

Introduction

THE COMPLEXITY OF LEADERSHIP AND OUR TRIUNE GOD



Summary: *There is a leadership crisis in the local church. When we look around, we see different visions of leadership competing for our devotion. We set these visions against one another—the convictional theologian against the soulful contemplative, for example. We choose the one we think is best. Living from insecurity, we exaggerate our favorite leadership image, and it crowds out the others. God didn't intend this. If we step back, we can see that God's own leadership is a beautiful mosaic. God's own complexity is the most appropriate model for leadership in a complex world. This book unpacks a fivefold vision of leadership rooted in the Trinity. You will see that God's redemptive leadership in the world is the basis for understanding the nature, purpose, and eternal impact of our own leadership.*

It had been a busy, fun week in Chicago.¹ My wife, Mandy, wanted just one more thing before we left town—cupcakes. I ran out to fulfill her

last wish before our exciting time in the city came to a close. She saw sacrificial valor. I saw an opportunity to go for a run in the early morning haze and bustle of downtown. I wanted to run along the lake, clear my head, and burn off a hearty dinner from the night before.

The run began well. I found the lake, and its breeze left a gentle mist on my face as I paced myself. Then I turned back to find coffee—perhaps the greatest of coffees—Intelligentsia. With my coffee in hand, I cautiously sipped and ran.

As I write this now, it seems ludicrous. Why run with coffee? It was not the best idea. But with caffeine coursing through my veins, I headed for the cupcakes. I ran and ran. Google Maps shouted directions. *Turn here. Turn there. Dodge taxi. Avoid nicely dressed folks who don't want a splash of my coffee.*

Then I realized the light overhead was gone. I was running through a tunnel. This can't be right. Wait? Where am I? How far is this cupcake boutique? Surely Google knows. I stopped. I tried to recalibrate my map app. My mind wandered as I paced, trying to find my bearings and strength. But once cell-tower reception was back, I found myself checking the fiber content on the cupcakes. Should my wife and I split one *or* should I get two for all this effort? Distracted, I tried to refocus and analyze the map. Then the texts started.

MANDY: "Daniel, our flight is in 90 minutes. Are you almost back to the hotel?"

With urgency I took off with the latest Google directions. No matter how far I ran or how many turns I made, the "how long to cupcakes" timer didn't budge. The texts increased in frequency, but my pride and shame kept me from texting back. Nearing exhaustion, I found the cupcake shop, ordered four cupcakes (lay off—there was a discount for four), swiped my credit card, trashed the coffee, and set off toward the hotel. I opened Google again, *but wait . . . what's the name of the hotel?*

MANDY: "Daniel, where are you? Are you lost? Come back. The hotel is at 33 W. Illinois St. We only have an hour before our flight!"

I was over a mile away and wiped out. Saved by grace and a rational, loving wife, I hailed a cab.

So let's start here: we are all lost in Chicago.

You are a church leader. And this means you're a sojourner on the road of leadership. As you look ahead, you can see that this road has many challenges. The journey will be difficult.

Maybe you're just starting out, fresh off your first internship. Now you're three months into your first church role. You are asking, "What is my identity? What will I do with this role? Who am I becoming as a leader? How do I handle this new responsibility I've been given? Wait a minute. *Am* I a leader? Around what person or organization or conviction should I organize my life?"² You've been in ministry just long enough to realize you never had a class on how to help your team see eye to eye. Managing conflict is one thing, but giving direction when you are discovering that your new team has major philosophical differences is another.

Maybe you've been in ministry for a while and you feel like you're moving from crisis to crisis—marriages failing one after another or a fellow minister and friend bailing on the faith. The number of funerals has caught up with the number of marriages. Your authority is increasing, but the creative juices that were there at the beginning are no longer there. You're asking, "How do I cope with the demands being made on me? How do I teach on being a great husband or dad when I'm short with my wife and yelling at my kids? Why am I so disappointed in others and myself? Am I making a difference? Am I making a contribution?" How do you process your own grief and limitations and still press on? Where do you find the motivation to keep leading week after week when you're so exhausted? You're realizing that the work rhythms that got you this far won't be able to sustain you as you move forward.

Maybe you're nearing the end of the road, and you're putting together a transition plan. You're asking, "Why is time moving so fast? Why don't I have the time to do all the things I want to do? When do I stop doing the things that have defined me?"

Too often ministers are lost on the road of leadership—wandering down streets they don't know and hoping not to be struck down by a motorist who is texting and driving.

Looking for Direction

Think about the last time you got lost. Maybe you were at a leadership conference looking for that elusive breakout session tucked away in a hidden corner. You're looking for room 217, and you've walked past 216 and 218 at least three times. Where could it be? One of our first inclinations when we're walking around lost is to look for someone to follow. You say to yourself, "He looks like he could be going to that breakout, and he's walking pretty confidently. I'll follow him—maybe not actually ask him for directions, but see where he's going."

When we're lost, we look for leaders. After all, they seem to know where they're going. The trouble is that as you look at other leaders, they all seem to be going in different directions.

We live in a world of pictures. People spend hours watching television and surfing the Internet. George Cladis has argued that this "flow of images across our brains is training our minds to think more in images than in words."³ Whether we know it or not, we all have an image in our heads that drives our work as leaders. I argue that, more often than not, our image of leadership is adapted from the images of leadership we see around us. Like young children acting out the latest Disney movie as they play, we've followed after the culture and we don't even realize it.

There are five distinctive images of Christian leadership in the American church:

1. *The theologian.* He's a thinking man. His congregation sits eagerly and attentively to hear his nuanced insights about the Bible. He also has convictions of steel. His mantra: "Here I stand." You admire how his tribe knows what is right and stays committed to truth in the midst of a hostile culture. Back when you were in seminary, this was the person you aspired to be.⁴
2. *The innovator.* He's the young cutting-edge guy whose teaching is engaging and relevant. He doesn't just preach it. He lives a life of creative contextualization, effectively reaching others and doing the work of an evangelist. This leader always has new ideas for reaching his community, and they always seem to work.

3. *The activist.* She's the millennial dream packaged up as a professional minister.⁵ Her rapidly growing nonprofit feeds the homeless, cares for crisis pregnancies, or wins prostitutes to Jesus. When you're tempted to become a complacent Christian, you hear her cry, "Take the hill!" Her passion is inspiring.⁶
4. *The good manager.* He's a business executive who could do anything but has decided to order his church like a well-oiled machine. His motto: "Get it done." Does your church have budget troubles? Marriages falling apart? Kids misbehaving? He has a discipleship program for that. Since you picked up a book called *Leadership Mosaic*, it's likely you're attracted to his team-based, collaborative approach. Do you have more business leadership books on your shelf than books on pastoral care? Maybe you could follow this organizational CEO.⁷
5. *The soulful leader.* She hasn't been to a conference in years, but everyone at the Christian retreat center knows her by name. Her prayer life is powerful. Her life is marked by radical transparency, deep vulnerability, and holy desire. Her constant prayer is "Abba Father, I trust you." You admire her, because she always seems to be at the pinnacle of emotional health.

These differing visions of leadership are all necessary within the church, but unfortunately they often compete for our devotion. It's easy to set them against one another and then choose the one we think is best—the convictional theologian against the soulful contemplative. Whenever we exaggerate one version of leadership, it crowds out the others. Soon we see there's something missing. The truth is we're still lost.

From Complicated to Complex

We're lost because the church-leadership world is complicated. How can a minister lead with truth, relational connection, a missional focus, solid management skill, and depth? We can't all be omniscient.

We're even more lost because the world we live in is changing. Researchers suggest that Christians in America are about to become a distinct minority group.⁸ Church leaders—even really competent



Five Contemporary Images of Christian Leadership*

Theologian All about: Truth	Conviction Clear beliefs Propositional/analytical thinking Theological purity
Innovator All about: Connection	Creativity Relevance Cultural engagement Community contextualization
Activist All about: Mission	Courage Change Visionary strategy Social advancement
Good Manager All about: Organization	Efficient collaboration Process Team-based strategy/management Planning/structure
Soulful Leader All about: Depth	Communion Relationships Contemplation/reflection Emotional health

* Adapted from Gary Bredfeldt, *Great Leader, Great Teacher: Recovering the Biblical Vision for Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), 163.



ones—find themselves less and less in a position of power in society. We need more than greater competency to handle it all. We need a new way of thinking in a changing world.

Similar shifts are taking place in the worlds of science, business, and even warfare. Science has moved from the modern, reductive, and efficient ways of Newtonian physics to the complex, indeterminate, and integrated models of quantum mechanics. The business world has moved from scientific and bureaucratic management systems with clear, top-down authority and bottom-line results to systems of process and responsibility where minimum-wage workers are empow-



Strategic Paradigm Shifts

	<i>Old-School Paradigms</i>	<i>New-School Paradigms</i>
Science	<i>Newtonian thinking:</i> atomistic, fragmented, reductive, determinate	<i>Quantum thinking:</i> holistic, integrated, both-and, indeterminate
Business	<i>Scientific and bureaucratic management:</i> top-down authority, results-oriented, decisions made remotely, bullet-proof strategic plans	<i>Lean management:</i> empowerment, process-oriented, decisions made on the spot with facts, organic strategy based in contingency and systems theory
Military	<i>Modern military:</i> race for newest and mightiest technology, chess match for greatest efficiency, decisions made by the brass	<i>Counterinsurgency:</i> long duration of engagement that seeks to change hearts and minds in order to change the political situation, each unit empowered to create strategy



ered to stop the assembly line for the sake of quality control and safety. Even the military looks less like a top-down chess match. Nations now fight with counterinsurgency methods. The days of throwing money at problems or simply thinking technology will solve all the problems are coming to an end. Conducting business as usual in a way that lacks understanding and empathy or using merely complicated solutions to attack complex problems is no longer viable.⁹

What we learn from these changes is that leadership in the world today is more complex than it was before the information age. We've moved from a merely complicated world to a complex and unpredictable one. The difference between a complicated system and a complex one, according to General Stanley McChrystal, is akin to the difference between a car and ocean currents.¹⁰ A car should work if all its parts are in working order. A failure of one part, like the fuel pump, has a

predictable outcome: the car stalls. On the other hand, ocean currents can be so complex that, in one situation, the migration path of a pod of whales may change the direction or force of a current, and in another situation, the same pod will change nothing. The number of factors is so vast and their interactions so complex that any prediction is defied.

Complexity and unpredictability can make a leader anxious. It's frustrating when old ways of leading stop working. What is a leader to do? Should we fight against the change or embrace it? Donella H. Meadows describes the tension we feel:

There's something within the human mind that is attracted to straight lines and not curves, to whole numbers and not fractions, to uniformity and not diversity, and to certainties and not mystery. . . . Another part of us recognizes instinctively that nature designs in fractals, with intriguing detail on every scale from the microscopic to the macroscopic. That part of us makes Gothic cathedrals and Persian carpets, symphonies and novels, Mardi Gras costumes and artificial intelligence programs, all with embellishments almost as complex as the ones we find in the world around us.¹¹

As our world increases in complexity, I believe that Christians should be on the leading edge of embracing and even celebrating this change. We cannot simply grow in our competency to fix predictable ministry problems. We need a new way of seeing. We need this paradigm shift because the complexity of the world is a witness to the complexity and greatness of our God.

God Is Our Master Image

An artist gathers together pieces of stone and glass. Each piece has a different shape and color. Slowly she arranges the pieces into a bigger picture—a *mosaic*—that gives shape and meaning to variegated tesserae. Some images—what George Cladis describes as controlling or master images—“can have a profound, though sometimes subtle, effect on how we perceive reality . . . an effect on how we order the world around us.”¹² That's what we need. We need a master image that can

provide a clear and practical critique of our own leadership journey and the competing contemporary visions of Christian leadership.

But we need even more. I gravitate toward studying leadership because I was born into a leadership crisis. My mom raised me by herself for the first nine years of my life. My father wasn't present. I grew up in a broken home, sandwiched between the suburbs of Orange County, California, and the barrio. All the chaos I experienced as a child has given me a burden for leadership in life, home, and church. But I wasn't able to put the complexity together on my own. I needed more than a master image to order my life around. I needed the Master.

Paul S. Fiddes writes, "A complex God is the most appropriate creator of a complex world."¹³ In other words, a God-sized world needs God-centered leadership. When we look to the Bible, we shouldn't merely look for a theology of leadership. We must look for the Trinitarian God who leads.

Herman Bavinck was a theologian possessed with a God-sized vision of the world. This is what he wrote about the place of the Trinity in the Christian life:

The thoughtful person places the doctrine of the Trinity in the very center of the full-orbed life of nature and mankind. The [Trinitarian] confession of the Christian is not an island in mid-ocean but a mountain-top overlooking the entire creation. And the task of the Christian theologian is to set forth clearly the great significance of God's revelation for (and the relation of that revelation to) the whole realm of existence. The mind of the Christian is not satisfied until every form of existence has been referred to the Triune God and until the confession of the Trinity has received the place of prominence in our thought and life.¹⁴

Our Trinitarian doctrine of God is not a mathematical formula we must solve in order to pass an orthodoxy test. That makes it sound like the Trinity is optional. Rather, God—in all of his complexity—must be the operating system for our lives and our leadership. Only he can empower us to lead meaningfully in every situation and circumstance. That's why the apostle Paul writes, "Be imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1).

But don't think this is merely our confession. It's a beautiful vision. The glory of this truth is that God has lived eternally in community. When he made mankind in his image, he invited every human person to participate in his mission and leadership in the world. Leadership at its source is relational and not merely functional. As Christians, we don't simply lead *like* God. We lead *with* God.

The Trinity, Our Mosaic

Persecution often forced early Christians into secrecy and seclusion. But when Constantine won control of the Roman Empire in the early fourth century AD, he eventually elevated Christianity to favored status. Soon Christian leadership began to build beautiful meeting places. By the end of the fourth century, Christians were adorning the walls, ceilings, and open aisles of their basilica-style buildings with the mosaic art form. At Santa Costanza in Rome, you will see mosaic depictions of cherubs gathering grapes and making wine. You can visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and find an original mosaic floor with geometric patterns in the Roman style. At the vaulted Tomb of Julii near the crypt below St. Peter's Basilica, you can find mosaics that tell the stories of the Good Shepherd with his sheep and Jonah and the great fish.

But those mosaics might never have been built if it hadn't been for a pastor in Alexandria whose enemies called him "the Black Dwarf." The pastor's name was Athanasius. Within the first decade of Constantine's rule, a young pastor by the name of Arius began teaching that the Son—Jesus—was a created being, not eternally divine. "If God is the cause of all," he argued, "then how can the Son, who received his being from the Father, be uncaused?" Arius was persuasive and popular. Many followed him. It seemed like the whole world would go astray. Athanasius dedicated his life to proving just how catastrophic Arius's teachings were for healthy Christian living.¹⁵ "Our redemption isn't possible," he wrote, "unless Christ himself is eternal—the image of the eternal Father."¹⁶

To forge unity, Emperor Constantine gathered the contending parties and representatives from throughout the empire to a council in the city of Nicaea in 325. Standing alongside Athanasius was a mosaic of

Christian leaders who both articulated Trinitarian doctrine and modeled it in their unity and love for truth. Bishop Alexander represented the embattled old guard from the West. He'd endured bloody persecution under Emperor Gaius and slander in his own parish.¹⁷ St. Nicholas—yes, indeed, *that* St. Nicholas—was part of a fiery contingent from the East. They were a diverse crew. Yet, in the end, they stood together with conviction and courage; out of more than three hundred representatives from churches throughout the world, only two bishops sided with Arius against the biblical and apostolic understanding of Jesus. Through the unity that emerged from this diversity came a beautiful and biblical affirmation of faith that developed over time into the Nicene Creed. The Arian heresy was defeated. Trinitarian orthodoxy had won the day.

The Council of Nicaea shows us that we need diverse personalities and leadership styles to contend for the faith. Like assorted pieces of rock and stone, leaders come in all shapes and sizes. If you're searching for a vision of leadership that encompasses the whole, it's easy to get lost. My prayer is that *Leadership Mosaic* will help you see how God holds all the diverse pieces together.

Leadership Mosaic is a fivefold vision of leadership rooted in five Trinitarian doctrines. The Trinity is our mosaic. The triune God himself, the Master, is our master image. In theological terms, we say that our God is transcendent and immanent. He's the God of the big picture and the God of the details. He allows us to see the beauty of the whole and the beauty in the pieces.

When we look to the Trinity, we find that God's mission transcends every cultural change and yet speaks to us immanently—in time, in place, in body. He is God over every leadership image in the Bible, in the culture around us, and even in our personal history.

He is the God who forms the church in his image. Church leaders don't simply have to compare themselves to one another or parrot the leadership images they see around them. We don't have to choose between being maverick parachurch leaders or sycophants in a megachurch system. We can find our vision of leadership by looking to God

wherever we serve. His redemptive work in the world is the basis for understanding the nature and purpose of our leadership.¹⁸ When we think of leadership, our first thought should be the triune God.

Just think. You have all kinds of leaders at your church. When the board meets, you have some guys who come in wired to lead as CEOs. Other guys—maybe staff members—think more pragmatically. Others are theologians. If you have seven different leaders, there are seven different family histories. There are seven different ways of viewing the world. And—whether we recognize it or not—there are probably seven thousand different principles driving their leadership. We don't have simple solutions that can cut through all of that complexity, but we know the One who can.

The goal of *Leadership Mosaic* is to dive deeper into the doctrine of God in order to understand how the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—*informs* and *transforms* our life as leaders. Leadership is knowing where people need to go and taking the initiative to get them there in God's way and by God's power.¹⁹ God is our model for leadership because God the Father shows us where to go. Jesus has already taken the initiative to get us there. We have the power to join him because the Holy Spirit goes with us on our way.

I believe only the Trinity is big enough to address everything leadership involves. A pastor recently told me: "I have a robust theology over here and a robust ministry philosophy over there. But it's hard to see how they connect. There is only pixie dust in between." I believe God not only defines doctrine but also guides leadership. He is big enough to knit together our theology and our church budgets. He can join a leader's spiritual life and his strategic planning.



Leadership is knowing where people need to go and taking the initiative to get them there in God's way and by God's power.



Over this book's five chapters, I will unpack five perspectives on leadership. My goal isn't to compare and contrast them. Don't pick just one. Rather, I believe each of these leadership visions can be rooted and redeemed in our doctrine of God. The best leaders exemplify them all. The best teams are those where each of the strengths is present.

- First, *convictional leaders* embody their beliefs. Many leaders are blown and tossed around by the latest ministry fads. But when God speaks, he is always true to himself. We need conviction to listen to God's voice and get in line with what he says.
- Second, *creative leaders* imagine the way forward. God has a plan to take your leadership chaos and make it beautiful. He has given us imagination so we can inspire others to follow his redeemed vision for the future.
- Third, *courageous leaders* take risks. Since God has sent us and the Spirit empowers us, we can leave behind what hinders and step out in faith. We can move forward to meet the challenges within and the challenges ahead.
- Fourth, *collaborative leaders* empower others. They know that working with others is better than leading alone. God has created us for community. We need a team to grow, develop, and strengthen one another for bigger and better things.
- Finally, *contemplative leaders* are fully awake to God. For leadership to be sustainable over the long haul, we need communion. We must abide in God in order to encourage the hearts of those we lead.

Christian leader, are you lost? If you are, I have an invitation for you. Stop chasing simplistic and reductionistic leadership philosophies; instead taste and see that the Lord has a better way forward. Gaze with me—not merely at the diversity of leaders we find in the world but at the varying ways the triune God himself leads his people. Take a step back and take in his complexity. Behold him.

Now consider. Piece by piece, he's transforming you into his own image. Gazing at him is the pathway to growth. Beholding is the way to becoming. The big picture—the whole mosaic—for how we lead is found in him.



Leadership Mosaic

Leadership is

This requires

knowing where people need to go	a convictional leader, a creative leader,
and taking the initiative to get them there	a courageous leader,
in God's way and by God's power.	a collaborative leader, a contemplative leader.

