

Christian leadership requires knowing my true identity in Christ and living authentically from that identity in community. It requires humility, transparency, vulnerability, and living through a process of transformation. As a good steward in community, I am called to love as Christ loves and to create an environment that encourages others to grow in Christ-likeness and to discover their own identities and visions from God. In this paper, I describe my leadership philosophy and the ways I am now applying this philosophy in small group discipleship for community intercessory prayer.

Part One: Christian Identity in Community

Jesus tells me He is the vine, and I am part of the branches (John 15:5). If I abide in Him, I will bear fruit, because of His life in me. If I do not abide in Jesus, I can do nothing. As a Christian leader, everything I do must be rooted in Christ. I can lead effectively only by His presence in me. If I fall off course, I need to step back into His presence.

When I feel lost, overwhelmed, or afraid, once again, His presence is what I need. In Christian life and ministry, things go awry. In John 16:33, Jesus tells me I will experience trials. When I encounter difficulties in leadership, and my mind starts spinning, that is a great reminder that I need to step back into His presence, and abide in Christ. He alone will give me peace, wisdom, and love in whatever situations I face.

Jesus' call to abide in Him reminds me that my identity as a leader comes from my relationship with Him. My identity is not my ministry, or the gifts God might have deposited in me. My identity is not my commission and calling. It does not come from my church, or even from the ways I enjoy serving. My identity is rooted in God. I am a daughter of God, a follower of Christ, and that is my true identity. If I am willing to simply be His daughter and His disciple, He will lead through me, in any way He desires.

Ogden (2003) underscores the importance of discipleship in identity (p. 49). I am called to be a follower of Jesus. As a leader, I must find and live out my identity as one of Jesus' disciples. Then I will know how to help others grow as disciples. Ogden notes that many Christians hesitate to call themselves disciples, let alone to lead others in discipleship (p. 49). Discipleship is a vulnerable place. It means walking through the fellowship of the suffering of Christ (Philippians 3:10), and letting our hearts be known by others. Yet discipleship is where we grow in our identity in Christ. Leadership means I can help others find their identity through discipleship, only to the extent I am willing to walk that same path.

As a Christian leader, I am also called to serve and love others with Christ's love. This begins with God. He must be at the center of all I am and all I do. Tippey (2016) in "Lead follower" reminds us that authentic Christian leadership begins with devotion to God: knowing Him, seeking to follow and obey, and recognizing our dependence on Him (slide 9). I have to know God's love for me, deep in my heart, as surely as the words of the psalmist in Psalm 139.

Lynch, McNicol, and Thrall (2011) remind me that if I allow my need for love to be met completely in God, He can love others through me (p. 93). When I know, to the depths of my heart, that God is love, I can also know His love for others. I can love others as God loves them, and I can help them discover His love with that same depth of heart understanding.

Part Two: Growing in Christ-likeness in Community

To serve as a godly leader, I need to surrender my whole heart and every part of my life to Christ. It is only by Christ living in me that I can love, serve, and lead others with His love. This is the sanctification process, being transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18), through death to old ways (John 15:5; Romans 8:5-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20), and through the renewal of heart and mind (Psalm 51:10; Psalm 139:23-24; Romans 12:2).

While God does the work of transformation in my heart, I need to be intentional about participating with Him, and being available to Him. I need to practice spiritual disciplines, such as prayer; sitting in God's presence and abiding in Him (John 15); worship (John 4:24); spending quiet time with God (Psalm 46:10; Luke 5:16); meditating on God's Word; keeping Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9-11); putting God first (Matthew 6:33; Mark 12:30-31); allowing God to search my heart (Psalm 139:23-24) and convict me of areas that need forgiveness, repentance, healing. I need to love and honor others (John 13:34-35; 15:12; Romans 12:10; 1 John 4:7-10); to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16); to live above reproach (Philippians 2:15); to live, move, and have my being in God (Acts 17:28).

Balducci (2014) reminds me not only of the importance of daily prayer, but also of the ways God uses prayer in transformation. Balducci cites Father Brett Brennan in the reminder that I become like Christ as I spend time with Christ, through prayer (p. 55). Whether I am talking with God, inviting and allowing Him to change my heart, or simply sitting quietly in His presence, He is working to transform me. I have to be willing to respond to what He shows me: to confess, repent, forgive, and walk out my healing.

The process of healing and transformation does not only take place in those quiet places of prayer, alone with God. Transformation also takes place in community, and in accountability. My ministry mentor has reminded me many times that we are wounded in relationships, and we need to be healed in relationships. Often God will reveal a heart issue during quiet prayer that must be confessed and prayed through in community. At other times, an issue will arise in community that must be healed through time alone with God. In all cases, accountability helps me move through the healing to walk out the transformation.

If I am willing to live vulnerably and transparently, in community and in accountability,

and to practice daily spiritual disciplines, to intentionally “be” in God’s presence, I will continue to grow as a disciple. I will also be living a model for the discipleship of others. As a Christian leader, I need to create an environment that invites and encourages transformation. Regardless of my area of ministry service, I need to include opportunities to participate in spiritual disciplines, together as a community, and to hold each other accountable as God changes our hearts.

While some ministries are not small, Ogden (2003) emphasizes the value of discipling in small groups, giving individual attention (p. 43). He illustrates the importance in Jesus’ ministry of investing in relationships with a small number of individuals (p. 61). A smaller setting for community and accountability allows for personal transformation (Ogden, 2003, pp. 43, 45-46).

As I think of churches where I have served, it is possible within a larger ministry to create more intimate discipleship opportunities. Discipleship may start with a few people, but these individuals will be raised up as leaders who can disciple others. This may be a call to disciple individuals volunteering in children’s ministry, or hospitality ministry, or serving on a church committee. Church leadership can create church-wide opportunities for small group discipleship, but how much more empowering when personal discipleship seeps into every area of ministry.

For many individuals, creating a discipleship opportunity within a focused ministry will be new, and perhaps radically so. Not everyone may be interested in going this deeply. Where churches lack a deep culture of discipleship, a children’s ministry volunteer might say, “I just want to serve in the pre-K class on Sunday morning, and that is all.” Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006), in discussing transition to a missional church, indicate 10-15% participation at the outset is to be expected (p. 103). This small number is not meant for discouragement, but rather as a sign of hope. As each small group of individuals submits to the discipleship and transformation process, they, in turn, will be able to bring others into the process.

Part Three: Stewardship in Community

Every person has gifts to contribute to the community. If one person is missing, the community is lacking. 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us we cannot function as the body of Christ without each other. Not only is each person a valued treasure, just for who they are. But also each person serves the body of Christ in a way no other person can do. Also, some gifts are meant to work together with others in the body of Christ, much as vitamins must work together in the human body. If one person does not participate with her gifts, not only is the body lacking in her particular gifts, expressed through her identity; but also the body will be missing the blessings that result from how her gifts are made to work in tandem with the gifts of others.

Each person must know his value to God and value to community, apart from gifts. People are valuable just because they “are.” Their identity in Christ comes from who they are to Him, not from what gifts they bring. When folks know their true value and identity, then they need to be given opportunities to find their places in the body of Christ, so they can share their gifts, in the unique ways that only they can.

As God shares His vision with a community, each person receives a piece of that vision. The leader may receive and carry the overall vision, but everyone in the community has a part in the vision. “Deep Dive” (1999) presents an idea of “focused chaos.” This is a way for leadership to keep a vision or project on track, but still allow full creativity among the team, as each team member moves in his or her identity to bring the vision to life.

While 1 Corinthians 12 talks about gifts, 1 Corinthians 13 speaks about love. God’s love, and relationships established in His love, are what Christian community is all about. What could be more important? What program, vision, or concern in a church family could ever be more important than God’s love? God regularly reminds me that “how” is often more important than

“what.” I often think of love as being the “how” – we love as Jesus loves, we interact with people by His love, etc. But in this class, I have also come to think of the “what” as love. No other “what” can outweigh or justify undermining the foundation of God’s love.

To steward this complex and vibrant environment, established in God’s love, requires sensitivity to how people perceive what we say and do (Elmer 2002, p. 43). In other words, we can try and be as careful as possible in how we interact with others in a complex cultural environment. But until we truly know people, and listen to how they are hearing our words, and what that means to them, we can trip over our well-meaning efforts to love. Love grows and is revealed in genuine relationship; that is how God made us.

Stewardship requires knowing and working with people on a personal level. As a leader invests in a small number of people, those people will then invest in others. The ripple effect will grow throughout the community. Ogden (2003) addresses the inevitable criticism that will arise, as folks wonder why a pastor is investing in a small group (p. 65). Ogden reminds pastors that their role is to equip the saints for ministry (pp. 40, 65). He argues that investing in a few people at a time, and sending them out to do the same, is the most effective means of equipping in the church. After all, that is what Jesus did on earth.

Effective stewardship also requires humility and grace. As a leader, it is okay not to know what God is doing. As members of the body of Christ, we can discover together how God is working among us. As a leader, I need to be open to what God is doing in and through others, and to see how that shapes and affects the vision for our community, whether that community is one ministry or the whole church.

Living in grace and humility is even more a *propos* as churches work together as the body of Christ in a city. In that setting, it is easier to recognize God is the actual leader. He delegates

His authority to church and ministry leaders, for the sake of loving and growing His Church. But He also delegates the authority of being a son or daughter to every member of the body of Christ. He shares His vision with all of His friends. We understand more as we bring our pieces of the vision together in community. God desires that we live, work, and implement vision in accountability and relationship.

Part Four: Application in Community

Before applying my Christian leadership philosophy to a specific setting, I would like to review the ingredients of this philosophy:

My Christian leadership

- is based on my identity as God's daughter and Jesus' disciple.
- is rooted in Christ's love, in a community founded on Christ's love.
- requires spiritual discipline, transparency, vulnerability, accountability, humility, and grace.
- requires my willingness to walk in forgiveness, repentance, sanctification (healing), and transformation, by surrendering my heart fully to the work of the Holy Spirit, and responding as He leads.
- knows that each person in the community is valuable, just because of who he or she is.
- recognizes a community in which each person brings unique gifts, many of which work together.
- encourages others to walk in their gifts and creates environments for them to do so.
- is sensitive to the ways people might misperceive things I say and do.
- listens and asks for the glimpses of vision God gives to each person for the community.
- understands that discipleship grows from small, intentional relationships.

- recognizes I do not know much, except that God is love and Jesus Christ is Lord.
- knows that Christ's love is more important than any program or goal.

For years, I worked on staff as head intercessor of a church. Now I am a missionary of prayer in my community. I lead a small mission that offers prayer resources and a prayer school, and works closely with two ministries. I am trying also to grow in relationship with the churches of my community. My passion is to help people grow in their prayer life, and to encourage praying families, praying churches, and a praying community.

Even though I am no longer part of a church staff, I am familiar with many mistakes we made as a church, in trying to grow a culture of prayer. Through the readings, lectures, and discussions of this class, I have tried to reflect on how I might have done things differently. I cannot go back, but these insights will help me in moving forward.

Some of the challenges I ran into, as head intercessor of a church, are still challenges I face today as a missionary of prayer. One of the bigger challenges is that many church-going people I talk with do not seem interested in prayer. Many people believe prayer is something others do. People are afraid they don't know how to pray, or cannot pray. Some individuals, including a church worship leader, have told me they don't want a relationship with God.

I receive a more active response to teachings on prayer at the local jail, where I have a captive audience (truly no pun intended), than among folks in a church on Sunday morning. The captive audience is really not the reason. The women in the jail respond to prayer because they have discovered their lives depend on it. They know they need an active relationship with God, and without Him, they can do nothing. Many people in church still falsely believe they have other ways to accomplish things, without being utterly dependent on God.

During inner healing schools, I have been blessed to be on the receiving end of intensive prayer cover. It affects not only the school, but also every aspect of my life as a leader in the school. Prayer cover works. Every church needs it – not only a strong foundation of prayer, but also an effective cover of prayer. Yet whenever I have shared this with an audience, I have received very little response. Even though I have shared my testimony of being on the receiving end of prayer cover, again, the reply is, “Someone else needs to do that. It’s not for me.”

Not every person is called to be an intercessor, but we are all called to pray: to talk with God; to interact with Him; to depend on Him; to have a deep and growing relationship with Him. Prayer, as very simply conversation with God, is a key to our relationship with Him. That is at the very minimum. Prayer does so much for our families, for our communities, for healing, for the salvation of others, for God’s big-picture narrative of His mission in the world. But as I have taught and tried to mentor in prayer, I have run across a catch-22: People often don’t know what prayer will do until they try it; and they don’t try it because they don’t know what it will do.

I admit it can be discouraging. On my good days, this doesn’t diminish my passion for sharing about prayer. On my bad days, I serve out of obedience, knowing what God has done for me and what prayer means to me.

With my newly refined philosophy of leadership, and a semester of reflections on challenging situations I have faced, what can I do differently, moving forward in this mission of prayer? I think some changes are underway already, by the grace of God. Others will require more intentionality on my part.

In addition to serving as a missionary of prayer, I have been involved for years with an inner healing ministry. Because of what God has done in me through this ministry, I have learned to submit to sanctification, and to walk in greater healing, which means more death to self each

day. Through this ministry, I have intense accountability, and I practice spiritual disciplines. I also mentor and minister to others going through this inner healing and sanctification process.

I can extend that, more intentionally, to my mission of prayer. I can actively share more testimonies, as suggested by Andy Stanley (2003), as a way to celebrate vision in community. I can share more about the spiritual disciplines, and why they have been so helpful to my life. I can include testimonies of others going through inner healing, who have offered to share their testimonies. Inner healing is prayer-based, so that is another way to share the impact of prayer.

As a teacher, one of my greatest desires is to help others learn about prayer in ways that will help them. Often, I teach from what I have experienced, rather than listening to the experiences of the people I am trying to help. While I know some of those folks well, I need to know others better. I need to be in a genuine relationship with them, so I can really hear their hearts. If I think of the heart like a garden, I might be trying to water one already overwatered plant, while neglecting a plant that lies dry at the other end of the garden. The very thing they need might not be what I am droning on about. When I miss what they need, it is because I haven't intentionally listened, and haven't gotten to know them as well as I could have.

I can do better with vision as well. Through years of working with families and churches, and through seeking God for prayer strategies, I have a pretty good sense of what a praying family and praying church looks like. I have mapped out these strategies, traveled those roads myself, and I can help folks get there. But is that everything? What if I ask people in my community to seek God for their own vision of prayer? Then they can come to me for help, to fill in the gaps. How much more invested would they be, then? What a leap in their prayer life too, as they begin by seeking and hearing God's vision.

Perhaps the biggest change needed for me, in my leadership philosophy, is to follow

Ogden's (2003) advice to disciple in small groups. I have been teaching for more than 30 years, and my goal has always been to help the most people, rather than just a few. I recall one professor told me, upon reading my teaching philosophy, that it was very unusual. In my philosophy, I said that if I had not reached every student in the class, and helped every one move forward, I had not done my job. My professor told me, "Typically, you won't reach more than a few. You should concentrate on them."

His comment never sat right with me, so I carried my teaching philosophy into church ministry. I wanted to help every person in the church grow in prayer, rather than start with just a few. In hindsight, and especially through my reflections in this class on leadership, I now realize my professor was right. My vision for every person in the church to grow in prayer comes from God. That is His heart. But it is not my role to reach every person myself. That is God's job.

I can start with a few people at a time. I can disciple them in prayer, and encourage and help them to do the same for others. In such small groups, I can truly get to know the people, know their hearts, know what they are seeking to learn about prayer. I can love them with Christ's love, and that love would be more important even than prayer.

I could interact with them not as a prayer teacher, but simply as God's daughter. We could practice spiritual disciplines and accountability together, just as my mentor does with our team of inner healing ministers. We could pray together, and share testimonies to celebrate what God is doing. This sounds remarkably like the small group ministries I used to participate in at our church, but with a focus on prayer. For two years, I have been seeking a new vision for this new season of prayer mission. I finally have an idea of what it looks like. Praise God.

Part Five: Implementation in Community

I mentioned some of this may be starting already, not by my own doing, but by God's

leading. I have been meeting once a week to pray with three other people at our local Starbucks. It is part of the university campus in our town, and the tables are on the sidewalk along Main Street. It is the perfect place to enjoy fellowship and to pray. Sometimes visitors stop by who need prayer. I have led community prayer groups before, but this is different. This started organically, simply by my telling just a few people, “I’m going to sit at Starbucks every Tuesday evening and pray. Stop by if you would like to join me.”

I started this weekly activity at the beginning of this summer semester. The same three individuals have shown up to pray every week. Now, thanks to my inner healing mentor, who received our sheriff’s approval to hang a county prayer map in the sheriff’s office, our little group is also prayer driving around the county, and marking these prayed-over roads on the map.

Every week, we share with each other transparently. We offer accountability. We pray for the community and for each other. We enjoy java chip frappuccinos together. I answer questions about prayer when they ask. They respond to the prayer resources I share online. We are growing together as disciples, and when I show up on Tuesday evenings, I am there simply as God’s daughter. I couldn’t have planned it. God just did it. As I have been writing out my leadership philosophy to see where it was leading, should I even be surprised God already set this in place?

I believe the new season has begun. I am leading in a completely different way than I did at the church. No more frustration, covering the church with materials on prayer, speaking and preaching on prayer, trying to mobilize prayer, and doing everything but skywriting to call for prayer. Instead, I am showing up, sharing Christ’s love over coffee, praying with three other daughters of God, and watching as God grows our families and community in prayer.

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