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'It's the System, Stupid'

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The Roys Report
'It's the System, Stupid'

 **ENGLISH**

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 **Guest Bios** |  **Show Transcript**

'It's the System, Stupid' - Lance Ford



Why is church after church succumbing to corruption and false doctrine? Yes, it's the result of greed, immorality, and a lust for power. But we've had those vices forever. So, why is there an epidemic of corruption in the church now?

Author, pastor, and church planter, Lance Ford, who's worked inside pastor training networks for decades, answers that question with a line reminiscent of Bill Clinton's first presidential campaign motto: "It's the system, stupid." Lance explains more in this enlightening edition of The Roys Report, featuring his session from our recent Restore Conference.

Lance says the system of leadership that's been imported into the church from corporate America is what's producing our abysmal results. This system has been wholesale embraced by Christians, but there's nothing biblical about it. It's what Jesus called the way of the Gentiles. And unless we start to dismantle this godless system and replace it with a godly one, the church will continue to be plagued by scandals and spiritual abuse.

Over decades, Lance has identified the toxic leadership models that have been imported into the church and he's sought a different path. As one who has designed unique training systems being used by networks, seminaries, and leaders throughout the world, he is speaking from a heart of love for pastors and the church.



This is an extremely illuminating talk, essential for anyone who cares about the health of the church and the proper care of those in it.

Guests



Lance Ford

Lance Ford is an author, church planter, coach, and consultant who has designed unique training systems currently being used by networks, seminaries, and leaders throughout the world. He has written several books including *UnLeader*, *The Missional Quest*, and *The Starfish and the Spirit*. His next book, *The Atlas Factor*, will be released in February. Lance holds a master's degree in Global Leadership from Fuller Theological Seminary. Learn more at LanceFordBooks.com (<http://LanceFordBooks.com>).

Show Transcript

SPEAKERS

LANCE FORD



 ENGLISH

LANCE FORD 00:00

You know, I'm sure that a lot of the speakers will do this, and it'll be appropriate. But I just really want to thank Julie and her team, not only for just putting this together but for the writers on staff. The hard, dangerous work that they do. Because let me tell you, if you're a demon right now, in the church, these are some dangerous people. Okay? So, hell fears what we're doing here. But I am convinced that what we have seen over the last few years, the exposures of leaders, and you know all the names, and many of you come from situations where the names behind your stories aren't in the headlines. But make no mistake about it, the Holy Spirit is shaking that which can be shaken, so that things that can't be shaken will remain. Okay? I am convinced that Aslan is on the move. And I'm convinced that Jesus is standing at the door knocking. And we probably heard that verse growing up a lot, how Jesus is standing knocking at the door of your heart. That's not the context of that verse in Revelation three. He's standing on the outside of the door of the church, knocking to get in. And the question should be asked, Why is he on the other side of the door? But I believe that we are in a moment, and we are in a time where the Lord is raising so many voices up to speak against this stuff. And not only to just expose it, but to truly bring restoration. Amen? To restore the church to the hands of Jesus into the headship of Jesus.

LANCE FORD 02:13

Some of you are old enough in here to remember Bill Clinton's first presidential campaign. You remember James Carville? So, Carville ran the campaign, and he came up with this campaign slogan kind of by accident, because he had just posted it in the campaign headquarters for the workers to kind of stay focused. He knew that Clinton's this guy from Arkansas and Arkansas wasn't really taken that seriously. I'm from Texas, so I still don't take Arkansas seriously. But, you know, this, I mean, you can't become president from Arkansas. And nobody knew who Clinton was. And so there was an uphill battle, and Carville comes



up with this little moniker that he thought, our best chance is if we can get the American people to focus on one bottom line. And how many of you remember what that moniker was? It's the economy stupid. And that, really, Clinton ran on that, and he won. Now, as I have listened over the last few years, to so many podcasts, and blogs and stories, and read articles, I constantly find myself doing it this week, I was listening to a podcast. And I'll hear myself out loud, say a little riff on James Carville's, It's the economy stupid. And I'll hear the stories and I'll go it's the system stupid. It's the system. And so, we have this system of leadership that has been imported straight into the church, that almost wholesale is received and accepted and run with, but few people question the system.

LANCE FORD 04:16

Edwards Deming said, every system is perfectly designed to produce the results it produces. So, when I hear so many of the leadership abuse stories, it should not surprise us. The system is perfectly designed to get the stuff that its getting. It's a perfect garden to grow what is growing. The prevailing leadership systems in most churches of our day are not only not rooted in the words and the ways of Jesus in the epistles, they come from what Jesus called the ways of the Gentiles. What the Old Testament prophets would have called Babylonian or Egyptian. Just read Jeremiah in Ezekiel, and some of those prophets, and see some of the metaphors that they use that always flipped it back to Egyptian or Babylonian. Well, in the time of Jesus, when Jesus says the Gentiles, he's speaking systemically, he's speaking about a system. And so, over the last 30 to 35 years in particular, we have sewed to the wind, and we're now reaping the whirlwind of the corrupt seeds of a false doctrine, and I'm going to call it that a doctrine of leadership. And see that's the thing is, we don't call it a doctrine. We don't think about it as a doctrine, but make no mistake, it very much is a doctrine in the church today.



LANCE FORD 05:49

 ENGLISH

Now, you've already figured out Julie put me right behind sweet Ken. Thanks, Julie. So, it's the typical, you already figured is good copy/bad cop, okay? And I don't want to be a bad cop. I want to be nice. I want to be sweet. I don't want to come across as a jerk. I spoke some of these types of things just a few years ago at a conference, and as I showed up to this particular conference, I was wondering, why did they invite me here? because they had me speak on leadership to a thousand Missouri pastors. And it was kind of like the experience for me, was kind of like Marty McFly on the stage when he was playing. And remember how the crowd just looked at him? That was my experience in Missouri to a thousand Missouri pastors. I was just glad to get out of there.

LANCE FORD 07:10

Ivan Illich was a Catholic priest and theologian, and he was asked what's the most radical way to change a society? Is it through violent revolution? Or is it through gradual reform? And he said, If you want to change your culture, if you want to change society, you have to tell an alternative story. And so, what he was talking about is what sociologists and anthropologists would call a system story. Because every one of us, every one of us, every group, every tribe, every family has what we would call a system story. A system story is really your paradigm. It's the way you see things. And the irony about a system story is it's not necessarily what you believe at as far as core truths. It's about habitual behavior. And it's tied to deep seated narratives. And when we are looking at systems story of leadership, especially in groups, people tend to behave in the moment, according to a leadership system story that's been imported into the church, not necessarily from what they believe the scriptures say. And so, the system story of a group will override even the claims of what they say they believe to be true. I mean, if you ever listened to any podcast or quotes from Mark Driscoll, one of his favorite monikers is, it's all about Jesus. Exactly. Okay. Because he operates from a system story. He operates from a particular leadership system story. Jesus told the Pharisees; you nullify the Word of God by your traditions. He's talking about their



system story. He said, you search the scriptures daily, but you don't come to me. Why?

Because this particular system story overrides, it's the way they look at things. And so your system story influences everything, especially in churches. Our system stories influence our vocabulary, the way we say things. How many of you grew up with this? I grew up in church and grew up in the South. You grew up with this.

LANCE FORD 10:00

That's a demonic little nursery rhyme. Why? Because this ain't the church, Jack. That's not the church. That's the church. The folks are the church, the church isn't a place you go to. It's not an event. It's not a location. It's a people. And so, when we start thinking that church is a place, we've immediately got the system wrong, because I love my grandpa, he used to always say, he didn't call it the church, he call it the church house. Guy Ford had that right back in 1965. He had it right. It's just a building. It's a sheep shed. But these are system stories. Our system stories influence our power structures within the church. It influences the way that we look at accountability. And even though we read Scripture, we read the Scripture over and over throughout the New Testament, it really emphasizes a mutual submission, a mutual accountability. In most of these abusive, in all of these abusive leadership systems, they'll say they have accountability. But the accountability only runs one way. It's a one-way street. But that's not the system story of the New Testament. We have systems stories of titles that completely conflict with what Jesus said, that we use every day in our churches. And I'm going to talk a little bit about that I can't help myself, I'm going to talk a little bit about that in a few minutes.

LANCE FORD 11:39



One of the things I like to do when I'll start to work with a church that says that they want some consulting, or some coaching or help in a transitioning, is I'll take them through some assessments and a few things. But one of things I always like to do right off the bat is look at their website. And so, I'll look at church websites, and I'll pull up the staff or the team, and I like to look to see how they list the team. And I've counted it up for usually it's about 95% of churches. And you could do this on your own, you could just start arbitrarily looking at church websites. About 95% list the staff by hierarchy. Very rarely will you ever find a church that lists the staff alphabetically. I found a church came to me a couple of months ago, our team is going to start working with them in January. And they said that they've been trying to transition to more of a servant leadership type of style. And they've been trying to make inroads. Now I went and looked at their website. The first person listed on their team was the custodian. I thought, hey, you're ahead of the game already. I mean because what they're trying to do is they're trying to get their thinking straight. But the language and the vocabulary that we use in our churches, and in our systems has a lot to do with what constantly gets recalibrated even in our hearts. Jesus says to the Gentiles, as we said, or says to His disciples, here's the way that the Gentiles do it. And you remember the context to that you remember, James and John, I don't know if it was their idea, or their mom's idea. But Mama James and John goes to Jesus, right? And says, Hey, could you know my boys, you know, be Secretary of the Navy and, you know, and Speaker of the House. And you know when you get this thing going. And you remember that, and the other disciples, they get ticked off about it. Now, I have a theory about that. I think they got ticked off because James and John thought about it first. And because they didn't get their mamas to show up first, because these guys were jockeying for position just as much because there's another occasion where Jesus has to do the same thing. But he calls them to him, and he sits him down, and he says, Hey, I know we've all been raised in the shadow of temple power. We have been raised under oppression, a Roman hierarchy. And I know that you've never seen any type of government or leadership other than power and above. I know you've never seen that before, but that's the way the Gentiles do it. It will not be so



among you. We read that text just so quickly, and I think Jesus probably emphasized that like a daddy sitting down with his kids. It will not be so among you. But we need to ask why is it so very so among us today? Because that style of top down, heavy handed, over lording leadership is exactly what's in the church. It's had us by the throat for a long time now. And please hear this. We typically pay attention or get upset when a new headline comes up about some leadership abuse. But here's the thing, and it's easy to point out, it's easy to highlight and put the spotlight on very heavy-handed abusers. But here's the deal; the everyday MO of the prevailing leadership system in the vast majority of our churches, even among those leaders that don't come across as mean or abusive, they're still operating under systems that functionally cause an elite individual or group to lord over others. And this was the thing Jesus forbade. The Gentiles exercise dominion, some translations say. Other translations say they lord over one another. And that's probably really the proper terminology from the Greek, they lord over one another. And we know there's only one Lord.

LANCE FORD 16:44

So, when you start breaking down some of the way that we do leadership, here's the thing. Once again, for the church, for the church, it's to be different. And so, when Jesus comes to tell an alternative story, an alternative system story, he does. And it's the story of the kingdom. And so constantly, you see these parables Jesus is giving, that just flips, our brains just flips the script. It's the opposite of the way that we normally do things or the way that we, hey, if you want to be first, let me tell you how to shoot up the ladder, become last. What?! The greatest will be the least, the best will be the servant of all. And make no mistake, the word servant to us doesn't have much impact. Back in the day, in their day, it had a lot of impact. Because nobody wanted to be a servant. When you're doing the dirtiest jobs all the time. So, when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples that was scandalous. When he says, "This is the way, this is the way to do it. But when you look in our churches today,



most of the people at the top with rank and title, how in the world can you convince me you're the servant of all, when you have more perks and privileges than anybody else on the team? I mean, you really think Jesus had a donkey parking place for himself, you know, at the front of the temple? Why is it that there's only one or two people on a staff on a church staff that seem to have the competency or the adulthood enough to be able to set their own schedule? Where does this stuff come from? Now it's normative in the world for someone to unilaterally have the power to fire somebody. Where in the world do we think that that should be in the church? See, because if I'm a church leader, I can't control the business world. I can't control the corporate world, but I can do everything in my power to try to structure and operate this thing according to the way that Jesus in the epistle writer said to do it. Okay? So, if I have unilateral power to fire somebody, that is a violent act. It's a violent act. And some of you are in here and that's your story. That's what happened to you. Because if I do that to you, I've affected your entire family. I've affected good chance where you live. And I've caused you to have to uproot because you're going to have to go somewhere else and find another job. I've affected your spouse; I've affected your children. They're going to be uprooted from their friends and their schools and the stability that they had. It's a violent act. No one person should have the power to do that. And there is no scriptural menu whatsoever that gives anybody the authority to do that. See, that's lording over somebody else. I'm acting as lord because I'm affecting your life in a significant way. No one person should have the power to do that.

LANCE FORD 20:33

This is about as quiet as it got when I was speaking to all those Missouri pastors that day. No one should have the power to dictate another team member's schedule, that's paternalistic. See, these two items alone are proof of the power of a system story. Because we say we don't believe that anybody should do that. And yet our systems operate in that way. We constantly accept things that are a direct dis to Jesus. Let me give you one here.



Okay. So, I'm basically trying to pull from like three books right now in 35 minutes. I feel like Carrot Top up here. Okay, look at this, okay. Look at this. Now, there's nothing about me and Carrot Top that have anything in common, right? But I'm just going to try to pull a few things out and just try to wake us up to the systems issue of the leadership system that we have. So, Matthew 23, Jesus says, But as for you do not be called rabbi. For only one is your teacher and you're all brothers and sisters, and that's the key right there. You're all brothers and sisters. We are siblings. The church is a group of siblings. A church staff is a group of siblings. He says, and do not call anyone on earth your father for only one is your father who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders. For only one is your leader that is Christ. But the greatest of you shall be your servant. And then he says whoever humbles himself will be exalted. But woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Don't you know the scribes and Pharisees always regretted when they showed up to a Jesus talk? Oh, no, it'd be great. I heard this guy's really exciting. He has great TED talks. And Jesus always gets them. Oh, you scribes and Pharisees that showed up! You hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven for men, for you do not enter in yourself, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. And that's the issue is these leadership systems literally shut the Kingdom of Heaven off from people. They shut down people's giftings they shut down people's callings. They alienate the anointings that people have had been given, the wisdom and the experience so often, because you can't speak up because you don't have the same title, or you don't have the same rank in the room. That's the way leadership works. We often tend to view the Pharisees as religious fundamentalist that were obsessed with the law of Moses. But we seldom consider or realize that Jesus' emphasis on their hypocrisy in setting themselves over their brethren. And when you look at what Jesus constantly was bringing up to the scribes and Pharisees. He's saying you're setting yourself over your brethren.

LANCE FORD 23:50



 ENGLISH

You know, I remember watching the documentary on Hillsong. I think there was two of them, actually. And I remember one of them, or maybe even both of them pointed out how that the Hillsong, New York and I think most of them are this way, but like the front seats were saved for the celebrities and everything. Jesus talks about this. This is stuff Jesus talks about, directly, and we just ignore him. And you know, that's elementary. That's just elementary Christianity stuff right there. Elementary Christianity is first off, just do what Jesus said. Just obey Him. And so, when Jesus says don't call yourself this, don't call yourself that, don't call yourself this, don't call yourself that, He is specifically forbidding rank-based titles and practices that degrade the beauty of our sibling status. He says it's a blockade to the kingdom. So, we have these totally accepted titles. Senior Pastor. Yeah, it gets quiet in the room because we think that's normal. Where did that come from?

LANCE FORD 25:10

Listen, when I'll get in little debates with guys, imagine that. And they'll say, Well, you prove to me from the scriptures that a woman can be a senior pastor. And I'll say you prove to me from the scripture that a man can be a senior pastor. We just think this stuff's normal. And then about 20-25 years ago, there was Robin to the Batman senior pastor showed up; the dynamic duo. And the second part of this was the onset of the executive pastor. And you remember that? Ephesians 4, Apostle, prophet, executive shepherd and teacher and executive pastor. Could you hardly come up with a more hierarchical executive pastor? I'm here to execute. You may be next, right? Where do we get this stuff? I know where we get it. Okay, but we import it straight in. And most churches, they think it's well, it's just, that's just normal. You got to have somebody managing things.

LANCE FORD 26:34



Well, that's really interesting, because this is where we started getting into the evolution of leadership. Interestingly enough, the word leadership, believe it or not, it's a pretty new term. It's a term here's how new it is. I started about three years ago, well it's been about four years ago, now, I was working on a new book. And I wanted to kind of research the history. I kind of got this, this burr under my saddle to research the history of the word leadership. And I remember, I've got this little office out in the woods that I built. It's a little cabin. And I remember the moment I went over to my bookshelf, and I have a 1955 version of the Oxford Universal dictionary. It is this thick, I mean, it I would have liked her brought it, but I would have had to pay for extra on the plane, probably because it weighs so much. So, it's this giant dictionary, and it has expansive definitions on words that it's working with. I went to look up the word leadership 1955 Oxford Dictionary went to look up the word leadership, I could not find it. I could not find it. I finally found like an eight-word sentence using the word leadership as a definition for leader, but there was no definition for leadership in 1955 in the Oxford Dictionary. In 1915, Webster's Dictionary the word leadership is not to be found at all. It's not there. You start looking back to the earliest dictionaries, the earliest dictionaries that had the word leadership was the mid-1800s. And then there weren't even any books with the word leadership in the title until the very end of the 1800s. And we're talking about a very few at that point. Where leadership really came on was in the early 1900s, as the Industrial Revolution kicked on. And as these giant factories started coming up, that operated on quotas and clocks. And so the management system was instilled. And actually, there's a guy named Frederick Winslow Taylor from Bethlehem Steel, that is credited as really the father of modern management. He wrote a book called The Scientific Art of Management. And basically, bottom line to it was what Taylor was saying was there's two kinds of people. There's thinkers and there's doers and most people are the doers. Most of them are too incompetent to think on their feet. So, he created a Management Worker system so that the managers told workers when to do what, how to do it, when to start, and when to stop. And Taylorism, as it's called, started moving straight into the corporate leadership structures throughout the 1920s, 30s, 40s,



50s, 60s. And there wasn't even still a lot of books even with the term leadership until the 1950s. And a few more started coming into the 60s. Today, it's everywhere. It's a \$50 billion industry,, leadership is.

LANCE FORD 30:31

Now when the Church Growth Movement started in the late 1960s, and the idea, okay, that we need to start quote, doing church a little different, because a lot of the seminaries and a lot of the denominational leaders, were starting to see a slippage in church attendance and participation. And so, they're kind of, it's the canary in the coal mine. And they're like, We got to start changing things. And so, you started having the Church Growth Movement come on, which ended up creating in the 90s, the Seeker movement. Anybody remember the Seeker movement? And the big mistake about the Seeker movement was they made the wrong person the seeker. Jesus said, Son of man goes to seek and save the lost. We're supposed to be the seekers. We're supposed to seek the lost. But we thought, well, if we can create cool church, if we can make it innocuous enough and safe enough and nice enough, because you know, really, carrying crosses, it's not that bad. Because that is the core of what it means to follow Jesus, right? But everything ended up being softened to such a point in the Seeker movement and the Church Growth Movement. But the thing was, was as these churches started growing in the late 70s into the 80s, they didn't know how to manage them, they didn't know how to run them. So, guess where they turn to find insight? They turned to the secular world. Why? Because here's the thing, even by the 1960s, in Christianity, my research, and I've tried to be pretty thorough with it, tried to be as thorough as possible. And I've tried to go to the sources, and I've tried to go to the experts. So far, I've only found about 9 to 11 books, in the 1960s Christian books that had the word leadership in them. Okay? So even before that, you're just not gonna find it. If you were to ask most pastors to name you know, ten classics on doctrine, they could just start naming so many books and authors to antiquity on Christian doctrine. But if you were to



ask them to name ten classics on Christian leadership, they would really struggle. Most pastors and Christian leaders that you know how much of a library they point back to Oswald Sanders 1967 book, Spiritual Leadership, but before that, you don't find anything. So, we turn to the world for it. I mean, if you look back at the history of the Global Leadership Summit, from Willow Creek, and you look at all these incredible spiritual speakers that had pastored churches, neutron Jack Welch, well I'm sure we're gonna get a lot of Jesus from old neutron Jack I remember walking into so many pastors' offices and just looking at the books and looking on the shelf and you see in the titles, leadership lessons from Attila the Hun. I'm not making this up. I'm not kidding. Where do we get this stuff? Yeah, you know, that's a great small group text right there.

LANCE FORD 34:08

So, here's the thing; it's the system, Stupid. You're not stupid. You're not the stupid ones. But that's exactly what Paul said. He called it folly. The wisdom of the world is foolishness to God, Paul said. The language that we see throughout the New Testament for a staff is not employ. There are no bosses on the New Testament Church staffs. The language that you see over and over and over throughout the Epistles is coworker, fellow worker, fellow worker, companion, co laborer, shoulder to shoulder. Here's the deal, the church is not a corporation, it's a community. It's not a factory. It's a family. It's not a business. It's a body. It's not an organization. It's an organic masterpiece of the fullness of Jesus as a gift to a watching world. That's who we are. And that's what every church staff is. If you were to ask and say, Well, you know, so and I'm wrapping it up, because my time is in the red up there now. If you know, and this is a question, I get a lot, So Lance, are you just saying there's no leadership? No, not at all. That's not what I'm saying. We need structure. We need systems. But the system that we have is not it. And here's the deal, as long as we continue to support these systems, and to prop them up and try to just work along with them, Julie is going to be running this conference for years to come. All the podcasts and the podcasters that are



represented here and the writers and people that write stuff like I write, we're going to have job security for a long time if we continue to prop up this system. I want to be put out of work, don't you, Julie? It'd be awesome. Wouldn't it be awesome if you know some time, you got an email, some point down the road, and Julie said, you know, we just don't need it anymore? Wouldn't that be awesome? Jesus is knocking on his church. He's knocking on the door of his church. Thank you.

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One Response

Richard DeVries says:

December 21, 2023 at 11:59 am (<https://julieroys.com/podcast/its-the-system-stupid/#comment-140478>)


What a great reminder of many churches today. Including my own nondenominational Bible Church. And thanks for these ongoing reports from Julie Roys. She is criticized by some, but I will make a contribution as requested. (I do remember when she was at Moody, and now reaches many more people and their churches.)

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