

# LEARNING TO LEAD

Shaped through pain and joy



[If anyone had told me twenty years ago that I would one day be leading a church, I would have told them that they were completely crazy - but here I am and totally loving it.](#)

My leadership journey began when I received a prophetic word at seventeen from my pastor at the time, who simply said to me: "Ingrid I believe that you will one day teach, preach, and minister to people." If you had known me then, you would have asked, "How can that be?" I had difficulty even talking with people because of past pain in my life. Yet that word dropped into my spirit the day I heard it ... though I had no idea how it would come about! The journey has been full of incredible joy

and incredible pain but through it all God has been faithful to me and there are many lessons that I have learned (and that I continue to learn).

### Learning to trust God's leading

I believe that one of the most important things in leadership (and in life) is to trust God in spite of the challenging circumstances we might find ourselves in. One of my favourite verses is Proverbs 3: 5-6 which simply says: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."

So often we depend on ourselves; on our own wisdom, gifting, or charisma. Instead of seeking God's leading, we forge ahead on our own.

On occasion it has appeared that choices God has asked me to make are a backward step. For example, I felt a number of years ago that God was leading me to do a ministry internship diploma through my church

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even though I had done some training elsewhere previously. I had to come back to the fact that God knows what he is doing and he knows where we need to be in order that he can bring about his plans and purposes in our lives and the lives of others. He knows the future he has planned for us even if it does look like a backward step in the eyes of others.

Sometimes we may hear what God is saying, but instead of waiting for him to continue to lead us in this, we try to bring it about ourselves. When God was speaking to me about doing the internship through my church, I immediately talked to the leadership, but was told that it wouldn't happen. I went back to God and said, "God, what is going on?" Amazingly, just a few weeks later (due to someone stepping down) I was asked to do an internship with a major focus on youth! It's not to say that we sit back and do nothing - it means we continue to do whatever God has put in front of us, lead the best we can where we are, and trust God to bring about that promotion or new opportunity in his timing.

I have learned to trust God in spite of enormous pain in my life. A few years ago, when I was having conflict with someone in leadership, I was prophetically writing in my journal and sensed God say: "Ingrid I have confidence in you. I love you. I have prepared a plan for your life. You are precious to me. Do not be afraid. This time that seems so painful now, you will look back on and laugh in the years to come because I am working strength in you; strength of mind, strength of character. I love you Ingrid, but I need to plumb you to the depths of your being in order to be able to use you for my plans and purposes. You thought you knew the way, you thought you knew the path, but you have no idea of what is in store for you: For you will see many come into the kingdom of God. But it will not be about you, it will be about me. That is why I am at work exposing your

weaknesses, because if they remain the structure will not be strong and will not be able to carry what I have designed it to carry. So do not be afraid. Trust, trust, trust. When things don't appear to go so well, trust me. Don't think you have done something wrong. Trust me. Don't trust in your feelings. Trust me. Don't trust in your emotions. Trust me." There followed the most painful season of my entire life. God used it to change me and make me someone who he could trust in spite of the painful circumstances I might find myself in. I learned to trust God at a level beyond that which I ever had before. I watched God supernaturally turn situations around that I could not through my own strength. I learned to encourage myself in God so that I could encourage the team I was leading at the time. I learned that God alone is the author of my destiny.

### Power of prayer

One of the most important lessons I have learned is the necessity as a leader to pray. It's so easy to rely on past experiences or knowledge instead of relying on God through prayer.

This was made even more clear to me when I discovered the power of praying for an hour a day in the Spirit. As I prayed in tongues my personality got changed. I got changed. Instead of being up and down depending on circumstances or people around me, my emotions began to balance out. It was like I had a wall of protection around me that fortified me against all the painful things going on in my life. I started to be stable, dependable and reliable in a way I had never been before. Even if things hurt, they no longer rocked me. I no longer needed approval from significant people in my life. I started operating at a whole new level, both as a leader and prophetically.

I have learned that I need to keep that daily habit of prayer up because it brings life to me; it keeps me sharp spiritually. When I don't pray, things

around me can tend to fall apart. I sometimes wish I could be like others who are more relaxed in their prayer life, but God knows me and knows how to keep me connected and dependent on him.

### Heart attitudes

One book that has really helped me out is *A Tale of Three Kings – a study in brokenness*, written by Gene Edwards. This book was given to me to read when I was seventeen, by the pastor who gave me the prophetic word mentioned earlier. It's a book about three kings in the Bible - Saul, David and Absalom - and their leadership. But it's also a book about trusting in God. I believe it is a must-read for anyone who aspires to leadership or is in leadership. In chapter seven, Edwards says this:

*"What can a man, especially a young man, do when the king decides to use him for target practice? What if the young man decides not to return the compliment?"*

*First of all, he must pretend he cannot see spears. Even when they are coming straight at him. Secondly, he must also learn to duck very quickly. Lastly, he must pretend nothing at all happened.*

*You can easily tell when someone has been hit by a spear. He turns a deep shade of bitter. David never got hit. Gradually he learned a very well-kept secret. He discovered three things that prevented him from ever being hit.*

*One, never learn anything about the fashionable, easily-mastered art of spear throwing. Two, stay out of the company of all spear throwers. And three, keep your mouth tightly closed.*

*In this way, spears will never touch you, even when they pierce your heart."<sup>1</sup>*

**WHEN I DON'T PRAY THINGS AROUND ME CAN TEND TO FALL APART.**

I love that. Little did I know as a seventeen-year-old that this particular quote would guide and keep me in future situations where I had to make difficult choices: Choices not to throw spears back; choices to keep my mouth shut; choices not to seek revenge but instead to seek God. There may be times of conflict in our lives. It is important to know when to speak up and when to stay silent. At times it may not seem just. But we need to seek God, walk in forgiveness, believe the best is possible, and keep our hearts clean from offence and bitterness.

I believe that it is those choices that have led me to where I am now. I look back and thank God that in spite of myself, through his help I got through that painful time.

### Expectations

We lead because God has called us – not because we have called ourselves, and not even because others have called us. If our motivation is to lead because of other people and what they think of us, we risk failing in the dark times and dark times inevitably come. Following God’s call can be hard. But God sees when we are being faithful and doing what we are supposed to be doing, and he sees the sacrifices we make, even when no-one else does. God is able to take us - like he did with Joseph in the Old Testament - from a place of pain to a place of promise.

As leaders we need to be honest with ourselves in order to continue growing and changing. I lived in the States for two years and during my

time there I was involved in leadership. I remember one of the other leaders in the organisation accusing me of being dictatorial. Ouch! But I was - it was my way or the highway, and needless to say it didn’t go down very well with other people. A very valuable lesson I learned is that just because you might be in a position of leadership, it doesn’t mean that you can be a dictator! (Well, I guess you can but I’m thinking it may not go well for you!).

Leadership is also about releasing others to be and become all that God created them to be. As leaders we need to be able to see the potential in others. Every person is born with potential that God has placed within them and I believe that one of our tasks is to encourage, equip and empower people to become the best that God has created them to be.

### Closing thoughts

Maybe you are reading this frustrated because you feel like you are being overlooked for any number of reasons. When I lived in the States I was frustrated because it seemed that only women who were married to men in ministry were able to preach or teach. I shared these frustrations with my friend and mentor at the time and she said to me, “Ingrid, your gift will make a way for you.” She told me I needed to trust God. I am so glad I have because truly I have seen God make a way where there seemed to be no way and I find myself with the awesome privilege of leading in an amazing church, with amazing people, regularly preaching and teaching.

His timing is truly the best. If I had been leading a church five years ago I quite honestly think I would have destroyed it because life was actually a lot about me! I needed those hard times to shape and mould me as a leader.

I am grateful to the five pastors who have led the churches I have been in, or who I have led under in the years since I was a teenager.

I have learned lots of things through their leadership. I have been encouraged, challenged, and even disciplined at times - but I am a better leader because of it. Aristotle said, “He who cannot be a good follower cannot be a good leader.” I have learned to lead by following and honoring those who God has placed as an authority over me. I want to especially thank David Costar who gave me the prophetic word when I was seventeen, and who continues to speak into my life and encourage me both in my pursuit of Jesus and in my role as the pastor of a church – I am so, so grateful.

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<sup>1</sup> Gene Edwards. 1980. *A Tale of Three Kings: A Study in Brokenness*. (p. 19-20). Auburn. Christian Books.

## TAKE OUTS:

1. Where is God asking you to be faithful today? Where might he be leading you?
2. What do you think the balance is between letting God open doors and pushing doors yourself?
3. How easy do you find it to trust that God knows what he is doing? How much does your prayer life reflect this?
4. Are there things that God may be wanting to teach you at the moment? How could you explore this further?
5. What influences the way you lead? Is it God, yourself, or the opinions of others?

**JUST BECAUSE YOU MIGHT BE IN A POSITION OF LEADERSHIP, IT DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU CAN BE A DICTATOR!**