

The scandal of weak leadership

Paul's defense of ministry

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INTRODUCTION

A JOB ADVERTISEMENT READS: Pastor Required

- For a growing, charismatic church with a congregation of diverse backgrounds.
- Must have strong leadership qualities and the ability to cast vision.
- Excellent preaching skills required.
- Needs to demonstrate appropriate spiritual gifts.
- Ability to interact with the influential in society an advantage.
- Attractive remuneration package.

Have you ever seen a job advertisement like that? It is the sort of job advertisement I could imagine the church in Corinth writing. However, their apostle and pastor did not quite meet their expectations. As an apostle, Paul was not very impressive. He was not the eloquent speaker they had hoped for. Instead of providing the “strong” leadership they wanted, he treated them with gentleness. He taught about spiritual gifts, but hardly

ever talked about his own experience. Rather than mixing with the influential, he insulted them. Even worse—he would not take their money!

He was an apostle who was radically different from the expectations of many in the Corinthian Church. He was not the embodiment of success, influence, power or eloquence they had hoped for. Instead, he was weak, sick, persecuted, afflicted, and suffering. To then add insult to injury, he had the audacity to tell them that his weakness was actually proof that he was genuine! How could that be possible?

What has come down to us as 2 Corinthians is Paul's defense of his model of apostleship; his insistence that the appropriate model for ministry was one where divine power was demonstrated in the presence of human weakness. This was the model because it reflected the pattern of Jesus who was "crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God's power" (2 Cor 13:4).¹

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–11

After the initial greeting at the beginning of 2 Corinthians, Paul launched into a benediction of praise for "the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our distress" (1:3–4). Paul went on to elaborate on the relationship between suffering (*pathēma*) or affliction (*thlipsis*) and comfort or encouragement (*paraklēsis/parakaleō*). Far from affliction disqualifying him from being an apostle, it was, in fact, a demonstration of his apostleship. For when he was afflicted, he received God's comfort, and both were for the benefit of the Corinthians. Thus, through the opening benediction Paul provided the theological basis for a defense of suffering and affliction as part of his apostolic ministry.

As he expounded these themes, Paul gave an example of God working through his suffering in a very dramatic way. While in Asia he had experienced an affliction where he had become convinced that he would not survive, and yet God had rescued him. While this was an example of what he had been explaining about the relationship between suffering and comfort, it was much more than that. For the reason Paul gave for the experience was not so that he would be able to comfort others, but so that he would learn to "rely on God who raises the dead" (1:9).

1. I am working from the assumption that 2 Corinthians 10–13 was written after 2 Corinthians 1–9, either as part of the same letter, or as an additional letter written shortly afterwards, probably after Paul received additional information regarding the changing situation in Corinth.

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Here, in stark contrast to other descriptions of afflictions he had experienced in the course of ministry, Paul gave only sketchy information about the details of the event. Instead, using very intense language, he emphasized his emotional response and the theological significance of that response. This “near-death experience” impacted much of what Paul wrote in the remainder of the letter. What he had learned through this event would become the backdrop against which he would defend his ministry. Through this experience, the principle of relying on God rather than relying on oneself had been compellingly reinforced. The situation had forced him to abandon self-reliance and any pretence of self-sufficiency and rely solely on God.

2 CORINTHIANS 2:14–3:6

In 2:14–3:6 Paul described and defended his apostleship as new covenant ministry. He did this by a series of metaphors and rhetorical questions. First, Paul likened being a minister of Christ to being led as a captive in a Roman triumphal procession.² This presupposes having previously been conquered, and brings to mind the fate of those in such a procession. That fate was usually to be executed as a demonstration of the superior power and authority of the victor—unless the one whose procession it was showed mercy. Paul pictured himself as one being led to death for the sake of Christ.

Then Paul likened being a minister to the wafting aroma of sacrifice. Incense was burned in the context of the Roman triumphal procession, but Paul’s choice of words also suggests an allusion to the aroma of Old Testament cultic sacrifices. So it was that as the apostle was such an aroma, the knowledge of God was spread abroad—with eternal consequences. It was a perfume to those who were being saved, but an awful stench to those who were perishing (2:15–16a). A comparison of these verses with 1 Corinthians 1:18 strongly supports the need for congruity between the content of message, the method of proclamation, and way of life of the one who proclaims it. This means that the message of the cross was always to be lived out by the one who proclaimed that message. How the message of the cross was demonstrated in the way Paul proclaimed

2. While there has been much discussion about the meaning of the verb, *thriambeuō*, the view that appears to have the strongest support is the one that understands it as referring to defeated prisoners of war being led as captives in a Roman triumphal procession.

the message is described in 1 Corinthians 1:17—it was not with eloquent wisdom.³ Paul maintained that to proclaim it in such a way would have been to empty the cross of its power; his eloquent speech, rather than the power of the cross, could have been given the credit for success. The way the paradigm of the cross was demonstrated in Paul's life is made explicit in 2 Corinthians 2:14–16. It was as he was led to death as a captive in God's triumphal procession that he became the means through which “the aroma of the knowledge of God was spread in every place”; that Paul “became the fragrance of Christ to God” (2 Cor 2:14b–15a). “It is Paul as the *proclaimer* of Christ crucified, and who as a consequence suffers, who is the aroma of Christ.”⁴

The message of the cross, the manner in which it is proclaimed, and the lifestyle of the person who proclaims it, must all fit the same pattern. Thus, Paul's suffering for the sake of the Gospel, far from invalidating his standing as an apostle, actually endorsed it. It was because he suffered, because he proclaimed the Gospel in the power of God, rather than with eloquent human wisdom, that his apostleship was valid.

Neither of the images Paul used were images the Corinthians would have naturally associated with apostleship. Their criticisms of Paul suggest they would have used much more “noble” images. However, Paul used images of weakness—the image of being led as a captive and the image of being the aroma of a sacrifice—to illustrate his calling as an apostle.

But even with such “weak” images, Paul claimed to be adequate for the task (3:16b). In contrast to the apparent claims of some others, Paul's sufficiency came not from himself, but from God. He was not the victor in the triumphal procession; he was the defeated captive. His presence in such a procession was not due to his own victory or achievement, but to the victory of God. It was from a position of weakness and defeat that he became the aroma of the knowledge of God. Twice in the space of just a few verses (2:17–3:6), and in only slightly different terms, he stated that he spoke and functioned as a minister of the new covenant, as one who was sent by God, whose responsibilities were carried out in the presence of God, and who labored as he did because of his relationship to Christ. The Corinthians, themselves, were the evidence that this was the case. Thus, he carried out his ministry with confidence, in the knowledge that his competency for

3. *ouk en sophia logou*; lit. “not in wisdom of words.”

4. Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 153.

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ministry did not come from himself, but came from God. Once again, the contrast between human power and divine power is evident.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:1–12

This same principle—that ministry can only be conducted in God’s power and not in human power—is reiterated with the statement in 2 Corinthians 4:1: “Therefore, since by God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.” As Hughes comments, “It is not an achievement of human ability but a consequence of divine mercy.”⁵ It was through God’s enabling, expressed here as God’s mercy, that Paul could face the difficulties, the suffering, the persecution, that apostolic ministry brought.

This is made even more explicit in 4:7: “We have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power might be of God, and not come from us.” Paul had just given a summary of his approach to ministry—it was with integrity both before people and, more importantly, before God. With two parallel statements, he had provided a summary of the content of his message: “the light of gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (4:4) and “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). This is immediately followed with Paul’s image of treasure in clay jars. His weakness, lack of eloquence, ordinariness, fragility, suffering, and hardships, formed a stark contrast with the unparalleled glory and power of the “treasure” he carried.

While Paul’s application of the image may have seemed outlandish, the image itself would have been familiar to Paul’s audience. Cheap, fragile, often unattractive, and readily discarded, clay jars were part of everyday life—much like the plastic container of today. Once again, Paul gave a startling picture of what apostolic ministry was like, an image that reinforced the concept that both suffering and divine power were integral parts of his ministry. As Garland summarizes,

Picturing himself as an ordinary, everyday utensil conveying an invaluable treasure is as striking an image as Paul’s picture of himself as a defeated but joyous prisoner marching in God’s triumphal procession (2:14).⁶

5. Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, 122.

6. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 220.

The second part of 4:7 forms a purpose clause: “so that the extraordinary power might be of God and not from us.” Most standard translations include the words “to show that,” or something similar. The treasure is contained in clay jars *to show* that the power comes from God. The assumption is that the power for ministry does come from God; the fact that the “treasure”—whether that is understood as a reference to the “light” of the gospel, the “ministry” of the gospel, or the gospel itself—is contained in the clay jars of fragile, weak human lives, simply demonstrates that. However, the “*to show that*” is not in the Greek. It simply has “so that the extraordinary power *might be* of God, and not from us” (cf. NAB, NJB)—a present tense subjunctive (*ē*) of the verb “to be” (*eimi*). If Paul wished to say “show that” it is God’s power, there are several verbs he could have used, but he chose not to. Thus Savage asks the question,

Is it possible that Paul means exactly what he says, that it is only in weakness that the power may *be* of God, that his weakness in some sense actually serves as the grounds for divine power?⁷

If Paul is understood to mean exactly what he says, this opens up an alternative interpretation. It raises the possibility that ministry could be attempted with human effort, in human power. But the reason the treasure is in “clay jars” is so that this will not be the case. The weakness and fragility of the clay jar of a human life, is so that the minister will give up any illusion of self-sufficiency and realize that ministry can only be carried out in God’s power. Once again, sufficiency comes from God and the minister must rely on the “God who raises the dead.”

2 CORINTHIANS 6:3–10

In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul described his ministry as a “ministry of reconciliation.” This ministry was possible only because it was through Christ’s death and resurrection that God had acted to reconcile the world to himself. This is yet another passage revealing that not only was it Paul’s message about Christ’s death and resurrection, and the right relationship with God that is possible as a result, but also his manner of proclamation of that message, and indeed his whole way of life, that followed the same pattern.

As Paul commended himself to the Corinthians (6:3–10), he did so using a well-known genre, that of the “hardship catalogue,” but in do-

7. Savage, *Power*, 166.

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ing so he did not draw attention to his own self-sufficiency in enduring hardship. Rather, the “great endurance” (2 Cor 6:4b) he displayed was the result of functioning “in the Holy Spirit” and “in the power of God,” and was demonstrated in a genuine, authentic and loving relationship with the Corinthian Christians (6:6b–7a). The antitheses he used to describe his ministry (6:8–10) reflect his paradigm that viewed apostolic ministry as sharing in both the suffering and death of Jesus and God’s power in raising him from the dead.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1–10

In 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 Paul brings his comments regarding weakness to a climax. In chapters 10 and 11 he had addressed various accusations and inferences that he was “weak,” and thus at least an inferior apostle—if indeed he was an apostle at all. His manner of dealing with these issues was to do what the Corinthians thought he should do—to boast of his qualifications, even though such boasting was, he said, foolishness (11:1, 21; 12:11). However, instead of boasting of his power and eloquence, he boasted of his weaknesses, including his persecutions (11:23–33; 12:9–10).

In 12:1–10 Paul dealt specifically with the matter of the relationship between ecstatic visions and qualification for apostolic ministry. He recounted his experience from fourteen years earlier, but even though it involved an exceptional revelation, he gave only minimal details about the experience, and revealed nothing at all of its actual content. Such an exceptional revelation could easily be the cause of enormous pride. In order to stop him from becoming proud, Paul was given a “thorn in the flesh” (12:7).⁸ Three times he pleaded with the Lord for it to be removed, but only when he received a categorically negative reply, did he realize its true purpose: to keep him from becoming proud because of the exceptional revelation he had received. Instead of the “thorn” being removed, it would remain as a constant reminder that not only such revelations, but also his apostolic ministry, were based on God’s grace, not on Paul’s worthiness.

8. There has been a huge amount of discussion regarding what the “thorn in the flesh” might have been. The two most common views are that (1) it was some sort of physical infirmity, or (2) it was some form of opposition or persecution. While the balance of evidence seems to be slightly in favour of it being some form of physical infirmity, there is insufficient evidence to identify this “thorn in the flesh” with any certainty. For the argument in this essay the existence of the “thorn in the flesh” is important, but its precise nature is immaterial.

Unlike the “unutterable utterances” Paul heard when he was caught up to paradise (12:4), the Lord’s reply to his request that the “thorn” be removed, was something that Paul openly shared.⁹ The statement is traditionally translated, “My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is made perfect in weakness,” although some recent translations omit the “my,” which is not in the older manuscripts. However, a more literal translation is “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness.”

The history of interpreting “the power” as a reference to the Lord’s power,¹⁰ coupled with a textual variation,¹¹ has led to a perpetuation of the traditional translation. The majority of commentators follow the translation of the standard English versions without comment on any textual issues. Even though some more recent translations omit the “my” and a number of commentators acknowledge that it is not original, the statement is still frequently interpreted as if the “my” were there; as if it were a reference to the Lord’s power. With regard to Paul’s choice of verb, most commentators, if they comment on it at all, argue that Paul used the verb *teleō* (*bring to an end, finish, complete*) as if it was *teleiōō* (*complete, end, finish or make perfect*). Exceptions to this are Lenski and Dawn,¹² who argue that the usual meaning of *teleō*, (“finished”/“ended”) is the one that is intended here. Lenski opts for the translation, “For the power is brought to its finish in weakness.” He does, however, still argue that it is God’s power, that is, the purpose of God’s power is brought to completion. Dawn follows Lenski in arguing that *teleō* should be translated “to finish” and not “to make perfect” as if it were *teleiōō*. However, she differs from Lenski in that she argues that the power is Paul’s power that is brought to an end in weakness.

There is significant overlap in meanings between the words *teleō* and *teleiōō*. However, with the possible exception of 2 Corinthians 12:9, the meaning of “to perfect” appears to be limited to *teleiōō*. Thus, if 2 Corinthians 12:9 does indeed have the meaning of “made perfect,” it would appear that the verb *teleō* has been used as if it were *teleiōō*. This raises the question of whether there are other occurrences of this phenomenon.

9. *arkei soi hēcharis mou, hēgar dunamis en astheneia teleitai.*

10. *hēdunamis.*

11. *hēgar dunamis mou en astheneia telioutai.*

12. Dawn, *Powers, Weakness*, 37–41.

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It is difficult to find other examples of such usage. There are none in the New Testament. There is one possibility in the LXX. The NRSV renders Wisdom 4:16 as “youth that is quickly perfected,”¹³ but has a footnote indicating that it could mean “ended”. As the phrase is contrasted with “prolonged old age,” “youth that is quickly ended” is at least as good a translation as “youth that is quickly perfected,” if not better. Outside of biblical literature, it is also difficult to find examples. One has to go back or forward several centuries to find possible examples of *teleō* being used as if it were *teleioō*, and even those are far from certain.

The evidence points overwhelmingly to the standard meaning of *teleō* being “ended, completed, finished”. While a meaning of “perfected” cannot be completely ruled out, it is at best a rare usage. As elsewhere, Paul uses the verb *teleioō* and related words to express the idea of “made perfect,”¹⁴ it seems that his use of *teleō* here was intentional.

As highlighted above, Paul began the section by recounting an experience from fourteen years earlier when he was caught up into paradise and was given an outstanding revelation. As a result of this vision, he received a “thorn in the flesh” to stop him from becoming proud. Three times he prayed for its removal, but the reply he received from the Lord was, “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness.”

The nature of the revelation meant that it would have been possible, perhaps even probable, that Paul would have become proud, and that he would have equated the outstanding nature of the revelation with his qualification, even right, to be an apostle. His qualifications, his experiences, in essence his own power, could have become the basis of his apostleship. It was to stop this that the “thorn in the flesh” was given. It was to be a constant reminder of his dependence on God, a constant reminder that his apostleship, his ministry, was not the result of his own power, but rather the result of God’s power.

In the weakness of the “thorn in the flesh,” Paul’s power was brought to an end. “Therefore,” he said, “I prefer to gladly boast in my weaknesses [rather than in the extraordinary visions], so that the power of Christ might take up residence in me.” This is a further example of how the weaknesses Paul suffered brought him to the place of realizing that his own power was inadequate, and of letting go of his reliance on human re-

13. *neotēs telesthesia tacheōs*.

14. Phil 3:12; cf. 1 Cor 2:6; 13:10; 14:20 Phil 3:15; Eph 4:13; Col 1:28; 3:14.

sources. The “thorn” was a powerful and ongoing reminder to rely on the “God who raises the dead,” a reminder that stayed with him and impacted his entire ministry.

The newcomers in Corinth presented the church with a model of apostleship that was very different from the model Paul presented. They advocated an apostleship that was strong, eloquent, boastful and forceful, and, as it fitted with their cultural expectations, this model of apostleship gained popularity among the Corinthians. By comparison, Paul’s model of apostleship was at best inferior, and possibly even invalid. It was in addressing this situation that Paul discussed his exceptional vision and subsequent “thorn in the flesh.” and then reported the Lord’s statement, “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness.” The traditional interpretation has provided comfort for countless people over the centuries, and will no doubt continue to do so. Nevertheless, the context indicates that Paul’s intention was not to comfort people who were weak and suffering, but rather to challenge those who valued power. Thus this alternative interpretation is, I believe, more likely to express the apostle’s intentions in defending his apostleship in the face of accusations of weakness.

SECOND CORINTHIANS 13:1-4

The theological underpinning for Paul’s understanding of weakness bringing human power to an end, and thus allowing divine power full freedom of operation, was the death and resurrection of Christ. This is made explicit in 2 Corinthians 13:3b-4:

He [Christ] is not weak in his dealings with you, but is powerful among you, for indeed he was crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power. So we also in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power.

While it was only as he concluded the letter that Paul spelled this out, it was in fact the paradigm that underlay all he had said in the letter, in particular, his defense of his apostolic ministry.

Paul’s statement of his paradigm contains three interrelated statements that are structured and include significant repetition, parallelism and contrasts, especially of the “weakness”/“power” antithesis. That Christ had not been “weak” among the Corinthians had been demonstrated by

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their conversion, and continued to be displayed among them. But the “power” of Christ’s resurrection had been preceded by the “weakness” of his suffering and death. It is apparent from this passage that Paul drew a parallel between his ministry among the Corinthians and Christ’s death and resurrection. Both Paul and the Corinthians were agreed that Paul was “weak,” but unlike the Corinthians who viewed such “weakness” as a disqualifier for ministry, Paul viewed it as being one with Christ’s “weakness.” Just as he shared in that weakness, so too would he also share in God’s power in his dealings with the Corinthian congregation. It would not be the human power of eloquent speech and forceful leadership that the congregation admired in the newcomers to Corinth. Rather it would be divine power that, if they did not change their ways, would be demonstrated in discipline. Even this would be for their benefit, for as he had previously stated (4:10–12), his sharing in the weakness and suffering of Christ not only meant that he shared in Christ’s life, but that they, too, shared in that life. What he had demonstrated in the way he interacted with them he now spelled out in theological terms: valid ministry must reflect a sharing both in Christ’s suffering and death and in God’s power in raising him from the dead.

REFLECTIONS

For the average pastor or lay leader, a search for Paul’s paradigm for ministry is little more than an interesting academic exercise unless a bridge can be built between the first century and the twenty-first century. The aim here is to build at least some of the scaffolding for such a bridge. It can only be a scaffold and not a carefully constructed bridge, for the nature of the topic means that as soon as detailed instructions are formulated on how to apply Paul’s paradigm for ministry, the ministry is no longer one that relies on “God who raises the dead” (2 Cor 1:9), but becomes a ministry that relies on human instructions instead. Thus each minister must learn to rely on God as they work out what sharing both in Christ’s weakness and in the power of his resurrection means for their particular ministry, for it will be different for each person. It is hoped, however, that this brief discussion will stimulate the thinking so that ministers of the gospel of Christ can begin to wrestle with what functioning in God’s power rather than their own power means for them.

For many in the first century, the cross, and thus ministry that followed that pattern, was a stumbling block and a scandal. It is, perhaps, the same for us, but over the centuries we have had a tendency to sanitize the cross, and thus downplay the scandal of the cross. We have made the cross the subject of art, jewelry and architecture and, to a large extent, have forgotten the horror and revulsion of such suffering and degradation.

In the Western world, at least, we have a tendency to see “scandal” not so much in the cross itself, but in leadership that follows the pattern of the cross: leadership that displays human weakness, human limitation, human suffering, and human fragility, but functions in God’s power. Somewhere along the line, we seem to have fallen into the same trap as the Corinthian church. We have come to value power, control, and success. As Shoemaker comments, “The super-apostles are with us today promoting a religion of super-pastors, super-Christians and super-churches.”¹⁵ We have developed a theology of health and wealth, of professionalism and success that reflects the values of our culture. We have turned to the secular wisdom of our society to discover a pragmatic solution to church leadership and while the insights of our society are not all mistaken, they are not always congruent with what either Jesus or Paul taught and modeled. A religion that looks to the wisdom of its culture for answers is, in Paul’s terms, a “different gospel” about “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4), for it has forgotten that the cross is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:18–25). The challenge that faces us—whether we realize it or not—is how can we rediscover the power and the wisdom of God that are revealed in the cross?

The advice of much that is written on the topic of church leadership calls for leaders to gain the best training they can, to discover their gifts, to work from their strengths, to research their target audience and tailor the approach to fit, to plan ahead, to have a vision for the future and communicate that vision to the congregation, and so on. There can be value in these strategies. Paul teaches that believers have been given spiritual gifts for the benefit of the whole church (e.g., 1 Cor 12–14), and the parable of the talents recorded in the Gospels (Matt 25:14–18; Luke 19:11–27) makes the point that the talents received should be used. But Paul’s example and the argument he expressed in 2 Corinthians indicate that as much as we are called to use our gifts, talents, training and intel-

15. Shoemaker, “2 Cor 11:1–21”, 407–11.

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ligence, Christian ministry and Christian leadership are to be more than that. Beerens makes the provocative statement,

In the established church, one leads out of skills and natural abilities and natural gifts. Such things alone do not establish leadership and authority. Our ability to be suffering servants is a testimony to renewal, to renewed and redeemed leadership.¹⁶

The assertion that skills, gifting and training on their own are insufficient for Christian leadership, that such leadership requires one to be a “suffering servant,” is one that tends to be uncomfortable for us. It was also uncomfortable for the Corinthian congregation, but it is congruent with Paul’s paradigm for ministry based on sharing both in Christ’s suffering and in the power of his resurrection (2 Cor 13:4).

Paul had an enviable heritage (Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22), a good education and a zeal for God (Acts 22:3), but those are not the things of which he boasted nor the things in which he placed his confidence. To the disgruntlement of many in Corinth, the things of which he boasted were his weaknesses, suffering, hardships, and persecution—the things that forced him to rely on God. Perhaps there is something here for the leader in the twenty-first century to learn. As important as good training and good strategies might be, they are no substitute for reliance on God. If this was the case for Paul, then surely the same would hold true for ministers of Christ today. Dodd comes to the following conclusion,

It is exciting to feel strong, competent and in charge, but there is no true spiritual power in this, no ability to materialize God’s kingdom reality. Life-giving leadership flows from a deep dependency on the One who empowers, cleanses, guides and gives life.¹⁷

This parallels Paul’s statements in 2 Corinthians. While we might accept this intellectually, it is difficult to embrace it in life and ministry. Our natural inclinations, as well as everything our society has taught us, point in the opposite direction. Yet this brief look at 2 Corinthians makes it difficult to draw any other conclusion. What Paul taught and lived, not to mention what Jesus taught and lived, say this is the way to experience God’s power in ministry. Nouwen puts it this way:

16. Beerens, “Journey into Weakness,” 26.

17. Dodd, *Empowered Church Leadership*, 32–33.

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The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross . . . Here we touch the most important quality of Christian leadership in the future. It is not a leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest.¹⁸

To be a servant leader was not easy for Paul; it resulted in much suffering and hardship. The same will almost certainly be true for us if we choose to follow Paul's—and Jesus's—paradigm for ministry. This is not the easy way, but Paul demonstrated that it is the way to effective ministry in God's power.

Servant leadership in reliance on God means vulnerability, openness, and honesty. It means that there must be a congruency between the message proclaimed and the way of life of the messenger. Like Paul, we are called to come in weakness and to proclaim “Jesus Christ, and him crucified,” so that “faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God” (1 Cor 2:2–5). We are not only called to proclaim the message of Christ crucified and raised, we are also called to live it.

To come to Christ is to come to the crucified and risen One. The life-giving apostle embodies in himself the crucifixion of Jesus in the sufferings and struggles he endures as he is faithful and obedient to his Lord. So Paul preaches the crucified and risen Jesus, and he embodies the dying of Jesus in his struggles to further point to the Savior. His message is about the cross and his life is cruciform, shaped to look like the cross.¹⁹

This is not a popular approach to ministry. The plethora of books on Christian leadership that take a different approach clearly demonstrate this. Yet this is the approach that Paul both taught and modeled: ministry in dependence on God and following the pattern of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

No crucified life, no cruciform existence, no life-giving ministry.²⁰

What Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians demonstrates that his paradigm for ministry was one of dependence on God. It was not in his strengths and

18. Nouwen, *In the Name*, 62–63.

19. Dodd, *Empowered Church Leadership*, 70.

20. *Ibid.*, 67.

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achievements that God's power was demonstrated. Rather, it was in his weaknesses, when he abandoned self-reliance and learned in the midst of extremity to rely on God that his ministry was truly in God's power. This was Paul's paradigm because it followed the pattern of Jesus's death and resurrection. Thus we discover that in essence Paul's paradigm for ministry was the paradigm of the cross.

This is the challenge for ministers in the twenty-first century: to learn what it means to follow Paul's paradigm, to follow the way of the cross. Circumstances today are very different from the circumstances that Paul faced. It is not possible to do a "direct transfer." Rather, it is necessary to learn how to apply the same paradigm that Paul used in the first century to the twenty-first century so that we can say with Paul,

He [Christ] is not weak in his dealings with you, but is powerful among you, for indeed he was crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God's power. So we also in our dealings with you share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God's power (2 Cor 13:3b-4).

As Henri Nouwen looked forward to the beginning of the twenty-first century, he made a remarkable and challenging statement. As we now find ourselves in the latter part of the first decade of the twenty-first century, his statement continues to challenge us to reflect on how Paul's paradigm for ministry based on the death and resurrection of Jesus, might be applied today:

I leave you with the image of the leader with outstretched hands, who chooses a life of downward mobility. It is the image of the praying leader, the vulnerable leader, and the trusting leader. May that image fill your hearts with hope, courage, and confidence.²¹

21. Nouwen, *In the Name*, 73.