

100 lessons

I wish
someone
had told
me earlier
about
church
leadership



WHERE DO WE
GROW FROM HERE?

100 lessons

I wish someone had told me earlier about church leadership

There is no criticism intended in this title.

I am hugely grateful to all those who were part of my training and development for church ministry and leadership.

Indeed it is very possible that a good number of these 100 lessons were told to me and I wasn't listening properly!

Yet, some of these lessons have taken a relatively long time to absorb and some I continually need to relearn.

So, I pray that offering them here might give a quicker route to finding help and hope for any church ministers and leaders.

Ken Benjamin

Some problems go away!

1

People don't tell you accurately how much things matter to them

2

Just saying 'thank you' is often not helpful - there is almost always something more personal and specific that you can say

3

God's 'no' and 'wait' – work for us too

4

God so often honours our best efforts even when we decide the wrong thing

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The support of people in your team will keep you going

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Cherish and live up to the trust you are given

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It is always easier to start than to end ministries

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It's OK to say 'no' to the next good idea

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Compromise is sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do (but not always)

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Some minor issues are major

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Some interruptions are the main thing

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Learn to worry less about reputation

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Conveying a key message takes longer than we think

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The cliché of keeping the main thing the main thing is true

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Leaning/depending on God beats problem solving

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When it's not confidential, communicate things as widely and as freely as you can

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The online world has changed church leadership – more than most people think

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There is no need to theologically justify things which are just a question or personal style, ability or preference

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Living with an uncomfortable vacancy – is both right and uncomfortable!

21

Vulnerability can be a strength

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There is always more you can do, but that doesn't mean you should

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There is always another side to the story you are being told

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People spend a long time worrying about the wrong things – that includes us

We work best together when we enjoy being together

25

In God's kingdom we are all equal, but it is easy to feel very different to this reality. There is no competition in calling

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When criticism comes, and it will, prayer for guidance, wisdom, strength and discernment might not be our first reaction but we can learn to make it our first-thing-to-do habit

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People will get upset with us but very often it's not about us

28

Give up trying to please everyone

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Speaking positively about other local church leaders has an impact

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Managing volunteers is very different to managing paid workers

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Unity is often more important than being right – but not always

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The season will change

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Diversity in a team is awkward and brilliant at the same time

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With God, we are always greater than the sum of our parts

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Don't assume that I have all the right answers

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Being in a leadership team is a privilege and can be fun

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Leadership can be a magnifying glass helping to focus on our strengths and weaknesses

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Remember that the emotional effect of some leadership discussions differs greatly within the group. Some don't sleep easily after leaders' meetings – even the positive ones!

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Leadership should be a constant learning and faith stretching process

41

I don't need to be passionate about everything (somebody else is bothered about finance and buildings)

42

An alternative view can change the course of a conversation for the better

43

Being part of an accountable team provides a safety net for decision making

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A meeting without an agenda is not by definition a purposeless meeting

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The person who speaks first sets the tone and direction of the conversation. Starting a conversation is therefore a responsibility not to be taken lightly

46

It can be uncomfortable to disagree with a good idea, but it is important to establish if any idea is right for its time and place

47

You need others to help you to know when your strengths are becoming weaknesses

48

Sometime it's good to take risks and try different things

Encouragement protects people

49

When we have nothing left but God we discover that he is enough

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He is there in the suffering

51

We have to make the distinction between healthy communication and gossip

52

Draw out and cheer on the hidden, timid qualities in others

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Listen and don't overreact

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I need to learn more, but I have more than enough to be getting on with

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If in doubt trust God – easier said than done

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Carve out time, intentional time, to consider your leadership role before God

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Don't forget to genuinely love people - People are precious to God

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Be ready and willing to change – always willing to change our methods whilst keeping our message

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The way you say something matters as well as the words you use

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With difficult and challenging conversations, the setting matters and people may tell others the setting you chose

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We aren't perfect. We make mistakes. God still loves us

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Pause long enough to celebrate good news

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If there isn't a clear answer, whenever you can, acknowledge that and take more time to think and pray

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Speak well of others

66

Sometimes leadership involves praying, followed by taking your best guess, followed by praying some more. This happens more than most church leaders admit

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A few high-quality investments are better than lots of low ones

68

Build in accountability structures where someone you trust has space to challenge you and you can challenge them

69

You might not be called to bring all your work skills to the leadership role

70

Communicate where we are going – more often than you think

71

Set regular review moments (where have I got to and where am I going – same question over the church) - ask this both personally and for the church

Almost all of us have a glass-half-full and glass-half-empty version of how things are going in church at the moment. It is good to be aware of which version we are telling/hearing. The truth is almost always a mix of the two

72

It's not about us

73

Create a culture of being willing to try new things - even if some don't work out

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Remember - We are here to serve not to be served - We have an amazing God

75

Live thankfully

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Be wary of first world problems

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Make space for regular encounter

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Being/doing church can look different – it's good to take some risks for the kingdom. Faith means - stepping out and having a go

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Faith is for living - what we teach and model needs to be real

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It's easier to lead a church that has a generous, faithful heart

81

People tend not to call us to say they are having an average day!
We can therefore develop a skewed view of reality

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Attitudes leak - mine and others, for good and bad – God’s Word, Spirit and Presence change my attitude when I let them

84

People judge our decisions on a ‘law’ of precedent, even when the precedent they refer to is completely different

85

Working out decisions on the basis of precedent is very, very often the right thing to do, some people will get this and see the fairness of it, even when others don’t see lesson above, other’s won’t!

86

Everyone’s story is a long story if we listen properly. Sometimes it’s OK that they are telling you the short version but know that, that’s what it is

87

Some days the office bit, the admin, computer stuff, the emails are like a whirlpool (vortex!) sucking you in – it takes a lot of work to get out from them and move on. Of course – some days they are disturbingly comfortable distractions and some days they are the main thing

88

Our people contact us from their Frontlines more often than they contact us about their Frontlines. It is for us to ask what is going on in their whole-life discipleship context so that we can pray and teach into those contexts

89

If you learn to make a mental deadline well before the absolute deadline there is room to breathe, think, pray, change and deal with pastoral crises. Some people cannot work or produce their best this way – but if you can your ministry and your church will benefit

90

It’s really easy to talk up bad outcomes and talk down good ones with spiritual language and not properly assess how things are going

91

Inhibitions are easily confused with prohibitions by some people including me

Kindness given by and to church leaders might be the most underrated but most needed Fruit of the Spirit

92

Some people will grow in God regardless of what we do and we may get the credit for great leadership, some may walk away from God regardless of what we do and we may get the blame. It doesn't matter what reputation we get for either – God knows

93

God is in the muddle before you settle. The time when your mind races with 20 other things on a good day and 200 things on a bad day. That settling down time is normal

94

Very often stopping and therefore being rested for the next thing beats working more on many things (including a bit more prep for the next thing)

95

There is a God given enthusiasm in Godly leaders

96

Remember and focus more on the privilege of what we are called to do – rather than the hassle/s that shouts for our attention

97

All your ducks are never in a row

98

The programme keeps shouting for our attention. The things that matter often whisper

99

It is ridiculously easy to forget to pray. Prayer recalibrates. When we pray we call to the one who holds the keys to open up and show the way forward

100

The route to these 100 thoughts has, like all key aspects in church life, been a team effort rather than an individual exercise.

The starting point was a few years ago, thinking and reflecting with my own church staff team and leaders on an away day. We were looking back and reflecting on lessons learnt 'along the way' in church ministry. I offered a list as a starting point but they added to the list in helpful ways that I would not have thought of.

The list has gone on being tweaked ever since. I've used the list in a couple of training scenarios and comments from participants have resulted in further edits and additions.

Most recently, in preparing for a seminar with Newly Accredited Ministers and Ministers in Training for the Baptist Assembly 2019, Anne Calver has helpfully added some of her own thoughts and lessons.

In short, I can't take credit for all 100 thoughts in these pages but I am very confident that those who offered them will be delighted and encouraged if anything you read helps shape your ministry positively for our Lord's Kingdom purposes.

Finally, I'm very aware that some of these short thoughts might need clarification. Sometimes I will add some notes on the News and Blog Posts section of my website www.wheredowegrowfromhere.org but if any specific lesson is particularly unclear do contact me via my website www.wheredowegrowfromhere.org/contact-us and I will seek to make a fuller answer the subject of a forthcoming blog post.