

## Without Love

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I once sat across the table from a friend who had spent his life in leadership – church, business, even Boy Scouts. He made a statement I will never forget: “There is really only one kind of leadership. That of example. If you don’t model it, you are not a leader.”

We know there are many leaders out there who do a horrible job of modelling – CEO’s, politicians, and pastors whose personal lives are nothing but a train wreck not to be imitated. But there they are, in a position of power, calling the shots. It seems that leaders are allowed to pull the “Do what I say and not what I do” card. So, you could easily choose to disagree with my friend. But the funny thing is, Paul chose to agree with him. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul tells us that you could pretty much own the whole world and everyone in it, but if you do not show love in a way that can be imitated “you are nothing!” And if I am nothing, then I am not – among other things – a leader. Not one in God’s eyes anyway.

There is a saying: you are not a leader if no one is following you. But what if the only opinion about your leadership that matters is God’s? After all, you could argue that the moment when Jesus was most clearly leading was when every one of his followers abandoned him. Our definition of leadership matters. If we don’t make hard choices for the good of our character and the health of our family, even when it will cost us followers, then maybe we’re not leaders at all.

### Love is the Beginning of Leadership

Where does leadership start? Where does modeling love start? In the relationships closest to us.

**My wife.** If I am not modeling love to my wife, and for my wife to others – then I am nothing. I might be preaching every Sunday in front of thousands, but I am not leading. I am lying. If I am telling them to love one another and I am not showing it...ouch! Hypocrisy 101 is what I’m teaching, for that is exactly what I am modeling. The people listening might not know it. But my wife will, and God will as well.

**My kids.** If I have nothing but a few spare minutes a week and a two-week-a-year vacation for my kids, what am I modeling to them... and to the whole Church? How can I raise spiritual children (disciples) if I can’t/don’t/won’t connect to the kids in my own house?

**Friends and those I disciple.** What am I modeling for those I disciple? How not to raise kids? How to produce rebels? How to use my wife for my own career advancement? If doing life together counts toward making disciples, then my life must be one worth imitating.

In 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul states it clearly: You want to lead? Great. Let’s see how you are already leading. What are you modeling? Let’s look at your home. Let’s look at your character. For in these two things lies your whole ability to lead others in a Jesus-like direction.

### Character and Competency

I have heard a lot about character and competency and how these two things are necessary for a leader in the church. Look at the lists in Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:2-12, which are used by nearly every church as the foundational criteria for church leadership. What do we see? Character - verse after verse,

and only one short comment on competency. Able to teach. It does not say “gifted at teaching.” Nor “eloquent in speech.” Nor does it say, “passionate in his preaching.” Simply able to communicate truth.

It is interesting to note that “hospitable” is on both lists. It is truly in a home of love and nurture where the Gospel is best exemplified, and those who are invited into that household learn more from the experience there than any sermon that might ever be preached.

Seminaries train for competency. We hire those with the degrees, with the accolades, the most gifted communicators. And we sure hope there is some character there somewhere, but how can we really know a man’s character when we are hiring him from 2000 miles away? Worse yet, as leaders ourselves, we focus in on honing our skills and the up-front talents, instead on the very things that will truly lead future generations.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul makes reference (and not in a great light) to ministers who made a big deal about letters of recommendation, so that they would be well-received by groups they visited. As opposed to these people, Paul talks about how his “letter of recommendation” is written on the hearts of the Corinthian Christians – they have seen how he loved them and were marked by it through the Spirit. When we focus on competency over character – things that can be quantified on a piece of paper over things that are written on the hearts in our lives – we risk becoming “peddlers of God’s word” rather than Christian leaders.

## **Follow My Example**

Paul says, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” How many of us might pause to think before saying this to those who are following us, because of what we know is going on in our homes?

If we are preaching with the tongues of angels but fail to model the love of Jesus to our wives, kids, and those we disciple, we are noisy gongs. How we serve and love our families is what we model. As believers in Jesus, this must be primarily what it means to lead. This the sole foundation for guiding others with our words.

Peter says we are not to lead like the world does, but by “being examples to the flock.” Our society screams that we must lead from the stage – from on top and up front. God’s word cries out that that “stage” must be our home – the love that is exemplified in our lives.

Servant-leadership starts in love, and love starts by serving in our homes. Love is not learned in sermons but from where one sees it, feels it, experiences it. It all starts in our homes – in our closest relationships.

## **A Common Problem**

I was with a 38-year-old friend and pastor one morning and I asked him this question: “In your lifetime, how many pastors have you seen whose kids don’t walk with Christ and whose marriages are not healthy?” He answered without hesitation, “Almost all!”

We all know what “P.K.” stands for. Preacher’s Kids do not have a particularly good reputation. I remember Tom – the most rebellious and out of control kid in the 8th grade. That was the first time I

heard “P.K.” I remember thinking “How could this be?” I knew this was messed up and I had not even read the requirements for elders in the scriptures. How tragic. Is this what we church leaders model: save the church while our own kids go to hell?

Perhaps you are dealing with the problem we’ve been discussing in your own life right now. Perhaps you’re afraid to tell anyone else what’s really going on because you’re afraid of what might happen as a consequence. What might get out. Please consider three things:

First, at least those who interact with your kids probably already have some idea of the truth. What is hidden will be made known – light will shine on darkness. Will it be the light of the gospel working through you to redeem your family life, or the light of gossip which tears down ruthlessly?

Second, this won’t go away on its own. Your family won’t grow out of it. You are planting seeds when your family is younger – you can only expect to see more of the same, unless you do some serious, aggressive weeding.

Third, you are not alone. This is not a unique failure on your part. There are people out there who will want to help you. But you must admit you don’t have it all together, first.

## **The Cause and the Solution**

There are two groups to blame for this problem.

First – us leaders. As a shepherd of God’s flock, I need to understand that my role starts at home. I need to decide – ahead of time – what I will do if my kids rebel, or if my marriage is suffering. Specifically, I need to be absolutely prepared to step away from my elder, pastor, leader role for whatever amount of time necessary to shepherd my family. The passages we have mentioned so far are not unclear (though we might like them to be). If my family is failing, I must take the time I need to be there for them. I must demonstrate love there, where it counts most. And I must have friends that love me enough to tell me it is time to love.

The second group to blame is the congregations. People see a pastor’s unhealthy marriage and unhappy wife and they often conclude, “His sermons are so good, and he is such a man of God doing so much for the kingdom, that it must be her fault.” The elders board sees his skill, his hard work, his ultimate dedication to the church, and his incredible up-front talents and are unwilling to let him take the break he needs, or if need be – to let him go. After all, he is a trained pastor – what else can he do? Yet the scripture seems clear – he can’t be a leader if his home life isn’t right. Do we trust God to be able to work in the lives of our leaders enough to give them the time they need to get things straight with their family?

The role of “Pastor” – what we have made it to be in our culture – actually pulls ministers away from their primary call – their families and their character – and forces them to focus on the superficial, i.e. their gifts, natural talents, and stage presence. Congregations and elder teams must encourage all their staff to lead by example first, and must be willing to sacrifice “the show” and “the crowds” to give their leaders the time to focus on what really matters – love.

I am not writing this to give you stones to throw at your leaders but rather for you to give them time and space to heal. We are not to be the police of one another’s family life. But this does mean you must

at times call out a leader who is putting in 70 hours a week, running all over the country to speak here-and-there. Sure, as his fame grows so do the numbers in your pews, but how is there any time at all for such a man to do what is primary – to model how to love one’s wife and kids?

I remember a defining moment for me in life and ministry. I heard the story of a talented pastor who loved his job. But in the love for his job, he realized he was losing his own son, who was rebelling against him and God. He read the scriptures and did something I have seen no pastor do.

In 1 Timothy 3:4-5, he read, “He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” And in Titus 1, “and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.”

This pastor listened to what the scriptures said, and he turned in his resignation. The congregation loved him so much and the elders tried to talk him out of it. But he listened to the word and followed.

His son caught word of what was happening, put two and two together, and knew exactly why his father had resigned. Their conversation:

“Dad, you can’t quit! You love pastoring. You are so good at it. Don’t leave your job!”

“Son, I have neglected you, and you mean way more to me than any dream job.”

“No Dad, I mean it. I am done rebelling. You can’t quit!”

This is the solitary example that I have seen of a man voluntarily giving up his position as pastor for the sake of his son, and it led to his own son’s repentance and salvation. While you could say that this might be an outlier, and there is no guarantee that any other child will act that way, I can say this for sure: I have countless stories of a pastors destroying their families, themselves, and ultimately their congregations because their career came first. What’s the smarter risk to take? What’s better modeling for our families and our congregations?

The very day I heard this story, I made the decision that I would gladly step away from “the ministry” for my family’s sake – any member. My wife and kids knew they had the right to call “time out.” After all, it was not “my ministry.” It was “our family’s ministry.” If we were not in this together, then I would refuse to go it alone.

I have the privilege to work with a young pastor named Ryan. His wife Michelle and their family show joy on their faces. But this has not always been the case. Michelle described for us her first years as a “single mom” while her husband was always away doing ministry on staff at a big church as youth pastor. After all, that is what youth pastors do...right? He was ready to crash and burn along with his family, so he quit and took a secular job. God has since called him back into leading, but this time it is different. His work starts by serving at home and he knows it. His wife knows and feels it and it shows on her countenance. You can see it in the kids as well. They are in it together and it is beautiful to watch. They

are modeling the words written 2000 years ago, and they bring life.

John says: "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him ..." And Paul says: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

More than preaching love or casting vision for love, leaders must model love starting with those closest to us. The scriptures scream it: if he is to be a leader, a believer must first lead his household. I think such a leader can count on God's help showing up in powerful ways.