

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DIFFERENTIATING INEQUALITIES FROM EQUALITIES:  
DEFINING THE CONSTANTS IN PENTECOSTAL LEADERSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

When asked to pinpoint the nature of Pentecostal leadership, believers will commonly offer some equation that begins with a position of pastoral or church authority as defined by title, office, or rank; they will then add variables such as one's denomination or faith tradition, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, power, the gift of tongues, a passion for the lost, and/or miracles, signs, and wonders. However, even if one includes all those variables in a singular definition, the description of Pentecostal leadership still lacks something more fundamental, resulting in, to borrow a phrase from the world of algebra, an inequality.

In mathematics, inequalities describe the relationship between two unequal expressions, such as  $3 + 9 \neq 20 - 2$ , or  $10 > 4$ . In defining Pentecostal leadership, the inequality looks something like this: Pentecostal leader  $\neq$  denomination + title + baptism in the Holy Spirit, or Pentecostal leader  $\neq$  rank + speaking in tongues + the gift of teaching. On the surface, these inequalities seem reasonable; they should work. Upon closer inspection, however, their inherent weaknesses appear. The problem is that many, if not all, of these variables appear in some form within Christian traditions that do not historically identify as Pentecostal, while some even make appearances outside of the Christian faith. Mormons, for example, display a passion for the lost seldom rivaled by any other religious tradition. Baptist and Reformed leaders have recently begun to acknowledge the value of the full range of the gifts of the Spirit, such as when John Piper declared in an interview that speaking in tongues "is a gift. ... I see no reason for arguing that anything has changed in the history of redemption between the age of the Apostles and our

age.”<sup>1</sup> Further, the Roman Catholic Church rightly embraces miracles, signs, and wonders as eagerly as self-identified classical Pentecostals.

In addition, authority, power, and position remain as prevalent within the corporate world as within church boardrooms, so the assumption that every leader associated with the Pentecostal Church practices true Pentecostal leadership remains problematic at best. Ultimately, such a perception of Pentecostal leadership lacks certain constants. In algebra, constants describe the well-defined known numbers in an equation (e.g. 3, 7, -2,  $\pi$ ,  $\phi$ ), and these numbers never change. Well-defined constants differentiate Pentecostal leadership from simply a leader associated with Pentecostalism; these constants consist of alignment with the Holy Spirit, mutuality as expressed through servant leadership, and courage born of the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, “Are Prophecy and Tongues Alive Today?” (video), Desiring God, posted January 17, 2013, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/piper-on-prophecy-and-tongues>.

## PART 1: ALIGNMENT WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Alignment with the Holy Spirit originates, of course, with the leader's baptism in the Holy Spirit; however, this transformative work should not end with a one-time experience. It remains ongoing and radical, a state of existence that the community would deem remarkable, as illustrated by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5, where he instructs the Church on issues related to their daily living and character. There, he makes a notable contrast between drunkenness and living fully in the Spirit: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 18-20).<sup>1</sup> Paul did not address those who simply drank wine with their meals but people who frequently, perhaps even daily, imbibed to the point of reckless and wild drunkenness.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the Ephesians' relationship with alcohol had become a controlling vice, which would have impacted all aspects of their lives: their personal health, their mental health, their families, their ability to hold a job, their reputation in the community, and their priorities. Paul

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

<sup>2</sup> The NIV translates Paul's word ἀσωτία as "debauchery" to describe those getting drunk, but the word indicates more than a vice or excessiveness. It indicates a troubled state of wildness or riots, to the point that others would abandon them because they are too far gone or unable to be saved. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, "Strong's G810 'asotia'," Blue Letter Bible, accessed April 2, 2018, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=VT0002412>.

tells them to exchange their addiction to happy hour and all that entails for ongoing intoxication with the Spirit—a radical change of behavior required on the part of the believer that would not only impact the believer but also the community. Further, this change needs to be ongoing, a daily endeavor. Through Paul’s use of the infinitive form of the verb *be filled* (πληρώω), he emphasizes the continuous nature of being filled with the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

This continual filling with the Holy Spirit brings about alignment in Him, drastically affecting every aspect of one’s life, especially the believer’s relationships to others. Nowhere, of course, does an individual’s state of spiritual health prove more telling than in one’s own household, where people let down their guard and show their true selves—the behavior and attitudes they often suppress from public eyes. After Paul implores believers (and leaders) to remain filled with the Spirit, he then expounds on how this ongoing alignment with the Spirit plays out in the believer’s household as husbands and wives “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” and practice sacrificial love as Christ did, who laid down His life for the Church (Eph 5:21-25).

Paul then continues to work his way down the standard Greek hierarchy to illustrate how alignment with the Spirit also impacts believers’ relationships with their children, whom fathers should “not exasperate” (Eph 6:4), and, finally, their slaves or “property” (v. 5). Slaves not only served in most Greek households, but society heavily depended on them throughout the entire economy, ranging from shipyards and farms to the marketplace and mining. Notably, Paul warns owners to treat their slaves as he instructs slaves to treat their masters, “with respect and fear,

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<sup>3</sup> *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, “Strong’s G4137 ‘pleroo’,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed March 31, 2018, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4137&t=NIV>.

and with sincerity of heart,” because the true Master in heaven does not favor masters over slaves (vv. 5-9).

Paul’s teaching on the outworking of the Spirit-filled life would have caused quite a stir, turning conventional wisdom, behavior, relationships, and attitudes upside down from the status quo. Indeed, the Spirit-filled life affects everything, from one’s marriage to how the believer interacts with the economy. This truth has profound implications for Pentecostal leaders as they allow the Spirit to permeate all aspects of life, especially as it pertains to mutuality and servant leadership.

## PART 2: MUTUALITY AS EXPRESSED THROUGH SERVANT LEADERSHIP

As shown in Ephesians 5 and 6, this continual infilling and alignment with the Spirit turns hierarchy upside down as leaders learn to live a life of sacrificial love and mutuality—the foundation of servant leadership for the Pentecostal leader. Mutuality exists as an expression of deep humility and the need for community; it remains essential for “true ministry” and accountability.<sup>5</sup> Henri Nouwen rightly asserts that without mutuality in ministry, leaders will eventually lead from the dark side of power as they go alone and “begin to show authoritarian and dictatorial traits,” the only kind of power that the world knows.<sup>6</sup> This kind of power, however, has no business in the life of the Pentecostal leader.

Ministering in mutuality helps prevent worldly approaches to power from creeping into the life of the Pentecostal leader, but leaders must first live authentically and possess its “twin sister, humility ... because it’s pretty hard to be truly humble if you’re not authentic first, if you can’t be honest and real about both your strengths and weaknesses.”<sup>7</sup> Leaders must embrace vulnerability and resist “the temptation to consider power an apt instrument for the proclamation

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<sup>5</sup> Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 62.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jodi Detrick, *The Jesus-Hearted Woman: 10 Leadership Qualities for Enduring and Endearing Influence* (Springfield, MO: Influence Resources, 2013), 62.



of the Gospel.”<sup>8</sup> This temptation to yield to power and demand allegiance from others, however, remains a persistent threat to the Church.

In response to this threat, the Pentecostal leader must endeavor to practice mutuality and submission to others. They must embrace authentic intimacy, practice reciprocity, and esteem others—their spouse, the dubious panhandler at the intersection, and the curmudgeon stewing on the back pew—more highly than themselves. They must carry

... the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil 2:5-8).

Thus, Pentecostal servant leadership delights not in rank, title, office, or position but submits in humility to the point of emptying oneself, practicing a kind of “leadership in which power is constantly abandoned in favor of love.”<sup>9</sup> The Pentecostal leader lives as Jesus did, turning hierarchy and top-down approaches upside down as He took on the nature of a servant (Phil 2:7)—a spiritual posture that requires unwavering courage.

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<sup>8</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

### PART 3: COURAGE BORN OF THE SPIRIT

At first glance, courage may seem like a strange constant to include in defining Pentecostal leadership. Often, the trait gets confused with loud personalities or is reduced to descriptions of boldness in the face of life or death situations, such as in the biblical stories of Queen Esther or David and Goliath, or the more contemporary examples of Harriet Tubman's work in the Underground Railroad and the ten Boom family's role in the Dutch resistance. Indeed, such stories illustrate impressive acts of noble courage worthy of unceasing notoriety and life lessons for countless generations.

Certainly, the Pentecostal leader would need immense courage to face such threats, but courage has a far more subtle side to it as well, one that often carries lasting consequences and thus becomes easy to eschew. This kind of courage either gets expressed or suppressed in the routine decisions of life, casting a ripple effect within the Church. Unfortunately, the suppression of courage remains frustratingly prevalent in the Pentecostal Church. Such lack shows up in the lead pastor who fears transparency about the high turnover rate and declining attendance of a congregation, thereby preventing members from helping address festering issues of church health.

Lack of courage also shows up in the worship leader who freezes when a congregant gives a prophetic message or tongues and interpretation and declines to pastor the moment, effectively asking the Spirit to politely and quietly exit the room. The lack of courage also shows when the prophetic voices opt to remain silent about the truth God reveals to them in exchange for keeping the peace, avoiding being misunderstood, and steering clear of conflict. It also shows

in denominational leaders who prefer to ignore rather than rebuke toxic factions who delight in tearing apart His Church over issues such as communion practices, women in leadership, and faith and art conferences at Christian colleges. Notably, all these deficiencies point not only to a lack of courage but also a lack of mutuality, authenticity, humility, and alignment with the Holy Spirit.

Courage born of the Spirit can only have Kingdom power when the Pentecostal leader, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, marries great conviction with great truth.<sup>10</sup> The art of Pentecostal leadership exercises such courage, resulting in leaders who refuse to live in denial and, instead, acknowledge current reality; they don't "pretend that all is fine."<sup>11</sup> They strive for transparency, not window dressing. They follow in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul, who minced no words in calling out and correcting the problems he observed within the growing Church, such as when believers in Corinth only bothered to feed themselves and humiliated those without food as they gathered for the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-22).

Leaders with courage born of the Spirit understand that "God's word is not always palatable, nor does it always evoke favourable reactions from an audience."<sup>12</sup> They learn from the prophet Ezekiel, who rebuked the "holy" people of Jerusalem for being "more acute at perceiving the moral failings of others than they were in perceiving them in themselves," as well as courageously addressed the powerful and wealthy prince of Tyre for his arrogance and self-

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<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Boa, "Courage and Risk Taking," Bible.org, March 22, 2006, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-courage-and-risk-taking>.

<sup>11</sup> Andy Stanley, *Next Generation Leader: Five Essentials for Those Who Will Shape the Future* (New York: Multnomah, 2003), 71-72.

<sup>12</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel*, The Daily Study Bible Series, ed. John C. L. Gibson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 91.

reliance (Ezek 28:1-10).<sup>13</sup> They speak not from power derived from positions of authority or rank, but from power given through the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Under the influence of courage born of the Spirit, today's Pentecostal leaders can follow not only the biblical examples of Ezekiel, Paul, Queen Esther, Deborah, or numerous others, but they can also follow the examples of the early Christian missionaries such as Saint Brendan, who, along with several other monks, stepped into a rickety coracle without oar and rudder and allowed God to blow the sails and take the monks wherever He desired to establish monasteries.<sup>14</sup> Pentecostal leaders today can also learn from Henri Nouwen, who, after realizing his own hunger for popularity, power, and relevancy, exchanged a prestigious teaching position at Harvard University to serve as priest to a community of mentally disabled individuals.<sup>15</sup> They can listen to Carolyn Tennant, who shook off her fear and, without hard evidence, prophetically confronted a pastor over his grave indiscretions; and they can glean from Jodi Detrick, who said "yes" when every fiber of her being wanted to say "no" because of her lackluster resumé when the Northwest Ministry Network asked her to join the leadership team.<sup>16</sup> Leaders of today can listen to these stories, read Church history, and listen to the Spirit as He asks them to exercise the courage He gives for the sake of the Kingdom.

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<sup>13</sup> Craigie, *Ezekiel*, 120.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Tennant, "Unit 4—The Spirit-Filled Leader" (class notes for Core 1 course at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, March 8, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name*, 91.

<sup>16</sup> Tennant, class notes; Detrick, *Jesus-Hearted*, 15-20.

## CONCLUSION

Going back to the algebra analogy, while highly imperfect for explaining spiritual matters, the concepts of constants and variables still prove helpful for understanding the roles that alignment with the Holy Spirit, mutuality as expressed through servant leadership, and courage born of the Spirit play in Pentecostal leadership. These three aspects serve as the constants, the well-defined numbers in an equation:  $S$  = alignment with the Holy Spirit;  $m$  = mutuality and servant leadership; and  $c$  = courage from the Spirit. Meanwhile, variables such as  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  represent a wide range of factors, describing each believer's unique background and makeup.

All examples of Pentecostal leadership include the three constants ( $S$ ,  $c$ ,  $m$ ), but they will differ in their variables, such as denomination, position, title, office, personality, dreams, goals, skills, and gifts. While no formula truly exists to describe Pentecostal leadership, a working equation such as this helps the finite mind explain that which remains ultimately infinite and inexplicable:  $S(x + y + z) + m + c = \text{Pentecostal leadership}$ . In other words, the Holy Spirit transforms and empowers every variable within the life of the leader, and Pentecostal leadership always remains grounded and aligned to the Spirit, as expressed through mutuality, servant leadership, and courage.

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