

#16 “Biblical Leadership 101”

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There are multitudes of books written on leadership how-to's from both secular and Christian authors. Only a few, it seems, rightly understand that Biblical leadership fundamentally is spiritual, and thus it requires the power of God, direction from God, and the enabling of God. Others try to tell us that leadership is fundamentally based upon inner strength, vision, and willpower. If only we can marshal enough resources, talent, and influence, then we can be leaders, they say. They tell us to dream it and seize it. Thus, such people put a great emphasis upon positions of influence and power. They take their cues from others who have led “successfully” by getting to the top of the pecking order of society. They have climbed their respective ladders, and thus, since they are farther along than others, it is said that they have the right to tell us how to climb like they did. They can sell books and speak on the national media because they have been “successful.” But is such the essence of leadership in the kingdom of God? Do God's prerequisites for leadership have anything to do with corporate, societal, and political “success,” fame, and popularity? If not, what are God's credentials for a leader fit to serve in His work?

First of all, we must understand that not everyone is called to be in an office of leadership or gifted to be a leader. It is completely wrong to say that unless a person learns to lead, he will not be an effective servant of God or at least measure up to his full potential. In other words, the modern church tends to give leadership gifts greater importance than the other gifts, such as teaching, giving, and so on. Leadership is important, but so are the other gifts. The body is built up and fitted together by what every joint supplies, whether leader, teacher, servant, follower, giver, or some other gifting and ministry. All of us need one another. How can someone teach unless someone is learning from them? How can someone lead unless someone follows them? Each of us needs to do what God has gifted us to do in addition to any other ministry to which He calls us. Let the leaders lead, and let the followers follow. It is going against God's design to try to manufacture leaders from everybody.

Maybe you haven't been pressured to step up, move out of your comfort zone, and lead. If it hasn't happened to you yet, it likely will at some point in the future. If it does, seek to determine what God wants you to do. Be mindful that influence is not dependent upon positions, power, and status. Influence is something that God gives and does as He builds His kingdom in and through us as we yield to Him. It is not about us conquering territory for God or building up some earthly empire that we call a church or parachurch ministry. It is all about God, and unless He builds it, those who build, labor in vain (Psalm 127:1). A person of Biblical influence is not a person who can muster up a crowd to follow him because of some gift, talent, skill, or achievement. Biblical influence is based upon God finding a person usable because the person has a heart wholly devoted to God (2 Chronicles 16:9). Biblical influence is bearing spiritual fruit, which is ultimately

something only God can do in and through us. So let us not confine the ability to have influence to merely those who can lead. We all influence the kingdom as we fulfill our God-given roles, and we will have a lot more joy in the process.

Leadership has been given way too much attention and press. We have tried to fix problems of a spiritual nature in the church through horizontal, manmade leadership techniques. If it was an issue of “winning friends and influencing people,” then it makes sense to learn from those who are the most popular, wealthy, and successful, whether saved or unsaved. Yet if leadership is fundamentally spiritual in nature, then we had better learn from men and women of God and from the Word of God. Horizontal leadership techniques and helps will not, cannot, and should not be the answer to the effectiveness and growth of the church. The way to advance the kingdom is spiritual, as it always has been. That said, may more godly leaders step up, walk faithfully, and utilize their God-given gifts. When leadership is spiritual in nature, it can indeed have profound effects on many lives.

Spiritual leadership is based upon the qualifications given in Scripture. Titus 1:6-9 gives us a list of qualifications, none of which have to do with worldly success standards. It says,

“Namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”

The only ability required of an elder is that he can teach. It doesn’t even mention anything about leadership gifts, though an elder may be gifted in that way. *The qualifications are simply a measure of a person’s integrity, morality, character, and spiritual maturity.* They are God’s ways to filter out those who are unable or unwilling to serve, shepherd, and disciple. It should go without saying that the spiritual leader is a believer, but I will mention it anyways, lest we think that we can find wisdom outside of Christ (Colossians 2:3). Those who can have spiritual influence are only those who have Christ.

Another interesting thing to note about spiritual leadership is that family matters. Think of the number of “successful” men in the world, and then think how many of them have children who are model young people, let alone walking with the Lord. Very few “model leaders” have model families. The spiritual leader, on the other hand, shepherds his home so well that his children are discipled to walk faithfully after Christ. It is not good enough to be successful in ministry and yet lose on the homefront. To lose on the homefront by having children who are not walking after the Lord is to lose altogether and to be disqualified from spiritual leadership. The home is seriously and critically important. If a

person cannot shepherd his own home, we ought not to have confidence in that person that he can shepherd a church or any group of believers.

Yet there are more qualifications, and they all have to do with the integrity of the leader. He is faithful to his wife in marriage, he is above any accusation that anyone can bring against him because his testimony is so outstanding, he doesn't compromise to "get ahead," he is just and fair, and he knows the Word of God so that he is able to teach, exhort, and refute those who are wrong. He may not know accounting, he may not know psychology, he may not know physics, he may not have published a book, he may not have an advanced degree, and he may not be well-known in his community. Yet if he is a man of character who knows the Scriptures and can teach them, then he is qualified to lead. Many of the men we hold up as "model leaders" we do so because they are strong, tough, and able to compete and get ahead in the world. Perhaps they like the fighting, they enjoy the conflict, and they love the triumph over those who disagree with them. In other words, they are self-willed and pugnacious, as Titus says. The godly leader is not one who tries to conquer territory for the kingdom with his brain, his pocketbook, or his biceps. The godly leader conquers through faith in Christ and through the teaching and preaching of the Word of God. He moves mountains through prayer offered in faith. He becomes weak so that he can be strong.

A person who can be a spiritual leader and a steward of a position of influence and power at the same time is a wonderful testimony of humility and the grace of God. A person who can use his spiritual gifts in obscurity is no less of a marvel, though nobody would care to hear a word that he said. It is time that we look to the heart of the matter which is the heart of a person.

Leadership skills are important, good, and necessary. Those who lead ought to be able to inspire, cast vision, administrate, delegate, organize, and do all the rest that comes with the territory of being a leader. But all the skills and abilities in the world are nothing unless God is at work mightily in and through the leader. Biblical leadership is not a power play, but a work of grace. It is not about worldly success and achievement but about faithfulness, the teaching of the Word of God, and the shepherding of the home and those whom God puts under the leader's care. Whether in obscurity or popularity, Biblical leadership is always the same, deriving the ability to bear spiritual fruit which carries spiritual influence because of a heart dedicated and committed to Christ.