

Leadership in church.

Hello my church family. Merry Christmas. Though that was yesterday, we still have Christmas cookies to eat so the festivities are ongoing. If you are new or otherwise don't know me, I'm Mike Weeks and I am a deacon here at Grace Church. My presence up here is becoming more frequent than I expected, and I want to mention my writing process. I have a folder in my dropbox account titled "sermons" and most of its contents are started when I see a connection between two verses that strikes me as profound, or when I am struggling with a question to God and I start to hear the answer. And as the words are built in a trickle, they tend to wander across many books. This sermon is actually on the young side, as its file was started when I was wrestling with getting up here the first time. This was a lesson I needed to grasp before I could get up here and start sharing previous lessons with you. From that point it grew a lot, and I've flipped the arrangement on its head multiple times in the last two months.

When you think of leaders, who comes to mind? An elected official? Your high school quarterback? Maybe, since we are sitting in church, a Biblical figure is the first to mind? I want to present the idea that a Christian or Biblical leader is fundamentally different from a worldly leader. Though their success might look similar, the methodology and requirements are different. Here are some aspects of a leader:

Confidence

Israel wanted a king, like the countries around it. They picked Saul. A worldly leader needs to be confident in themselves, with a strong enough opinion to make other people follow their choices. Saul fit that mold pretty well, being confident in himself and the number of soldiers behind him. But that is not how he is supposed to be. When in the bible does man say "I'll do it myself" and God says "meh, that looks good, I'll bless that." I haven't found a case. Biblical leadership is not confidence in self, it's not about pride. Saul gets it wrong.

1 Samuel 13:8-12

8 He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. 9 So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. 10 As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. 11 Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, 12 I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering."

King Saul was preparing for war. The thing to do for victory is to get a priest to bless the army. He is tired of waiting, sees his forces starting to scatter, and says "I'll do it myself." Saul is stuck on the idea that human strength of arms is what is needed. The sacrifice before the battle is just a box to check on the prep list to him.

As a counter example, let's look at Gideon.

Judges 6:11-12

Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezerite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor."

Judges 6:11-12 ESV

We don't beat out wheat by hand anymore, so let me tell you a little about the process. Beating out wheat is a process usually done in an open space, a threshing floor. You would beat the bundles against the hard ground to separate the wheat grain from the straw. Then you would toss the wheat into the air to let the wind separate the papery sheath, called chaff, from the wheat berries. That is why the phrase "blown like chaff" is used in other passages, it was a common sight and easy to understand.

So, let's picture this scene. Gideon has his wheat in one of those large wooden vats, where it can't be seen. Then, he is tossing up bunches of it, high enough to get above the edge of the wine press and into the wind. The Angel of the Lord walks up and is standing there, watching the wheat appear above the edge and then drop back down, maybe getting some of the chaff off. Gideon is completely involved in his inefficient method, hiding because he is scared, mind probably wandering in circles about the raiders. Then the Angel of the Lord greets him in a voice that I would guess is louder than it needs to be, saying "Hello strong and brave warrior." And Gideon about jumps out of his skin. God has a sense of humor, and can use sarcasm.

God eventually gets Gideon to gather the men of Israel to fight the invaders. And this year the Midianites brought their buddies.

Judges 6:33

Now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East came together, and they crossed the Jordan and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.

Judges 6:33 ESV

Up to this point, if Gideon had confidence in anything it would be in losing. But God is talking to him so he listens and obeys. Then God looks at the troops that have gathered, and tells Gideon "you have too many. Send home whoever is scared." 22,000 leave and 10,000 remain. Then God says "still too many" and has Gideon separate the troops again.

Finally, Gideon has the 300 who were too scared to go home when the scared people were allowed to leave, because it had to be a trap or trick of some kind, right? And when drinking water at the spring surrounded by the rest of the Israel army, they were too scared to put their weapons down. Fun trivia side note, that spring is named "Ha'rod" which means "trembling," as in the scared people shaking in their boots. Gideon and these 300 most scared are the ones used to drive out the vast hordes of invaders.

Judges 7:12

And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance.

Judges 7:12 ESV

And God's chosen leader wins a major battle without fighting. Gideon gets trumpets and torches and clay jars to smash. He makes a commotion, and since the invaders are from multiple countries they start killing each other in the confusion in the night. We met Gideon in hiding. God gathers the most scared to do something brave. Saul had confidence in himself, while Gideon had confidence in God.

Another aspect of leadership, leaders use advisors.

Counsel

1 Kings 12:6-13

Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he was yet alive, saying, "How do you advise me to answer this people?" And they said to him, "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever." But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him. And he said to them, "What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, 'Lighten the yoke that your father put on us'?" And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, "Thus shall you speak to this people who said to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us,' thus shall you say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs. And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'" 2 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king said, "Come to me again the third day." 13 And the king answered the people harshly, and forsaking the counsel that the old men had given him, 14 he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions." 15 So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfill his word, which the Lord spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 16 And when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, "What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David." So Israel went to their tents.

1 Kings 12:6-16 ESV

King Rehoboam picked the advice that he wanted to hear. He huffed and he puffed about how much greater he was than his father, full of his own importance. He was the final say in what to do. Let's compare that with Joshua at Jericho.

Joshua 6:1-6

Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. 2 And the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. 3 You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. 4 Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat,[a] and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him." 6 So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord."

Joshua 6:1-6 ESV

For context I looked for details on the wall and found them on wikipedia. The city was surrounded by extensive defensive walls strengthened with rectangular towers. The wall was 5 to 6 ft thick, 12 to 17 ft high, and if interpreted as an "urban fortification", the Wall of Jericho is the oldest city wall discovered by archaeologists. Surrounding the wall was a ditch, a dry moat, 25ish ft wide and sloping from ground level to 9 ft deep by the wall, cut through solid bedrock all the way around. After I read about that ditch, the part in verse 5 where it says the wall will fall flat made more sense to me. Here is a convenient trough to collect the rubble from the wall.

Joshua, to take down the fortress city of Jericho, is given marching orders and a trumpet section. God is saying "You are going to win this battle, but don't fight, just throw a parade." I bet that is not what he wanted to hear. But because of the source of this counsel Joshua listens and obeys, as we see in verse 6 and beyond.

Rehoboam picked the counsel he wanted to hear, Joshua followed illogical instructions. Confidence, advice or Counsel, now a third point like a professional sermon writer.

Credit

Leaders want the credit for the win, right? Both examples for this one are from Moses. Moses had a temper problem. The first time he brought the ten commandments down from the mountain he saw the golden calf and the trouble the people were getting into and he threw the tablets to the ground and shattered them.

Exodus 32:19

And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

Then he had to climb back up the mountain and get God to write out a second set. Exodus 32 and 34. His biggest mistake also came from his anger. After decades of leading the sinful whiners around the wilderness, delivering miracles to keep them alive, they're complaining about being thirsty again.

Numbers 20:7-11

7and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle." And Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them."

Numbers 20:7-12 ESV

Moses, in anger, says "you want water? I'll give you water" and strikes the rock. In that wording Moses implies that he is the one doing this for the people, and neglects to give God the credit. But see here, Moses doing it wrong does not invalidate God's provision. The people still get the water. Moses is fed up from years of being the middleman between the whining Israelites and God's miraculous provision. That "shall we bring water for you" should have been "God will provide again." Leading is listening to God and crediting the victory back to Him.

Yet God gives us even more than just the surprise victories, He gives us our basic ability in the first place. Check this out, when God assigns this job to Moses at the burning bush.

First Moses is properly awed at a bush on fire that does not burn up, and God talking to him through it. But Moses does not want the job and tries to convince God to send some one else. They go back and

forth a bit, Moses presenting arguments about how he is not the guy and God granting solutions and the power to perform miracles.

Then, in Exodus 4 starting at verse 10

Exodus 4:10-15

10 But Moses said to the Lord, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” 11 Then the Lord said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” 13 But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” 14 Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do.

Moses had a speech impediment. It was not something that could be trained away, or while he was growing up in Pharaoh's household the royal speech therapist would have done that. It is clear here that Moses is embarrassed about this defect, yet God chooses him as His mouthpiece. When Moses points this out to God, God replies "Who made the mouth you are using? Don't you think I know what I gave you, and had reason to do it?" This is the root of the encouragement that I needed to get on the stage.

Look at that again. God specifically gave Moses less ability than others in this specific area, then tells Moses that this is the area he will be serving in.

This isn't bad management or poor planning, this is God acting to increase His own glory. If Moses was charismatic, people would give him more credit than they give God. God points out this reasoning to Gideon.

Judges 7:2

The Lord said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’

God says this basic ability thing to the whole nation in Deuteronomy 8:18. “But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability ...”

Pastor Harrold preached on that passage back on Nov 14th, and I encourage you to listen to that recording.

Let's review.

Saul had confidence in himself, Gideon trusted God.

Rehoboam picked what he wanted to hear, Joshua listened to instructions even when they did not make sense.

Moses didn't do so well when driven by his passion, but even his limitations were part of God's plan. God is gathering the most scared to do something brave. Going against these vast forces with no weapons. God is besieging a city with a concert. God is taking the guy with a speech impediment and using him as His Own Voice to the people. What does that look like to you?

1 Corinth 1:25-29

God does not want his leaders boasting about their own strengths. A secular leader is the one making the decisions, deciding which plan to follow. Holding the reigns, steering the ship. A worldly leader is the one to whom others defer, a Biblical leader is one who defers to God. We are the body of Christ and he is our head, even our leaders are just following His guidance.

Those are the broad strokes from the heroic tales, but it is all Old Testament. What does this look like in a more mundane and modern setting? Let's look at Jesus.

John 13:12-16

12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant[c] is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

There are a lot of great sermons on just that passage, that lesson. Foot washing was the low-man job. People wore sandals back then, and walked on dirt streets with animal droppings and whatnot. Their feet were filthy, and the lowliest slave was the one to wipe all that off of guests before a meal. That is not a smell you want around food. Here Jesus is showing that no position of service is too undignified for one of us to fill. Jesus himself says "follow this example."

This idea is even making it into the business world. I am a Certified ScrumMaster, trained in the agile framework to deliver adaptive solutions for complex problems. I took a class, passed the test, and received the little gold sticker on my Linked In account. Can you guess what the most surprising part of that was for me? Learning that a ScrumMaster takes the role of the servant leader. They support and facilitate and shield the ones actually doing the work, which results in a surprising boost in output.

Being the master of the process is about making sure other people have what they need to do what they do. And that the people with the knowledge are applying it. The ScrumMaster does not say what part of the job is next or assign who does what, they lead as a 100% support character.

Said another way, pastors shouldn't wait tables. There is this story of the early church in Acts 6

Acts 6:1-4

1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

There is a need to fill a hole in their services, and the ones preaching ask the rest to nominate some normal congregation members to fill the hole. They say "pick out some of good repute" not "pick out some showing skill in this area." Moses with his stutter works fine for teaching Sunday school. They are not looking for talent, they are looking for fellow laborers ready to do the work.

Each of us are equal heirs and siblings, fellow members of the same body. The freeman is a bondservant of Christ, and the slave is a brother. It is as valid for you to receive inspiration as it is for me. You, Christian, have the indwelling Holy Spirit and the fruit of the spirit. That is "fruit" singular: love, gentleness, patience and all the rest are flavors of that one fruit, and you have them all together. Your flavor balance will be different than mine, but that is okay. You still have a fruit and can use it.

Not all are gifted the same; I lack the gift of administration. If my calendar did not live in my pocket and take an active role in reminding me, I would miss so many meetings. When I put something away "to keep it safe" it is not seen again for years because I have no idea what shelf or closet it went to. Jim and George, sorry about that fanny pack. I am not the best choice for a leadership role, by human standards. But God is good and I am serving how I can.

Church leaders are the foot washers. They lead in that they are the ones "doing" and so they make the practical decisions in the process. The unity of the church as the body of Christ makes the more secular leadership roles unneeded.

Church leaders need to listen, believe, and obey. Like Moses listened, like Joshua believed, like Gideon obeyed. Doesn't that sound familiar? It's the basic Christian walk. A church leader just needs to do what you are already supposed to be doing. They're just a step ahead, and we follow them while they follow Christ.

Small aside, salvation is the same way because God is consistent. God has done the work, and you just need to listen, believe, and obey.

You, fellow believer, have every tool you need right here.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Your hands can fold bulletins, or push a vacuum once a month. You can read out loud to children from the lesson plan handed to you, or make sure toddlers don't choke on a toy for an hour or two. You are capable of stepping into a role that others would call leading. But we are members of the body of Christ and He is the head. He is leading, and we are just doing what we can to walk as He directs.

Now, this church has some openings in our volunteer list.

[get volunteer needs list from Jessica & George]

We need volunteers to work in the sound booth, and on the camera. From the first day we got a camera back there, we have had one man faithfully serving on that camera every Sunday, rain or shine. We could really use a second. I have never heard Russ complain, but he is beginning to acknowledge his limits. We need volunteers willing to miss a sermon down here because they are spending the morning upstairs watching the kids. It's okay, if we have a guy on the camera then the sermon is recorded and you can catch it afterwards. There is a rotation for Sunday school teachers, so you are only out one sermon a month. We need volunteers to stand at the check in table before service and type in names to print out stickers. I think that position is only twenty minutes long and you can come in here after the first worship song.

Consider what you can do. Not everyone can do everything. Some lead, some encourage from the back, and together we move forward. If you are waiting to be asked, this is me asking you. If you are not ready for large commitments, that's fine. Joshua did not march around Jericho alone. March with us.