

The Gift of Leadership

A gifted story: The church was locked to keep out the riffraff, lest the building be ruined. It was already so run down. The congregation had dwindled to such small numbers—most people had moved to the suburbs. Then George said, let's open the doors and welcome the street people in—we'll make it their church. Horrors! But George was persistent. "Whenever you do this unto the least of me..." he proclaimed to the congregation. Eventually the doors were opened, the needs of the people were addressed, a soup kitchen was set up, the pews began to fill again, and a whole new congregation was born. And the priest? He went on to become the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Biblical references:

Romans 12:8 - ...if it (our gift) is to encourage others, we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do so generously; whoever has authority should work hard... 1 Thess. 5:12 - We beg you, our brothers, to pay proper respect to those who work among you, who guide and instruct you in the Christian life.

John 21:18 - ...Jesus said to him (Peter). "Take care of my sheep."

Definition and comment:

The gift of Leadership: the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to set goals in accordance with God's purpose for the future and communicate these goals to others so that they voluntarily and harmoniously work together to accomplish them for the glory of God. Through this gift the Spirit enables the believer to motivate, direct and inspire God's people in such a way that they desire to work together to do the Church's work effectively. The gift of leadership gives the believer the confidence to step forward, give direction and provide incentive to get a task completed or a dream fulfilled. Members of a group will be led with caring concern and foresight. Sometimes this gift is paired with the gift of administration, but that may not always be the case. The original word for "leadership" in Greek is "prohistemi" and it conveys the picture of someone "presiding over others." In 1 Timothy, chapter 3, a full account is given of the characteristics of a church leader. A high standard is set: without fault, sober, self-controlled, orderly, welcoming of strangers, able to teach, gentle and peaceful, be not enamored with money, able to manage his family and children, mature in the faith and respected by the people.

Caring more than rank or authority marks Christian leadership. The gift may be employed in a small and unofficial way, such as in a committee or task force, or it may be used in an official way, such as by a pastor or elected officer of the church. Christian leadership is always exercised under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Affirm that you have this gift; questions to ask yourself:

1. Do you enjoy inspiring and leading others for the sake of Christ's work?
2. Are you usually quick to sense when a group you are in is getting nowhere and you want to do something about it?
3. When you join a group, do others often expect you to take leadership?
4. Have you accepted leadership responsibilities and succeeded in helping a group work toward a goal?
5. Do you find it easy to motivate others to follow through on a ministry project?
6. Do you tend to think futuristically about ministries within the church and community?

Areas for study and personal growth:

1. There are many stories in the Bible that illustrate how leadership is exercised in the name of God. Temples were built, people were led to new lands, and armies were led to victory. Read passages throughout the Bible that exemplify leadership by people under God's direction to understand what God expects of his leaders, the faith that is required, and the ways in which the leadership is carried out
2. Read biographies of great leaders to gain insight into effective methods used. Learn how to develop rapport, how earn the trust of others, and how to delegate. Study leadership techniques to understand how administration and leadership tie together for effective management practices.

3. Consider attending a seminar on leadership dynamics, management skills, or time management in order to gain more insight into effective goal-setting, prioritizing, and planning.
4. Build a library of leadership materials and resources, such as: *Strategy for Leadership* by Edward Dayton and Ted Engstrom, the *Christian Leadership Newsletter* (monthly), and *Leadership 100* (bi-monthly magazine).
5. Meditate on the ways your gift of leadership could most effectively be employed to help build up the church. Where is leadership needed, and what skills can you bring to the table to help move things along in the right direction? Prayer is essential to support any initiative you may feel moved to take.
6. It will be important for you to develop discipline in the caring exercise of your leadership gift to avoid drifting into a condition where the sense of center-stage power moves your consciousness rather than the sense of how God wants ministry done. Understand fully how attractive you will be to the Evil One once you are leading others, and arm yourself to stay on God's course.

General ways to use the gift of leadership:

- Personally: help others to set healthy goals and objectives; lead family projects.
- Within the church: chair a committee; assist in the setting of long-range church plans; head up a project (see more specific church service opportunities in the Booklet *Channels for Using the Gifts*).
- Within the wider community: serve as a school board member; become involved in community service groups (Hospice, Bootstrap, youth activities).

For reflection:

A leader has to believe in himself or herself, and that carries the danger of being perceived as arrogant. But a good leader is not so. The good leader appreciates that there are a great variety of paradigms and principles out there about how the world works—different ways of looking at things. Other viewpoints are respected - they are different, not necessarily wrong. Confidence in the leader stems from a sense that he or she is centered in basic principles that are true and good; the Christian ethic gives us these principles. Steven Covey (*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*) believes that personal effectiveness builds when a person is proactive, begins with the end in mind, puts first things first, thinks “Win/Win”, seeks first to understand and then to be understood, synergizes (finding a creative result from cooperation), and works at self-renewal. These are good points for a leader to master for maximum effectiveness.

However it is arrived at, leadership requires conviction, the courage to pursue what you believe in, and the ability to convince others that you are on the right track. Churchill said, “An accepted leader has only to be sure of what it is best to do, or at least to have made up his mind about it.” It is the curse of leadership that you have to stick your neck out every so often and see if you can get others to follow. One might say it is not a task for sissies!

But true Christian leadership is on a higher plain. God provides special empowerment when it is his plan that is being worked on. The leader is acting as God's instrument, and when that is evident, a wonderful harmony can be achieved, the activity is blessed, and good things begin to happen. You share the spiritual gift of leadership with the likes of Moses, Peter, and Paul. Won't it be interesting to uncover the special mission God has in mind for you?