



This past week several members of our staff attended the Leadership Summit hosted by Willow Creek. In video venues all over the world about 120,000 people watched a live feed of some of the world's top leaders talk about various aspects of leadership, not just church leadership, but all kinds of leadership. Wes Stafford, the President of Compassion International. Jessica Jackley, who started an amazing nonprofit called KIVA. Bill Hybels. Tim Keller. Even Bono.

One of my favorites was David Gergen, who has been an adviser and speech writer to four presidents: Nixon, Ford, Reagan and Clinton. He's written a book called *Eyewitness to Power* about the strengths and weaknesses of each of those men as leaders. It was fascinating.

This morning, I want you to think about leadership. In your personal experience, who are some of the leaders you've been exposed to? It could be leaders in your school, work, church or even family. It might be someone who has mentored you. Among those people, who were the best leaders? What made them so effective? Who were the worst leaders? Why were they so bad?

You don't have to be a Pastor or a President to care about leadership. In some way leadership matters to all of us. All of us have to decide who we'll allow to lead us. All of us have to decide how we'll lead those put under our charge. At some level, all of us are called to lead others.

Some of you may wonder, "How do I spot a good leader? How do I know when I'm ready to lead someone else?" Today we'll look at a passage of Scripture in Galatians 4 where Paul answers that question.

Paul founded the church in Galatia, so he considered himself their spiritual leader. They had begun to struggle in certain areas—they were listening to the wrong crowd of teachers—and he wrote this letter to help them get back on track. Up until the middle of chapter 4 he's focused mainly on doctrine, proving that believers don't have to keep the Jewish law to be a full-fledged Christian. But in the middle of chapter 4 he gets personal. He reminds them of who he is to them, and who they are to him. Spiritual leadership isn't just about teaching truth and getting people to line up behind that truth; it's about relationships, and sometimes relationships get messy. Make no mistake, Paul wants to get them back on track doctrinally, but to do that he needs to address some relational issues as well. As he does that, we discover six characteristics of real spiritual leadership.

This is what to look for in your leaders and mentors; this is what you strive to be yourself.

A real leader leads by example

First of all, a real spiritual leader leads by example. There aren't many people who can look you in the eye and say, "Do as I do." Paul didn't hesitate to say it repeatedly.

In 1 Cor. 4:16 he says, "*Therefore, I urge you to imitate me.*" In 1 Thess. 1:6 he says, "*You became imitators of us, and of the Lord.*" And in today's text, look at v.12, "*I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I have become as you are.*"

Paul used that turn of phrase because he'd taught these Gentile believers that being a Christian isn't about following Jewish laws; it's about having a relationship with Jesus through faith. Now, years later, as the Galatians had become mired in legalism, Paul encourages them to be like him—free from the chains of the law. He's saying, "I put all that behind me. Be like me. Live the Christian life the way I live it." He reminds them of how he lived when he was with them. He says, "...for I have become as you are." Even though he was a Jew, trained as a Pharisee to be totally separate from Gentiles, he lived like a Gentile to reach them for Christ. He modeled freedom for them and now he calls them to follow his example.

Soon after I became a Christian I went off to college in San Luis Obispo. My life had been transformed and I was passionate about growing in my relationship with God and making a difference for him. I fell in with a group that shared my passion and intensity but little by little I became imbalanced. I focused more on my works than God's grace. My Christian life was all about **me** trying to do something for God. I became ultra disciplined and I judged those who couldn't keep up. I had a long list of rules to keep and inwardly I beat myself up if I didn't live up to them. Basically I was becoming a good Pharisee! But the next year I returned home and attended a junior college. During that time I hooked up with a group of leaders from Young Life. They, too, were passionate about Jesus, but their passion was lived out in an entirely different way than I had seen before. They had fun. They laughed. They gave people a lot of room to express their love for Christ in different ways. In short, they were modeling for me Christian freedom. That year changed my life and the difference was a few seasoned leaders who understood their freedom in Christ.

That's what Paul modeled to the Galatians. That's the power of an example. How many of us can say, "Do as I do. Be like me"? Trust me, you won't find perfection in anyone. And you won't be perfect either. But, short of perfection, find the best example you can find, and be the best example you can be.

A real leader is vulnerable

Second, a real leader is vulnerable. Look at what Paul says starting at the end of v.12. *"You have done me no wrong; but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me (Galatians 4:12–15).*

Paul reminds them of how their relationship with him got started. He's like a jilted lover reminding his ex of when they fell in love. When he says "You have done me no wrong," he's thinking of those early days when he first came to Galatia. It wasn't even part of his plan to show up there. He got sick and needed a place to convalesce and Galatia was the perfect place. And while he was there he preached the gospel to them.

We don't know exactly what Paul's illness was. Some say it was bad eyesight. Maybe that's why he says in v.15 that the Galatians were so concerned about him they would have plucked their eyes out for him. Others believe Paul contracted malaria or even suffered from epilepsy. It's interesting that v.14 indicates it was something repulsive; something that might have caused them to loath him and turn away in disgust.

But instead they had treated him as an angel of God, or as if he were Jesus himself. They didn't worship him, but they welcomed him and his message as if he was an angel or Christ himself. This is the way he should have been received. And it was a credit to the Galatians they didn't judge him based on his outward appearance, but rather based on his message. But now, they've lost that sense of joy and blessing that expressed itself in a willingness to even pluck their eyes out for him. So, he asks, "Where's that sense of blessing you had?"

You can see that Paul's relationship with these people was one of vulnerability. This isn't taught in Leadership 101. When Paul came to them, he didn't have it all together. He didn't show up with a new three piece suit and a \$100 haircut. He didn't come talking about the victorious Christian life and how Jesus makes us rich and healthy. He came sick as a dog. He came needing help. But Paul had learned a lesson, and the lesson was it wasn't about him; it was about Christ in him. He'd learned it wasn't in his strength but in his weakness that God shows himself. That's why so often in his letters Paul says, "If I'm going to boast, I'll

boast about my weaknesses. When I'm weak, then I'm strong. When I'm weak then His power is seen through me."

Can you imagine a leader doing that today? As leaders, it's not that we don't know we're weak, it's that we think we have to hide it, because if we show we're weak, people won't follow us. So we fake it. And more and more our leadership becomes a charade. People around us sense something is missing, but they can't put their finger on it. People want a leader who is real and authentic; who knows his own frailty. As a young pastor here at CPC, I had a great example of that in Jeff Farrar. He and I served together for about nine years and for most of that time he suffered from severe chronic pain. Some of you remember how willing he was to be honest about not just his pain but his disappointment and discouragement. That's the kind vulnerability we see here in Paul.

Sometimes we have unrealistic expectations of our leaders, especially spiritual leaders. This is true of the expectations some people have of their pastors. Someone described the ideal pastor this way: "He condemns sins, but never upsets anyone. He works from 8:00 a.m. until midnight and is also the janitor. He makes \$60 a week and gives \$50 a week to the poor. He's 28 years old and has been preaching for 30 years. He smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his work. He spends all his time reaching the lost and is always in his office when needed."

When you look for a spiritual leader, look for someone who understands his weakness; someone who is vulnerable.

A real leader tells the truth, even when it hurts

Third, a real leader tells the truth, even when it hurts. Paul speaks rather bluntly to the Galatians in v.16. *"So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?"* All the love the Galatians had expressed to Paul was in danger of vanishing because Paul now had some tough words for them. Would they now become his enemy just because he's telling them the truth?

Do you have someone in your life, a leader perhaps, who spoke hard truth to you and you wrote them off as a result? Maybe they called you on some moral issue that you were compromising on. Maybe they felt you weren't the right fit for some ministry you were serving in. Do you really want to make them your enemy because they cared enough about you to tell you the truth? Proverbs 27:6 says, *"Wounds from a friend can be trusted,"* because a friend speaks with your best interests in mind.

A few years back the elders got together and reviewed me. Overall they were pretty nice to me but one of the things they said was that I don't do a very good job of pursuing people. Maybe that doesn't sound like a real big deal but as a pastor that's a big part of what you do. If a shepherd loses a sheep he's supposed to go track them down. So that was hard for me to hear. But I had to decide how I'd respond to that. I could have defended myself or

sulked, but the fact is they were right and the best thing was to thank them for loving me enough to tell me the truth. That's what a real leader does; he speaks the truth even it when it hurts, because he has your best interests in mind.

One note of caution: there are a lot of people who have the "when it hurts" part down pat, but they're not too convincing on the "having your best interests in mind" part. You get the idea that they live to knock others down a few notches. Here's what I've learned from great leaders: if it hurts you to hear it, it hurts them to say it. They don't relish putting you in your place, but they'll do it if needed. And they say it as gently as possible, with only as much force as is necessary. That's why in v.20 Paul said, *"How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone..."*

A real leader doesn't play head games

Fourth, a real leader doesn't play head games. He doesn't have ulterior motives. Paul says in verses 17–18: *"They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you."*

He's talking about the false teachers. When he says *"they eagerly seek you..."* he means they treat you like a million bucks. They make you feel so good. They flatter you. It's like when you walk into car lot and the salesman comes up and shakes your hand and begins to show you around. He learns your name and gives your kid a lollipop and pretty soon you feel like you could be friends forever. But in the back of your mind you know he's just being that way because he wants to sell you a car. So Paul says, *"they eagerly seek you, not commendably..."* They're not doing this for you; they're doing it for them.

Then Paul reveals their ulterior motive. He says, *"...they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them."* He doesn't say what they wish to shut them out from. It's probably from Paul himself. The NIV translates this, "they want to alienate you from us." If the false teachers can cut the Galatians off from Paul, they'll make more of them. Paul says, "They make you feel like a million bucks. But they're really playing games with you. They have an ulterior motive. They really want to cut you off from me so you'll make more of them."

Pastors do this all the time. Someone new comes into our church and we eagerly seek them; we kill them with kindness. And if they came here from another church, we find ways to keep them from going back. Maybe we drop a few hints about how goofed up their theology is. The bottom line is we want to shut them off from them so that they'll seek us. By the way, if you've come here from another church, we're glad you're here. Sometimes it is the right thing to leave a church. But don't leave a church without talking to the leadership of that church and doing everything you can to work out what's troubling you.

A real leader doesn't play head games with you. He doesn't have ulterior motives. If he seeks to befriend you, he does so for the right reasons. It's not about him. It's about Christ. He's not trying to curry your favor.

A real leader agonizes over the welfare of those he leads

Fifth, a real leader agonizes over the welfare of those he leads. He struggles with you in the midst of your struggles. He hurts when you hurt. Paul says in verses 19–20: *"My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you."*

What an analogy! He's like a pregnant mother in labor. I've been present at the birth of all three of my children. All I can say is, I'm glad I'm a guy! I would never want to go through that!

That's what it like to struggle with the ones you lead. Paul says what makes this worse is I'm having to go through this twice with you. I thought the labor was over when you came to Christ. Now I'm going through it again. Paul is saying, "I'm willing to hurt, I'm willing to suffer, I'm willing to worry if that's what it takes to help you become the person you can be."

That's leadership at its best. Do you know what hit me about this? Real leadership is as much like mothering as it is like fathering. We normally think of it in terms of fathering, don't we? That's why Catholics call their priests, "father." But Paul pictures himself like mother; a mother in pain.

Honestly, this made me think of my own mother. My mother had a hard life. As a small child she was abused and abandoned by her father. She was mostly raised by her extended family. She married my father after the war and though they had all the material comforts in the world there was a lot of instability in their marriage. So my mom developed a drinking problem. One thing I always knew was how important my brother and I were to her. She agonized over us. When she found out I'd become a Christian she went into panic mode because she thought I had joined a group like the one that just drank the Kool-aid in Jonestown. The sad thing is I don't think I appreciated her nearly enough. When I was 30 I was at my parents' home and for some reason out of the blue I just told her what a great mother she had been. And I'll never forget how surprised she was. She was shocked. Four days later she died.

I tell you that story because even if you're not a mother you know how a mother agonizes over the welfare of her children, not just in birth but in life--over and over again. That's what a real leader does.

A real leader has the right goal

This leads to the last thing: a real leader has the right goal. Frederick Nietzsche once said, "To forget one's purpose is the commonest form of stupidity." Paul didn't do that. Look again

at verse 19, *“My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you...”* Paul is willing to endure any hardship because he knows the goal; the goal is for them to be Christlike.

Notice the contrast again with the false teachers. Their goal had to do with themselves being the center of attention. Paul’s goal focused on Christ and his work in their life. As a leader, if your goal is to get the approval of others, you will always end up disappointed.

Maybe you’re a small group leader. You work hard so the people in your group will learn and grow and feel accepted and loved. Unconsciously for awhile, you work solely to serve God and use your gifts. After some of the meetings you observe the group loves your leadership and are growing leaps and bounds. You’re thrilled with that and you continue. But after a few months attendance drops off and the affirmations aren’t as frequent or intense. You begin to feel under appreciated and you’re tempted to come down hard on your group. Eventually your feelings might escalate into bitterness and even quitting, unless you realize the goal of your teaching isn’t to please others. Your goal

is for people to make Christ the center of their lives; to become more like him.

Every leader must know the outcome he wants to achieve. In the world of sports, the goals are pretty clear cut: you want to win games. In the world of business, you have to make a profit. Paul’s desired outcome was to help new Christians reach maturity in their relationship with Jesus Christ. That’s why he said “until Christ is formed in you.”

Conclusion

A real leader makes a big difference. What’s a real leader? One that leads by example, one that is vulnerable, one that speaks the truth, one that doesn’t play games, one that agonizes over your welfare, and one that has the right goal.

With this mind, I hope that each of you will do two things. Seek out the right kind of leaders, and look for opportunities to be the right kind of leader to others. Find a real leader; be a real leader. And as you do that remember to put Jesus Christ above all human leaders, because he and he alone will never disappoint you.