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Understanding Leadership

Leaders With The Heart Of God

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Mark 10:45

The heart of leadership is service: making God's dream come true in the lives of those you minister to. Although the leader is out front breaking new ground, he is also a follower. Jesus called men to follow Him, and promised to make them fishers of men, that is, lead others in turn to follow Him too.

Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." **Matthew 4:19-20**

Leaders respond earlier than others to challenges, and carry the weight of responsibility and discover vision and purpose. They are moved by conviction rather than settle for convenience and comfort. They dare to be different and manifest more strongly the 'dominion drive' that is found in all people as revealed to us in the book of Genesis.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." **Genesis 1:26**

Leaders of excellence will submit this drive under the Lordship of Christ and use their ambition to further God's kingdom purposes and not their own agenda. They will recognize that we are called to have dominion over creation and not one another. Through Jesus, the way back to God is open for all men to draw near as kings and priests for themselves in what is called the "individual priesthood of the believer." Leadership is never to usurp the privilege we each have in approaching God, rather it is to encourage and equip the saints in their walk with the Lord. Jesus is the only mediator, and no leader should stand in the doorway blocking a person's way to God. Unfortunately, history is full of leaders who have used their influence to manipulate God's people for their own advantage rather than to stimulate them to walk in the freedom that comes from knowing God personally through Christ.

True leadership involves equipping believers to be and do all they are called to. Leaders that stimulate their followers are characterized by a desire to impart faith in God through a practical presentation of the Word, and a focus on building internal conviction and trust in God alone. Their ministry appeals to a person's position in Christ. The positive response to this kind of leadership is increased illumination of God's true purposes and a strong unwavering identification with His cause. The followers are energized to be equipped and activated by the Holy Spirit into fruitful ministry.

Leaders with the heart of God understand that they are placed in the Body of Christ to serve the people and not the other way round. They see themselves as facilitators of ministry. They equip

the people according to Ephesians 4:11-12 so that the people can fulfill their God given dreams. God has deposited a great treasure in every believer: their hopes and dreams, and expects His five-fold gifts to draw them out and create an environment in the church where they can be fruitful in their callings.

When you focus the church's attention on God's presence and not the leader's gifting and personality, you avoid creating a dangerous 'star gazing' mentality that seems so prevalent in much of the church today. Here the rank and file is taught by default to merely attend services and contribute money to support a limited number of programs which very often serve as a bottleneck to broad congregational based ministry. The congregations are obliged to fit into the 'box' of acceptable formally based ministry or service, usually only on the weekends. Hardly ever are they seriously challenged and encouraged to reach out and touch the community in their sphere of influence; at work, play, at the shops, library, wherever!

Intimacy with God in worship and prayer allows for the transfer and planting of divine seed from heaven to earth. The heart of men is the soil in which the plant grows, and fruit is produced. God wants His leaders (son-servants) to ensure that the people are really raised up to productive maturity, and not kept in perpetual barren childhood as they pay lip service to the ministry of the believer.

True fellowship in a church is not about drinking coffee together in a holy huddle somewhere, but involves 'participation in a common cause'. This means that every joint must supply something other than a warm seat on Sundays. The sometimes frantic activities of church life (worship, word preaching and witnessing programs) must be measured against whether they are actually producing the results God has intended for such activities. God is holding up a plumb line to the church, challenging it to build according to the pattern shown on the mountain: the mountain of sacrifice and service of Christ's Calvary. He is interested in the sort of church we are building, not the size. Size is a given. God wants everyone on the planet to accept His Son, so quantity is not the issue, but quality of life and service. He does not want brass substituted for enduring gold.

To equip the saints to impact their communities for Christ, they must see the church as a 'force' that is not confined to space and time: Sundays at 10 am. They must see ministry outside the walls as their primary calling, not whether they sign up to usher or work in the children's ministry. These are important as 'temple' service within the walls and serve as a hub to the wheel, but this type of ministry is largely inward focused. The spokes of the wheel are the people reaching out with the heart and spirit of Christ into the dark places in society where the light is needed. The salt must be shaken out of the salt shaker to be effective. One preacher getting ten to respond to the altar call is not as good as one hundred congregants going out and getting one person each saved that week.

Jesus has given His people permission to go and 'do the stuff' – proclaim good news, pray for the sick, speak in tongues and cast out devils where needed (Mark 16:15-20). Gathering around some superstar and cheering is a perverse form of Christian sport that God is trying to shake us loose from in these days.

God has more faith in His people than most leaders do. 'Let my people go' is His cry to much of the church's leadership. Ponder the path of your feet as you walk the road of leadership. Does your leadership accurately reflect God's heart or does it show signs of fear and manipulation, things you have probably experienced a lot in life so far? Realize that you reproduce after your own kind (the 'Genesis Principle') so it is time to:

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 1 Peter 5:2-4

Manipulative Leadership

Manipulative leadership is characterized by fear, is externally based on duty and practice, condemnation, and drives their people from behind. In time, most people will respond to this kind of authoritarian leadership negatively. They will rebel, recoil or robotically resign themselves to a religious treadmill that sucks the life out of the purity and simplicity of their relationship with God. These followers see their leaders as their source of inspiration, not God Himself. Sooner or later they are let them down in some way and drop away to some low level of church life and expectancy. The leader of excellence must always see and place Jesus and His power preeminent in all areas of their service.

Instead of berating the sheep to do what they can and should, the leader is called to stir up the Christ within each believer so that they live life from the inside out, thus provoking or stimulating the call.

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,...” Hebrews 10:24

Other Leadership Characteristics

Leaders have and provide a sense of purpose with a clear and guiding vision. A passion for the Lord and His work grips them as they pursue a love affair with destiny. Life is seen as an adventure, and the leader is prepared to take calculated risks to explore creative ways to get the job done. Their pioneering spirit of faith sustains them in adversity. Secure in Christ, they do not wear borrowed clothes in order to conform and not stick out in any way. Leaders perceive and grasp the key points in a situation and make quality decisions that propel them in their purpose.

Leaders recognize the needs of their followers. They too need acceptance, a sense of belonging and value in the big picture of what the ministry is doing. Leaders also know what necessary equipping must be provided for the journey, as well as a sense of safety or protection. Leaders are dealers in hope and promote the promised future and hope that is found in God.

Leadership Is About Change

To bring about change in God’s people the leader must understand the following essentials. Be ready for change yourself. People never rise beyond the level of their leaders. Lay down professionalism; get honest with yourself and God. Lose the fear of failure and criticism and realize that change begins with you. Lead your people from the front.

Blow a certain sound. Get clarity from God as to the change and then communicate it clearly with certainty.

For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? 1 Corinthians 14:8-9

Be ready to teach the Biblical reasons for the changes are needed. You will be challenged by the status quo, for change always brings a reaction from early resistors. Take the time to lay the foundations for the new direction you are providing. Be committed to what God has instructed. After all He has initiated the change and knows all about opposition to His plans.

Begin making small but significant changes, build the necessary relationships to facilitate change and believe that the good work God has begun will come to fruition in His time.

Understanding Your Leadership Type

God's family has variety, and so too with the leadership He appoints. Leaders usually have a mixture of features, but usually one stands out as a defining feature. Consider:

The hero leader: Leads by virtue of his ability to meet the needs and aspirations of the group following him. They look up to him as their hero.

The expert leader: Leads because of superior knowledge and or expertise in a particular field.

The power leader: Leads by virtue of personal strength authority, and personality.

The humanitarian leader: Consistent care and compassion for others thrusts this person in time into leadership.

A pastor in a church will often be an 'all-rounder' displaying at least some of the above defining features. Build on your strengths, and gather people around you that compensate for your weaknesses.

Does a leader have to lead in every situation? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, in the general sense that as leader he is to be out in front. No, when the leader has to yield to the expertise calling and gifting of another leader in the same team when the situation arises.

For example, in a church service you have at least two leaders leading in their particular responsibilities. The worship leader will stand in front of the congregation and lead them in worship whilst the overall church leader, the pastor yields to that person for that purpose. When time comes for preaching or ministry, the worship leader steps back and yields to the pastor / preacher to lead from then on.

Take another example, at a business meeting, the church leader or pastor may have to allow the church administrator to provide leadership in an area of administration where he has few skills or background. This does mean that the administrator now takes charge of the church, he is simply providing input that no one else is gifted to give. Team ministry and leadership can and should be a blessing when leaders in their respective fields mutually submit to one another in the fear of the Lord as we are taught in Ephesians.

...but be filled with the Spirit... submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Ephesians 5:18a, 21

True Spirit-filled leadership recognizes that to build up the body a variety of leadership contributions have to be made to make up the whole. If the pastor leader tries to be the 'expert in everything,' a level of excellence that could be achieved will not be established as the team sinks down to an average level. It is wise to yield to the contributions God has put in the hearts of team leaders around the 'set person' leader. That is why the kings of old would have wise men stand alongside them to counsel them with their expertise when needed. Wise leaders today still wage war and gain victory because of the multitude of counselors they receive input from.

*For by wise counsel you will wage your own war,
And in a multitude of counselors there is safety.*

Proverbs 24:6

Can Leadership Skill Be Improved On?

Some contend that leaders are born, not made. Others say that leadership skills can be acquired. I believe that there is truth in both points of view. There does appear to be something that a leader has from birth. Leaders have a tendency to see things in terms of potential, how things could and even should be. They desire to be out in front more so than their peers.

On the other hand, when you consider that leadership has a lot to do with character issues like faithfulness and consistent commitment, obedience, determination and courage in the face of opposition, then leadership can be developed too. People who do not match their noticeable gifting and talents with character qualities, do not fully realize their leadership potential. Charisma and character work hand in hand in leadership. Excellence in leadership is therefore taking what God has given each of us and making choices to grow in what He has given us. To become a better leader become a better person.

Characteristics Of Godly Leadership

A Godly leader will always recognize that the 'sheep' belong to the Lord and steward his ministry in such a way that recognizes this important truth. Leaders are to guard against a tendency to receive adulation from the people without truly deflecting glory to the Lord who is the source of all successful and fruitful ministries. All things are of Him, through Him and to Him, and the minister of excellence will not allow people to put their trust in their abilities rather than the Lord.

A desire to serve rather than be served is an important leadership characteristic. Followers are attracted to leaders who have vision and throw their weight behind them serving the leader with their talents and time. This is all good so far. But when the balance shifts and the leader forgets why God sent him to the people in the first place, then a problem arises.

Jesus cautioned his disciples to set a new standard.

*"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." **Matthew 20:25-28***

How To Keep Growing In Leadership

The base principle is this: God has promised to reward faithfulness at one level with increase at a higher level.

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Matthew 25:14-21

When a leader properly stewards what God has entrusted to him, God rewards the diligence with which the released resources were used for increase. God is the God of increase, and He wants to reach more and more people through His chosen and responsible leadership.

God expects the leader to maintain a priority and grow in his relationship with Him. There is no limit to growing in who you are in Christ. Peter exhorts us this way:

...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18

Reading, study, prayer, meditation all provide the groundwork for growth, but only when this input is tested, does true growth take place. It is one thing to know who you are in Christ, yet another to know who Christ is working in you when faced with tests and trials.

Leaders grow when they learn to stand their ground and press on when all they have is the promises of God. Passing the word test is vital for a leader as progress cannot be based on how you feel at any one time. Faith is not based on feelings but on the integrity of God's word.

*"Look, I go forward, but He is not there,
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;
When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him;
When He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him.
But He knows the way that I take;
When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.*

Job 23:8-10

In ministry we are instructed not to look at the people's faces, only God's face. If we are changed by the people, we become more like them, instead of becoming more like God as we behold Him face to face. God's presence is the place of change.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:18

Circumstances cannot hinder what God has truly set in motion. Our adversary will always try to set up roadblocks in the way, but when we pass the vision test we continue to grow in God's grace. Habakkuk was told that even though the vision would tarry, it would come to pass in time.

*"Write the vision
And make it plain on tablets,
That he may run who reads it.
For the vision is yet for an appointed time;
But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
Because it will surely come,
It will not tarry.*

*"Behold the proud,
His soul is not upright in him;
But the just shall live by his faith. **Habakkuk 2:2-4***

Pride likes to see self at the center of things. But in God's kingdom, He is at the center of all. He is the giver and sustainer of the vision and the godly leader does what he does merely in response to what God has already done and set in motion. The godly leader will remain committed despite any time delay or 'tarrying' that has to be done. God will do what He has promised to do. To fret is to put you at the center and dethrone God.

There Is a Higher Price To Be Paid In Leadership

*From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." **Matthew 16:21-23***

Peter had just received a revelation of who Jesus really was: the Christ! Jesus had spelled out his participation in the cause and the power to be wielded: binding and loosing. Now it was time to paint a picture of the price that would have to be paid. Peter, now in the flesh, unknowingly yields to Satan's way of thinking designed to contradict and undermine God's plan and has to be rebuked for his offense.

At this stage of his leadership training he had little idea of the price of sacrifice that would need to be paid. Later we find that Peter did learn, and eventually paid the ultimate price himself as he was crucified, as tradition has it, upside down in deference to the Lord's own crucifixion.

God expects more of leadership than He does of followers, and to grow in leadership excellence here are some costs.

Rejection, Misunderstanding And Criticism

Leaders never enjoy unbroken acceptance and popularity as they confront the community in its need of change. Persecution comes with the territory; the secret is to turn it into blessing as you realize that you are making a difference to people settled in their mediocre and sometimes evil ways. Not even Jesus rode the wave of popularity all the way to the beach. He first enjoyed great acceptance, but as His ministry drove deeper towards the core of society and man's need, a gathering storm of rejection swelled up against Him from religious leaders with their vested interests and an envy that drove them to be totally hypocritical.

Family Misunderstanding

*And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. **Luke 2:47-50***

This can be the most painful as God has purposed that family ought to be supportive. When they are not, realize that you are not alone in being misunderstood. Jesus despite being the most perfect communicator and submitted to his family oversight was nevertheless misunderstood.

Rejection From Your Own People

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.
John 1:11

Cultural rejection rooted in familiarity is also painful. Keep your mission in focus and serve God as your primary audience. You have been accepted by Him, so don't worry about anyone rejecting you.

The Cost Of Aloneness

The leader by definition first sees things others do not, and for a season at least, the leader will pay a price for being alone.

Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.
John 6:15-16

Jesus' followers had their own agenda. They wanted to make Him king in the natural realm, so He was obliged to withdraw and be alone till the situation cooled off. His kingdom was not of this world and only He saw it as this stage. So He had to go it alone. Godly leaders must be prepared to pay the price of going it alone in this sense.

Consecration To The Cause

There is a time-table that a leader has to adhere to. Some things may be permissible, but not all are expedient if the vision is to be fulfilled.

You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

2 Timothy 2:3-5

A leader cannot become entangled with the ordinary affairs of life if he is to remain focused on the mission at hand and not become distracted from His responsibilities as an enlisted soldier in the Lord's army. A level of trust is expected of leadership where they seek the Lord and His kingdom at the expense of pursuing their own goals. God has promised to meet our needs and excellence in leadership cannot be achieved by someone entangled in the affairs of this life.