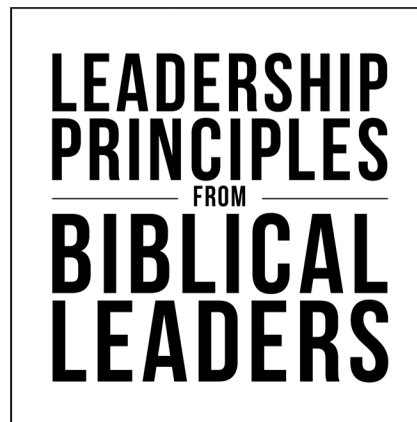


# **THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT**

**FROM THE SERIES**



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## INTRODUCTION

If you wanted to get a book about *leadership* on Amazon, a search would result in over 40,000 entries. If you were to narrow the search to *Christian leadership*, it would turn up 20,000 entries. But if were to search for *biblical leadership*, you would end up with only 3,000 entries. There aren't many books about biblical leadership. I believe there's a good reason for this: people don't realize the Bible is full of leadership principles. This is because they don't know how to read it with leadership eyes.

Most of the leadership principles we live by come from people's experiences, and sometimes a Bible verse is then attached to it; some may call this biblical leadership. I believe there's a better way to understand biblical leadership.

Although the Bible isn't a leadership book, you can still derive divine leadership principles from the Bible. And who better to learn leadership principles from than the Person who wrote the Bible: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who dwells within Christ-followers, is the same One who wrote the Bible and is the One who can teach us about leadership.

This idea of biblical leadership didn't originate from me. I learned it from Dr. J. Robert Clinton, retired professor of leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary. I took one of his classes in 2008 and his teachings opened my eyes to biblical leadership. Up to that point, I was learning leadership from other people's experiences through books, cassette tapes, CDs, and conferences. And it never occurred to me to mine the Bible itself for leadership principles. But when I did, the Bible came alive and the Holy Spirit showed me divine leadership principles that have been there all along.

What follows are the three most important leadership principles from the Old Testament. This is part of a larger collection of 41 biblical leadership principles Dr. Clinton found throughout God's Word.

Without these three leadership lessons, your ministry can be destroyed, destructive, or derailed.

## INTIMACY

### **Leaders need to develop intimacy with God, which in turn overflows into all their ministry**

When I was a kid one of my best friends was J.R. His real name was Raymond but because his father was also named Raymond, J.R. was a junior, hence the initials J.R. He lived six houses away from me, but close to the neighborhood park where we spent a lot of time playing basketball and riding our skateboards. We would build ramps to jump our bikes. We would try to do wheelies. We would wait for the candy truck to come around in the afternoon so we could buy candy BBs and shoot at each other using straws. We would play with fireworks in an unsafe manner, either blowing them too close to our ears or almost blowing our fingers off.

We would alternate lunch spots between his house where his grandmother would make sandwiches and my house where my mom would make some kind of Chinese food (but his grandmother's lunches always tasted better). We would spend summer days slurping Otter Pops on the sidewalk curb. He could spin a basketball on his finger but I never had the balance or rhythm to do so.

But by the time 5th grade came around, we didn't hang around as much. While I was at the library, J.R. was at the bowling alley. When I stayed home studying, J.R. was cruising with his friends. Essentially we drifted apart. I would see him here and there, and we would say hi to each other, but we never hung out again.

This story is not uncommon. Many of us have had friends from our childhood who could be considered best friends then but today we hardly see them or know what happened to them. We grow apart, intimacy is lost, we don't talk with them as much, and we lose track of their lives.

The same applies to Christian leaders and their relationship with God. During the early years of a believer's life, a relationship with God is fresh and exciting. Then as the years go by and we start doing more and more ministry, intimacy with the Lord becomes more of a desire than a reality. We grow apart, intimacy is lost, and when we do talk with God it's about ministry, and we lose track of our relationship with Him.

Moses understood the necessity of intimacy with God. As the Hebrews were wandering the desert after their exodus from Egypt, Moses would take a tent and pitch it outside the camp, and he called it the Tent of Meeting. When Moses entered the Tent, a pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance, and the Lord would speak with Moses face-to-face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:7-11).

The Tent of Meeting wasn't the only place Moses heard the Lord. He first heard the Lord when he encountered the burning bush. And this intimacy would continue throughout Moses' life. Can you imagine how wonderful it was for Moses to hear directly from the Lord? To hear His voice? To dialogue with Him?

Thankfully, we don't live in the days of Moses where only one man could meet God face-to-face. You can see the progression of God's intimacy with His people throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, God was with His people. In the Gospels, God walked amongst His people. Today, God lives within His people. One of the greatest events that transpired 50 days after the resurrection was Pentecost when God's Holy Spirit dwelled in His people.

What does this mean for you? That means you can have the same intimacy Moses had with God. You can now speak to God face-to-face. You don't have to wait until a priest intercedes for you. You don't have to wait for a special service. This ability to converse with God on a moment-by-moment basis is an incredible gift.

What does this mean for you as a leader? It means before you speak to others about Jesus, before you evangelize the lost, before you disciple another believer, before you bring comfort to the hurting...before you do anything for Him, you must have an intimate relationship with Him. This is the foundation for any believer, but more importantly for a leader. Before you can have a public life, you need to cultivate your private life.

This means prioritizing the way you communicate and relate to God. It may mean daily times of prayer and reading the Word. Or it may mean times of contemplation throughout the day. It could mean taking a walk at the beach or in the forest. Being intimate means being connected to God on a constant basis. In his book, *Sacred Pathways*, Gary Thomas outlines nine different types of people and how they commune with God: naturalists, sensates, traditionalists, ascetics, activists, caregivers, enthusiasts, contemplative, and intellects.<sup>1</sup> Knowing the way you have been created to commune with God will be very freeing.

It is during this time with God, you will better understand God Himself and His will. It's not just about ministry and then praying, "God, please bless my ministry." It's going deeper with God before going farther for God. It's developing an intimacy so you are able to feel the small tugs of the Holy Spirit directing your steps. It's also the opportunity for the Lord to bring correction when necessary because we can't hide anything from God.

I appreciate how Jesus spent intimate time with His Father before moving out to do ministry. After a day of ministry which included teaching and healing, and more healing, Jesus knew the best and most important way to start the next day. "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35). He spent intimate time with His Father before engaging in ministry.

This is by far the most important leadership lesson. All other leadership lessons rest upon this one.

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. Are you as intimate with God as you can be? If not, what do you miss in your relationship?
2. Are there any priorities that need to be adjusted to allow intimacy to happen?

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas, Gary. (2010). *Sacred Pathways*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

## PRESENCE

### **The essential ingredient of leadership is the powerful presence of God in the leader's life and ministry.**

It's one of the earliest memories from my childhood. I must have been about 4 years old. My mom, dad and I were shopping at a local Woolworth's. The store is no longer around but back then it had a restaurant attached to it and my family would go and eat lunch there every once in a while. Other times my mom would stop at the fast-food counter and order a freshly carved roast beef sandwich. It was a treat when my mom bought me a strawberry Icee.

So this one time my family was shopping at Woolworth's and we got separated. You know how it is. A young toddler starts playing inside the clothing racks, making it his personal clubhouse. The parents unconsciously wander to another rack looking for clothes, not realizing their son is not following them. I eventually came out from the clothing rack and couldn't find my parents. A quick search in the area resulted in that lost feeling...that feeling of separation and the fear that accompanies it.

A store clerk found me, understood the situation, and took me to the customer service area in back of the store. By this time, tears were rolling down my cheeks at the thought of my parents leaving the store without me and I wouldn't see them again. The clerk got on the P.A. system and said there was a little lost boy. When she asked me to say my parents' name in the microphone, I yelled, "MOOOOOMMY! DAAAAADDY!" The next thing you know I saw my dad running to the back of the store to retrieve his lost and found. It was a frightening lesson for a young toddler: as long as my parents were near, I was safe; but once they were gone, I was lost.

The same applies to Christian leaders. It doesn't matter if you are doing something large or small for the Kingdom, the essential ingredient of leadership is the powerful presence of God in a leader's life and ministry. It's when you can sense the presence of the Father in the midst of what you are doing. If the Father is near, you are safe. But once you stray far from His presence, you are moving towards dangerous grounds.

Moses understood this. By the time you get to Exodus 33, Moses has led the people out of Egypt and has received from the Lord the various laws for holy living and the plans for the Tabernacle. Now it's time to leave Mount Sinai and start moving towards the Promised Land. However, the Lord says, "I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people...if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you." (33:3, 5). Moses realized the presence of the Lord was essential if they were to move towards the Promised Land. He said, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here" (33:15). In other words, Moses is saying, "Lord! We need you! If we move towards the Promised Land but You won't be with us, then we don't want to go! We only want to be where You will be!" Moses continued, "For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people?" (33:16). Because Moses found favor in the sight of the Lord, God would go with them.

As a leader, you dare not minister without God's presence. Just because you are doing the work of the Lord, doesn't necessarily mean the Lord is with you. There is a huge danger when you think you are doing the Lord's work but the Lord isn't there. It's perilous when you presume the presence of the Lord. I once observed a pastor make some critical decisions regarding his church's weekend services. It seemed little by little, the pastor was straying far from what the Lord desired and decided to do his own thing. And then people stopped coming to the services, the attendance dropped dramatically, there wasn't enough money to pay expenses, and church staff had to be let go. Try as he might, the pastor could not get the church back to where it was. You could sense the presence of the Lord had departed from this pastor's ministry.

Charles Swindoll writes in his book *Moses*, "When God is in it, it flows. When man is in it, it's forced."<sup>2</sup> When the presence of the Lord is in your ministry, you don't have to work as hard. You don't have to figure out which way to go or what to do. All you have to do is follow the lead of the Lord. This is what Moses desired: Lord, where you go, I will follow. Then he was assured of God's presence.

When the presence of God is in your life and ministry, you sense an anointing from the Lord. Rick Warren writes in *The Purpose Driven Church*, "Church leaders should stop praying, 'Lord, bless what I'm doing' and start praying, 'Lord, help me to do what you are blessing.'"<sup>3</sup>

Imagine if all leaders had the presence of the Lord in their ministry. Imagine the Kingdom moving powerfully in one direction, in His way, in His timing, all pointing to the glory to God. This is what can happen when Christian leaders move with God's presence in their midst.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Do you sense the presence of the Lord in your life and ministry? Or are you assuming the Lord is present?
2. If you don't sense the Lord's presence, what adjustments do you believe you need to make?

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<sup>2</sup> Swindoll, Charles R. (1999). *Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson. p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Warren, Rick. (1995). *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p. 15.

## CHARACTER

### **Integrity is the essential character trait of a spiritual leader.**

My Uncle John was a genuine man. He was the kind of man who, when you shook his strong, calloused hand, you knew was a man of integrity. His handshake was his word. He didn't say much but his actions spoke louder than words. When I was a teenager and just obtained my driver's permit, my Uncle John tossed me the keys to his Ford truck and told me to drive. This caught me by surprise but as we drove he gave me tips and tricks of how to drive carefully, skills I still use today. I appreciated his patience and investment. I miss this man of integrity.

Then there was my Aunty Christine. She was the Christian matriarch of the family. She was the one who led the family in prayer whenever there was a get-together. Sometimes she would stand up in the midst of a meal and sing Amazing Grace (followed by her high school's alma mater). When my parents passed away, my Aunt was there by my side, helping me navigate critical decisions, and what to keep quiet about. She was both a character and a person of character.

And then there was Uncle Sam. He wasn't my uncle by blood or marriage but that's what everybody at church called him. He was another one who had strong, calloused hands, only matched by his calloused knees that were spent in prayer. He was a Vietnam veteran who was honored every Veteran's Day at church. He really loved Jesus and would raise his hands during worship and prayed for people at the prayer tent. He was a gentle man who dearly loved his wife.

We all know people who have strong character. Maybe it was an aunt or uncle, a beloved man or woman at church, a favorite teacher in elementary or high school, or a neighbor who always brought something from the garden to share. These are the kind of people that when you spend more time with them, the more you want to be like them. They just have an air about them that communicates godly strength and character.

Daniel and his three friends were people of strength and character. When you read their story amongst the prophetic books of the Bible, you get the idea that the word Integrity was tattooed on their arms (if the Hebrew culture ever allowed such a thing). When the king's guard in Babylon brought them royal food, they said no; they wanted to adhere to a Jewish diet that honored the Lord. When the three friends refused to bow to a gold statue, they chose to go into an oven. When Daniel was told to bow to a gold statue of the king, he refused and only bowed down to Jehovah God. This got him thrown into a lion's den, which he escaped unharmed because the Lord protected him.

Having a strong character is an essential, if not the most important, trait of a Christian leader. It's the ability to display integrity in all areas of life. It's when your outside actions match your inside beliefs. It's being trustworthy in all your dealings. It's doing the hard work rather than taking shortcuts. It's trusting in the Lord's way rather than manipulating situations to get what you want.

Having a strong character is a result of the first leadership lesson, intimacy. When you meet with the Lord on a consistent basis the Holy Spirit develops your character. How does this happen? As you are praying or reading the Word, the Holy Spirit convicts your heart. He knows not only what is happening in your life now, but knows what will happen in the future. Thus, He impresses you in the areas you need to deal with: love, faith, patience, trust, perseverance, and so on. Thus your heart, mind, and soul are prepared when different circumstances come your way. This builds character.

Another way the Holy Spirit helps is when you are misaligned with the Lord. It's during your private times with Him that He convicts you of different areas that need to be corrected. It's the gentle voice of the Lord that says, "Remember when this happened? That wasn't right. You need to take care of it." This may lead to confession to the Lord as well an apology if you have wronged someone. This is part of God's gracious hand in building your character. I've found that if the Lord cannot correct you in private, He will correct you in public.

I was once having a devotional in Luke 13 where Jesus was healing on the Sabbath and was being criticized. Scripture says Jesus humiliated his opponents. The Holy Spirit highlighted the word *humiliation* to me. I thought it was similar to the word *humility*. So I looked up both words in the English dictionary and found out they come from the word Latin word *humus*, which means *ground*. Then the Holy Spirit spoke powerfully to me: humility is when you take the initiative to put your face to the ground; humiliation is when the Lord has to do it.

When we are open to the Lord's correction, He can build our character. This happens when we are intimate with the Lord day by day, moment by moment. I've learned there are no shortcuts to character, but there are shortcuts to losing it.

As a leader, your character is essential. We live in a time when leaders are not trusted. Not a month goes by that I don't hear or read about a pastor or Christian leader who has fallen or has rejected the faith. Dr. J. Robert Clinton says, "Leaders desperately need credibility with followers."<sup>4</sup> We need leaders who have strong, godly character. The world needs it. Our calling demands it.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Has the Lord convicted you in an area of your life that needs to be corrected? Have you taken steps to make things right or are you hoping God will overlook it?
2. Are there any areas where you are taking shortcuts? Are there any areas where you are not trusting the Lord?

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<sup>4</sup> Clinton, J. Robert. (1998). *Approaching the Bible with Leadership Eyes: An Authoritative Source for Leadership Findings*. Altadena, CA: Barnabas Publishers. p. 6.