

# A Biblical Perspective on Delegation

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Leaders who keep all their authority and responsibility to themselves are failing in their leadership role.

The technical word for giving people responsibility with equal authority is called 'delegation'.

*A definition of delegation is, "To entrust or commit authority to another as an agent or deputy".*

It is more than just assigning a task to someone. Ken Blanchard, Bill Hybels and Phil Hodges in their book, 'Leadership by the book', states, "...Leaders are willing to share power. Their purpose is to equip other people to become freer, more autonomous, more capable – and therefore more effective." At times, our insecurities and need for personal power causes us to stifle the development of younger leaders. Delegation has its roots in scripture and there are many principles regarding it to help us raise leaders. If it is done in the correct way it will build morale, give others a sense of responsibility and feeling of privilege.

In the first book of the bible God delegates authority to Adam and Eve. In Genesis 1:28-30; 2:15-20 we see how:

God creates the environment for them to exercise their abilities.

God allows them to become partners in his creation

God gives them the responsibility to work and take care of the land

God gives them authority 'to rule and to subdue'

God holds them accountable for their actions.

If we want individuals to get the most out of life and reach their full potential then we need to understand this principle. This is more needed in the church than anywhere else.

Delegation is a process whereby higher authority exchanges a 'given weight' of authority and responsibility for an 'equal weight' of obligation and accountability

## **People who do not delegate**

Trusts no one

Do everything themselves

Takes all the glory for the success

Keeps everything a secret (in order to have power over others)

Have a guru mentality (they must control everything and even people's lives)

Keep themselves very busy to cover up their inefficiencies (they are often too busy for people).

Moses was a typical leader who delegated nothing

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law had to bring this to his attention.

## Exodus 18:17-26

*“This is not good! His father-in-law exclaimed. You’re going to wear yourself out – and the people too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself. Now let me give you a word of advice, and may God be with you. You should continue to be the people’s representative before God, bringing Him their questions to be decided. You should tell them God’s decisions, teach them God’s laws and instructions, and show them how to conduct their lives. But find some capable, honest men who fear God and hate bribes. Appoint them as judges over groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty and ten. These men can serve the people, resolving all ordinary cases. Anything that is too important or too complicated can be brought to you. Bu they can take care of the smaller matters themselves. They will help you carry the load, making the task easier for you. If you follow this advice, and I f God directs you to do so, then you will be able to endure pressure, and all these people will go home in peace. Moses listened to his father-in-law’s advice and followed his suggestions. He chose capable men from all over Israel and made them judges over the people. They were put in charge of groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty and ten. These men were constantly available to administer justice. They brought the hard case to Moses, but they judged the smaller matters themselves.”*

We don’t know how much time expired between Exodus 18:25 and Numbers 11:10-15, but something went wrong for Moses. Now it was God who confronted him.

## Number 11:10-15

*Moses heard all the families standing in front of their tents weeping, and the Lord became extremely angry. Moses was also very aggravated. And Moses said to the Lord. “Why are you treating, your servant so miserably? What did I do to deserve the burden of a people like this? Are they my children? Am I their father? Is that why you have told me to carry them in my arms – like a nurse carry a baby – to the land you swore to give their ancestors? Where am I supposed to get meat for all these people? They keep complaining and saying, ‘give us meat!’ I can’t carry all these people by myself! The load is far too heavy! I’d rather you kill me than treat me like this. Please spare me this misery!”*

A reason why leadership can be a most challenging service is that people change. For a time the children of Israel saw Moses as their savior but eventually they became less grateful and more demanding.

### **Remember:**

1. Every leader and every organization is limited in what it can do for people. The masses seldom recognize this fact.

Here we see Moses was pushed to the limit. He had reached the end of his spiritual, mental and physical strength. He had finally recognized his limitations.

Then Moses offered one of the saddest prayers a God-chosen leader can pray. Verse 15,

The load is far too heavy! I'd rather you kill me than treat me like this. Please spare me this misery!"

Sounds like burn-out! Perhaps he did delegate after being confronted by Jethro but did not have time to train and supervise, or other leaders may have failed to take care of their responsibilities. Be as it may, Numbers 11:10-15 Moses was in trouble. He was blaming God for his dilemma and he wanted out. God directs Moses to delegate further.

Numbers 11:16-17 states,

*"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Summon before me seventy of the elders of Israel. Bring them to the tabernacle to stand there with you. I will come down and talk to you there. I will take some of the Spirit that is upon you, and I will put the Spirit upon them also. They will bear the burden of the people along with you, so you will not have to carry it alone."*

Again we see that God does not overburden His servants to where they break down physically and emotionally. We might do it to one another but God has no satisfaction in seeing one of His servants broken and asking for death.

God said to Moses—"delegate; let other men share the burden with you so that you don't bear it alone."

Numbers 11:17 is one of the most important Scriptures references in the whole Bible, as it pertains to leadership. God did something there that goes beyond our understanding.

God said to Moses, *"I will take of the spirit which is upon thee and put it upon them!"*

What is God going to take from Moses?

Authority, power-power of the Holy Spirit! But what is this going to do to Moses? Isn't it going to humiliate him?

Is he going to be less of an authority than he was before?

But God is teaching all of us a profound lesson. God is teaching us that the same authority that works in top leadership must also work on every level of that organization.

*"I will take of the spirit that is upon thee and put it upon them, and then only will they bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone."*

### **We have a good example of this in scripture**

*"And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt. The Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he*

*clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck”*  
Genesis 41:41-42.

The King of Egypt delegates a key responsibility to Joseph, and by placing the ring on Joseph's hand he delegates the same authority and responsibility he possesses. This act not only extended his leadership influence but saved Egypt from a sure calamity.

Delegation of leadership responsibility must be accompanied by the power and authority to execute the job

As a leader it is important to find out how well you are doing in this area. Moses thought he was doing a good job. He tried to justify his actions (Exodus 18:15, 16). He explains what he is doing, and why he is doing it.

“Well, the people come unto me to seek God's guidance.”  
“When they have arguments, I settle the cases.”  
“I inform them of God's decisions.”  
“I teach them His law and instructions.”  
(Notice that everything centers around “me” and “I.”)

What he need was feedback from others

We see from Exodus 18:13-26 that Moses received unsolicited criticism and advice from Jethro, his father-in-law.

### **Leadership can be exercised in three ways**

Doing things for the people (making them dependant)  
Doing things to the people (manipulation, abuse, with-holding etc)  
Doing things through the people (developing them)

Jethro observed Moses on the job. After a brief time, he observed two obvious weaknesses in Moses' leadership. They are brought out in two questions.

“What is this thing you are doing to the people?”  
“Why sittest thou thyself alone and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?” (Verse 14).

These two points, as observed by Jethro, are marks of poor leadership. Moses was doing things to the people and doing all the work himself while many were standing by doing nothing.

Moses, in his zeal over-extended himself,  
Apparently large numbers of people had to sit around in difficult circumstances waiting to see him.  
Jethro concluded that his one man service was inconveniencing the people.

This is why Jethro asked “What is this you are doing to the people?”.

What Moses was doing was good service, but it was not good leadership. He was solving problems among his people. He was teaching them, but he was giving them only head knowledge. They have no opportunity to put that knowledge into practice by solving their own problems. He was very devoted to his cause and to his people. Jethro had come to visit him, but the Bible tells us that next morning Moses was back at his office. He had no time for pleasure and visiting with his father-in-law. He was very unselfish man, giving himself completely to his people. He was in his tent from morning until late in the evening. He thought that his organization and form of leadership were right. He had good justifiable reasons for doing what he was doing. He was a great man. When he heard honest criticism and good advice, he listened to it. After considering the counsel, he introduced a system of organization and administration which was very new and radical, and is still valid today.

All leaders have a need for feedback and evaluation. Without feedback we live a life of illusion. According to Covey we need someone to tell us:

**What to STOP doing,  
What to START doing  
What to CONTINUE doing**

Before this, Moses did not know or apply the principles of delegation. He held all the authority and all the responsibility; and as a result was failing in a duty which was solely his own. Verse 19 says, “To be the people’s representative before God...”

This sounds very much like Acts 6:1-7.

Resulting directly from the miraculous church growth was a multiple of church related problems including discrimination and dissatisfaction. After Pentecost the church grew rapidly and interpersonal problems emerged. The Greek speaking Jews felt that their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food. In this situation the Apostles demonstrated principles regarding delegation.

They acted promptly – they did not wish away or spiritualize the problem, or get involved in sectarian politics but gave leadership. They initiated the decision-making process – we are not always called to make the final decisions but must ensure it happens. They involved the people in finding a practical solution – they did not impose ‘an already made’ decision on the people. They determined their own priorities and wisely decided to delegate – this freed them to concentrate on the most important tasks of prayer and preaching instead of getting into ‘crisis management’ mode. They carefully selected leaders to handle the task- they had clear criteria for selecting leaders.

They publicly presented those who had been chosen to be leaders – I'm sure that this instilled commitment and loyalty, and underscored the seriousness of their appointment.

Moses had to learn some important lessons during this process:

He needed to delegate activities which others could do well but also activities he did well.

Because God chooses a person for a particular service or ministry does not mean that person knows everything or has all the right answers.

People of other backgrounds often have knowledge and experience from which we can learn.

The quality of authority is the same on all of the levels of the organization. The quantity may differ based on the responsibility but not quality.

Human tendency is to dilute the quality of authority delegated to the subordinates.

### **GOD'S ACTION**

Numbers 11:25. *“And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spoke unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.”*

Authority (power) is real—you either have it or you don't?" Here we see that the seventy didn't have it when they came to the tabernacle. In the twinkling of an eye, God gave them this authority—they had it and it was working!

This truth is further verified in Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus says, *“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth...therefore go ye.”* Jesus is saying that the exact power and authority which He has will be given us through the Holy Spirit if we accept the responsibility of the Great Commission.

In John 14:12, Jesus further verifies this truth, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth in me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.”*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is any wonder that we are failing the church and the church is failing our Lord and this world? Why is it that the pastor of a local church is afraid to delegate the same authority that he has to his assistant pastor, church members, Sunday School Superintendent, etc.? Our failure in leadership stems from a perversion of this important law of delegation.

Are you aware that the opposite of delegation is 'withholding' or 'not releasing'? When people in leadership are not delegating their power and authority, they are simply withholding or keeping from unleashing the extension and circulation of the influence of their leadership to the majority; the ordinary people they are called or appointed to serve.

Worldly leaders love withholding and hanging on to the reigns of power, as that makes them have a sense of being in charge and in control of all that is happening.

In addition, worldly leaders do not delegate because they think that by giving away some of their authority, they would become less powerful.

On the contrary the Bible teaches us with the Example of the Christ Himself, that the more power, we delegate, the more powerful and more spread-out, the influence of our leadership becomes. And we must always bear in mind that delegation of leadership responsibilities without releasing the necessary power and authority to execute them is pure tyranny.

*“All Authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go...”*

Matthew 28: (18 – 19)

And in sending His disciples Christ delegates to them the same Power and Authority as He has; to accomplish in more remote places the same work that He Himself has demonstrated. *“Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. And He said to them, ‘Take nothing for the journey...’* (Luke 9: 1-3)

Christ, in giving away His Authority and Power has by no means become less powerful! Instead through the Holy Ghost’s working in His disciples (delegates), His Kingdom has spread and continues to spread from shore to shore. We see some fundamental delegation principles in Christ’s leadership.

### **He called them**

He separated them from the rest of the crowd to be with Him as His Apostles. In addition to calling them, He went further to empower, instruct and dispatch them to specific well defined tasks. Before setting out to select and appoint people, we must first have a task or function of a felt-need nature for them to perform.

### **He gave them power and authority**

We have concluded that nothing is more frustrating in leadership than holding a position without empowerment and freedom of authority to operate. Quite often senior leaders in establishments, who are insecure and autocratic, deliberately fail to empower as a means of maintaining control and manipulating the activities of followers. Like Christ we equip and empower our people with every spiritual resource and care to accomplish their roles.

### **He sent them**

There must be a time when disciples or trainees are trusted well enough to be released and commissioned to go out on their own to do the task for which they have been called, appointed, trained and equipped. Jesus demonstrated this by commissioning from time to time his disciples to go out on their own without Him, to carry out the works of the ministry. That is without looking over their shoulders to see how they are doing. He waited for them to come back at the scheduled and agreed times with their reports.

### **He said to them**

Jesus gave His disciples very clear descriptions of the task (preaching the good news of the Kingdom, curing of diseases; healing the sick and casting out demons) and instructions as to what is expected of them, up to the details of what not to take and how to behave while on their assignment. A clear job description provides the basis for evaluating performance of every worker to determine if the goals are achieved and the expectations met.

In conclusion, Our Lord Himself is a delegator. Even though He is Almighty, and has exclusive powers, privileges and ability to do everything, yet he delights in delegating His powers to His saints. But He first calls them – chooses and invited them, instructs them to empower them and then sends them.

*“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” John 20:21*