A Leader Worth Following

Second in the series “Christian Leadership”

# Scripture: 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Nehemiah 2:11-20

# Key Thought: Leaders we admire are people worth following.

# Intro:

Jim Dornan successfully made the transition from aerospace to the world of global marketing and is president and owner of network 21 international with offices in 25 countries. He co-wrote the book Becoming a Person of Influence with John C. Maxwell. I introduce him so that you recognize that he has economic privileges that fit the following story.

He tells a story from his life in the book about the time when he celebrated his wife’s birthday in London and for her gift, took her to one of those expensive London clothing boutiques. When she struggled to decide which things to buy, he told the clerk to wrap them all up. When they arrived back in San Francisco to go through customs, he tells what happened.

“When they asked what we had to declare, we told them about the clothes Nancy had bought and the amount we had spent. “What?” The agent said. “You’re declaring clothes?” He read the figure that we’d written and said, “You’ve got to be kidding!” It’s true that we had spent a little bit of money on them but we didn’t think it was that big a deal. “What are the clothes made of?” He asked.

That seem like an odd question. “A bunch of different things,” answered Nancy. “Wool, cotton, silk. Everything’s different. There are dresses, coats, blouses, shoes, belts, accessories. Why?”

“Each kind of fabric has a different duty,” He said. “I’ll have to get my supervisor. I don’t even know what all the different rates are. Nobody declares clothes.” He looked frustrated. “Go ahead and pull everything out and sort it according to what it’s made of.” As we opened up our bags he walked away and we could hear him saying to a coworker, “Bobby, you’ll never believe this…”

I’ll make a long story short to say they ended up paying a bunch of money in duty on all those expensive clothes. Back to his narrative.

“As they were putting things back into his suitcase the agent said, “You know what? I think I know you. Aren’t you Jim Dornan?”

“Yes,” I answered, “I’m sorry, have we met before?” I didn’t recognize him.

“No,” he said, “But I’ve got a friend who’s in your organization. Network 21, right?”

“That’s right,” I said.

“I’ve seen your picture before you know,” the agent said, “my friend has been telling me that I’d really benefit from hooking up with your organization. But I haven’t really listened. Now I’m thinking I should reconsider. He might be right after all. See, most people I see every day try to get all kinds of things through customs without paying duty, even stuff they should know better about. But you guys, you’re declaring stuff you could’ve gotten through with no problem. That sure a lot of money you could’ve saved!”

“That may be true, answered Nancy, “but we can spare the money for customs a lot more than I can spare not having a clear conscience.”

Jim Dornan and his wife showed integrity of character in the little things that most people don’t bother with.

You see, integrity and character are things a leader needs to show every day in all kinds of situations. Stop and think about the Biblical story for a moment. Think about what kind of a man Nehemiah was. He was an outstanding leader. His integrity and leadership had been recognized by the Persian King, Artaxerxes. He was the king’s cupbearer, one of the most trusted positions in an ancient kingdom. Trust in that position was so crucial that the king even noticed when Nehemiah’s facial expression was sad, and he wanted to know what the change of expression was about.

The message for us today is that character is at the foundation of good leadership. Occasionally people who do not have good character succeed but they are always on slippery ground (Psalm 73:18). Their followers do not trust them. And usually they do not follow them for long. As John Maxwell put it;

The key to becoming an effective leader is not to focus on making other people follow, but on making yourself the kind of person they want to follow. You must become someone others can trust to take them where they want to go. (Maxwell, The Right to Lead, 2001, p. 7)

Obviously, this is a subject that is much bigger than one message. But our goal this morning is to think about the passage in Timothy which outlines the character expected of Christian leaders and use Nehemiah as a shining example. From this starting point, we’ll try to set down some basics about the kind of character that Christian leaders need to be successful.

# A leader worth following has character worthy of respect.

The bottom line is that a leader who is worth following over the long term has a character that is worthy of respect. They live rightly and followers notice.

## Upright in character

The need for integrity today is perhaps as great as it has ever been. And it is absolutely essential for anyone who desires to become a person of influence. John C. Maxwell and Jim Dornan in Becoming A Person of Influence p. 19

Good character is needed not just in Christian leadership but in business leadership as well.

Integrity is the quality most needed to succeed in business. John C. Maxwell and Jim Dornan in Becoming A Person of Influence p. 21

Nehemiah was a man of good character whom the King could explicitly trust. Character was the foundation of his good leadership.

Paul makes it very clear as he writes to Timothy that character that deserves respect is the starting point needed for leaders in the church too. The leading men and women of the church were to be people looked up to because of their righteous living. Paul lists some specific areas that are key.

## Has integrity regarding finances and speech

There are two key places that good character is especially evident. A leader worth following has integrity, especially regarding finances and in their speech. They are honest in handling money; and their words can be relied upon. Integrity has to do with self-discipline in each of these areas. J. Oswald Sanders wrote about Spiritual Leadership.

**A leader is a person who has learned to obey a discipline imposed from without and has taken on a more rigorous discipline from within. Those who rebel against authority and scorn self-discipline – who shirk the rigors and turn from the sacrifices – do not qualify to lead. J. Oswald Sanders in Spiritual Leadership P. 52**

## Humble

**The best leaders are also those who remain humble.**

**Sanders said;**

**Humility is the hallmark of the spiritual leader. Christ told his disciples to turn away from the pompous attitudes of Oriental despots, and instead take on the lowly bearing of the servant. J. Oswald Sanders in Spiritual Leadership P. 61**

I notice that Nehemiah was a humble person. He did not make a show of the things he was doing. He was not seeking praise. In fact, his book is a model of giving credit to the team members for an accomplishment. In chapter 3, you will find all the key leaders under him who built sections of the wall listed along with their accomplishments in building the wall. He passes the glory on to them for the work completed. In First Timothy, one of the dangers for bishops or overseers to guard against is becoming conceited. So, humility is a virtue that leaders need, not a false or pretentious humility, but a genuine humility.

## Their spiritual life is an example - prayerful, bold faith, thankful

In this series, we are especially concerned with Christian leadership. Nehemiah is also a perfect example of the exemplary spiritual life of a Christian leader. Chapter one of Nehemiah contains his humble prayer of confession and entreaty before God for his nation. In addition to his prayerfulness, Nehemiah was also a man of bold faith. Great Christian leaders are people of great faith. They know God is at work and they expect to see God’s handiwork in their field of endeavor. Jesus said,

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.” John 15:5 NIV

Great Christian leaders do not rely upon themselves to produce fruit, they rely upon God’s Spirit working through them. As Paul put it;

“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” 2 Co 9:10 NIV

J. Oswald Sanders expressed it this way;

“Spiritual leadership requires superior spiritual power, which can never be generated by the self.” Sanders p. 28

Contemporary pastor, author and church multiplier, Jim Cymbala, wrote;

“Let every pastor take note: Our attempt at ministry will be an absolute exercise in futility if we are not expecting and experiencing divine help through the power of the Holy Spirit.” Jim Cymbala in Fresh Power p. 48

In a small but challenging volume, Ben Patterson challenges us all;

“So, we must pray, because the work of the church is God’s work, not ours! We must also pray because prayer actually gets God’s work done. That’s the way prayer is seen in heaven.” Ben Patterson in Deepening Your Conversation with God, Bethany House Publishers, 2001 p. 24

# A leader worth following loves and inspires people.

Another one of the important characteristics of leaders worth following is that they are people persons.

## Such a leader values people, loves people, gets to know people, and understands people more than most folks do.

Good leaders appreciate the worth of the people who are with them. God places gifts in the body through people. Leaders spend time getting to know people. They enjoy interacting with people. Jesus loved people. Jesus’ method was people. God has chosen to work through people.

It is true that leaders are always walking a delicate tightrope between people priorities and task priorities. But any leader that does not understand the people side, cannot be a good leader. Notice that several of the characteristics of a good bishop or deacon have to do with their ability to get along with and care for people. For example, they must be hospitable and gentle.

## Builds Up others

Another people-person characteristic of leaders is that they are people builders. Paul specifically mentions the teaching ability of the bishop. Nehemiah was constantly encouraging the workers on the wall. One of the key responsibilities listed for pastors is to equip the people for works of ministry. The kind of speech that is appropriate for a Christian is speech that builds others up as persons and in the faith. So, one of the characteristics of leaders is to build up those who follow. (More about this in the bonus class after service.)

## Is a communicator

True leaders realize that speaking is not just telling your thoughts. It was from John Maxwell that I first remember hearing about being a communicator not just a speaker or a preacher. He modeled what he was talking about too. After I heard him speak once, I never spoke the same way again. A communicator is very aware of the unspoken dialogue going on even while they are speaking.

In the book, Real Leaders Don't Do PowerPoint, Christopher Witt talks about the purposes of true leaders when they speak.

1. Leaders speak when a lot is at stake. In times of crisis, change, or opportunity – when expectations are high, and the consequences may be momentous – that's when people turn to leaders for words of insight, reassurance, or direction…. Leaders speak to make a difference, in unsettled times are when their words can have the greatest impact. P. 2, 3

2. Leaders speak as representatives of their organizations. Real leaders know that audiences take their words seriously, much more seriously than they take the words of other people. And leaders *want* their words to be taken seriously. P. 3

3. Leaders speak all the time. P. 4

4. Leaders speak because it's their job. Speaking is one of the most important responsibilities of the leader, and real leaders take it on as a challenge and an opportunity. P. 5

5. Leaders speak to influence and inspire. They aren’t primarily concerned with communicating information. They speak to promote a vision, a direction, or a passion. They are seeking to influence and inspire… Speak like a leader and you’ll present information, not for its own sake, but in a way that shapes how the audience thinks about it and influences how they act on it. P. 6

For Christian leaders, communicating the message is part of our assignment from Jesus. We are his witnesses. Teaching and discipling involve communicating. So being a communicator is a Christian leader’s responsibility.

# A leader worth following is committed to the mission.

## Proven competence and commitment

We’ll talk more in the bonus class about how a leader earns their stripes showing competence in the area that they are leading. As a pastor, you would not respect me as a leader if I did not show competence in leading services and sacraments and delivering messages, in caring for people in crisis and ministering in end of life situations. Those are basics of ministry. As I perform those well, you have respect for my leadership.

In addition to competence in the basics, the good leader who earns respect also shows commitment to the cause he or she is leading. There is a passion and a desire to see the process through.

People do not follow uncommitted leaders. Commitment can be displayed in a full range of matters to include the work hours you choose to maintain, how you work to improve your abilities, or what you do for your fellow workers at personal sacrifice**. Stephen Gregg quoted on P. 15 in John C. Maxwell in The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader**

The commitment of the leader starts way before success is visible. The leader does not have the option to wait and see if this works and then decide to hop on board.

“Commitment always precedes achievement.” **John C. Maxwell in The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader**

## Provides direction forward

A leader is going someplace; they are not marking time. A leader helps the organization to understand the current reality and then the leader helps the organization to navigate into a desired future. Otherwise they are not a leader, they are only a caretaker. Caretakers do the minimum maintenance to keep up appearances and maintain status quo; but leaders have an agenda to create positive change and carve out a future for the organization that they lead. That is what leaders do.

I said before that leaders are always balancing people priorities and task priorities. A leader who only looks at the people side may be liked initially but eventually will not do well. They will ultimately not be respected because they can’t make the tough decisions. Providing direction will often lead to some task-oriented decisions.

## Courage in difficulties

Leaders show their metal when things get difficult. A good leader has courage to persevere, to stay the course.

Leaders require courage of the highest order – always moral courage and often physical courage as well. Courage is that quality of mind which enables people to encounter danger or difficulty firmly, without fear or discouragement…. Courageous leaders face unpleasant and even devastating situations with equanimity, then act firmly to bring good from trouble, even if their action is unpopular. Leadership always faces natural human inertia and opposition. But courage follows through with the task until it is done**. J. Oswald Sanders in Spiritual Leadership, Pp. 59-61**

Leaders know that just has life has setbacks and surprises, so to organizations. Plans fail and need to be readjusted. But when we believe in a good purpose, it will take courage and perseverance to stay on course.

# Conclusion

I found this list of qualities of character which a Christian leader needs to excel. It could serve as a description of Nehemiah as a leader. It will summarize for us our goals of integrity and good character as leaders.

Integrity commits itself to character over personal gain, to people over things, to service over power, to principle over convenience, to the long view over the immediate. John C Maxwell and Jim Dornan in Becoming A Person of Influence p. 21

If you want to become someone who can positively influence other people, you need to develop the following qualities of integrity and live them out every day:

• Model consistency of character. Solid trust can develop only when people can trust you all the time.

• Employ honest communication. To be trustworthy, you have to be like a good musical composition; your words and music must match.

• Value transparency. People eventually find out about your flaws, even if you try to hide them. But if you're honest with people and admit your weaknesses, they will appreciate your honesty and integrity.

• Exemplify humility. People won't trust you if they see that you are driven by ego, jealousy, or the belief that you are better than they are.

• Demonstrate your support of others. Nothing develops or displays your character better than your desire to put others first.

• Fulfill your promises. Never promise anything you can't deliver. And when you say you'll do something, follow through on it.

• Embrace an attitude of service. We have been put on this earth not to be served, but to serve. Giving of yourself and your time to others shows that you care about them.

• Encourage two-way participation with the people you influence. When you live a life of integrity, people listen to you and follow you. Always remember that the goal of influence is not manipulation; it's participation. Only as you include others in your life and success do you permanently succeed.

John C Maxwell and Jim Dornan in Becoming A Person of Influence p. 28, 29