



3+4. The call to create space

From my early teens I have had the privilege of being given opportunities to contribute in different ways. When I was 13, I was asked by my youth leaders if I would like to start a prayer group for my peers. This was both exciting and daunting. I grew massively from this opportunity. As a group, some of the ideas we developed were embraced and encouraged by the rest of the church.

I always found whenever there was an invitation to lead at a young age, there was also support and space to bring new ideas to the table. This has made me an advocate of creating this space for others.

So, it was not surprising when, at a Leader's Weekend in Jan 2019, Hugh Osgood mentioned that *'the role of leadership is to create space'* that this phrase lodged with me. I started to think *what is 'space' and how we can 'create' it?*

In May 2019, I gathered about 30 young people who had grown up in the church and been recipients of the children and/or youth ministry. I explained that the previous year (July 2018) we had celebrated 40 years of LifeLine, but that those who had led the work for the last 40 would not be those leading the next 40.

There is a need for the emergence of future leaders today. I felt a responsibility, as one in leadership, to create space. I felt I needed to inspire, provoke and challenge those among us (especially those who are now entering adulthood having grown up within the community) to bring their unique contribution to the table to shape us as we move forward.

Importance of creating space (and inspiring ownership)

When watching nature programmes, I am always impressed at the great lengths and sacrifice animals go through to reproduce and keep their species going. There is something in creation's design to invest in the future.

'Reproducing after our own kind' has always been a mantra within LifeLine. So has *'investing in the next generation'*. If we believe that what we are doing is really important, and is the work of God, it is bigger than any one of us and therefore needs to continue beyond us.

Repeating Patterns of Christian History

I don't know a lot about Christian history, but one clear thing is that when God wants to do something new, He tends to reveal this to an individual. This individual shares what they have seen, but the establishment feels threatened by this new revelation and either kicks the individual out or forces them to jump. This pioneer then faithfully pursues this revelation and cuts a new path. Others follow. This movement will camp for a while and then move forward. But at some point, this pioneer passes away. The followers have the chance to keep moving and keep the pilgrimage going or they turn the camp into a settlement. Over time they become more protective of the form and expressions practiced by the pioneer, and they fortify the work. Then God must provoke a new individual to resurrect the movement, often at great heartbreak as the people have to part company as a new trail is blazed.

I have wondered; is it possible for the community to keep moving, even after the original pioneer? How does a community catch the heart and receive the same revelation that the pioneer has so that they become faithful to God and not just the leader?

Keeping our hearts set on pilgrimage

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
Ps 84:5

Keeping the story moving is about more than replacing dying leaders. In God's design there is space for creative contribution and teamwork that come together at once. I've heard the phrase *'youth are the leaders of tomorrow'* but in my experience they can also be the leaders of today.

We need everyone God has joined to us to put their shoulder to the plough. There is no place for coasters/passengers in the call of God.

A heart set on pilgrimage is about a commitment to play our part in God's plan out of love for Him. It speaks of a personal conviction to be faithful to what He has shown us. It is beyond keeping someone else's legacy alive.

Creating space is about giving people room to express this conviction and contribute to the corporate journey.

Setting the context for the space

As a leader it can feel like two key roles are in tension:

1. To provide a lead and
2. To create space for others.

When you are creating space, it can feel like you are stepping back from leading the charge. But as a leader you can't abdicate your responsibility to take those who He has given you to care for in the direction you feel He has pointed you.

But 'space' isn't saying anyone can do anything they fancy. Space can only be provided within a context of the wider direction the church is heading.

For us, as LifeLine Church, John Singleton and those around him, have a deep conviction that we are called to show what God is like. Commonly used phrases included

"Love God, love others and live as if you do"

"Close enough to know, love enough to care and willing to pay the price"

We are very strong on living out our values. Our values are aspects of His nature that He has revealed to us. They include love, acceptance, forgiveness, integrity, commitment, generosity, serving. These values can't remain theoretical, they must be expressed in real life otherwise we are in danger of being hearers but not doers of the word (James 1:22).

You could say that our vision is our values. As a church we want to support each other to experience and then live out these aspects of the nature of God in whatever setting we find ourselves.

If there isn't a buying into this vision, then there is very little space that can be offered otherwise there will be tension at the very core of who we are.

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

Amos 3:3

This is one of the reasons we put such importance on the Foundation Programme, a course where we set out the values that we have received as a community and are committed to express. Folk who are tracking towards the community are encouraged to consider if they have the same conviction for these values before they commit to journeying together.

Serving your leader

A particular principle we see in scripture is that of the importance of leadership. The Bible doesn't hide from the potential failures of leadership, and yet God hasn't done away with it.

God seems to raise up individuals and then gathers people around them to support them in the execution of their calling (e.g. David & the mighty men, Elijah & Elisha, Paul & Timothy et al), which becomes a collective calling. It seems to be a principle in scripture that we are called to serve the leader and not just to fulfil a function. When we serve, we do it as if we are serving Jesus Himself (Col 3:23). The effect of this is that as a leader, I expect that those who are serving alongside me, are as committed to see me become who God has called me to be, as they are to see success of any particular endeavour.

There will undoubtedly be times when we disagree with the leader's decisions. If we love them and are serving as instructed by God, we will raise our concerns. If our concern is a matter of principle, i.e., they are contradicting God's will we must confront in accordance with the Bible. If it is a matter of preference or style, we can still voice our concern but appreciate the leader is accountable for their role God has given them. We find our comfort in the fact that we are safe in God's hands. We can serve under an imperfect leader by the grace of God.

We must be careful how we build on another's foundation

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care.

1 Cor 3:10

We must recognise the battles which the forefathers have fought and the sacrifice they have made to produce what we now live in. We build with humility. Appreciating that we look back with the benefit of hindsight and that the culture around us would imply that the values society now embrace are of moral superiority to any of those held by a previous generation.

David demonstrated an ability to serve under a corrupt leader. Even though David knew he was to be King, he didn't snatch the chance. He showed a reverence for God's sovereignty and a willingness to work with who He chooses, in ways He decides.

But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?"

1 Sam 26:9

In the same way, emerging leaders can be confident in God's provision and protection. If I am surrendered to Him, I can surrender to whoever He gives me to serve. I can confidently surrender to God who was crushed for my salvation. There are points where an emerging leader might say *"I don't see eye to eye with my senior leader on this matter. Perhaps I'm*

right, perhaps I'm wrong. I must give account to God for my position, in the same way my leader must give account to God for their position. I can trust God to make something good out of this situation. The senior leader is the one in the seat, not me."

I heard a story of a young leader whose contribution was flat out rejected by a senior leader. One evening the senior leader was walking through their building and noticed the lights to the sanctuary were on. He wandered over and noticed the young leader on his knees in prayer. He could hear him pouring his heart out to God, "God if I have made a mistake here, please show me, but if my leader is making a mistake, please rescue him". On overhearing this prayer and recognising the pure attitude of the young leader the senior leader was convicted. The young leader had been processing the disagreement before God whereas the senior leader had dismissed the suggestion out of hand without consulting God.

Barriers to creating space

In December 2021, it dawned on me that I had been complicit in a culture that put a premium on the performance/behaviour over heart change. I had been satisfied with the 'output' rather than pursuing the 'outcome'. By output, I mean what happens as a result of an intervention. And by an outcome, I mean the overall goal we are looking for. For instance, we want to see people experience God's presence (outcome). In response we set up a series of worship events (intervention). We have 30 people attend these events (output). There is a danger I am satisfied that we had a good output, but this falls short of seeing people experience God.

As I have thought more into this revelation, I have identified a number of underlying thought processes which have led to barriers to creating space.

1. **Warped image of Him** – no matter what I have claimed to believe about God, my attitude and behaviour at times suggests I have an image of God shaking his head and tutting towards me. My focus is avoiding being a disappointment to God. This becomes a barrier to creating space, because this image of God inevitably cascades down to those I'm leading. They will feel assessed and judged, and as if they are walking a tight rope. Not what you need when stepping out to try something new!

2. **Veteran mindset**

Characteristics of a veteran:

- You have been around the block a few times
- You can recite all the catchphrases
- You may have led a charge (championed a particular thrust or been on the cutting edge of what God was doing for us as a community.)
- You aren't surprised by anything being taught from the platform
- You have experienced that 'touch from the king'
- You have experienced the ups and downs and you are still here (not easily concerned by things)

- You are stable
- You aren't in any grave danger of committing adultery or murder
- You have learned what behaviour is expected and over time your comfort zone has expanded to incorporate these behaviours. To live out the values, to some degree, doesn't feel much of a stretch.
- You can rattle off the processes and procedures

None of what I listed above is wrong. Much is commendable. The only concern is that this can become about self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Much of that list can be ticked without a current experience of enjoying God. You can be on autopilot. We can even become proud about our stability. Self-Sufficiency is the enemy of God's message – He wants you to live out of a sight of Him which becomes the motivation for all we do.

Or. we can fail to analyse ourselves - I can know an attitude is sinful, and that sin is wrong and therefore I want nothing to do with it. But the danger is we can skip the vital step *"this is my attitude, and I can't stop it by trying harder. God, I need something greater than me dropped into me to enable the change"*. Veteran mindset can lead to self-sufficiency and fear of truly allowing the Spirit to search me.

This mindset becomes a barrier because I can't lead people to a delight in God if I'm not there myself. Also, my focus becomes the smooth maintenance of what exists, and any change becomes a threat to my stability.

3. Focus on output rather than outcome

- For example – I deduce that an individual would benefit from taking a position of thankfulness. But I end up prescribing when, where and how this individual needs to give thanks publicly. If they refuse the prescribed behaviour, I conclude they are rejecting the principle (thankfulness). This is not necessarily the correct conclusion – the individual may embrace the need for thankfulness but don't feel to give thanks when, where or how I prescribe.
- Perhaps I could use a verse about commitment (e.g. take up your cross and follow me) as evidence a leader should come on the leaders' weekend. I can end up pushing so hard for a particular output (come on the weekend) that I overlook the outcome (a heart shaped by experience of God that leads to an attitude of commitment whether expressed by attending the weekend or not)
- I see someone's negative behaviour. I challenge that person's behaviour. The behaviour changes. I deem this is a success.
- I might be able to explain the need to catch a glimpse of God as the basis for any change. But then I see a behaviour change and assume it is the result of a sight of Him. But what if that person was just being compliant to my suggestion? This becomes a barrier because we aren't leading people to

catch the sight of God which will set their heart on pilgrimage. If we are satisfied with mere behaviour change, we won't build faithfully toward what we have seen.

4. **Weaponizing disappointment**

I've wanted to see someone move into a different place. The reality is I really don't know what's going on in this person, so I am using the evidence which is visible (which is ultimately their behaviour or confessed attitude). When I don't see the behaviour change that I think would be indicative of a heart change I am disappointed with their choices. In my disappointment I withdraw from the person, write them off, condemn them to a label.

What if my disappointment-fuelled actions manipulate the individual to moderate their behaviour? They make changes in the hope they will 'qualify' once again. What precedent have I just set? All this might be done subconsciously but it is allowed to happen because I'm focused on the output rather than the outcome. And I'm overconfident that

- a. I know what the individual needs to do and
- b. I'm equipped to make this assessment in and of myself.

I can claim '*my heart is in the right place*' but how can this be so if my communication is ultimately tutting and shaking my head. It is a betrayal of God's heart towards the person, and it potentially leads to manipulation.

God spoke to me about sowing with tears

Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Psalm 126:5

I can sow with tears of *longing* or tears of *disappointment*.

- **Tears of longing** – this is a vertical focus. I express my pain towards God. "*God, you have put this love in my heart for this person, yet they seem to be making bad choices. Please protect them and help me not to try to force the issue out of my own strength. If this person caught a sight of You, it would revolutionise their life. It might change their behaviour in the way I hope but I'm willing to accept it might not look like I want even if their heart is liberated.*" Longing is about me doing business with God. It is summarised in this old hymn.

*What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!*

- **Tears of disappointment** – this is a horizontal focus. My frustration is aimed at a person. I'm tempted to an act which will coerce the person to change their behaviour. God is excluded from the equation. Disappointment is me trying to do business 'on' the other person.

Weaponised disappointment doesn't give people the safe space to explore their own response to God because we end up putting our opinion front and centre.

5. **Lack of proximity or depth of interest in the individual**

I assume the role the individual has taken on means they have a certain heart condition. E.g. surely we can assume if someone is a steward they would have a heart to welcome and connect people...??? I assume this behaviour (stewarding) indicates a heart position but I'm not curious enough to enquire if this is true. A lack of proximity is a barrier because I can't support others in a relevant way, and I relate to them based on assumptions which could be misplaced.

6. **Compliance bias**

We put a premium on expressing our values. We want to be doers not just hearers of the word. We believe in spurring each other on to good works. But does this mean we have a bias to the 'compliant' and struggle with the 'non-compliant'?

- How do we feel about people saying 'no' to our well-argued suggestions? Do we assume the refusal is an indication of a bad heart?
- How do we feel about people saying 'yes' to our suggestions? Does our loving curiosity end there? What if that person's motivation is to keep us happy or avoid hassle of conversations but they aren't motivated by the sight of Him.
- E.g. most of those who said 'no' to an invitation to join the leaders' on weekend away would have had one of us check on them to ask what they were thinking (this hopefully would have been done without judgment). But how many of those who said 'yes' to the leaders' weekend had anyone curious to know why they were coming and what their thinking was?

We don't to get 'tick off' the person based merely on behaviour and fail to journey with that person to the ultimate outcome – a sight of Him. Compliance bias doesn't take the time to see a heart in beat with God and is suspicious of new ideas and ways of doing things.

7. **Reverting to structure**

Because we think this is the fastest, most effective way of achieving what we think is needed.

- a. E.g. extend the stewarding role to make sure all are included after the meeting
- b. E.g. A senior leader's reaction to another who told the pastoral team to forget their 'list'

These are reasonable/logical suggestions from diligent people who desire to do what they believe God wants. But we inflate our role and deflate His. He is showing us His baby, we take it out of His hands and then rack our brains how we can possibly look after this thing *“Thanks for pointing that out, I’ll take it from here”* and we turn our back towards Him who is the source of power to accomplish what He has pointed out.

He is building His Church (Ps127:1) – can we trust that God knows what He is doing and can see what we can’t? This is a barrier because it doesn’t allow space for God to grow something up in the fallow ground.

8. **Don’t raise the bar after you.** We so often compare someone’s heart or competence to who we are now, not what we were like when we were first given the opportunity. If God was able to make something beautiful out of the wreck that is me, can I believe He could also do that for the next person.

What helps create space?

1. **Commitment that creating space is necessary and possible**

Necessary because God has taken each of us, like living stones, and built us together. All have a contribution. Possible because it is by God’s power. There are plenty of disappointments we face whilst trying to create space. It can be destabilising. But God hasn’t changed His plan which is to continue to co-work with broken humans. We need to learn what to do with our disappointment, so it doesn’t end up making us cynical. We have to express our pain to God and look to Him to re-energise us to get back in the game – this is how we don’t become tired of doing good (Gal 6:9).

2. **Growing *people*, not sharpening *tools***

We mustn’t to see people or leaders as tools to help us to achieve our project, but see them as our first sheep we are to love. Their personal struggles aren’t blockages to achieving our goals. Their struggles, just like mine, are an opportunity to catch sight of a loving, powerful, patient God. God wants you, not your utility. If I find I roll my eyes or sigh when my efforts are disrupted by someone, I need to say *“God, enable me to see with your eyes!”*

We have the privilege of being empowered and used by God to journey with each other as we are becoming more and more like Him. This often means that God allows me to see an attitude, thought or behaviour in my brother which is damaging. I then have a choice what I will do with this.

I had a conversation with a fellow leader where we were considering who could step into a new leadership role. Every name I put forward; this leader could give reasons

why the person wasn't ready. In most cases I think the leader's insight was correct. But a number of thoughts later occurred to me.

- Had anyone made these prospective leaders aware of the concerns that my fellow leader had seen?
- Had the prospective leader received these concerns and taken ownership of the concerns?
- Had there been any exploration of who and how we, as leaders, could stand with the prospective leader as they sought to see breakthrough in these areas?

Perhaps a prospective leader is seven steps away from being ready for a role but if we don't start the journey with them to take the first step, we aren't empowering them. And we end up maintaining an invisible threshold we are hoping they might stumble across. As we look to God, He can cause us to love being part of each other's journey. This journey involves leaving no stone unturned in our desire to see our friends become more like Jesus. Sometimes you have to ask the awkward question or allow your own motives and action to be explored in order to journey together.

3. Confidence that God is up to something in every human life

Our good friend, Mark McGrath, once shared a message entitled "*Don't touch the ark*" based on the story of Uzzah. In it Mark said *every human life is holy, in that God is at work. When we fail to appreciate this, we mistakenly think its all on us to come steady the wagon.*

The clinical psychologist, Jordan Peterson, makes a similar point in his [interview with Stephen Bartlett](#).

Bartlett: How do I encourage a friend without overpowering/stifling them or making them feel inadequate? (Sometimes trying to change someone you love)

Peterson: *Disabuse yourself of the notion that you know what is best for this person. Not only do you not know, but you don't want that responsibility for two reasons*

1. *Say they do what you say and something good happens to them – whose victory is that? Yours or theirs? And if it's yours, did you just steal it?*
2. *Say they fail following your advice – they pay the price for that, and you can skip away merrily and say "well, I should have spoken more carefully"*

You don't mess around with people's destiny. You do not know where they are heading.

Having said that, you do what you are doing in this interview. You ask people questions. Real questions like "how are you feeling?". "I'm not doing so good today". "What's going on?"

You can't ask questions which will lead this person in a particular direction because that's the same game.

Sometimes people have little prepared speech that is packaged like a question. But really attempt to corner you into admitting what they want.

*Your questions, like your statements, should be honest.
If you ask questions and really listen people will often untangle themselves*

When meeting someone I will ask them their name (to help settle them and mark them out) and if I listen, they will tell me something within next 10secs that I need to know. Because they have something to say. You become wise by collecting this.

We are invited to walk **humbly** with our God (Micah 6), in our relationships with each other. There are many scriptures that highlight our insufficiency at spotting what God is up to

- He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know." (Eze 37:3)
- When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." (Gen 28:16)
- Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding (Prov 3:5)

CS Lewis captures the sense of wonder of accepting there is a destiny in front of our brother and sisters which we can't imagine, in his essay, *Weight of Glory*

"It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendours."

Coupled with the humility of confessing we just don't know what God is up to, there is also a hope, a **joyful** expectation that whatever He is up to is going to be great.

- And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28)

- However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived” — the things God has prepared for those who love him— (1 Cor 2:9)

We create space for God to continue building in the lives of individuals and the corporate expression when we take a step back and choose to explore what He is up to. The adventure of observing is conveyed by this old hymn:

*Come, walk with me round the walls of the city,
See what the King has been building so well.*

Curiosity is a place of awe and wonder, when we accept that we are surrounded by mystery. Before music could be streamed online, a true fan would queue through the night to buy the new album. They would be desperate to find out what their favourite artist had been up to. If God is the ultimate artist and humans are how He expresses Himself, I will be fascinated with his artwork. What is my God up to in your life?

“Be curious, not judgmental.” (Walt Whitman)

Curiosity prompts us to keep searching out the truth. Not assuming we have already conquered it. It is similar in parenting. This [video](#) highlights the difference between Wonder and Knowing

Wonder sends a message of trust and acceptance, which deepens connection. Knowing only allows you to know a certain version of who someone is, or who you think they might be.

4. Invitation & coaching

It is important to be explicit about opportunities to contribute. Requests for participation should also be accompanied by an envisioning, providing the ‘why’ behind the opportunity to participate. This gives people room to be creative as to how they can achieve the ‘why’ and avoids being unnecessarily prescriptive. The envisioning should also apply to the individual; *why* would contributing be good for this person, encouraging them that you believe they could bring something helpful to the table.

Sometimes a blank canvas can be intimidating, and the invitation needs to be narrowed and set in context. It is difficult to pitch it right.

Appreciate it takes time to change a culture and engage a whole new generation. Sometimes you need to gain trust, especially if someone feels their contribution was undervalued before.

It takes patience to draw people out. Don't assume because you don't get a response that people aren't thinking about it. Continually reflect on how your efforts are being heard and received.

Sometimes there are several steps in someone's development before they can serve in a certain role. As we commit to walk this journey with each other, remember we are seeking and nurturing faith over compliance. We want people to serve out of a conviction (serving with faith), this means the leader is clearly accountable to God for how they know He has instructed them. They can expect His grace to enable them to do what He has commanded, and they can be more creative in how they serve. Alternatively, people serve by completing a particular task (faithfully serving). They might be loyal, reliable, and diligent in achieving the output. But haven't taken the same ownership of the outcome. When I serve with faith, I have a commitment to the outcome, and I will become aware if the output isn't achieving the outcome and will want to explore what we can adapt.

5. Safe in His hands

It is scary to let go of your child when they are learning to peddle a bike for the first time. But we need to step back, keeping our hands off the ark when our emerging leaders need to 'wrestle' something through with God for themselves. Sometimes our role is to pray from a distance and not to shield people from the process.

Emerging leaders need to be given genuine responsibility where there are consequences to their decisions. It takes wisdom to know when and how to give this responsibility for the sake of the emerging leader and those who will experience the fallout. In sharing power like this we want to be sure the emerging leader(s) have caught the heart and are agreed on the direction we are heading.

Conclusion

In all these things we can't just 'try harder'. I need something dropped into me which will cause something to come out of me. I need a sight of Him that causes me to love and journey over some tough terrain with my brothers and sisters.