



Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 11:37-54
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How To Lead So No One Follows

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

Last weekend we had about 300 people at Mt. Hermon for our annual retreat. I was there for the first half of the retreat and I enjoyed listening to Steve Madsen teach us about leadership from the life of Nehemiah. One of the things Steve did was pass out an outline in which he listed 47 different things that effective leaders do. It's really a helpful list based on Nehemiah's example as a leader. And these are principles that, in some way or another, apply to all of us, because, in some way, all of us are called to be leaders. It may be at home as a parent, or at work, or as a student, or here in the ministry of the church.

This morning we're going to continue on this theme of leadership. But what I have to say has a bit of a different spin to it. I want to talk about leadership, but I'm NOT going to talk about what effective leaders do. Instead I'm going to talk about what ineffective leaders do. I'm going to talk about what effective leaders DON'T do. Have you ever thought about that? What are the things that leaders do that really sabotage their leadership? What are things that will cause your children or your class or your team or your subordinates at work to NOT follow you?

It's a question that Jesus had to deal with because there were so many ineffective leaders around him. Most of them were religious leaders. In the last 25 years or so here in America some of the leaders who have proved to be the most ineffective have been religious leaders. There is something about religion that breeds ineffective leaders. And one of the biggest pitfalls religious leaders fall into is hypocrisy.

What is a hypocrite? A hypocrite is someone who, consciously or unconsciously, pretends to be someone that they're not. In Jesus' day the word for hypocrite was used mostly used in the context of the stage. An actor would wear a mask as he acted out a role on the stage. Soon that word came to be used to describe someone who approached his whole life as an actor, trying to act out a role that wasn't true to who he really was. This is a trap that leaders can easily get caught in because so much time is spent in front of people, as if on a stage. We know we're being watched, so we can easily try to project an image that isn't true to who we really are.

I. Jesus offends an ineffective leader (vv. 37-38).

Jesus confronted this problem in Luke 11:37ff. After he got done teaching, he received an invitation to

lunch. Look at vv. 37-38.

“Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal.”

The Pharisees were very religious guys. They weren't professional pastors or priests; they were lay leaders. But they were very zealous in trying to keep the Jewish law. So much so that they added their own rules to the law just to make sure that no one came close to crossing the line. If the law said, “Don't cross this line,” the Pharisees said, “We're going to draw another line way back here so we don't even get close to that line.” Luke 11 is a case in point. The law didn't say anything about ritual washings before meals. But the Pharisees said, “What if you unknowingly came into contact with something or someone who defiled you? You had better wash up just to demonstrate that you're separating yourself from those things!” They even had a little rule book called the Mishnah that actually told them exactly how much water to use!

Jesus accepts the invitation to lunch, but he doesn't wash up. He just sits right down at the table. That would be like him coming to your house for dinner, sitting down at the table, and instead of waiting for someone to bless the food, he digs right in. If he did that in my home I'd say, “Excuse me. We like to pray before we eat.” By the way, Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. He knew this would become an issue. And, sure enough, this Pharisee was taken back. Jesus could see that.

II. Ineffective leaders focus on externals rather than internals.

Look what he says.

“But the Lord said to him, ‘Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you’” (vv. 39-41).

The first thing he says is that ineffective leaders focus on externals rather than internals.

Jesus uses an illustration that hits home with the Pharisees. They had a tradition of carefully washing cups

and dishes to avoid being rendered ceremonially unclean. I'm sure they were careful to wash both the outside and the inside. Imagine finding a half a cup of coffee that you left somewhere for a week. What kind of nut would carefully scrub the outside and proceed to drink what was left in the inside? But Jesus says that's what they do when they focus on all of these external rules of behavior and neglect what's in their heart. Jesus says that inside their heart is "robbery (greed) and wickedness." He says, "You guys really put on a great show. You give some money and you make it look like you really care about people, but really you're just selfish and greedy."

And then he asks them a question. It's one of those questions that they knew the answer to, but the way they lived betrayed the very truth they knew. So they were acting like fools. "Didn't the One who made the outside make the inside also?" "Well duh, of course he did." He made the soul as well as the body. And since he made it he also cares about it. But they were acting like the outside was all that mattered.

So he gives them the remedy: "give that which is within as charity." That means they should literally give alms from what is on the inside; they should apply the same energy they give to almsgiving to issues of the heart. In other words, wash your heart; pay attention to heart, and then you will be clean.

The essence of hypocrisy is that you pay far more attention to the outside of the cup. The problem is that in leadership, sooner or later, people are going to see you for what you are. And then they'll say, "Why should I follow you. It's just an act." I think about this when it comes to parenting. As parents, we can say all the right things to our kids about putting the Lord first in our lives and obeying him, but our kids see what's really important to us. They're experts at sniffing out hypocrisy. We say we care about the poor, but they see how we spend our money. We say care about the church, but they see how we spend our time. You see, ultimately hypocrisy will sabotage your parenting because sooner or later what's on the inside will leak out.

III. Ineffective leaders major in the minors.

And then he says in v. 42a, "**Woe to you, Pharisees!**" As the passage continues, he keeps saying, "Woe to you...Woe to you..." It sounds kind of strange. We don't really talk this way. If I'm driving down the freeway and someone cuts me off, I don't say, "Woe to you!" So what does this mean? It's kind of like a warning, but it's not vindictive; it's filled with regret. It's as if someone you love is headed down a path of destruction and you want to warn them, "You're in trouble, most of all, with God." So this is

very serious stuff.

In this woe he goes on and gives the second characteristic of ineffective leaders—they major in the minors. Look at v. 42. "**But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.**" To us this almost seems laughable. Imagine taking tiny mint leaves and herbs and pulling out a tenth and putting it into the offering basket at church! This would be like you walking down the street and finding a dime. You say, "Wow! This is my lucky day." You pick it up and put it in your pocket. The next time you go to church you are careful to place a penny in the offering basket. But what if on the way home from church, you saw someone who was injured laying on the side of the road, but you neglected to even stop because you didn't want to miss the 1:00 kickoff of the game. In essence, that's what Jesus says, "You tithe every kind of herb, but you disregard justice and the love of God." I know people who tithe off their tax return, but they don't have the time of day for the single mom who could use some help fixing her roof. Jesus isn't telling them to stop tithing. He says, "you should do this." But not at the expense of the bigger issues of justice and love.

You see, we may give 10% of our money, but at the same time we can neglect and even look down on people in need. The Pharisees believed that people who were poor deserved what they got. They believed wealth was a sign of God's blessing and poverty was a sign of God's displeasure. But Jesus says, "I'm glad you're committed enough to give 10% of everything. Don't stop doing that. But there is something even more important, and that's your heart. I want your heart to reflect God's heart. God cares about people in need. He loves them. He cares about justice. He wants you to care about it."

As a leader, major in the majors. Look at your heart. Do you really care about people, or are you just going through the motions? As my kids have grown up I've seen how the teachers they've responded to the most are those who demonstrated that they really loved them. There are some teachers who focus exclusively on the rules, but they neglect to communicate any love for the student. I recall one teacher who was concerned about one of my kids and she actually came to our house and she wept out of love and concern for my child. That communicated more powerfully to my child than any punishment or rules ever could.

IV. Ineffective leaders relish special treatment.

But ineffective leaders don't really care that much about people. They care more about themselves. The third characteristic of ineffective leaders is that they relish special treatment. Look what Jesus says next.

"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful

greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it” (vv. 43–44).

The most important seats in the synagogue were those facing the front, facing the congregation. The Pharisees liked sitting up there, being seen by all as they lifted their hands in prayer, or as the law was read and they pensively stroked their beard. Out on the street they loved the elaborate greetings that were given to men like them: “Ah Rabbi Benjamin, doctor of the Torah, repository of wisdom, son of Amos, son of Saul...” They loved that stuff. And you can be sure that if they didn’t get the right seats and if they weren’t given the proper greeting they let people know about it. People thought they would be blessed to be in their presence, but in fact they were being contaminated by their pride! That’s what he mean when he says they’re like concealed tombs that people walk over unawares. If a person walked over a concealed tomb, they’d be rendered unclean. He says, “You contaminate people.”

I have to say, this one hits kind of close to home. I mean, I’m a pastor of a large church. I have a masters degree and a doctorate. I’ve written a book. I go to places, sometimes far away places, and I’m the featured speaker. When they introduce me, I’m listening! Heaven forbid they just say say “Won’t you welcome Mark Mitchell from CPC into our pulpit this morning.” I’m thinking, “Hey, the doctorate...the book...” I get a lot of special treatment, and when I don’t I’m kind of bummed out.

Now you’re laughing at me, but you would do the same thing. The flesh loves to be seen as special; the flesh loves to be pampered. That’s why in another sermon, Jesus warned us, **“You’re not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ (Mt.23:8-10 NIV).** Jesus knew; he knew what we’re like. He knew that this kind of thing would puff us up and contaminate those we lead, so he said, “Don’t even go there.” So effective leaders find ways to serve; to communicate that they’re just frail human beings like everyone else.

Don’t you just love Jesus? He wasn’t the kind of guy to skirt issues. He’d get in your face. Have you ever wanted to walk out on a sermon? Believe me, the Pharisees wanted to scam. It wasn’t just the Pharisees that he was going after. Look at v. 45. **One of the lawyers said to Him in reply, ‘Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too.’”** I find this rather humorous. It’s like, “You’re hurting our feelings, too. That’s not nice.” The lawyers were a subgroup of the Pharisees. Their job was to interpret the law of Moses. They’re the Bible scholars. Jesus has some things to say about why they were ineffective leaders, too.

V. Ineffective leaders place impossible demands on others.

Look at v. 46. **“But He said, ‘Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers.’”** Here is the fourth characteristic of ineffective leaders—they place impossible demands on others, but they won’t lift a finger to help them. These experts in the law had smothered the people with 6,000 laws. To make sure people didn’t break the Sabbath they created 39 different classifications of work. They said if you carried anything heavier than a dried fig that was considered work. So you could carry something lighter than a dried fig, unless you put it down and picked it up again, because that would be counted as doubling the weight and thus breaking the law.

A few years back when my oldest daughter was applying to colleges she applied to one Christian university that had a long list of rules that you had to agree to if you were going to attend. That’s normal for most Christian colleges so we didn’t think much of it. But when I read the rules I was amazed at what they included. I expected the no drinking and dancing and movies, but they had no jealousy, or greed or lust. I’m glad they were focusing on the heart, and certainly those are all things you want to try to avoid, but what a burden to lay on a bunch of college kids! What if you had a lustful thought, or a stab of jealousy or one of your friends got a new car and you felt just a little envious? You sure didn’t want to admit it, because they could kick you out! So you learn to cover it up. That’s placing impossible demands on people. She didn’t go to that school. She went where it was okay to be jealous and lustful!

VI. Ineffective leaders repeat the mistakes of their predecessors.

The next thing Jesus says is even more straightforward.

“Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, ‘I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation’” (vv. 47–51).

This seems unfair. He’s blaming them for the sins of their fathers, the prophets. Here they were

building their tombs, and Jesus says, "You think you're honoring them, but you're really celebrating their murders!" Why? Because they had within themselves the same attitudes that their forefathers had when they killed the prophets. He says, "You don't know it, but you're really in partnership with them."

And the way that's seen is by how they treat the present day prophets and apostles. God said, "I will send them prophets and apostles and some of them they will kill and others they'll persecute." This is a prophecy. He's predicting that they will treat the prophets and apostles of Jesus the same way their forefathers treated the prophets of old. They'll even kill the greatest prophet of all, Jesus Christ, who was more than a prophet. That's why at the end of this sermon, in vv. 53–54, they started to plot against him.

It's funny how ineffective leaders repeat the mistakes of their predecessors, all the while thinking they're so much more enlightened. We can hate the institution of slavery and put Abraham Lincoln's picture up on our wall and memorize the Gettysburg Address and yet be just as filled with racism as our forefathers. We can relish our freedom in Christ and hate the pettiness of our parents' religion and still be as steeped in legalism as they were. Effective leaders are willing to take a good hard look at themselves. They're willing to ask, "How is what's in my heart just the same sin wrapped in a different package?"

VII. Ineffective leaders keep others in the dark.

The last thing he says was the final blow. **"Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering"** (v. 52). Ineffective leaders keep others in the dark. This is really quite an indictment. He says you have the key to knowledge; you have the OT Scriptures, yet you don't use them to enter. Enter what? He's talking about eternal life. Even worse, the very people you've been entrusted to teach are trying to enter in and you're hindering them! You keep them in the dark.

How do we as leaders hinder people from entering? We can hinder them by reducing the Scriptures to a rule book. We can say, "If you just keep the rules, you'll enter." But it's not about the rules; it's about a relationship. We can hinder them by making people think that you have to have an advanced degree to really understand it. We preachers do that today. We talk about the original Greek and Hebrew and the impression we leave is that you really can't get the deeper meaning of the Bible unless you know it too. That's baloney! We have good translations of the Bible. We can hinder them just by our hypocrisy.

When they see that what is really under the surface of our lives is different than what we are trying to project on the outside, then they won't want anything to do with our faith.

CONCLUSION

You see, that's the bottom line here. It all goes back to hypocrisy. In all six of these ways, ineffective leaders are hypocrites. That's why in 12:1 he warns his disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

You can see that I have a gift here. Some of you would like to open it. That wrapping is beautiful, isn't it. But what if I told you that beneath that wrapping is a box of manure. That's right. I got some manure, put it in a box, and then I put this wrapping over it. It's an illustration of an ineffective, hypocritical leader. Looks great on the outside but in fact, he's full of it. There are a lot of people in churches this morning who are full of it. Some of you are full of it. But people don't know it because all they see is the wrapping. They see you come to church and talk about God and sing the songs and nod your head at the sermons. But inside that's not what you are, and you know it.

I know that because I hear the stories all the time. I talk to people who are finally starting to get it and they tell me. They tell me they used to come to church after spending a good part of the week watching pornography in front of their computer. I've talked to high school students who talk about how they would come to church hung over after being wasted the night before. I've talked to college students who are involved in leadership in a youth group, yet they're sleeping with their girlfriend on a regular basis. I've talked to pastors who can get up and preach a sermon and then go home and that night drink themselves to sleep. But we think that if we just put another layer of wrapping on the gift—give more to the church, teach Sunday School—everything will be okay. Well, I'm here to tell you that it's not okay. Because you might be able to fool people, but you can't fool God. Sooner or later, he'll call you to account.

One of the signs that God is at work in a community of people like CPC is that people start being real with each other. People start to come out of hiding. The Spirit of God begins to move and people are convicted of sin and come before the body in a small group or some other venue and they say, "I've been living a lie. I want to get my life right. Would you help me? Would you pray for me?" I have to tell you, if that starts happening here, we won't be able to wait until 2010 to start a church. What is it that will draw them? Authenticity. Effective leaders know that, and so they're always on the lookout for hypocrisy in their own hearts.

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