

WEEK 4 >>

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH?



WATCH: How can churches support public leaders? – Ruth Walker

Daniel is frequently cited by those pressing for more Christians to get involved in public life. In a world hostile to his faith Daniel committed to serve in the place he found himself. He made a valuable contribution to a pagan society while remaining faithful to God. But it wasn't Daniel who in chapter 3 was cast into the fiery furnace for not bowing down and worshiping the image of gold. It was Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who refused to obey the new decree - men who Daniel had appointed as chief ministers over Babylon.

It is important not to build an illusionary picture that Daniel was the only righteous man in Babylon. The truth is that he worked together with others. They supported each other practically, they prayed together, and they worked for a better future together. Community, communion and communication were central to their effectiveness.

The Church is God's plan A. It is through the Church that the world gets to see the hope and the light at the heart of the Christian faith. It is through the Church that followers of Christ have worked for over two millennia to make his name known. It is through the Church that we get to add our actions to our prayers as we say: "Your will be done, your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven."

Local churches have incredible capacity to support and encourage individuals as they live out their mission to bring God into every corner of society. Christian communities can provide the fuel to sustain public leaders through challenging days and endeavours that may last lifetimes. Churches can release and support public leaders, and society should be the better for it, and churches should thrive as the mission of God is served.

Community provides a place from which we can act and from where we can speak. It provides us with the soil to grow roots and the sustenance to feed on as we live out our faith. Working with other people reminds us it is not about our own achievement – it ensures we have the

broadest possible perspective. It helps us think beyond what might be achieved in our own lifetime. When we are supported by a community that's working for the long haul, we can think about the generations that are to come. And it means that when we fall down, someone is there to pick us up and help us to not fall down again (and we can do the same for them).



READ & REFLECT ON SCRIPTURE

READ: DANIEL 3 What difference do you think it made that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced King Nebuchadnezzar together?

READ: EPHESIANS 4 Is your church striving for unity and maturity? Have your experiences of Christian small groups been effective in helping your discipleship and mission? Are there other people in your church who you could meet with to support each another in your mission?

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-26 How can you improve your relationships with people at church who you don't know, or with whom you do not naturally gel? How is the Church called to hold one another accountable? How can this help us to be better leaders?



DISCUSS

Jesus, with all the power and authority given to him from his Father, opted to work with a bunch of rag tag individuals. He did not need these other people to help him accomplish what he had to do. In fact, often enough they got in the way. They woke him when rough waters rocked the boat, they drew swords to defend him and they denied him thrice before the cock crowed. One even betrayed him with a kiss.

Jesus could have taken the crowd he'd fed with the loaves and fishes (in Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:5-15) and turned them into his street team to spread the message. He could have mobilised the masses, but instead he sent out first the 12 and then the 72. After

his death, it was this core group of followers who led the expansion of the Church.

To repeat the well-known quote, usually attributed to anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." If we want to transform society, then building up core groups of committed individuals who will spread the message throughout their communities is a good place to start.

- Why did Jesus call the disciples? What characterised his relationship with them?
- What do we think about Jesus' approach, spending time and investing in the lives of 12 people? How did that help the movement to grow further down the line?
- How can we model our spiritual communities on Jesus' example?

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Think about practical ways that your church could support you and others interested in public leadership. Commit, as a small group, to calling on your church leaders to support public leaders in your church. Consider these questions:

- How is your church currently supporting public leadership? What does it look like for a church to value public leaders in its congregation?
- How can the church ensure that 'all things' are the focus of our attention and not just those that come with a Christian or spiritual label?
- Can local churches encourage public leadership without sacrificing leadership within the church? How might this be done practically in your church? What could your small group in particular do?
- How could your church release you so that you have the time and energy to follow your calling? How could they pray for, mentor, encourage and honour those in public leadership?
- How could you encourage your church, particularly the leadership, to implement such support?

LISTEN TO GOD

Take some time out in silence and solitude to listen to what God has to say to you. If you're struggling to hear Him, try saying this short prayer:

Lord, I want to live in a church which supports its members to be who you have called them to be. Help me to make that a reality. Help me to support my brothers and sisters who need redirection or release. Help me to step out in faith as I live out your call on my own life, surrounded by a community that will support me.

Amen.

TAKEAWAY CHALLENGE

Identify a public leader in your church. Ask them how you can encourage and pray for them. Connect this person to the Evangelical Alliance Public Leadership programme by giving them a Public Leadership postcard (delivered with this booklet) or directing them to the Public Leadership website (thepublicleader.com) and commit to supporting them for the long-term.

LEARN MORE

For links to these articles, go to thepublicleader.com/ctw4

John Stott: Four Ways Christians Can Influence the World, John R W Stott, October 2011, p. 38

The power of a small group, Abi Jarvis, January 2016