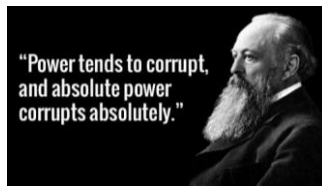




March 21, 2021 - "Follow The Leader" - Mark 9:33-50

OPEN

"Follow the leader" is a simple, children's game. A line is formed. The child at the head of the line runs, skips, jumps – and the rest of the children must follow suit. Leadership is an inescapable reality of life! However, the lure of leadership is rarely to selfless service. Often, pride, dominance, and entitlement are in evidence. Lord Acton was an English Catholic historian, politician, and writer. In 1887 he wrote these now famous words:



DIG

We have been looking at lessons of following from Jesus' miracles, parables, and teaching. Today, in **Mark 9:33-50**, we see continued misunderstanding of Jesus' assurances that He was on His way to suffer, die, and rise again.

Jesus and His disciples returned to Capernaum, where His ministry began (1:21). Likely in Peter and Andrew's house Jesus asked what they discussed – silence! They were debating who was greatest! Were they embarrassed to answer? Regardless of their pride Jesus continued to invest in this disciples for the leaders they would become once filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus calls us to be **followers and leaders**. This is not contradiction but an integration! Good followers make good leaders. Pastor, author Chuck Swindoll defines leadership as "*inspiring influence*". Where does the inspiration come from? From a relationship of following Jesus – and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Ruth Haley Barton in her book, **Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership** (IVP, 2008) puts it this way, "...the best thing any of us have to bring to leadership is our own transforming selves."

What are the ways that God is transforming followers into leaders? There are three markers of spiritual leadership in this passage.

1. **Spiritual leadership requires humility – verses 33-37**

An argument had arisen about "*which of them was the greatest!*" (v.34).

**What was Jesus' response?** Notice he sat to teach (as a rabbi) and explained, "*If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant (lit. diakonos) of all.*" (v.36)

**What was Jesus' object lesson?** Jesus placed a child among them and suggested that leadership is tested by how one reaches to the least. It takes humility to serve the "least of these" – but the disciples discounted children – see Mark 10:13.

Are you allowing God to develop humility in your heart? It really is a challenge. Because one of the keys to good leadership is growth in competency. But we have a human tendency to allow expertise to grow at the expense of humility and selflessness.

2. **Spiritual leadership requires unity – verses 38-41**

First, Jesus dealt with an argument among His followers. Next, He addressed a complaint. The disciples were frustrated and perhaps jealous that someone was serving Christ's name but "not following us" (v.38). Maybe this highlighted their failure to cast out a demon – see Mark 9:18.

**What was Jesus' response?** "*Do not stop him.*" (v.29) Jesus wanted His followers to make space for others who follow Him but whose style, emphasis, methods might differ. How do we foster such unity?

**What was Jesus' object lesson?** He referred to the simple yet essential service of offering a drink of water. Even such service will be rewarded (v.41). In other words, we must not allow a dis-unity to creep into the Body of Christ just because we regard the ministry of others to be "less" or "different".

In his booklet **Christian Leadership** John Stott wrestles with the challenge of unity as it was seen in Corinth.

*There is a paradox at the heart of the church. It is the painful tension between what the church claims to be and what it seems to be; between the divine ideal and the human reality; between the romantic talk about "the bride of Christ" and the very unromantic, ugly, unholy and quarrelsome Christian community we know ourselves to be. It is the tension between our final, glorious destiny in heaven and our present, very inglorious performance on earth. This is the ambiguity of the church – and it creates a challenge for us as leaders.*

### 3. Spiritual leadership requires integrity – verses vv. 42-50

Building on the image of a child, Jesus offered a third leadership lesson. We must not (lit.) “scandalize” or cause other believers to sin (v.42). Jesus was raising the bar of leadership from the examples familiar to the disciples – ruthless Romans and hypocritical Pharisees.

**What was Jesus’ object lesson?** First, Jesus used hyperbole in describing amputation. He calls followers to radical discipline so that we may not miss *true life* in eternity. Second, Jesus pointed to the tragedy of living lives that are neither spiritually savoury nor morally preservative – as salt should be.

We do not have to look at the 1<sup>st</sup> Century to see leaders without integrity. Even evangelical leaders have “scandalized” the Body of Christ. *Jeffrey Greenman* is President and Professor of Theology and Ethics at Regent College. He offers an insightful formula concerning leaders who end up slipping into scandal.

**ISOLATION + PRESSURE - ACCOUNTABILITY = DANGER**

You can listen to more insights in a recent *FaithToday* podcast [When Leaders Fall](#), in which host Karen Stiller adds to this formula. Some leaders have the danger “*multiplied by fame*”.

<b>REFLECT</b>
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Jesus is the pattern of servant leadership – see Mark 10:42-45. He did not lead for His own comfort or fame. And this kind of servant leadership is what He calls each of His followers to practice. We must avoid the sin of the disciples. “*While their Master was preaching the cross they had been dreaming of crowns.*” (***The Training of The Twelve***, A. B. Bruce, Kregel, 1988, 197)

- ***Do you feel reluctant to lead?***

Yes, God wants you to lead others into deeper discipleship in Christ. Wesley Duewel writes, “*God wants to use you in a special way. You are important to Him; He needs you. He wants to prove what He can do through your life and leadership. God wants you to be ablaze with His love, His Spirit, and His power.*” (***Ablaze For God***, Zondervan, 1989, 16, 26)

- ***Do you see the reward of leadership?***

There is a lot about the cost of leadership. But there is also reward! David and Warren Wiersbe remind us that “*the privilege of ministry is growth*” (see I Timothy 4:15-16; Philippians 3:10-14; II Timothy 3:14-15; ***Making Sense Of The Ministry***, Moody Press, 1983)

### Some questions to ponder – can you think of ways your leadership...

...could display more humility?

...can foster greater unity?

...needs to develop integrity?

Ruth Haley Barton in [Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership](#) writes...

*Strengthening the soul of our leadership is an invitation that begins, continues and ends with seeking God in the crucible of ministry. It is an invitation to stay connected with our own soul – that very private place where God’s Spirit and my spirit dwell together in union – and to lead from that place....Because we are experiencing ourselves to be deeply loved by God, we begin to recognize an inner freedom that is beyond what we ever thought possible. We can handle an enormous amount of success and failure without losing our identity.*

Here are 8 soul-strengthening principles from the book...

1. *Rather than leading from the unconscious patterns of the false self, I am leading from a self that is being transformed by my encounters with God in solitude and silence.*
2. *Rather than leading from frenetic busyness, I am leading at a measured pace, taking time to notice the burning bushes in my life.*
3. *Rather than leading from a place of overstimulation and exhaustion, I am discovering rhythms of work and rest, silence and word, stillness and action that God built into the universe for our well-being.*
4. *Rather than being subject to other people’s expectations and my inner compulsions, I am operating out of a deep sense of God’s call upon my life.*
5. *Rather than leading from a simplistic view of the spiritual life, I have an inside-out understanding of the shape of the spiritual journey that comes from having been faithful to my own journey.*
6. *Rather than arguing and fighting and trying to defend myself against every criticism and challenge to my leadership, I am regularly and routinely carrying the people I am leading into God’s presence and interceding on their behalf.*
7. *Rather than carrying the burdens of leadership alone and being derailed by isolation, I am opening my loneliness to God and to those with whom I can cultivate a healthy interdependence.*
8. *And rather than leading from a place of intellectual striving and human strategies, I am discovering with a few others how to be open to the gift of discernment so that we can do God’s will together.*