

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY of LEADERSHIP



1

INTRODUCTION

The corporate world seems to be infatuated with the concept of effective leadership. It is widely believed that if any organization wants to be successful, effective leadership is the key. That's why there are so many books, seminars, articles, etc. on how to be an effective leader. But what about leadership in a local church? Is effective leadership vital in that context? Is human leadership even a biblical concept? If so, what makes a leader and what should leaders strive for?

Over the course of this study, we will seek to answer these questions (and others) going to God's Word for our answers. We believe strongly that God's word is our guide in all things, especially as it pertains to the local church.

2

IS HUMAN LEADERSHIP BIBLICAL?

This is the first logical question to ask. Before we can define leadership or determine success for leadership, we must first know if this is even a biblical paradigm.

Let's start at the very beginning.

READ Genesis 1:28-29

🔪 What did God say to Adam in the garden?

It doesn't take long to see God giving rule to man over all His creation. And when God gave Adam a wife, he was also to be her leader. That's why, after the fall, God states that one result of sin would be Eve's desire to take the leadership. There is ample evidence that Adam, the very first man, was called to be a leader.

And it continues from there. When God wants to save a remnant of His people from the flood, the Bible records, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8). He used Noah to lead a people into the ark and through the flood.

As you simply peruse the rest of the Old Testament, many leaders come to the surface. Abraham, Joseph, Joshua, Saul, Samuel, Elijah, David, Nehemiah, Isaiah...and we could go on and on.

This pattern doesn't change in the New Testament. John the Baptist, Peter, James, Paul...human leaders are used over and over again. In fact, we can say that THE way God chooses to lead people here on earth is through human leadership!

But is the same true of the local church today?

READ Acts 14:23.

- ① What did Paul and Barnabas do before they left a church they planted?

READ Titus 1:5

- ① What did Paul instruct Titus to do?

What does Paul give to us in 1 Timothy 3:1-7?

What does the author of Hebrews say to the church in Hebrews 13:17?

It is clear from God's word that His plan for His people from the beginning to now is to use human leadership to guide them to godliness.

So, "Is human leadership even biblical?"

The answer is a resounding "YES!"

3 WHAT DO LEADERS DO

If God uses leaders, the next logical question, then, is how? What do we see leaders doing in the word of God?

This may not be as easy to answer as it may seem since God uses all kinds of men to lead in all sorts of circumstances. However, we can find a few key elements of leadership that seem to be common in most, if not all, godly, effective leaders in the Bible.

A. EFFECTIVE LEADERS FOLLOW GOD

It has been said that to be a good leader, one must first be a good follower, and that is certainly true of the kind of leadership God uses.

Paul said, “Follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). In giving the qualifications for elders, Paul lines out clearly that these men are to be godly men who love God and their families well.

Character and effective church leadership go hand in hand.

Al Mohler, president of Southern Seminary and author of the book, “The Conviction to Lead” said; “Character is indispensable to credibility, and credibility is essential to leadership.”

He went on to say, “Leaders of character produce organizations of character because character, like conviction, is infectious. Followers are drawn to those whose character attracts them as something they want for themselves.”

We are all too familiar with the leader who was one person in front of others, but someone different behind closed doors. And though it’s certainly true that no human leader is perfect, any leader who seeks to be effective for God must first be close to Him.

B. EFFECTIVE LEADERS LEAD

A leader must, by definition, lead! But where are biblical leaders leading others to? What’s the destination of godly leadership?

1. They lead to God’s glory!

Though we could focus on many leaders in the Bible, let’s take moment to consider Nehemiah. God used his leadership effectively to build the wall in Jerusalem and to re-ignite God’s people to live for HIM again.

But why?

In the first chapter of the book that bears his name, a report comes to Nehemiah concerning the people of Israel. And it's not good. One of his brothers tells him,

“The remnant there in the province who had survived the excise is in great trouble and shame. The wall in Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are destroyed by fire (Neh. 1:3 ESV).”

This breaks Nehemiah. He weeps and mourns, and eventually offers a passionate prayer to God. He reminds God that He promised mercy on His people if they would turn back to Him. And there was a reason; “to make My Name dwell there.” In the eyes of Nehemiah, God's name, His reputation, and His glory was at stake! And he risked much and gave much so that God's name might dwell in Jerusalem.

Godly leaders are passionate about God's fame. They are motivated by God's glory more than anything else. And therefore, the key destination they lead to is a place of more glory to God!

2. They lead to Christ-likeness

Paul, another great leader in the Bible, gave instruction to the leaders at the church in Ephesus. He taught them that God gave leaders for a purpose!

READ Ephesians 4:11-13

- 🔪 According to verse 13, what was the end goal of church leadership?

The end goal of church leadership is the body growing to become more like JESUS! In fact, Paul told the church in Galatia in Galatians 4:19

“my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!”

This should not be surprising to us! If the mission of the church is discipleship and if discipleship is growing to be more like Jesus, than it makes perfect sense that godly leaders are to lead others to Christ-likeness.

4

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE A LEADER?

Are you a leader? How does a person know if he/she is called to be a leader?

Three key elements will be present if leadership is God’s call in your life.

A. GOD’S DESIGN

First, God has to design you with the right personality and abilities to be a leader! Leadership is not the only holy calling of God! He designs people to fulfill different roles in the body of Christ (Romans 12:3-8) and leadership is just one kind of service. But whatever He has called you to, He has also designed you to effectively serve in that role!

Moses argued with God about this in Exodus 4. God reminded him in Exodus 4:11-12

“Then the Lord said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”

God had called Moses to the task of leadership and since He did, He also designed Moses with all the abilities necessary!

Now, it's important to note that God uses all kinds of men to lead His people, not just ONE personality type.

-Paul was a prophet - "God said!"

-Barnabas was a priest - connecting people with others, loving people well.

-Peter was zealous - Often talking first and thinking later!

-David was a military genius, administrator, musician and poet.

But, if God has called you to lead, He has designed you for that task. And even if some qualities of an effective leaders do not come naturally to you, God can grow you to be the kind of leader He's called you to be. It's not so much that God calls the qualified, but more that He qualifies the called!

B. MAN'S DESIRE

Paul had appointed Timothy to develop and implement leaders in the churches. He says something important to him in chapter 3 of 1 Timothy.

READ 1 Timothy 3:1

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

🗒 According to this verse, is it wrong to want to be a leader?

🗒 What does God call pastoral leadership in this verse?

This verse reveals a key truth. There are men who will desire leadership and that is not a bad thing! In fact, God might be giving you that desire!

Do you hate the idea of leading? You might not be called to leadership! Are you eager to lead people to more glory and more Christ-likeness? It's not a bad thing do desire that! And it might indicate God's calling on your life.

C. GOD'S APPOINTMENT

But ultimately, you will not be a leader unless God opens the doors for you to step into that role.

Paul and Barnabas were serving faithfully in Antioch when God gave the church instruction;

Acts 13:2-3

"While 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." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

There is an important order here:

- 1) Paul and Barnabas were already faithfully serving the church in Antioch.
- 2) The Holy Spirit determined they were called into greater leadership and
- 3) He used the Church to send them out.

They were designed for leadership. They desired it. But it wasn't until the Holy Spirit, through the church, opened the doors that they were placed in that position.

There are men who feel they are gifted and have that desire but until God opens the doors, they must serve faithfully, and wait for God to open the doors for them.

5

WHAT IS “SUCCESS” IN LEADERSHIP?

How do we know if a leader is successful or not? How do we determine if our leadership is successful?

First, let's address this:

A. WHAT SUCCESS IS NOT

If one were to ask the “world” what successful leadership is, no doubt the answer would come in the form of some kind of outcome.

- When more people are following, you are a success.
- When you are bringing in more money, you are a success.
- When there are more tangible results, you are a success.

And this idea is massively prevalent in the church! Ask anybody to name a successful pastor and no doubt they will name a leader with a large congregation and a large following. In fact, one of the most common questions pastors are asked is, “How big is your church now?” If the pastor gives a larger number, he is viewed as more successful. If the number is smaller, then he must be failing in some way.

This is not God's view.

READ Matthew 25:14-30

 What were the different results of men's investments?

 How did the master praise the first two servants?

☞ Was there a different praise for the one who had greater numeric success?

☞ What would be the key determination of success from this passage?

Jesus pointed out that more than the result of the men's work was their faithful trust in the Master!

☞ How might that apply to church leadership?

In this text, God identifies faithfulness as a key element of success, regardless of the numeric outcome of the investment.

And as you look at the rest of Scripture, especially those directed at pastors and church leaders, what God focuses on is not outcomes, but on character.

READ 1 Timothy 6:11

☞ What is the man of God to pursue?

How many of these pursuits are based on numeric outcomes?

READ 1 Timothy 3:1-12

- ① How many of these qualification are based on numeric outcomes?

God is after the character of the leader and a successful leader is one leading and living like Jesus.

This is profound and it changes the very foundational motivation for leadership.

If a leader owns this truth...

...he will not lead to make a name for himself

...he will not lead to feel more significant

...he will not lead to look good to other leaders

...he will not lead at the expense of others

...he will not lead and neglect the loving of his family

But the leader will lead in order to please Jesus and lead others to do the same.

- ① What might be a wrong motivation you could be tempted by?

- ① How can you keep the right success in leadership in front of you?

6

CONCLUSION

Leadership is a wonderful privilege and a weighty responsibility. But when God calls, leaders step up and show the way toward godliness. They help people move from where they are to where they need to be. And in so doing, they fulfill the great commission as they make disciples for God's glory!

Harvest Bible Chapel
Fort Wayne, IN
www.harvestfortwayne.org