

IX 9Marks

JONATHAN LEEMAN

A CONCISE GUIDE FOR MEN

USING
AUTHORITY
WELL

“In our anti-authoritarian age, Jonathan Leeman is convinced that authority is good and aims to convince you that, when used well, authority leads to human flourishing in every sphere of life. In our day, in which confusion about this topic abounds, Leeman brings much-needed clarity backed by deeply biblical convictions. In all the best ways, this book challenged and changed me. And if you prayerfully give your attention to it, fair warning—the Lord just might change you.”

Josh Manley, Senior Pastor, RAK Evangelical Church, Ras al-Khaimah, United Arab Emirates; Chairman, Great Commission Congress

“I’m always impressed with how Jonathan Leeman couples careful biblical analysis with pastoral wisdom and experience. Jonathan demonstrates awareness of all sides of these conversations. The lengthier version, *Authority*, sits on my shelf and should sit on yours as well. This abbreviated volume will likely become your go-to resource for training leaders in the why and how of Christlike authority. It’s a great tool to get the conversation started.”

J. D. Greear, Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina

“This is a playbook for Christian manhood, a roadmap for Christian ministry, and should be required reading for every teenaged Christian boy. Saturated with the Bible and filled with concise applications, *Using Authority Well* is a well-timed reminder of what real, Christlike leadership looks like. I’ll be recommending it to every young churchman I know.”

Clint Pressley, Senior Pastor, Hickory Grove Baptist Church, Charlotte, North Carolina; President, Southern Baptist Convention

“‘Authority is a good and dangerous gift.’ This is a much-needed resource in our African context, where authority is often misunderstood. Jonathan Leeman provides a practical and insightful study of authority, exploring its nature, functions, and challenges across every man’s life. I found the reflection questions useful as I assessed my own authority in various areas.”

Tommie van der Walt, Executive Director, Imprint; Elder, Brackenhurst Baptist Church, Alberton, South Africa

“Jonathan Leeman has done wonderful work in helping all Christians understand the limits, power, and beneficial effects of God-given authority. He helpfully reminds us that one cannot exercise upright authority unless one can be under authority.”

R. D. “Tex” Alles, 25th Director, United States Secret Service

“Churches in China often find themselves caught between external persecution and internal conflict. A leader who can guide a church forward under such circumstances needs to be courageous, decisive, and steadfast. Pastors with these qualities, however, can easily become domineering, controlling, or in other ways harmful to the congregation. Jonathan Leeman’s work can speak to pastors in China or other closed countries, reminding us that even a bold and decisive pastor should at the same time be a sacrificial, patient, and gentle servant.”

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Using Authority Well

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Using Authority Well

A Concise Guide for Men

Jonathan Leeman

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When one rules justly over men,
ruling in the fear of God,
he dawns on them like the morning light,
like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning,
like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.

THE LAST WORDS OF KING DAVID

(2 Samuel 23:3–4)

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Series Preface

THE 9MARKS SERIES OF BOOKS IS PREMISED on two basic ideas. First, the local church is far more important to the Christian life than many Christians today perhaps realize.

Second, local churches grow in life and vitality as they organize their lives around God's word. God speaks. Churches should listen and follow. It's that simple. When a church listens and follows, it begins to look like the one it is following. It reflects his love and holiness. It displays his glory. A church will look like him as it listens to him.

So our basic message to churches is, don't look to the best business practices or the latest styles; look to God. Start by listening to God's word again.

Out of this overall project comes the 9Marks series of books. Some target pastors. Some target church members. Hopefully all will combine careful biblical examination, theological reflection, cultural consideration, corporate application, and even a bit of individual exhortation. The best Christian books are always both theological and practical.

It's our prayer that God will use this volume and the others to help prepare his bride, the church, with radiance and splendor for the day of his coming.

Introduction

AUTHORITY IS A GOOD and dangerous gift. People can use authority for great good or for great evil.

The question I want you to consider is How well are you using yours? You have authority. Everyone does.

My friend Anthony told me a story about good and bad uses of authority through two of his high school coaches. One coach used his authority well, the other poorly. The good coach had high expectations for the team, drilled them, offered correction, and worked the boys hard. Yet he knew the boys' limits, sometimes joined them in the drills, and let them know he was for them. He cared more about their good than his ego. Therefore, the boys loved him, worked hard, and won games.

Meanwhile, Anthony said, the bad coach did just the opposite. He seemed most interested in feeling good about himself. Therefore, he belittled the boys, played favorites, pitted them against each other, and regularly mocked them. So they despised him, played poorly, and lost games.

Back to you: If I asked your children, wife, employees, church members, or anyone else over whom you possess authority,

would they say you're more like the good coach or the bad coach?

I wrote this book because I want all those people in your life to thank God for how you've used your authority. At the end of the journey, I want them to look back at their lives, consider your role in it, and say, "I loved that authority! It made me strong" or "smart" or "wise" or "holy."

I also want my own children, wife, church members, and ministry staff to say the same about me.

For that to happen, you and I need to better understand the authority that God has given us. We need to be able to explain the difference between good and bad authority. And we need to understand how authority differs from one domain to another.

Instinctual Suspicion of Authority

In my experience, however, people spend most of their time talking about the badness of bad authority. We've learned not to trust the authority of the government, the church, the pastor, the media, or the scientific establishment. We definitely shouldn't trust the authority of men, and probably not our parents either, at least the ones who insist on their rules. Watch out for the Deep State, Mainstream Media, Big Eva, #metoo, #churchtoo, abusive pastors, and the list goes on. Both the political left and right have their list of bad guys. We're all pretty suspicious.

Perhaps the easiest way to spot our cultural angst over authority is to go to the movies and notice who the heroes are. Our heroes are the people who stand up to authority. Growing up, I watched Luke Skywalker fight against the Empire in the *Star Wars* trilogy, Neo against the machines in the *Matrix* trilogy, and Jason Bourne

against the US Central Intelligence Agency in the *Bourne* trilogy. We've also seen Katniss Everdeen against the capitol and President Snow in the *Hunger Games* trilogy, Tris and Four against the Erudites in the *Divergent* trilogy, William Wallace against King Edward in *Braveheart*, Minnie against Hilly in *The Help*, and on and on I could go. While I enjoy such movies individually, after a while, you realize the plots all follow one formula. The ones with authority are the bad guys. The ones who topple them are the good guys.

As an American, this same lesson is woven into my national history. The American founders equal the good guys. King George III and his redcoats equal the bad guys. For Americans, this story is rehearsed every July 4.

All these movies and national holidays, not to mention the nonstop anti-authority drumbeat of Western education generally, have shaped my cultural instincts about authority. And they have probably shaped yours too.

But never mind cultural analysis. Most of us can tell personal stories about hypocritical, heavy-handed, or downright heinous authority figures in our lives. Pastors and parents, politicians and policemen, have been untrustworthy. People have been experiencing the badness of bad authority since Genesis 3.

I could tell you about a boss I had who alternated between shouting and the silent treatment. He occasionally showed up in my dreams for a couple of decades, even after I left that job. More troubling, I could tell you the terrible stories I've heard as a pastor about fathers, mothers, husbands, and pastors abusing their authority. Maybe you know the stories I mean—the ones that make you want to cry and rage at the same time.

Such abuse is wicked. It tells lies about our good God and his use of authority.

We Cannot Live Without Authority

The challenge is that we cannot live without authority. Should we drive on the right side of the road or the left? How does this game work? Who is married to whom? Am I responsible for these kids? Who does she turn to when assaulted?

Living with other people requires coordinating our decisions. Living in a world of sin and scarcity requires protection, provision, and sometimes punishment. Living with children requires teaching and correcting. Living at all, apparently, requires authority. Even the Bible's society of perfect beings—angels—live inside hierarchies.

Yet authority is not only a practical necessity. The story here is bigger than that. Exercising authority is how we image God. Get this: God created you and me to rule. He has given every one of us dominion over something—some plot of dirt like Adam and Eve had in the garden. Even my eleven-year-old daughter has dominion over her bedroom and her bunny named Boo Radley. She also claims dominion over the family dog, Atticus Finch, though her older sisters would contest that claim. The point is that God has given us all authority because exercising authority plays a central role in what it means to be created in his image. We image him by ruling like he rules. Authority is not merely a necessary evil, as I've heard Christians say. It goes right to the heart of human existence, which means that authority can be a wonderful, life-giving thing.

King David thought so. Authority well used, said David, is

like the light of morning at sunrise
 on a cloudless morning,
 like the brightness after rain
 that brings grass from the earth. (2 Sam. 23:4 NIV;
 see also Ps. 72)

Do you see the picture here? A shower of rain falls on a field. Then the sun emerges. You look out and see a field of vibrant green. Good authority is like that sun and rain. It gives life. It creates vitality and color.

The Goal of This Book

The solution to bad authority, it turns out, is not *no* authority, but *good* authority. Just ask the child who has been abused, the minority who experiences discrimination, or the church member whose conscience is violated. In each case, justice requires some other authority figure to step in and rescue. Or think back to my friend Anthony. The boys with the bad coach didn't want *no* coach, they wanted a *good* coach.

How much time have you spent reflecting on what good authority is? How many sermons have you heard on this topic? How many books have you read? The goal of this book is to help you do exactly this. It's a condensed version of my larger book on authority.¹ As in the fuller version, my goal isn't theoretical; it's practical. I want you to know how to rightly use the authority God has given you.

In all our talk these days about the badness of bad authority, we've become afraid to exercise the authority we do possess. Any

¹ Jonathan Leeman, *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing* (Crossway, 2023). Used by permission.

assertion of authority instinctively feels heavy-handed. Managers are afraid to impose consequences on lazy employees. Pastors are afraid to make culturally unpopular decisions. Parents are afraid to draw boundary lines or punish disobedient children. And all that fear makes sense! Bad authority is really bad. A former pastor of mine, Mark Dever, calls it “a particularly heinous sin.” Yet we can’t throw the baby out with the bathwater, like witnessing a bad marriage and deciding to do away with marriage altogether. If King David is right about good authority, doing away with authority means we’ll miss an amazing gift that God has given to humanity—indeed, something central to being human.

So I’ll say it again: Authority is a good and dangerous gift. Authority in creation and redemption is good, while authority from the fall is bad. Christians must always keep one eye on the potential for good and one eye on the potential for bad.

Not only that, God gives us different kinds of authority—one for the parent, another for the husband, another for the government, another for the pastor, another for the workplace manager. Each of these “offices” serves a different purpose, has a different jurisdiction, and possesses different tools. It’s crucial to know the differences.

Lastly, I need to be honest: For me to write about the good kind of authority is to write better than I am. I’m not a paragon of the good; nor are you. To think otherwise is to be like the Pharisee who prayed, “I thank you, Lord, that I am not like that tax collector over there” (see Luke 18:11). A Christian approach to authority, in other words, should begin by confessing the bad in ourselves. Too many of the books I’ve read on bad authority only seem to point the finger. This book has been written by

INTRODUCTION

a man who has sinfully raised his voice with his kids, who has been selfish with his wife, who has been unloving with church members, who sometimes fails to show adequate care to ministry staff, who finds it easy to be severe with his words, who can lack compassion, who can be defensive, who too quickly feels certain that his opinions are right, yet who can also abdicate and pass the buck. God, have mercy on me, a sinner!

After confession, a Christian approach looks to the one man who used his authority perfectly—the one who came not to lord it over others or “be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45)—the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that by the end of this book you’ll see that using your authority well means trusting Christ and then using authority like he did.

What Is Authority?

WHAT EXACTLY IS AUTHORITY?

Distinguishing *authority* from *power* helps answer that question. Power is the *ability* or *capacity* to do something—the ability, say, to pick up a boulder, solve a math problem, or fix a leaky faucet. Authority, on the other hand, is the *moral right* or *license* to exercise that power. It is the *authorization* to do something.

I have four daughters. The older three drive. At age fifteen, they each had the power to drive a car. They could physically do it. Yet they could not do it legally because they had not been authorized. At age sixteen, they each passed a driving test, and the Maryland Motor Vehicle Authority gave them each a driver's license. That license represents their authority to drive a car on public roads.

Furthermore, every authority or authorization has boundaries or limits. These boundaries are tied to the purpose for which the authorization is given. My daughters, for instance, have been given authority to drive a car, not a motorcycle or an eighteen-wheeler. Both of these would require an additional license or authorization.

In other words, when you're given authority over something, you have authority only over that *something*, not over *anything* and *everything* you want. Your moral right to make decisions or give commands falls inside certain boundaries—what we might call a *jurisdiction*. Think of when Jesus talked about “a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch” (Mark 13:34 NIV). God hasn't put anyone in charge of everything, only some things—an “assigned task.”

God alone has absolute and comprehensive authority. His authority *is*. Like an author who writes whatever he pleases, so the author of all creation has all authority over what he has made.

Human authority, on the other hand, is always relative. It is not something we *are*. It is something we must *be given*. It's an office we must step into—whether the office of parent, husband, citizen, church member, pastor, elder, policeman, congressman, judge, teacher, airline pilot, tollbooth operator, and so forth.

As I said in the introduction, a right view of authority must always keep one eye on the potential for good and one eye on the potential for bad. Bad authority is Satan's version; it's authority as exercised in the fall. Good authority is God's version; it's authority as intended in creation and as exercised in redemption. With both eyes open, we see that authority is a good but dangerous gift. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I want to offer five principles to help you distinguish one from the other.

Good Authority Doesn't Steal Life but Creates It

Good, godly authority “authors” life, like the root of the word itself: *author-ity*.

Think of God. He created the universe and then exercised rule by authorizing Adam and Eve to rule over the earth. He told them to be fruitful and multiply, subdue the earth, and have dominion (Gen. 1:28). He “crowned” them and “put everything under their feet” (Ps. 8:5–6 NIV). We go to work as human beings, therefore, by waking up in the morning, putting on our Genesis 1:28 crowns, and undertaking even a small role in creating something. Maybe we help create a house, a painting, a book, an organized office space, a law case, a school, or, perhaps most amazing of all, a child.

Good authority creates, builds up, strengthens, disciplines, disciplines, corrects, encourages, gives opportunity, gives life, and passes out power. Bad authority, by contrast, destroys, deceives, steals, oppresses, uses, usurps, exploits, violates, undermines, dehumanizes, and annihilates.

Good authority employs rules that speak truth and serve love’s purposes in the life of the ruled. Bad authority employs rules too, but its rules are usually made up. They mostly serve the rule maker, not the ruled.

Good authority works not only from the top down but also from the bottom up. Like God who is our Rock, good authority says, “Let me be the platform on which you build your life. I’ll supply you, fund you, resource you, guide you. Just listen to me.” Bad authority can also speak with empathy. The heavy hand is not its only form. Yet its empathy is feigned. It wears an understanding face only because doing so furthers its own agenda. “They don’t understand you. I do. Listen to me!” It appeals to our flesh as we seek to accomplish our own aims.

Good authority is the teacher teaching, the mother mothering, the pastor modeling. It says, “Watch me swing this golf club; now

you swing it.” “Listen to me play this scale; now you play it.” Its goal is nearly always growth, even in discipline. It often aspires to work itself out of a job. Not so with bad authority. It aspires to remain in control forever. It loves possessing power over others and preserving its own convenience.

Think of how Christ invites us to rule with him in eternity. The creature never becomes the creator. God’s rule alone is eternally absolute. Still, the apostles Paul and John both say that God set up this whole thing called creation in order to invite us into his rule and glory. Christians will “reign” with Christ forever and ever (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:5). The word *reign* in the Greek literally translates “be kings with.” Jesus Christ wants us to be kings with him for eternity!

Let me bring this down to earth. One of my daughters can be absent-minded. On one occasion when I was teaching her to drive, she barreled toward a red light at full speed. She slammed on the brakes only after I said her name a third or fourth time, by that point quite loudly. Arriving home, I said to my wife, “That girl *will* crash our car.” We briefly wondered if it was foolish to teach her to drive. Just as quickly, we said to each other, “No, this is how people learn.” Those with authority have to instruct but then take risks, giving people a chance to make mistakes and grow. Little by little we authorize them to do more, even to exercise their own authority.

Isn’t this what God in Christ has done with us? Think of how low God had to stoop in order to draw sinners such as us up into his rule, emptying himself by taking on a frail human nature (Phil. 2:7). Surely I can be patient with my daughter as I teach her to drive. So can you with all the authority God has given you. Your

goal is to use whatever stewardship you've been given to create life, opportunity, and rule in others.

So stop and think about any position of authority you have. Maybe you're a manager in an office, a teacher in a school, a parent in a home, an elder in a church. When you "go to work," what's your goal? Is it to help those underneath you flourish? Grow? Do you aspire to help those under you *grow up into you* so that they can do what you do?

Good Authority Is Not Unaccountable but Submits to a Higher Authority

The incarnate Son didn't wield his authority without any accountability. He did only what his heavenly Father told him to do, said only what the Father told him to say (John 5:19; 12:50). By submitting to the Father's authority perfectly, the Son proved that he was worthy of all authority (Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:27–28).

Authority and submission are two sides of one coin. By learning to submit, we learn to lead since submitting involves aligning oneself with—replicating, mimicking, or *imaging*—the leader. No one should be put into a position of authority who does not know how to submit, who doesn't acknowledge that human authority is never absolute but is always accountable to someone, most of all to God.

When you lead, you're asking people to submit. So if you don't know how to submit, you're asking people to do something you don't know how to do, which is to say that you won't really know how to ask them to do it other than by force of personality. That's not very good leadership.

A pastor once asked me how to instruct a woman who had slammed her teenage daughter into a brick fireplace in a fit of anger. Not only did she need to apologize to her daughter, I advised, but the daughter needed to see her mother submit to the discipline of the authorities placed over *her*, at least if the mother wanted her daughter to learn to trust her authority again. Those who exercise authority well submit—even a king (Deut. 17:18–20).

Like me, you might be able to quickly list the names of pastors who did not submit to their fellow elders' or their congregation's authority. They eventually disqualified themselves in one way or another, and their names are now bywords. That's why the elders of my church, when considering potential elders, always ask the question, "Do you think you'll be able to gladly submit to the other elders?" Again, if a man will not submit, he should not lead.

Consider these questions to ascertain whether you're able to submit: How well do you listen to others? Do you have to have the last word? When you're participating in a group decision, do you get angry when the group doesn't take your counsel?

Good Authority Is Not Unteachable but Seeks Wisdom

Compare the two Pharaohs, one at the time of Joseph and the other at the time of Moses. One sought the counsel even of a slave who had been locked in prison. The other rejected the instruction of an adopted prince raised in the palace. One sought wisdom; the other despised it. And in so doing, one saved his kingdom, while the other destroyed it.

Bad authorities believe they know everything they need to know. Good authorities seek out wisdom as if it's hidden treasure.

So learned NASA. Leading up to the *Challenger* and *Columbia* space shuttle disasters, the agency administrators ignored the warnings of their engineers. Tragedy followed. Afterward, they spent days in flight readiness reviews, seeking as much counsel as possible. Those reviews made all the difference and saved lives.

Again, a couple of questions to ask yourself: Do you seek the wisdom of others in your job, in your ministry, and in your life? Do you invite correction? Would your spouse, children, or colleagues say you're defensive?

Good Authority Is Neither Permissive nor Authoritarian but Administers Discipline

Failing to discipline and draw boundaries for children creates narcissists—kids who are centered on themselves and ruled by their feelings. Boundaries teach a child, “You’re not the center of the universe. You must relinquish some of your desires, conform yourself to wisdom and the structures of the world around you, and consider other people.”

Not only that, but undisciplined children never learn the humility of accepting fences and disappointments. When college and adulthood inevitably impose those boundaries—a failing grade, an employer’s reprimand, even an encounter with people from different political perspectives—such children claim to be “triggered” and regard themselves as victims. Sociologists in turn write books theorizing different factors that contribute to this victim mentality. Yet the larger problem is the previous generation’s failure to draw boundaries and discipline their children.

Good discipline, like trimming a rose bush, causes people to flourish (John 15:2). It makes runners run faster and church

members love better. Even the Lord “disciplines the one he loves” and “chastens everyone he accepts as his son” (Heb. 12:6 NIV). Discipline reflects that some things in life are valuable, precious, and worth protecting. When practiced rightly, it is loving. It corrects against the bad and harmful, and it points toward the good, healthy, and holy. Only a world without worth, meaning, or truth requires no discipline.

At the same time, we all know stories of harsh and abusive authoritarians whose discipline didn’t strengthen but rather diminished those under them.

The word *abuse* gets thrown around quite freely in today’s society, but it is not as frequently defined. What is abuse? Simply put, it’s using your authority to do harm. What about spiritual abuse? Spiritual abuse is using God’s name or Scripture to justify your abuse. Abuse is bad. Spiritual abuse is worse.

You can sometimes identify an abusive or harsh authority by its effect on those who are being led. Abusive authority affects people differently, but over time people can become anxious, self-doubting, and people pleasing. They can become good at smiling on the outside while being insincere and cynical on the inside. They can become untrusting and suspicious in relationships, even isolated. They can become hardworking only when their boss is watching. They can become self-protective, defensive, and in that regard sadly self-interested and not others directed. They can become hedonistic, because pleasure seeking can feel like the only escape. They can become afraid of taking initiative, making decisions, or fully employing their God-given gifts and abilities. The stress of living under abusive authority for an extended time can even affect people’s physical health.

Heavy-handed authority really does hurt and misshape people. It's dehumanizing.

If you're a harsh teacher, your students are more likely to hate school; a harsh parent, your kids are less likely to love your faith; a harsh boss, you might achieve short-term gains but long-term losses because you'll have crippled your staff.

Again, the solution to bad authority isn't no authority; it's good authority. While all these warnings need to be taken seriously, Proverbs 13:24 also says that the parent who neglects discipline "hates" his child. This principle applies not just in the home but also the church, the business, and the nation. For example, pastors who don't lead the people in their churches to practice discipline undermine their own preaching.

Putting all this together requires wisdom, study, and care. Ask yourself—or better, ask those who know you well—what are the long-term effects of your discipline? Are the people you're leading growing in their domain? Getting stronger? Holier? More loving? Do they look more like Christ? Or do they appear diminished or anxious? Would people say that living or working with you requires them to walk on eggshells? Has anyone under you tried to express the negative effects of your authority, only for you to become defensive and dismissive? Is there a divide between the strong who seek to get out from under your authority quickly and the dependent who are stuck or afraid to do anything without your approval?

Alternatively, maybe you don't exercise enough discipline. Ask yourself: Do those under you act entitled? Are they excessively demanding? Do they throw a fit when you start to lean in and act as if you're committing a moral offense by leading? Do they try

to emotionally manipulate you when you insist on your instruction? Do they repeatedly demonstrate that they care more about themselves than the group or team? Are they ever willing to make sacrifices for the group or team? It may be that you've been afraid to exercise good, godly authority, and you've trained up a group of selfish and thin-skinned "children." You've cultivated immaturity.

Good Authority Is Not Self-Protective but Bears the Costs

One temptation in leadership is to use the control we possess to push the costs downward.

My youngest daughter and I both sit comfortably in the living room. I ask her to get me a drink from the refrigerator, since I know she's compliant and—at this age—happy to serve me. Yet notice what I'm doing. I'm using my authority to push the very light costs of getting out of a chair downward in the hierarchy to her. You might argue that this serves the good purpose in her life of teaching her to honor her father. Yet whether that's true or not, I know that my heart in that moment isn't seeking her good. It's just being lazy. I want to avoid the cost, so I pass it on to her.

No doubt, part of being in authority is distributing the costs of labor to different parts of a body or organization. Good leaders will delegate. "I too am a man under authority," says the centurion to Jesus. "I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it" (Matt. 8:9).

Still, there is a sense in which good leaders seek, as best as they can, to minimize the costs for those beneath them, all the while absorbing what costs they can. They want to spare those beneath them such difficulties and hardships, and so they employ the

additional strength and resources they possess to that end. That's the job.

In that sense, being “the boss” is often—and rightly—one of the hardest jobs in any group. How often is the school principal the first to arrive and the last to leave the school building on any given school day? So with the hard-working father. So with the coach.

I have to admit that I hate bearing the costs, especially of others' mistakes. But this instinct in me is the least Christlike part of me and my leadership. Didn't Jesus come to serve and give his life as a ransom (Mark 10:45)? And the giving of his life—did he do so for his mistakes or mine?

A friend recently made this observation to me: The New Testament texts on authority all communicate that part of your job as an authority figure is to help ease the burden of those under you. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger” (Eph. 6:4). “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way” (1 Pet. 3:7). “Masters, . . . stop your threatening” (Eph. 6:9). “Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly” (Col. 4:1). Easing the burden of those following you will always cost you something.

Here are a few questions, therefore, for you to consider: Do you work to lighten the load for your children, wife, church members, constituency, or employees? Are you conscious of looking for ways to make it easy for them to follow you? Are you the first to quit cleanup duty for the Sunday potluck or the last? If you are the first to leave, is it because you're rushing to help someone else or to serve yourself? Are you willing to take the blame for the mistakes of those under you, or are you preoccupied with how doing so will make you look? When someone under you disobeys you, does the desire to be honored cause you to lash out, or are you willing to

overlook his offense if doing so may serve him in the long run? Are you more personally offended by someone's rebellion than you are concerned about that person's dishonoring the Lord?

None of These Rules Matter If You're the Pharisee and Not the Tax Collector

To some degree, you and I have both misused our authority by lording it over others. We've used our leadership to serve ourselves rather than others. For us to begin anywhere other than acknowledging and confessing these things would be to mimic the Pharisee who thanked God that he wasn't like the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14).

Part of what's wrong on this planet is that each one of us assumes, "I've used my authority relatively well," when the Bible tells us over and over, "No, only one man used his authority perfectly well." His name isn't Adam or Abraham, Moses or David, Miriam or Mary, Peter or Paul. It is Jesus, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45; cf. 10:42–45).

Therefore, if we think we can simply adopt the five lessons above and move on with our lives, we will remain proud. And if we remain proud, we will eventually use our authority in a way that hurts, belittles, or undermines those whom we lead. We will use our authority wrongly, even if we dress it up with nice clothes and new manners. As Jesus said, a good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad (Matt. 7:17). We need new natures so that we can then lead out of those new natures.

To gain new natures, we must begin by getting low, confessing our sins, and putting our hope in Christ. We must put off the old

self and put on the new (Eph. 4:20–24). This requires recognition and confession of sin at the deepest levels of who we are. Not just “Lord God, I have once or twice misused my authority. Oops. Sorry for the slipup,” but “Lord God, I am, by my fallen nature, a misuser of authority, and I will misuse it repeatedly apart from your grace.” It requires continual repentance, faith, and looking to Christ. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

