

(A Spiritual Leader) 15. an Example

by Zac Poonen

A spiritual leader must be an example to others, following Christ and leading others to Him, and demonstrating Christlike leadership in all aspects of their ministry.

Scripture: Matthew 7:1, Matthew 20:26-28, John 13:14-15, Acts 20:17-35, Romans 5:9, 1 Corinthians 11:1, Philippians 3:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:4, 1 Peter 5:3, 1 John 2:18-19

Topics: "Humility in Ministry", "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes that a true spiritual leader should exemplify Christ-like humility, urging followers to connect with Christ rather than with themselves. He warns against leaders who seek personal attachment and recognition, likening them to the spirit of the Antichrist. Poonen reflects on the importance of living a life that demonstrates servanthood, as Paul did in Ephesus, and encourages leaders to focus on being humble examples rather than seeking fame. He stresses the need for discernment in recognizing true godliness and the responsibility of leaders to guide the next generation towards radical discipleship. Ultimately, he calls for repentance and a commitment to embodying the character of Christ in leadership.

Transcript

A spiritual leader will be such an example to others, that he will be able to say to them, "Follow me as I follow Christ". He will seek to lead others to be connected to Christ alone as their Head.

Many Christian leaders, however, seek to attach believers to themselves. And they're happy when those believers are more attached to them than to other leaders. Such leaders then become like little "gods" to their flock. They misuse the Scriptural teaching on submission to elders for their own benefit.

The Bible says that the Antichrist will one day sit in the temple of God and present himself to people as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). The church is the temple of God and the apostle John said that there were people with the spirit of the antichrist in the churches, even in his days (1 John 2:18,19)! There are many more like that today.

Sin came into this universe when a created being wanted to go up and become bigger and more visible in the eyes of others and become like God. That's how Lucifer became Satan. We should never forget that. If ever we see that spirit within ourselves, we should recognise it for what it is - the spirit of Satan.

Salvation, on the other hand, came when the Son of God humbled Himself and became as invisible as possible. We shouldn't forget that either.

Sin came through the pride of Lucifer and salvation came through the humility of Jesus.

When people see the way today's Christian leaders advertise themselves on public platforms and in their magazines, do you think they get a true picture of the self-effacing, humble Jesus? Not at all.

The examples that today's younger believers need to see are humble, self-effacing men who seek to hide themselves and to be unknown, who don't want to be highly spoken of, and who do their work quietly and disappear. This is the ministry we should all covet.

Supposing you did a piece of work for the Lord and no-one knew that you had done it. That should excite you! On top of that, if someone else got the credit for what you did, that should excite you even more! If you're like that, you're truly a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

I remember as a young Christian, looking around at the Christian leaders and elders in the churches that I moved about in, in those days. I'm sorry to say that I didn't see this spirit of Jesus in any of them. I'm not judging them, because I'm not their judge. I'm only saying that I couldn't respect them as godly examples for me to follow.

We don't have to judge anyone. But we must be able to discern people. Immediately after Jesus spoke about not judging others, He told His disciples to be careful to discern the pigs, the dogs and the false prophets from others (Compare Matt.7:1 with verses 6 and 15). If we don't have discernment, we'll certainly be led astray by the dogs and the false prophets (See Phil.3:2).

So I didn't judge my elders, but I didn't see them as worthy examples to follow, because they didn't have the spirit of a servant, like Jesus had. They were not people who wanted to wash the feet of the saints. It was then that I decided that I would look at Jesus alone, until I saw a Christian leader whose example also I could follow.

We have a very great responsibility to demonstrate to the next generation what Christlikeness really means. People who look at us - the way we live, preach and serve - should be able to see in us what it means to be a true servant of the Lord, in the style of the apostles and prophets of old, and not in the style of 20th-century film-star-like evangelists.

Whether we realise it or not, we're leaving behind us an image, wherever we go - an image that's going to remain in people's minds long after we've gone away and long after they have forgotten the messages that we preached to them.

When Paul called the elders of the church in Ephesus to bid farewell to them, notice what he told them in Acts 20:17-35. He reminded them that he had been with them for three years (verse 31) and that he had preached to them night and day. Three years is more than 1000 days. And so if Paul actually preached twice every day, as it seems to imply here, he must have preached over 2000 sermons there.

Ephesus was the place where they had once had a great revival and where Christians had burnt their old books of magic and witchcraft costing nearly half a million rupees. It was also the place where handkerchiefs that had touched Paul's body were used to heal the sick and deliver the demon-possessed. God did some amazing miracles through Paul in Ephesus on a scale that hadn't been seen anywhere else

(See Acts 19:11,12,19).

At the end of all this, what does Paul remind the elders of? Does he remind them of his sermons or the miracles? No. He tells them to remember the humble way he had lived among them, from the first day they had seen him (v.19). Even if they forgot his sermons, they could never forget how he lived among them. His life had made a permanent impact on them. They could never forget his compassion and his simplicity. They'd remember that he had worked hard with his own hands as a tentmaker to support himself and his coworkers - so that he would not be a burden to them and also to be an example to other Christian workers (v.34,35). They would never forget that during all those three years, Paul never desired money, or gifts, or even a new set of clothes, from any of them (verse 33)!

Paul also reminded them how he had proclaimed the WHOLE counsel of God to them uncompromisingly (Acts 20:27). He hadn't been a man-pleaser, seeking popularity for himself. He had preached repentance and every other unpopular subject, if it was profitable for his hearers, even if some got offended thereby (Acts 20:20, 21).

These are the things Paul pointed out to them

If you pastor a church for three years like Paul did at Ephesus, and then leave, what will your flock remember you for? Will they remember you as an impressive preacher or as a humble man of God who showed them by your life, what Jesus was like. Will they think of you as one who drew them closer to God and challenged them to be more Christlike or as one who taught them how to distribute tracts?

Whatever our gift or calling may be, it must flow from the inner spring of a Christlike life.

One who has the gift of healing must exercise it the way Jesus exercised it. Jesus was a humble Man Who lived simply, mingled freely with all people, had great compassion for the sick, and didn't take any money from anyone, either before or after healing them. He healed people freely.

But I have never met even one "healer" like that in my entire life. If you come across someone like that, please let me know, because I'd love to meet him. But I haven't met such a man yet.

Instead, I've met a lot of money-loving preachers who pretend to have the gift of healing and who deceive people with psychological tricks!

The sad thing in all this is that undiscerning, young men follow these deceivers and begin to seek for such a ministry themselves! And thus the next generation is led astray too. This is what saddens me.

If we're called to an apostolic ministry, or a prophetic ministry, or an evangelistic ministry, or a shepherding ministry, or a teaching ministry, whatever ministry it be, we must exercise it in a Christ-like way. The Spirit of Christ must motivate us in every calling.

If you feel you're called of God to pastor a church, then do it the way Jesus would do it. And may the lasting impression you form on your flock be of a man who was radiant with the glory of Jesus.

Let me finally share a word about our past failures.

We cannot change our past. That part of our lives is over. We have all failed and we can only repent of our failures, confess them and ask the Lord to cleanse away our sins in His precious blood.

I have made many mistakes in my life. But I've also learnt many lessons from my mistakes. So all those failures of mine were not useless to me. I've also learnt many valuable lessons by studying the mistakes of others. Thus I can avoid committing those mistakes myself.

We may be ashamed of many things that we did in the past. But once we have repented and made restitution (where necessary), we can learn lessons from our past failures and put our past behind us forever.

We must never allow Satan to take us on a "guilt trip" or a "condemnation trip" because of our past failures. There is no condemnation for anyone who is in Christ.

When God justifies us through Christ's blood (Rom.5:9), He looks at us thereafter, as if we had never sinned in our entire lives! We too must then see ourselves, as God sees us.

So don't let Satan or anyone else tell you that you're useless just because you failed in the past. You are a valuable vessel in God's hand, because you have repented. You can live the rest of your life for the glory of God.

It is a tremendous privilege that we elders have to disciple young people, because they have their whole lives ahead of them. Think of the tremendous potential there is in each of the young people in our churches. Remember that Satan is out to get them. Before he gets them, we must get them for God and His kingdom.

In the hearts of those young people, a struggle is going on. If the devil can't prevent them from being saved, he will want them at least to compromise. But God has placed you over them as a shepherd, to ensure that they become radical disciples of the Lord and not compromisers. So let me urge you to take your calling seriously.

May the Lord help us all to fall on our faces in repentance and ask for His forgiveness for the dishonour we have brought on His Name in the past, by being such poor examples to the next generation of believers.

May He help us to become humble, godly leaders of His people in the days to come. Amen.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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