose – a loving hand of God that means to do good in you. This perspective is central to understanding Jesus and leadership; He endured the cross for the joy set before Him, trusting the Father's plan perfectly.

And trusting, not rejecting, God also enables and strengthens us to equip others. It instills humility that leaders need in order to love and serve the people around them. Or it causes us to be more compassionate—one of the vital 10 characteristics of servant leadership—giving us new language

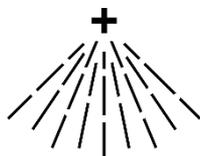
## FIELD GUIDE

to speak sympathetically. By doing so, we emulate the leadership traits of Jesus, who always led with compassion and dependence on the Father.

What situation are you in? And how are you responding to the situation? Turn your eyes upwards to God the Father who, in his providence, loves you and trust that he is sanctifying you in the midst of your situation. And let this trust in God turn to love for others. Remember that everything in your life is appointed by the Father's hand. His eyes are not off of you. He is for you.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

1. How has trusting in God's providence looked like in your life?
2. In what ways are you tempted to treat people and situations when you don't remember God's sovereignty?
3. What are some lessons that God has revealed to you after trials? Can you think of any trials that have been wasted?



## CONCLUSION

Humble leadership first begins by delighting in God's Word. Pride can't root itself in God's Word. Rather, in the soil of God's Word, humility is planted and grown. When we delight and meditate on the Scriptures, we remember that we are made for His glory, and that our joy ultimately comes from being reconciled to him. Christian leadership marked by humility also requires committing to His Church. God's Church is the gym where Christians see faithful leadership practiced and can imitate healthy leaders. Finally, right stewardship of influence requires trusting God's providence in every circumstance. We're able to correctly steward our influence through leadership if only we acknowledge that it was given for our good by a sovereign God.

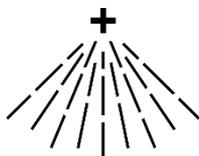
These truths remind us that humility is not weakness but strength rooted in dependence on Christ. It's God's Word, God's church, and God's providence. When we lead from this posture, our influence becomes life-giving rather than self-serving. It brings life and flourishing to those who relate to us, work for us, listen to us, and obey us. Pastors and parents, you especially carry a unique authority that requires stewardship, balancing leadership in the home and ministry. How are you handling it? Is your leadership marked by humility or by arrogance? Do you listen to others or only listen to yourself?

How would you describe Biblical servant leadership? What does stewarding authority and influence for others look like? It looks like love—love that pours itself out for others. This is the heart behind the best verses about servant leadership. Apostle Paul describes, "Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things,

## FIELD GUIDE

believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

May we strive to be leaders who reflect the character of Jesus—the One who came not to be served but to serve—embodying true Godly leadership so that those under our care see Him, not us, as the ultimate source of hope and joy.



## END NOTES

1. See Christopher Ash, *The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary*, II.5-6.
2. John Webster, *Christ Our Salvation: Expositions and Proclamations*, ed. Daniel J. Bush (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 21.
3. Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?*, 98
4. See *Authority* by Jonathan Leeman
5. <https://archive.spurgeon.org/sermons/3114.php>



THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

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