

# **Apostolic Ministry: An Overview** -By George Miley

## **1 – An apostolic injunction:**

*And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil. – 2 Timothy 2:24*

This study is presented with great respect for the variety of understandings regarding apostolic ministry found throughout the Body of Christ. It is in no way intended to be dogmatic. It comes from one who is still learning, and seeking to learn more from the insights of others. May the spread of God's kingdom throughout the earth be advanced by a maturing understanding of the role our Lord designed for apostolic ministry in his Church.

**2 – How I came to the subject of apostolic ministry:** During Antioch Network's early years we served churches who desired to start new churches among unreached peoples. Some churches seemed able to engage in this rather quickly, whereas others struggled for years with little progress. Why this difference? As we sought the Lord for deeper understanding, we gradually realized that to initiate kingdom advance requires leaders who are called and gifted by God for that purpose—to initiate. What terminology should we use to describe them? Surely they were present in the New Testament, and we preferred to use New Testament terms.

In the midst of this pursuit, I slowly came to fuller insight into my own history. During twenty years of senior leadership in an international missionary society, I had been identifying and developing this kind of leader intuitively, without having the vocabulary. This study is informed by 1) my study of Scripture and 2) my personal ministry experience.

## **3 – Four terms we might use to identify these kinds of leaders:**

He is an apostle.

He is an apostolic leader.

He is an apostolically-gifted leader.

He is an apostolic-type leader.

I have come to prefer the terms “apostolic leader” or “apostolically-gifted leader.” These allow for a view that 1) there are apostles today, or 2) that there are leaders today who carry the same kind of calling and characteristics the apostles did. My goal is not to advocate a certain terminology, but to seek to understand and connect with the workings of the Holy Spirit reflected in whatever terminology is being used. I want to respect those who may prefer a different terminology, and to use the terminology that is appropriate in a given context. Love and unity are more important than “correct” terminology.

## **4 – Does the New Testament teach that there were only 12 apostles?**

Certainly the original twelve hold a unique place.

The New Testament calls others apostles:

Paul – Romans 1:1

Barnabas – Acts 14:4, 14

James, the Lord's brother – Galatians 1:19

Silvanus and Timothy? – 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6

Andronicus and Junias? – Romans 16:7 (see NIV note)

Caution: Some claimed to be apostles but were not– Revelation 2:2

**5 – Is the writing of Scripture a defining characteristic of a New Testament apostle?** Among New Testament apostles, it is only clear that Matthew, John, Paul, Peter and James, the Lord's brother, wrote Scripture. We do not know who wrote Hebrews. Jude may have been written by the apostle Judas (not Iscariot), but more likely the author was Judas, the brother of the Lord. In any event, less than half of those called apostles in the New Testament wrote Scripture.

On the other hand Luke, who is not identified as an apostle, wrote more of the New Testament than anybody else except Paul, if we count by chapters.

**6 – Is planting churches a defining characteristic of an apostolic leader?** If apostolic leaders are called by God to initiate, we can certainly expect that this will include starting new churches. But the process of kingdom advancement requires initiation in other areas also. And our experience is that some churches are planted by leaders operating in other giftings, such as pastors and teachers.

**7 – Apostolic ministry is an important New Testament theme:**

- *apostolos* (apostle) is used 86 times in the New Testament.
- *prophetes* (prophet – referring to NT prophets) is used around 45 times.
- *evangelistes* (evangelist) is used 3 times.
- *poimen* (pastor/shepherd) is used 18 times.
- *didaskalos* (teacher – referring to NT teachers) is used around 12 times.
- *episkopos*, *episcopo*, *episkopeo* (bishop/overseer) are used 11 times.
- *presbuteros* (elder – referring to NT elders) is used around 31 times.

**We conclude from this** that the Holy Spirit, through the Scriptures, has left the Church with a substantial amount of information about apostolic leaders and apostolic ministry. We assume that this is intentional, and indicates the importance of the role with which apostolic leaders have been entrusted by the Lord.

**The extension of the kingdom of God on earth is empowered when:**

- the calling to apostolic ministry is correctly understood
- those who carry it are
- identified and affirmed in it
- developed toward maturity, especially in Christlikeness of character
- released into their God-given spheres of service

**8 – Apostolic ministry comes forth from the foundation of Apprenticeship to Jesus.** Jesus came to catalyze a movement of the kingdom of God. He knew exactly how he wanted to go about it. Early on he chose those who would become the initial leaders of the movement, the original twelve apostles. He called them into a relationship with him that was an apprenticeship in how to live life and how to minister.

The curriculum centered, not on external leadership or ministry skills, but on the spiritual formation of the inner person. These initial apostles, together with others, were to be with him, to learn from him, how to be like him.

**Our understanding of apostolic leaders must begin, not with Acts or the epistles, but with the gospels.** Here we see how Jesus imparted into the lives of his first apprentices the foundations of apostolic ministry.

**The essential characteristic of an apostolic leader: Christlikeness.** Without Christlikeness of character, we do not yet have New Testament apostolic ministry.

**The central focus of all leadership and ministry training that seeks to be New Testament based:** to impart principles as to how prospective leaders and ministers can become increasingly formed to be like Jesus in the inner person. God is the one who initiates and advances his kingdom, and he does it through Christlike people.

*My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! – Galatians 4:19*

**9 – Looking backwards from Jesus: The “ancient anointings.”** Jesus was born into a sacred heritage – the Judeo-Christian line of leaders. While Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, Esther, Mary and John the Baptist are not known as apostles, they were characterized by qualities found in men and women upon whom God has placed his hand. New Testament apostles were rooted in this legacy.

**10 – Looking forwards from Jesus: An informed view of church history.** It is sometimes suggested that apostolic ministry was lost to the Church after the age of the original apostles until modern times. It is wise to be careful here. Could the astonishing advances made by the Church through the centuries have taken place without the callings and giftings given by the Spirit for such advance? Could it be that the reality was not lost, but the terminology changed?

**11 – Importance of symbols: What does a godly man or woman look like?** Various symbols, pictures and examples are stored in our minds. We access them when we consider a question like, “What does a godly person look like?” Is he/she one who has a mass following, leads a large church or organization, draws big crowds, performs “manifestations” or is associated with other external measures of “success”? How do such images compare, for example, with the “heroes of the faith” described in Hebrews 11? Becoming increasingly familiar with those who carried “ancient anointings” enriches our understanding with images of what is real. To be able to correctly identify the authentic is a crucial protection against the counterfeit.

**12 – Can women be called and gifted by God in ways that result in kingdom initiation?** My own thoughts:

- I understand that no New Testament spiritual gift is gender specific.
- How God has gifted us points to how he has called us.
- Spiritual gifting and calling, as character matures, will be expressed.
- Mature expression of apostolic calling/gifting will be apostolic ministry.

- In Romans 16:7 Paul introduces us to Junias, a feminine name, and designates her as “outstanding among the apostles.”
- See *Why Not Women: A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry and Leadership* by Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton
- From my study of Scripture and personal ministry experience I believe women can be called to apostolic ministry. I respect those who disagree.

13 – **Church structure:** Christians generally agree that the Church has both a local and a universal expression. But different streams have various views and practices of a trans-local expression or organizational structure.

**Apostolic ministry is essentially trans-local.** Can we see, at least in embryo, trans-local expressions of the body of Christ in the New Testament – something between the local and the universal? Consider:

- What were Paul, Barnabas and John Mark when they left the local church at Antioch in Acts 13:4 on what is known as “Paul’s first missionary journey?” Were they a local church? Or an apostolic team?
- Who was responsible for the formation and protection of doctrine within the young Christian movement? See 1 Timothy 6:3-5.
- How were trans-local issues of discipline handled? See 1 Corinthians 4:14-21.
- Did the training and mentoring of congregational leaders only take place locally? See Acts 16:1-3.
- Did the apostles exercise a trans-local spiritual authority among a number of local assemblies? See Acts 14:21-28.
- Consider this picture of part of Paul’s apostolic band – Romans 16:3-23.

**Much current teaching on apostolic ministry is informed by independent church images;** i.e., streams in which the local congregation is seen as autonomous. Many independent churches, by their very nature, may have limited meaningful relationships with trans-local ministers and structures. Hence, when their leaders encounter challenges beyond their experience and capacity to address, trusted overseers may not be part of their immediate relational circle. They have no one to whom they can easily turn. This can result in real harm to both the leaders and the congregation.

**In wisdom, some leaders within independent churches have established relationships of trust** with spiritual fathers and mothers beyond their congregation. These serve them in love with oversight, counsel and spiritual protection. Might this reflect Christ’s intended structure for his Church and the ministry of apostolic leaders?

**What is the “right” Church structure?** I believe the Holy Spirit can work with a variety of Church structures when leaders within these structures are growing in Christlikeness and forming their people so. The drive to be “right” involves showing that someone else is wrong, resulting in grievous divisions among us. I “hear” our Lord calling us to love one another, and seek him together for further understanding, in meekness and humility.

**Spiritual authority is, in the first instance, expressed relationally.** Consider how God the Father exercises his spiritual authority with us and the Church. Yes, in Church history, far too often, there have been leaders who have assumed a posture of institutional power rather than relational servanthood. Jesus addressed this during his in-depth training of the original apostles.

*And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.” – Luke 22:25-27*

**Might there be a relationship between the New Testament apostles and the first bishops?**

To some the term “bishop” carries negative connotations. But the fact that a leadership role has at times been carried unworthily does not in itself invalidate the role. We have already seen that the designation “apostle” has not always been carried honorably (2 Corinthians 11:13; Revelation 2:2). At the end of this study I have included some thoughts about apostles and bishops, and would welcome your insights and responses.

14 – **Reconciliation and unity:** Apostolic leaders walk in a calling that is geographically broad. They typically have an extended sphere of influence. When two or more such leaders relate to each other with genuine love, in humility esteeming each other better than themselves (another apostolic injunction – Philippians 2:3), their circles of influence tend to move toward each other in the same spirit. The fruit is reconciliation and spiritual unity.

**A key to the spiritual unity of the Church:** As the ministry leaders of Ephesians 4:11-13—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers—relate to one another in Christlike humility and love, their followers will be drawn together in the same way.

**Spiritual unity among Christians is sacred.** It is achieved and preserved only at great cost. On the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 it came spontaneously and naturally. But it was soon challenged.

*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. – 1 Corinthians 1:10-11*

During 20 centuries of Church history we followers of God’s Son have not always treated each other well. Deep wounds divide us that reach back into history. They cannot be quickly or easily healed. They call on us to confess these wrongs, in truth and humility, asking for and extend forgiveness.

**Cultivating reconciliation and unity is a process of initiation.** We learn how to do this through the understandings Jesus imparted to the original apostles. Apostolic leaders carry the calling, gifting, influence and responsibility to advance Christian unity.

## 15 – Thoughts about apostolic leaders and the “five-fold” ministry callings of Ephesians 4:11-13:

- Apostolic leaders, due to their calling and gifting to initiate, create a context in which other leaders find their places of ministry. Like the bow of a ship plowing through the water, they create a way in which others may follow. This positions apostolic leaders for relational oversight.
- One example: What is the proper relationship between apostolically-gifted leaders and prophetically-gifted ministers? Certainly the apostles are to listen to the prophets. But those gifted prophetically can get out of order (as can we all). They are responsible to pass on, in appropriate ways, what they discern as insights from the Lord, but they are not responsible for how others respond. And prophetic insights can be communicated inappropriately. Apostolic leaders, walking in Christlike maturity, can provide an environment of protection and safety for prophetic expression.
- God is love: His kingdom is characterized by relationship and teamwork. Apostolic leaders are to function in fellowship and teamwork with other five-fold ministers. They are to lead in a spirit of submissive and honoring brotherhood. This requires, and further develops, “apostolic character.”
- Apostolic leaders often carry one or more of the other callings in a secondary way:
- The ministry of an apostolic leader may have a prophetic dimension
- One called to church planting may have an evangelistic anointing.
- Some apostolic leaders initiate and give direction through teaching.
- New Testament teaching on pastoral ministry comes mainly through apostles.

## 16 – Apostolic leaders are a gift of God to his people. (Eph. 4:11-13)

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## Postscript: Is There Any Connection between Apostles and Bishops?

1 – **Bishops appear in Church history in the generation immediately following that of the New Testament apostles.** It seems that Polycarp was installed as Bishop of Smyrna by the apostle John and Ignatius as Bishop of Antioch by the apostle Peter. Surely John and Peter were aware of the significance of what they were doing.

2 – **In Acts 1:15-26** we find the account of Matthias being chosen and added to the eleven apostles in the place of Judas. The NIV records Peter, outlining the necessity of this move in Acts 1:20, quoting from Psalm 109:8, saying, “.... May another take his place of leadership.”

The Greek word translated here “place of leadership” is *episcopé*, the word from which our English word “episcopal” comes, referring to the ministry of bishops. What was Luke trying to communicate by selecting this term? The English Standard Version, whose doctrinal perspective is that of “classical evangelical orthodoxy” (see Introduction, page 10), and therefore rooted to a significant degree in an independent church tradition, translates the word “office.” The King James Version, formed in the context of the Church of England and other historic traditions, uses the word “bishopric.”

Is there basis to translate *episcopé* as “office of bishop” or “office of overseer”? In the New Testament, I suggest, there were those who exercised oversight with respect to a single congregation, but also those called of God to serve a number of congregations with oversight. Both roles are needed.

I don't mean to make more of this than is warranted, but only to suggest that it is possible that Luke's use of *episcopé* points to a connection between apostle and bishop.

**3 – Thesis: The New Testament records both local and trans-local ministry and church structure.** The trans-local role was filled by apostles. In the post-New Testament era it was filled by bishops. God's pattern is for bishops to function in similar ways to the New Testament apostles:

- They are to be Christlike in character.
- They are not to lord it over the flock, but to reflect Christ in humility and servanthood.
- They are to serve collegially with other bishops, honoring one another in love.
- They are to provide spiritual covering to local churches and their leaders.
- They are to mentor, protect and release younger leaders.
- They are to be spiritual fathers.



# Identifying Apostolic Leaders –by George Miley

This teaching originally appeared in *Loving the Church...Blessing the Nations* by George Miley. (Below is an edited version.)

1 – **Apostolic leaders are called by God.** Because of the assignment God has given them to initiate, apostolic leaders can count on facing hardship, misunderstanding and spiritual attack. Their ministry will be challenged and at times strongly resisted. They must know with certainty that what they are doing is because of him who has called them.

*Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead* -Galatians 1:1

2 – **Apostolic leaders are sent by God.** The Greek word translated “apostle”, apostolos, has the foundational meaning of “one sent forth”—someone sent on a particular assignment, such as an ambassador, or someone sent with a particular message.

*Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”* – John 20:21-22

3 – **Apostolic leaders are entrusted by God with a specific sphere of influence.** It is important that they recognize their God-given sphere, and do not move into a sphere God has not given them. There will be other apostolic leaders assigned to that sphere whom they can honor and to whom they can submit in humility and love. Christlike apostolic leaders honor one another.

*On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles),* – Galatians 2:7-8

An apostolic sphere of influence can be a city, a region, a country or a people group. It can also be setting new directions or laying new foundations in areas such as theology, education, health care, leadership development, discipleship, divine healing and reconciliation.

4 – **Apostolic leaders are gifted by God for the ministry to which he has called them.** Gifting points to, confirms and empowers calling. God never calls us to do something he does not give us the gifts to accomplish.

*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.... And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.* –1 Corinthians 12:1, 28

5 – **Here are some helpful definitions** in understanding and ordering the development of Christian ministry:

- **Calling** is God summoning a person to a specific role in the work of his kingdom.

- **Gifting** is the God-given capacity required to fulfill God's calling. It is helpful to understand gifting to include natural abilities and learned skills as well as spiritual enabling. All are needed to be effective in our calling. All are given to us by God.
- **Character** is Christlikeness in the inner life expressed outwardly and reliably.
- **Anointing** is empowerment by the Holy Spirit for ministry—God's hand upon us.
- **Mature ministry** emerges when calling and gifting are rooted in Christlike character, empowered by God's anointing, God's circumstances and timing have arrived and God's anointing rests upon the individual(s) involved. We might even think in terms of this formula:  
**Apostolic calling + apostolic gifting + Christ-like character + God's circumstances and timing + the Holy Spirit's anointing = mature apostolic ministry.**

6 – **Apostolic leaders carry specific visions given to them by God.** Today some sections of the church are allowing themselves to be shaped by concepts from the business world. Some aspects of this can be good; it is a way to honor and be enriched by the callings and giftings of lay people. But there is also the need for caution. The “vision” carried by God's apostolic leaders is not the same kind of reality that entrepreneurial vision is in the business world. It does not originate with these leaders. It is implanted within them by God.

*And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.... And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. –Acts 16:6, 9-10*

7 – **Apostolic leaders are “big picture” thinkers.** They tend to function in overall strategic direction, leaving tactics and organizational implementation to others with complementary callings and giftings.

*But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. –Romans 15:23-26*

8 – **Apostolic leaders have faith for things beyond themselves.** Reality for them is straightforward:

- There is a God.
- He is able to do anything.
- Therefore he can do this specific thing no matter how great the obstacles seem to us at the moment.

*In hope he [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” –Romans 4:18-21*

9 – **Apostolic leaders initiate new works of God.** Certainly the birthing of new congregations is

a prime example. But throughout Church history the Holy Spirit has been birthing other entities such as missionary fellowships and communities for worship, contemplation and prayer. There has also been apostolic direction-setting in the kinds of spheres of influence mentioned above.

*... and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation* –Romans 15:20

**10 – Apostolic leaders lay foundations for these new works.** Because prophetic insight, evangelistic fruit, pastoral care and teaching are all required in laying foundations, the initiating leader is often multi-gifted. God-given ability to lay foundations also carries the ability to repair them.

*According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.*  
–1 Corinthians 3:10

**11 – Apostolic leaders identify, develop and establish leaders for these new works.** This is a crucial component of foundation laying. Until the new work has leaders who are mature in God and can assume the responsibilities of the apostolic leader, the process of birthing is not yet complete.

*And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.* – Acts 14:23

**12 – Apostolic leaders are at times sought to provide oversight to works they were not involved in starting.** The needs for spiritual fathers and mothers are always greater than there are those available to fill them.

*I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.* – Romans 1:13

**13 – Apostolic leaders have strong personalities.** This enables them to overcome the obstacles involved in initiating. But such strengths must be refined and matured through extended experience of the cross.

*Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.... If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.* – 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, 30

#### 14 – **Apostolic leaders are tested.**

*Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. – 2 Timothy 2:8-10*

15 – **Apostolic leaders grow increasingly aware of their weaknesses.** The process of initiating exposes the leader in areas where he or she is vulnerable. Strengths, but also inadequacies, become apparent.

*But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. – 2 Corinthians 12:9*

#### 16 – **Apostolic leaders are channels through whom God performs signs and wonders.**

*The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. – 2 Corinthians 12:12*

What are these “signs and wonders and mighty works” to which Paul refers? Among those who love God and hold to the integrity of the Scriptures there can be different answers to that question. Perhaps two things can be safely said.

First, these signs and wonders were obvious interventions of God into the visible world. They revealed that God and his kingdom were present among men. Such manifestations are important to the ministry of initiation. When God’s kingdom is breaking through and taking possession of areas of entrenched spiritual darkness, indications of his Presence and power seem appropriate.

Second, Paul underscores the fact that these signs and wonders were performed “with utmost patience”. They weren’t supernatural bolts of lightening unrelated to the human vehicles through whom they came. Maturity in Christlikeness sets the context in which the supernatural can be imparted with safety and protection.

17 – **Apostolic leaders are holy in character.** Without holiness in character, we do not yet have biblical apostolic ministry.

*For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. – 1 Corinthians 4:9-13*

18 – **Apostolic leaders are spiritual fathers and mothers.** They have given birth spiritually, and parented new works and those involved in them to maturity.

*For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me.*

– 1 Corinthians 4:15-16

## **Identifying Younger Potential Apostolic Leaders**

**1 – Characteristics of apostolic gifting tend to appear early in younger leaders and potential leaders.** Because these ones have not yet come very far in their maturing process, they can appear immature, unmanageable and even dangerous to older leaders, especially those who are not themselves apostolic.

**2 – Wise are those who can see the raw potential in these young lives,** and come alongside them in love and truth. The God-ordained calling and gifting within them needs affirmation, protection and wise guidance to fully develop.

**3 – What might young, unformed, apostolically-gifted leaders look like?**

- They want to take on new initiatives.
- They have their own ideas of what they want to do.
- They influence people easily and gain a following.
- They do not fit the mold; they color outside the lines.
- They have a genuine hunger for a deeper relationship with God.
- They show impressive spiritual insight.
- They have noticeable areas of character immaturity.
- They are broad in their horizons and think beyond “our” church or group.
- They thrive on doing things that are challenging and risky.
- They claim loyalty to “our” church or group, yet seem critical and impatient.
- They easily over commit themselves. They lack good boundaries.
- We see real potential in them but are unsure how far we can trust them.

## **The Character of Apostolic Leaders** –by George Miley

This teaching originally appeared in *Loving the Church...Blessing the Nations* by George Miley. (Below is an edited version.)

**1 – To be called to apostolic leadership is a sacred trust.** These leaders have been assigned a prominent role by God in advancing his kingdom throughout the earth—called to clear new paths through the spiritual darkness.

**2 – How unfortunate that throughout Church history some have carried this responsibility while allowing impurity to characterize their lives.** This is in clear contradiction to how the New Testament portrays apostolic ministry.

**3 – Jesus is our defining example of an apostolic leader.** It is he who called the first apostles and imparted to them the life foundations for the roles they were to exercise. Seeking a comprehensive understanding of apostolic ministry, we must begin, not with Acts, but with the gospels. We must begin with Jesus.

*Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. – Hebrews 3:12*

**4 – The apostolic leader is intentional in the pursuit of Christlikeness.** When Christlikeness in character is not present, we do not yet have New Testament apostolic ministry.

*A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. – Luke 6:40*

*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. – 1 Corinthians 11:1*

**5 – The apostolic leader is a servant.** Every spiritual gift is a servant gift, given by God to empower us to serve others. The gift of leadership is no exception. God energizes leaders that they might provide the godly leadership any group requires. When someone else is providing it, a Christlike leader happily remains in the background. When it is lacking, he/she makes his/her gifting available for the benefit of the group.

*A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. – Luke 22:24-27*

**6 – The apostolic leader renounces the self life.** This is indispensable to becoming a channel through whom the life of God can be imparted to others.

*... always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. – 2 Corinthians 4:10-12*

**7 – The apostolic leader walks in humility.** Humility is simply living by what is true—about God and about me.

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.... And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. - Philippians 2:5, 8*

**8 – The apostolic leader carries spiritual authority with gracious and compassionate restraint.** True spiritual authority is exercised relationally, in love, rather than through hierarchical power.

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. – John 13:3-5*

*He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.” – John 21:17*

**9 – The apostolic leader counts others more significant than himself.** Apostolic leaders do not compete with each other; they honor and support each other. They function in fellowship and mutual submission with other five-fold ministers (Ephesians 4:11-13). This provides spiritual protection and ongoing maturing of character.

*Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. – Philippians 2:3*

**10 – The apostolic leader is devoted to worship and prayer.**

*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. – Acts 16:25*

**11 – When a leader, not inwardly formed in Christlikeness, exercises influence among God’s people** the consequences can be disastrous.

- When decisions are not formed by Christlikeness, the self-life is ascendant.
- An undeterred self-life opens the leader to temptation in the areas of money, sex and power. Sadly, the history of the Church holds multiple examples of this right across Christian traditions.

*For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. – 1 John 2:16*

- The darkness, seeking to damage the Church by attacking her leaders, will exploit this vulnerability.
- When God’s leader falls, the sheep who trusted him/her are left confused, disillusioned and often bitter. Their ability to trust God will be shaken.
- Our hope: Christ, the head of the Church, has promised us that the gates of hell would not prevail against her. *“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” – Matthew 16:18*

**12 – Inherent in the Lord’s words is that the gates of hell will do all they can to prevail against the Church.** Prominent targets of this attack will be apostolic leaders. We are to remain forewarned, watchful and close to the Lord.

*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.... – 1 Peter 5:8-9a*

**13 – The apostolic leader models the life of love.** He lays down his life for others.

*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. – John 15:12-14 14*