

BECOMING A LEADER LIKE PAUL

Sermon by Rick Lanning / Roanoke church of Christ / September, 2018

INTRO: The very title to my sermon will make most of you grin, if not outright laugh. To think that you could ever be a leader like Paul will make most of you immediately tune me out and dismiss these next few minutes to other pressing issues in your busy life.

You are saying, "I could never lead like Paul, so why bother trying."

You are saying, "Paul changed the world, but preacher, I have a hard time just changing my mind about dinner. I could never lead like Paul!"

When it comes to the subject of leadership we too often think of terms of national figures or corporate owners or professional athletes or Hollywood stars that have a large audience they influence. Or spiritually we think that only public figures like preachers or elders are leaders. In other words, you must be some public person who has charisma or natural talents to persuade others to become a leader of people.

Nothing could be further from the truth !!!

I like John Maxwell's definition of leadership. "***Leadership is influence.*** Nothing more and nothing less. If you have influence over another person, then you are a leader."

If we take that definition, how many of you are now in a leadership role?

Husband? Wife? Dad? Mom? Big brother / sister?

Friend? BFF? Room-mate at college? Work-mate at your job?

School teacher? Bible-class teacher? Worship-leader (songs, prayers, LS)?

Young people, if you think you have to be old and gray-haired to be a leader, think again.

Ladies, if you think you have to be a man to be a leader, think again.

New Christians, if you think you have to be in the church for years and have lots of experience to be a leader, think again.

CHRISTIANS ARE LEADERS

I want to help every one of you understand something critically important about the topic of leadership. If you are a disciple of Christ (a Christ-ian), then by that very description you ought to be a ***leader*** in this world!

Tell me what you think these verses mean:

Matthew 5:13-16

"You are the salt of the earth; ...

You are the light of the world.

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Jesus is defining leadership in its most basic form. He is saying in no uncertain terms, “If you are influencing another person to be separate from the world, and to glorify God, then you are My Kind Of Leader!”

Romans 12:1-2

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

When you give your life in acceptable sacrifice to God, you transform not only yourself, but others of the world too. You become God’s change-agent in this sinful world. You become God’s Leader!

LEADERSHIP WE MUST IMITATE

When we think of world leaders we too often think only of great men who led nations through a crisis or a war.

Americans might think of George Washington at Valley Forge in a bitter winter, holding a ragged army together to gain our independence.

Patrick Henry’s bold and courageous “Give me liberty, or give me death” speech that sparked a nation to a revolution of freedom from tyranny.

We might think of Abraham Lincoln quietly, but firmly holding the Union together during the dark days of the Civil War.

We might think of FDR during the Great Depression giving his famous fireside radio chats, calming a nation’s fears with these words: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Or, his war-time speeches during WW2 that gave hope to a young nation facing Hitler’s *Nazism* or Musolini’s *Fascism*, or Hirohito’s *Empirialism*. I have listened many times to the recorded speech he made on December 8, 1941 – a day after Pearl Harbor:

Yesterday, December 7th, 1941 -- a date which will live in infamy -- the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.
No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.
I believe that I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost, but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us.

Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger. With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph -- so help us God.

That's leadership.

But can I tell you from my heart, and from my experience of 65 years of life, that the greatest leaders I have ever read about were found in the Bible.

Noah saving his family even when the entire world, literally, could only think evil thoughts continually (Genesis 6).

Moses and Joshua leading a ragged band of slaves from Egypt to the Promised Land through countless trials and fears.

David's courage to slay a giant, lead a fearful army, and build a mighty nation for God's glory is incredible.

Prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Daniel and others leap off the pages of the Bible to impress us with their faith and courage. "Follow me!"

Jesus is obviously the greatest Leader of men who ever walked the earth. There is not even a close second. His impact and influence will live on until the world ends.

ONE SOLITARY LIFE

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself..

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth -- His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen long centuries have come and gone, and today He is a centerpiece of the human race and leader of the column of progress.

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the

kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.

PAUL'S LEADERSHIP STYLE SIMPLIFIED

Paul's impact and influence on the world is legendary. All of us would immediately place him in the upper echelon of leaders who have helped change the world. He took the teachings of an obscure Jewish carpenter's son, a man who had been executed as a common criminal, and passionately spread Jesus' impact on the Jewish, Greek and Roman world in his own lifetime! He became a living legend in about 30 years of ministry.

He was able to write in one of his 13 epistles: *"if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister."* (Colossians 1:23).

So how do you succinctly describe this amazing man's leadership style that so impacted the world of his day, and for the past 2,000 years?

I have chosen to look at what may seem to you to be an obscure text to describe Paul's leadership. But look a little closer and you may discover his "secret" to how he influenced thousands, and millions through history, to "imitate me as I imitate Christ."

I Thessalonians 2:1-20

1 ¶ For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.

4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness--God is witness.

6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

7 ¶ But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;

11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,
12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

13 ¶ For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans,

15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,

16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

17 ¶ But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.

18 Therefore we wanted to come to you--even I, Paul, time and again--but Satan hindered us.

19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

20 For you are our glory and joy.

Did anything jump out at you as I read that scripture? Anything? _____

Can I tell you what impressed me? His passionate *love* and *concern* for those people he met on his second missionary journey! Paul was not some icon who lived in an ivory tower who dictated orders from on high and intimidated people to change... or else.

He was someone who knew them intimately, and they knew him. He had very likely eaten Sunday lunch at their homes and played with their kids a game of Ring-a-Round-the-Roses, or, Follow-the-Leader. He could (and did) tell stories of them from his past association, and they could no doubt tell "Paul Stories" of his days with them. "I remember when..." was the beginning of many such story times around dinner tables over the years, and at bedtimes with the children.

Look at his intimacy:

"You yourselves know, brethren..." (vs. 1)

"... as you know" (vs. 2)

"...as you know" (vs. 5)

"For you remember, brethren..." (vs. 9)

"You are witnesses...how we behaved among you" (vs. 10)

"as you know how we exhorted you, comforted...as a father his children" (v.11)

"...endeavored more earnestly to see your face with great desire" (vs. 17)

"we wanted to come to you" (vs. 18)

“for you are our glory and joy” (vs. 20)

Look at his “My Life Is An Open Book” public approach:

3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.

19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

20 For you are our glory and joy.

Remember, when Paul first came to Thessalonica he literally limped there from Philippi. He had been beaten and imprisoned (Acts 16). *“But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.”* (vs. 2) They had personally seen the *“marks of the Lord Jesus”* on his broken body (Galatians 6:17). He had not been a “lead from the rear” commander marching into battle. He was the “lead from the front” tip-of-the-spear kind of leader. That impressed them.

Paul’s Positive Leadership Lessons

1. A Leader Cares Deeply About The Needs Of Those They Lead

7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,

Note the TLC: *As a nursing mother... Affectionately longing for you... You had become dear to us... laboring night and day... not be a burden to any of you... As a father does his own children.*

Who wouldn’t want to follow a leader that loved them like a nursing mother? I have watched my wife, my daughter-in-law, my daughter, and so many of you mothers here at Northwest. There is nothing more tender and lovely than the unconditional love and sacrifice mothers make for their babies.

“The hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world.” That’s leadership!

Do you envision Paul’s tireless labors? His tears of both joy and sorrow? That’s leadership! The world doesn’t need more bosses, it needs more tireless servant-leaders who can weep and rejoice with those they serve.

What’s your Love Language?

Gary Smalley writes them in his best-seller, *The 5 Love Languages*:

1. Words of Affirmation
2. Acts of Kindness

3. Physical Touch
4. Receiving Gifts
5. Quality Time

It seems Paul felt the Thessalonians' love languages were #1 and #2. He repeatedly told them words of affirmation, and showed them acts of kindness. They responded greatly to that Servant-Leader approach. To all married couples... To all parents... To all employers... To all employees... To all who hope to Make-A-Difference in this world, lead like Paul in this way.

2. **A Leader Is Genuine and Authentic Above All Else**

3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.

4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness--God is witness.

6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Too often I have spent my public life trying to please people. It is perhaps my greatest weakness (among many). When I try to please everyone, it always (and I mean ALWAYS) backfires eventually.

Ricky Nelson, who sang in his Garden Party song: "You can't please everyone, so you got to please yourself." That's not true. What is true is this, you can't please everyone, so you should seek to please God.

That's what Paul did. It made him the real deal. He was the genuine article. He was sincere and non-hypocritical. A leader must know who he is, where he stands, and Whom he serves. I can't follow someone who is wishy-washy, uncommitted, and a Casper Milquetoast spineless people-pleaser. Too many of our national "leaders" are Poll-Watchers who lick their fingers, stick them in the wind, see which way the wind blows, and go that direction. They are not leaders. They are politicians.

But Paul. You know the man. You know what he stood for. He could have used his authority (and miraculous power) as an apostle to bully his way around. But he chose not to make "*demands as apostles*" – but instead influence others with the power of God's preached gospel.

3. **A Leader Is A Man Of Prayer**

13 ¶ For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

While this point would not be listed among the world's description of leadership (many military, political, educational leaders were atheists), every single leader found in the

Bible was a man of habitual prayer for those he led. Moses. David. Daniel. Nehemiah. Paul. Peter. Jesus.

A true leader knows it is not his eloquence, or his charisma, or his talents, or his stature that causes others to stay-the-course and follow him all the way to the goals he has given them. A true leader knows that for there to be ultimate success, the power must come from outside himself.

Solomon put it plainly in Psalm 127:1-2

“Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep.”

Leaders must find their strength in the power of God. They contact that power only in the avenue of prayer. Did you notice verse 2 above? Long after the leader has fallen asleep, God is still at work. He prays to God to give success, trusting Him who does not slumber or sleep to go to work, allowing the leader to confidently dream sweet dreams.

Paul did that... often.

“do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph 1:16)

“always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy” (Phil. 1:4)

“We give thanks to the God ... praying always for you” (Col. 1:3)

“We give thanks to God always for you, making mention of you in our prayers” (I Th 1:2)

“I thank God ... without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day” (2 Tm 1:3)

“I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers” (Philemon 4)

Show me a leader in the church who is making a lasting impact on others, whether it is a preacher, a shepherd, a deacon, a Bible teacher, a dad / mom, a class-mate, or a soul-winner --- and I will show you a person with calloused knees and a burdened heart who knows it is only in God that success comes.

CONCLUSION:

Paul’s leadership, from this simple text in I Thessalonians, reveals that:

1. A Heart That Cares For Others
2. A Genuine, Authentic, Sincere God-pleaser.
3. A Man (or Woman) of Prayer.

I contend that if you have these three qualities in your life, you are making a far greater impact on the lives of people than you even imagine. You are being a leader in the mold of the greatest leader of men who ever lived. You are greater than Julius Caesar, Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, Bill Gates, Andrew Carnegie and thousands of other leaders of world history. You are impacting a life for eternity. That makes you the greatest leader of all time!