

## HOW TO AVOID LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOTS

BY GRAHAM ARCHER, CPAS DIRECTOR OF MINISTRY

Is it risky to write about blind spots in leadership? As all writers know, you have to check yourself first before you communicate to others, or God will use your preparation to challenge you. My inner self-check went like this:

'Am I suffering from any blind spots at the moment? ...

No, I can't see any, but then again, how would I?! ...

I could ask my wife ... dangerous move, she will think of loads, ignorance is bliss ...

Or is it?'

By definition, blind spots are hard to see but the best biblical leaders knew that they had them. David prayed that God would search him for them; Peter had to

discover that his own courage wouldn't be enough; Nathanael needed to deal with his Nazarene prejudice; and Judas never quite dealt with the ones he had picked up as a Zealot. God loves to open our eyes to things we can't see and sometimes he uses those close to us to do so.

Blind spots are defined in one quadrant of the Johari window as things about ourselves that we don't know, but others do. They don't have to stay hidden. Structured feedback or the observations of close acquaintances can bring them to our attention if we are willing. I started reflecting on this a few months ago when the following conversation took place.

'How is your new minister getting on?' I asked a friend. 'He is a great preacher, but not really a people person, so it is taking some adjustment for us all.' Just a bit of small talk about a church and guy that I don't know, but people are beginning to assess his strengths and weaknesses. Quite apart from whether the assessment is right (and all church leaders get misunderstood), does the minister know that about himself? Has anyone ever talked to him about it, or has he ever had the opportunity to grow in his people skills I wondered.

All of us have blind spots, and they are often the cause of recurring misunderstandings. How do they get there and what do they hide behind? Here are half a dozen starters, places where blind spots easily develop.

### 1. USING GIFTS YOU DON'T HAVE ON A REGULAR BASIS

Leaders often feel responsible for everything and can be tempted into filling gaps even when they have no real skill in that area. Congregations will happily

**ALL OF US HAVE BLIND SPOTS, AND THEY ARE OFTEN THE CAUSE OF RECURRING MISUNDERSTANDINGS. HOW DO THEY GET THERE AND WHAT DO THEY HIDE BEHIND?**

collude for a while, hoping that your attempts to prove that you are omniscient will meet with success. However, if they don't, it is hard to hide the truth. No one really likes misaligned newsheets flipped on the wrong edge, hymns led by a pianist who can hit only 90% of the right notes and parties planned by people who prefer to be in bed by 9.30pm. We convince ourselves we have to do it, and we are doing OK, but everyone knows it is a distraction from the things we are called to and are best equipped to do.

## 2. A GAP OPENING UP IN OUR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE

We may not like it, but our public and private lives are talked about by those we lead on a regular basis, as illustrated above. We can't change it. It is a feature of leadership. The author of the book of Hebrews wrote about this reality: 'Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith'.

Church leaders are supposed to be visible, appropriately accessible and recognised in their communities, and the way that we live our lives is part of our message. Social media give people yet more access to who we are and what matters to us, so let's not think that the only thing people respond to are our well-planned sermons and thought-through documents. This is not about spin – it is about checking that what we live is authentic to our faith. Being role models is biblical.

## 3. FORGETTING JUST HOW MUCH GOD LOVES US

Theologically we may not buy into a Protestant work ethic, but every time I teach leaders about Frank Lake's cycle of grief and cycle of grace almost 100% will admit that they sometimes feel they are working for God's favour not out of it. I love the fact that Jesus restored Peter after his denial by checking his love rather than his actions. Sure our mistakes matter, but even while we sort them out we are still loved by God so much more than the sum total of our achievements. Our devotions aren't another task to be ticked off, they are ... Well, devotions.

## 4. MAKING UNHELPFUL COMPARISONS

Below most of our cheery exteriors lurks a fairness demon that we might manage to keep hidden but still whispers in the silence that life would be a whole lot better if only... (add your own 'I was less busy, more healthy, smarter, had a smaller parish, larger congregation, less argumentative home

group, more motivated colleagues' and so on). Often there is another church or person that from our perspective has those things, but sometimes we wish we or our circumstances were different because we can't come to terms with something about ourselves that we don't like.

## 5. FEELING INSECURE

Leading out of a place of security is key to helping us avoid blind spots. Chairing meetings is an important skill but one which a certain leader didn't possess. Hence meetings were rather long and decisions not quite made. The committee included some very good chairs who felt unable to help said leader because they felt she would take it as a personal attack. Knowing our gifts and our call is our foundation to our security. The people who wanted to help the leader mentioned were in no doubt that she was a more gifted preacher and pastor than they could be, so wondered why couldn't they offer some help in their area of strength?

## 6. TRADING FAITHFULNESS FOR SUCCESS

In John 5:17 Jesus says, 'My Father is always at his work ... and I too am working'. People will occasionally judge us according to how hard we appear to be working, and there is something quite luring about that. If I can prove that I have done a certain number of hours and put a certain amount of effort in, then I expect people to respect me, and God to bless my labours. But it never seems to work that way.

Big plans don't always work, best worked sermons sometimes bomb and yet off the cuff ideas and the odd unplanned comment occasionally have huge impact. These things remind us that blessing is a result of walking daily with Jesus and being faithful to the best of our ability. My father is working and I am working also, and sometimes the best things happen despite us because God is God and in the end, the glory is his.



### FOR REFLECTION

1. Do any of these themes strike a chord for you? If so, when can you take a moment to acknowledge that thing in your prayers?
2. If it is leading towards something that might be a blind spot, who can you talk to about it whose opinion you can trust?
3. Are there actions you need to take right now that will allow Jesus to open your eyes and set you free?