



## Editor's note

### The December 2018 issue: Rethinking leadership

Many people today long for better leaders—and better models of leadership. I work with graduate students who make plain that they want more out of their studies than the knowledge and skills to lead. The [Oxford Character Project](#) and the [Oxford Pastorate](#) have attracted strong interest from students, believers and non-believers, who want to be leaders who possess character and integrity. In a time when many are attracted to leaders who offer to save their nations through exercising strength and putting down those who are weak, others are crying out for a different kind of leadership.

But should we be talking so much about leadership? The biblical authors don't seem to think we should aspire to be leaders. They don't recommend leadership training courses. Instead, they call us to be servants, to sacrifice ourselves, and to love our neighbours. In the Scriptures, we find pictures of men and women who are raised up and

placed in positions of authority. Leaders emerge and are recognized rather than made, said Theological Advisory Group member Vinoth Ramachandra as we corresponded about this topic. Just as the Bible doesn't seem to recommend cultivating leadership in ourselves, academic theologians don't seem to pay much attention to leadership as a goal, with just a few exceptions.[1]

But the authors in this issue of *Word & World* think it's time to rethink leadership rather than to avoid it. They think it's time to see leadership reconfigured and transformed after the example of Jesus. In our feature article, **Joshua Bogunjoko** from Nigeria says that renewing leadership means working with the grain of our cultural backgrounds. He highlights the strong traditions of leadership in African villages, pointing to their fulfilment through biblically based transformation. He wants leaders to experience salvation that touches not only on guilt but also on shame; he wants them to embrace biblical images of shepherds, servants, and stewards; and he hopes for networks of leaders who support one another.

Amid corruption scandals across Latin America, **Daniel Salinas** from Colombia says that the example of Nehemiah in the Bible is 'like an oasis in the middle of the desert'. When the people of Judah have been forced to leave their homes and the unjust monarchy is largely to blame, Nehemiah is given the opportunity to help the people return home. He demonstrates a new model of leadership as a leader who puts people's well-being before his financial well-being and who listens and adapts to those under him. Nehemiah gets to work side by side with others, he continues to fight against injustice, and he remembers that he is accountable to God.

In short pieces to round out the issue, **Wendy Quay Honeycutt** (USA/Malaysia/Australia) draws on conversations with leaders from her student fellowship. These students agree with others at their university that it's right that 'leaders eat last'. But they conclude that when leaders on campus are encouraged to achieve their own goal, Christian leaders are called to seek a goal that they can't see or comprehend. **Pierre Ezoua** (Tunisia/Cote d'Ivoire) writes about what to do when African Christian leaders refuse to leave their positions. He says that changes in policy aren't enough. What is needed is a new leadership modelled on Jesus, who is the slave of all. This Jesus is a leader who does not live on bread alone but on the love and faithfulness of God.

Like previous issues of *Word & World*, each article is accompanied by discussion questions so that you can use them to spark conversation in your fellowship, your church, or elsewhere. Also, every article is available in English, Spanish, and French, so you can choose the language that speaks to you the best. Please contact me with your thoughts on how you think *Word & World* can do better at prompting theological reflection on the world students live in.

As you rethink leadership, may this issue equip and inspire you.



Robert W Heimburger, Editor  
[robert.heimburger@ifesworld.org](mailto:robert.heimburger@ifesworld.org)

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1. Rethinking leadership / Joshua Bogunjoko
2. Leadership in times of crisis / Daniel Salinas
3. Leaders eat last / Wendy Quay Honecutt
4. The challenge of change for African leaders / Pierre Ezoua

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## Footnote

[1] Examples in English include Skip Bell, ed., *Servants and Friends: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2014); Arthur Boers, *Servants and Fools: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015); Benjamin Forrest and Chet Roden, eds., *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Academic, 2017); Don N. Howell, Jr., *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003); Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 20 (Leicester: Apollos, 2006).

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## Rethinking leadership / Joshua Bogunjoko

How African village traditions and the Bible point toward renewed leadership

Growing up in a small Yoruba village in Nigeria, I was privileged to observe leadership first-hand. Decades later, this privilege continues as I have been serving in leadership of diverse teams from many cultural backgrounds and have observed leadership from around the world. Yet in my own discipleship journey, I have begun to grasp the influence of my origins on my leadership values and practice, and how the Holy Spirit, through the Word, can both use and transform my rich heritage as well as that of others. Let me share with you some of my own origins, dilemmas, what I have observed in African leadership and my journey learning to grow into a more biblical leader.

I grew up under the leadership structure of my village, with a king and complex system of advisors, higher chiefs, and lower chiefs. There, I observed integrity, mutual respect, accountability, truth telling, and character shaping happening towards the development of future leaders in the community. Our community leaders demonstrated

shepherding by protecting the vulnerable; they demonstrated service by ensuring that the needs of the village were met, and they demonstrated stewardship through accountability that went from the young people right through to the king himself. All the same, African leadership in its cultural mode is far from perfect. Indeed, many aspects are uncondusive to effectiveness in modern nations and to effective development of young leaders in the modern era. However, within Africa one can find a leadership development ethos that rivals any books on the shelf today. The question then is, *what happened?* What happened in the church and in the nations of Africa that these values have been lost and replaced by fraud, corruption, lying, squandering resources, and even abuse and exploitation of those led?

An entirely new set of values happened—values that arrived from the West and simply set up shop in the African context. The new values were not explicitly identified or examined in light of their impact upon existing value systems, in large part because the new values were assumed to be better than the ones long present there. The Western democratic approach to leadership works most effectively under two conditions: where the norm is the rule of law based on individual rights, and where egalitarian ideas have taken root. Democracy does not work without a robust presence of the rule of law. What might have gone wrong with the way democratic values have been applied to Africa? A story from Malawi will help. Let us remember that democracy is a form of government, not necessarily a biblical model of leadership.

Recently in Malawi, I asked two senior Christian leaders, one of whom is a top government official, to describe their leadership experiences growing up. Both were from different cultures and ethnicities, but they described a system of village chiefs as decision-makers that resembled that of my own village. I asked, how did leaders emerge and how was leadership succession carried out? They unanimously reported that leaders emerge through a natural progression of children growing up, learning from their parents and others, and gradually moving into chieftaincy roles as their elders pass on.

I further asked these leaders their observation of leadership in the church and even political leaders in the country. Their response was unanimous: they lead just like what they knew growing up in the village. They neither expect nor desire to give up leadership according to term limits; they do not develop younger leaders in the ways that we would call “development”; and they do not hold themselves accountable to the populace in a formal, democratic way. Surely this illustrates the power our origins can exert throughout the rest of our

lives if they are left unexamined, no matter how different our lives as adults.

### **Saul and David: The influence of background**

Saul was appointed king by God. When Samuel approached Saul to reveal God's intention, the first concern Saul expressed was his humble background, "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak to me in this way?" (1 Sam 9:21) It is interesting that later, when Samuel rebuked Saul and told him that the consequences of his disobedience to God was his rejection as king over Israel, Samuel referenced Saul's humble background. "Samuel said, "Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the Lord anointed you king over Israel, ..."Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord?" (1 Sam 15:17,19) It was as if Saul's humble background never ceased to haunt him in his role as king. The anointing of the God of Israel Himself upon Saul did not seem to transform the heart or personal history of Saul. In short, Saul continued to be shaped by the forces outside of his anointing.

David on the other hand, had a different background story to his ascension to the throne of Israel. He was a shepherd, called in from the sheep to be anointed as God's chosen king. When David's ability to confront Goliath was questioned, David simply recounted stories from his background as a keeper of sheep. He had learnt that to be a shepherd means to protect the sheep at all cost; and to confront danger with courage, by faith in the God of Israel. These truths shaped David's spontaneous response to Goliath and would shape much of his leadership as a shepherd-king. "But David said to Saul, 'Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him.' ... And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam 17:34–35, 37).

It is well-known that David, as a young man, respected Saul's anointing as God's choice for the moment, even while Saul was mad and looking to kill him. David, as an old man, respected what God might have been accomplishing through Absalom, by accepting that God may have rejected him as king.

Samuel said of David: “The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart.” (1 Sam 13:14b) The Psalmist testifies, “He also chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.” (Ps 78:70–71) Note the emphasis on David’s background and the description of his leadership —“integrity of heart and skillful hands.”

To help leaders in Africa be renewed and reshaped by God’s truth for God’s purpose, we need to know where the leader is coming from. I know of no leadership development that intentionally investigates and invites the story of the individual to be part of the development process. None that I know seeks out the cultural values, life experiences, relationships, family ties, and traditions that have produced the individual that we are seeking to appoint or develop as a leader.

### **Transition of power and accountability**

Examining our past will provide enormous insight for us as we develop the next generation of leaders. A common dilemma in Africa is the lack of intentional development of new leaders. Africa is full of leaders who spend decades in their roles as country presidents or church founders, and many times without accountability. Even at very old ages, many hold on to positions and power, and one wonders why.

The stories from the men in Malawi give us a glimpse of the answer. The king or chief in Africa holds a hereditary, lifelong position. Traditionally, a leader is function and personality rolled into one—there is no compartmentalization of their identity. They are one with their title, position, status, and role. New people taking chieftaincy titles do not displace current chiefs. There is no need to fear young people growing up and moving into positions of power because the elders, who already hold titles of power, never lose theirs; they simply welcome new title holders into their midst. It is a process of addition, not subtraction or displacement.

But a democratic system (and many evangelical churches have shaped their leadership along democratic lines, with leaders who are voted in and out) necessitates a rotation of leaders to fill a scheduled change of title and power. This practice is completely foreign to Africa’s traditional contexts. No wonder elections in Africa so often invite some level of violence. Elections in churches are sometimes no different. If someone is voted out of a position, then the question they must ask is, “Who am I?” In a shame culture, “who am I?” exists in relation to

everyone else in the community. To remove the title and role is no less than to disassemble their identity. When change is needed, it is naive to allege that simple power is threatened; rather, the whole identity of the individual is at stake.

With this in mind, the lack of intentionality in developing new leaders should be no surprise. The village context that once groomed many generations of leaders is now an inadequate, increasingly irrelevant, and often unexamined blueprint for leader development.

Another related area where looking back will sharpen our vision for looking forward is in accountability. In the new democracy with its inherent individualism, the protective accountability structure of the village is the first casualty. In a system where individuals campaign and get votes as independent persons and decision-makers, the age-old communal accountability structure no longer holds sway. It is replaced by the community looking up to the individual as a benefactor, because he or she now has means to do things for them. As we have seen, entire nations are the losers in the end.

So, what is the solution? How can we be like King David who gained rich lessons from the pastures and sheepfolds of his childhood but was not “stuck” in the pasture or sheepfold decades later? The contexts of his boyhood were formational in his spiritual and leadership development. Yet he did not act like he was in a pasture when he was in a palace.

## Status and role

To understand leadership expectations and development in an honor/shame society as in many parts of Africa requires understanding the impact of status and role. Put simply, a **status** is a position in a social hierarchy or structure. It is typically assigned but can be earned. A status can change over the course of a lifetime from childhood to being an elder. By contrast, a **role** is the behavior and actions a person performs. It is linked to one's status but is more of “doing” than “being.” So, a role is not the only consideration in the African power structure. Age means higher status in many places, and an older person could, in some instances, supplant or undermine a person who holds a leadership role.

When members of a society have strong, collective beliefs and expectations about the status and roles of a leader, the leader is pressured, consciously or not, to live up to these expectations, even

when they conflict with democratic ideals or, more seriously, with biblical truth.

Christian leaders are not exempt from having status and roles. How, then, does the presumed status of Christian leaders shape their role in society? Could some of the failures observed in some Christian leaders in Africa result from their status exerting pressure on their roles—their behaviors and actions? Let's look at this with stories.

A young African man had entered Europe illegally with the hope of getting a job and making money. But his dream had not come true. This man was a dedicated Christian and even a leader among the Christian youth in his country before he left for Europe. A friend of mine asked the man why he would not return home, since he was contravening the law, and had no work. The young man replied that he could not return to his family empty-handed—there would be too much shame. My friend was incredulous. This is difficult for a European, raised where the rule of law is paramount, to make sense of this man's seemingly misguided priorities. To those from an honor/shame culture, saving face often eclipses keeping a law—whether legal, ethical, moral, and/or even theological.

In the book, *The Way Thais Lead*, Larry Parsons tells the story of a wealthy man who was stopped and fined 200 *baht* for speeding. However, instead of coming to pay the fine, the man went to the head of the police and offered to take him to eat at a restaurant together. The meal would cost him more than 500 *baht*, but he preferred this to paying the fine. Why? The writer explains that this man's intention was not to bribe the police chief, but rather to cover his own shame should it become known that he had been caught speeding. It was more acceptable to him to spend more money to take the chief of police out for a meal than to endure the shame of paying a smaller fine. How does one work through a biblical understanding of legal and ethical responsibilities, yet compassionately acknowledge the man's cultural milieu? The expectations on many to fulfill a role—with its attendant status—may run contrary to Scripture, but the compulsion to save face keeps them bound in the cultural flow.

The thinking of the African and Thai men is echoed in the biblical story of Saul who disobeyed the Lord and was losing the kingdom. Yet he said to Samuel, "I have sinned. BUT... please honor me before the elders and before Israel" (1 Sam 15:30, emphasis author's).

This deep-seated value of seeking to preserve honor by covering shame, imprinted since childhood, is rarely rationally or carefully examined, either by the leader or by the led. Nor does it get addressed by those seeking to “help” or “develop” the African leader.

What is the answer to these seeming paradoxes of leadership in Africa? How can we allow the Word of God to collide with our cultural upbringing and worldview, transforming us into the image of Christ? Below I will make suggestions: to work out our salvation more fully, to embrace the biblical images of leadership, to continually undergo personal transformation, and to embed ourselves in godly community. I hope others will think of more.

## 1. A fuller working out of salvation

The teaching on salvation across Africa has focused almost exclusively on sins forgiven and guilt removed. Yet a corresponding truth is that shame is also covered. The work of Christ and redemption in Him is not only about guilt, it is also about the power to be free from sin, death, and the fear of shame and death. Leaders in Africa need this full understanding of the Scriptures sense of wholeness or *shalom* that Christ brings. The challenge of a guilt-based salvation story alone is that leaders can act in unbiblical ways to cover shame, believing they can ask God for forgiveness later. Their lives are dichotomized into dealing with guilt, shame, and even fear as totally different theological realities. The Bible has just as much to say about guilt-based forgiveness of sin as it has to say about shame and fear.

It must also be taught that failure does not have to be associated with shame. In fact, failing can be a powerful step to greater honor if reflected upon and seized as an opportunity for learning and growing. If confession of sins and repentance are genuine, they mark the beginning of a new life, not the end of a life.

Hebrews 12:2 says, “For the joy set before Him [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame, and [He] has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus actually *despised* shame, but with a purpose: for joy. Like Jesus, every leader should take up his own cross and, likewise, despise shame.

Scripturally transformational leaders are what Africa needs. The Holy Spirit working through the Word of God has the power to transform all aspects of a person—spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically, environmentally. Even shame can be transformed into freedom in Christ. Only those who have experienced the transformative work of

the Holy Spirit in all aspects of their lives can become transformative where they live and work. This is where personal godliness begins to have the potential to change a family, a community, an entire society.

As the fullness of salvation is being worked out in our lives, the leader growing in Christ-likeness begins to truly reflect the biblical image of a leader, an image to be understood and embraced.

## 2. Embracing the biblical image of a leader as a shepherd, servant, and steward

An accurate reflection on the biblical image of leaders is important for a genuine transformation of leadership in Africa. David's story is a great help to us. David, an excellent leader, was described as a shepherd. *"He brought him to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands"* (Ps 78:71–72).

### Shepherd

To shepherd is the role and priority of a leader. Jesus' words to Peter in John 21 were, *"Tend My lambs,"* *"Shepherd My sheep,"* and *"Tend My sheep"* all point in the same direction. The image of a shepherd is a common metaphor of a leader in both the Old and the New Testaments. A community without a godly leader is described as *"sheep without a shepherd"* (Matt 9:36). Jesus described himself as the Good Shepherd, and commanded Peter to be a shepherd to his flock. Peter demanded the same of the leaders of the diaspora church (1 Peter 5:2), and Paul of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:28). Shepherding is the primary role and duty of all God-appointed leaders.

The shepherd's primary responsibility is the wellbeing of people, God's sheep. It is to love and to nurture God's people spiritually, emotionally and in all aspects of life. It is to provide guidance to God's people, to point them faithfully and continually to the One who died and rose again for them. It is also to protect them from false teaching by providing true teaching, to protect them from deception (Phil 3:19). The shepherd image is a rich leadership image.

### Servant

While servant leadership is the most talked about Christian image of leadership, it is one of the least understood. A reason for this is the limits of languages across cultures. A church leader from West Africa once told my friend, who had spoken on servant leadership, that he (the leader) could never be a servant leader. He added, "I cannot see

myself carrying out the functions of a housemaid.” Like this leader, every listener hears and interprets words based on their associated image and experiences.

In the English Bible, four different Greek words (two basically masculine and feminine) are translated “servant”. Each word was distinct in the mind of the original hearers: *παῖς* (*pais*)—a boy, youth, child, slave, or servant (Matt 8:6); *παιδίσκη* (*paidiskē*)—a female slave (Matt 26:69); *δοῦλος* (*doulos*)—a slave or subject, (Romans 1:1). However, the word Jesus used was *διακονέω* (*diakoneō*)- to be at one’s service, help, serve, minister, care for (Matt 20:26, BDAG). This is the same root word translated “deacons” in 1 Timothy 3. In other words, the biblical understanding of servant leadership is closer to the Ephesian church’s understanding of the role of a deacon (1 Tim 3), than to our friend in West Africa’s understanding of a housemaid. Biblically, servants meet needs that encourage and enable people to be who God has created and called them to be, and to do what God has called them to do.

## Steward

A steward holds in trust people, their skills, and gifts, and all the resources that God has given to His people. He or she is accountable. Stewardship is the attribute, quality, characteristic or trait of a godly leader.

True leadership and authority come from righteousness, both for individuals and for nations (Prov 14:34). There is no servanthood without stewardship, and real stewardship is only as it comes out of a servant heart. A leader who seeks the kingdom of God should have a steward’s perspective on life. He or she is in a continuous state of being and becoming, as he stewards his gifts and talents, people, the trust of others, and resources, all as gifts from the hand of the Lord. He is always in a process of growing and developing, while developing others to become true stewards of gifts and grace.

These images create for African leaders a wholesome view of their status and role, the godly attitude behind their leadership, and the accountability expected of a godly shepherd. Its strong community value connects them with their upbringing and with their new life as Christ’s under-shepherds.

To continue the discipleship journey as one saved by grace and to embrace the biblical images of a shepherd, servant and steward is to set

the stage for still deeper transformation—both for the leader and the community.

### 3. Transformed leaders transformed communities

As the Christian leader on a discipleship journey experiences the work of transformation, the core of Christian leadership, like Christ's, should be the transformation of people, families, communities, and societies, for *“everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher”* (Luke 6:40). For a transformational leader, the central issue is the being and core identity of the leader. The core being of any Christian leader must first undergo the work of the Holy Spirit in transformation, before he or she can be a leader of and for transformation (Rom 12:2). The being of the leader is the core upon which leadership rests.

Peter Koestenbaum writes,

*“The mistakes lie in thinking that human beings improve if the system changes. This ignores the personal side, since the deeper transformation required ... is an act of will: ... And that resoluteness comes from a different part of the soul—the heart, not the head; the personal side, not the strategic”* (47).

Leaders must not just lead from the heart, but they need to lead to the heart. This is contextually transformative leadership, and it is the kind of Christian leadership urgently needed in our African context and around the world. It is leading the people of God to love and serve God with all their heart, mind, and strength.

For a deep work of transformation, leadership development in Africa must invite leaders to articulate their underlying, often unconscious, philosophy of leadership, beliefs and values about leadership. Patterns of attitude, behaviors and choices often relate to spiritual state, theological disposition, moral sensitivity, cultural expectation, worldview, environmental and/or community influences, and the loyalties in one's life. Wise mentors and counsellors can journey with a leader to discover what lies behind their leadership actions. There is no other way to get to the depth of what makes the leader who he or she is.

The call to leadership is the call to come and die—including to cultural predispositions and to a particular background and upbringing. To come and die is an invitation to a new life in which Christ reigns. *“For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God”* (Col 3:3). How many leaders lead as dead men or women?

Transformative leadership is that the leader and those led may walk in the Spirit together, as image-bearers of God, accomplishing the purposes of God. These purposes find expression, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, in the “chief purpose of man,” which is “to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

#### 4. Creating a community of the committed

Just as a community’s expectations of a leader can negatively pressure the leader, so righteous communities can influence a leader towards Christ-likeness.

Malachi 3:16 gives us a biblical option to consider:

*“Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name.”*

The strength to stand is found in a new and godly community, formal and informal, where those who fear the Lord speak often one to another, encouraging and supporting each other.

It is therefore necessary, indeed urgent, to create a network of Christian leaders of integrity in countries across Africa. For individual leaders to stand for godliness in their difficult situations, they will need a support group of people of similar commitment. Such a group becomes a community around such leaders when they face the threat of isolation from those who choose a less godly way. A community of support could also provide an appropriate forum for such leaders to be checked and corrected by people of similar age and/or status.

As laid out above, a leader may stick to power not for the sake of power itself, but because their identity is one with the status and role. Those who stand alone for what is right or who step down are faced with the risk of losing out. They may be considered to have thrown away a community’s opportunity and prestigious position. They are not just an individual in a position; rather, the whole community shares in that position. Yet remaining in certain corrupt contexts can mean compromise or becoming corrupt oneself.

One of the most painful experiences for someone from a shame culture is to be isolated or accused of shaming one’s family and community. It is to be shunned and unwelcomed in the community to which one should belong. Inclusion is a key need in a shame culture, therefore isolation is feared and the threat of it can lead to compromise.

Therefore, to help African leaders in the church and in the nations embrace a new paradigm of leadership, it is imperative that we address the isolation and identity crisis, though many will not articulate their feelings in these terms. Christian leaders in Africa must be intentional in creating a community that can support and uphold the leader who is pursuing righteousness.

## Conclusion

For most in Africa, the most natural model of a leader is the village chief. And surely the village king is closer to the biblical idea of a shepherd than national officeholders can reach. But the time has come to begin a conversation about creating a new model—a model that courageously takes the best of the village chief, the best of the democratic ideals, and submits them all to biblical evaluation, to lead for the wholeness of people and communities. This is the discipline of bringing a Scripturally-based transformation to bear on a village chief-shaped understanding of leadership.

Indeed, each of us can learn much from the examples of leadership that we grew up with. Perhaps you grew up in urban Manila, or on a farm in New Zealand, or in a fishing town on the Mediterranean coast. Just as good principles characterize African leadership and can be redeemed and re-purposed in the light of Scripture, so there are characteristics of leadership from other cultures that can be redeemed and re-purposed in light of Scripture.

But to fully understand and appreciate the impact of deep-seated, cultural models, it will be necessary to engage in Holy Spirit-led reflection, to compassionately yet critically examine where we are. The dominance of the village setting is fading in many parts of Africa—and the cultures of your past may be fading, too—yet I believe we can be nourished by our roots to grow a new, biblical leadership for the future, the future of a world that is everywhere desperate for godly leaders. There is much to learn, much to research and investigate, and much to transform; the journey is not a simple one. Let's begin!

## About the author

**Dr. Joshua Bogunjoko** is the International Director of SIM ([www.sim.org](http://www.sim.org)), a mission organization serving in more than seventy countries worldwide. He is from Nigeria and was a member of the Nigeria Fellowship of Evangelical Students (NIFES) in his university days. Dr. Bogunjoko is a family physician, and he was a medical missionary and a hospital director in Niger before taking other SIM leadership roles. He can be contacted at [international.director@sim.org](mailto:international.director@sim.org).

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## Discussion questions

1. What do you consider your most important identity?
2. What were the ways you observed leaders emerging and leadership being carried out in your culture, village, or home?
3. Who were your leader heroes growing up, and what attracted you to them? Has your hero changed? Why or why not?
4. What is your first consideration in decision-making? Do you consider its impact on your standing in your family and community? Do you fear being shamed? Do think of your relationship with Jesus first?
5. How do you use Scriptures in your decision-making process?
6. Read 1 Sam 9:21 and 1 Sam 15:17–19 about Saul and 1 Sam 13:14, 1 Sam 17:34–37, and Ps 78:70–72 about David. For each king, how does their upbringing and experience form them as leaders?

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## Leadership in times of crisis / Daniel Salinas

Lessons from Nehemiah

Translated from the Spanish by Catherine Shepherd

According to Colombian newspaper *Semana*, “half of the recent presidents and former presidents of Latin America are involved in major corruption scandals. Lula is simply the latest one to come out.” [1] It mentions at least three cases in Brazil, as well as cases in Peru, Panama, Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, El Salvador and, of course, Colombia. The article clarifies that although only the most notorious cases are mentioned, there are many others across the continent. The conclusion about the situation in Colombia is that “the country is facing an ethical crisis and there is no point in denying it. The fact that it is not as bad as in other countries is no consolation.”

In view of this situation, talking about leadership is complicated these days. The great failures of so many leaders today have given people a negative impression of the institution of leadership. People question

motives, strategies, personalities, leaders' lifestyles, what they like and dislike. Not even leaders' families are safe from criticism. The media gorge themselves on these stories. As *Semana* points out, presidents that are elected democratically manage to make their bank accounts grow, extend their terms and refuse to let go of their position. A large number of politicians, congresspeople, senators, ministers, and other government employees are on trial after making millions illegally. Meanwhile, the people fight to survive and are defenceless against the greed and hunger for power of their leaders. Unfortunately, the situation in the church, ministries, NGOs, and mission organisations does not appear to be any different. It seems like the salt has lost its flavour. Instead it has been contaminated by the corruption of society in general.[2]

Many readers may say, and rightly so, that this is not new, that it has always been like this since the dawn of time. History is full of despots, dictators, megalomaniac rulers, corrupt leaders and their followers. But for every leader who falls, there are hundreds of other leaders who have remained faithful, but who have been systematically ignored by those who write history. Shocking stories sell more, and that is what the media looks for nowadays.

This is why the example of Nehemiah in the Bible is like an oasis in the middle of the desert. In the midst of a painful exile, mainly caused by the depraved and corrupt monarchy, while going through a transition process in the middle of a spiritual and existential crisis, Israel needed a different leader, someone who would help the people as they tried to settle back in their own land.

The situation was critical. Those in exile were returning to a city in ruins, with financial problems and no food security, and they ended up being exploited by greedy speculators. Even slavery in Babylon seemed better than the situation in Palestine. In this context, Nehemiah made a difference and we can learn important lessons from his leadership. As the cupbearer to the king, Nehemiah knew all about what went on in the empire's government. He was no stranger to the benefits that came with power. He was used to the luxury and glitter of the palace. Because of all this, the fact that he took part in the process to rebuild the city is even more noteworthy. As he said himself,

*Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy*

*burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land. Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people. (5:14–18)*

Something stands out in this description: Nehemiah put the needs of the people he was governing before his own. There was not enough money for him and his entourage to charge impoverished citizens interest, like the governors preceding him had done. Furthermore, Nehemiah rolled his sleeves up and worked shoulder to shoulder with the people. He could have simply supervised and managed the project from the governor's chair. But instead of that, he got his hands and clothes dirty, like everyone else. "We did not acquire any land" can be understood if we look at 5:1–5:

*Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."*

The land was mortgaged to usurers who, like leeches, held on to the fields and crops. The only way the people could survive was by selling their possessions and enslaving their children. Nehemiah could have taken advantage of the situation, but he didn't. He didn't take away anyone's land. Instead, as it says in verse 10, "I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain." Instead of taking away from them, he helped them by giving them resources.

We might ask, why was Nehemiah so different to other leaders? We find the answer in verse 15, "But out of reverence for God I did not act like that." It was his "reverence for God" that made him act that way, unlike his greedy predecessors. The meaning of "reverence for God" is

not clear. Nehemiah possibly meant obeying God's law. At least that is what he seems to be saying when he talks to the people in verse 9. Obeying God's law was something that God's people had to do and that set them apart from other people (verse 9). But this required them to know the law, which is an important topic in the narrative (see chapters 8 and 9, for example). What we can see is that it permeates Nehemiah's entire life. From the beginning of the book, God and His law are central themes. He is constantly praying to God. His involvement in the rebuilding process is presented in the narrative as a direct answer from God to his prayers. The success of the project and the defeat of the enemies are entirely God's doing. Everything Nehemiah did, his decisions, way of working and exercise of power, was all guided by the fear of God, the obedience to the law.

There is so much more we could say about this amazing leader in the Old Testament, but this is enough to bring out a few essential principles for our leadership model.

1. The common good must be above all our personal interests, even when it is not good for our finances. The accounts in foreign banks of many former politicians warn us that it is easy to give in to temptation and get rich illegally. Our work must be transparent and public, so that no one can accuse us of being corrupt. We must not see leadership as a way of growing personally at the expense of the people we are leading. We must be careful not to have questionable motivations for the exercise of power. As Mexican president Benito Juárez said in the nineteenth century, "Government employees should not earn their wages without responsibility; they should not govern following their own selfish desires, but according to the law; they should not try to improvise fortunes or live a life of idleness, but dedicate themselves to their work, deciding to live an honest life with average earnings, as established by law." [3] Wouldn't it be amazing if these recommendations were followed in real life?

2. Our leadership must seriously take into account the specific context of those over whom we have authority. Previous leader models may be useful, but we must be ready to be different, especially if our predecessors left a negative legacy, as we see in Nehemiah. Sometimes we have to be reformers. Not long ago people preferred an authoritarian leader who told everyone what to do, with a big ego; someone who governed without asking anyone's opinion. Today the paradigm has changed. Human, participating, transforming leaders who work in a team are preferred. Our group's specific context must help us to determine the type of leaders we want to be.

3. As leaders we must listen to our subordinates, take their comments seriously and adapt the way we manage our work, so we can address them. We see this several times in Nehemiah's story. He permanently kept an open communication line with the people and responded accordingly. His example encourages us to show empathy to the people, to put ourselves in their shoes, to share their daily concerns. The people we have the privilege of leading are not objects. It is very easy to dehumanise people and forget about their situations, and there are many examples of this in history. As well as having management skills and specialised administrative knowledge, as leaders we need to develop our human capacity. We must be willing to be assessed by the people and get feedback about our leadership. We need wisdom to understand what type of leadership the context requires. One model does not fit all.

4. We must set an example and work side by side with others. Nehemiah is an example of a leader who is present in the people's everyday lives and shares their human progress. We must be leaders who are present in our people's reality. Leaders who are absent or who work from the outside and avoid permanent contact with the people will inevitably fail. These leaders will be invalidated, and the people will be confused. Nehemiah identified with the desperation and fears of those who had come back from exile. He does not shy away from working with the people and getting his hands dirty. Leaders who remain on the sidelines, without "getting infected" by the germs of real life, without breathing the dirty air of the streets, discourage the people and in the end the flame of the mission is snuffed out.

5. Leaders must be willing to fight against abuse and injustice, whenever necessary and wherever it comes from. Rebuilding the wall wasn't enough—it was more important to rebuild the people, following the principles of God's law. The former would have been enough for Nehemiah to fulfil his task, but he had set higher goals. Nehemiah realised that, although the city's safety was important, he needed to address the problems of social injustice, exploitation and disobedience to God's law. The urgent matters did not limit the important ones. Leaders must keep the organisation's vision and mission clear, so they don't get distracted by tangential problems and forget the essential issues. Nehemiah's guideline was "for the sake of the Law of God" (10:28). This must be our guide too. God's Word must be the highest authority for any changes, strategies, goals, objectives and anything else in the group. As Desmond Tutu said, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." [4]

Nehemiah is known especially for not remaining neutral and for taking the side of those who were suffering.

6. As leaders we must remember that we are accountable to God, before anyone else, for how we exercise our authority. The “fear of God” should make us aware of the temptations that come with power. We are accountable to God and we are ultimately responsible before him for how we carry out the leadership that he entrusts us with. We should have a close, growing relationship with God and his Word. Obedience to God’s will must be a characteristic of our lives. We can learn a lot from modern leadership theories, but the ultimate guidelines are in God’s Word. Being a leader does not exempt us from obeying God—rather, we are even more committed to doing his will. After all, the group of people we are leading belongs to God and not to us.

While the *Semana* article might have been right in saying that we are facing a serious ethical crisis, they do not suggest any solutions. We could also say that there is a moral, spiritual and human crisis with the corrupt leadership in Latin America. The solution is not simply to have more leaders or to get rid of the institution of leadership altogether. Our challenge is to demonstrate distinctive models of leaders who are sensitive to real life, subject to God’s Word, committed to God and his people and willing to lead while getting involved in the work, and who have an ongoing, growing relationship with God. This is the only way to solve the leadership crisis in Latin America today.

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### About the author

**Daniel Salinas** is Colombian and has served with the IFES movements in Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Bolivia and Paraguay. He has worked with other IFES movements as a speaker and Bible teacher. Daniel has a PhD in Historical Theology from Trinity International University in the US. He is a history and theology professor at the Fundación Universitaria Seminario Bíblico de Colombia and International Partnership Coordinator with the United World Mission’s Theological Education Initiative. Daniel is a member of the IFES Theological Advisory Group. He can be contacted at [dgkjs@hotmail.com](mailto:dgkjs@hotmail.com).

## Discussion questions

1. What qualities would your ideal leader have?
2. Would you like to have more leaders like Nehemiah? Which of Nehemiah's qualities do you think are most necessary today in your group, church, family, city?
3. Why is corruption so attractive, even for Christians?
4. How can we help leaders in our groups to remain upright?
5. Why is it more important to be a leader with "reverence for God" than a leader with amazing professional qualifications? Would this change the way new staff workers and employees are recruited in your group?
6. What practical steps can you take to avoid becoming a corrupt leader? How are you going to live out the biblical leadership model?

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## Leaders eat last / Wendy Quay Honeycutt

Student reflections on leadership in North America

“How would you compare your experiences of ‘secular’ leadership on campus with leadership in the fellowship?” This is the question I asked eight student leaders from the InterVarsity Graduate Christian Fellowship (IV Grad) at Stanford University in the United States. Most of them were PhD candidates, and many have extensive leadership experience in their academic departments and in student housing. This year on our annual retreat, our student president, Jonathan, and I wanted to address our leaders’ worry about our inadequacy for the task. For the size of our fellowship, we are a small team, and as their staff worker, I am in transition into another role. As our text, we chose Mark 6:6b–13, 30–44, where Jesus sends out the disciples two by two without money or spare cloak to preach and heal, and then feeds the five thousand. After studying and meditating on the passage, I asked them how their experiences of leadership on campus differed from leadership in the fellowship. With their permission, here is a brief synopsis of our discussion.

## Methods

The students observed that Christian and secular spheres of leadership have borrowed methods from one another. In both cases, a group of people come together with a common goal, and a leader's job is to get them to that goal. The question is, how does a leader do this? What methods can a leader employ to rally the team?

One of our most experienced leaders explained that campus leadership training focuses on self-knowledge. If you know *yourself* well enough—your style, center and purpose—and similarly, if you know these things about those on your team well enough, then successful leadership is about reconciling and leveraging these similarities and differences. All the better if you have a good dose of charisma to inspire people.

In Christian circles, we do the same thing. We use Myers-Briggs personality tests and SWOT analysis tools. In our own retreat, we had done a Spiritual Gifts Assessment, and we likened this to taking inventory. The disciples at Jesus' command identified five loaves and two fishes. We had eight people, mostly introverts, with a blend of the gifts of helps, leadership, administration and evangelism. How could we leverage these assets to achieve the optimal result?

The exchange of methods worked both ways, however. The students reported that "servant leadership" in campus training is a common phrase, as is "leaders eat last."

## Whose goal?

The key difference between secular leadership and Christian leadership was about whose goal leaders seek. On campus, the perfectly acceptable motivation for these leadership practices is to achieve your goal. It's a transactional paradigm. As one leader put it, there is talk about sacrificial leadership, but you do it so that you can meet your goal. Everything is focused on productivity and the goal.

Fresh from soaking in the miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand, we reflected that in Christian leadership, we don't ever get to see the whole goal. The glory of God's Kingdom is beyond our comprehension. As disciples, the only thing that's clear is Jesus handing us our allotment of bread and fish and handing it on to the group he's assigned us to. Through our time in this Scripture, we had a sense of the overwhelming vastness of the vision, and simultaneously of needing to focus on the given task and the people at hand. We felt tension in that, but we also saw potential.

For a moment we glimpsed how Christians could be called to very different things—handing out bread and fish to very different groups of people—and still unified in Christ. We realized there is great freedom in this to be faithful to what we’re each called to do, and at the same time, to cheer on others who are doing what they’re faithful to.

We concluded that *the* difference between Christian and secular leadership is the recognized presence and Lordship of Christ. Thus, we said, our unity is in Christ rather than in a task or goal. It helped us to begin to make sense of the different Christian groups on campus, and closer to home, those graduate students who chose not to join us but to join a church small group or some other fellowship.

### **Power and weakness**

It was not a big step then for us to see that Christ leads us to notions of power and weakness that are radically different to what we might learn and experience in settings governed by secular priorities. We were struck by how *not ready* the disciples were when Jesus sent them out. And we were equally struck by how, at the end of the day, the disciples had to take inventory, organize the people into groups, and clean up afterwards. Not exactly rocket science! Yet the people were fed and were satisfied. As people called to faithfulness and obedience rather than ability or skill, we realized we needed to be people who would let go of power and embrace *dependence*. This is not an easy thing for graduate students at a prestigious American university, where filling up your resume with impressive credentials is the primary goal.

### **The ideal and the real**

But we also all acknowledged the gap between the ideal we saw in our passage of Scripture and the realities we experienced and lived out on campus, both within our Christian fellowship and outside of it. In the context of our fellowships, we talked about the issue of a sense of entitlement to leadership. On campus, all students are allowed, indeed encouraged, to lead. At public universities in the United States, student clubs are governed by an “all comers” policy: clubs have to permit all students access not only to membership but also to leadership. A club cannot restrict access to leadership based on a list of qualifications.

On campus, particularly in the undergraduate context, a leadership role in a student club is all at once an addition to your resume, a signal you’ve reached some sort of pinnacle in your student experience, and access to an intensity of community experience that comes from being deeply involved. Leadership is something that a student can access as a

right. In contrast, our meditation on our passage told us something very different about leadership. In Mark 6 to lead is to step into scary places ill-prepared, to run the risk of rejection, to continue serving when you're tired, and most of all, to obey Jesus.

But even in our Christian fellowships, the secular paradigms can reign. One student talked about his great surprise when one of our leaders voluntarily stepped down from leadership in the absence of scandal because she felt called to other things. This just didn't happen in the first student's previous experience in his campus fellowship. Rather, when you got to be a leader, you stayed there at the top. And all of us confessed to certain privileges we felt entitled to because we'd served as leaders—gratitude, recognition, seeing *results* due to their leadership. And which of us haven't felt these things?

## Conclusion

To lead as followers of Christ is indeed to lead differently. It is to lead in dependence, handing on bread passed to us by Jesus to the people he brings to our attention, whether we feel ready or not, and whether it produces results or not. For these student leaders, the challenge will be to lean on Christ not just now, but all year, leading morally, relationally, and technically both in IV Grad and in their labs, departments, and other campus settings.

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## About the author

**Wendy Quay Honeycutt** serves with the Graduate & Faculty Ministries of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA as the Pacific Area Faculty Specialist and as staff worker at Stanford University. She was born in Malaysia and grew up in Australia. After practicing law in Melbourne for ten years, she moved to the UK where she completed her Bachelor of Theology at Oxford University and her Masters in Systematic Theology at the University of Aberdeen. Her passions are evangelism, teaching theology, and helping graduate students and faculty members articulate the connections between Christian faith and all of life. She is married to Jared who is completing his PhD in Immunology at Stanford. In her spare time, she rides horses, cooks delicious meals with Jared, and watches Star Trek episodes on Netflix. She can be contacted at [wendy.quay@intervarsity.org](mailto:wendy.quay@intervarsity.org).

## Discussion questions

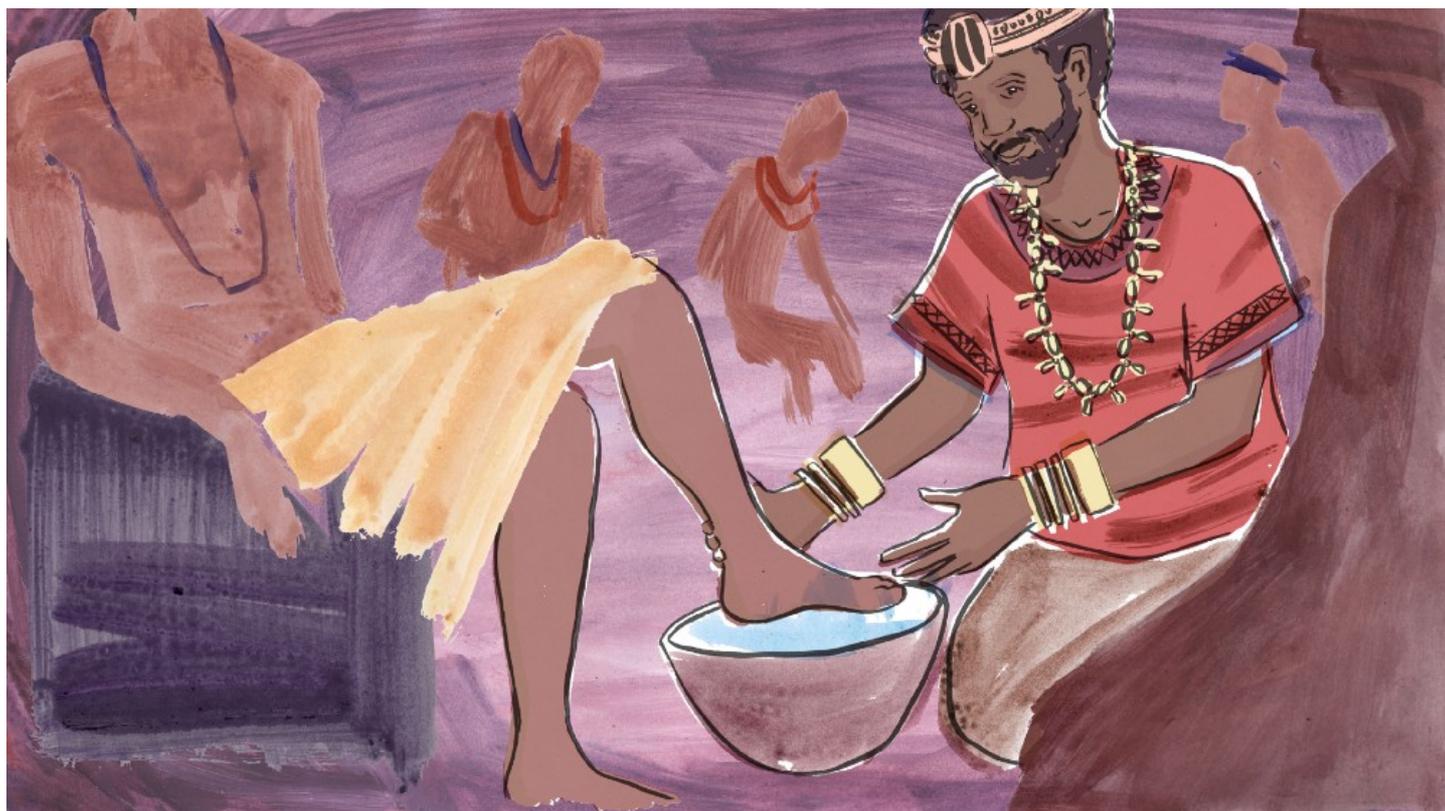
Read Mark 6:6b–13, 30–44.

- What is your source of strength, power or influence in your leadership
- How do you define success in your leadership?
- Read the passage and prayerfully imagine either the scene of the disciples going out, or of the feeding of the five thousand. Imagine the scene in detail—the weather, the light, sights, sounds, smells, people. Where is Jesus in the scene? Where are you in the scene? Bring these two realizations to God in prayer.

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## The challenge of change for African leaders / Pierre Ezoua

Renewed leadership according to Jesus' example

Translated from the French by Ruth Morton

This summer, I was told two almost unbelievable stories:

First story: The main leader of a Christian congregation refused to leave his post after the AGM at the end of his term on the basis that the previous leader had held the position for over 15 years.

Second story: The pastor of a local church, appointed by the National Council, categorically refused to leave.

Given our Black African context, were these Christian leaders right to refuse to leave? This was the question I asked brothers and sisters in Christ during a series of very enriching debates. The salient points of the discussions are summarised below.

## 1. We should follow procedure—even in Africa

For those who answered in the negative, these “stubborn” African pastors were wrong to refuse to leave because they had been elected or appointed to their posts. So why would they display such behaviour when it was time to change? Participants believed that the honour and the financial and material benefits linked to the post explained the rebellion. As evidence, they argued that if these pastors were offered another good position—an honorific title, a good salary—the ex-leader and appointed pastor in question would leave immediately. For them, this was why self-centred African leaders like these ones, who put their own interests first, often cause and fuel deep conflict and crises in their churches. The Bible may well advise, “*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*” (Rom. 12:18) or to keep to our word (Matthew 5:37). But to no avail! These preachers of the word don’t keep their own word. They accept an arrangement that suits them one day and reject it the next when it gets in their way. They are wolves in shepherd’s clothing.

## 2. But democracy is neither African nor Biblical

According to their supporters, these African pastors are right to refuse to leave if their work and the result of their ministry are positive. And if the congregation likes them as well, why replace them? Under what authority? Democracy? The church constitution?

Democracy is neither an African nor a biblical concept, they argued. Democracy is only one method of governance and it has many advantages and drawbacks, but it is not the best form of governance by any means. In ancient Africa, just like in the Bible, a leader would stay in place until the end of their life. For example, Joshua only succeeded Moses after Moses died (Joshua 1:1–2). Were the leaders of the church in Jerusalem—Peter, James and John—replaced after a few years of apostleship?

If we consider the criteria for choosing elders and deacons (1 Corinthians 3 and Titus 1), we see that Paul never said a word about a limited term of ministry. This side of the debate concluded that, just like monarchs who rule by divine right, Black spiritual leaders should stay in place until they die, provided they are doing a good job. This should therefore be reflected in the constitution of African churches.

## 3. Yet, Jesus represents ultimate leadership

“*My kingdom is not of this world.*” (John 18:36). In my closing remarks, I contended that if Jesus speaks of a “kingdom,” there must therefore be

a model of “kingdom leadership” as defined by the Lord himself:

*[...] 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. (Mark 10:42–44)*

But, I went to say, let’s be honest: Both “*the rulers of the Gentiles*” and “*whoever wants to become great*” require respect (1 Peter 2:17), bread and clothing (Matt. 6:25).

But is that a good reason to offer an honorific post or a good salary to encourage African leaders to give up their position? Is that a good reason to add into the constitutions of African churches that church pastors and leaders are appointed and elected for life, provided they have good results? Is that really a good solution to the problem?

My answer was both yes and no. Yes, although this would only address the material, worldly aspects of the issue. To do so would be a solution, but it would only have the effect of a placebo: it would provisionally relieve worries about “What will we eat?” or “What will we wear?” (Matt. 6:23). But let’s not fool ourselves: the principle of leadership for life comes with its own risks attached: a personality cult, murmuring, a risk of division.

No, such a decision would not seek the “kingdom [of God] and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33), nor would it seek what Martha’s sister Mary chose, “what is better, ... [which] will not be taken away” (Luke 10:42). No, this African trinity—a good position to move on to, a good salary, and leadership for life—is not the “kingdom” solution.

The time has come for a new leadership, as modelled by Jesus in the washing of the disciples’ feet (John 13.1–17), his intentional refusal of celebrity status (Luke 4:40–44), and his self-sacrifice for his friends (John 19). This new leadership doesn’t seek to be the first but rather to be the slave of all in love and holiness.

Christian African leaders, “*let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*” (Heb. 4:16). For the servant leader is the new leader, the slave of all, who does not live by bread alone (Matt. 4:4), who does not seek their own interests (1 Cor. 13:5), but who lives from the principle of dependence upon the love and faithfulness of the Lord alone.

## About the author

**Dr. Pierre Ezoua**, man of letters and cultures, has served in a number of roles: pioneering Secretary of GBUCI, the IFES student movement in Côte d'Ivoire from 1992 to 2000; programme director at *Fréquence Vie*, a Christian radio station in Abidjan from 2001 to 2002; and travelling secretary for the GBUAF, the IFES Francophone Africa region, with responsibility for mission and evangelism in West Africa from 2002 to 2009. Since 2010, Dr. Ezoua has been a pastor in the Reformed Church of Tunisia. He is married to Juliette and they have 2 daughters. He can be contacted at [pierre.ezoua@gmail.com](mailto:pierre.ezoua@gmail.com).

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## Discussion questions

1. How might churches and student movements take responsibility for teaching leaders to know God's love and faithfulness?
2. What place might church members have in the fight against leaders who only look out for their own interests?
3. What place might church members have in defining and describing servant leadership in your context?

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