

LEADERSHIP 4

LEADING OURSELVES

My toughest leadership challenge is myself. I have nothing to offer my team if I am not sorted out internally. *(Bill Hybels)*

A reporter once asked D L Moody which people gave him the most trouble. He replied, 'I've had more trouble with D L Moody than with any person alive.'

Bill Hybels recommends that leadership of ourselves should occupy 50% of our time and the best of our ability.

The Apostle Paul (Acts 20:28) urges the Ephesian elders to look after **themselves** first and then the flock of God for whom they have responsibility. If we want to be remotely effective in leading others we have to lead ourselves first.

In reading the lives of great men, I find that the first victory they won was over themselves...self-discipline with all of them came first. *(Harry S Trueman)*

In the Film *The Mask of Zorro*, the young Zorro has to submit to intense character training and self-discipline, mastering his own emotions and inner life before he is equipped to contemplate embarking upon his mission.

'Nobody - I mean nobody - can do the work of self-leadership for us. Every leader has to do this work alone, and it isn't easy. In fact, because it's such tough work most leaders avoid it. We would rather try to inspire or control the behaviour of others than face the rigorous work of self reflection and inner growth.' *(Bill Hybels)*

As we examine the life and teaching of the Apostle Paul we see that self-leadership has implications in at least four areas of our lives. These are all interrelated. Success in each one facilitates success in the others.

1. Personal Holiness

Romans 12:1

Ephesians 4:1

2 Corinthians 7:1

More is expected from those to whom much has been entrusted. Leaders lead primarily by example. We should aim to set an example in Holy living, inspiring others to walk the same way.

A Person who cultivates inappropriate desires is not at home in the Kingdom of God.
- Dallas Willard

Growing in Holiness is achieved by recognising those areas of our lives where we fail God, where we allow sin to get a hold and ruthlessly applying ourselves to putting things in order. It involves recognising ways in which the world exercises a negative pull upon us, dulling our spiritual effectiveness (1 Tim 6:6-12).

Paul often uses the imagery of training for athletic contests in order to impress upon us the importance of making a conscious effort to work at problem areas in our own lives. John Maxwell offers the following strategy for growth in personal holiness and in increasing our effectiveness for God (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), reminding us that 'Discipline is the choice of achieving what you really want by doing things you don't really want to do!'

GROWING IN SELF DISCIPLINE
A SMALL PLAN THAT WILL MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE!

1. List five areas in your life that lack discipline.
2. Place them in your order of priority for conquering them.
3. Take them on, one at a time.
4. Get hold of resources, such as books or tapes, that will give you instruction and motivation to conquer each area.
5. Ask a person who models the trait you want to possess to hold you accountable for it.
6. Spend fifteen minutes each morning getting focused in order to get control of this weak area in your life.
7. Do a five minute check-up on yourself at midday.
8. Take five minutes in the evening to evaluate your progress.
9. Allow sixty days to work on one area before you go to the next.
10. Celebrate with the one who holds you accountable as you show continued success.

We do well to note that much of the New Testament's teaching on holiness has to do with how we conduct ourselves in relation to others. Our relationships with those closest to us and our impact upon them indicate the true level of our own spirituality.

The first step in God's curriculum is bringing the disciple to behold the loveliness of God in himself, in Jesus, and in his personal care of us. The second step must go hand in hand with this.

This is the breaking of patterns of wrongdoing and evil that govern our lives because of our long habituation to a world alienated from God. We must learn to recognise these habitual patterns for what they are and escape from their grasp. In fact, the patterns of wrongdoing that govern human life outside the kingdom are usually quite weak, even ridiculous. They are simply our habits, our largely automatic responses of thought, feeling and action.

It is primarily in the body that work must be done to replace wrong habits with automatic responses that flow with the kingdom of Jesus and sustain themselves from power. Reliance upon what the Spirit does to us or in us, as indispensable as this truly is, will not by itself transform character in all its depths. The action of the Spirit must be accompanied by our response, which cannot be carried out by anyone other than ourselves. (Dallas Willard – The Divine Conspiracy)

We are often most vulnerable to succumbing to temptation or to 'losing it' when we are tired, hungry or hurt.

Jesus knew that we cannot keep the law by trying to keep the law. To succeed in keeping the law one must aim at something other and something more. One must aim to become the kind of person from whom the deeds of the law naturally flow. This is the most crucial thing to remember if we would understand Jesus' picture of the Kingdom heart given in the Sermon on the Mount – Dallas Willard

2. Living a Balanced Life

Phil 4: 12-13

James Lawrence (*Growing Leaders*) suggests that the different areas of our lives could be measured by different gauges, just as e.g. the speed of a car is measured. He asks us to imagine gauges to measure how well we are being resourced spiritually, intellectually, physically, relationally and emotionally. He warns us to beware of spending too long in the 'Red Zone' in any one of these areas i.e. spending ourselves beyond our level of resourcing.

As well as making sure that we are well resourced in all of these areas we need to ensure that we are not putting ourselves under wrong pressure. Prioritising in each of these key areas is a vital discipline.

The hardest leadership challenge for most of us will be...how to invest our one life with the many competing demands there are for our time, energy and talents... If we were to identify the three or four things that matter most to us what would they be? Are these really receiving the care, time and attention we want to give them? *(James Lawrence)*

The greatest incentive to saying 'no' is having an even greater 'yes' burning within you. *(Stephen Covey)*

EXERCISE

Take a quick look at the 5 gauges measuring the different aspects of your life.

Are you ticking over well in these areas?

Are you living too much in the red zone in any of these areas?

What do you need to do to rectify this?

Get into pairs and talk it over.

3. Dealing with unresolved issues

2 Corinthians 12: 7-10

A leader can never take others further than they have gone themselves, for no-one can travel without unless he or she has travelled within. *(John Maxwell)*

Our effectiveness in leadership will always be adversely affected by unresolved issues.

- Open wounds, when touched, will lead us to react out of hurt and may lead to bitterness and spiritual dullness.
- We will often seek to compensate for emotional need/weakness and act in such a way as to have our own emotional needs met.
- Holding on to fears will limit our capacity to exercise faith and lead to spiritual disability

Recognising the things which are going on within us and then allowing God to deal with them is a vital step towards more effective leadership. There is no shame in acknowledging weakness; however, it is both foolish and irresponsible simply to try and cover up areas of need. God longs to sort them out in us. His goal is to present everyone mature in Christ (Col 1:28).

Leaders must be able to forgive themselves. Our ability to lead is directly proportional to our ability to forgive ourselves and risk failure again. If our actions are circumscribed by fear of failure we cannot lead. Failure must be forgiven and learned from.

4. Paying attention to our relationship with God

'The soul will bring forth fruit exactly in the measure in which the inner life is developed in it. if there is no inner life, however great may be the zeal, the high intention, the hard work, no fruit will come forth.' (*Charles de Foucauld*)

The desperate need to day is not for a greater number of intelligent or gifted people, but for deep people. Need for spiritual disciplines which are means of appropriating or growing toward the life that God graciously offers. Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder but of training wisely. Spiritual disciplines are the training manual for the marathon of running the race of Christian discipleship with our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. (*Richard Foster*)

Phil 3:12-15

Eph 1:17-20

Eph 4:13-16

Making use of the classic spiritual disciplines:

- Prayer; time alone with God

A disciple is simply someone who has decided to be with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is. (Dallas Willard)

- Bible meditation; allowing the full truth of Scripture to wash over us
- Fasting; laying aside the things which distract us from experiencing God's immediacy

The purpose of fasting is never explicitly stated in Scripture, but its connection to penitence, mourning, and supplication suggests a self-denial that opens one to God and to the immaterial aspects of life. Inasmuch as food and drink typify life in the flesh and all its demands and satisfactions, their absence or rejection speaks to the reality of a higher dimension, one in which the things of the spirit predominate. The theology of fasting, then, is a theology of priorities in which believers are given the opportunity to express themselves in an undivided and intensive devotion to the Lord and to the concerns of the spiritual life. (*Eugene Merrill*)

- Solitude; creating space and time for stillness

In doing so, we are following closely in the footsteps of Jesus (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, Mark 6:46 etc.) These are not ends in themselves, but rather tools by which we develop our sense of closeness to God and heighten our sensitivity to his voice (cf. Psalm 73).

To put off the old person and put on the new we need to follow Jesus into the activities he engaged in to nurture his own life in relation to the Father. It was an important day in my own life when at last I understood that if he needed 40 days in the wilderness at one point, I very likely could use 3 or 4!

The cure for too much to do is solitude and silence, for there you find you are safely more than what you do. The cure for loneliness is solitude and silence, for there you learn you are never alone. It leads to an increased sense of who you are. The harassing feeling of 'have to' largely comes from the vacuum in your soul where you ought to be at home with your Father in his Kingdom. (Willard)

Furthermore, we begin to develop a godly mindset whereby we think in God's way and see all situations from his perspective. One of the most important qualities of a leader is that of being able to help others to reimagine their own lives and life situations in the light of God's truth. This can only be done by those who have the mind of Christ.

We need to understand that what simply occupies our mind very largely governs what we do. It sets the emotional tone out of which our actions flow, and it projects the possible courses of action available to us. Of all the things we do, we have more freedom with respect to what we will think of, where we place our mind than anything else. The deepest revelation of our character is what we choose to dwell on in thought, what constantly occupies our mind. (Dallas Willard)

Romans 12:2

Ephesians 1:17-20

Colossians 3:1-4

EXERCISE

In pairs or threes,

- Talk about the ways in which you have been helped by practising any of the spiritual disciplines mentioned above. What are the things which most help you progress in your own intimacy with God?
- Are there ways in which you would like to grow in these areas, new disciplines you might take on or incorporate into your own life? What resolutions do you think God is calling you to make in terms of developing your relationship with Him?
- Pray for one another asking God to enable us in these areas.

The best gift you can give your church as a leader is a healthy, energised fully surrendered and focused self. Only you can make that happen! (*Bill Hybels*)

Ian Parkinson, April 07

PROJECT

Work through the following list of leadership questions noting any answers which reveal that you are less than satisfied with some area of your life. List these areas in order of priority and begin to work on them, possibly using John Maxwell's tool set out above. This exercise can be repeated regularly. It should give us an agenda for personal growth which will occupy a good deal of time and effort!

- Is my calling sure (Acts 20:24)
- Is My Vision clear
- Is my Passion hot?
- Am I developing my gifts? God is going to hold me accountable for the stewardship I have exercised of what he has entrusted to me.
- Is my character submitted to Christ?
- Is my pride subdued? (1 Peter 5:5) Do we want opposition from God as we choose to lead, or his grace and favour?
- Are Interior issues undermining my leadership?
- Am I overcoming fear?
- Do I give in to pressure?
- Is My Pace sustainable?
- Do I manage my time well?
- Is My love for God and for people increasing? If people are God's greatest treasure then they ought to be our greatest treasure too. Our hearts ought to be overflowing with love for them. Church work ought to be, at its core, the work of loving people like God loves them. What good does it do to be a Christian leader if my skills, insights, decisions and my energy don't flow from a deep love for God and for other people?
- Am I leading with a servant heart?
- Do I model what I teach?
- Am I teachable and accountable?
- Do I listen well?
- Do I keep my promises?
- Do I make enough space for prayer?
- Do I study the Bible for me, as opposed to studying it to teach others?
- Is my family/those closest to me happy?
- Am I ministering grace?
- Am I walking in integrity?
- Am I living in the power of the Spirit?
- Am I willing to take risks?
- Am I willing to make sacrifices?

Lay before God your calling, vision, passion, gifts, character, pride, fears, interior issues etc. Let God reveal truth about your life. Then take whatever steps you need to become proficient at the single most important aspect of leadership : self-leadership.

Ian Parkinson, April 07