

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Leading By Function

by Dan Trygg

“Do nothing from self-promotion or empty conceit, but in lowly-mindedness let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; ⁴ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Think this way among yourselves as did Christ Jesus, ⁶ who... emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave...” Philippians 2:3-7

“Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the nations lord it down upon them, and the ones who are great exercise authority down upon them. ²⁶ It will not be this way among you, but whoever might wish to become great among you shall be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” Matthew 20:27

“Then He took a child, had him stand among them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, ³⁷ ‘Whoever welcomes one little child such as this in My name welcomes Me...’” Mark 9:36,37

“Expressing family loyalty to one another with brotherly love. Outdoing one another in showing honor.” Romans 12:10

Jesus taught a radically different view of leadership and authority in the kingdom of God, than what was prevalent in the world around them. This is an understanding that the disciples had a hard time grasping, and it has been difficult to keep true to Jesus’ “kingdom perspective” on leadership and authority throughout most of church history. The world’s understanding of power and authority has continually infiltrated the understanding and practice of leadership in the body of Christ. Some of the darkest episodes in church history have come about when church leaders tried to embrace, teach and employ the mindset, expectations and practices of worldly power.

As Jesus pointed out, **there is to be a distinction between the way worldly rulers operate, and the way His disciples are to operate. There are two very different kingdoms at work on this planet: (1.) There is the kingdom of this present, evil age**, a domain of darkness, presided over by the god of this world system, Satan (Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13; Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9); **and (2.) There is the kingdom of God**, a kingdom of light, which has been inaugurated in a new way through Jesus’ coming, death, resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon His followers (Mar. 1:15; Lk. 4:43; 10:9; 11:20; Jn. 18:36; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 12:10). **The kingdom of God is set against the renegade kingdom of darkness**, and the church is to come against the very gates of hades, the places where the enemy has been dug in, entrenched and fortified. **The kingdom of God is definitely on the move, breaking down the enemy’s power, exposing his lies, liberating people held in bondage**, and bringing hope, life and freedom through the victory of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. **In the end, the kingdom of God will totally defeat and displace the kingdom of this present evil age**, and God will create a new heaven and new earth untainted by evil.

As the disciples came to understand that Jesus was the promised Messiah, a king, the prophesied Son of David, it was natural to assume that His kingdom would operate like the kingdoms they knew about in their first-century world. In reality, however, the kingdom of God was to operate in a very different fashion. At times, they argued which of them would be the greatest. Jesus confronted them about this, saying that the one who wished to be first will be last of all and servant of all. Jesus pointed out, once again, that the kings of the nations lord it over them, and they exercise authority over them, and *they* like to be called “benefactors” or receive an honorific title. He said, “You are *not* to be like this. Rather, the one who is greater among you become like the younger (the least honored), and the one leading be as the servant” (Lk. 22:24-26). Then, He pointed to His own example, again, “I am among you as one who serves.” Taking a child in His arms, He said that whoever welcomes a child in His name is receiving Him. Children were considered very unimportant in those times, certainly not worthy to disturb the “great ones” of the world, but Jesus put such a child front and center (Mk. 9:33-37). In Matthew’s version, Jesus even said that **they needed to become like a child to enter His kingdom, and humble themselves like children to become great** (Matt. 18:4).

In the system of the world, ...this present evil age..., authority is often positional and hierarchical. “Greatness” is ascribed to those who are directing and commanding others. Often this is reinforced by control, dominance and fear of punishment. Those in power become “more important” in their own minds, and demand allegiance and obedience. They “lord-it-down-upon” others and “exercise-authority-down-upon” them. **By contrast, those who are “great” in the kingdom of Jesus remain humble and accessible, ...having interest, concern, and time for even the least of people.** They are not there to demand respect or to boss others around. They are there to serve others. **Respect in the kingdom of Jesus is won through service. Leadership is inspired by humble example.**

If what Jesus said is true, ...namely, that leadership in His kingdom would be different than leadership in the evil world system..., we would expect a definite *differentiation in the leadership terms being used, and the way leadership is described* and worked out in practice. That is exactly what is found, if you do a careful study.

(1.) The three most common words for authority in the NT that are applied to worldly political rulers (*archōn*-rulers, *exousia*-authorities, and *hegmōn*-governors) are *never used to describe leadership positions, or interactions between Christians* within the church. (2.) While the noun form of other leadership words is preferred to describe leaders in the world, *there seems to be a conscious rejection of the noun form in favor of a verbal form, when describing leadership functions in the church*. This is amazingly consistent. This seems to reflect a conception of leadership within the church as *not* resting in offices or positions, but in *function* and *activity*. If someone is *doing leadership*, and people are following, *then he or she is a leader*. (3.) The consistent use of the verbal forms forces us to look more closely at the functional translations of the words, instead of just translating them as “leaders”. What we discover is that there are “the ones-thinking-and-planning” (Lk. 22:26; Act 15:22; Heb. 13:7,17,24) and “the ones-standing-before” (Rom. 12:8; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4,5,12; Tit. 3:8,14), but these verbal forms are often translated simply as “leaders”, without differentiating their functions. Elders are defined functionally as ones “shepherding” and “watching over” the flock of God (Act 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-5). They are there to protect and serve the sheep, not boss them. Sheep were led by a developed relationship of trust with the shepherd, not by herding them by force (Jn. 10:1-16; Ezk. 34). Understanding these functions more clearly removes misunderstandings regarding their place in the body of Christ, as well as what our voluntary response should be. (4.) What we find is that there is *no relationship of absolute, unquestioning obedience to any human being* by virtue of their position of leadership in the church. We are responsible to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, as He works through people. God has *not* given any human being the power of mind control, or a divine right to demand your obedience by virtue of their position. We are to voluntarily “order ourselves under” others (Eph 5:21), or “be persuaded by and yield to” them (Heb. 13:17). (5.) The kingdom of God does *not operate by dominance or command, but by prayerful explanation, trust and voluntary cooperation*. God does not desire that we mindlessly obey other people. He desires that we thoughtfully, consciously consider and make a free choice. (6.) Effective leadership in the body of Christ will come through relationship, example, communication and a track-record of good fruit. While many leadership relationships in the world often operate based upon power and threat, in the kingdom of God effective leaders will win the right to be heard through relationship or example, and others will follow because *they see evidence of God’s working in the life of that person*.

The body of Christ is to be an environment where we learn how to relate to one another in love, and care for one another with oversight (Heb. 12:15). *We are to value and respect one another, and regard each other as family*. Our goal is to help each one come to a unity of the faith (a common understanding that we all agree to), an experiential-knowledge of the Son of God (intimacy with Jesus), and to a mature person, ...one who becomes like Jesus in our character and interactions with the world (Eph. 4:13). ...*That is the goal, the end point of our spiritual development. We do not start out there*. We start our spiritual journeys as newborn spiritual babes, with a mixture of fleshly training and a new, growing spiritual awareness. *We have a mixture of clarity and misperception, ...of old thinking and new insights. If we compare notes, we are not going to all see things the same way*.

What is important is to grow in every way into Jesus, ...to get into the revealed Word of God in the Bible, and learn to discern the leadings of the Holy Spirit..., so that He, who is our Source, the Origin and the One who brings us to maturity (our “head”), can renew our minds and direct us to do His will. He will then activate us and lead us to express truth to one another in love, so that we help each other grow. *We all have our areas of brokenness and incompleteness. God’s life-giving grace will come through our truth interactions with one another, as we speak and demonstrate the heart of Jesus to each other. This is a process*. There will be times when we make mistakes, ...when we misstep, misunderstand or even selfishly hurt one another. As we continue to love and share both grace and honesty in our interactions, God will use even those “rough edges” and “hurtful exchanges” to challenge us to go deeper and to reach farther. It is by going *through* such relational struggles that we learn the skills of caregiving, serving and leadership. *You may not have ever thought of yourself as a potential leader, but God is training you to become a wise, seasoned, caretaker of the spiritual growth of others*. The interactive family of the body of Christ is meant to produce such people! *We are all being trained to nurture and care for others!*

The servanthood of effective leadership is demonstrated and developed in the trenches. It comes through caring for the interests of others beyond your own comfort. *The right to lead comes through demonstrated competence and consistency in your own walk with God, ...and a demonstrated heart of concern and service for others*. Leadership is all about learning to defer to others, preferring them and their needs before your own, and being willing to invest the time to develop a relationship with them so that you *can* share the truth that you know and see with them, ...truth designed to encourage and build them up. Kingdom leadership is about taking the initiative to invest in and serve others. *Being a leader is not a position, it is a function. It is not about what you know, ...or about what you may have done in your life. It is about how you relate to and care for others*. People will respond to those who they know care about them. They will trust those who have shown themselves to be credible examples, worthy of trust.