



“...DO NOT BE
CALLED LEADERS;
FOR ONE IS
YOUR LEADER,
THAT IS, CHRIST.”

by Wayne Jacobsen

“You know that those who are regarded as 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 slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

Jesus didn't view leadership as the power to command, but the passion to serve people as they sort out what it means to live as God's children. In the last decade my understanding of leadership has changed completely. I used to see it in terms of power—thinking leadership was defined by influence, institutional power or the value of their giftedness.

Not so in God. Those who've helped me most to grow in our Father's love, surprisingly enough, don't hold positions of power but simply loved me enough to point out the way to God's heart and then let me decide if I wanted to follow it. In fact, those I meet now who are most transformed by Father's character disdain the power of the institutions I thought so essential to the kingdom. They reject anything that doesn't reflect the childlike freedom to walk together focused on doing what pleases our Father.

The first person I ever met like that shocked me—whenever he opened his mouth, wisdom poured out in the simplest terms. He knew more about God than I could ever hope to, and his calm spirit mirrored the nature of Jesus that I'd read about in the Gospels.

He had been a pastor for a number of years, but left during a brutal congregational fight rather than resort to their tactics to secure his place. For the next 15 years he hung wallpaper, which I thought he was doing just to pay the bills until he could find another ministry position. I was wrong! But I really didn't realize how wrong until one day when I told him we were considering him as a future elder and eventually as full-time staff.

To my absolute shock, he listened for a while and then shook his head. “I'm just not interested,” he said. When I pressed him as to why he just smiled and told me that I would understand some day.

IMAGE BY MARY WENNER—FTM

I think now that I know what he meant. Those who have been shaped by Christ's life know there is an inherent conflict between spiritual authority and institutional power. Unfortunately, most people in the institution don't understand this truth, and they continue to be hurt by those who act as leaders and fail to recognize true leadership God has so generously scattered throughout his body. Perhaps we need to think differently.

Transformed Lives, Not Credentials

I'll never forget the first time I saw "Rev. Wayne Jacobsen" pressed on an office door. Even with my vocational mindset of ministry some 30 years ago, it was a shock. I was age 22 with a B.A. in Bible and two weeks experience in marriage. How was I supposed to be a leader among the body of Christ? It would be laughable now if it were not so tragic. Even though God used that time in my life in spite of how deeply I misunderstood him, I realize now how little my life at that point reflected God's priorities.

Though I couldn't recognize it at the time I know now that I was driven less by a desire to serve others as I was to satiate my ego by trading on my speaking ability and proving my worth by influencing as many people as possible. What's even stranger is that people did so without even questioning whether this is what God wanted.

Today people qualify for leadership based on their university degrees, eloquence, biblical knowledge or their ability to draw a crowd, manage a vision or manipulate people to help them achieve their goals. If they draw a salary from a religious institution or hold a title we believe them to be leaders even if their lives don't reflect his life.

Will that ever change? Not on this side of eternity! We have spawned an entire industry of seminaries and institutional positions to prepare people to lead our religious institutions. They come out with \$30,000.00 of debt and the

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need to find a career to justify that expense. All the while they have never even had the time to be transformed by the life of Christ and to demonstrate it in their personal life. No wonder there is so much failure and error among those who seek to lead in the body of Christ.

Mostly well-intentioned men and women get into "the ministry" for all the right reasons and then

recognize Godly leadership among us is when people reflect his glory, his truth and his demeanor in the way they live.

Supplements, Not Substitutes

The body of Christ can only be healthy when every member in it is growing in relationship to Jesus and learning to live in his view of reality. He is the Head so that he "will come to have first place in

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stay for all the wrong ones. The New Testament recognizes leadership by the evidence of a transformed life that lives in vital, daily, dynamic, relational connection with the head. People could tell they had been with Jesus. It didn't matter what gifts they possessed or lacked, only that their character had been transformed to such an extent that they began to treat others the way Jesus would—with the same mix of truth and tenderness.

That's why it is so important that every believer be thoroughly acquainted with the Jesus of the Bible, because the only way we can

everything" (Colossians 1:18, NASB). That can happen only as every believer experiences the depth of friendship that Jesus wants with each of us.

Unfortunately, leadership in our day doesn't always help people live in that reality, but often offers a substitute for it—and people like it that way. Like the children of Israel, many prefer to keep God at arm's length, expecting so-called leaders to deal with God for them so that they can follow only when they think it best.

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their confidence in his ability to work in them and has made them dependent upon clergy and institutions for their spiritual life. Isn't it amazing that every religious system creates a local, holy-man guru who becomes the resident expert on things spiritual?

The early apostles never saw it as a threat to their place in the body to say things like, "You have no need for anyone to teach you.... You have an anointing from the Holy One to know truth and error." They wanted Jesus' followers to learn to trust him and hear from him directly as they lived in mutual relationship with each other.

They were not discounting the importance of teaching or counsel, but only putting it in its proper place. Leadership in the body simply happens as Jesus expresses himself by the Holy Spirit through a submitted life. Sadly the star syndrome in the church often means that we elevate and give glory to the messengers rather than to the rightful ruler.

No one can take Jesus' place in the body. That's why Paul told people not to listen to anyone who distorted the gospel of Jesus (Galatians 1) nor to follow anyone purporting to know God's will for others (Colossians 2). Those who have Jesus' heart for the body will always be wary of others growing dependent upon anyone but the Lord himself. They would never rob a brother or sister of the joy of learning how to live freely in daily submission to Christ alone.

To Serve, Not to Manage

One popular teacher a couple of decades ago defined spiritual leadership as the ability "to motivate people to do what they wouldn't otherwise freely choose to do." That's manipulation, not leadership. While it may be true of drill



sergeants in basic training or advertising executives designing commercials, it is the opposite of what God has in mind for his children.

Beware of anyone who finds their identity in the body based on a role of leadership or a title of ministry. As clearly as Jesus told us anything, he told his followers not to depend on such nonsense, for it is based on a false view of our Father's family. "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.... Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ." (Matthew 23:8;10, NASB)

The primary relationship for each member of the body is to be connected to the Head, then to share his life with each other as brother and sister. No greater identity is needed than to be sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters in Christ, and anything God asks us to do to help others will not alter that simple identity.

Those who seek credibility in their degrees, their prowess with the original languages of Scripture, or some kind of extra anointing not available to other believers, demonstrate by doing so how little of God's nature they truly understand. Whatever elevates you above others destroys the value of anything God wants to share through you.

So, what do leaders do? Scripture gives us three functions for leadership:

To Facilitate, Not Control: Leading in the body is as simple as

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initiating, at God's leading, actions and activities and inviting others to come along and share in that experience. Leadership doesn't seek to control an event or make sure it happens the way they think best, but acts as a catalyst to allow others to express what God has revealed to them. That happens as simply as someone leading out in a chorus, inviting people over for fellowship, or planning an outreach activity. A gift of leadership can get the ball rolling and see if others will pick it up and run with it.

To Equip, Not to Perform: Instead of taking center-stage in the body with their gifts, true leaders crawl behind the scenes to help others grow in the life of Jesus and discover how God wants to express himself through them. Since this is best accomplished by example, they will live open lives before others as they help others learn how to connect with God in a meaningful way. They never exploit people's shame or try to hold them accountable, but free them from shame so that they can engage in a transforming relationship with God.

To Watch Over, Not Police: While not trying to manage the body, leaders will look beyond themselves to help the body live in wholeness. They will seek out those who exploit the body for their own gain and deal with them honestly and lovingly. They will help young believers learn to discern between true and false believers and point them back to Jesus when they are distracted. □

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IMAGE BY SANJA GJENERO