Accept Leadership

First in the series “Christian Leadership.”

# Scripture: 1 Sam. 17:31-37

# Key Thought: If God has given us the opportunity and ability to lead, we should accept it.

# Intro:

A little more than a century ago now, a bishop paid a visit to

"… a small, Midwestern religious college. He stayed at the home of the college president, who also served as professor of physics and chemistry. After dinner the bishop declared that the millennium couldn't be far off, because just about everything about nature had been discovered and all inventions conceived. The young college president politely disagreed and said he felt there would be many more discoveries. When the angered bishop challenged the president to name just one such invention, the president replied he was certain that within 50 years men would be able to fly. "Nonsense," sputtered the outraged bishop. "Only angels are intended to fly." The Bishop's last name was Wright, and he had two boys at home who would prove to have greater vision than their father. Their names were Orville and Wilbur. The father and his sons both lived under the same sky, but they didn't all have the same horizon.
How can this be? Why is it that two people can be in the same place at the same time and both see entirely different things? It's simple. We see what we are prepared to see, not what is. Every successful leader understands this about people.
John C Maxwell in Developing the Leader Within You p. 142, 143

The father saw only the difficulties in such a project, but the boys, Orville and Wilbur saw the possibilities. Leaders see things differently.

In the story that we read this morning, King Saul saw only the difficulties that Israel faced concerning the giant Goliath. The young man David, on the other hand, looked at the situation differently. He saw a huge opportunity for God to win a big victory. David thought of the insults being hurled by Goliath, not as insults against Israel, but as blasphemy against God. He saw the opportunity to be personally involved, not as an opportunity for personal glory, but as an opportunity to use his gifts to defend the honor of God.

For the next three weeks, I’m going to be talking about leadership. Now I know what many of you are thinking, “I’m not a leader.” For a few of you that might be true, but for most of you it is not true.

Stop and think about the definition of leadership. “Leadership is influence!” (Both John Maxwell and J. Oswald Sanders). It’s that simple. If you have influence, you are a leader in some way.

One of the main problems of growing and maturing leaders is that they do not recognize that they are, in fact, leading. Being a leader is not in their conscious agenda. I know as a young man in my first church, even though I was the pastor, I was not nearly as aware as I should have been about the whole subject of leadership. Leadership was relegated to one half of one semester in seminary. The sad result was that for about the first ten years of my ministry I focused mostly on preaching, teaching and shepherding, thinking that the less “administration” I did the better. After about ten years I figured out that leadership was really at the very center of what pastoring was about.

Leaders shape human lives and for that reason leadership is sacred work. It’s a sacred responsibility and therefore it deserves commitment and purposeful development.
By Jenni Catron In YouVersion Bible app devotional. “Becoming an Extraordinary Leader”

That is what the next three Sundays will be about. So, let’s begin.

First, the vision of leaders is different! They have the same physical eyes as everyone one else, but they don’t see the world around them quite the same way that everyone else does.

# Leader’s see the opportunity, not just the difficulty.

## Leaders do see the difficulty

Often when people come up against an optimistic person, they accuse him or her of having their head in the clouds and not facing reality. I suppose sometimes it might be true. But it is not true of good leaders. Even though they may have a positive attitude they also face reality head on. As Jim Collins put it in his famous book,

"You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts" (Jim Collins in Good to Great p. 70)

Or as leadership guru John C. Maxwell summarized,

"Good leaders are both visionary and realistic" John C. Maxwell in Leadership Gold p. 68

In the story we read today, David looked at Goliath realistically. After all, in his description of his reason for confidence he mentions that he has defeated both a lion and a bear while defending his father’s flock. Apparently, Goliath was in the same class. Some have asked why David took five smooth stones. They best answer may be that Goliath had 4 giant relatives (1 Sam.15:15-22). So, it was not that David was unrealistic.

## Leaders see beyond the difficulty

It wasn’t that David was unrealistic, rather, David looked beyond the difficulty. It was true that Goliath was huge. But that was not the focus of David’s thought. Most people allow the difficulty to be the entire focus of their thought. That is why they don’t make progress. That is why they need a leader like David with vision to see beyond the difficulty and glimpse the opportunity. The vison of the leader can lead to a new reality for those who follow.

In the 1960’s race relations in the United States were awful. Segregation was the rule and hearts were hard. Blacks and whites were involved in violence toward one another.

But a Christian leader arose, one whose key words, nearly everyone in America can recite still today, “I have a dream!” he announced. His dream that people might be judged not by “the color of their skin” but by the “content of their character,” still illumines America’s conscience today. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King saw beyond the difficulty of segregation, as dark as it was. He glimpsed a golden future of equal opportunity. Since then much progress has been made, but there is much yet to do. And still today we dream and work for the fulfillment of racial equality and justice in our country. True leaders see beyond the difficulty. They see an opportunity. They see a possibility.

This possibility becomes their personal goal. As John Maxwell puts it.

All effective leaders have a vision of what they must accomplish. John C Maxwell in Developing the Leader Within You p. 139

John C. Maxwell lists four levels of people with regard to vision.

  Some people never see it. (They are wanderers.)

Some people see it but never pursue it on their own. (They are followers.)

Some people see it and pursue it. (They are achievers.)

Some people see it and pursue it and help others see it. (They are leaders.)

Developing the Leader Within You p. 141

David was a leader. Everyone else saw only the giant. David saw the opportunity for God to win a great victory.

What do you do when you run into a difficulty in your life? In your work?

I had an opportunity to put this idea into practice just this month. In our Vision 2020 planning here at church I had a vision to expand our kitchen area out toward our parking lot to give us the much-needed nursery space and a multipurpose classroom. But Robert Loomis looked up the required set-back footage for wells in our township and found that we will not be able to build in that area at all because we are already too close to our well. We’re grandfathered in as they say.

So how would I look at this seeming setback? I said to Robert, “Well, often I have seen that just such setbacks are the seed of an even better solution.” So, I asked the council for permission to have the nominating committee put together an exploratory committee to help find a better solution. And they have done so. Already I’m excited that this process is better than what was evolving before. God helped me to see an opportunity for collaboration rather than a roadblock.

# A Christian leader’s faith is in God, not themselves.

## Leaders have a positive confident attitude

One thing you will note about nearly all leaders is that they have a positive and confident attitude.

Someone joked that when the giant Goliath came out to fight against the Israelites, most of the soldiers thought, “He’s so big we can never kill him.” But David looked at the same giant and thought, “He so big I can’t miss.”

Well, that’s not exactly in the Bible, but if you read the account, you will see that David had a tremendous positive attitude about the outcome of his upcoming encounter with Goliath. He knew his skills with the slingshot. But he also knew God and he had a positive confident attitude. Positive, confident thinking is important for leaders.

The first instance an idea is conceived is a moment of decision. When an opportunity for growth is opened to you, what do you tell yourself? Will you grasp the chance with a tingle of excitement and say, “I can make it work!” Or do you smother it by saying, “That’s impractical… Too difficult… I don’t think it can be done”? In that moment you choose between success and failure. You help to form a habit of either positive or negative thinking by what you tell yourself. So, give your “better” self a chance to grow. Form the habit of positive reaction followed by positive action.
John C Maxwell in The Winning Attitude p. 170

Leaders are possibility thinkers. Leaders are positive thinkers—almost to a fault.

## The true source of our confidence is faith in God

But if we stopped there, we would be doing a grave injustice to David’s story. And we would be missing something that is of tremendous importance to us as Christian leaders. Of course, David was a positive thinking and confident young man. But there was something much deeper about his confidence. It was confidence in God. His faith was in God. It was God who would win the victory.

When the battle between David and Goliath was about to begin, Goliath cursed David and promised to destroy him. But David’s answer tells us so much about what David was thinking.

David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.” 1 Sam 17:45-47 NIV

The true source of confidence for Christian leaders is not in themselves, it is in God.

Paul said:

 “I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Phil 4:13 NRSV

There is something about the spiritual leader that gives another dimension to their leadership. God’s Holy Spirit is at work through them by faith.

Spirituality is not easy to define, but you can tell when it is present. It is the fragrance of the garden of the Lord, the power to change the atmosphere around you, the influence that makes Christ real to others. J Oswald Sanders in Spiritual Leadership p. 31

# Leaders step up to make a difference.

## Leaders take the initiative

The next thing I would like us to note about David is that he did not just talk about what needed to be done, he stepped up and volunteered.

I found in my last church that there were many people who were willing to say, “We should do this.” Or “You should start this ministry.” They learned quickly that I would usually thank them for the idea and then the conversation would go something like this, “You know every ministry here at Kirkville Wesleyan has a leader. A new ministry can’t really get started unless it has someone who has that cause on their heart and is willing to develop the idea, organize it and lead it. Would you like to lead such a ministry!” About 99% of the time they would get that deer-in-the-headlights look and quickly reply, “Oh no, I just think it would be a good idea.” So, I would thank them again for the idea. After all, the church does need idea persons.

You see, the people who make the ministries of the church happen are the leaders who will step up like David and take initiative. They are the kind who get the ball rolling. Their energy is contagious.

## Leaders bring others along on the journey

Lastly, leaders step up by bringing others along on the journey. If we just do all the work ourselves, we are not yet leaders. It is when we invite others to work together with us in fulfilling the vision, that is when we are leading.

David lead the battle by defeating Goliath. But immediately afterward, the whole army of Israel was called into action to defeat the Philistine army.

Three kinds of people think they are leading but they are not.

1. The person who thinks they are leading by has no one following is not leading – they are just out for a walk.
2. The person who is holding up progress may have people waiting behind them but that is not leadership. – Saw a cartoon with a man driving slowly in his convertible on a one-lane road. He had traffic backed up for miles. His wife leaned over and whispered, “Fred, this does not qualify you for a leadership position.”
3. The person doing outstanding work by themselves often thinks of themselves as leading. But they are working alone. Doing outstanding work is a good thing but it is not leading.

Leading is influencing others to work with you together toward a common goal. Those who influence others to help fulfill the vision together, they are the leaders!

In a congregation like this, there are some who are leaders, but have been hesitant to admit it. If you had asked them whether they were a leader, they would probably have answered, “No.” But they really are influencers. They lead in their family. They might even oversee other people at work. The truth about them is that God has given them the spiritual gift of leadership. It is time to acknowledge it and diligently fan it into flame as Paul put it in his letter to one of his young mentees. This morning message is for you—to encourage you to use the grace that God has gifted you with.

Also, in a congregation like this, there are likely leaders who would acknowledge being leaders, but who have never thought about exercising their gifting through their church. To such leaders, I challenge you to step up spiritually. Open your heart to the Holy Spirit’s presence and to the call of God. God needs you! He calls leaders to follow because his kingdom needs leaders. The Methodist church is very short of leaders at all levels.

Lastly, to you are the leaders in our congregation here, I want to thank you again for your partnership in the gospel. May God give us grace to see together beyond the challenges to the opportunities that he has for our church. AMEN