

11. Healthy Churches Develop Godly Servant Leaders

In the world, we commonly have two types of leaders. Some are drivers who drive other people to complete their personal goals. Others are leaders who lead people to accomplish group goals. However, we see that Christ teaches us that, in the church, we are to develop a third kind of leader. That third kind of leader is a godly servant leader. Christ modeled this style of leadership throughout His ministry and helped His disciples to see the difference when He washed their feet the night before He was crucified. After washing their feet, Christ said in John 13:14-15, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”

Christ did not just tell His disciples to wash one another’s feet. Instead, He chose to wash their feet and then told them that He was giving them an example to follow. Here, we see one of the differences between a leader and a godly servant leader. A godly servant leader does not ask others to do what he is unwilling to do. Instead, a godly servant leader takes the time to show people, by his example, how to do what he is asking them to do.

We see all three of these styles of leadership in the Bible. John 13:2 says that Christ waited until after supper to wash the feet of the disciples. This allowed each of the disciples to have the opportunity to wash the feet of the others, but none of them did, because none of them were willing to humble themselves and do the work of a slave by washing the feet of the others. The reason none of them offered to wash the feet of others was due to their own pride. That is a key difference between a leader and a godly servant leader. Let’s look at a Biblical example of each of these three kinds of leaders.

First, some leaders are drivers. They drive people to reach their own personal goals. Esau gives us an example of a leader who was a driver. He showed this characteristic when he met his brother Jacob, as Jacob returned from Laban. Genesis 33:12-14 says, “Then Esau said, ‘Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you.’ But Jacob said to him, ‘My lord knows that the children are weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing are with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die. Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir.’”

Esau was leading four hundred soldiers, and he was going to do things in a military way by helping Jacob drive the flocks hard so they could get to his goal quickly. Jacob knew that a driver would drive both the flocks and the children in such a way that it would destroy the flocks and harm the children. As a result, Jacob said that he would come at a pace that would be good for both the flocks and the children. A driver is driven by fear, and he drives others with fear until they can get out of the way.

Today, many church leaders have followed the example of the world and drive people to accomplish their goals. The people are either driven or forced to try to get out of the way of such leaders, for their own survival. 3 John 1:9-10 describes such a leader in the early church. Those

verses say, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.” We see the following characteristics in the life of Diotrephes:

- he loved to have the preeminence – pride
- he refused to receive other godly leaders
- he spoke against those who were godly spiritual leaders
- he spoke malicious words against those leaders to try to destroy the trust of their followers
- he forbid those who wanted to follow godly leaders
- he put out of the church those who disagreed with him

A much better style of leadership is the kind of leadership demonstrated by leaders who are concerned about helping a group move toward worthy goals. This kind of leadership can be seen in some leaders in the world. Instead of driving people, these leaders lead by inspiring people. The first act of leadership by Saul demonstrated this kind of leadership, although he later became a driver. In 1 Samuel 11, Saul heard that Nahash, the king of Ammon, had told the men of Jabesh Gilead that the only way he would agree not to kill them would be if they agreed to be blinded in their right eye.

We see the reaction of Saul, in 1 Samuel 11:4-7, where we read, “So the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the news in the hearing of the people. And all the people lifted up their voices and wept. Now there was Saul, coming behind the herd from the field; and Saul said, ‘What troubles the people, that they weep?’ And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh. Then, the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused. So he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, ‘Whoever does not go out with Saul and Samuel to battle, so it shall be done to his oxen.’ And the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.” The people willingly followed Saul, because all of them wanted to join in the worthy cause of rescuing the men of Jabesh Gilead. Here, we see that Saul was able to lead the people, because he inspired them to fight for a worthy cause.

The third kind of leadership is the kind of leadership Christ demonstrated when He washed the feet of the disciples. Christ had earlier told some of the disciples, in Mark 1:17, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” These words certainly inspired those disciples. However, they also did something much greater. Christ said that He would show these men how to become fishers of men. Here, we see that Christ did several things:

- He invited the disciples to follow Him - He gave them a choice to follow or not follow. When they learned the cost of following, many chose not to follow (John 6:66-69)
- He promised to transform their lives - I will make you become...
- He promised to serve them by helping them develop into something that was not presently true in their lives - become fishers of men

Christ also taught these men the following things about godly servant leaders:

- He taught them the differences between godly leadership and worldly leadership (Mark 10:35-45)
- He provided them an example, by His acts of service to them, such as washing their feet (John 13:1-17; Mark 10:43)
- He provided them an example of true humility by becoming obedient unto the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8; Mark 10:44)
- He transformed their character so they were no longer driven by fear, but instead led by the love of Christ (compare Luke 9:49-56 with Acts 4:13, 23-31, and especially Acts 8:14 and 25)
- He loved them in such a way that they knew He loved them greatly, because He commanded them to love one another as He had loved them (John 13:34-35)
- He prayed for them, and for us, at the very time He was preparing to go to the cross within a few hours (John 17:1-26)
- He called Judas a friend at the very moment Judas betrayed Him; since Christ is God, the words He spoke were words of truth. Matthew 26:48-50 says, “Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.’ Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.”

Drivers are driven by fear, and they drive others until others can get out of their way. This is the most common form of worldly leadership, because leaders are motivated by their own self-gain instead of focusing on developing others.

Leaders inspire others and can lead others as far as they have gone themselves. They may inspire a group to work toward worthy group goals.

Godly servant leaders love and inspire others. In addition, they show others how to grow and develop godly character by their own example. They take others with them and show them, by their example, how to serve the Lord effectively. Godly leaders focus on the development of every Christian, not just those who are dynamic. Godly leaders also serve others and help them develop their God given potential, which may go far beyond the potential of the leader. Godly leaders multiply their ministry through a second, third, and fourth generation of godly spiritual leadership.

If a church is truly a healthy church, it will make the development of people the focus of its ministry, so that every Christian develops the God-given potential that God has given each Christian. They will see God work through each Christian in a mighty way as God accomplishes what He has promised, in Ephesians 3:20-21, where we read, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. The Lord wants to work mightily through you and your church. May the Lord richly bless you as you develop godly servant leaders who are able to develop others.