

Gideon

by T. Austin-Sparks

A true leader must have a spirit of responsibility, humility, and a willingness to submit to God's will, as exemplified by the life of Gideon.

Scripture: Judges 6:8-36

Topics: "Leadership", "Responsibility"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the qualities of true leadership through the story of Gideon in Judges 6, emphasizing that effective leaders possess a spirit of responsibility, humility, and a strong moral foundation at home. Gideon's rise to leadership was marked by his selfless actions in secret, his acknowledgment of his own inadequacies, and his commitment to addressing the issues within his own household before leading others. The sermon highlights that true leadership is not about ambition but about being called by God and relying on His sufficiency. Ultimately, Sparks illustrates that a leader must embody the spiritual qualities they wish to see in their followers.

Transcript

Judges 6

In one of his concise and terse messages, speaking of leaders and followers, Dr A.W. Tozer said:

"When our Lord called us all sheep, He told us that we should be followers; and when Peter called some shepherds, he indicated that there should be among us leaders as well as followers. Human nature being what it is, the need for leadership is imperative. Let five men be cast adrift in a lifeboat and immediately one of them assumes command. No plebiscite is necessary. Four of the men will know by a kind of intuition who the leader is, and without any formality he will take that place. Every disaster, every fire, every flood, elects its own leaders. In retrospect the weaker ones may find fault; but they were glad enough for the leadership when the crisis was on. Among Christians, too, there are leaders and followers. The followers may resent the leader, but they need him nevertheless. In the church there must be leaders, but the leader must also be a follower. Paul gave us the pattern when he exhorted the Corinthians: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1)."

If, then, leadership is both scriptural and necessary, it is well that we get to know from the Scriptures what leadership really is and what makes it. So we proceed to another valuable and instructive example, and find here some features and factors additional to those already noted. Gideon indeed has some helpful

and vital things to teach us in this connection.

It is not without importance to note that Gideon had no official position in Israel. He became leader because he had the spirit of a leader. Several details which composed this leadership-spirit are evident. Let us note them:

(1) A spirit of responsibility

Gideon was characterized by a spirit of responsibility. The times were times of straitness, weakness, and poverty. The enemy was depriving the Lord's people of their bread, their means of sustenance. There was vigilant alertness on the part of the enemy, and it was a perilous thing for anyone to counter his strategy of starvation; for weakness was a great ally of his purpose to suppress. Both courage and wisdom were required in any attempt to subvert the enemy's plan. This whole story shows how few there were who really were ready to pay the price. In other words, how few there were with an adequate sense of responsibility. Of those few, Gideon was chief. He had a sense of responsibility for the Lord's people and their great need; a sense of responsibility for the Lord's honour. The sense of shame and reproach, this sense of jealousy and indignation, this sense of things not being as they ought to be, moved Gideon to action -- dangerous action. His whole course to find victory was inspired by a spirit of responsibility which demanded dangerous action.

The first phase was his action of beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. Here was exercise in secret to meet vital need. The true leader is not always the one who ostentatiously parades himself in public. Gideon was not thinking of leadership. His action behind the scenes was not a subtle, veiled bit of policy or diplomacy by which he would have control and gratify an equally secret desire for power. It was just an act of disinterested, unselfish concern, prompted by a lofty purpose and largeness of heart. The food question is acute and the people just must be fed, whatever the cost to oneself. That is where leadership begins, in the hidden history of the one concerned. It is to be noted that the eye of the Lord was upon the secret life and exercise. "The Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel" (Judg.6:8), but "the angel of the Lord" came to Gideon. (Was this one of the many theophanies -- appearances of God Himself in man-form -- recorded in Scripture? Verse 23 would imply this.)

The Lord knew where Gideon was, what he was doing, and why he was doing it. The Lord knew that Gideon was discerning the works of the enemy and doing what he could to counter them. There was not much that he could do, and practically nothing in public -- a very testing situation; but he was being faithful in that which was least.

Gideon passed the first phase of the test for leadership without ambition for it; the test of faithfulness, responsibility, and selflessness in secret.

(2) The test of humility

The second characteristic of great account with God is humility. Responsibility was being thrust upon him without his ever having manoeuvred, schemed, worked, or used any force to get it. Indeed, the record would indicate that leadership was something not desired by Gideon.

Dr Tozer says: "I believe that it might be accepted as a fairly reliable rule of thumb that the man who is ambitious for leadership is disqualified from it."

To the amazing declaration and command of "the angel", Gideon could only reply: "... my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house". His excusable trepidation is displayed in his request for the tokens; easily understood in the presence of so immense a responsibility. It is all the revealing of how little the man had confidence in himself. He passed that second stage in the test.

(3) The test of the home-base

A further test of fitness for leadership had to be passed before Gideon could move out to the task. It was what we can call the home-base. Things were not right at home. There was compromise there. There was mixture there. The enemy had a foothold there. In the home, in the family, in the background there was that which would have put him in a false position and have completely sabotaged his campaign. He could not win on the field if the enemy held the stronghold behind. In other words, there could be no true testimony in the world and in the heavenlies, if the testimony was contradicted in the private life. However those that might resent, contend (see verses 31, 32) or fear in the long-run all those who knew him best had to be compelled to say that, what he was in public, he was at home and in private. How much more could be written in there, but, with the Lord, and with the ultimate issue, this "home-base" factor is vital.

(4) The sufficiency of the Lord

It was indeed a testing way by which the Lord led Gideon to leadership. The man well knew his own lack of qualification and ability. Like David he was the least in his father's house, and, no doubt, despised by his bigger and -- according to the world's standard -- more important brothers. But his course under the hand of the Lord was one of continuous and progressive reduction. Elimination and sifting out reduced his resources to a minimum. The Lord was stringently applying the precaution "lest". Lest Gideon should feel, lest Israel should say: By my own power, by our own sufficiency we triumphed.

Gideon does not seem to have disagreed or argued with the Lord. The leaders of the world want plenty of room and plenty of means. Gideon agreed that God was enough. He agreed with God's wisdom and judgment that a small company of solid value is better than a great multitude of divided heart.

There, then, are the factors which constitute a leadership which has the right to say: "Look on me, and do likewise." The leader must be spiritually all that he wants others to be. He must be spiritually ahead of those whom he would lead. Were we considering the whole episode we should mention a number of other things, but we are only concerned with the matter of leadership as it relates to the leader, not to his strategy, which is very instructive in Gideon's case, not to the incidents of the assault.

Other things will come up in other instances but here we can set a high value upon those four features mentioned, because they were the things to which God committed Himself.

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