

Stopping the Bus

During my first year of Bible college, I saw a demonstration of leadership both graphic and memorable. In those days, the church and the college were separated by about five miles. Since many students didn't drive, the college provided a shuttle to and from the services. During one of those hops, a girl faced up to her problem- sort of.

She was campused. By diligent and applied effort, she had piled up enough demerits to suspend some privileges. Once the bus rolled onto the college grounds she was forbidden to leave, even to run down and pick up a hamburger, which she desperately wanted.

A lesser mortal might have used the time and discomfort to foster personal discipline, contemplating the reason for her circumstance, and seeking divine help in amendment of conduct. But this young woman had a gift and knew how to use it. She had approximately two minutes to create a consensus that would stop the bus at MacDonald's.

Naturally, there were other opinions. My dinner was at home, in the refrigerator, and the time to get it heated up was tightly sandwiched between church and the enforced, lights out curfew. A ten-minute stop was a problem. I carried no cash and MacDonald's food wasn't good for me anyway.

So she began to work the bus, talking to this one and that, planting seeds and fanning flames creating a group dynamic out of thin air. The bus driver agreed to go with the majority. When asked my opinion (or consent) I replied that I had no desire to stop and no money for food but if she wanted to impose on my time, a small order of fries would help repair my feelings. (I had no expectation of her doing this but it seemed right to suggest recompense for what she wanted take from me).

As I watched her win over one person after another I couldn't help imagine what it would be like had it been me trying to sell my idea to a busload of indifferent and preoccupied people. In a matter of seconds someone would have gently but firmly grasped my arm and using low, soothing words of few syllables informed me that all these people were not interested and I should stop harassing. There is something about such baby talk that makes it difficult not to punch the speaker but so far I've found grace to resist.

It was easy to see a gift as this girl operated. Some people can sell their ideas quickly and efficiently. Others, not so easily. I arrived at a new definition of leadership: Can you make the bus stop?

Several negatives leap to the eye. Leaders make things happen. While the 97% are still wondering what happened, the leader knows what, how and why and even has a pretty good idea what's coming next. Many leaders have glaring character problems. Things never get resolved. Anytime confrontation looms, they manipulate their environment and ease the pain.

It works but you can't fool all the people all the time. The more folks realize they were used selfishly, the less devotion they will give such a leader. After a season, even the best of charmers will have worn out an audience and need to move on. Good decisions, and hence good leadership build authority. People see results and they get personally excited about following that leader. Poor decisions produce no long-term fruit and people tire of following a wandering star.

There is a dangerous side of politics. Votes cast without purpose or morality wind up lit by the fires of Hell. Democracy is two wolves and a sheep 'voting' over what to have for dinner. God's true leaders will be ever mindful of the leadership gift, its ability to trample and rob the weak, and will actually tremble at the responsibility God entrusted to them.

All levels of authority rise and fall according to how a person responds to life, other people, and especially God. Since authority comes from God, it stands to reason that people who allow God to exercise His authority in their life will find their authority increasing. They make good decisions, and they care for the weak, so others deem them worthy of trust.

Jesus' first temptation was to feed himself by his gifting. While God knows our needs, they should be met as a by-product of a supernatural flow directed outward to others. By turning stones to bread, Our Lord would have set the wrong example for all time and eternity. Listening to the wrong voice would have set a dangerous precedent. The secret of Jesus' ministry was receiving His leading and inspiration directly from Heaven. He did what He saw The Father doing, not what Satan whispered into His ear.

Some years after the first incident took place I was sharing some of these thoughts with a friend as we rode back from reform school ministry. We had a good time, he laughed at some of my thoughts (the ones meant to be humorous), and we ended on a high note. But as I drove home I found chills going down my spine. For that very day I had *stopped the bus*.

We had taken in the church van a ministry team of inner city kids to put on a program for the reform school. And they did good. In fact, they did real good. On the way back I remembered a stash of Christmas money tucked away in my wallet, waiting for something special—like this. So I asked, "Who wants to stop for a burger? I'm buying."

You know, it took that girl a good two minutes or more to gain a consensus. I had mine in 10 seconds. It was unanimous. Nobody felt trampled on that day. After all, I remembered the fries. Another friend told me, "You bought them off." Absolutely! A man's *gift* makes room for him... (Proverbs 18:16). The ability to 'cold call' a group is a rare thing, and I don't ever expect to see it in my life like that girl had it. But to lead because God has given one both the idea and the provision to carry it out is a different matter. That's one to grow in grace over.

For those who have the gift of leadership in a far deeper way, I have a question and a challenge. If you can make the bus stop, why is it stopping? Is it just that you want a hamburger? Or is there a deeper purpose, something that does the will of God and builds His kingdom? Are you leaving behind people who feel walked on? Or do you have satisfied customers? We can't please all the people all of the time. But we can please God every day.

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