

## “Leadership as an Identity”

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Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

I have come to embrace a few guiding, fundamental perspectives concerning distinctively Christian leadership. These perspectives in my mind represent a starting point that will be very helpful in our approach to leadership.

There are five of them.

**First** we must fight the encroaching secularization both of Christianity in general and Christian leadership in particular.

**Second**, as a result of adopting human-centered values, we’ve made too much of leadership. We need to stop making idols out of leaders and stop idolizing the position of leadership. As followers of Christ, we should not parrot a culture that celebrates image, stature, and position, nor should we tout leadership as the pathway to recognition and fame.

**Third** we must avoid preferring competence over character.

**Fourth**, we ultimately live and therefore lead before an audience of one.

**Fifth**, distinctive Christian leadership must be defined by the assignments given to us by God. The real irony is that God’s assignments involve changing your life as a leader just as much as they involve changing the people you want to reach. Another distinctive feature of God’s assignments is that they ultimately bring Him the glory.

Brokenness is not a onetime event. It is never finished; it’s an ongoing process. In her excellent book *Brokenness: The Heart God Revives*, Nancy Leigh DeMoss writes: “Brokenness is not a feeling or an emotion. Rather, it requires a choice, an act of the will. Further, this choice is not primarily a onetime experience, though there may be profound and life-changing spiritual turning points in our lives. True brokenness is an ongoing, constant way of life. True brokenness is a lifestyle—a moment-by-moment lifestyle of agreeing with God about the true condition of my heart and life—not as everyone else thinks it is but as He knows it to be.”

In our world, leaders are chosen because of their abilities and experience. The more success they see as a leader, the more they grow in confidence—and the more they are tempted to take pride in their gifts and abilities. This is a pitfall for young leaders and older leaders alike. “Young leaders tend to be full of pride and self-sufficiency and a generational arrogance that comes with being twenty and thirty,” says Hans Finzel. “This should be recognized as a danger sign!”

It's good to be reminded that we are most useful to God when we realize that in ourselves we don't have what it takes to get His assignments done. When you are aware of your inadequacies and very few people pay attention to you, it's not so difficult to pursue a surrendered life. But the more successful you become, and the more recognition you receive from that success, the more difficult it is to embrace humility and to remember your constant need for His grace and mercy.

My heart aches even as I write these words. If you don't surrender your accomplishments and successes to Him as an act of worship and thanksgiving you will foolishly conclude that what has been accomplished is all because of your abilities. When you can embrace mistakes—and even failures—you've opened the door for growth and a different outcome for the next time. It doesn't take much to become intoxicated with yourself." Opposition, division, gossip, accusations were all a part of the pain. These tender times are a rite of passage. It's highly doubtful if God can ever use a man greatly until He hurts him deeply. This is why, in the words of Dr. Samuel Chand, "No leader walks with a strut—they always walk with a limp."

Before any talk of restoration, there should be a demonstration of the fruit of repentance. A wise older pastor was asked one day when is it appropriate to restore someone who has sinned. His response was priceless: "When the repentance is known as broadly as the sin." I like this thought from Tim Kimmel. "If a leader doesn't humble himself he leaves God no choice but to humiliate him.

And He will because He must." The work of His kingdom cannot be left at the mercy of a leader who is wrapped up in himself." Education, experience and training are important, and I would even say vital, to accomplishing the tasks God places before a leader. We must be committed to developing the gifts and talents God has given to us. But there is a problem when we view these things as the reason why God uses us and as the source of our effectiveness and success. In my view, too many of us are trusting in our competencies as the primary means for advancing the interests of His kingdom.

Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. These four "jewels" come from Dr. Blackaby, but the explanations and applications are mine:

The **first jewel** is suffering.

The **second jewel** is personal struggles.

The **third jewel** is failure. There is something to the old line that "failure is the back door to success."

I am persuaded that failure is a vital part of leadership. In fact, with rare exception most of the great leaders in the Bible have been marked by failure. It's part of the journey.

The **fourth jewel** is success through hardship.

The very word, leadership, implies the willingness to take others to a place where none of you has been before. Your credibility to lead is in direct relationship to your ability to endure. The challenges of leadership are meant to make you hungry for God. God's presence is the distinguishing characteristic of your leadership. What separates you from the pack is not your ability and proficiency in the art and skill of leadership—it is the call and obvious presence of God in your life. If leadership is all about God, then let's make it all about God. Godly leaders act on what God clearly tells them to do and then they keep coming to Him when they don't know what to do next.

Clyde Cook observed that there is a close relationship between your walk with God and the assignment He has given you. He has made you and knows the gifts He has given you. In order to maximize your effectiveness, you need to be close to Him. Planning is not wrong; setting goals is not wrong, but self-reliance is wrong. Embracing servant leadership not as a strategy but as an identity. As Bruce Fong says, "Vision gives the leader the responsibility to see the big picture and determine where a ministry is going. The leader then mobilizes the people to get the job done."

My friend Jim Reese adds, "I think one of the greatest challenges for a leader is to move people to places that many times they don't want to go—but they are never the same once they have gone!" It is not humility to refuse to do the difficult but right thing. Both pride and humility have, for the most part, very little to do with your actions and choices, but they have everything to do with your motives and attitudes. Are you teachable? Are you gripped by a desire to learn more—not only about the Scriptures, but about life?

Are you concerned with visibility and recognition, or with significance? Are you overly focused on comparison and entitlement? There's also a danger in spending too much time with other leaders. You lose touch with, in Russ Crosson's words, your "roots." You are drawn to the fraternity of "insiders" and if you're not careful, you become self-absorbed.

As leaders we need to be wary of the temptation to devalue people. They are real "getter-doners"—they place high priority on getting the job done. But to them, people are an expendable commodity. It's difficult for them to express appreciation or to communicate value to those they lead. They have little sense of their responsibility to serve the people they lead. Or when someone is not performing well in his job. But even in these circumstances—even when you need to let someone go—it's possible to let people know you value them and care about them. I have seen more than a few people who were given positions of leadership that were beyond their ability to handle. Invariably, they began using their position to control others because they were afraid that their weaknesses and failures would be discovered.

Our self-absorption is hurting our ability to love and give to others so that they can soar and be all that God intended for them to be. Investing in others also may require a sacrifice in your prominence.

Biblical leadership is characterized not only by brokenness, uncommon communion and servanthood, but also by radical, immediate obedience. It is one thing to be content; it's quite another to be complacent. God is looking for leaders who are not perfect but who respond to Him; leaders who don't make excuses about their sin or justify patterns of disobedience; leaders whose hearts are tender and responsive to the conviction and correction of the Holy Spirit.

I've heard a number of definitions of courage over the years, but I like to think of it as complete obedience in the face of opposition. Leadership is always about verbs, action. It is not about the safety of ideas (as important as that might be), but about implementation and movement in the face of opposition. There comes a time when you have to stop doing the things that you can do, and even the things that you are improving in, and concentrate on the things you were born to do."