

Leadership Is A Calling

One of the most liberating lessons for me has been to see leadership as a calling, not a reward. We put leaders on a pedestal, assuming they've arrived, the sum total of all things spiritual. Immediately they inherit an expectation no man could live up to. When they disappoint, the whole paradigm shatters and a new idol is required. What's wrong with this picture?

From my earliest days as a believer, there was always someone claiming to have been the most faithful, most spiritual, or perhaps been here the longest, and *that's why I'm the leader*. They list their accomplishments, the times they single-handedly cleaned the building, their service to the previous leader, or their devotion to prayer and the Word, winding up with, *that's why I'm the leader*.

Now those are all good reasons, but others were faithful too, some even more so. Why hadn't they been similarly rewarded? Was it hidden sin? Was God asleep? What was wrong?

And what about the character of the man in the hot seat? He's never perfect. Much of the time he thought he was, speaking with the infallibility of a whole passel of popes and yet, falling short. How could such a thing be—and in God's house, no less!

We take it as a given the problem is not with God. In most cases it's not with the leader, or even ourselves. The problem is with our understanding of the leadership dynamic. We don't understand how it's supposed to work.

Leadership is a calling. Some men or women are called to lead others. To fulfill that calling they are given gifts, or abilities. The gifts include inspiring others to action, leading so others wish to follow, and building an environment others want to spend time in. In order to have a group we need leaders. No leaders = no group. People need a reason to come and be part of a group. That reason is leaders.

The gifts and callings of God are without repentance. While they may be hidden for a season, they're from birth. An immature, undeveloped leader is still a leader. A carnal leader with mixed up motives is still a leader. He needs to grow and develop- like the rest of us.

A proper realization of this is liberating. If I'm not the leader, it doesn't mean I've been bad, or rebellious, or missed my calling. It means I'm not the leader. If I am the leader, I don't have to pretend to be some spiritual giant I'm not- I'm still the leader. It's how God set it up. It doesn't lessen a man's stature as a leader to admit he doesn't have all the answers, to admit he struggles and ask for the help and prayers of others. And for those who, though not the leader, are asked to advise and support, it can be a breath of life.

Too much of our world has an all or nothing mentality. Either the man is the statue on the pedestal, or he's nothing. There's no middle ground. Where's the ladder, the support, the infrastructure? How do we get from point A to point B and live to tell about it? Where's the love, the grace, and the fellowship?

As we take this understanding to the Bible, several things come into focus. We see the leader not as a towering colossus, but as a precious resource, needing support, nurture, and prayer. He needs this, not only to do his job properly, but survive. His life, health, family, finances, morality, and even his eternal soul are under attack from an enemy who gives the leader special attention.

Is he the most spiritual man in the church? Maybe, maybe not. Does he have the keenest insight into God's Word? Not necessarily. Is he the best example of a mature believer within the church? Probably not. Is he the most visible example of what the church stands for? Absolutely! He's the focus, the point man, the place the dots connect. So what does all this prove? The many sided and complicated wisdom of God.

What we see portrayed in the New Testament is a vulnerable man, who stands before God as one who must give account and is very conscious of his shortcomings. He needs to overcome fears and intimidation and yet he stands in a place where God put him. He doesn't have all the answers but he's the key to seeking the solution. For God will honor his position and cause doors to open.

There may be others who pray and hear from God, sometimes better than he can. Although he has the final decision, he does well to weigh what everyone says and feels. Not only is there safety in a multitude of counselors but the leader's job is to move the flock without loss or damage. He may be leading but if nobody follows, he's only taking a walk.

Some *spiritual* people are a couple years into the future. Interesting, but the revelation doesn't match what's current. The inclination is to brush them aside, creating a rift between pastor and prophet. But if the words are put on the shelf so to speak, they can be a powerful confirmation when their time arrives.

However, the leader must still lead according to what he thinks and feels. The prophetic is the map, the big picture. The driver must still turn the wheel to follow the road, which appears to contradict the map at times. The leader is that driver. He leads in a plodding, nuts and bolts sort of way, keeping an eye on his entire flock, trying not to leave any behind or let others get too far ahead.

Those who pray and receive such leading have a responsibility of supporting their leaders in prayer and words. Fragile egos abound, needing the anointing to protect and heal. In times of apparent conflict, love needs to cover the multitude of sins. If you are a key person praying for your pastor you need to have someone covering you in prayer too, because you're next in line to get beat up by the forces of hell. It takes a team.

A good leader will draw from other resources around him too. Once he gets away from the *I should have it all* mindset and can ask help from those around, a whole new world opens up. Counsel, everything from Bible research to business sense becomes much easier. He doesn't have to do it all- even if he does get a good share of the credit. A good leader is a team.

There may be a tension with business leaders too. On the one hand, a church needs an excellent reputation in the financial realm. Bills should be paid on time, promises honored, and accountability maintained. But on the pastoral side, some decisions will go counter-intuitive to the business climate of the city and the ministry.

Sowing and expanding in a depressed economy, buying at inflated prices and selling into a recession—sometimes it happens. While sound business should be the rule, there will be times to stretch, reach out, see the invisible and do the impossible.

This can also be the difference between an ordinary business and one that takes off and soars to the heights. Faith doesn't just build churches, it raises up financial empires. The literal meaning of *entrepenuer* is risk taker. That's faith. And if that faith is inspired from God and seeded with divine revelation, it's going to do amazing things. What could it do for a pastor to be surrounded by a contingent of millionaires, especially if their breakthrough was based on his preaching? It's possible.

True leadership should be a symbiotic. The leader doesn't just *use* people, he speaks and builds into their lives. He delivers keys to unlocking their hidden treasures and resources. Often the keys were already in their hands, overlooked, unvalued, unused. While the Kingdom of God is largely built by poor people, those who can put seven figures onto a check have their part to play! Don't we want everything God longs to give us?

When it's time to buy and sell property, it pays to be joined to someone who knows the business. From the price of dirt to the intricacies of zoning, there's a lot of money on the table. Some people make fortunes in this arena, others lose their shirt. Wouldn't you rather have a tour guide at this point? A life calling is needed.

Just the same, when all the wisdom, advice, gut hunches and prophetic words have been thoroughly shared, a decision remains. As Michelangelo is reported to have said, *You've got to draw the line somewhere*. That's the leader's job. God called him to it. God honors the calling.

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