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**Biblical Servant Leadership
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Biblical Philosophy of Leadership Paper

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Biblical Philosophy of Leadership

Leading people remains a necessity in every area of life. No matter one's religious propensity, leadership will be present in some fashion whether exercised by them or exerted upon them. Leadership is a fact of life. However, the root of such leadership makes a significant difference in its effectiveness and foundational morality. As beings created by God for relationship with him and exhibiting his glory to all the earth, mankind was made to make an impact founded in the truth of God's word and with God's sustainable power and authority given to man. Thus, when leaders operate in their authority as Christians and the truth of God's word they will make the most effective and lasting impact. This true form of leadership, that has the ability to bleed into every area of one's life and every facet of society, is ultimately found in exploration of the Word of God.

A true biblical leader remains one who communes with God and abides in Christ in order to align their actions with those of biblical living. Leadership, as understood by society, culture, and even most Christians, is fairly unknown to the Scriptures (Penno, 2017, p. 142). Despite the Bible never explicitly giving leadership instruction, there is much to learn from descriptions of biblical leaders and how they interacted in their environments. The concept of leadership is woven into Scripture through the lives of biblical men and women and the inspired words written in the form of teaching, exhortation, or narrative. The sum of these thoughts then gives Christians a model of leadership in which surpasses all non-biblically based models, as it is inspired and empowered through God's living Word. The Word of God reveals a distinctive definition

of leadership and informs today's leaders of characteristics of a sustainable, biblical leader.

A Biblical Definition of Leadership

Skills do not define biblical leadership. Rather, biblical leadership primarily involves character. Although skills remain an important part of effective leadership, they are not ultimately defining. Skill alone causes one to lead out of their own efforts and fail to bring God glory through their influence. However, the biblical leader leverages their skills in light of their character and call to reveal God's strength and glory through their endeavors. In 1 Corinthians 15:33 (New International Version), Paul instructs the Corinthians stating that, "Bad company corrupts good character." Character, found here, is "a settled habit of mind and manners" (Mounce, 2011), and in the Old Testament character frequently is representative of strengths or capabilities. The *Bible Themes Dictionary* defines character as, "the moral and mental features that define a person, whether good or evil" (Manser, McGrath, Packer, & Wiseman, 2012). Features that define a leader are tied directly to their character and living out godliness.

Paul frequently refers to overseers, elders, or deacons when addressing church leadership. In 1 Timothy 3:2-3 (New International Version), Paul states, "Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money." These verses only reveal a portion of the instruction given by Paul to the leadership of the church of Ephesus. However, they prove sufficient to disclose God's emphasis on character for leaders when they are leading with a biblical leadership model. Biblical leaders are men and women of godly

character. Through numerous biblical examples, similar to that previously noted, the importance of leaders possessing, or at least working towards, a godly character is evident. Leaders must allow God to refine their integrity, attitude, and moral disposition to look more like his in light of who they are and how they lead.

The Scriptures also define biblical leaders by a couple of specific characteristics. Biblical leaders are both shepherds and servants. The term shepherd was a common term used to describe leaders throughout the Old Testament. Referencing King David to the term shepherd, Psalm 78:70-72 reveals David as the one who led Israel. Thus, directly relating the term shepherd to leader. The usage of the term shepherd for leader recurs in the New Testament in teachings by Jesus in reference to himself (Luke 15:3-7, John 10:1-18), as well as by Luke (Acts 20:28-29) and Peter (1 Peter 5:1-5). Luke and Peter define the role of the elders of the First Century church revealing the longevity of this biblical leadership definition. Malphurs notes that, "These passages emphasize the role of shepherd-leader as protector, overseer, and example to the flock" (Malphurs, 2003, p. 177). Shepherds are among their sheep, know their sheep, care for their sheep, and lead their sheep. Biblical leadership is not a disconnected, insensitive lording of power, but it is a giving of oneself in time, effort, energy, resources, and knowledge to lead those under one's care.

Similar to that of a shepherd's role but much more biblically explicit, the Scriptures best define leadership through the lens of servanthood. In fact, "servant leadership finds a vivid and picturesque motive in shepherding" (Lutz, 2011). There is no more successful model of leadership than of Christ's model himself, and, in Mark 10:45, Jesus says, "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” (New International Version). Jesus not only taught the act of service but embodied it in his actions with those he led. He also served all of mankind in the giving of his life as ransom for the world’s salvation. Jesus laid down pride, selfishness, personal gain, and position for the sake of serving and putting others’ livelihood above himself when he came to dwell among humanity as fully man for the purpose of sacrificing his life. As leaders, if the one, in which we serve and owe our life to, came to serve, then there is nothing greater that we can ever strive to be than a servant.

Today’s biblical leaders choose to discover God’s will and live it out in humble service. Eugene Peterson states, “All true work combines [the] two elements of serving and ruling. Ruling is what we do; serving is how we do it. There’s true sovereignty in all good work. There’s no way to exercise it rightly other than by serving” (as cited in, Wilkes, 1998, p. 2). Scriptures demote self-serving and self-promoted leadership while encouraging humble leadership that does not pull for prominence or dominance. Two primary passages that reflect a biblical leader as servant are Luke 14:8-11 and John 13:1-17. Biblical leaders do not mind being in places of lesser honor to serve the mission of Christ, and they place themselves wherever needed in order to meet the needs of those they lead (Wilkes, 1998). Servant leaders give up their rights for the sake of a greater purpose, humbly wait for the Lord’s promotion, seek Jesus above all else, and do not mind delegating and sharing authority for the sake of the mission. Serving means giving of oneself in action without expectation of any benefit (Lutz, 2011). There is no greater definition of leader than that of a servant. Obtaining a godly character, living as a shepherd, and leadership as service are the major insights to

defining biblical leadership through the Word of God; however, there are other less prominent characteristics that are necessary for effective biblical leadership.

Biblical Leadership Characteristics

Additional to the models of leadership that Scripture reveals, as previously explored, there are common characteristics that reflect biblical leadership. These characteristics, when learned and lived by the Christian leader, have the potential to create longevity and health for the leader and their position. The Scriptures reveal common traits that leaders should work toward in pursuit of living out a biblical leadership model. Most traits of a leader fall under having a character of integrity and grace. However, there remain characteristics that do not clearly fall under godly character that continue to be paramount for effective biblical leadership. These traits can be seen across secular and biblical pursuits of leadership but are best understood and lived through the understanding of the Word of God in relation to these leadership characteristics.

First, leaders are visionaries. As seen in the lives of Moses, Joshua, Nehemiah, and many more biblical leaders, including Jesus, purpose and direction drove their leadership to success and fulfillment. “Jesus was never off vision; He always knew what He was doing because He always knew why He was doing it” (Lawrence, 2007). Leaders must have a sense of direction (Malphurs, 2003). Direction is driven by mission and vision, and as every action, speaking engagement, or healing opportunity that Christ had pointed back to God and the coming salvation, leaders must have a sense of mission and vision that drives that which they do. Mission points to what one is called to accomplish, and vision paints a picture of what it will look like in action (Malphurs,

2003). As demonstrated by these biblical leaders, today's leaders must also discover their mission and vision through devoted time with God, communicate it well, and live it out unashamedly.

Secondly, biblical leadership is accomplished through effective delegation and empowerment. John Maxwell states, "The ideal equipper is a person who can impart the vision of the work, evaluate the potential leader, give him the tools he needs, and then help him along the way at the beginning of his journey" (as cited in Wilkes, 1998). Exodus 18:13-27 reveals a biblical example of a leader's need for delegation through a conversation between Moses and Jethro. However, Jesus demonstrates this concept throughout his entire ministry in the most evident and motivational ways. He chose to bring people onto his mission to carry it on when he went to Heaven. He gave them equal authority for accomplishing the mission (Luke 9:1-2). He also gave the Great Commission as a symbol of delegation, as he passed the mission on to the disciples and the generations that follow (Matthew 28:18-19). Jesus demonstrates that delegation and empowerment is key to successful leadership and the accomplishing of a mission, and he modeled that is it done with time, shared responsibilities, and remaining the steward of his mission while entrusting others with their own part. Effective delegation leads to increased empowerment. Hans Finzel (2007) notes, "Great leaders inspire us to go places we would never go on our own, and to attempt things we never thought we had in us" (p. 17).

Third, leaders recognize the importance of building a team. Leadership reveals a relationship between leaders and followers, or those being influenced by another (Malphurs, 2003), and a leader's mission cannot be accomplished without this following.

As previously mentioned, Jesus built a team in order to expand his influence beyond his own life. Wilkes (1998) says, "Mission continues when people are captured by it, equipped to do it, and 'teamed' to carry it on" (p. 213). Biblical leadership reveals the need for ensuring continued vision and fulfillment of the mission beyond one's own influence. In example, Moses delegated and appointed leaders, and he then passed his mission into the hands of Joshua. It is important to build a team around a shared goal or purpose in order to best accomplish a mission.

Finally, biblical leadership is founded in trust. Believers are to place their confidence in God. Trusting God is key for a biblical leader. Many biblical passages reference trusting in God (i.e. Psalm 20:7, Proverbs 3:5-6, Hebrews 11:1-3). Trusting in God is vital not only for a Christian leader in their own life, but it also extends in vitality to human relationships, especially in regards to leadership (Malphurs, 2003). People will not follow a leader they cannot trust. Genesis 41 reveals a man's trust in another due to his trust in God. Joseph was entrusted with much because his trust in God produced a character of trustworthiness in him. Whether in delegation or how other's see their leader, trust is an important part of living out biblical leadership, as it is foundational to one's walk with God.

Conclusion

Although never explicitly referencing leadership, the Scriptures are clear about how those who have influence over others should carry themselves in action and spirit. Ultimately these models and characteristics of biblical leaders point to one common goal: influencing people towards God's mission. No matter one's area of service or leadership, leading out of godly character, as a shepherd, with a servant's heart, and

applying key biblical leadership principles will ultimately lead to greater success and effectiveness than one leading out of their own strength and ability. God has strategically called and anointed every individual to their own area of leadership, and as biblical leaders found their purpose so must those desiring to lead in such a manner. Good leaders become great leaders as they discover not only practical principles of leadership but their personal revelation of who they are in Christ and what he has specifically for them.

Personal Application

At the beginning of August, I will be starting a new career path and experiencing a unique leadership development setting. For the 2018-2019 school year, I will be teaching inner-city high school math. As a first-year teacher, I will have few leadership opportunities within the staff and will have a leadership position by role or title as teacher for my approximately 150 students. Especially due to being in a public-school setting, my life as a leader in regards to biblical standards cannot be openly expressed. However, I have the opportunity to allow these concepts to become a part of who I am, so that, even without the direct use of Scripture, my students and colleagues will be able to see God in me.

My classes will be my flock to shepherd. I will have the opportunity to care for them in a unique and strategic way, guiding and disciplining to produce a more positive outcome at the end, and all this done in love. I will live out a godly character to the best of my abilities and lay down my rights as teacher to serve them. Giving my students choice and allowing them to play a part in what happens in the classroom will let them know that I am not there to lord my title as teacher over them, but that I want to see

them on to a better future. I can appoint and delegate authority to group leaders when appropriate for activities and allow them to experience leadership in the form of teaching others as well. I plan to be a visionary with them from the first day of class. They will be walking in to a confessional statement letting them know that I believe in them and that they have purpose in my class. My mission is to not simply teach math skills but to give these students a sense of self-worth and purpose, and I will model this in my behavior and actions as much as possible. Finally, I can build a culture of trust in my classroom. If my students feel like they can trust me, then they will be more apt to learn more and behave better in my classroom. Biblical leadership will be choosing to walk in integrity, love, and grace every day, no matter what my student's may say or do.

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