

The Leader and the Cost

by Peter Maiden

The cost of Christian leadership includes disappointment, criticism, and perseverance through such challenges, but with humility and the right attitude, leaders can overcome these challenges and make a positive impact.

Duration: 43:40

Scripture: Exodus 4:10, Exodus 5:1, Numbers 11:16, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 26:40, 2 Corinthians 6:4-6, Galatians 1:6

Topics: "Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the challenges and hardships faced by Christian leaders, using the examples of Moses and Paul. He emphasizes that occasional exhaustion and feelings of not being able to continue are not abnormal for leaders in the front line of the battle. The speaker also highlights the importance of obedience to God's calling, even when faced with doubts and objections. He references Moses' reluctance to obey God's command to confront Pharaoh and Paul's disappointment with the Galatians for deserting the true gospel. Overall, the sermon encourages Christian leaders to persevere through challenges and to prioritize obedience to God.

Transcript

Well, we were in Exodus last night, and I'd like us to return there this morning, this time to the fifth chapter, Exodus chapter 5, and we're going to read the whole of that chapter. Actually, I'm not very pleased with my title this morning, the cost of leadership. I always find it hard to speak on subjects like this.

I don't know what it is about Christians, but they're always asking me to speak on the problems of leadership, and the perils of leadership, and the pains of leadership, and the cost of leadership. And really, I love being in Christian leadership. You know, I'm sure I'm just like you.

I wake early in the morning, sometimes about 4.30 or 5, and I just can't wait to get up to start another day. You're just like that, aren't you? Some of you are just like that this morning, because you're absolutely frozen stiff where you were sleeping, I'm sure. We hope to get all the places warm tonight.

But you know, the joys of leadership, in my opinion, far outweigh the costs, and the problems, and the perils. And yet there are some costs to be paid if we're going to move into Christian leadership, and it is right and important that we should look at them. So let's read the fifth chapter of Exodus.

Afterwards, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert. Pharaoh said, who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go? I don't know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go.

Then they said, the God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord, our God, for he may spike us with plagues or with the sword. But the king of Egypt said, Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work.

Then Pharaoh said, look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you're stopping them from working. That same day, Pharaoh gave his order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people. You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks.

Let them go and gather their own straw, but require them to make the same number of bricks as before. Don't reduce the quota. They're lazy.

That's why they're crying out, let us go and sacrifice to our God. Make the work harder for the men, so that they keep working and pay no attention to lives. Then the slave drivers and the foremen went out and said to the people, this is what Pharaoh says, I will not give you any more straw.

Go and get your own straw, wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all. So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. The slave drivers kept pressing them saying, complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw.

The Israelite foreman appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers were beaten and were asked, why haven't you met your quota of bricks yesterday or today as before? Then the Israelite foreman went and appealed to Pharaoh, why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told make bricks. Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people. Pharaoh said, lazy, that's what you are, lazy.

And that's why you keep saying, let's go and sacrifice to the Lord. Now get to work. You'll not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks.

The Israelite foreman realized they were in trouble when they were told, you are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day. When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them and they said, may the Lord look upon you and judge you. You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his servants and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.

Moses returned to the Lord and said, oh Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he's brought trouble upon this people and you have not rescued your people at all. We saw last night as Mr. Alexander was preaching to us, that when God called Moses into a position of Christian leadership, his response was less than enthusiastic. And God spoke to him in a very dramatic fashion.

We were reminded last night of the burning bush. The call of Moses was an unmistakable call. But you remember his response, we read it last night.

Exodus 3 and verse 11, who am I, said Moses, that I should go and bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Well if we read further through chapter 3 and chapter 4, we would have found that God encouraged Moses after

that initial response. He gave him some signs, no doubt, both to encourage him to fulfill his calling and to use in his mission.

But even after those merciful comforting signs that God gave to Moses, he remained quite unimpressed. Chapter 4 and verse 10, oh Lord, I've never been eloquent, neither in the past, nor since you've spoken to your servant. I'm slow of speech and tongue.

Moses still, quite obviously, just does not want to go. He just does not want to obey the Almighty God. However, I'm sure you know this story, eventually he does obey.

You can imagine the emotion and the feeling behind the words of chapter 5 and verse 1. Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, after all their objections, and they said, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert. Probably a little bit of extra conversation went on.

Maybe Moses turned to Aaron and said, well Aaron we've done it. We've done it at last. We've obeyed God.

We've given Pharaoh God's word. Just as they're talking like that, Pharaoh interrupts them. Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I don't know the Lord, and I won't let Israel go.

Moses said, pardon, what? Pharaoh said, yes, who is this Lord you're talking about? I've never heard of him, and I just won't let Israel go. Well, if Moses wasn't shocked by Pharaoh's response to his obedience to God, he was certainly shocked, and I would imagine greatly distressed, by the time you get to the end of chapter 5. You know the story, we read it, because of what Pharaoh no doubt considered to be impudence in Moses, he accuses the children of Israel of sheer laziness, and increases their workload. And the reaction of the people is seen in verse 21 of chapter 5. They say to Moses and Aaron, may the Lord look upon you and judge you.

You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his servants, and you have put a sword in their hands to kill us. So here's Moses, he never wanted to go in the first place. He really tried to, you know, to put God off.

He just didn't want to go. But eventually he does, and all he gets when he's obedient, is disappointment and criticism. And those are two challenges, that every Christian leader will constantly have to face.

The challenge of disappointment, and the challenge of criticism. And I want to think about those two challenges with you, for a few moments this morning. First of all, disappointment.

Now this initial disappointment, first of Pharaoh's reaction, and then the people's reaction, is just the beginning for poor old Moses. If you turn across to chapter 6, you'll find that again at God's express command, Moses returns to the children of Israel, bringing a further word from God. Verse 6, chapter 6. Say to the Israelites, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians, I will free you, and so on.

Now look at verse 9. Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him, because of their discouragement, and their cruel bondage. Turn another page, chapter 7, and verse 12. Moses has thrown down his rod, one of the signs which God gave to him.

He's thrown it down, right there in the presence of Pharaoh, and it's become, as God promised, a snake, or a serpent. Must have been a marvelous moment of triumph for Moses. He was worried about the whole affair, from the beginning.

But there he is, right in the presence of Moses. He throws down his rod, and it becomes a serpent. It's obvious to all, that God is with his leader.

But then the Egyptian magicians, throw down their rods, and I'm sure to Moses' utter consternation, their rods become serpents as well. And that didn't only happen once to Moses. Next, he turns the river into blood.

That's pretty dramatic, isn't it? The Nile becomes blood. Again, he must have felt great. There he was, obeying God, and God was responding to his obedience.

There's those Egyptian magicians again, and it shows you the power of evil, doesn't it? Because they're able to do exactly the same thing. And then there's the plagues, the plague of frogs, and the magicians can do the same. It appears to Moses, that these magicians are unbeatable.

They can do anything that he can do. And that's followed by the plague of gnats, and this time the magicians are beaten. And in chapter 8 and verse 19, they say, this is the finger of God.

That's those evil Egyptian sorcerers. They are now claiming that the finger of God is with Moses. Must have been another moment of tremendous triumph.

A really heartening experience for Moses. Great encouragement. But then we read, Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

He wouldn't listen, just as the Lord had said. And I could lengthen the story. You know that the gnats were followed by the flies, and this time Pharaoh is brought to his knees.

Chapter 8 and verse 28, I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the Lord your God. You can imagine Moses rushing back to Goshen, where all the children of Israel were gathered. Pack your suitcases.

What we've been waiting for, what we've been pleading with God for, has happened. Pharaoh says, we can go. They've just got the luggage ready.

The cattle are in place to be driven ahead of them. And what happens? Pharaoh changes his mind. Didn't happen once or twice, but three or four times.

Moses gets the people gathered together, ready to go. And Pharaoh changes his mind. You know, eventually they were released.

But the disappointments in Moses' life didn't cease then. Can you imagine how Moses felt when he came down from the mountain, and there was the golden calf. And the children of Israel were all worshipping it.

And who was in the forefront? Aaron, the co-worker that God had given to Moses, was leading this great apostasy. This is what we read in chapter 32 and verse 4. Aaron took the gold that the people had given to him, and he made it into an idol, and he cast it into the shape of a calf. But the greatest disappointment of all for Moses, must be in Deuteronomy chapter 34.

Then the Lord said to him, this is the land, look at it Moses, this is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, when I said I'll give it to your descendants. Now Moses, I'm letting you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it. Can you imagine how Moses felt? Against his own better judgment, in obedience to God, he committed himself to this great goal, the release of the Israelites from Egypt, and their entrance into Canaan.

He committed himself to it, he'd given everything to it, and there he's looking at the goal, with his own eyes, that God, the God who called him, said Moses, you'll never put your foot in it, you'll be buried outside the land, that I've promised to your fathers. Disappointment, disappointment, disappointment, throughout the life of Moses. And it wasn't only Moses, think of the Lord Jesus, and of Gethsemane, Matthew 26 and verse 38, records Jesus saying these words, my soul is overwhelmed, to the point of death.

Now my disciples, will you stay here, and will you keep watch with me? Here I am, the cross is staring me in the face, I'm in deep sorrow, will you just stay and watch with me? He went deeper into the garden, in order to cry, when he returned to his disciples, the disappointment is clearly evident in his words, couldn't you keep watch with me, for just one hour? And eventually you know, they all forsook him, and fled. It's the same with Paul, disappointment was a regular challenge he had to contend with. Remember his words to the Galatians, Galatians 1 verse 6, I am astonished, that you are so quickly deserting the one who has called you, by the grace of Christ, and you're turning to a different gospel.

He planted churches all over Galatia, he left them, in charge of elders and deacons, false teachers had come in, and all that he'd led to Christ, it would appear, were now turning to a different gospel. Remember what he said to Timothy, 2nd Timothy 1 and verse 15, you know that everyone, listen to this, in the province of Asher, has deserted me. Everyone in Asher, had deserted Paul, had turned against him.

Disappointment was such a part of Paul's ministry, that he expected it, and spoke about it, long before it even happened. Remember how he talks to the Ephesian elders, in Acts chapter 20, verses 29 and 30, he's just about to leave them, after his ministry in that city, this is what he says, I know, that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you, and will not spare the flock, even from your own number. You people who are standing around right now, even from your own number, men I've led to Christ, men I've placed into eldership in the church, from your own number, men will arise, and they'll distort the truth, in order to draw away the disciples.

Disappointment, discouragement, a definite part of the cost of Christian leadership, and perseverance through such disappointments, is essential, if you are going to continue and make your mark, as a leader in the work of God. It's going to happen to the Sunday school teacher, going to happen to the Bible class leader, young people you've got the highest hopes for, young people you're investing your life and your time in, and they're going to slide away from the faith. It's going to happen to the minister, it's going to happen to the elder, it might be disunity in your congregation, it might be co-workers who just aren't pulling their weight.

Often of course, it will be disappointment with yourself. If we look further into the life of Moses, we would have found that that was often the case. Moses was most often disappointed with himself.

He let himself down, he let God down, and I know in my own life as a Christian leader, that is the fundamental disappointment. Disappointment so often with myself, the challenge of disappointment. Look secondly at the challenge of criticism.

We've already seen it in the life of Moses. The moment he began to lead God's people, he received the backlash of their criticism. May the Lord look upon you and judge you.

You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his servants, and you have put a sword in their hands to kill us. And again, both Jesus and Paul faced this regularly. Whatever good deed Jesus did, he incurred the wrath of the Pharisees.

They were out like a pack of hounds, weren't they? Waiting to pounce on their prey. Listen to Luke 6 and verse 7. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. So they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath day.

The critics were all around, just waiting for Jesus to put one finger out of place by their scheme, by their standard. And then the hammer of their criticism would come down on him. If you know anything about the life of Paul, you'll know that he was constantly facing the charge that he wasn't a real apostle.

You see, Peter, James, and John, they were great men. They'd been with Jesus while he was on this earth. But who was this upstart from Tarsus? He used to persecute the church.

What kind of a fellow was he? He wasn't a real apostle. Many Christian leaders, some I know personally, have just not been able to stand against the barrage of criticism they have received. They've bowed under it, and sometimes been broken by it.

Many Christian leaders would testify that they find no challenge more difficult than the challenge of facing criticism. And yet for every leader, and certainly for every Christian leader, criticism is inevitable. Oswald Sanders, in his book on leadership, *Spiritual Leadership*, quotes a letter from Fred Mitchell, who was the home director of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship.

And Fred Mitchell sent this letter to a young minister. And I want to read just a paragraph of it to you. I'm glad to know, wrote Mitchell, that you're taking the blessings there is through the criticism being mounted against you by, and then a name follows, in which case even his bitter attack will yield sweetness in your life.

A sentence which has been a great help for Mrs. Mitchell and myself is, it doesn't matter what happens to us, but our reaction to what happens to us is of vital importance. I think you must expect more and more criticism, for with increasing responsibility, this is inevitable. And it causes one to walk humbly with God, and to take such actions as he desires.

Criticism is inevitable, but that last sentence is important. Not all criticism, by any means, is bad. There are, of course, two kinds of criticism, negative and positive.

It's that concentrated negative criticism which can be so potentially destructive. Such criticism has to be, where possible, confronted and dealt with. You just can't let negative criticism pass.

You have to confront it, you have to deal with it. And often it's in the process of doing that, that physically, emotionally, and spiritually, you find it so exhausting. Two or three weeks ago I heard that a member of my own church, my own fellowship, was feeling that I was not a good influence on the church.

We're going through some changes in our church at the present time, and this brother really didn't feel I was a very healthy influence at all. And I heard this secondhand, and my mind went to Matthew chapter

five, that if you're offering your gift at the altar, and you realize your brother has something against you, you must leave your gift and go and be reconciled. Very important verse there.

Not that you've got something against your brother, you've certainly got to do it if that's the case, but if your brother has something against you, this is the standard of the New Testament, you leave your gift at the altar, in other words, stop praying, and you go and you'll be reconciled to your brother. So I telephoned and made an appointment, and I can still remember driving the three miles to his house. He didn't know what I was going for.

It was just physically and emotionally exhausting to get into that car, to put it in gear, doesn't usually tire me at all, but physically and emotionally it was just exhausting to confront what I felt was negative criticism. Now positive criticism is hard enough of course, but it can be a great blessing in our lives. You know, back-slappers destroy leaders.

Just as much as those who inflict negative criticism, back-slappers, oh that was a marvelous brother, tragic failure actually, marvelous brother. I was preaching in a little church on the west coast of Cumbria a few, well it's a year or two ago now I suppose, and there was a brother right on the back, I don't think he's in tonight, who was fast asleep, and he actually fell into the aisle halfway through my sermon, and jumped back immediately into his chair, and as I was leaving he shook my hand so warmly and so, marvelous message brother, what a marvelous message. He had slept, unless he was a man of solid intercession, he had slept remorselessly through my sermon.

Back-slappers destroy leaders just as much as those who inflict negative criticism. They make you feel good, the back-slappers, but they don't actually do you any good. One way we really get to know ourselves is by feedback from other people.

We don't know how we come across to people unless they tell us. So we need responses from people, positive and negative, and we need the maturity to apply those responses to our lives if we're going to grow in our Christian experience and in our leadership. So, disappointment and criticism, inevitable consequences of Christian leadership, and probably the most consistent problems the Christian leader will have to face.

Let's just look at a few more very, very briefly. A third, turn please to Exodus chapter 32 for a moment, Exodus chapter 32, and look at verse 27, Exodus 32 27. Moses has just come down the mountain after the people had erected the golden calf, and look at the action he takes.

Verse 27, then Moses said to them, that's the Levites, this is what the law of the God of Israel says. Each man strap a sword to his side, go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, killing his brother, his friend, and his neighbor. Do you think it was an easy decision to make for Moses? Do you think it was easy to come to that conclusion? Do you think it was an easy command to give? But hard decisions, often made alone, hard decisions made alone, are something which every leader has to face from time to time.

Two weeks ago at 1 30 in the morning, I got a phone call from Austria. Our brothers in Austria had just had a phone call from Poland, it was to inform us of a fatal accident, a four or five car pileup in Poland on ice, and two young missionaries had gone to be with the Lord. One from right here in Scotland, in Glasgow, his funeral will probably be in the next few days.

And I received that information before his parents, before his pastor, it was my job to convey it. And I can remember at 1 30 in the morning walking around the bedroom, wondering what I should do with that information. Should I wake the parents and tell them there and then? Should I do it by phone? Should I get in my car and drive? What would be best for them? Would it be best for me to tell the pastor and then they can, he can tell the parents? That was a decision I had to make, couldn't give it to anybody else.

And I had to make it at 1 30 in the morning, alone, apart from my wife, who was full of excellent advice. Hard decisions, often made alone, are the lot of many Christian leaders. However, we need to say one balancing thing about this.

I think some writers on leadership over the years have tended to overemphasize the loneliness of the leader. They've tended, it seems to me, almost to glory in the loneliness. I believe team leadership is clearly encouraged in the scriptures.

Jesus chose 11 to be with him and to lead his church in its early days. When he sent his disciples out in mission, it was two by two, wasn't it? Never alone. Paul appointed elders and deacons, plural, in the churches which he founded.

And he himself was hardly ever alone, was he? There was always a Barnabas or a Silas or a Timothy with whom Paul could share. There's a safety in numbers. I'm very worried about these Christian leaders who fly all across the world on their own.

I don't know if they think they're some kind of spiritual giants who can survive all the temptations of this world without help. I'm worried about them. These evangelists in the forefront of the life of the church, with people almost bowing at their feet sometimes.

I'm worried about them. There's strength in numbers. We believe strongly in OM, in team leadership, of each of us being accountable to others and they being accountable to us.

There's also collective wisdom, isn't there? When brothers from different persuasions and backgrounds get together to discuss, the decision which is made is often a much better decision than the decision one person would make on his own. Some people in the church, we have to face it, just like to be a one-man band and that's why they're lonely. They like to rule the roost and they don't like to have their authority or the decisions questioned.

Their loneliness is self-inflicted and they're a long, long way, in my opinion, from the concept of biblical leadership. However, when everything is said and done, the final responsibility with some decisions, often the really hard decisions, rests on one man's shoulders. And the Christian leader has to be a man with broad shoulders.

One further area of strain that many leaders have to face, and we'll see this again in the life of Moses, turn please to Numbers 11. Numbers 11, 10 to 15. This is a really poignant passage of Scripture.

Numbers 11, 10 to 15. Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry and Moses was troubled.

He asked the Lord, why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms as a nurse carries an infant to the land you promised on

earth to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, give us meat to eat. I can't carry all these people by myself. The burden is too heavy for me.

If this is how you're going to treat me, put me to death right now. If I've found favor in your eyes, then don't let me face my own ruin. You know, those are the words of an utterly exhausted man.

A man who feels he's just had enough. He can't take any more. He feels the burden of leadership is just too heavy to bear.

Let's say two things about this. Exhaustion being a price, if you like, of leadership. Two things.

First of all, I'm a bit worried about the image which is sometimes presented today of the model Christian leader. Have you met him? He's the man who's got absolutely everything together. He's prosperous.

He's healthy. He's immaculate. I've got a tie on, by the way.

He never seems rushed. That's unspiritual. He never seems rushed.

He has a highly efficient, qualified staff. It's all computerized, of course, who keep him organized and in control. Well, that's great.

Thank the Lord for leaders like that. But I'm afraid, personally, that in spiritual warfare, it's not always going to be like that. I wonder where you fit Paul's monthly report into that kind of picture.

Just listen to his monthly report. 2 Corinthians 6, 4-6. As servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way.

In great endurance, in troubles, hardships, and distress. In beatings, imprisonments, and riots. In hard work, sleepless nights, hunger.

In purity, understanding, patience, and kindness in the Holy Spirit, and in sincere love. That is a realistic testimony from a Christian leader in the front line of the battle. Occasional exhaustion.

A feeling that you just can't continue. It's not abnormal. It's not a sign that you've got it all wrong.

That your life is in a mess, and that you're out of the will of God. But to balance that, I want you to notice the counsel which God gave to Moses just after his outbursts. If you're still open at Numbers 11, look at verse 16.

The Lord said to Moses, bring me 70 of Israel's elders, who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Make them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take the spirit that is on you, and put the spirit on them.

They will help you carry the burden of the people, so you will not have to carry it alone. You see, delegation isn't just a modern principle of management. Centuries ago, it was God's way of relieving the pressure on an exhausted Moses.

And this lack of willingness to delegate is probably the greatest cause of fatigue and exhaustion amongst Christian leaders. You know one practical way you can respond to these last two points, is to look at your life and your leadership, and ask yourself this question. Is there anything which I am doing that others should be doing? Remember this.

If you want to kill yourself, that's your desire. You want to kill yourself. And you also at the same time want to strangle the work you are involved in leading.

If that's your twofold desire this weekend, you want to kill yourself and strangle the work you're involved in leading. If that's why you've come, you're looking for help in that area, it's easy. It's dead easy.

Just keep on doing everything, and those two goals will be accomplished. Now you'll think you're a hero. You'll march around with your head high.

You were up at five o'clock this morning, and you won't be in bed before twelve, and you are doing everything. And people will lord and fate you. Look at that man.

He does everything. I've heard people talking like that. You go to a church, they introduce you to this man.

He does everything. He's a hero. You know the man's a fool.

The man's not a hero, he's a fool. He is in the business of strangling the life out of the work of God. Ask yourself that question.

If you are doing something others should be doing, go away from this conference and determine to get that person who should be doing it actually doing. You may have to do it with him for a few weeks, but delegate. It'll save you from much exhaustion, and it'll save the work of God.

But even for the best delegator, if you get deeply involved in Christian leadership, I'm afraid from time to time you're going to have to face the challenge of utter tiredness and exhaustion. Finally, I think I've got time for just one point. The final price.

There are many others we could have mentioned, but I think this is an important one, and that is the loss of personal freedom. The loss of personal freedom. This is a bit of a paradox really.

On the face of it, it appears the more your breadth of responsibility increases, the more control there should be over your time and your commitments. But it just doesn't work like that. Increased responsibility means increased commitment.

Right now in our church back in Carlisle we're dividing, quite lovingly, we've agreed to do it, to start a new church on a housing estate. And I've been talking to some of the people who I really feel would be great as helpers in this new work. And they're intelligent people.

And as we've talked, they've understood what I'm talking about. I'm talking to them about moving from church membership to church leadership. I was talking to two just on Tuesday of this week, and they were saying, if we accept this challenge, if we do go, you know, we won't just be able to go on our summer holiday when we want, will we? We'll have to work out a kind of rota, won't we? You know that little cottage I've got, you know, that weekend place? I'm not going to make so much use of that, am I? Increased responsibility means increased commitment.

As you accept responsibility, you lose personal freedom. Some of you who are Sunday school teachers know that. When you accepted that Sunday afternoon teaching post, you didn't know what you were doing, did you? You really didn't.

All those weekends you could have been away. But if you're taking Sunday school teaching seriously, then you realize that increased responsibility means increased commitment, loss of personal freedom. Jesus faced this problem constantly.

When he received news of the beheading of John the Baptist, he was grief stricken, and he just wanted to be alone. But listen to Matthew 14 and verse 13. When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw the large crowd, he was wanting to head for a private place, a solitary place. But when he got there, the crowd was there.

And that beautiful man Jesus had compassion and healed their sick. Privacy, freedom, greatly restricted in the life of Jesus by those pressing demands of his ministry. It's another challenge you just have to face as you contemplate Christian leadership.

So there's a start. Disappointment, criticism, exhaustion, loneliness, loss of personal freedom. If you want to leave now, you may.

I've probably put you off leadership for life. And I'd love to talk to you about the joys of leadership. Because you know the Lord Jesus taught, didn't he, that if you want to win your life, if you really want to live, then lose it.

Lose it. Lose all these things. Your freedom, your privacy.

Lose these things in order that you might really know the life of Christ. I'd love to talk to you about the joys of leadership because they far outbalance the problems and the cost. But you know it's good to take account.

Jesus taught us that, didn't he? He said, what a foolish man it is who starts off to build a tower. And he gets his foundations in the building half erected. And he realizes there's no bricks left.

And the superstore has run out of that type of brick. What a fool the man is. He should have counted the cost before he began.

Some of you are here this weekend because you're contemplating moving into, or moving further on, in Christian leadership. And it's good that you and I should count the cost. Because although the joys are great, the cost is considerable.

Let's pray. Father, we want to thank you for the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that he came not to be ministered to, but to minister and to pour out his life, a ransom for many.

Lord, we heard last night that service, servanthood, is the badge of Christian leadership. And Lord, we know there's a price to pay for the servant, the bond slave. And we know, Lord, that many people never face leadership.

They may have all the abilities and the talents, the gift, the calling, but they never move into leadership because they look at the cost and they say too much. Lord, we pray you'll help us to look at Calvary and to see the cost that you pay. And then Lord, we realize that every problem, every price that we have to pay, falls into its rightful place.

Lord, help us to take our place in your work and help us, give us the grace to pay the price. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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