



Spiritual Leadership in the Family

Fall, 2010 – Kettering Church of Christ

Sunday AM Study

LESSON 2 - FOUR CORNERSTONES OF FAMILY SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

James MacGregor Burns has written, “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.” If you are a regular visitor to some of the national booksellers that are in your area, you have most likely seen a large display of books on leadership. When doing research for this workbook, I conducted a broad search online and found hundreds of resources that are available, ranging from titles that have been recently published to ones that are over a century old. Many of these books seek to define leadership and then offer practical instruction on how to become a leader. With all the help and advice that is available, it is amazing that so many feel like they know so little about leadership. Knowing about the necessary principles to become an effective leader is of ultimate importance. Without a clear understanding of their role, leaders are destined to fail.

Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.

What is a spiritual leader?

“Leadership is like the Abominable Snowman, whose footprints are everywhere but who is nowhere to be seen.”¹ In studying leadership, one can find many varying definitions. It has been said, “(There are) almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.”² When studying leadership, we know there are general principles that are connected to secular and spiritual leadership. For this study, we

¹ Bennis, W. G. & Nanus, B. (1997). *Leaders : Strategies for taking charge*. New York: HarperBusiness.

² Stogdill, R. M. (1974). *Handbook of leadership; a survey of theory and research*. New York, Free Press.

wish to narrow our focus to that of the spiritual. Spiritual leadership has some important components that must be implemented for success. The spiritual leader always takes God and His purposes into account. Before going on to build a good definition of what spiritual leadership is, it is important to understand what it is not.

Spiritual leadership is not:

Spiritual Leadership *is not:* Position Knowledge Management

Position inside the family. Max Dawson³ observes,

“This is the most common myth about leadership - that if a person is given a position, that automatically makes that person a leader.” Perhaps the best example of this comes to us from the Old Testament. Saul was chosen by God to be the first king of Israel. Rather than trust God to lead them, Israel wanted a king that increased their stature with the nations around them. They wanted a national army and the magic and splendor of a monarchy. Their desire came with a heavy price.⁴ Saul was handsome, strong physically, passionate, and a man’s man. But he was not a spiritual leader. In fact, he was insecure and foolish. He made several rash decisions that later had to be rescinded. He was prone to violent temper tantrums, and did not depend on God. Just because he occupied a leadership position, did not make him a spiritual leader. “It’s not the position that makes the leader, it’s the leader that makes the position.”⁵

The possession of knowledge. Some individuals have dedicated themselves to the pursuit of biblical knowledge. I have always been impressed with those who have an ability to memorize Scripture (perhaps this is because I have such a difficult time doing it). But, the simple possession of knowledge of biblical facts and doctrines does not a leader make. Christianity is much more than just an academic pursuit. Biblical IQ does not always equate to leadership. It is the application of and day to day execution of biblical principles that makes a leader. In his epistle, John wrote:

³ Dawson (2010). *Kingdom leaders*. Temple Terrace: Florida College Press.

⁴ See 1 Samuel 8.10-18 for Samuel’s warning about establishing a monarchy.

⁵ Stanley Huffy as quoted in: Maxwell (2007). *The 21 irrefutable laws of leadership: Follow them and people will follow you* (10th Anniversary ed.). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Spiritual Leadership

involves:
Influence
Accountability
to God

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

1 John 3.18

The ability to manage the family. Just because a person has an ability to manage people does not automatically guarantee spiritual leadership. John Maxwell⁶ has written, “Managers can maintain direction, but they can’t change it. To move people in a new direction, you need influence.” I am certain that you have seen effective managers in the secular world whose moral character should not be emulated. Just because they were an effective manager, did not mean they were a leader worth following. Spiritual leadership involves much more than managing and achieving goals. A person may be able to accomplish a large number of goals and still be unsuccessful in glorifying God and making a difference in the kingdom.

It should be very clear that in and of themselves, these things do not make a leader. When we speak of spiritual leadership, we are talking about some essential characteristics that cannot be left out. We see that....

Spiritual leadership involves:

An ability to influence persons to God. Oswald Sanders⁷ writes plainly “leadership is influence, the ability of one person to influence others.” He goes on to say, “leaders who make no difference in their followers’ lives are not actually leaders.” I believe Sanders and Maxwell have it exactly right. Leadership *is* influence. But, let’s take it a step higher. Spiritual leadership involves the ability to influence people toward God, to have a heightened awareness of their relationship with Christ. This is exactly what Robert Clinton⁸ has written, “The central task of leadership is influencing God’s people toward God’s purposes.”

⁶ Maxwell (2005, September 9). Leadership is influence: Nothing more, nothing less. *Building church leaders* [Web page]. Retrieved September 2, 2010, from <http://www.buildingchurchleaders.com/articles/2005/090905.html>

⁷ Sanders (2007). *Spiritual leadership* (reprint ed.). Chicago: Moody.

⁸ Clinton, J. R. (1988). *The making of a leader*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress.

An ability to achieve results. In the final assessment, leadership is ultimately measured by the results. Can a person inspire those he leads to dedicated service to God? If those who are under a person's leadership do not progress spiritually, how effective of a leader is he? Obviously, there are some who refuse to respond to spiritual leadership. But, when evaluating the effectiveness of a leader, that should be the exception and not the norm.

I believe one of the best definitions of spiritual leadership has been written by Henry and Richard Blackaby⁹:

Spiritual leadership is moving people on to God's agenda.

The goal is to take individuals inside the family and move them from following their own agenda to that of pursuing God's purposes.

For the remainder of this lesson, I would like to emphasize four points they make in their book to help us better understand what spiritual leadership is. I believe these are four cornerstones, four principles, that are immovable and absolutely essential. Without them, a person will never succeed in being an effective spiritual leader.

The spiritual leader's task is to move people from where they are to where God wants them to be.

Earlier, we looked at some definitions of leadership that stress the importance of influence. Here is influence in action.

Remember Maxwell's quote from earlier, "...To move people in a new direction, you need influence." The goal is to take individuals inside the family and move them from following their own agenda to that of pursuing God's purposes. This means that attitudes and behaviors will need to be changed,

following the biblical example. One of the best passages that illustrates the changed life and conduct of the Christian is found in Colossians:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another,

⁹ Blackaby & Blackaby (2001). *Spiritual leadership: Moving people on to god's agenda*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman.

forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Colossians 3.12-14

Who can forget Paul's writing where he speaks of the need for transformation?

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12.2

Simply put, the spiritual leader recognizes his mission (spiritual transformation) and plays a "hands on" role in the process. The spiritual leader works to accomplish this task through persuasion, consistent discipline, encouragement, and *most importantly*, example. Most often, when spiritual leaders have done their job, those inside their family will have encountered God and obeyed His will.

Spiritual leaders depend on God's word.

When looking at Scripture, we find that God's leaders were dedicated to following the revealed pattern for guidance and assurance. David is a great example. He wrote,

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.

Psalms 119.97

In beginning his leadership role over the fledgling nation of Israel, God instructed Joshua to stay inside His word.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Joshua 1.8

Before departing this life, Paul instructed his son in the faith, Timothy:

A spiritual leader's religion is never just confined to an activity inside the church building for three hours on Sunday and an hour on Wednesday.

What are some things spiritual leaders can do to better focus on their responsibility?

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

1 Timothy 4.13, 15

Later, Paul writes,

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2.15

In a busy world full of busy lives, spiritual leaders schedule time to learn about God. But, this goes above and beyond mere attendance at worship services and Bible classes. It involves a personal devotion to gaining a deeper knowledge of God through the Scriptures. A spiritual leader's religion is never just confined to an activity inside the church building for three hours on Sunday and an hour on Wednesday. There should be regular devotion to reading. Observe the teaching of the Psalmist:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Psalms 1.1-3

Spiritual leaders take responsibility for themselves and their family.

They understand they are accountable to God for the way they lead. They understand there are no excuses. They approach their role with an attitude of sobriety. When assuming the

role of leadership over Israel, God expected Joshua to take his role seriously. Focus was required:

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

Joshua 1.7

Many fathers/husbands develop aggressive goals for career and life, then they pray and ask God to join them in their personal agenda. Some are so busy pursuing their personal agenda that they have forgotten God's.

Spiritual leaders work from God's agenda.

"The greatest obstacle to effective spiritual leadership is people pursuing their own agendas rather than seeking God's will" (ibid). Many fathers have suffered greatly in their leadership role because they have not fully surrendered to God and His purposes. In many households today, the wife is forced into the role of the spiritual mentor and guide of the family because the father has "checked out" on his responsibility. I know many fathers/husbands who have the best of intentions, but never follow through. Others are just lazy.

If a family is to be led in the proper direction, the husband/father *must surrender himself fully to God*. God must become first in all things. In speaking about the ministry of Jesus, John the Baptist once said, "He must increase. I must decrease."¹⁰ What John said must be true of us. Christ and His ways must increase while our own personal agenda must decrease. Paul's writing comes to mind:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2.20

God's desire is not to advance a person's personal dreams and build their portfolio. Many fathers/husbands develop aggressive goals for career and life, then they pray and ask God to join them in their personal agenda. Some are so busy pursuing their personal agenda

¹⁰ John 3.30

that they have forgotten God's. "God's purpose is to turn His people away from their self-centeredness and their sinful desires and to draw them into a relationship with Himself. Spiritual leaders seek God's will...then they marshal their people to pursue God's plan." (ibid)

It is incumbent on husbands and fathers to understand God's will for them and for their family. They make a diligent effort to move members of the family off their own agendas and on to God's.

In our next lesson, we will take a detailed look at the Perfect model of a spiritual leader: Jesus Christ. His example of self sacrifice and love for the Father is a perfect pattern to follow...*in any generation.*

Questions:

1. Besides position, knowledge, and management, can you think of other characteristics that in and of themselves do not make a spiritual leader? What are they?
2. Besides influence and results (accountability to God) can you think of other characteristics that go in to the making of a spiritual leader? What are they?
3. How essential is influence to spiritual leadership? To what/whom does this leader influence others toward?
4. What is the mission of the spiritual leader?

5. How is this accomplished?

6. Spiritual leadership requires focus. What are some common distractions in today's society that keep fathers/husbands from taking their role seriously?

7. What keeps a person off of God's agenda?

8. Who is the perfect example of spiritual leadership?

9. Today's lesson on spiritual leadership has helped me by: