

POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

LOVING THE PEOPLE YOU LEAD (PART 2)

by Allen Webster

In the last part of this study, we noticed that a loving leader is studious and urgent. Furthermore we noticed that he proclaims, inspires, assists, and resists. Although we have covered a lot of ground, a great deal remains to be covered. In this installment of our study, we will notice five additional things that a loving leader does.

A Loving Leader Reclaims

Sheep wander away, so they must be searched out and brought back to the safety of the flock (Luke 15:17). Not all conversions end in baptisms. Some end in restorations. James wrote, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5:19-20). In some ways, the latter is more fulfilling than the former. For one reason, it is more challenging. Solomon explained, "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle" (Prov. 18:19; cf. Acts 15:39). But it can be done, and when it is, it is rewarding. Consider two patriarchal examples: Esau and Jacob (Gen. 27:41; Gen. 33:4) and Joseph and his brethren (Gen. 37; Gen. 45:15). In the New Testament, Simon the sorcerer fell, but he requested prayer after Peter's rebuke (Acts 8:22-24).

In many communities, there are more inactive church members than active ones. The assembly would be overflowing if every living person who had ever been on the rolls were

still in the pews. Elders know the value of these precious people and take time to influence them. They try to build rapport when they see them in town. They graciously offer their services if there is a death in the family. They take time to visit them when they are hospitalized. They make sure they have personal invitations to homecomings, meetings, and special church events.

A Loving Leader Aims

God's men have definite goals. They have vision. There is a difference in sight and vision, of course. Helen Keller said, "The greatest tragedy in life is people who have sight but no vision." Marcus Aurelius Antoninus said, "The true worth of a man is to be measured by the objects he pursues." Norman Vincent Peale believed, "All successful people have a goal. No one can get anywhere unless he knows where he wants to go and what he wants to be or do." William Barclay wrote, "There are two great days in a person's life - the day we are born and the day we discover why" (Poole et al.).

Acting on goals is important. Elders do not just aim, they fire! The Wright brothers were not the inventors of the plane. Another man had a plane ready a year before them but did not believe it would fly. We must take, or in some cases make, our opportunities (John 4:6-10; Acts 16:13; Acts 16:31-33; Acts 20:7; Acts 20:18-21; Acts 28:16; Acts 28:30-31).

What are worthy aims for church leaders right now? ***God's leaders aim to speak in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:2).***

They watch for a good opportunity

to speak a good word for the Good Shepherd (Gal. 6:10; Prov. 12:25; John 10:11). They do not want to be too shy in speaking to others about Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:67). The phrase *be instant* is used of persons coming upon one suddenly. It can be used of a rain shower coming up quickly or of the advent of angels.

God's leaders aim to be patient (2 Tim. 4:2). Patience means "endurance, constancy, steadfastness, perseverance, forbearance, longsuffering, slowness in avenging wrongs." It describes the spirit that never grows irritated, never despairs, and never regards any man as beyond salvation (cf. Matt. 5:22). We like for needed changes to be immediately made in the lives of those we encourage to obey the Lord; we are zealous to see the congregation grow in zeal and faithfulness; but at the same time, we realize that the situation likely did not develop overnight, and probably will not change overnight. Like turning a large ship around, it takes a while even to tell it is moving, and longer for the bow and the stern to switch positions; but if enough pressure is applied, it eventually happens.

God's leaders aim to reprove (2 Tim. 4:2). They know they must make the sinner aware of his sin before he will repent. As politically incorrect as it may at first sound, at times, elders at times seek to "shame" those they see in sin. Reprove carries with it a "suggestion of shame of the person convicted." It means "to bring to the light, expose; find fault with, correct" (Col. 1:28-29; 1 Thess. 2:11-

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12; 5:14). At times, Paul spoke to shame others. He said candidly, "Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34; Heb. 5:11-12). Some behaviors are shameful (1 Cor. 14:35; Eph. 5:12; Phil. 3:19); those who do them should be ashamed of themselves. That feeling of shame is powerfully motivational to change (Luke 16:3; Rom. 6:21; 2 Thess. 3:14).

In another sense, the elder's work is to tame others. The word tame is found four times in Scripture. Like the possessed man in the Gadarenes, no one but Jesus can tame the rebellious spirit of sinful people (Mark 5:4). Speech patterns are especially difficult to control (Jas. 3:78). We gradually help hearers to bring their lives into complete submission to King Jesus.

Reprove means "to convict, refute; reprehend severely; call to account, demand an explanation; chasten, to punish." This takes courage, conviction, and discipline. "This does not fit the stereotypical ineffectual parson who takes five sugars in his tea, always says positive things, never rocks the boat, and finds his members consulting psychics and astrologers when they are in distress" (Author unknown). Someone observed that in modern churches the "priest" threatens to push the "prophet" out of his place. To be a priest requires less study and less courage since it is easier to do something for God than to be something for Him.

God's leaders aim to rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2). This word means, "to raise the price of; to tax with fault, rate, chide, censure severely; to admonish or charge sharply" (cf. Rev. 3:19). Epictetus contrasted the false

philosopher, who is out for popularity, and the real philosopher, whose aim is the good of his hearers. The false philosopher dealt in flattery; he pandered to self-esteem. The real philosopher says: "Come and be told that you are in a bad way." "The philosopher's lecture," he said, "is a surgery; when you go away you ought to have felt not pleasure, but pain" (Epictetus, Sec. 2 CXXI).

Alcibiades, the brilliant but spoiled darling of Athens, is a case in point. He said to Socrates, "Socrates, I hate you, because every time I meet you, you make me see what I am." The first essential to change is to bring a person to see himself as he is.

Elders and preachers must be both loving and plain (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1; John 10:24). A doctor or therapist who always avoided causing pain could not treat disease and injury. Neither can a church leader. Ideally, truth is dispensed in small doses over a long period of time - like a prescription, but sometimes doctors must give a large dose immediately, like a shot. Preaching is the prescription; an elder's rebuke is getting a spiritual shot. It is painful for a moment, but speeds the process of recovery. John T. Lewis said: "I would rather have thousands to say to me at the judgment, 'We heard you preach and you hurt our feelings,' than to have just one lost soul to say, 'I heard you preach, but you did not tell me the truth.'"

In personal relationships a word of warning spoken early and often would sometimes save a brother from spiritual shipwreck (Prov. 27:5). It must be spoken with a consciousness of our common guilt (cf. Gal. 6:12). God's Word judges us; we do not have the right to sit in judgment on another based on our preferences (John 7:1; John 7:24).

A Loving Leader Cheers and Steers

Good leaders learn the art of exhorting. This word literally means "to call to one's side for a word of encouragement." Not only must men be rebuked, they must also be encouraged. The world is a daunting enough place as it is without coming to church and getting even more discouraged. Robert Louis Stevenson purportedly wrote in his journal, "Wonders of wonders! I have been to church today and am not depressed" (Exum). No rebuke should ever be such that it takes the heart and hope out of a person. We should not send hearers away on flat tires. Discouraged members are not assets to any church. To adapt Shakespeare to this subject:

*Who steals my purse steals trash;
'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been
slave to thousands;
But he who filches from me my
courage,
Robs me of that which not
enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.*

So, church work requires both tact and contact. A man entered a hardware store and requested half of a stovepipe. The clerk went to the back to find out if he was permitted to cut one in half. He said, "Some nut wants half a stovepipe," and then noticing that the man had followed him to the back, reacted quickly and said, "and this fellow wants the other half." That's tact!

They called him "Encouragement" (cf. Acts 4:36). How lovely! You can hardly picture Barnabas without seeing a smile on his face. What would it have been like to hear Barnabas preach? Perhaps he could

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have made you forget "Tempted and tried, we're oft made to wonder" in view of "O, Victory in Jesus!"

Good elders steer the work of the church in fruitful evangelism. God is glorified when we "bear much fruit" (John 15:8). God is serious about gathering fruit (read carefully John 15:1-16). Churches can get bogged down in all kinds of busy activities that do not really accomplish any long-term spiritual good. Every event and activity should be judged in how likely it is to bring a soul to Christ. Did we baptize anyone when we did this last year? Did we get any Bible studies or visitors to services? Preachers and elders can often steer the church's work in the right direction by a well-placed suggestion in a foyer conversation or a planning session, or a timely sermon keeping the focus on saving souls (2 Cor. 4:3).

Loving Leaders

Enrich and Enliven

We get to be in the heavenly banking business. You could say we are financial advisors for long-term investments. Jesus said that people can "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:20). The rich young ruler was advised to liquidate all his assets and put his wealth in absolutely secure stock (Matt. 19:21). Jesus told those of Laodicea, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed" (Rev. 3:18). Paul was happy to be able to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8).

Church leaders also get to put life back into people. Like an old photo left in the sun, the life of sin sooner or later loses its color. Like an iced drink left out too long, it goes flat. Like week-old bread, it gets stale. Like a game played too often, it loses its

appeal. We get to tell those on the backside of sin how to invigorate, freshen, revive, and renew their lives. When the long-missed prodigal returned, his father urged his older brother to accept him, reasoning, "It was meet [appropriate] that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:32). Paul said, "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5).

Loving Leaders

Insure and Assure, Brighten and Lighten

To quote William Clark upon finally seeing the Pacific Ocean, "Oh the joy" of church work! An evangelist is the "bringer of good news" (1 Cor. 15:1-4). We get to repeat the sweetest message ever written again and over.

- To tired people we get to say, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

- To those burdened by sin and life's hardships, we get to tell Jesus' promise: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:29-30).

- To those who are troubled, we have a good word: "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels... When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

- To those who feel lost, we get to point the way to "the way" (John 14:6).

- To those who feel guilty, we get to say, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1; cf. John 5:24).

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Deuteronomy 5:32

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• To those who fear death, we can assure: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:52-57).

• To those who fear that God has abandoned them, we can say, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful...For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever" (Psa. 37:25-28). And we can add for good measure: "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5).

• To those who feel that God is angry with them, we have a comforting word, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

• To those who feel God is inaccessible, we can say, "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2).

Conclusion

Of all the world's shortages, the shortage of love must be the greatest. Of all the needs of churches, perhaps love properly understood and practiced is our greatest need. What the church needs now is a big spoonful of charity. As church leaders, let us do our part to solve this problem.

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