

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

PRINCIPLES OF EXCELLENCE

FOR EVERY BELIEVER

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NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

When I came to you . . . my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

1 Corinthians 2:1-4

Leadership is influence, the ability of one person to influence others to follow his or her lead. Famous leaders have always known this.

The great military leader Bernard Montgomery spoke of leadership in these terms: "Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose, and the character which inspires confidence." An outstanding example of this statement was Sir Winston Churchill, leader of Britain during World War II.

Fleet Admiral Nimitz said: "Leadership may be defined as that quality that inspires sufficient confidence in subordinates as to be willing to accept his views and carry out his commands."

General Charles Gordon once asked Li Hung Chang, a leader in China, two questions: "What is leadership? And how is humanity divided?" Li Hung replied: "There are only three kinds of people—those who are immovable, those who are movable, and those who move them!"

John R. Mott, a world leader in student circles, believed that "a leader is a man who knows the road, who can keep ahead, and who pulls others after him."²²

R. T. Chandapilla, an Indian student leader, defined Christian leadership as a vocation which blends both human and divine qualities in a harmony of ministry by God and His people for the blessing of others.³

President Harry S. Truman (1945-53) said cogently: "A leader is a person who has the ability to get others to do what they don't want to do, and like it."⁴

Spiritual leadership blends natural and spiritual qualities. Yet even the natural qualities are supernatural gifts, since all good things come from God. Take personality, for instance. Montgomery said that "the degree of influence will depend on the personality, the 'incandescence' of which he is capable, the flame which burns within, the magnetism which will draw the hearts of others toward him."⁵ Both natural and spiritual qualities reach their greatest effectiveness when employed in the service of God and for His glory.

Yet spiritual leadership transcends the power of personality and all other natural gifts. The personality of the spiritual leader influences others because it is irradiated, penetrated, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. As the leader gives control of his life to the Spirit, the Spirit's power flows through him to others.

Spiritual leadership requires superior spiritual power, which can never be generated by the self. There is no such thing as a self-made spiritual leader. A true leader influences others spiritually only because the Spirit works in and through him to a greater degree than in those he leads.

We can lead others only as far along the road as we ourselves have traveled. Merely pointing the way is not enough. If we are not walking, then no one can be following, and we are not leading anyone.

At a large meeting of mission leaders in China, the discussion turned to leadership and its qualifications. The debate was vigorous. But D. E. Hoste, general director of China Inland Mission, had an opinion. "With a twinkle in his eye, Hoste said in his high-pitched voice: "It occurs to me that perhaps the best test of whether one is qualified to lead, is to find out whether anyone is following."⁶

BORN OR MADE?

Are leaders born or made? Surely, both. On the one hand, leadership is an "elusive and electric quality" that comes directly from God. On the other, leadership skills are distributed widely among every community and should be cultivated and developed. Often our skills lie dormant until a crisis arises.

Some people become leaders by luck and timing. A crisis comes, no one better qualified steps forward, and a leader is born. But closer investigation usually reveals that the selection was not accidental but was more the result of hidden training that made the person fit for leadership. Joseph is a perfect example. He became prime minister of Egypt through circumstances that most people would call "lucky stars." In fact his promotion was the outcome of thirteen years of rigorous, hidden training under the hand of God.

When we contrast natural and spiritual leadership, we see just how different they are.

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| <i>Natural</i> | Self-confident | Knows men | Makes own decisions | Ambitious | Creates methods | Enjoys command | Seeks personal reward | Independent |
| <i>Spiritual</i> | Confident in God | Also knows God | Seeks God's will | Humble | Follows God's example | Delights in obedience to God | Loves God and others | Depends on God |

People without natural leadership skills do not become great leaders at the moment of conversion. Yet a review of the history of the church reveals that the Holy Spirit sometimes releases gifts and qualities that were dormant beforehand. When that happens, a leader is born.

A. W. Tozer wrote:

A true and safe leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the press of [circumstances]. . . . There was hardly a great leader from Paul to the present day but was drafted by the Holy Spirit for the task, and commissioned by the Lord to fill a position he had little heart for. . . . The

man who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader. The true leader will have no desire to lord it over God's heritage, but will be humble, gentle, self-sacrificing and altogether ready to follow when the Spirit chooses another to lead.

Sangster's biography includes a private manuscript written when the English preacher and scholar felt a growing conviction to take more of a leadership role in the Methodist church.

This is the will of God for me. I did not choose it. I sought to escape it. But it has come. Something else has come, too. A sense of certainty that God does not want me only for a preacher. He wants me also for a leader—a leader in Methodism.

I feel a commissioning to work under God for the revival of this branch of His Church [Methodist]—careless of my own reputation; indifferent to the comments of older and jealous men. I am thirty-six. If I am to serve God in this way, I must no longer shrink from the task—but do it.

I have examined my heart for ambition. I am certain it is not there. I hate the criticism I shall evoke and the painful chatter of people. Obscure, quiet browsing among books, and the service of simple people is my taste—but by the will of God, this is my task, God help me.

Bewildered and unbelieving, I hear the voice of God say to me: "I want to sound the note through you." O God, did ever an apostle shrink from his task more? I dare not say "no" but, like Jonah, I would fain run away.

Once Saint Francis of Assisi was confronted by a brother who asked him repeatedly, "Why you? Why you?"

Francis responded, in today's terms, "Why me *what?*"
"Why does everyone want to see you? Hear you? Obey you? You are not all so handsome, nor learned, nor from a noble family. Yet the world seems to want to follow you," the brother said.
Then Francis raised his eyes to heaven, knelt in praise to God, and turned to his interrogator:

You want to know? It is because the eyes of the Most High have willed it so. He continually watches the good and the wicked, and as His most

holy eyes have not found among sinners any smaller man, nor any more insufficient and sinful, therefore He has chosen me to accomplish the marvelous work which God hath undertaken; He chose me because He could find none more worthless, and He wished to confound the nobility and grandeur, the strength, the beauty and the learning of this world.

Montgomery outlined seven qualities necessary for a military leader, each appropriate to spiritual warfare: the leader must (1) avoid getting swamped in detail; (2) not be petty; (3) not be pompous; (4) know how to select people to fit the task; (5) trust others to do a job without the leader's meddling; (6) be capable of clear decisions; (7) inspire confidence.

John Mott moved in student circles, and his tests covered different territory. One should inquire of a leader whether he or she (1) does little things well; (2) has learned to focus on priorities; (3) uses leisure well; (4) has intensity; (5) knows how to exploit momentum; (6) is growing; (7) overcomes discouragement and "impossible" situations; and (8) understands his or her weaknesses.

A single life has immense possibilities for good or ill. We leave an indelible influence on people who come within our influence, even when we are not aware of it. Dr. John Geddie went to Anetym and 1848 and worked there for twenty-four years. Written in his memory are these words:

When he landed, in 1848, there were no Christians.
When he left, in 1872, there were no heathen."

When the burning zeal of the early church began to draw converts at an extraordinary rate, the Holy Spirit taught a wonderful lesson on leadership. The church had too few leaders to care for all the needs, especially among the poor and the widows. Another echelon of leaders was needed. "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them" (Acts 6:3).

These new leaders were first and foremost to be full of the Spirit. Spirituality is not easy to define, but you can tell when it is present. It is the fragrance of the garden of the Lord, the power to change the atmosphere around you, the influence that makes Christ real to others.

If deacons are required to be full of the Spirit, should those who preach and teach the Word of God be any less? Spiritual goals can be achieved only by spiritual people who use spiritual methods. How our churches and mission agencies would change if leaders were Spirit-filled! The secular mind and heart, however gifted and personally charming, has no place in the leadership of the church.

John Mott captured well the heart of spiritual leadership:

Leadership in the sense of rendering maximum service; leadership in the sense of the largest unselfishness; in the sense of full-hearted absorption in the greatest work of the world: building up the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹²

NOTES

1. Bernard L. Montgomery, *Memoirs of Field-Marshal Montgomery* (Cleveland: World, 1958), 70. Bernard Law Montgomery (1887-1976) made his mark in World War II as the first allied general to inflict a decisive defeat on the Axis, at El Alamein in Northern Africa, in October 1942. He was knighted that November.

Chester Nimitz (1885-1966), quoted in Sanders's text without a citation, was commander of the Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Area during World War II.

Charles George Gordon (1833-85) also quoted without citation, was an eccentric but effective British military commander in China during the 1860s (for which he was tagged "Chinese Gordon") and in Africa, where he died at Khartoum trying to withstand an overwhelming army led by the Mahdi, a mystic leader in the Sudan.

2. Lettie B. Cowman, *Charles F. Cowman* (Los Angeles: Oriental Missionary Society, 1928), 251. John R. Mott (1865-1955) was a Methodist evangelist who served in the Student Volunteer Movement and the YMCA. His best known book is *Evangelizing the World in Our Generation* (1900), which was also the motto he was widely known for. He was a founder of the World Council of Churches.

3. P. T. Chandapilla was general secretary for the Union of Evangelical Students of India from 1956-71. His goal was to reach India's intellectuals with the gospel. Following Hudson Taylor, Chandapilla never asked for financial help. He worked closely with Inter-Varsity Fellowship and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

4. Montgomery, p. 70.

5. Phyllis Thompson, *D. E. Hoste* (London: China Inland Mission, n.d.), 122.
6. A. W. Tozer, in *The Reaper*, February 1962, 459. Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963) was a minister in the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Among his thirty books, the best known is *The Pursuit of God* (1948).
7. Paul E. Sangster, *Doctor Sangster* (London: Epworth, 1962), 109.
8. James Burns, *Reverals, Their Laws and Leaders* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), 95. The text in this quotation has been modernized.
9. Montgomery, p. 70.
10. B. Matthews, *John R. Mott* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1934), 346.
11. John Geddie (1815-72), born in Scotland, was called the father of foreign missions in the Presbyterian church in Canada. He went as a missionary to the New Hebrides (formerly called Aneityum) in 1848.
12. Matthews, p. 353.