

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

The book of Joshua records for us the entrance of the people of Israel into the Promised Land. They had waited for years to enter that land, and it must have seemed to them as though it would never happen. But when God promises, God fulfills. He may not do what we are waiting for in our timeframe, but he does it nonetheless.

Our study of the book of Joshua for these last three weeks has been very timely for our church because we are steadily but surely moving toward our own promised land. I have learned a lot during this process. If you had asked me one year ago what it took to buy land and put up a building, I would have probably told you that you just do it. I had no idea there was such a thing as mineral rights that had to be purchased independently of the property. Neither did I have any idea there were so much red tape, so much waiting for government agencies to approve you for all kinds of things. I have received an education, and we are now moving through those things and moving toward the day in which we will break ground.

But, as important as it is, building a new building on our property is not the most important thing that we have to deal with. The most important thing we have to deal with is getting ready as a church to occupy the land that is before us, and that occupation means "change." Change is a word we have heard a lot about in recent days, and we will hear more about it in the days to come. That's because having new facilities will not make us the church we want to be. Becoming the church we want to be must begin internally. We must change from within if we are to change from without.

One of the changes we have been making in the past months up until the present time is that of a developing leadership structure. The leadership structure is the foundation that the house of the church sits on. The strength of the church and its capacity to do ministry will never be in a stronger or any bigger than its foundation.

I have been delighted in seeing the quality of leadership that God has brought into our church to help us to become what we need to be, and I believe that it is time for us to recognize some of that which has been done. It's time to recognize a few more men as elders. According to first Timothy 5:17, elders are to "direct the affairs of the church." According to first Peter chapter 4, they are shepherds of God's flock.

Important issues concerning elders

1. Elders are gifted for the task for which they have been appointed

The concept of spiritual gifts is not an uncommon one for any of us. I have preached on the subject many times, and we have had many classes which deal with the same. Elders are people who have a special giftedness to be able to do the job assigned to them.

Having those gifts does not make them any better than someone who does not have those gifts. It just means they are to serve in a certain position in the body of Christ.

2. Elders desire the task of shepherding

A few months ago, I was reading in first Timothy chapter 3 concerning the qualifications of an elder, and one verse spoke deeply to my heart.

The verse was first Timothy chapter 3:1, " Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task"

The thing that struck me so strongly was the fact that an elder has his heart set on doing the work of an overseer. He is not just someone who is willing to do the job. He desires to do the job. What does that mean? According to first Peter 4, he is to be a shepherd of God's flock. When the word shepherd was used in the first century, it would bring up many vivid memories and pictures to the people who lived in that time. Jesus used it to describe himself when he said he was the "good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep. It was this kind of relationship the shepherd of the first century had with his flock. He literally gave himself for it and would have died for it.

Elders are not Church bosses who are the big cheese in the church. Rather, they are humble servants who minister to the flock, and that desire to do so comes from God himself.

We have in our church numbers of men who are very wise, godly men, men who are great decision-makers, but not all of them desire to be shepherds just like all of them don't desire to be pastors or evangelists. That being the case, an elder is not chosen simply because he has a great deal of Bible knowledge or even because he is a wonderful, spiritual man. He is chosen because he has a special calling upon his life for that job.

3. God chooses elders

The old and New Testament provides many stories of how God personally chose his leaders. Jeremiah was not a leader because he applied for the job. David was not a leader because he got in good with the boss. Gideon did not become a leader because he was the most likely to succeed. People are chosen by God to become leaders.

Acts 1:23-25, "So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."

Acts 13:1-2, "¹In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod

the tetrarch) and Saul. ²While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

J. Oswald Sanders wrote the following in his classic book on spiritual leadership, "Spiritual leaders are not made by election or appointment of man or any combination of men, nor by conferences or synods. Only God can make them. Simply holding a position of importance, does not constitute one a leader. Spiritual leadership is a thing of the spirit and is conferred by God alone."

God appoints leaders. We, as a church, simply recognize what he has already done. In other words, when we ask someone to become an elder, we are not asking him to do something new. We are simply asking him if we can give him the title for what he is already doing.

THE ELDER'S POWER-INFLUENCE

Leadership is influence-nothing more, nothing less. Observe the life of Jesus Christ, and you will see this principle. The people were required to follow their religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, but no one had to follow Christ. And yet his influence was so great that people stopped following their appointed leaders and followed Christ to the place of death.

The same was true of the apostle Paul. Paul said in

1 Cor 11:1, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

No one had to follow Paul. They followed him because they saw him following Christ, and that influenced them.

True leadership cannot be appointed, or assigned. It must be earned, and that is especially true in the church. In businesses, bosses have leverage in the form of salary, benefits and perks. But in volunteer organizations, the only thing that works is influence. If you have no influence with people, then you will not be able to lead them.

1. A SPIRITUAL LEADER INFLUENCES PEOPLE BY HIS EXAMPLE

Paul said to the Thessalonian Christians in

1 Thess 1:7, "you yourselves became an example to all the Christians in Greece."

Far more is caught by following someone's example than will ever be taught by listening to his teaching. Paul gives us a picture of what a leader should be like in 1 Timothy.

1 Timothy 3:2-7, "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."

There are a number of questions that arise out of this passage.

a) How does the person behave in his home?

Regardless of the spiritual state or the choices of family members, how well do you reflect the character of Christ in your home?

b) How does the person respond to unfavorable circumstances?

When things don't go the way that he thought they would, how does he respond? Does he get angry? Does he blame someone else? Does he doubt God? True spiritual leaders do not overreact to negative situations.

c) Is he humble?

I heard about it pastor who was voted the most humble pastor in America. And the congregation gave him a medal that said, "to the most humble pastor in America." Then they took it away from him on Sunday because he wore it. Pride is one of those things that keep coming up over and over again in Scripture, and God's attitude toward it is always the same.

Proverbs 16:5, "The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished."

"Stay humble or stumble."

d) Is he respectable?

The word, "respectable," has to do with having a well-ordered life. The life of the spiritual leader should be ordered in such a way as to reflect the beauty and orderliness of God. Respect is very important. When you lose someone's respect, you have lost the ability to lead them.

e) Is he patient?

One of the first things faced true spiritual leader must learn is the fact is that God does not always work on our timetable. Many times we would like to see things move a lot

more quickly, but God does not have the same idea. That's when we have to continue trusting and continue waiting until God's perfect timing comes.

The spiritual leader must also be patient with other people. Madeline Rockwell wrote the following story for readers digest: my grandmother was a ball of fire, while grandpa was slow and deliberate. One night they were awakened by a commotion in the chicken house. Grandma sprang out of bed, ran to the chicken house and found the cause of the racket, a large black snake. Having nothing to dispatch it with, she clamped her bare foot down on its head. There she stood, until grandpa finally arrived, a good 15 minutes later. He was fully dressed, and even his pocket watch in place. "Well," he said cheerfully to my disheveled and enraged grandma, "if I'd known you had him, I wouldn't have hurried so." Sometimes people think they are hurrying when they are not, in the spiritual leader has to be patient.

J. Oswald Sanders said,

"The man who is impatient with weakness will be defective in his leadership. The evidence of our strength lies not in streaking ahead but in a willingness to adapt our stride to the slower pace of our weaker brethren. If we run too far ahead, we lose our power to influence."

f) How does he react to people who do him wrong?

Tom Landry, former head coach of the Dallas Cowboys once said,

"Leadership is a matter of having people look at you and gain confidence, seeing how you react."

Sometimes people will do things that will totally blow your mind. You pour your life and time into them, and then they do something that really hurts you. How do you respond? How did Jesus' respond when people did him wrong?

The scripture says in 1 Peter 2:23, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

The word "entrusted" is a banking term. It means that Jesus took all of the hurt, all of the wrong that was done against Him and deposited it with God the Father. That is exactly what we must do as spiritual leaders. If you allow yourself to be upset with people, it will ruin your leadership. You must give that hurt to God. He can handle it a lot better than you can.

2. A SPIRITUAL LEADER INFLUENCES PEOPLE BY HIS SERVICE TO THEM

People follow you because they see in your life a level of maturity that they respect and want, but they also follow you because you serve them and meet needs in their lives. Jesus did that.

One of the most astonishing pictures of Christ on earth is found in John 13 where He bent down and assumed the position of the lowest household slave by washing the feet of the disciples. He was a servant, and we are to follow in His steps.

The moment that you stop being an example, and the moment that you stop meeting people's needs, that is the moment people will stop following you, and you will cease to be a spiritual leader.

If you want to LEAD on the highest level, be willing to SERVE on the lowest.

Our response to our leadership

1. Pray for their continued strength

Remember, these men are not being asked to do something new. They are simply being asked to take a title that describes what they are already doing, and that title is not for them. It is for the sake of the Church.

2. Thank God that he has given us people who are willing to do one of the most difficult tasks on planet Earth

Being a spiritual leader in the local church is not a piece of cake. It is often very trying, very disappointing and very draining both physically, emotionally and spiritually.

3. Encourage our leadership

One of the greatest enemies we have is that of discouragement. Discouragement robs us of our passion. It takes away our joy and our motivation. It keeps us from being powerful for the Lord, and there is only one cure. When you receive blessing from our leaders, let them know that God has used them in your life. The encouragement you give them will empower them to continue doing what they are doing with the joy of the Lord.