

Spiritual Leadership Series 03
The Foundation For Spiritual Leadership
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. We started this series of lessons on spiritual leadership by asking the question, “What is it – what is spiritual leadership?”

1. I like the very simple, straightforward definition – “spiritual leadership is helping to move people from where they are to where God wants them to be”
2. That is a far more complex statement than it sounds, but it is direct enough that it really helps us understand what spiritual leadership is

B. In the second lesson, we looked at the flip side of leadership

1. Leaders cannot lead anybody who will not be led
2. If there is a crisis of leadership in the modern church, I think we can say just as truthfully that there is a crisis of followship too
3. As we will learn, spiritual leadership is not like the military where the person in charge issues orders and everybody else obeys or else!
4. Like it or not, positive things happen when spiritual leaders connect with people who are willing to be led where God wants them to be

C. Today I want to talk about the foundation for spiritual leadership

1. Like anything else, if leaders build on the wrong foundation, then regardless what you call them, or what title they wear, their leadership will not be consistent with God’s will
2. **1 Corinthians 3:10–11 (NAS) —**
10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. **11** For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
 - a. generally speaking, the foundation for leadership is Jesus Christ
 - b. it is important to see that Paul did not say the foundation was a set of doctrines, or a list of rules, or even a book – the foundation is Jesus
3. Today I want us to look at what Jesus said about leadership
 - a. it’s more familiar scripture, but how easy it is for us to forget what it says
 - b. every spiritual leader must begin with Jesus’ concept of leadership

I. THE COMMON PROBLEM THAT RUINS SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

A. Matthew 20:20-21, –24 (NAS) —

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. **21** And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.”

24 And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.

B. Mark 10 also records this conversation, but Mark does not include “mama”, making the request that of James and John

1. We might assume this means the idea was largely that of James and John, or that “mama” had put it in their heads to seek positions of honor and power
2. What it does is reflect the way many people think about leadership
 - a. it is a “position” to hold not a function to perform
 - 1) you sometimes hear this in political conversation
 - 2) “he campaigned for the office, but he doesn’t want to govern”
 - b. it is about gaining personal glory, honor and power
 - 1) these are potent motivators
 - 2) people are often willing to do pretty much anything in order to obtain these things
 - c. it is about exercising authority over others
 - 1) the idea of controlling other people is intoxicating
 - 2) there are few things for which people will exchange all they have and all they are than power and authority over others

C. Sadly, this is the very thing that many seek when it comes to spiritual leadership

1. They want a position
2. They want personal glory, honor and power
3. They want to exercise authority over others

D. But here is the problem – each and all of these are characterized by things we need to move away from

1. They are filled with sinful human desires, not the things God wants for us
2. Selfishness, greed, hunger for power – these and more are at the heart of this concept of leadership
3. This is not what moves people from where they are to where God wants them to be – it moves them further away from God

II. THE FOUNDATION FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP IS JESUS

A. After the request by James and John, and after the other 10 became indignant because they really wanted what James and John asked for, Jesus gave a humbling lesson in leadership training

1. **Matthew 20:24–28 (NAS)** —

24 And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. **25** But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. **26** “It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, **27** and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; **28** just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

2. Jesus effectively took the wind out of the disciples’ sails

B. Jesus compared the kind of “position”, “honor”, and “authority” common among the Gentiles with that which was to define his disciples

1. Gentiles

- a. they “lord it over” others – that means “I’m the big shot, and you’re the next-to-nothing”
- b. they “exercise authority over” others – that means “I tell you what to do and you don’t argue, you just do it”

2. The pivotal statement

- a. “It is not this way among you”
- b. well – at the moment, it really was the way his disciples thought and acted, but it wasn’t what he wanted, it wasn’t how things were to happen among them
- c. I don’t know how Jesus could be any clearer than this
 - a. President Obama frequently says, “Now, let’s be clear. . . .”
 - b. so let’s be clear on this – what was commonly observed among Gentiles was not to be observed among Jesus’ disciples
- d. so any jockeying for position, or desire for personal glory and honor, or the desire to boss other people around does not define the person who would be a spiritual leader

3. I can tell you that far too often, this is exactly what is practiced in the church

- a. I once heard a man say that he was going to “run for elder” because he wanted to straighten out the church!
- b. I have observed men in leadership positions who misused and abused other people instead of leading them
- c. I have watched small groups of people within a congregation manipulate the whole church because they wanted their way
- d. I have heard people threaten to leave, quit giving, or cause trouble unless they got their way about something
- e. I have seen power-hungry people sink good efforts and whole churches

C. Jesus made himself the foundation for spiritual leadership

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2. What’s the foundation for spiritual leadership

a. Jesus is – 20:28 is the key to understanding what a spiritual leader is

- 1) if anyone deserved a “position” it was Jesus
- 2) if anyone deserved personal glory and honor it was Jesus
- 3) if anyone deserved to exercise authority it was Jesus
- 4) but that wasn’t Jesus’ way

b. Jesus didn’t come to be served, but to serve

- 1) he gave his life a ransom for many
- 2) this is the foundation for spiritual leaders

3. It’s time for the church – this church – to check ungodly motives at the door

a. you might think you’re the person to lead, or you might think someone is the right one to follow – but you need to examine what’s behind the façade

b. will a particular person take you where God wants you to be? If not, then nothing else matters

D. This is the constant battle in which the church must engage itself

1. Look at Corinth

a. **1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (NAS)** — **10** Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. **11** For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. **12** Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." **13** Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

b. **1 Corinthians 3:1–4 (NAS)** — **1** And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. **2** I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, **3** for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? **4** For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not mere men?

2. You need to see that the problem was not merely a lack of spiritual leadership, it was also a problem caused by followers who didn't recognize real spiritual leadership from that which wasn't

3. Bottom line – real spiritual leadership always looks like Jesus

CONCLUSION

A. I urge you to think about what Jesus said to his disciples, and to see the contrast between what is seen in the world and what Christ wants in his church

B. Invitation