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## Delegation: An Introduction

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Leadership is not easy--and yet it is a great privilege to be called by God to serve in this way. The Bible comments on leadership in several different ways and so we know just from the Bible that leadership can be complicated and it takes years to learn to lead well. One of the many responsibilities of leaders in the church is delegation.

## Delegation: What Exactly Is It?

A very simple definition is "giving some work to another to do." A less simple definition is "assigning or commissioning responsibility for a particular role, or the completion of a task, to another while retaining ultimate responsibility."

- The task may be large (for example, organizing a special program in the life of the church) or small (for example, helping clean up the mess after a church meal); it may be one task or many.
- The role may be large (for example, leadership of the church's youth ministry) or small (for example, being in charge of the parking of motorbikes each Sunday); it may be long-term (years) or short-term (less than a day); it may be for a high level or low-level position.
- The role may involve authority to act as a representative of another.
- It usually involves devolution of power and authority to someone lower down the church or organization.
- It requires trusting others with the responsibilities involved.
- Delegation always includes accountability. The leader retains final authority and so others should report to him or her from time to time.
- Delegation must include training, support, and supervision, as well as the provision of the resources needed to fulfil what is required.
- Delegation at its best involves increasing freedom and responsibility over time as the wisdom and abilities of others increases. Ideally, others will one day be able to do all that you do-and do it even better than you do!


## Delegation: Is It Biblical?

The short answer is a strong "YES!" Some examples for you to explore:

- Check out Exodus 18:13-27. Moses delegated responsibility to the elders for many of the decisions that needed to be made.
- Note the way Jesus appointed others to both large and small responsibilities. There are lots of examples through the Gospels, not just in sending out the disciples on mission journeys but also in the small practical arrangements of daily living.
- Starting in Acts 6:1-7, we see several examples of delegation in the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 6 is not just an example of delegation. It also demonstrates that there are priorities for leaders, and to be free to focus on these, leaders must hand over responsibility for other things to other people in the church. Note also that those who were delegated a task needed to be qualified to handle it.
- Paul delegated responsibility to Silas, Timothy, Titus, Tychicus, Epaphras, Epaphroditus, Onesimus and Philemon,

Erastus, and no doubt others not named. In fact, the pastoral letters could be subtitled "Delegated Responsibilities." For example, in 2 Timothy $2: 2$, training is essential so that delegation can be practiced so that more and more people are able to teach others.
Another way of addressing the question about delegation in the Bible is to ask this question; "Is it possible to have a church that follows Biblical instructions for church life and ministry without delegation?" The answer is a strong; "NO!" A number of passages make it very clear that church leaders must delegate to others.

- Paul describes the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians $12 . \mathrm{He}$ leaves no doubt that for the body to function, every member needs to do what it is equipped to do: toes must function as toes, lungs as lungs, arms as arms, and so on. If just one part of the body does not function as it is designed to do, then the whole body is affected. In other words, each member of the church has a role in the church. And the leaders must delegate responsibility to others to ensure each one is involved in accordance with his or her gift for serving the church. If there is no delegation, the church will fail to operate in accordance with God's instructions for the church to be like a body.
- Notice the verse immediately after the list of gifts for ministry in Ephesians 4:11. Paul immediately says that these gifts are so that others might be trained for ministry so that the whole body can be involved in the work of the church. People are not to be trained (prepared and equipped) so that they can then do nothing! The next step after training is delegation of responsibility for an area of ministry. Sometimes the delegation may happen before or during training-there is no fixed way these things need to happen just as long as everyone in the church is involved in serving.
- Recurringly, the apostles urge ALL in the church to love and serve others. This can only happen effectively when the leaders regularly appoint others to the many roles that need to be filled. Sometimes people will volunteer, but mostly
people will wait until the leaders invite others to be involved and assign each one to a particular responsibility in the church. This is what delegation is all about.
So in the Bible, both by example and by instruction, delegation is highly valued and strongly encouraged. In fact, as I have already written, delegation is totally necessary to have a church that fulfils what God wants in every church.


## Delegation: What Happens if Leaders Do Not Practice It?

Here are some of the consequences of leaders failing to practice delegation routinely:

- The leader will have far too much to do, much more than she can do in the available time. Eventually she will become very weary, frustrated, disillusioned and discouraged-and probably give up.
- The leader will have to do things that he is not qualified to do; nor gifted nor skilled to do. And therefore these things will not be done very well and everyone will get frustrated.
- Many important things will be neglected. They are not done because the leader is too busy and has no time. Things such as evangelism, teaching and training in discipleship, training others for ministry and good works, caring for and pastoring ALL the people in the church or organization, developing the organization of the church.
- Church members will either become frustrated (as they would like to help and be involved but are not allowed) or they will find it easy to remain lazy, disinterested and lukewarm.
- Church members will lack opportunities and experience to learn new roles, develop new abilities, grow into leadership, increase in Christian maturity, and understand how to make wise leadership decisions.
- Everyone will be disobedient to the scriptures. Leaders will not be doing what scripture requires: delegating responsibilities and ensuring as best they can that the church
practices every-member ministry. Group members will be prevented from doing what God has called them to.
- The church as a body will remain immature and not built up into the vision for the body outlined by Paul.
- God's glory will be limited in that his glory (for example wisdom, Eph $3: 10$ ) is to be revealed in the life of the church as the body of Christ functions as he designed-including in every-member ministry.


## Delegation: What Happens if Leaders Do Practice Delegation?

Here are many of the advantages of leaders routinely practicing delegation:

- The work is shared among many more people and so everyone is less likely to be overworked and tired, because delegation results in a more even and fair distribution of work amongst the whole body.
- The more the leader delegates, the more he is free to focus on other priorities such as teaching, training and prayer, coordinating the work of others so that each one is able to be helpful for the others, leading the church with vision rather than just organizing lots of things.
- If leaders both delegate and then coordinate the many things people are doing, there will be increased efficiency and much more will be achieved.
- Everyone is able to reach up to higher levels of responsibility, and so each one has the possibility of developing their abilities. The leader rises up to a higher role (coordination, leadership, and training rather than lots of smaller roles) and this creates space for others to take on greater responsibility and develop further in their skills, wisdom, and leadership. Delegation helps produce the best people have to offer-it enables people to move towards their full potential.
- The Holy Spirit makes good use of such experience to increase our maturity and develop our gifts for ministry and
leadership. Without delegation, the every-member ministry of the body of Christ is not possible.
- As more people are able to take on increased responsibilities, their motivation for the church and to serve in the church increases.
- Delegation gives opportunity for people to be involved in more complex and difficult decision making, which increases their wisdom and leadership ability.
- Delegation strengthens the relationships between leaders and others, as delegation only works if leaders spend time supporting those to whom work or ministry has been delegated.
- Delegation requires the setting of standards and expectations, which in turn increases the level at which people complete their work or ministry.
- Delegation is essential for increasing the body-like functioning of the church, and this pleases God.
- Delegation reveals the wisdom and power of God in that it proves his ways are best and he is powerful enough to grow gifts for ministry in every single Christian.
- Delegation only works if the people of God have a longing for unity because delegation needs much cooperation and coordination. So delegation facilitates much stronger expressions of unity.


## Delegation: How Can I Learn How to Delegate?

I started learning about how to delegate when I was still a teenager. But I find that I still have lots to learn. I still make mistakes. Some of these mistakes are:

- Not being clear enough in my explanations to others as to what I want them to achieve or do.
- Asking too much of people: giving them more responsibility than they are ready to handle.
- Blaming others when they don't do very well when really it is my own fault for either asking them to do more than they
were able, or for not providing sufficient guidance, training, or support.
- Not spending enough time with people to encourage them and to help them increase in their abilities.
- Interfering too much by giving responsibility to others and then taking the responsibility away from them by telling them what to do.
- Expecting others to do things in exactly the same way I do! It never works out this way because people always do things in ways that are unique to them.
But even if I make many mistakes, I need to keep on learning how to improve.

The best way to learn how to delegate is to start delegating! You can approach this in two ways: start with the people or start with the needs.

1. Consider the people in the church and ask how each one could be involved. What responsibility can be given to each person that she would be able to handle with sufficient training and support from the leaders'?
2. What are the needs in the life of the church for which people are needed to take responsibility? Who can be assigned to meet these needs?
You won't be able to cope with all the people and all the needs at the same time. In the average church, working through all the needs and all the people would take months at least. Often you will find you just don't know yet what would be best for some people; and often you will not be able to find anyone who can be asked to deal with a particular need.

But please do not avoid delegation because it is difficult or takes a long time-or because you might make some mistakes. Remember, we must delegate if we are to have churches that are healthy and strong. We must delegate if we are to have churches that obey the instructions of God for church life and ministry.

## Delegation: What Do You Know Already?

Here's a simple exercise to help you to think about delegation and learn more about it. It is based upon the idea that everyone who is likely to read this article has already been delegated some responsibilities.

- Think about those times when you were delegated a responsibility by a leader. This could be just one example that you remember well or a time when you served under a leader who often delegated work and responsibility to you.
- Describe just one or two things that your leader or manager did in supervising you that was NOT helpful for you while you were learning how to do the job. Write these down!
- What things did your leader do that you did find helpful? Write these down!
- Given your own experience, how would you delegate responsibility to another so that he is encouraged and able to improve in ability and wisdom with less and less close supervision being needed?
In working through these questions, you will realise that you already know some things about delegation!


## Delegation: Some Questions to Ask

The following is a list of questions to consider as you decide how to delegate responsibility to another. Some of these can be ignored if the task is small (for example; going to the market to buy the snacks for a meeting). But the larger the responsibility, the more these questions need to be considered.

- What exactly is the person expected to do, and what are they expected to achieve? Is the responsibility large enough to need a written job description? If so, who is going to produce the job description?
- What exactly is the time frame for this delegation? Is this for a day or five years?
- What decision-making authority are you giving to them: what freedoms and limitations are being given? Is it clear which
decisions must be referred back to the leader and which ones they are free to make them selves? (Remember, the more we can give decision-making responsibility to others, the more they will have opportunity to grow in wisdom!)
- What training will be needed and how will it be provided?
- What resources and facilities will they have to use-including finances and people? Who exactly is responsible to provide these things?
- What support can they expect from you or others? How will you as the leader ensure the person receives plenty of encouragement and support from you?
- How they will be supervised? What requirements are there for reporting back to you? How often will you need to meet with her? (If the responsibility is an ongoing one, the inexperienced will need weekly meetings; the experienced will need monthly meetings.)
The answers to these questions vary from one person to the next and from one task to the next.


## Delegation: Three Pastors

Which of these three pastors is working towards building a church based on Biblical instructions?
$\operatorname{Pastor} \boldsymbol{A}$. The church that he leads is average in size. There are some elders with whom the pastor meets about three or four times a year. Sometimes the pastor asks one of the elders to teach in the weekly Bible study or preach the Sunday sermon. The pastor is happy when people offer to help, and usually accepts these offers, but he doesn't ask people very often or provide training. This pastor also is the main Sunday School teacher and leads the youth group. He doesn't understand much about Paul's idea of the body of Christ and every-member ministry, so he doesn't teach this to the church. He also says that the culture of the society recognizes that leaders should do most of the work themselves so that others will respect them. He is too busy to do much evangelistic work. He has a desire to see God glorified in the church and for the
church to grow.
Pastor B. This pastor's church is also about average in size. The pastor is gradually increasing the number of people helping in Bible study groups, youth ministry and Sunday School. He often asks people to help with small tasks. He has a team of elders and he meets with them at least monthly to discuss and agree together on the major concerns in the life of the church. Once a month he has a training day; sometimes for the elders, sometimes for the evangelists, sometimes for the service leaders, sometimes others. He often discusses with others what they think about the church and spends a lot of time listening to their opinions. His goal is to have at least two ministries of the church with sufficiently healthy leadership within three years so that he no longer needs to have much involvement, though he would still meet with the leaders regularly. He has a desire to see God glorified in the church and for the church to grow.

Pastor C. Again we have an average size church. This pastor is a strong leader. He sometimes says God has anointed him to be the leader and therefore he says he should make all the decisions and he does not need to include others in the ministry and work of the church. He says the instructions about eldership that are found in the New Testament are not relevant in his culture and he has found that having elders is always a problem anyway. He often tells people what the church needs but does not provide opportunity for people to share their thoughts with him. He has a habit of being quite critical of anyone he sees to be liked and respected in the church-even if he delegated some responsibility to them and even if they are good in what they do. He is quick to blame others when things go wrong and yet does most of the work himself. He often preaches on those passages that stress submission to leaders. He has a desire to see God glorified in the church and for the church to grow.

Which pastor is most consistent with the leadership teachings of the Bible? Which one is growing a biblical church?

## Delegation: Is That All? No!

The title to this article says this is just an introduction. There is much more that could be said. May I encourage you to take up the opportunity to participate in the Training of Timothys seminar on delegation when next it is offered in your area!

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