



Week Three: Undeveloped Leadership

The welfare of every country on earth is dramatically impacted by the leadership that governs it.

In nations that are known for maintaining continual states of chaos, violent conflict and oppressive poverty, there can usually be found a common denominator: an incompetent, self-seeking or corrupt leadership at its head. On the other hand, countries that thrive tend to be those with governments that truly care for the welfare of their people above personal power or self-gain. Corrupt leadership is at the very root of this global crisis. The turning point for nearly all global decline is securing righteousness at the head of every nation; a righteousness that can only come as a result of an authentic fear of God.

Daily Reflections | i61 | Undeveloped Leadership



MONDAY

Mis-leader

Reflect

God's Message came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherd-leaders of Israel. Yes, prophesy! Tell those shepherds, 'God, the Master, says: Doom to you shepherds of Israel, feeding your own mouths! Aren't shepherds supposed to feed sheep?"

You drink the milk,
you make clothes from the wool,
you roast the lambs,
but you don't feed the sheep.
You don't build up the weak ones,
don't heal the sick,
don't doctor the injured,
don't go after the strays,
don't look for the lost.

You bully and badger them. And now they're scattered every which way because there was no shepherd—scattered and easy pickings for wolves and coyotes. Scattered—my sheep!—exposed and vulnerable across mountains and hills. My sheep scattered all over the world, and no one out looking for them!

Ezekiel 34.1-6 |MSG

Receive

If [the true Leader] understands his function in any other way than as it is rooted in fact, if he does not continually tell his followers quite clearly of the limited nature of his task and of their own responsibility, if he allows himself to surrender to the wishes of his followers, who would always make him their idol – then the image of the Leader will pass over into the image of the mis-leader, and he will be acting in a criminal way not only towards those he leads, but also towards himself. The true Leader. . . must lead his following away from the authority of his person to the recognition of the real authority of orders and offices. . . he must radically refuse to become the appeal, the idol, i.e. the ultimate authority of those whom he leads. . . he serves the order of the state, of the community, and his service can be of incomparable value. But only so long as he keeps strictly in his place. . . he has to lead the individual into his own maturity.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted by Eric Metaxas in *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*

Written within the historical context of the rise of Hitler's Third Reich, Bonhoeffer's words provide us with a pivotal orientation and insight into the nature and need of leadership at all levels of society. The historical backdrop of the terrors and bloodshed unleashed through a "führer" (the German word simply means "leader") who was accountable to no one else only infuses Bonhoeffer's words with even more urgency and relevance.

Leaders on any level of human society have a huge impact on how that society fares – which is why James cautions those overzealous to attain to its robes. "Don't many of you become teachers (leaders on the religious level of society) knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For in many things we all stumble..."

The path from leader to mis-leader is one all too easily taken. It's what happens whenever we who are leaders forget just who we are: people who create, maintain, shape, and reshape the structures of society through which either justice and peace or injustice and oppression flow. There is much power passing through the hands of those in leadership, and Lord Acton's dictum still stands true: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." Or as Lincoln observed, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power

The leaders of Ezekiel's day failed that test – as do, arguably, most "great leaders" through the course of human history. Perhaps it is the seed of ambition at the heart of aspiring leaders that dooms much of leadership from the start – that ambition to "make a difference" that so quickly morphs into a self-seeking "game of thrones" as we jockey for our own position, power, and prestige ostensibly "for the greater good." And so we just morph into "bad shepherds" feeding ourselves off the sheep we're supposed to be leading into green pastures. This is held up as the status quo in this "life under the sun" observed by the ancient sage we know as Qoheleth:

Don't be surprised if you see a poor person being oppressed by the powerful and if justice is being miscarried throughout the land. For every official is under orders from higher up, and matters of justice get lost in red tape and bureaucracy. Even the king milks the land for his own profit!

Ecclesiastes 5:8-9 | NLT

No, let's not be surprised at all of the oppressive mis-leading that happens under the sun. But let's not sit still for it either.

Relate

Who has been an example of a "true leader" in your life? Whom have you experienced as a "mis-leader"? How would you summarize the difference between the two?

Respond

Father, when and wherever I find myself in a position of leadership and power in any human endeavor, give me the grace to lead as you lead, to shepherd as you shepherd; keep me from bullying and badgering ways; keep power from going to my head by a more concentrated flow of your mercies to my heart.

Thank someone today who is or has been a good leader to you.

TUESDAY

Justice in the courtroom

Reflect

¹God calls the judges into his courtroom,
he puts all the judges in the dock.

²⁻⁴ “Enough! You’ve corrupted justice long enough,
you’ve let the wicked get away with murder.
You’re here to defend the defenseless,
to make sure that underdogs get a fair break;
Your job is to stand up for the powerless,
and prosecute all those who exploit them.”

⁵ Ignorant judges! Head-in-the-sand judges!
They haven’t a clue to what’s going on.
And now everything’s falling apart,
the world’s coming unglued.

⁶⁻⁷ “I commissioned you judges, each one of you,
deputies of the High God,
But you’ve betrayed your commission
and now you’re stripped of your rank, busted.”

⁸ O God, give them their just desserts!
You’ve got the whole world in your hands!

Psalm 82.1-8 |MSG

Receive

This Psalm pictures a gathering of the “gods” (Hebrew *elohim* = the powers) – the movers and shakers in human society who really think they answer to themselves alone, wielding power for their own ends. But here they are “gods” in the dock of God. Now the real *Elohim* summons the would-be *elohims* of this world and puts them on trial. The Judge itemizes their guilt: “You’ve corrupted justice long enough and you’ve let the wicked get away with murder.”

And then the condemnation is complete by providing the job description for all leaders, everywhere, for all time: “You’re here to defend the defenseless, to make sure that underdogs get a fair break, to stand up for the powerless, and to prosecute all those who exploit them.”

This is the leadership “job description” we are called to carry with us as we travel upstream through the crises of this world. For where spiritual confusion reigns, so will a host of mis-leaders. A revolution of hope led by believers who come as “little ones,” doesn’t topple thrones. They don’t need to. Psalm 82 makes clear that the power at the heart of all things does that with the turn of a hand.

This frees his “little ones” to quietly, persistently, subversively insert a new leaven of leadership in the messy lump of society at all levels. It’s an insertion/infusion of God’s justice: His DNA of

defending the defenseless, of giving underdogs a break, of standing up for the powerless, and of prosecuting oppressors.

And we know how *that* story of leaven goes: it spreads through the whole batch of dough...

Relate

In your own personal leadership roles, how are you failing and succeeding at being a selfless leader, caring about others' needs and standing up for the defenseless?

Where and how is God calling you to help be and bring the true leaven of leadership? How are you called to identify, equip, and release Christ-like leadership in your community? In the wide world?

Respond

Jesus, you came into this world as a leaven of grace and truth; you didn't raise your voice or cry out in the streets; you were careful with the bruised reeds of humanity; you trimmed and relit the smoldering wicks among the downtrodden; and you did it until justice issued in unstoppable cruciform victory.

Lead me in your Way, Lord.

Identify & repent of any yearning for power you've had in your own life. Do one thing today in the opposite spirit of power aggrandizement, by serving others with no agenda and showing selfless leadership.

Pray for your local and national government leaders, that they would encounter the Good Judge and turn to follow His ways, being a defender of the defenseless and fighting for godly justice.

W E D N E S D A Y

Ministers = doers of little things

Reflect

¹⁻⁴ If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

⁵⁻⁸ Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself.

He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

⁹⁻¹¹ Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.

Philippians 2.1-11 |MSG

Receive

The world is overrun with ministers: prime ministers, foreign ministers, head ministers, ministers of finance, ministers of agriculture, ministers of defense, ministers of communication, ministers of transportation, etc.

We tend to see “ministers” as “doers of BIG things.” Even in the church, it's “minister” with a capital “M”, if you please. These are the important people imbued with the knowing and the doing of the important things.

Something has been lost in translation.

The word “minister” is carried over to us directly from the Latin *minister* and it means, literally, a doer of *little* things. We tend to lose the *mini* in “minister.” Think *waiter* as in a server in a restaurant who sets the table, takes your order and brings your food or the cook who prepares it behind the scenes or the busboy who clears your table after you're gone.

If only in both secular and ecclesiastical contexts, those who are ministers would be mindful of the *mini* in “minister.” The sad fact is that most *ministers* are more interested in being

magisters (from which we get our word “magistrate”) – which is Latin for a “doer of great things” (their word for institutional teacher or instructor).

It is the life and example of Christ put on display so brilliantly in Paul’s ancient Philippian hymn that restores the *mini* to minister, revealing that the ultimate crisis we face is not one of a shortage of qualified, capable *leaders*, but of humble, dedicated *followers*.

True leaders are true followers.

They don’t push their way to the front; they don’t sweet-talk their way to the top; they put themselves aside, and help others get ahead. They aren’t obsessed with getting their own advantage; they forget themselves long enough to lend a helping hand. They have the mind of Christ and life flows through them.

This reveals the direct connection between dispelling spiritual confusion and developing healthy leaders on every level of society. To see Christ is to see the light in the darkness... the light that highlights the *mini* in minister, and the light that ignites us all to be “doers of little things.

Relate

How is the heart of the Philippians’ Christ hymn impacting the DNA of your life and leadership? In what practical, fresh ways is it challenging you to become a “doer of little things”?

Respond

Christ, I need more than leadership tips and pointers – and so does the world. Give me your mind. Fill me with your humility and self-sacrifice. Make me a true follower that I might be a healthy leader. Make me a minister in the wide world in the deepest, truest meaning of the word.

Physically get in a posture of humility, and consider Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and also his life of sacrifice in the little things.

Do one small act of kindness and humble service today as the Lord leads you.

THURSDAY

What I've done, you do

Reflect

Then he said, “Do you understand what I have done to you?

You address me as ‘Teacher’ and ‘Master,’ and rightly so.

That is what I am.

So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other’s feet.

I’ve laid down a pattern for you.

What I’ve done, you do.

I’m only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn’t give orders to the employer. If you understand what I’m telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life.

John 13.12-17 |MSG

Receive

Foot washing was reserved for people who were “doers of little things” – for servants and slaves who were to be seen and not heard, mostly. And while the followers of Jesus in that upper room on that last night of his life argued over who got to sit where and debated about which of them was most important in the administration of the kingdom, Jesus quietly got up and stripped down to the skin, girding himself with a servant’s towel. And taking up a basin of water, he began the menial task of washing twelve pairs of smelly, grimy feet – including the feet of his betrayer, who was pondering the darker thoughts/powers occupying his heart at the moment.

It’s the essence of Christ and the essence of leadership.

The emblems of Christ’s reign and leadership are not scepter and crown, but the bowl and the towel. His greatness was not established by the taking on of laurels and kingly vestments, but by the taking off of a prized glory and recognition, which so many sought after. Jesus embraced the gritty needs of the whole world that day as he modeled what true love was and what true leadership continues to be: a lowering of oneself for the sake of lifting others up. As he lowered himself to the cross, he was raised up by his Father to be worshipped high above any other power. Sin entered the world through a craving of power and greatness. Sin was stopped of its power by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus at the cross. And sin continues to be stopped each time we follow his example of the bowl and the towel.

Relate

Whose feet are you being challenged to wash today?

Respond

Foot washing Savior, show me the bowl and the towel you have for me – and help me to see the feet for which they are intended. But wash me first. Wash these proud feet that wish to stomp all over this world “for the greater good.” Make them beautiful feet of your Good News.

Take a few minutes to breathe.

Breathe out your own selfishness, desires for prestige, desires for being right, need to be in control, and unforgiveness. Feel the burden lessen with each exhale.

Breathe in the love of your heavenly Father, the grace of Jesus, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. He is watching over you, he is right next to you, and his spirit lives inside you. Feel him fill you with each inhale.

Serve the person He has brought to your mind by putting them first, washing them with a heartfelt grace and love.

FRIDAY

All the diligence of a shepherd

Reflect

¹⁻³ I have a special concern for you church leaders. I know what it's like to be a leader, in on Christ's sufferings as well as the coming glory. Here's my concern: that you care for God's flock with all the diligence of a shepherd. Not because you have to, but because you want to please God. Not calculating what you can get out of it, but acting spontaneously. Not bossily telling others what to do, but tenderly showing them the way.

⁴⁻⁵ When God, who is the best shepherd of all, comes out in the open with his rule, he'll see that you've done it right and commend you lavishly. And you who are younger must follow your leaders. But all of you, leaders and followers alike, are to be down to earth with each other, for—

*God has had it with the proud,
But takes delight in just plain people.*

⁶ So be content with who you are, and don't put on airs.

1 Peter 5.1-6 |MSG

Receive

A tour bus in the Holy Land, decides to stop and wait along a road in the countryside. Suddenly, the air fills with a cloud of dust and the sounds of beating sheep. Passengers on the bus rush to the windows, hoping to catch a glimpse of the fabled Middle Eastern shepherd – you know, the one who leads them beside still waters, who restores their souls, who makes them lie down in green pastures? That one? But all they see are the sheep rushing by – with a yelling, angry man flailing a stick at them, driving them on relentlessly. One of the passengers turns to the tour guide, her face flushed with confusion. “I thought shepherds here were gentle, going before the sheep, calling them by name? Why is this one chasing them so angrily?” The tour guide just smiles. “Oh, no, no. That's not the shepherd. That's the *butcher!*”
Yes, we come full circle back to shepherds. And butchers.

From the bad shepherds who were the subject of Ezekiel's ancient rant -- the mis-leaders who were little more than butchers, now to those seeking to follow the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. The true shepherd is the life of their sheep, their door, and their defender. To the true shepherd the sheep are not merely tagged with a number; he knows them by name.

He uses his voice, not his fist. Jacob in Genesis provides us with one of most ancient descriptions of the way of a true/good shepherd:

For twenty years I have been with you, caring for your flocks. In all that time your sheep and goats never miscarried. In all those years I never used a single ram of yours for food. If any were attacked and killed by wild animals, I never showed you the carcass and asked you to reduce the count of your flock. No, I took the loss myself! . . . I worked for you through the scorching heat of the day and through cold and sleepless nights. (Genesis 31.8-10, NLT)

The way of the Good Shepherd is the way of the true leader.

The way of the mis-leader, the way of the world “under the sun,” is the way of the butcher.

May we receive the wisdom and grace to know – and *be* – the difference.

Relate

How do you respond as a leader during times of pressure or conflict? Do you hold onto the identity and heart of a Good Shepherd or do you degenerate into the butcher who lets insecurity, anger and fear dictate their actions, often using or manipulating people.

Respond

Good Shepherd, whether a leader or a follower in this world, keep my heart in a down-to-earth place. Let me not take on airs nor bossily tell others what to do. Let me not be a butcher in this world with anyone, especially in your name. And show me how to lead others in your paths of true leadership.

Think of a few specific times God has led you as the Good Shepherd. Write down a few of the attributes of His leadership:

Who is He calling you to lead right now in your life, with these same attributes?