

Leadership Qualities: Leadership Development

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Two women were walking down a street in New York City when they spotted a frog. The frog looked up and said, “I used to be a handsome, wealthy stockbroker, but I was turned into a frog. If one of you kisses me, I will be turned back into my original self. And I will be mighty grateful.”

One of the women stooped down, picked up the frog and placed him in her purse. The two friends walked on for a while, but the other finally got curious and said, “Aren’t you going to kiss the frog and turn him back to what he was?”

“Nope,” she replied. “I’d rather have a talking frog.”

That’s not how the story goes, is it? The woman is supposed to kiss the frog, unleashing a transformation process by which the young prince (or stockbroker) is liberated to be all that he can be. That’s how the story should go, but the truth is that many women would rather have a talking frog – and all the entertainment that might come with it – than a wealthy, prince of a guy – and all the headaches that come with him!

Likewise, many leaders would prefer to keep their followers the way they are rather than help them develop their own leadership skills and reach their full God-given potential. But that’s not leadership – at least not as Jesus modeled it. Jesus selected his followers very carefully, spending an entire night in prayer before he chose them (Luke 6:12-13). Then he poured himself into them for the next three-and-a-half years, teaching them privately and empowering them to do ministry. He wanted to be sure that when he left, they would carry on his work as leaders for others to follow.

Jesus on Leadership Development

Jesus came to earth to accomplish the will of the Father by giving his life as a ransom (Mark 10:45). On his way to the cross, he taught, performed miracles and demonstrated the love of the Father to thousands of people. But why did he choose disciples? He could have come, lived, taught, died, been raised and gone back to heaven without having to bother with 12 guys leaving their families behind, arguing over who's the greatest in the kingdom, whining about status and asking a lot of frustrating questions.

But God's plan from the start was to involve others in the work of bringing people into the kingdom. Jesus demonstrated a principle that C. Gene Wilkes has written about in his book *Jesus on Leadership*: "You will never be an effective leader until you include those you lead in what you do."¹ In fact, it is interesting that no person in the Bible comes to faith in Christ apart from the work of another human being. Even Saul of Tarsus, when he was confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, was sent to another person who would tell him what to do (Acts 9). Jesus could have told him what to do, but he did not. He involved Ananias in the conversion of Saul.

Wilkes continues:

Jesus seldom did ministry by himself. Jesus was Lord and Master and needed no one to help him. Yet no matter what he was doing, he ministered with his disciples nearby. He usually had at least three disciples with him wherever he went. By constantly having his closest followers near him, he showed how the best lessons came from the classroom of experience. In the sense that Jesus was all-powerful and could do whatever he wanted, he did not need a ministry team, but he built one so that his mission would continue when he returned to the Father.²

We see this clearly in Luke 10, as Jesus commissions 72 of his followers for ministry:

¹ C. Gene Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1998), p. 211.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

Luke 10:1-3

When Jesus commissioned them to go out in pairs, he knew that they would face hardship. After all, they departed without food, money or extra clothing (v. 4). Wisely, Jesus did not send them out alone; he sent them “two by two.” Not only did this satisfy the Old Testament ideal of confirmed witness (Deuteronomy 19:15), but it also met the practical need of each disciple for protection and encouragement. Jesus looked after his followers to the smallest detail.

As emissaries from Jesus, they were to offer a blessing wherever they went and accept whatever hospitality was offered to them. However, they were not to be pushy or go where they were unwelcome. If they encountered opposition, they were to go through the same ritual of wiping the dust off their feet as the 12 practiced (Luke 9:1-6).

When they returned, they were overjoyed with the success of their ministry tour. They were especially thrilled that even demonic forces were powerless before the authority they had been given by Jesus: “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” (v. 17). Jesus Himself affirmed their work when He said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (v. 18). Satan had been routed by the power of God as the message of the kingdom had been shared. How did this motley bunch of disciples meet with such success?

First, they were well-trained. They knew where to go and what to say. They even knew in advance how to deal with rejection. In fact, Jesus was constantly teaching his disciples, formally and informally through his own example. He instructed them about the kingdom of God (Matthew 13), his mission on earth (Mark 10:32-34) and their own attitudes about being his

followers (Luke 17:7-10). They had seen him deal with hostility and negative responses before. Jesus made sure that his followers were well-prepared.

Second, they had a clear vision: They were impelled by Jesus' urgent declaration that "The harvest is plentiful" (v. 2). Max DePree says that the first responsibility of a great leader is to define reality.³ That is precisely what Jesus did. Jesus painted a clear picture of what their mission would look like when it was complete: the harvest would be plentiful. And it was.

Not only did Jesus listen to their report, but he praised their efforts. And, more importantly, he praised *them*. He reminds them of their blessed position in history by saying, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (vv. 23-24). Think of the impact this must have had on Jesus' followers – many of whom certainly came from the "wrong side of the tracks." These oppressed people enjoyed something that made Old Testament kings and heroes green with envy.

Jesus mastered in leadership development. He trained leaders, tested them and then rewarded them. H.G. Wells wrote:

More than 1900 years later, a historian like myself, who doesn't even call himself a Christian, finds the picture centering irresistibly around the life and character of this most significant man.... The historian's test of an individual's greatness is "What did he leave to grow?" Did he start men to thinking along fresh lines with a vigor that persisted after him? By this test Jesus stands first.⁴

Leadership is not merely a cognitive grasping of concepts. Neither is it just a matter of developing skills to their full potential. For leadership to be passed on, it must be modeled. Leadership, like most things, is more *caught* than *taught*. By allowing the 12 to follow him

³ Max DePree, *Leadership Is an Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 9.

⁴ Quoted from *The Greatest Men in History* in Mark Link, S.J., *He Is the Still Point of the Turning World* (Chicago: Argus Communications, 1971), p. 111.

around for more than three years, Jesus was able to model leadership principles for them. He showed them what true greatness in the kingdom of God looked like. It looks like humility; it looks like service; it looks like Jesus himself.

Learning like Jesus

God has invested extraordinary potential in human beings, but in a fallen world there are many obstacles to the realization of these capabilities. The fact of the matter is that many of us are disappointed in ourselves, in our sinfulness and in our inability to do things the way we know they should be done. We are often bad parents, bad spouses, bad friends and bad neighbors. We do foolish things at work and make unwise decisions. We speak without thinking. We harbor resentment and withhold forgiveness. We don't pray enough. We watch too much television.

Pop psychologists would tell us that our disappointment is merely low self-esteem – a failure to accept ourselves as we are. They would tell us that the root of our problems lies in the unrealistic expectations we set for ourselves. After all, nobody's perfect. There's some truth to that, but it's not entirely accurate. The better answer lies in the fact that we are not the people God had in mind when he created us; we are not living the lives he created us to live. In many cases, we haven't set the bar too high for ourselves, we've settled for far less than our true potential.

The incarnation and earthly life of God's Son reveal a pattern for what human life before the fall was meant to be. Jesus, as the second Adam, models for us the full potential of a Spirit-filled life. He shows us what a life fully devoted to God's purposes could look like. We do not have to just shrug and accept the way we are; through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit,

true transformation, real life-change, is possible. This is what is behind Kierkegaard's wonderful prayer: "And now, Lord, with your help I shall become myself."⁵

In Hebrews, we find the astonishing truth that Jesus *developed* into the leader he was:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:7-10

This passage points to the mystery of the incarnation of the God-man and the manner in which Jesus "learned obedience from what he suffered" (v. 8). Luke tells us that "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). For 30 years he was preparing for his relatively brief public ministry. He developed intellectually ("in wisdom"), physically ("in stature"), spiritually ("in favor with God") and socially ("in favor with men"). In all things Jesus submitted to the Father's sovereign plan to ready him for the purpose for which he had been sent into the world.

Our Lord developed as a servant leader through personal discipline, through "reverent submission" (v. 7) and through pain and opposition. He viewed every obstacle which he encountered as something allowed by his Father to assist him in the fulfillment of his earthly mission, all the while focusing his thoughts beyond the externals to that ultimate mission: "I have come to do your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:5-7). This attitude of submission and radical obedience to God was key to his development as the spiritual leader and redeemer of humanity.

Jesus never invites us to do something he has not done for us first. We have a God who really engages in our condition and knows what it's like to be human, to be abused, to be

⁵ Soren Kierkegaard, *The Prayers of Kierkegaard*, ed. Perry LeFevre (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 147.

tempted, to be rejected and alone. He does not ask us to suffer without having suffered himself. He doesn't ask us to love unlovely people without having first loved us in our unlovely state. He does not ask us to serve others without having first served us.

Jesus was not born a fully developed adult; he was born a human baby. And a baby with the odds stacked against him. There was constant talk about the suspicious circumstances surrounding his birth. His mother was probably a teenager. His father was a blue collar laborer. He narrowly escaped being killed in his infancy. He spent his first years as a refugee in Egypt. When his family returned from Egypt, they settled in a backwater town called Nazareth – a town so small and insignificant that it does not make the list of 63 Galilean towns mentioned in the Talmud. His people were under Roman oppression. No one could accuse God of showing preferential treatment to his Son.

He had to learn to speak and write and walk. He had to learn how to be a leader. He had to grow up. This is what he invites us to when we surrender to him. With his help, we can grow up and be the men and women we were designed to be.

Growing Up

God has called us into being and is preparing us for a purpose. In light of this purpose, he sometimes assigns us to courses we would not have chosen as electives. The process of our preparation often seems slow and painful, but there is no painless way to create servant leaders who possess depth and character. One primary example of this is the Old Testament hero Joseph. As a young man, Joseph had dreams that seemed mysterious but would later be fulfilled in surprising ways. God had raised him up to deliver and provide for his family, but Joseph could never have predicted the tortuous paths by which the Lord would bring this about. Joseph endured rejection, misunderstanding and persecution, but the Lord was with him through it all.

He continued to trust and hope in the Lord despite the apparent hopelessness of his situation. Through this process of testing and trusting, Joseph was finally ready to take on the task for which he had been chosen. On one remarkable day, Joseph was transformed from prisoner to second-in-command in Egypt.

In the same way, God raised up other servants like Moses, David, Jeremiah and Paul. In each case a lengthy and sometimes painful process of character and personal development was involved before these people were ready to serve and lead others. This necessary preparation process is also the reason that new converts should never be placed in positions of spiritual leadership. In his instructions to Timothy concerning the appointment of overseers in the church, Paul wrote, “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6). Leaders must be taught and nurtured, and they should be allowed to grow into increasing spheres of responsibility.

Frederick Buechner tells us that every age has produced fairy tales.⁶ We want to know that there is something more besides the world as we experience it. We tell ourselves stories of other worlds where death is not the end and a reversal of fortunes is a possibility. But one facet of fairy tales is the idea that these other worlds are closer than we might think – just a walk in the woods away or a trip through the other side of our closet. And the crux of fairy tales is the transformation of the central characters: ugly ducklings turn into swans; frogs turn into princes; wooden puppets become real boys; neglected orphans become princesses. In the book *The Princess and Curdie*, one of the main characters has the magical ability of knowing from a single

⁶ Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977).

touch of someone's hand just what he or she is becoming.⁷ If all of these facets sound familiar, they should; they are all facets of the gospel. The only difference is the gospel is true!

In some fairy tales, the transformation is instantaneous – one kiss wakes up Sleeping Beauty. In most, however, the process is grueling, and the hero must endure peril and hardship before the transformation is complete. Like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly, the changes are holistic; not one part is left the same. And as the butterfly is struggling to free itself from its chrysalis, it is actually developing the strength it will need to fly. Any assistance will actually consign the butterfly to a certain death. In spiritual transformation, there are no short cuts to maturity. The hardships and struggles we endure during the transformation process will eventually provide us the strength we will need to accomplish the tasks our transformed nature will require.

Concentrate on Character

Where is a person who wants to be a leader to begin? Leaders are compelled to know so many things and do so much well. David groomed Solomon for leadership, and Israel enjoyed the successive reigns of these two great kings. The book of 1 Kings reveals David's focus as he, a great leader, worked to develop Solomon into another great leader:

When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

“I am about to go the way of all the earth,” he said. “So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: ‘If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.’”

1 Kings 2:1-4

⁷ George MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* (Baltimore: Puffin Books, 1976).

How's that for the first day on the job? The scope of the work itself was enormous, and David was a tough act to follow. Solomon was ready; David had developed him as a leader. The charge above is based upon the assumption that Solomon knew and honored God's "ways...his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements." There is no greater preparation for leadership than that. Leadership takes on many forms as an organization grows or downsizes, as its climate and environment change. What remains constant is the moral base of the leader, and this was the first issue that David addressed. Solomon was ethically ready.

Only at this point did David reveal to Solomon some of the specifics of his new role as king of Israel:

"Now you yourself know what Joab...did to me – what he did to the two commanders of Israel's armies.... He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle.... Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace.

"But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom.

"And remember, you have with you Shimei...who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord: 'I will not put you to death by the sword.' But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood.

1 Kings 2:5-9

Makes you wonder whether Solomon might have wished that the job of royal dishwasher was available! David left Solomon with some thorny, unresolved leadership situations, but notice that twice in these five verses David referred to his successor's wisdom. He asserted, "You will know what to do" (v. 9). David had invested himself in preparing Israel's next leader. Solomon had acquired a deep knowledge of God's Word and wisdom. In view of this foundation, it was

in essence immaterial what further preparation was needed. The new leader already possessed the basic credentials and stood prepared to learn.

Mentoring is Mandatory

Leadership development should be an ongoing process in our own lives as well as in the lives of those we seek to prepare. We should have multiple mentoring relationships. First, there are those who have gone before us who should mentor us. We are the leaders who will eventually succeed them. Then there are the people who will eventually replace us in our leadership role. We should reach out and intentionally mentor them. Mentoring relationships don't just happen. Neither can they be forced. Mentoring is an intentional two-way street.

If we're going to effectively develop the leadership abilities of others, we must provide them with more than training and instruction. We need to "mentor" them. In her book *Women to Women*, Sheila R. Staley points out:

[T]he word "mentor" originated in Greek legend, where Mentor was the wise and trusted counselor to whom Odysseus entrusted the education of his son. The mentor nurtures, supports, and provides wise counsel. She helps her protégé set and realize goals. For the Christian woman, these goals are established and bathed in prayer. Growth emerges out of practical experiences, the mentor serving as a wise advisor.⁸

The apostle Paul understood the crucial role of mentoring in leadership development. He reminded the Thessalonians that he had done more for them than impart spiritual truth. Paul had internalized his beliefs to such an extent that those who followed in his steps could be confident that they were following Christ. He told them,

[O]ur gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of

⁸ Novella Carter and Matthew Parker, ed., *Women to Women* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/The Institute for Black Family Development, 1996), p. 76.

severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 1:5-6

It is important to note that the chain didn't end with the Thessalonians. After following Paul, they became a "model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" (v. 7). The followers became leaders. Those who had been mentored became mentors to others.

Until fairly recently, mentoring was a part of the fabric of people's everyday lives. Mentoring is how most people were trained and developed in business and life. A young man would be apprenticed for years to a master craftsman in order to learn the trade. Life knowledge was passed on in the context of a relationship, the opening up of one life to another. Mentoring may be a buzz word of the last decade, but its roots are ancient.

A good mentor will walk with you through life, be a true brother or sister, challenge your thinking and faith, caution you when appropriate and share what he or she has learned that might help you. This is the idea behind the Bible's admonition, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

Not only does a mentor challenge, but a mentor supports and encourages as well. The Bible says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). A mentor puts his or her arm around you to help you make it through those times when you doubt you can take another step – an absolute necessity on the road to becoming a leader.