Everyone, at some point in time, has struggled with someone in authority, whether a parent, a policeman, a politician or a church leader.

Why do you think there is so much tension with authority in our world?

The apostles understood tension with both religious and political authorities, yet look at the words they wrote.

**Romans 13:1-7 (NIV)**

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

**1 Peter 2:13-14 (NIV)**

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

What is the base argument as to why we should submit to and honour those in positions of authority over us?

Leadership is a God designed concept. Though the leader may not be godly, the office of leadership they fill demands respect and honour as they represent God's rule on the earth. God will hold them accountable for how they rule, or fail to rule, on his behalf, but we are still to respect the office, regardless of how the leader acts.

What type of leadership was in place when Paul and Peter wrote these words?

The political and spiritual leadership that was in place (Roman government and Jewish authorities) were hostile to Christianity and growing increasingly so. All the Apostles were ultimately executed for their faith by these or other authorities. Yet, in light of this, they still understood submission to authority.
Acts 23:4-5 (NIV)
4 Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?" 5 Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

Exodus 22:28 (NIV)
Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.

If we are to respect leadership, how might that affect how we talk about them, and to them?

We often find it easy to get caught up in criticising the faults of leadership. Instead of constantly condemning leaders, what should be our attitude towards them? Why?
Leadership is extremely difficult. A leader needs encouragement and affirmation, not condemnation. Condemnation very rarely turns a bad leader into a better leader. Condemnation merely makes a bad tension even worse. Encouragement is a much better motivation to help a leader be what God has called him/her to be. A leader will always have weaknesses. We need to build around a leader’s weakness and free them to be effective in the areas of their strengths.

Is it possible you may need to repent to God for your attitude toward certain leaders – political, vocational or spiritual? What type of leadership do you find you are most critical toward?

Does this mean we are never to deal with conflict with a leader? If so, how should this be handled?

Sometimes the tension is due to the failings of leadership; sometimes the tension is due to the perspective of those under authority.

What types of challenges might a leader face from those under his/her leadership?
Rebellion against Moses and Aaron

*Numbers 16:1-4 (NIV)*

1 Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites--Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth--became insolent 2 and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. 3 They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?"

4 When Moses heard this, he fell facedown.

Moses had been used by God to successfully and miraculously lead the Israelites out of Egypt. What was the tension some were now struggling with regarding his leadership? Why do think they might have felt this tension?

Their tension was that "all" of Israel was "holy" and therefore God’s representative. They were a community of equals and therefore were offended by the fact that Moses and Aaron would appoint themselves as having special authority over others. It would appear that jealousy and a desire for power influenced their perspective.

What was wrong with their approach to handling conflict?

1) They were not showing respect to the leadership of Moses and Aaron

2) They had obviously been grumbling among one another for some time and spreading that discontent to others until they had amassed a large gathering of discontent people. They found it easier to talk about the problem to each other than address the problem early with the appropriate people.

3) They forgot that Moses and Aaron were not self-appointed, but directly appointed by God.

What does Moses’ response reveal to us about his character?

Falling to the ground was an act of deep humility. Moses did not raise his head and proudly fight for his position. Moses always felt unworthy to be the leader of this people and was only there by the compelling order of God. Moses was considered by God to be the most humble man on earth.

Do you think there is a natural tendency in mankind to devalue any leadership over time? If so, why might this be?
Numbers 16:5-7 (NIV)

5 Then he said to Korah and all his followers: "In the morning the LORD will show who belongs to him and who is holy, and he will have that person come near him. The man he chooses he will cause to come near him. 6 You, Korah, and all your followers are to do this: Take censers and tomorrow put fire and incense in them before the LORD. The man the LORD chooses will be the one who is holy. You Levites have gone too far!"

Why is it important to be clear with regard to who is the leader?
When it is unclear who the leader is, people become confused and do not know who to follow. Divided leadership always means a divided community.

Have any of you ever had a job situation where you had two people you reported to? What tensions did that create?

Numbers 16:8- (NIV)

8 Moses also said to Korah, "Now listen, you Levites! 9 Isn't it enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near himself to do the work at the LORD's tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? 10 He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near himself, but now you are trying to get the priesthood too. 11 It is against the LORD that you and all your followers have banded together. Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?"

Why was their desire to spread out the leadership an act against God?
They were not content with the position and influence God had given them. They wanted more power and more influence. In so doing they went against God’s plan and purpose for them.

Numbers 16:12-15 (NIV)

12 Then Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab. But they said, "We will not come! 13 Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? 14 Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come!"

15 Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, "Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them."

In what ways did their frustration distort their perception of past events? Why do you think this happens?
God rescued the Israelites from Egypt because they had been calling out to him for deliverance from an oppressive state. They had experienced their male children slaughtered at one point, they were enslaved and treated brutally and they were powerless and could do nothing to redeem themselves. Now, the Israelites were looking back on Egypt as a wonderful place, a land flowing with milk and honey – a complete distortion of reality.
In what ways did their frustration distort their perception of Moses’ character and motives? They viewed Moses as a power hungry, ruling tyrant who might gouge out their eyes for standing up to him.

Why do you think we so easily vilify leaders when things do not go our way? Have you ever been guilt of doing this?

Moses wanted to meet and talk the issue through with Dathan and Abiram. Why do you think they refused?

How might a simple conversation have diverted the upcoming disaster?

We often forget leaders are real people, with real emotions, and generally speaking, people who want to lead well. Why is it that we tend to relate to leaders with a “we” versus “them” mentality?

Have you found this “we” versus “them” mentally present in any of your life environments (parenting, work, church...)?

How do you think God views this “we” versus “them” mindset when it comes to leaders and followers?

*Numbers 16:16-50 (NIV)*

16 Moses said to Korah, "You and all your followers are to appear before the LORD tomorrow—you and they and Aaron. 17 Each man is to take his censer and put incense in it—250 censers in all—and present it before the LORD. You and Aaron are to present your censers also." 18 So each man took his censer, put fire and incense in it, and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 19 When Korah had gathered all his followers in opposition to them at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the glory of the LORD appeared to the entire assembly. 20 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 21 "Separate yourselves from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once."

22 But Moses and Aaron fell facedown and cried out, "O God, God of the spirits of all mankind, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?"
Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to the assembly, 'Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'"

Moses got up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. He warned the assembly, "Move back from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins." So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children and little ones at the entrances to their tents.

Then Moses said, "This is how you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt."

As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, "The earth is going to swallow us too!"

And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense.

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, to take the censers out of the smoldering remains and scatter the coals some distance away, for the censers are holy—the censers of the men who sinned at the cost of their lives. Hammer the censers into sheets to overlay the altar, for they were presented before the LORD and have become holy. Let them be a sign to the Israelites."

So Eleazar the priest collected the bronze censers brought by those who had been burned up, and he had them hammered out to overlay the altar, as the LORD directed him through Moses. This was to remind the Israelites that no one except a descendant of Aaron should come to burn incense before the LORD, or he would become like Korah and his followers.

The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. "You have killed the LORD's people," they said.

But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the Tent of Meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared. Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and the LORD said to Moses, "Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once." And they fell facedown.

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD; the plague has started." So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped. But 14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah. Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, for the plague had stopped.
What is so compelling about the leadership of Moses and Aaron in this story?

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (NIV)
12 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.

Why does Paul tell us to respect those leaders who work hard among us in the church?

Why do you think Paul felt he needed to give this directive?

In what ways do we sometimes disrupt the peace and unity of the church in “how” we relate to church leaders?

1 Timothy 5:17-18 (NIV)
17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.”

What is Paul indicating about the importance of the role that elders play in the church?

Hebrews 13:17 (NIV)
Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

In what ways are we to submit to church leaders? What does this mean?
We are to submit to and obey church leaders when they call us to live according to scripture and to act in ways that do not harm the family of God. In other words, we are to submit to them in the areas of life where God has called them to provide oversight and protection for the church. They will be held very accountable to God with regard to how they use or abuse this authority.

Do you feel the way you are relating to church leaders is making their work a joy or a burden?
Elders play a significant God-designed role in the church and therefore that role is to be respected. But we also know that church leaders are human and can sometimes act in sinful ways. Some people have been deeply wounded by those in spiritual authority.

How should we respond if we believe elders are being ungodly in their leadership?

We always have a responsibility to speak to any Christ-follower if we believe they are engaging in sin.

*Galatians 6:1 (NIV)*

> Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

What should we do if the leader does not repent of sinful activity?

*Matthew 18:15-17 (NIV)*

> 15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

*1 Timothy 5:19 (NIV)*

> Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.

When Paul discusses accusing an elder in 1Timothy 5:19, he is referring to sinful activity that would disqualify an elder from serving in that capacity.

Why do you think Paul placed this restriction of multiple witnesses on listening to accusations?
NOTE FOR ALL:
Sometimes people have been wounded by a leader and they carry around judgment against that leader, or perhaps all leadership, for many years. In so doing, they become trapped in bitterness and distrust, unable to lovingly embrace and apply the scriptures addressed in this study.

The key here is to go back and reflect on the studies in the “Living Your Faith” series dealing with judgment and forgiveness. Judgment creates a barrier between you and God and traps you in the past. By trusting God to be judge, it will free you to love your enemies and those who have hurt you. It will also free you to be able to trust other leaders, knowing God is ultimately in control and will take care of you.

Everyone is sinful. Our foundation in life is never to come from leaders or anyone else; it is always to be rooted in Christ. No downfall of any leader should shake the core of our faith or how we relate to others. If the sinful actions of a leader have caused you to put up personal walls of defence and judgment, then it reveals that your faith was more rooted in man than in God and his purposes. That type of faith will always fail and render you ineffective in the kingdom of God. You can stop judging, you can forgive and you can be free to trust God works through leaders.