
SPOTTING THE “WRONG” LEADERS

Before It Is Too Late!

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I TIMOTHY 1:3 THROUGH 4:14

Almost nothing is more crucial for church growth than good leaders. Good leaders—and I’m not necessarily referring to obvious, standout leader-types—encourage active participation by all the people in the church. Finding the right set of leaders for church has been an issue since the earliest days when fledgling congregations were springing up around the Mediterranean world. A surprising number of New Testament verses deal with the subject of spiritual leadership, and those passages give us food for thought.

As the new pastor of an existing church in Ephesus, Timothy was faced with a leadership problem. The wrong sorts of individuals had assumed leadership roles for which they were unsuited—not because of a lack of giftedness or training, but because they had faulty concepts of spirituality. They made incorrect use of their leadership because their views about leadership and spirituality were fundamentally flawed.

Where did they get their perceptions of leadership? Probably from the same places many of us get ours; natural thinking, role models witnessed while growing up, hyper-religious examples, etc! Jesus had to instruct His disciples about leadership when two of His followers (goaded on by their mother from a worldly mindset) sought greater rank within the kingdom...(see Matthew 20:20-28). Notice the contrast Jesus paints between *world thought* and *kingdom thought*.

Our natural notions about leadership will likely take us in the wrong direction.

PAUL’S ADVICE TO TIMOTHY

What can we learn from Paul’s counsel (1 Timothy 1; 2) to his young friend about the right kinds of leaders for church? What did Paul identify as the “wrong” kinds? Do you have leaders with these qualities in your church? If so, you may want to have a good (redemptive-for-their-sakes) talk with them—and/or remove them from their current positions of influence.

THE MYSTICS (1:3-4)

- Focus on extra-biblical subjects, not on simple truths, and they tend to specialize in extensive teaching on little-mentioned truths.
- Increase mystery and pseudo-spirituality, rather than understandings to which everyone can come. They speculate on subjects about which God has said little or nothing.
- Make true leaders feel spiritually unknowledgeable and inadequate, and they imply that they have some sort of insider’s number to hear from God.

THE LEGALISTS (1:7-16)

- Focus on morality, more than on righteousness, and view the world very much in terms of who is right/wrong.
- Know how to condemn and judge whether or not someone has measured up, but they have little knowledge for or interest in how to redeem people who have failed.
- Write people off, rather than help them change. When legalists are in charge, decisions about prospective leaders (or just ordinary people) are made too quickly and too conclusively.

FORMERLY SIGNIFICANT PERSONALITIES (1:19-20)

- Use their position or role—in the history of the church and/or in the community—as the basis upon which they have the right to advocate doctrines and directions for the church.
- Cease contending earnestly (and daily) for their faith, and shrink spiritually into a hollow shell. They may use religious words, but they cannot describe a current work of the Lord in their lives.
- Do not focus on little points of obedience in their own lives, but want to steer the whole church according to what they think it (you) should do.

CONTENTIOUS, OPINIONATED MEN (2:8)

- Intimidate with arguments and/or anger; debate with indignation as they try to “clear house” and push everyone else aside.
- Impress other with their outspokenness and obvious competencies, but grow uncomfortable during protracted times of prayer and worship.
- Forget that “the greatest” should become “the least,” and that the Lord uses neither our might nor our power.

FASHION-DRIVEN, VISUALLY PROMINENT WOMEN (2:9-11)

- Impress with their outer adornment—hair fashion, costly garments—but rarely find their way to obscure corners of servanthood.
- Confuse worldly measurements of stature with marks of true godliness.
- Forget that God “sees in secret” and that most real work in the *kingdom* is done behind the scenes.

SPIRITUAL JEZEBELS (2:12-14)

- Overwhelm God’s intended order in the home and in the church by initially offering to get something for the leaders.
- Divert true leaders from their God-given assignments, and cause pastors to second-guess themselves again and again.

- Cannot sit still and accept instruction/correction. They rise up and attempt to teach/lord over anyone who presumes to challenge them.

LEADERS SHAPE YOUR FUTURE

Each of these leader-types are pseudo-spiritual—meaning that they appear to be very powerful and knowledgeable in the kingdom, but they convey a false notion of what the Lord really wants in His followers. Instead of reproducing gentle, servant-hearted, loving and redemptive-minded saints in your church, these sorts of leaders will only bear fruit in like kind to themselves. They will create a spiritual climate of: strangeness and spookiness; condemnation and shame; favoritism and cliquishness; contention and disagreement; showiness and shallowness; and, intimidation and abnegation.

The leaders you choose for various positions—and allow to remain in those roles—will be prophetic of your future. Just as sowing one kind of seed will naturally lead to reaping its fruit, so it will be with your leaders. Regardless of what you say in your sermons, announcements, and pleas for more workers, the single biggest and loudest communication you make about servanthood and leadership will always come from the examples you currently have as leaders in your church.

Sometimes, then, it is better to temporarily have no leaders for CM, coffee ministry, or worship team than it is to have the wrong leaders perpetuating the precise scenario that we’re living with—i.e., not having the leaders we want.

Have courage. Do not settle for the *wrong* leaders just to have leaders. Trust the God who calls into being out of that which does not exist. He who arranged the cosmos can arrange for leaders to emerge in your midst, through loving discipleship and being *merciful-with-their-mistakes* mentoring.