
GETTING A HANDLE ON SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

What are Leaders in Congregations Supposed to Do?

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

If we want to do a good job as spiritual leaders, it's important to know what we're actually supposed to do! As obvious as that sounds, many people who are being promoted by God to accept a role of Kingdom leadership in the lives of fellow believers, neglect to think through what, exactly, that means. Because we are sincere in our desire to do what God wants us to do for the sake of others, we bravely launch into spiritual leadership, but most of us have a nagging suspicion that we do not know what we're doing.

We start the job off, feeling inadequate to the task, and it doesn't take many days before we realize the unspoken doubt we had about ourselves is true. Subsequently, our thoughts run down a predictable path, "Somebody made a mistake in asking me to be a leader. Should I wait until I'm found out as a fraud, or should I quit before I do real damage in someone's life?"

Add to this feeling (of inadequacy) the fear of failure—that we'll be blamed for our mistakes—most sensible people want to avoid becoming spiritual leaders! Those who have already fallen into that designation search for reasons why their life is too-*something* to continue as identified leaders; or, they default to doing the obvious things leaders are supposed to do (run meetings, organize events, help people with problems, receive more training, etc.).

All the while, they try to be as inconspicuous as possible, hoping that if they do not disturb anything or draw any attention to themselves, nobody will challenge their (non-existent) leadership credentials.

CULTURAL DIVIDE

Furthermore, church culture in the 21st century frequently promotes a clear separation between clergy and laity—the professional spiritual leaders (pastors/staff) on one side of the divide, and all

the rest of the congregation on the other. Church services have obvious demographics; one tiny group of people talks or sings in front of the other, much larger group of people.

Even those of us who pastor today feel like phonies because our years of sitting in church services that were led by real leaders (i.e., our mentors or predecessors) convinced us we are not adequate to the task.

Consequently, most people in congregations believe that there really are two categories of believers: leaders and non-leaders. *Whew*, many godly and wonderful believers think to themselves, *I'm glad I'm not called to be a leader!* And yet, Jesus reminds us that the least in the kingdom of God is (potentially) more of a spiritual powerhouse than the prophets of old. Hmmmm...

The Bible truth is simple and unequivocal on the subject: though we do have different roles within the whole body of Christ, each and every believer is intended by God to be a vital ministering person who disciples and leads others into Kingdom life. If we define a spiritual leader as someone with a Hollywood personality and a commanding stage presence, then I will concede that we are not all leaders.

But if spiritual leadership is more akin to being a parent than a performer, I rest my case in saying that every believer is capable of becoming an excellent spiritual leader—just as sincere people can become great parents. They will be better parents if they have good role models and/or biblical training. But there are few people, indeed, who cannot parent well.

SUPER-LEADER MYTH

The idea that leaders are somehow intrinsically different from normal believers can even fool pastors who try to live up to grand expectations that their congregations put on them—or, that they have for themselves. Those same leaders tend to perpetuate the myth of super-saint-leaders, so they search within their congregations to identify people with the potential of being spiritual leaders. After searching for super-shepherds among their mere-sheep, those misinformed pastors grow discouraged because they cannot find many leaders in their congregation.

Obvious, *already-trained-and-ready-to-lead* leaders are few and far between. That's because of two realities. First, spiritual leaders are developed over time. They are not pre-designated by God or prepackaged by life experience as leaders! Jesus promised His disciples that if they followed Him (and His words), He would transform them. Jesus, Himself, “...kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). Though it sounds a bit strange to say, Jesus developed in His ministry, just as we develop in ours.

The second reason why pastors have a hard time finding spiritual leaders in their congregations—and the reason why most people in church do not see themselves as spiritual leaders—is because most Kingdom dynamics are fairly invisible. They are not overtly impressive. They do not stand out as significant or sufficient. The stuff of miracles most often resembles a couple of fish and some bread, not an entire catered meal (Matthew 15:36).

OUR #1 JOB

We forget that our main job is to make disciples—to pass along to others the very words and lessons that Jesus has taught us on our journey of faith (Matthew 28:19). That is the one assignment He has given us. I believe that almost every solution to needs/problems with church leadership can be found by rethinking our strategies for inspiring and mobilizing people “*for the work of service.*”

Pastors and other ministry leaders get confused about the nature of their spiritual assignment. They focus too much on getting help to run their churches/programs, and not enough on developing people. It isn't God's plan for pastors or ministry leaders to pray for God to provide them with more, already-ready leaders. God wants them to develop the *leaders-in-the-rough* who are in their churches.

That brings us back to my original point—spiritual leadership isn't well understood by either the people who are being asked to be leaders, or by those who ask them.

Since the Bible is the only authoritative source for all things in the Kingdom, let's look at a few key passages to highlight the nature and purpose of spiritual leadership. Obviously, I have definite views on the subject, but let me take you to some of my favorite passages to help you get a clear job description for servant-leaders in church.

What is our primary assignment as spiritual people (leaders)?

- Disciple/develop people into what they could not become without us, simply by passing along what Jesus has taught us (Mark 1:17; Matthew 28:18-20).
- Lead people in ways and to places they would not otherwise go without our guidance (Psalm 78:72; John 10:1-6).

What is the ultimate hope for the people who follow us? What do we want to be true of them; what do we want them to be?

- Complete in Christ (Colossians 1:24-29); restored in mind and heart.

- Engaged in ministry to other people, and in service to the world and church.

ISAIAH 61:1-4

- What is the context of this passage (read vs. 60:15-22)?
- For what purposes are we anointed by the Spirit?
- What is the evidence of someone's anointing; in other words, what happens to people who have been ministered to by an anointed servant (v. 3)?
- What do those ministered-to people do, after they have been trained (v.4)?

ACTS 1:1-11

- Who will be *completing* the work Jesus began (v. 1)?
- What prior *orders* did Jesus give His disciples (v. 2)?
- What did Jesus tell His disciples during the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension (v. 3)?
- What had the disciples heard from Jesus about the Holy Spirit (v. 4-5)?
- Who do the disciples expect to be the primary Kingdom-restorer? Based on Jesus' reply to their question, who does Jesus intend to be the primary kingdom-restorers (vs. 6-7)
- What happens when we are baptized in the Spirit? How does that capacitate us for Jesus' assignment to us—to *witness* and *make disciples* (vs. 5, 8)?

EPHESIANS 4:7, 11-16

- Who has Christ gifted for ministry (v. 7)?
- What is the purpose for apostles, prophets, etc. (v. 12)?
- *Equip* means to mend, repair, reframe, reconstruct. If the apostles, prophets, etc. are doing their job, what do the saints begin to do? What then happens to the whole body (v. 12)?

- Who is intended to become mature believers (v. 13)?
- How does the body of Christ hold together (v. 13)? What is the proper working of each individual part?

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-18

- How does Paul use his authority in his disciples' lives (v. 8)?
- How does that relate to the first five verses in this chapter?
- What is Paul's "*sphere*" of influence—and how do you think he developed such a large one (v. 13-17)?