

The Urgent Call for Christian Leaders



Dynamic Christian Life Lessons

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by Steve Nelson

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Discussion Questions

- 1) Do you desire to be a leader? Why or why not?
- 2) Do you think God wants more people to desire positions of greater influence and/or impact? Why or why not?
- 3) Is it wrong to desire leadership?
- 4) How can you desire leadership without pursuing your own self interests? Do you think it is possible to have completely pure motives in the pursuit of leadership?
- 5) Do you think people should pursue leadership, or just pursue the development of godly character in their lives? How might those two goals affect how a person lives his or her life?
- 6) What aspects of godly leadership stand out as being drastically different from worldly leadership? What aspects are similar?
- 7) Which characteristics of leadership would you say are your strengths? Which characteristics are your weaknesses?
- 8) What are the changes that you feel God wants you to make as a result of reading and thinking about these things?

Conclusion

2 Chronicles 16:9a For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. NIV

If a person correctly understands what God asks of a leader, or any Christian for that matter, he will most certainly be overwhelmed. Likewise, anyone who truly understands the utter depravity and darkness of our world will also be besieged with feelings of hopelessness and despair. Yet the fact remains: God wants you to reach this lost world. The need is great; the workers are few.

Paul understood his weakness. He wrote, “That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). He understood that his weakness served to make him depend upon God for all he did. His own abilities paled in comparison to the amazing accomplishments God could do through him.

We should be overwhelmed, but that should not cause us to shy away. God is looking to strengthen those who are willing to serve him.

In light of the desperate needs of a lost world, the great calling of God on your life, and the strength that God will provide, a question remains. Are you willing? Will you be the gap man? Will you be the gap woman?

God may call you into a role that is great, or it may seem insignificant. We don't always know what paths following him will lead us down. The important thing is our willingness to follow His exhilarating call on our lives.

Are you willing to yield to God's call on your life, whatever that requires, and wherever that takes you?

The Gap Man

Ezekiel 22:30 [The LORD said,] “I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.” NIV

In a time of rebellion and sin, God sought out a leader. The destruction that He would have to bring upon his own people weighed heavy on his heart, and he searched for a way out. If only one man could be developed into God's man—His disciple, His spokesman, His deliverer—perhaps there would still be hope. God desired someone who would step up to the plate and be willing to set his life on a course that would run contrary to the norms of society. God searched for such a man, but sadly, He found none.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. NIV

If we are not in these last days now, we are certainly closing in on them swiftly. As described in 2 Timothy 3, the state of our world is one of dreadful godlessness. Sin is rampant among the lost, and among professing Christians there is little measurable difference. Our only hope, the gospel, is spreading at an alarmingly slow rate.

Were the days of Ezekiel any more desperate than the times that are now upon us? Could it be that God is also looking for men and women to stand in the gap today?

The Desire to Lead

1 Timothy 3:1 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. (NIV)

It is easy to think of people who aspire to leadership as being arrogant or proud. Humility is certainly of the essence with God's leaders, and it is imperative that we don't prematurely work ourselves into positions to which God has not called us. However, in the above verse God says (through Paul) that those who desire leadership aspire to a noble calling. He does not call them proud or arrogant and he does not reprove them for this desire. In fact, He seems quite favorable toward their aspirations.

Let's not forget that the idea of church leadership was God's idea. Perhaps it could be argued that any group of people forming any given function needs a leader. One might think that church leadership rose out of such necessity, and thus is somehow worldly at the outset. However, this is not the case. God instituted the offices of pastors and deacons, and used various prophets, judges, kings, and priests to lead his people throughout the Bible. Leadership was His idea. It is a system instituted by God.

Most of us have a desire to lead others. This aspiration is unhealthy when it stems from a longing to be viewed as important and significant, and to prove that in some way we have "arrived". However, this desire to lead is honorable when it grows out of a desire to use the gifts and talents that God has given us to further his kingdom here on the earth. When done with pure motives leadership is simply one more avenue with which your life can bring glory to God. There is nothing wrong with this, and there is nothing wrong with aspiring such an opportunity.

The Centurion: A Man under Authority

Matthew 8:9 "For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

The centurion had a profound understanding of leadership. Even though most people viewed him as a leader, he realized that he was actually under authority himself. In a sense, he was just part of a chain of command. This of course brings us back to the definition of a Christian leader. Even though others served him, he himself was a servant. Christian leaders serve.

Even Jesus was under authority. In John 5:19 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." Eleven verses later he reiterated, "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me." Jesus was following his Father, concerning himself with the will of His Father, and striving to please his Father.

In Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). He yielded His own will to His Father's. In Philippians 2:7-8, it says he "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!" This is the ultimate picture of being completely submitted to God's authority.

A good, safe, and true leader will always be a man or woman under authority. We all need to be under God's authority, but we should also yield ourselves to *every* authority God has put into our lives. 1 Peter 2:13 calls us to this great standard of humility. "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men."

Abraham: A Generous Man

Genesis 14:20b Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. NIV

When Abraham met Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, he gave him a tenth of everything he had. The truly amazing aspect of this is that Abraham did this well before the Law was given. He had not received a command to tithe. No one had told him to do this. He just knew it was the right thing to do. Abraham was a man who gave freely to God. In fact, in his greatest act of faith, he was even willing to give God his precious son Isaac.

Examples of generous giving abound. Jacob, like his grandfather Abraham, also gave a tenth of all God gave him (Genesis 28:22). In the early church everyone shared everything in common, and they gave to anyone that needed it (Acts 2:45). You may remember Barnabas as a disciple of Paul's, but the first time he was mentioned in the Bible was when he sold a field and gave all the proceeds away (Acts 4:37). Jesus commended the poor widow who gave away the last of what she had to live on (Mark 12:44). The Good Samaritan gave to cover the expenses of the man who had been beaten up and left for dead (Luke 10:36). Even the Pharisees were commended for their tithing (Luke 11:42).

The men and women who have been used greatly by God have been men and women who have been generous toward God. God prohibits church leaders from being lovers of money (1 Timothy 3:3). While this certainly includes avoiding greed, paying taxes, and being honest in our dealings, it is also being generous. Jesus said that we cannot love both God and money (Luke 16:13), and that anyone who stores up riches for himself, but is not rich toward God, will face very strict judgment (Luke 12:21).

Every Christian needs to be careful to examine his heart in this area. God is a jealous God, and does not want to compete with anyone's wallet!

Seeking God's Glory

Jeremiah 45:5 "Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not. For I will bring disaster on all people," declares the LORD, "but wherever you go I will let you escape with your life." NIV

Baruch was Jeremiah the prophet's friend and scribe. Being a scribe had some unique challenges. Other people could choose to ignore Jeremiah's gloomy prophecies, but Baruch had no escape. He had to bear the weight of hearing it all. It's not hard to imagine how difficult this could be for him. It would be natural to want to do something easier or more glamorous, or to even be envious of Jeremiah's fame.

Perhaps it is in this context that God took a timeout from His typical prophecies and gave Jeremiah a special message for Baruch the scribe. God told him that he should not seek great things for himself. God made it clear to Baruch that he was not going to be the next Billy Graham. He was not going to lead a great revival, and he probably wasn't even going to escape disaster. However, he would escape with his life.

An important distinction here is that it is not wrong to seek great things. It is wrong to seek great things for yourself. Many great men have desired to see their lives used greatly. Bringing yourself glory is wrong; bringing God glory is the greatest possible use of your life. In fact, in Isaiah 43:7 it says that it was for his glory that mankind was created. Ephesians 2:10 says that we were created to do the good works God planned for us. Jesus Himself said in John 14:12 that anyone who had faith in Him would do even greater things than He did. God has great things planned for our lives to bring Him glory, and we should not shy away from those.

Do Something Great

Matthew 4:19-20 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. NIV

When Jesus called the fishermen, Peter and Andrew, He did not go into a lengthy dissertation about leadership. He did not lay out three years worth of strategic plans to see if they would be interested in what he had in mind. He did not give a fiery and passionate talk about the great needs of a fallen world and about how they could change the face of history. Instead He gave a very brief explanation as to why they should follow Him. They could become fishers of men.

Now to today’s reader this makes more sense than it likely did to them. We’ve been taught this story since our Sunday school days, we’ve had the opportunity to read about how their lives played out, and we’ve had chance to think about the significance of such a statement. It’s a metaphor related to bringing people into God’s kingdom. It’s pretty simple...to us.

Peter and Andrew lacked the 20/20 hindsight we bring to the situation. To them it most certainly was a strange and intriguing statement. One can imagine them thinking, “Fishers of men...fishers of men...what in the world could that possibly mean?”

Without some time to mull these words over in their minds, it seems like about all they could have understood is that Jesus was calling them to something astonishingly great. They had given their lives to catching fish. There was nothing wrong with that. It provided an income, it was a support to their father’s business, and it fed hungry people. But Jesus was calling them to catch men. Men! As important as catching fish was, how much more important must catching men be? Without hesitation, they jumped at this opportunity to pursue this vague but exciting calling on their lives.

Cornelius: A Family Man

Acts 10:2a He and all his family were devout and God-fearing. NIV

You may remember Cornelius as the centurion who invited Peter to his house right around the same time Peter had a vision about unclean animals being lowered from heaven in a sheet. You may not remember that “He and all his family were devout and God-fearing.” This statement about Cornelius is rare praise. Among all the characters of the Bible, hardly any have their family lives highlighted in this manner. Examples of struggling parents abound, but godly examples are sorely lacking .

This is obviously not God’s desire. God very clearly sets the expectation that Christian leaders are to be men with strong families. The following passages show God’s heart related to Christian leaders and their families:

1 Timothy 3:4-5 [An elder] must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) NIV

1 Timothy 3:12 A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. NIV

Titus 1:6 An elder must be ... a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. NIV

When striving to make their lives count for something either in business or in ministry, many leaders lose sight of their families. Scores of people can be successful leaders if they throw themselves at it wholeheartedly, but God’s desire is that we win at home first. God says that a man who can’t manage his family most certainly shouldn’t be a Christian leader. God wants leaders who are strong at home, like Cornelius, whose entire family was devout and God-fearing.

Mordecai and Esther: Visionaries

Esther 4:12-14 [Mordecai said to Esther,] “...For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” NIV

During the time of captivity, King Xerxes took Esther the Jewess to be his queen. At the same time, her uncle Mordecai fell into disfavor with the king’s highest noble, a man named Haman. Mordecai refused to bow down and pay him respect. This infuriated Haman so much that he plotted not only to kill Mordecai, but all of his people—the Jews. Haman used his position with the king to pass an edict that would bring about the destruction of all the Jews.

In the above passage Mordecai begged Esther to go before the king and plead for the lives of the people. Mordecai understood that in God’s sovereignty it was quite likely that He had brought Esther to this particular point in history for the very purpose of sparing her people.

At the risk of her life, Esther approached the king and through a series of implausible ironic twists, Haman’s power collapsed around him. He ended up hung on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai.

Mordecai was a visionary. He saw what needed to be done, and saw how to do it. Esther also caught this vision and risked her life to bring it about. They were like the “men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chronicles 12:32).

Being a godly visionary is simply knowing God and knowing his will. Mordecai did not simply know the right leadership decision, but he knew his God, and how his God worked. Our ability to lead well depends greatly on our ability to see what He wants.

Our Great Calling

Matthew 28:19-20 [Jesus said,] “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” NIV

Jesus set a great calling before Peter and Andrew and it stirred something in their hearts. It was not out of selfish ambition that they followed Him, but they wanted to do something significant with their lives. They saw an opportunity to be with Jesus and to live lives that made a difference—a huge difference.

Jesus also called us to join Him on a similar thrilling mission—to catch men, all men. This calling to preach the gospel to all men is commonly referred to as the Great Commission. The Great Commission was given in various forms right after his resurrection, later in Galilee, and again at his ascension. It was given to the disciples, to others with them, and on one occasion it seems over 500 people were there. It was one of the most important instructions He had ever given them, and so when he said to make disciples and to teach them to obey everything He had commanded, it is certain they understood that this mission was to be passed along to every Christian. It was not given just to the disciples, and it was not intended to be just for the disciples. The mission given here was to be the life mission of every Christian throughout the ages.

Does it stir your heart, even a little, that God has an exciting and rewarding plan for your life? Does the idea of throwing caution to the wind and following Jesus one-hundred percent with wholehearted devotion grab you? How thrilling it is to be called by God!

Will you follow?

Opportunity of a Lifetime

Luke 9:57-62 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

He said to another man, "Follow me."

But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family."

Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." NIV

The calling of a Christian leader is certainly not the same as that of the three men in the above example. However the rejection of that calling may have parallels.

Because these interactions are so brief, it is hard to know the exact situation and motives of each person. The first man seemed uncomfortable with the level of sacrifice that following Jesus would involve. Perhaps the second man's father was dying, and so this was not an opportune time to follow Jesus. The third man may have desired an opportunity to say goodbyes at a going away party with his extended family. Whatever the situations, Jesus was not pleased with their responses.

Each man found following Jesus to be somewhat complicated and inconvenient. Isn't this often the same response we have when we sense that God has a greater calling on our lives? What an opportunity these men missed! They had a chance of a lifetime to follow God in a special way, and they missed it. Make sure you do not miss God's once-in-a-lifetime calling on your life!

Deborah: A Woman of Strength

Judges 4:9a "Very well," Deborah said, "I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman." NIV

In the days of the judges, Deborah stands out as the only female judge. Deborah was also a prophetess and gave Barak a message from God and told him to attack Sisera. Barak agreed, but only if Deborah would go with him. God gave Deborah a great victory that day when Jael, another woman, killed Sisera with her own hands.

The Bible is very clear that men and women have different roles, and that there are some roles that God has reserved for men. This does not mean by any stretch of the imagination that men are better than women. On the contrary, the Bible makes it very clear that men and women are sons and daughters of God, co-heirs of eternal life, and one in Christ Jesus. However, they still have different roles at times.

Like Deborah, many women have been powerfully used by God. Timothy's faith was passed onto him by his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). Several women followed Jesus and helped support Jesus' ministry financially (Luke 8:2,3). Rehab is commended with a spot in the Hall of Faith for her boldness in rescuing the spies (Hebrews 11:31). The Proverbs 31 woman does many important things including working with her hands, buying fields, trading and dealing, and watching over her household. In Titus 2:3 the older women are encouraged to teach younger women.

Women obviously play an indispensable role in their families, in the church, and in society. Christianity needs women who have a heart for following God, a tenacity to do His work, and a heart to lead and instruct those God entrusts to them. Christianity needs more strong women like Deborah.

Paul: A Man on a Mission

Acts 20:24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. NIV

A great leader understands his task and he latches onto it like a bulldog until it is accomplished. Nehemiah was such a man. When some troublemakers wanted to meet with him he told them, "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down" (Nehemiah 6:3). He understood that God's project was his mission and that anything else was a distraction.

Paul was also a man focused on his mission. In the above verse he said that his life was worth nothing to him if he did not complete the mission he was on.

In Philippians 3:8 he said that everything he had given up he considered dung compared to knowing and following Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 9:19 he said he made himself a slave to everyone, to win as many people as possible. Look at his single-mindedness in the following verse:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Paul was certainly locked into his mission!

While there may be special, unique missions that God has for your life, the ultimate mission is to love Him wholeheartedly and to live for Him enthusiastically. Tenaciously pursuing this mission with our time and energy will not leave us disappointed!

The Incredible Need for Leaders

Matthew 9:35-38 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." NIV

Mark 6:34 ...So he began teaching them many things. NIV

Following God is not the same as following him in the pursuit of leadership. However if God is calling you to be a leader, then not following him in that area is similar to not following him in any other area. The reality is that almost every single Christian will be a leader in some way, and that most should be taking on greater responsibilities than they currently are.

Many people's minds automatically think of Christian leaders as pastors, but there are many roles that require leadership. Deacons, the church servants, are needed to lead the ministries of the church. Facilitators are needed to lead various small groups and Bible studies, and teachers are needed in Sunday school and youth group.

Even outside of the church meeting itself leaders are needed. Husbands need to lead their families and parents need to lead their children.

Discipling itself is an act of leadership. The Great Commission calls us to teach our disciples to obey everything Jesus commanded us. If that is not an act of leadership, it is hard to say what is.

When Jesus saw that the people were like a sheep without a shepherd he had compassion on them and he did two things. In the book of Mark, He began teaching them. In the book of Matthew, He told them to pray for more workers.

Could it be that God would want you to have compassion on the crowds, to be a worker, and to be a teacher or leader, even if only in some small way?

What is a Leader?

Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” NIV

A college professor once asked his class what a leader was. The class participants eagerly threw out answers hoping to land on the right one. The professor handily proved the difficulty of the question by dismantling each response with an example of a great leader that lacked the stated characteristics. He finally gave the definition that a leader is someone with followers.

Such a response seems to avoid reason behind asking the question. People want to know what makes leaders great, so they can become better leaders themselves. If you want to be a great leader Jesus said you start by being a servant. This may be the clearest definition of a Christian leader. A servant is under authority, is not serving his own interests, and works for the benefit of others. This is the type of leadership Jesus praised as being healthy and great. It is this leadership emphasis that will bring Him glory, and keep His followers from merely seeking position and honor for themselves.

The Bible is full of examples of great leaders. Almost every one of them has some great flaw that we could focus on, but each one also has great qualities that we can imitate. We’ll look at some of these men and women’s lives to help discover what areas we can grow in to become better leaders and better servants.

Nehemiah: An Impassioned Leader

Nehemiah 1:4 When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. NIV

Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. When some men came from Jerusalem and reported to him the condition of the walls and the gate he broke down. He mourned and wept that the city was still in ruins. The king noticed his sadness of heart and asked him what was wrong. Nehemiah told him and boldly asked the king for permission to go and rebuild the wall. The king granted his request and he left for Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, Nehemiah spent three days examining the condition of the wall and determining the scope of the project. He then enlisted support for the project from the people living in Jerusalem, divided up the work, and started the rebuilding.

When enemies threatened, he took up defenses. When there was arguing and bickering, he stepped in and found resolution. When the people grew disheartened, he encouraged them.

Within fifty-two days the walls and the gate were rebuilt. Their enemies were struck with fear, because even they realized that such a feat could only be accomplished with God’s help.

Nehemiah might seem like the stereotypical project-manager type of leader, but he was much more than that. This project was not just something on his to-do list. It was something that bothered him. It moved him to tears. It drove him to fast and pray. The greatest leaders are not just individuals who are gifted in people management. Instead, they are men and women who are troubled by some great need which no one else is meeting. In the depths of their soul they sense that God wants them to lead in taking up the cause.

What great cause troubles you? Has God put a special project of His on your heart?

Ezra: A Pacesetter

Matthew 23:2-3 “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.” NIV

One of the faults that Jesus pointed out about the Pharisees was that they did not practice what they preached. Jesus told people to follow obey them anyway. Perhaps that was merely out of propriety, or it is quite likely that they actually taught many good things. In any case, they did not do the things they taught. They may have felt they had reached such a level of Spiritual maturity that they didn’t need to “practice”, or they may have felt that some of the teachings were beneath them. In any case, Jesus was quick to point out that this was not to be the approach of His leaders.

Nearing the end of the time of the Israelite captivity, God raised up two great leaders to prepare the people for their return to the Holy Land. Ezra was instrumental in rebuilding the temple, and Nehemiah led the rebuilding of the wall that protected Jerusalem from enemy forces.

Ezra was “well versed in the Law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). He was also a strong leader and it would have been easy for him to rest on his laurels, and like the Pharisees, invest more energy into teaching than into learning.

Ezra 7:10 says, “Ezra had devoted himself to the *study* and *observance* of the Law of the LORD, and to *teaching* its decrees and laws in Israel.” Even though he knew the Law, he continued to study. In spite of already being a recognized leader, he continued to obey. Only after studying and obeying did Ezra teach. Ezra did not just lead the people into what was right, but he went there before them. He wasn’t just a leader, but also a pacesetter.

Jesus: A Man of Payer

Hebrews 5:7 During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. NIV

Jesus, of course, was the one man who exemplified all the traits of a strong leader. He understood His mission and was passionate about it. All authority was granted to him, but He still lived as a humble servant under the authority of His Father. The fact that he was a man of character goes without saying. He was undoubtedly the complete package of what it means to be a leader.

Being God in the flesh, none of this seems unexpected. Of course He is going to be the perfect example in every way! Perhaps the one thing that stands out was that He was a man of prayer.

The need for God, the Son, to pray to God, the Father, is mind-boggling to say the least. Of all people who have ever lived on the face of the earth, it would seem that Jesus was the one person who wouldn’t need to pray. Yet he prayed. He prayed alone and He prayed with His disciples. He prayed for the little children, for all His followers, and even His tormentors. On one occasion He spent the night praying on a mountainside. At Gethsemane He wrestled with God in prayer three different times to the point of sweating drops like blood. Luke 5:16 says, “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

The implication is obvious. If Jesus needed prayer, how much more do we need it? If the Creator of the universe took the time to be in relationship with His Father, how much more desperately do the leaders of His church need to be men and women of prayer?

David: A Patient Leader

1 Samuel 26:23 “The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The LORD delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the LORD’s anointed.” NIV

While there is nothing wrong with a proper desire to be a leader, we must remember that is for God’s glory that we would serve as such, not our own. With this in mind, it would not be wise for us to work ourselves into leadership positions through opportunistic self promotion. We must wait for God’s timing.

One of the most amazing aspects of David’s life was his willingness to wait patiently for God to raise him up as a leader. When Saul turned away from God and did not carry out His instructions, the LORD became grieved that He had made Saul king. The LORD told Saul that he had been rejected as king. God sought out a man after His own heart to lead His people, and He sent the priest Samuel to anoint David.

David did not immediately become king and seemingly made no effort to hasten the process. He was only a boy when he fought Goliath and he did not become king until he turned thirty. Over those fifteen or so years of waiting, David had at least two different opportunities to kill Saul, but he didn’t. He had the LORD’s anointing, he knew he was a better man than Saul, and he knew that God had delivered Saul into his hands. Yet David waited patiently. He waited for God’s will to unfold in God’s timing.

It is with that heart that aspiring leaders should wait for God to raise them up and to continue serving Him in righteousness and faithfulness regardless of their positions and titles.

Psalms 75:7 But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another. NIV

Timothy: A Loving Leader

1 Peter 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing , as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. NIV

If a person were to read through the entire New Testament looking for a common theme, one theme that would certainly have to be a front runner is the topic of love. The greatest command deals with loving God, and the second greatest command is about loving people. This theme of love is not just in the Gospels, but it is continued throughout the writings of all the New Testament authors. It is not surprising then that God’s leaders should be men who love.

Jesus warned in the above passage that leaders shouldn’t lord their position over others. People are not pawns to serve our purposes. They are not projects; and they are not a means to an end. Every person is a unique and special creation of God’s—His children. Leaders need to be careful to not lose sight of this.

The above passage also mentions that leaders should not lead because they must, but because they are willing. In other words, they should lead because they want to—because they enjoy helping people.

Timothy was like a son to Paul, and was one of the leaders of the early church. About him, Paul said, “I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare” (Philippians 2:20). What a great example for us to follow. When God puts us into positions of leadership, we need to take a genuine interest in those we are leading. If you take a genuine interest in the welfare of others you are sure to be the type of leader who will be God-honoring and influential.

John the Baptist: A Humble Leader

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. NIV

Humility is certainly one of the marks of the greatest Christian leaders. Jesus modeled this by washing the disciples' feet (John 13:12). Moses, one of the Bible's greatest leaders, was called the most humble man on the face of the earth (Numbers 20:3). Humility is so powerful that Ahab (1 Kings 21:29) and Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:12), two notoriously evil kings, humbled themselves before God and as a result were given second chances.

Godly leadership and humility go hand-in-hand. Jesus said, "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12) A Christian leader who is not humble is quite simply a contradiction of terms.

John the Baptist was a commanding leader. He spoke directly and powerfully, and people came from all over Jerusalem and Judea to be baptized by him. Many of the religious leaders, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, even came to be baptized. He had his own following and his own disciples. He was a quickly rising to greatness. Jesus even said, "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7:28a).

When John's disciples heard that people were starting to turn to Jesus and his disciples to be baptized, they became distressed. They brought this concern to John and he answered beautifully, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

John the Baptist understood that his rise in influence was merely to serve a purpose. When his disciples came to him hoping he would defend his place of greatness, he resisted the temptation. Instead, he graciously bowed out, realizing that his purpose had been fulfilled. He rightly considered Jesus better than himself, and was completely satisfied to be the emcee, and not the keynote speaker.

Daniel: A Man of Integrity and Character

1 Timothy 3:2 Now the overseer must be above reproach... NIV

1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 lay out the requirements for church leaders. Almost all of the requirements listed relate to a person's character. The implication is clear: church leaders are not to be the most dynamic speakers, the most brilliant orators, or have the most charismatic personalities. Leaders in the church are to be men of profound character, not just gifted motivators.

Daniel was a man of unquestionable character. As one of the captives during the time of captivity, Daniel served in the Babylonian courts. He was a man of great ability, and rose to a position of great authority while serving under King Darius. He stood out so much, that the king planned to put him in charge of handling the affairs of the entire empire. Daniel's rise to power made the other leaders jealous, and they made plans to find a way to unseat Daniel from his important place of service.

After a time of careful scrutiny, they decided that Daniel was such a man of character, that they would never find a way to condemn his actions. He was always trustworthy and honest in his dealings.

These corrupt leaders knew that the only way to get at Daniel was through his God. They tricked Darius into creating a law that would prohibit prayer, and as they predicted, Daniel prayed anyway. He could have just prayed in his closet, but he didn't. Instead, Daniel prayed out in the open, because that was his habit, and that's what he felt was right to do. This, of course, landed Daniel in the lion's den, but God miraculously spared him.

When Daniel prayed openly at the risk of his life, he demonstrated a level of integrity and character that is rare among men. It is this type of moral fiber that is needed among God's leaders.

Samson: A Zealous Man

Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. NIV

By the narrative given in the Bible, Samson was not your typical leader. His relationships with women depicted him as immoral. At a casual reading many of his interactions with the Philistines make him appear to be rash and hot-headed more than a man of God. When he let Delilah repeatedly trick him, with an obvious intent to bring him harm, he didn't seem to be particularly intelligent. Samson was apparently greatly lacking in self-control, and overall, in depth of character.

It is hard to imagine why anyone would even view Samson as a leader or a man of God. Yet he is heralded as a great man of faith in Hebrews 11:32. What example could Samson's life hold for us today? What one area of his character could possibly be imitated?

Perhaps one area of Samson's life that was commendable was his zeal. Samson was the kind of guy that lived his life full throttle. While the unrestrained aspect of this trait wreaked havoc on his personal life, it also made him a formidable foe to the enemies of the LORD.

Why do athletes allow themselves to be yelled at by coaches? Why do they practice, pump iron, and push themselves? Why do they play injured? They do it because they are excited about what they do. As Christians, are we as excited about what we do?

The church of God needs more men and women who are *more* excited about Him, than the typical sports fan is about putting a ball through a hoop, into a hole, or between the uprights. The church needs passionate people like Samson, John the Baptist, and Jonathan's armor-bearer—people who are zealous about God and fanatical in following Him. It needs radical people willing to take chances.

Peter: An Unlikely Leader

John 21:15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." NIV

People often feel inadequate about leading because they don't feel good enough. Sometimes this is a healthy concern that they should address with their own leaders. Other times this is simply a misunderstanding of what leaders are. Leaders are not infallible men and women with flawless pasts, and with every "i" dotted and every "t" crossed. Most the biblical leaders were used greatly in spite of, or perhaps because of, their weaknesses.

Peter was a great leader, but in his early days he seemed to always say the wrong things.

When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water he did not believe that it was Jesus. He asked Jesus to prove it by letting him walk on the water as well. Jesus obliged, but also rebuked him for his lack of faith.

On another occasion Jesus was telling His disciples about His imminent death and resurrection. Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him. Jesus responded with, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:23)

When Jesus predicted the desertion of his followers, Peter contradicted Jesus, saying that he would die before denying Jesus. It was then that Jesus told him that before the rooster crowed, he would deny Him three times. (Luke 22:34)

We could view Peter as a colossal failure, but let's not be too hard on him, or on ourselves. We can all be pretty foolish at times. Jesus knew this about Peter, but he called him to lead by *feeding His lambs*. He became one of the pillars of the early church. Jesus can also see past your weaknesses and may well have plans for your life that are beyond what you think you are equipped or qualified for.