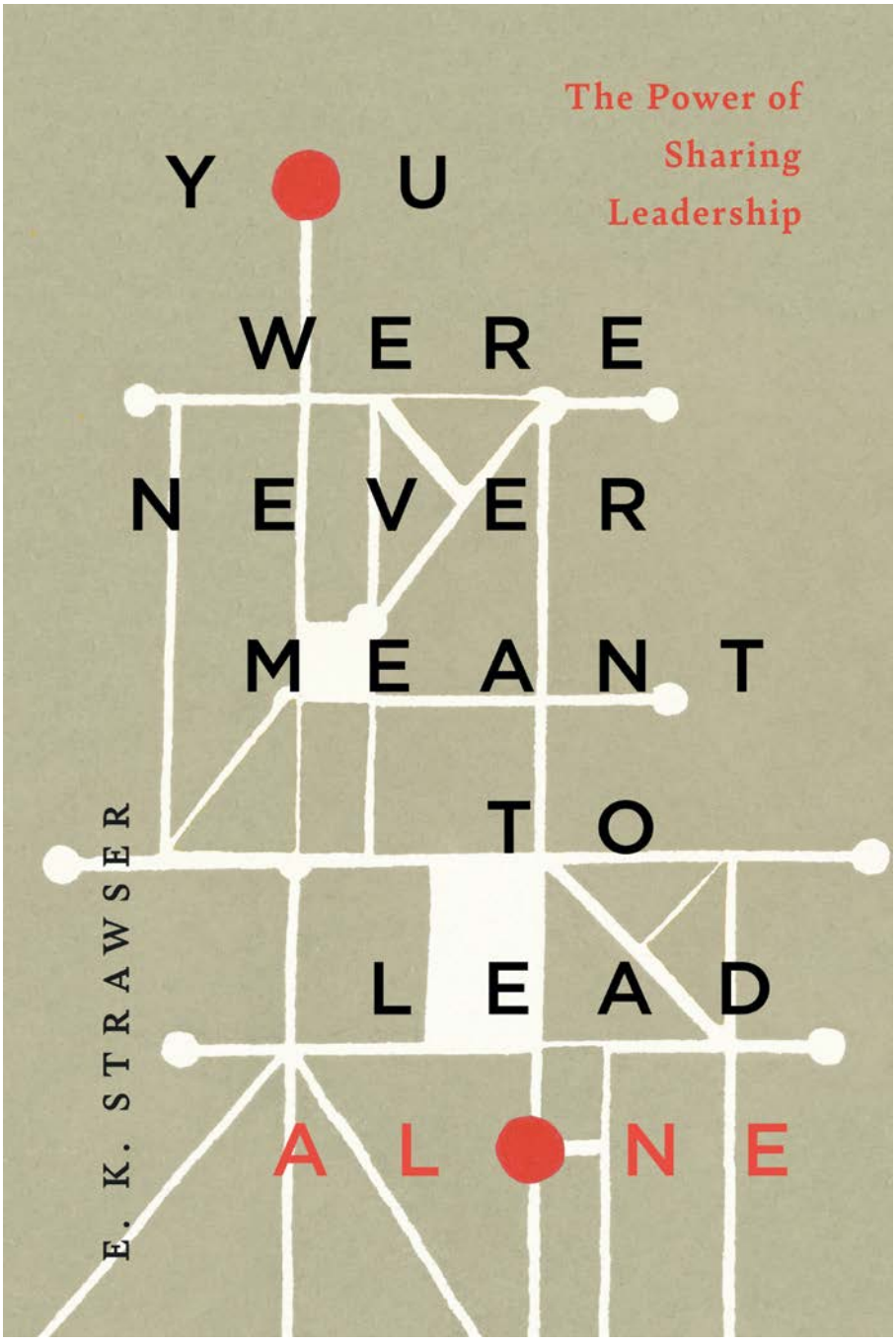


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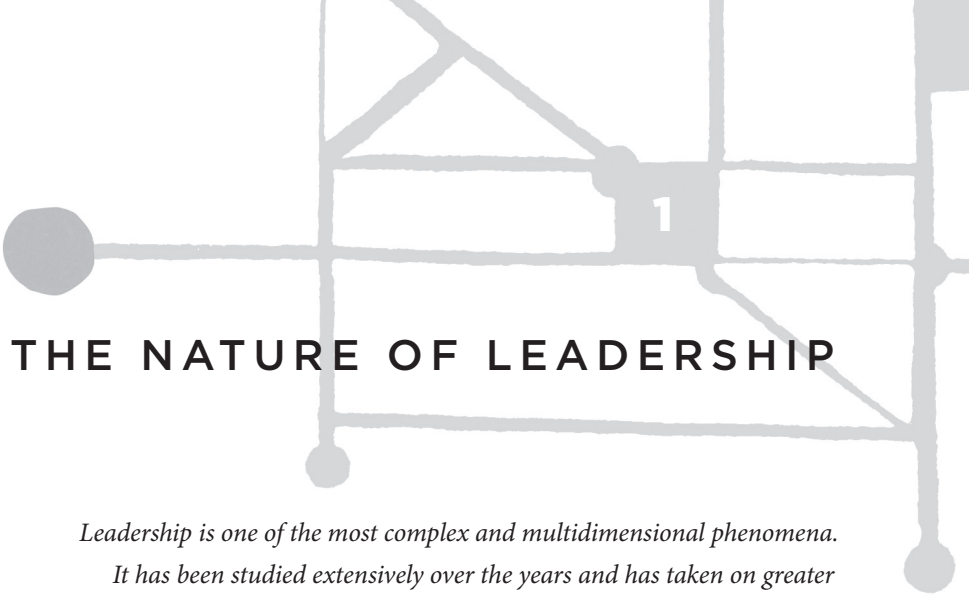

# 1

# THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

*Leadership is one of the most complex and multidimensional phenomena. It has been studied extensively over the years and has taken on greater importance than ever before in today's fast-paced and increasingly globalized world. Nonetheless, leadership continues to generate captivating and confusing debate due to the complexity of the subject.*

SIHAME BENMIRA, MOYOSOLU AGBOOLA

*But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant."*

MATTHEW 20:25-26 NLT

**THERE IS A THREE-PRONGED APPROACH** to leadership in the church in our day and age: lead until you become weary ("I'll sleep when I'm dead"),[1] experience an insurmountable depth of loneliness ("It's lonely at the top"),[2] and succeed by overpowering others. Weariness in church leadership is an expected qualification of successful leadership that often moves church leaders into experiencing loneliness and being tempted with domineering power. Mark Driscoll, C. J. Mahaney, and Steve Timmis have all succumbed to these pressures.[3]

"Leadership is lonely; welcome to the club!" Jason and Kai said to me, bright eyed and sort of smiling. I was in a local coffee shop sitting across

from my two male pastor counterparts; it was the day before my ordination. I had hesitantly said yes to a co-leadership position in our local (and very successful) young church plant. After several years of our denomination's prodding, I only said yes after my youngest, who was about three at the time, slipped onto my lap during one church service and whispered into my ear, "Can girls be pastors?" Every leader she saw on the platform that day was male. I stepped into a leadership position because, first, I wanted to answer my daughter's question about women in leadership. Yes, we can. Second, I wanted to answer the question, Can leadership be shared? This church was about to give me that opportunity.

Church leadership, for women and men, is a lonely road. My two younger male counterparts, both in their early thirties, one White, the other Polynesian, had had no other paid work experience besides that of ministry. They were bright eyed and smiling because my acceptance of leadership would bring another person into their fold of commiserating on how life is so lonely at the top. "You'll be misunderstood," they said. "You can't have friends," they continued. Leadership is an isolating pathway, but worth it to advance God's kingdom. Or so they said.

It so happened that Jason and Kai also came out of an all-too-familiar leadership structure: working with a senior pastor—a tall, thick, bravado of a Latino pastor, highly regarded in the denomination—who regularly told the church about his beautiful, sexy wife and raised up only male leaders in an egalitarian denomination. He was infamously known for his strong-handed leadership, spending most of the weekly staff meetings issuing orders, criticizing mistakes, and shooting down anyone else's feedback. It was said of Pastor Juan that he spoke the words of God, and if you didn't accept what he said, then you were rejecting the voice of God. I've known a series of young men who could not weather this senior pastor's storm, but Jason and Kai had. And what was their reward? To lead a church of their own. Domineering leadership like this is often seen as a strength and something to endure, be loyal to, and learn from. Because of this, domineering leadership in the church is reproduced repeatedly.

Amid recurring news of domineering church leadership and failure of church leadership, most efforts to devise an antidote to this toxic leadership culture in the church have focused on the psychological health, soul care, and better sabbath techniques for the burned-out main leader. Fix the leader, heal the leader, or train the leader. It has left an extensive wake of communal harm, confusion, and grief. A better leadership model is needed to replace weary, lonely, and domineering leadership in the church. There is also a need to contribute a practical real-life model of sharing leadership for the church today and a lived-out model that includes both women and men, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) leaders, and the local cultural community.

Whether we like to admit it or not, history and culture, tradition and systems, shape so much of what we expect in leadership, both for persons who hold a leadership position and for people who appoint people to those positions.

## EXPECTATIONS SHAPE THE LEADER

Warren Bennis states that "leadership is the most studied and least understood topic of any in the social sciences." He continues, "Never have so many labored so long to say so little."[4] While the debate on what makes a good leader goes from "great leaders are born"[5] to "great leaders are made,"[6] we are left unsettled. In a global world where leadership decisions affect the daily lives of so many people, we are often left feeling helpless in a changing world. Unfortunately, we routinely see headlines of failed leadership these days.

Leadership impacts all of us, and yet it is so misunderstood or poorly understood. As a senior pastor for a local church here in Hawaii, I think the sentiment is more pronounced when it comes to church leadership.

On one hand, the intrinsic perspective of leadership, that "great leaders are born," has an additional nuance for the church leader. The traits required for church leadership are not just those that move a person to action, as is the case for most secular leadership positions (including business leaders, nonprofit administrators, and politicians). The required

leadership traits must showcase an intrinsic morality. Nearly 65 percent of Christians in the United States say that the most important trait for a Christian leader is integrity, followed by authenticity. The least listed traits are passion for God, humility, and purpose.[7]

When I hear *integrity* in a predominantly American White evangelical Christian context, I picture an uncompromising adherence to a White evangelical portrait of Jesus. While integrity often looks like a person who is the same in all situations with all people, the integrity that the congregation often wants is a pastor who has uncompromising adherence to their moral viewpoint. Unchanging, inflexible. And when I hear *authenticity*, I hear a demand from a congregation worshiping its own privatized religion that the leader be "relatable" (meaning, make me feel personally comfortable). Because of the identity of those who promote "The Great Man" theory, it already connotes that women are excluded from leadership.

In stark contrast to the great (Christian) man theory, the extrinsic perspective of church leadership, that "great leaders are made," suggests that if anyone were to commit to certain skill sets, over time that person could lead the church too. Perhaps a framework could be devised that includes Christian formation, personal formation, relational skills, intellectual skills, and management skills.[8] Then you could be a pastor too! This seems to minimize the sense of call that most church leaders, both women and men, have experienced in making the courageous decision to lead, matched by discernment from the Jesus community calling them to lead.

In my current local context, I am a co-vocational founding pastor of a missional community–based church plant in Hawaii. In our seventh year we have multiplied from one community to twelve, serving the needs of over 650 persons. I have equipped over twenty-five missional community leaders who tethered their discipleship to community renewal. In my previous church leadership context, I was one of three executive team pastors in the fastest-growing and largest denomination in the state, the only woman pastor at this level of leadership in Hawaii. During my time in this position, we grew our church-plant team of twenty volunteers to 450 Sunday worship service attendees in five years' time, with 80 percent of our worship

attendees participating in these missional community groups. I equipped eighty-five community leaders, who tethered their discipleship to community renewal and cultivated a communal discipleship model that produced over a hundred active disciples in six months' time. What's more, I have served on an executive leadership team (three persons) for an international church-planting training organization with over six hundred alumni around the world. In addition, I manage my own consulting firm, working with church plants, established churches, denominations, seminaries, and Christian community-development nonprofits on centering discipleship and moving their people through change processes. I am a physician by trade, own my own practice, am a published author, and contribute to professional journals. I am routinely asked to sit on governing boards of local and translocal institutions, have been married to Steve for twenty-two years, raised three insanely thoughtful and kind children, care for my elderly parents, graduated from an Ivy League institution, and am a Fulbright Scholar.

Pretty impressive resumé, huh? Not to mention I have a third-degree black belt in Tang Soo Do. I am a direct descendant of King Sejong Lee in Korea (the guy who invented the Korean alphabet and brought literacy to the Korean people), the only daughter of a decorated colonel who fought in the Vietnam War, play the piano, and taught both Swahili and medicine in higher education.

I resonate deeply with the apostle Paul when he writes to the Jesus communities in Philippi:

> If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.
>
> But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. (Phil 3:4-7)

I resonate deeply with him because none of my "reasons to put confidence in the flesh" capture whether I'm a good leader. They don't even capture if I follow Jesus.

## THE ANATOMY OF A CHURCH LEADER

Just as there are numerous studies on the complexities of leadership in social science, there are numerous conversations about the complexities of church leadership. There are a few things to keep in mind as we consider teasing apart what makes a church leader. First, when speaking about church leadership, the dominant culture of the Western church—that is, the White evangelical church—is the loudest voice in both literary and conversational contributions. That being said, we need to keep in mind that the loudest voice is not always the most correct voice. It may only indicate which churches and church leaders have more access to resources, funding, time, network relationships, and opportunity. There is a skewed lack of voices from immigrant church leaders, BIPOC church leaders, and women church leaders. Second, church leadership has historically (and still today) rendered so much personal and communal hurt. We have to keep in mind that stories of failed leadership are not just about the leaders' mistakes; these stories also describe broken communities in the leaders' wake. Third, the most prominent leadership structure still used today is hierarchical leadership, and in the church this draws less from hierarchy in business structures and more from social hierarchy. Hierarchy isn't just a leadership structure; it's a power structure. Isabel Wilkerson, the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in journalism, writes about social hierarchy:

> Caste [or our current social hierarchical ladder] is insidious and therefore powerful because it is not hatred, it is not necessarily personal. It is the worn grooves of comforting routes and unthinking expectations, spatters of a social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the natural order of things.[9]

The picture of the Western church leader is a skewed and colonized image, a leader who has participated in a history of communal damage and holds a position of great power and authority. Ultimately, the church leader is not dealing with structures and organizations or decision-making and management; the church leader in our modern time must reckon with power.

## LEADERSHIP IN THE FIRST-CENTURY CHURCH

Nijay Gupta writes, "When we read the New Testament, especially Acts and the Epistles, we get the impression that the early Christians intentionally avoided the pyramid leadership system, certainly rejecting any kind of human 'ruler' of churches,"[10] consciously rejecting authoritarian systems that were prevalent in their contemporary Roman society. The pyramid structure of leadership, or hierarchical structure of leadership as it is more popularly called today, was not the model early Christians wished for their leadership structure. As Gupta notes,

> Roman people prized social class. At the top of the pyramid you had the emperor, of course, the highest person in the land. Below that you had the senatorial class, a tier of nobles with considerable wealth and political power. Then the equestrian class, a rank of wealth, men hoping to rise up into the senatorial echelon. Underneath that you had commoners, then foreigners, then freedpersons (ex-slaves), and last of all slaves.[11]

In the norm-disrupting culture of the first-century church, the center of their communal life was table fellowship, and all social class was disrupted at the table.[12] As Paul writes to the Jesus communities in Galatia, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26-28).

In the first-century church, there was no hierarchical leadership structure. On the other hand, there was no flat leadership structure either. In the business world, a flat organization has no management levels between the employees and their employer, the idea being that it decreases budget cost for middle management while increasing the staff's involvement in decision-making and independence. The biggest downside is that there's "a risk for generalization and confusion if the company fails to hone and specifically direct team goals and talents."[13] Too many decision makers, no decisions made. Flat leadership structure in the modern church

often results from resistance to our current dominant hierarchical church leadership structure—a resistance to reliance on a single decision maker.

Gupta highlights that in the first-century church the ethos of leadership centered on the community rather than instruction or worship. For the most part, each of apostle Paul's letters to the Jesus communities was addressed to the whole congregation. The community listened together. "Paul's tendency was to refer to leadership as giving care and oversight, not wielding power and authority."[14] Soong-Chan Rah adds in *The Next Evangelicalism*, "Acts 2 points to an evangelism and church growth that incorporates the secondary cultural system of the preached word with the primary cultural system of self-sacrificial living."[15] Further evidence that the emphasis of the first-century church was not on instruction or worship but on community. For most of the churches across the Greco-Roman world, Jesus communities met together in homes, and leadership was provided by both women and men as ministry/care providers (*diakonos*) and overseers/managers (*episkopos*).[16]

In the first-century church, all participated, but there was no flat leadership structure. Instead, oversight or care was provided by more senior or seasoned leaders. Therefore, I would argue that in the first-century church leadership was shared.

## SHARING LEADERSHIP

Not only is sharing leadership the vital antidote to the "great man" and "great skills" theories (and presumptions) of leadership, but this approach is foundational for addressing the severity of weariness, loneliness, and domineering leadership in the church today. Sharing leadership in the church is not just a good idea; sharing leadership is essential to the flourishing of both the church and the community the church resides in. It's not just a nice picture of what the church could experience; it's the very portrait of ideal leadership as it was intended for the church.

The remainder of part one will address the idea that leadership is not about a skill set or intrinsic traits; leadership is about maturity. I will identify the marks of maturity in leadership and demonstrate how

progression in maturity requires sharing leadership. Part two will explore a commonly used fivefold leadership delineation from Ephesians 4—Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, and Teachers (APEST)—as a tool for framing sharing leadership with the clear goal of equipping the church. The principles of APEST will be applied to all types of leaders, especially addressing gender, race, and culture. Part three will consider the practicals: how to identify sharing leaders, structure sharing leadership in the church, and sustain sharing leadership.

## *HŌKŪLEʻA*

In *Hawaiki Rising*, Sam Low writes passionately and reverently about the *Hōkūleʻa*, the voyaging canoe led by legendary navigator Nainoa Thompson, which by now has traveled over 150,000 miles of clear Pacifica guided by star navigation.[17] The first *Hōkūleʻa* voyage in 1975 occurred during a time when the people of Hawaii were experiencing a generation of lost heritage. Most of the young adults at that time grew up never having seen authentic hula (traditional Hawaiian ceremonial dance), heard traditional *mele* (song), or spoken ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian language). In the late 1800s, the independent Hawaiian kingdom was overthrown by the United States. Act 57, sec. 30, of the 1896 Laws of the Republic of Hawaii mandated that English become the only medium of instruction throughout Hawaii and prohibited the use of the Hawaiian language in schools, a rule reinforced with corporal punishment.[18] The same mandate prohibited hula, *mele*, and traditional ceremony. Nainoa Thompson's maiden voyage on *Hōkūleʻa*, re-learning how to navigate by the stars in open ocean like thousands of his indigenous Hawaiians' ancestors, occurred during what is now called the Hawaiian cultural revolution.

To celebrate the heritage of Hawaii, my husband, Steve, and I went to our kids' elementary school early and signed them out. "What are we doing?" asked Beren, our oldest and a very studious eight-year-old at the time. Emma, our middle child, a kindergartner, then exclaimed, "Yay! We're getting out early!" Kyriella, the baby, having just turned four a few days prior, was wide-eyed and excited to see her older siblings so early. We

ran down to the beach and joined a quickly forming throng of people on shore. Without hesitation, the five of us swam out to the *Hōkūleʻa*. The canoe was about to embark on another voyage, and before it launched, it was making some key stops across all the Hawaiian Islands. We swam with our little ones and got hoisted on board. The navigators, so kind and warm, let the kids tinker with navigation tools and showed them around the large *waʻa kaulua* (double-hulled canoe), where they fished, where they slept, and where they navigated. Then the five of us, on the count of three, jumped off the *Hōkūleʻa* together. (Beren was timid but reassured, Emma was squealing with joy, and Kyriella just held onto Steve and then asked to do it again.) We're transplants from Philadelphia, but we were brimming with reverence because we knew just how much the *Hōkūleʻa* meant for the people and the islands that we have come to love.

When I pray for the kingdom of God to come to Hawaii, I always get an image of the *Hōkūleʻa*. I see the double-hulled canoe approaching the shores slowly but surely, with such an air of regal reverence. I see an endless multitude of people waiting at the shoreline, pining to get a glimpse of it, overjoyed at its arrival. Everyone waiting at the beach knew what it was; the kingdom of God was at hand, and everyone could recognize it because it was coming as something recognizable to them.

Sharing leadership is vital to my own leadership. It's vital to my leadership because I lead in a local Hawaiian context that isn't my own. I lead a community of mostly locally born and raised-in-Hawaii people. My participation in the existing work of God in Hawaii has nothing to do with my abilities or accomplishments; it has everything to do with the ones with whom I share power. While I started as the solo lead pastor with my congregation expecting that I would lead alone, it was never my intention to remain alone. It's essential that I share power, especially with a culture of people who have lost so much of their identity and purpose to White Christian colonization. How I share leadership with my people is vital for them to recognize that the kingdom of God is at hand in their place and that they are fully invited to join in.

I'm not a good leader because of my CV. I know I'm a good leader because my local leaders let me know. Marissa, one of our local church leaders, Maui-born and raised, educator, lover of her islands and her people, happiest when waist deep in a *loʻi kalo* (taro patch) and sharing the beauty and richness of her culture with others, told me,

> When praying for you, *pikake* was the word I kept hearing and the fragrance I kept smelling. *Pikake* is adapted from the word *peacock* because Princess Kaʻiulani[19] was fond of both the bird and flower. The *pikake* is normally worn by women during ceremonies and rituals to honor the person. It felt fitting to adorn you with the *pikake*. I want to honor the work that you've done and are doing, the leader that you are. Like Princess Kaʻiulani, you demonstrate a life of strength and compassion for your people and because of your people.

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