



LESSON #4 THE TRAINING OF A LEADER

“One of the most dangerous pitfalls for a leader to beware of is when we allow administration, schedules, reports, meetings and ministry demands to become our focus instead of people. God puts a high premium on how we treat people—because how we regard them is a telling reflection of our relationship with Him.”

Ministry is all about people—the word ‘*people*’ is recorded over 2000 times in the Bible—people are important to God—and they should be important to us, whether familiar friends or strangers. I’ve made it a habit over the years to call people in check out lines or behind counters by their name. Walmart and Tim Horton’s employees wear name tags, making it very easy to bless them by thanking them by name—the look of surprise on their faces that you actually acknowledged them tells the story that they are real people! Prophesying over them is even more fun!

There is a very real and present danger in our leadership training which we are so prone to get caught up in—and that is when we allow studies and courses and reading and curriculum and lectures and writing and exams to become our ministry focus instead of people. As important as those things are, people take priority!

When we consider the topic of leadership training, it’s only natural to have the idea of four years in Bible College, or correspondence in Biblical studies to some degree. While this is definitely the method for many up and coming leaders, it does not begin or end there. At the very moment that I got saved, I knew in my heart that God was calling me to ministry. I had no clue what that meant or what it involved. I shared my feelings with several ministers that to this day, I still respect, and they informed me that it would require Bible College for me to enter the ministry. Their sincere advice did nothing for me. I knew that formal education was not the course for me, but that God would train me in His own way. That was over 40 years ago and He’s still training me!

Let’s be clear that God’s word instructs us as leaders in 2 Timothy 2:15 to *“study to show ourselves approved... rightly dividing the Word of truth”*.

Therefore, there is no valid excuse for ignorance or illiteracy concerning educating ourselves in scriptural doctrine for the purpose of teaching, preaching, counseling and instruction. However, God often trains His students in the “*school of wilderness*” where we experience necessary learning that we could never achieve by books, sermons, and lectures, as helpful as they may be. This is the training method that equips and prepares the leader like nothing else can. God’s method is people. Dealing with people. Praying with people. Putting up with people. Crying with people. Celebrating with people. Your ministry focus is people for better or for worse. In what way has God used people in your life to train you as a leader?

For 40 years, Moses was engaged day after day with a couple million people—those who the Bible describes as murmurers and complainers. This is a sample of what Moses tolerated from these unthankful, belligerent, rebellious people.

“Weren’t there enough graves in Egypt that you brought us out here to die?”
“How long do we have to eat this manna—we want meat!”
“We can’t go into the land, there are giants there and we’ll all be killed!”
“Who do you think you are Moses? Does God only speak through you?”

And when God was ready to cut off this stiff-necked people for their idolatry and raise up a new nation through Moses, he stood in the gap on their behalf and was willing to perish right along side of them. They were part of his training ground.

“So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Oh, what a terrible sin these people have committed. They have made gods of gold for themselves. ³² But now, if You will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot my name out of the book You have written!” Exodus 32:31-32.

God entrusted the care and well being of a great multitude of people to the capable hands of a man trained for 40 years as a shepherd of sheep. Shepherds in the house of God today must acknowledge sin in their people and address it boldly and timely, while all along laying down their own lives for the sheep. Shepherds must have the scent of sheep upon them through close contact. True shepherds who love their sheep will guard them from the wolves, will feed them the word, will anoint them with oil, will bind up their wounds and will stay with them through the cold, dark night. This is the kind of training required to be a leader in God’s House. In what areas have you been challenged in ministering to difficult people?

One of the hardest lessons of leadership training is dealing with people, especially in the area of failure and betrayal. Many leaders fail at this point and never recover. Walls of protection go up and never come down. This is the ultimate training of a leader. If you have never experienced the betrayal of a friend or ministry associate, be prepared for when it comes. There can be no room for bitterness, animosity or unforgiveness. King David experienced leadership training in the same way, when someone very close to him turned against him. He records the painful experience in Psalm 41:9- ***“Even my best friend, the one I trusted completely, the one who shared my food, has turned against me.”*** This is such an unpleasant part of training, and yet so necessary to maintain a heart of love and forgiveness towards our betrayer. Without identifying names or locations, briefly share your own experience of betrayal by a friend or ministry associate. If you have not yet encountered betrayal, then continue reading.

At the risk of sounding irreverent, even Jesus, the Son of man had to undergo training to be a leader. The Bible teaches in Hebrews 5:8 ***“Even though Jesus was God’s Son, He learned obedience from the things He suffered.”***

Christ was trained by His Father through real life lessons, including the hardship of betrayal and disloyalty by His own disciples, especially during His greatest need in the garden at the time of His anguish in prayer when Peter, James and John fell asleep. Later that night during His arrest, they all fled and forsook Him. Think about this—as the Son of man, Jesus on many occasions, became frustrated with His own disciples as He taught them fundamental Kingdom lessons which they failed to grasp. His righteous irritation was expressed more than once during these crucial training moments where He called them out —*“O you of little faith!”*—*“Where is your faith?”*—*“How is it that you have no faith?”* And yet Jesus continued to love them and work with them as flawed people—the same kind we have been appointed to serve and to love.

“When Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” John 13:1

It’s not a sin to become frustrated with people that we have high expectations for in leadership—it’s all an essential part of our personal training from God as His leaders. God uses difficult, high maintenance people to train us to love them unconditionally to the end! God places a high premium on how we treat people—especially those we don’t consider as being important enough for us to bother with.

Pastors need to be careful of this—showing favouritism to those who can really benefit the church and make the pastor look successful! James warns about that temptation of showing preference among people.

“My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others? 2 For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. 3 If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor”—well, 4 doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives? James 2:1-4

How we treat unimportant people is a reflection of our relationship with God. Jesus viewed lepers, prostitutes, thieves, widows, tax collectors and children as important—in fact, more important than the self-righteous, rich Pharisees. Christ was a Lover, Healer and Savior to the lost, despised people—a friend of sinners. In Matthew 25, Jesus expressed our role as leaders in training with hurting people from all backgrounds and walks of life—the homeless, prisoners, immigrants, the poor, convalescents, widows, etc.

“I was hungry and you fed Me, I was thirsty and you gave Me a drink; I was a stranger and you received Me into your home, 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me, I was in prison and you visited Me.’ 39 ‘I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of Mine, you did unto Me.’

In what way recently have you ministered to Christ through reaching out with love to a hurting, helpless person?

Leading the people who are looking to you for help and direction is not child's play—it's serious business and that's why there are so few true leaders. The fragile lives of the people you lead are in your hands. If you fail, they fail. If you quit, they quit. If you try, they try. If you succeed, they succeed. Their progress is your reward for the high price of leadership training in God's “*School of Wilderness*”!