

# GROWING TOWARD *Spiritual* MATURITY

HANDOUT B

## Leading Others

Chapter 10 of *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity*

By Gary C. Newton

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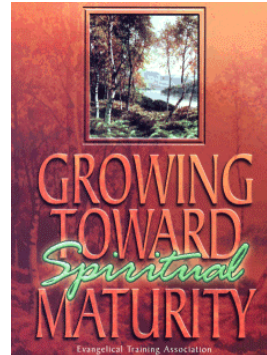
All Christians who are truly growing spiritually will be involved in some form of leadership. Given the vast array of needs in the world today, each Christian should be able to find a satisfying leadership role in the home, church, or society. Ty8

God has given specialized leadership gifts within the church to provide vision and direction. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul gives us a list of leadership positions based on specific gifts related to apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoring, and teaching. These positions may seem more prominent within the church but they should never overshadow the gifts of leadership given to other lay ministers within the body of Christ. A key growth factor for the body of Christ rests in every member taking leadership to use their gifts in service to others (Eph. 4:16).

Society needs to see the moral and ethical influences of Christian leadership. Government, education, media, entertainment, science, health and social services all need to be infiltrated by loving, godly Christians. Yet, leadership in society must be administered through the believer's life and witness. Even the earliest society of Adam and Eve was charged with having dominion (or authority) over the creation (Gen. 1:26). Psalm 8 also makes reference to the fact that God gave man leadership responsibility over all of creation (v. 6). In addition, Jesus described the leadership role of believers as being "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" so that others might see their good works and glorify God (Matt. 5:13-16). Mature Christians have a God-given responsibility to serve Him as leaders within God's creation and society.

Leadership is required of every believer, not just a few select individuals. We may not all have official positions of leadership, but we do all have the responsibility to lead others in some area of our giftedness.

Leadership, from a Christian perspective, is a God-given ability to provide vision and direction to accomplish God's will within His kingdom. Leadership is using one's gifts and abilities in loving service to a person or group for the sake of Christ. The result of biblical leadership is the growth of individuals and groups in Christ-likeness.



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## Principles of Christian Leadership

Jesus established radical standards related to how we should love others and instituted radical principles of how we should lead others. These principles become more distinctive when we realize how authoritarian the leadership structure was in the Roman and Jewish culture of Jesus' day. The three principles undergirding Christian leadership are integrity in character, a servant's attitude, and an equipping vision.

### Integrity in Character

Even contemporary secular authors reinforce a principle long held by Christians: Effective leadership is built upon a disciplined inner life and a strong character. The word "integrity" describes a person whose thoughts and private behavior are consistent with their outward profession. The Christian leader with integrity is a person whose heart is set on loving and obeying God, no matter what the cost. Daniel powerfully illustrates this principle for us in his rise to leadership in the Babylonian empire. He maintained his regular practice of praying to God even though it meant getting thrown to the lions (Dan. 6). The New Testament also emphasizes this principle. The majority of qualifications for church leaders mentioned by Paul relate to character rather than skills (1 Tim. 3:1-10; Titus 1:7-9). Our tendency may be to take short-cuts to get to where we want to go in our ministry career, but integrity demands Christian leaders invest the necessary time and energy to build spiritual consistency in the soul. Only then will God bless us in our outward ministry.

### A Servant's Attitude

This characteristic is often associated with the ministry of Christ. Our Lord is seen in Scripture as a servant. One of the best known passages on servant leadership occurs when the mother of James and John asks Jesus about the leadership roles and positions for her two sons. Jesus' reply was:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:25-28).

On another occasion Christ said, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matt. 23:11).

Two of the many examples of servanthood that Christ demonstrated were in situations where He cared for His disciples in very practical ways. Before the Last Supper, Jesus washed the disciples' feet (John 13:1-11). After His resurrection, He prepared breakfast for them on the beach (John 21:9-14). If we are to follow Christ as a leader, we must follow His example and serve those we lead. There is a dangerous tendency, as churches and Christian organizations get bigger and more powerful, for leaders to move away from this basic principle of Christian leadership.

Yet, we must be careful not to call *servanthood* a style of leadership. It really has nothing to do with style. It is primarily an attitude of the heart that may express itself in various styles depending on the circumstances and needs. A Christian leader with a servant's heart may find

it appropriate to use an assertive approach to get something done and on another occasion respond more meekly. Regardless of the style of leadership used in a certain situation, the Christian leader must be motivated by a heart to serve God and others.

### **An Equipping Vision**

One of the major roles of church leaders is to prepare, train, or equip Christians in the church to use their gifts to minister to one another in the body. Church leaders are the spark that ignites the fire that spreads between members to help each other grow and mature into the likeness of Christ.

It was he who gave some to be ... pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13).

If church leaders are to be successful in helping the body of Christ to mature, they must have a vision to invest in preparing others to utilize their gifts to minister within the body. Once again this vision is very different from what normally drives people into positions of leadership. It takes humility and a servant's heart to use one's gifts to empower other believers for ministry, rather than focusing on establishing one's own position or career. When a leader's power is shared, it multiplies, when it is used to further one's own ends, it corrupts.

These three principles—integrity of character, a servant's attitude, and a vision to equip others—must be in the heart of a leader interested in helping others to grow and mature in Christ. In addition there are five skills that leader must learn in order to be effective in leading others.

## **Leadership Skills**

### **Vision Building**

All the great leaders mentioned in Scripture had a vision: Noah—to save his people from the flood; Abraham—to settle the Promised Land; Moses—to set his people free; Joshua—to recapture the Promised Land; Solomon—to build a great temple for God; Jeremiah—to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem; and Paul—to see Gentiles come to the Lord. Leaders initiate and carry out visions.

Visions that further the kingdom of God, however, must be in accordance with God's will. Most of us can give illustrations of idealistic visionaries who dreamed up a lofty vision and got people to follow them. Then when the leader left, the vision died. Visions from God are based upon solid biblical principles and are verified by the body of Christ. The best protection against a leader going off on an egotistical crusade is to build a vision together with other members in the body of Christ. The one advantage we have over the people in the Old Testament is the presence of Christ in the corporate gathering of the church. Too often we do not take advantage of the energy and wisdom that comes from other believers who are following Christ closely. If we want to develop leadership within the body of Christ, then we should share the vision building process with them. When people have been a part of the planning, they are more apt to take the responsibility to carry the plan through.

## Empathetic Listening

The second skill of an effective leader is the ability to empathize with the thoughts, feelings, and frustrations of other people. Since many “natural” leaders tend to be more direct and goal centered, this skill is one that will have to be intentionally developed. People tend to follow leaders who have a clear idea of where they are going and who are also sensitive to the concerns of those around them.

In Philippians 2:3,4 we are challenged to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Since this advice is given to all believers, we can be sure that it applies even more to those of us desiring to be leaders.

Practically, this means spending time with each of those we work with. It means asking good questions that help other people to express their inner thoughts and feelings. It means being more concerned about others’ personal lives than their contribution to the “cause.” People can pick up very quickly whether or not we are genuinely interested in them as individuals. Our goal needs to be to make every person on our team feel significant and special. While this will obviously take time and effort, the investment in others’ lives will bring rich dividends of loyalty and commitment. People follow those who sincerely care for them.

## Empowering Others

After leaders train and equip people in the church to use their ministry gifts, the next step is to empower them to minister or serve. The concept of empowering others implies that the leader shares power with another person. A good example of this is when a father confidently tells his daughter that she can mow the lawn by herself this time. The child is motivated by the confidence that the father places in her to accomplish a new task. Power is transferred from father to daughter. The same thing happens when a leader empowers another gifted person for a ministry. By giving away both the responsibility and the rewards of ministry, leaders allow their people to enjoy the rich benefits of serving others.

Empowering others for ministry is similar to the process of delegation except that delegation usually relates more directly to a task than a ministry. Delegating responsibility involves the use and transmission of authority. For delegation to occur, Christians need confidence and trust in one another. Yet to be effective, tasks should only be delegated to people with the gifts and abilities to accomplish them. For example, there would be no basis for appointing someone to be responsible for a youth group if they had no experience working with students or had little knowledge of Scripture.

One of the clearest biblical examples of delegation is seen in the advice given by Jethro to his son in law, Moses. Jethro observed that Moses was overwhelmed, overextended, and overworked by spending all of his time single-handedly judging the people (Exod. 18:13). In response to the situation, he advised Moses to delegate responsibility as explained in Exodus 18:17-22.

New Testament examples of delegation of responsibility in relation to Christ include John 5:27 and Matthew 28:18-21. In the John passage, the Father gives authority to the Son to

accomplish His purposes. In the Matthew passage, Jesus gives responsibility to His disciples based upon His authority. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.” Empowering others for ministry is a leadership skill that is directly linked to the growth of the kingdom of God.

### **Team Building**

The fourth skill necessary for effective leadership is the ability to inspire others to work together as a cohesive team. The church is not just a random group of individuals. Rather, it is an interconnected team of followers of Christ. Unity and love are values that are elevated in Scripture even above those of success and personal accomplishment (Eph. 4:1-6). Paul goes on in chapter 4 to explain that: “speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (v. 15,16). A major leadership skill is helping the members of the body to work cooperatively while using their gifts and following their visions. Part of this skill is encouraging the “ligaments” to support one another in this process.

### **Conflict Resolution**

The fifth skill for effective leadership is the ability to help people to resolve conflicts. Where there are people, there are problems. This is as true for the church as it is for any other organization. Yet if conflicts are not dealt with in accordance with biblical principles, they can destroy people’s lives and the unity within the body of Christ.

The skill of helping people to resolve conflicts involves several aspects. Leaders must be courageous enough to deal with major conflicts rather than just ignoring them. Often there is a cost involved in dealing with conflict, particularly if it has been brooding for a long time and ignored by previous leaders. Leaders must be objective enough to listen to the facts and feelings of all the parties involved in the conflict. This demands good “detective” skills. The leader needs to help the parties involved to listen to each other and try to empathize with the other party’s feelings. In helping to reach a resolution to the conflict, the leader must demonstrate a thorough knowledge of God’s Word and be able to clearly teach what the biblical alternatives to the conflict are. Finally the leader must be able to help the parties come to a mutually acceptable decision based upon scriptural principles.

As complex as this process sounds, it is one of the most important skills of a leader. As many of us can verify, one of the main reasons why people leave the church, full-time ministry and missionary service is because of unresolved interpersonal conflicts.

*—Gary C. Newton serves as the Associate Dean of the Graduate School of Christian Ministries and Associate Professor of Educational Ministries at Huntington College in Huntington, Indiana. His passion has been to help the church become a training ground for building disciples of Jesus Christ.*

### Summary

The home, the church, and society desperately need strong Christian leaders. Yet before volunteering too quickly, we must count the cost of what it means to follow Christ as a leader. The radical standards of Christian leadership demand that leaders are men and women of integrity, with hearts to serve and a vision to prepare others to serve. These standards are quite different from the way the rest of the world looks at leadership. To be an effective Christian leader we must continually develop our skills in these five areas: building a vision, empathetic listening, empowering others, team building, and conflict resolution. While the cost of leadership is high, the rewards are great. To see others in the body of Christ growing and using their gifts in ministry is one of the greatest blessings we will ever experience.

### For Further Discussion

1. In what ways should a Christian leader be distinct from the leadership patterns of the world?
2. Why might empowering others be difficult for some leaders?
3. Identify and give an example of each of the leadership skills discussed in this chapter.
4. What biblical leaders stick out in your mind as good leaders? Why did you choose them?
5. Give an example of a situation in which a leader may have to be assertive in being a servant-leader.

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