

Spiritual Leadership Series #2
What Is Spiritual Followership?
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. Last week we began a series of lessons on spiritual leadership

1. We began by addressing the question, "What is spiritual leadership?"
2. My answer is this: spiritual leadership is helping move people from where they are right now to where God wants them to be
 - a. I will admit that there is a lot of detail involved when you unpack that
 - b. but we need to keep in mind what we're talking about

B. Today, we take on a slightly different question (thought very much related)

1. Let me begin by reading something I found recently – a blog by a fellow I don't know, but who accurately states the problem faced by today's churches -- but right now, our churches in America are suffering -- we can hardly be called a vibrant and living community of believers -- the churches in our nation are divided on issues of theology and doctrine and worship and social persuasion -- and this has caused us to experience a dramatic decline that we've never seen before in the history of the church -- all major mainline denominations have been losing members over the past two or three decades -- and we are seeing more and more people who identify themselves as "unchurched" Christians -- the Barna Research Group said that 10 million self-proclaimed, born-again Christians in America have not been to church in the last six months, apart from Christmas or Easter. -- (Barna defines "born-again" as those who say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important today, and believe they will "go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.") -- for these people, spiritual life has nothing to do with church. -- why is that? -- I believe it is because the church has forgotten its calling -- I think its because we have forgotten our purpose -- our function as the body of Christ here on earth
-- Gregory Lee (http://onlyimagine.blogspot.com/2005_01_01_archive.html)
2. I agree, at least to some extent, to Lee's conclusion that the problem is a church that has "forgotten its calling," and that has "forgotten its purpose"
 - a. but this necessarily involves spiritual leadership and spiritual leaders
 - b. if leaders were providing the right kind of leadership, we should expect the church to live up to its calling and achieve its purpose
 - c. so the fact that the church is failing, is a symptom of a leadership issue

C. But it's not quite that simple because like most issues, things are a bit more complex than we sometimes want to admit

1. There is a flip side to leadership that is easily forgotten
2. If spiritual leadership is helping move people from where they are to where God wants them to be, then we need the reciprocal response by those people to move where spiritual leaders are taking them
3. In other words, we need spiritual leadership but we also need spiritual fellowship
 - a. one without the other is destined to failure
 - b. put the two together and you've got something amazing

D. Today, I want to encourage you to think about following those who lead

I. THE MODERN AMERICAN CHURCH PROBLEM

A. We need to begin by understanding some of the problems of the modern church

1. My effort today is not to provide you a thorough, all-encompassing statement of the problems of the modern church
2. I do want to give you an idea about some of the problems we face and the negative impact they have on us
3. I want to caution you about the things I'm about to tell you
 - a. the problem is almost always that things are taken "over the line" or that we go to extremes
 - b. many of the problems in today's church are caused by things that might actually be good, if practiced in a reasonable, less extreme fashion
 - c. it is also one reason the problem is so hard for some to see

B. We can suffer from American desire for freedom and democracy

1. Politically, freedom and democracy are wonderful concepts
 - a. these are the things that have led America to top the list of the greatest countries in the world
 - b. in many respects, these are the ideas that have enabled us to promote equality, prosperity, opportunity and more
 - c. even with problems, turmoil, and disagreements based in political, social and economic differences, we are thoroughly steeped in a tradition around 300 years old
 - d. if you think Christians are unmarked in their thinking and behavior by things that drive us as a nation of people, you'd be very wrong
2. But this very desire for freedom and democracy creates problems in the church
 - a. Jesus will, indeed, free you from sin, and the truth will set you free
 - b. but this is a totally different kind of freedom
 - c. the church is not a democracy – it is a kingdom with Christ at its head

3. What happens is that Christians begin to behave as if the same political ideas of freedom and democracy ought to shape how the church operates
 - a. so we all want to vote our leaders in and vote our leaders out
 - b. we allow our desire for freedom to mean that we all get to choose on our own, based on our likes/dislikes or how something benefits us personally, whether we cooperate with leaders or not
 - c. if you will just look at any given congregation you will always find a group of people who do their own thing with little consideration given to the church as a whole, or to the leaders in particular
 - d. sometimes members get pretty vocal, and if things aren't going their way, they create all sorts of trouble – some open and public, but often behind the scenes
 - e. I can tell you from experience, trying to get some people to move from where they are to where God wants them to be is like trying to move a 10-ton rock with a toothpick
4. Otherwise good and helpful ideas, in the proper context (like freedom and democracy) can cripple any spiritual leader's effort to help people become what God wants them to be

C. Opposition or resistance to educated leadership often sets us up for failure

1. In some places there has been an active opposition to educated leadership
 - a. I once had a fellow tell me I had been educated beyond good sense, all because I disagree with something he believed
 - b. never mind that what he believed was flatly inaccurate based on the scriptures
2. Whether you know it or not, every sermon I preach has at least a day's worth of preparation behind it, and often that doesn't count the several day's worth of reading and study that precedes the actual writing of the sermon
 - a. I try very hard not to say things for which I have no biblical basis
 - b. but I know that it's not uncommon for people to hear a sermon and because it doesn't fit with what they already think or believe, they just ignore it
3. The truth is that regardless of the arena – trained and educated leadership is always better than untrained and uneducated leadership
 - a. some of you have jobs where this truth is obvious
 - b. few of you would turn over the reigns of anything to people who don't know what they're doing or what they're talking about – except when it comes to spiritual matters!
 - c. **1 Timothy 1:6–7 (NAS) —**
6 For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, **7** wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.

C. A host of old-fashioned, but biblical, problems

1. Here's what I want to see – the very things from which you need to be led away from are the very things that can keep you from following a spiritual leader to where God wants you to be
2. It could be any number of sinful things or areas of human weakness
 - a. pride
 - b. hard hearts
 - c. stubbornness
 - d. lack of love
 - e. lack of faith
 - f. immaturity
 - g. the list could go on!

D. Here's what I know to be true – you can have the best leader in the world, but if you will not follow, that leader cannot help you, and you will not do it alone

1. Don't think that's true?
 - a. well, I think Jesus is the best leader ever
 - b. but Judas wouldn't follow
 - c. not even Jesus could help him
2. My point is very simple
 - a. we want good spiritual leaders
 - b. but we also want good followers, willing to move to where God want them to be

II. A BRIEF LOOK AT THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR FOLLOWSHIP

A. Acts 2:41–42 (NAS) —

41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. **42** They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

1. What did those 3,000 baptized believers do – they followed the lead of the apostles
 - a. the apostles teaching
 - b. fellowship
 - c. breaking bread
 - d. prayer
 - e. these things are not important only because the apostles led people to involve themselves, each is an important means for spiritual growth
2. So if a spiritual leader were to encourage you to practice these things, would you participate or resist; follow or go your own way
 - a. we're still studying the apostles teaching, we still have opportunity for fellowship and breaking bread, and we pray
 - b. are you following or not? the answer reveals much!

B. 1 Thessalonians 1:5–8 (NAS) —

5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. **6** You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, **7** so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. **8** For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

1. This is an excellent passage from which to see the idea I'm talking about
 - a. vs 5 – the claim to have been a certain kind of men
 - b. vs 6 – the Thessalonians became imitators of Paul and company (that's following their lead)
 - c. vs 7 – the Thessalonians, in turn, became an example to believers in Macedonia (essentially providing some form or spiritual leadership)
 - d. vs 8 – likely, that leadership had to do with taking the lead in preaching and teaching, and demonstrating their faith to others
2. These Christians became leaders of others because they were first followers

CONCLUSION

A. It is often said that the modern church is in a leadership crisis

1. That means we don't have the leaders we need to have
2. That assessment is largely true

B. But there is a flip side to that problem, and it's one we don't seem to want to address

1. We have a crisis in followship
2. We've got too many Christians who think they don't need spiritual leaders
3. We're suffering from a resistance to, and sometimes a rebellion from, leaders
4. If we're ever going to resolve the leadership crisis, we will need to begin at the followship crisis because no one can lead, who has not learned how to follow

C. Invitation