

LEADERSHIP AS MINISTRY: SOME SCRIPTURAL QUALITIES & METHODS

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For many Christian leaders, today's realities may require a substantial change in philosophy of leadership. As western societies continue to decline, we Christians are increasingly wounded; emotionally, spiritually and interpersonally. Thus, personal issues increasingly affect people's ability to survive the difficulties of life. And many of those who survive need ongoing help to be able to live and work effectively.

The church cannot depend solely upon professional care-givers. Christian leaders must assume a growing role in ministering to those who struggle with personal, interpersonal and work problems.

God's Word speaks clearly to two basic issues relevant to those who want to be effective in their ministry to others:

- 1) qualities to be developed in the leader, and
- 2) specific methods which the leader is to employ in relating to others.

This is not an exhaustive treatment of these two areas, but it can form the basis for ongoing study.

Qualities of the Effective Leader

God has built into each Christian the potential for growing in the qualities discussed here, to "...become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Fortunately we don't have to attain this level of perfection before God can use us to help others! If we recognize needs in our own lives and are actively growing in these areas, we can help others in their quest for growth. The emphasis is not on being like Christ as much as on becoming like Him.

The process of becoming like Christ is active rather than passive. Because of what He has already done for us, we are to actively "clothe ourselves" with the qualities He wants us to develop, such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Col. 3:12). We are told to put on the new self (Eph. 4:24). These commands demonstrate that we are to actively develop these qualities.

Here are a few qualities which are important for the Christian leader who wants to minister to others. Perhaps this list will stimulate you to further study of the Scriptures in this area. These qualities are already familiar. Consider each one in a new light, looking at how critical each is for the modern leader.

1. Love.

Agape consists of many distinct characteristics blended together. First Corinthians 13:4-7 emphasizes seven positive facets of love and eight negative descriptions of what love is not. Some of the positive aspects are discussed individually below. However, we would also do well to consider the negative facets which are opposed to love: envy, boasting, pride, self-centeredness, rudeness, irritability, and resentment. These characteristics obviously hinder our effectiveness in helping others. Colossians 3:14 says that love is more important than the other qualities mentioned in the passage.

Without it, other characteristics will be of little value.

- a. Patience: bearing with weaknesses and failures without becoming impatient, slow to get angry or give up when others fail to live up to our expectations.
- b. Kindness: sensitive and sympathetic to others' needs, willing to help in time of need, showing active interest in the welfare of others.
- c. Rejoicing with the truth: taking pleasure in what is true and right, delighting in telling and hearing the truth, even when the truth may be difficult to face.
- d. Bearing all things: able to overlook faults, bearing up under anything, having great endurance under trials.
- e. Believing all things: always ready to believe the best of the other person, able to truly trust others until they prove themselves untrustworthy, then to appropriately rebuild trust when it is broken.
- f. Hoping all things: hopeful in every circumstance and able to communicate this hope to the person in need; optimistic.
- g. Enduring all things: love enables us to bear anything without wanting to give up when things don't go well.

2. Wisdom from above.

God's wisdom, like love, is made up of several individual qualities, each of which is critical for the successful leader. The seven qualities of wisdom in James 3:17 are as follows:

- a. Pure (from *hagios*, holy): free from defilement, free from sins that would hinder the flow of God's power through us to help others.
- b. Peace-loving: eager to maintain harmonious relationships, free from strife.
- c. Gentle: considerate, sensitive to others, tender, not harsh or stern.
- d. Reasonable: approachable, compliant, open to reason, willing to yield, without preconceived ideas or prejudices.
- e. Full of mercy and good fruit: rich in compassion and kind actions, eager to relieve distress while showing goodwill, tolerant of others' weaknesses and failures.
- f. Impartial: free from partiality or favoritism, not harboring doubts.

g. Sincere: straightforward, consciously dropping all pretense in order to be congruous and authentic.

3. **Complete dependence on God** (John 15:4-5; 2 Cor. 3:5).

We must be constantly aware that only as God works through us will change take place in others. As we abide in Christ and allow Him to abide in us, we will bear much fruit in the lives of others.

4. **An accepting attitude** (Rom. 14:1-4; 15:1,7).

No attitude can destroy the helping process more than a judgmental spirit. And most of us know how easy it is to become judgmental. A judgmental attitude hinders our ability to objectively see things from the other person's point of view. The "plank" prevents clear vision of the "speck of sawdust" (Matt. 7:3-5).

True acceptance requires a conscious, self-sacrificing decision to set aside our prejudices, opinions and judgments in order to see things through another's eyes. Acceptance of the person must not be confused with approval of behavior. However, until acceptance is clearly communicated there will be little openness, trust and freedom to confront destructive behavior. See Jesus' example in John 8:1-11.

5. **Awareness of and honesty about our vulnerability.**

We are to look to ourselves, lest we also be tempted (Gal. 6:1), and not give the impression that we are spiritually superior to those we are seeking to help (Heb. 5:1-2). We must be honest, open and transparent about our own struggles and weaknesses as appropriate (2 Cor. 1:8-9; 2:12-13; 11:29-30; 12:7-10).

The Christian Leader's Methods of Ministry

To be effective we shouldn't confine our ministry to one particular scriptural technique. We need to become proficient in several methods described in the Word, using them according to the needs of the person being helped.

The following discussion covers some principal biblical methods of ministering to those who are struggling. If you are interested in becoming more skilled in helping others, you may find this list helpful as a guide for in-depth study of each item. The goal of learning is to apply these specific methods in your helping ministry.

1. **Parakaleo.**

This Greek word means "to call to one's side, to help." In the NIV it is translated "comfort" (2 Cor. 1:2-3; 2:7), "exhort" (1 Tim. 5:1), "encourage" (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13), and "urge" (2 Cor. 8:6). Obviously several specific kinds of actions are included in this term.

2. Pray.

Two aspects are emphasized in Scripture:

- a. Praying for someone (James 5:16).
- b. Praying with someone (Matt. 18:19-20).

3. Listen well.

See Prov. 18:13 and James 1:19. One mark of an effective leader is the ability to listen well, to truly hear the person out before giving an answer. Often the first things a person shares represent only the tip of the iceberg, or a small unrelated piece of ice floating on the sea while the iceberg lies mostly submerged, waiting for an opportunity to surface.

To listen intently while withholding our own ideas for the moment is one of the most difficult skills to develop, and requires a great deal of self-sacrifice. Yet it is essential to an effective personal ministry. Job needed someone to listen. Job 13:17: "Listen carefully to my words; let your ears take in what I say." See Job 21:2.

God is a listening God. He listens well to the cries of His people (Psa. 10:17; 66:19). Forty-two verses in the Psalms refer to Him as a listening God, and we are to imitate Him (Eph. 5:1-2). See also James 1:19 and Isa. 50:4.

4. Listen to confessions.

In James 5:16 the command to confess our faults to one another implies the reciprocal obligation to listen to those confessions. This is an important part of the healing process, especially in the emotional area. Study Nathan's ministry to David as he confessed in 2 Samuel 12.

5. Admonish.

In Colossians 3:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12, the Greek word is *noutheteo*, meaning instruction and warning, primarily with a view to things that are wrong. It is warning based on instruction.

6. Carry burdens.

Galatians 6:2 points up the importance of carrying each other's burdens. One way to bear others' burdens is to allow them to share them with you. Another meaning of this word is seen in Romans 15:1: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves." Accepting others' weaknesses in a nonjudgmental way is an act of self-denial. The effective leader appropriately bears his followers' burdens, and bears with their weaknesses.

7. Restore.

This word means “to make thoroughly right.” In Galatians 6:1 it occurs in the continuous present, implying patience and perseverance. It describes the process of patiently and carefully helping others straighten out the sinful and/or destructive areas of their lives.

8. Speak the truth in love.

In the context of Ephesians 4:15-16 we are to do this with one another in the body of Christ for the purpose of mutual growth. This may mean to share the truth of God’s Word or to give loving, honest feedback in a manner that will stimulate growth. We may be the first to share the truth with that person in a truly loving way. The more truth we share, the more love we need.

9. Empathize with others.

Romans 12:15 tells us to share in others’ negative and positive experiences, to truly feel with them. This dramatically demonstrates our caring as leaders. However, a balance is needed. We must not become so caught up in their emotions that we lose our objectivity and with it the ability to help them see things clearly. See 1 Peter 3:8, where “be sympathetic” means to feel with others.

10. Help the weak.

The Greek word used here means “to support, to hold on to.” See 1 Thess. 5:14. Stress tends to bring out our areas of weakness. Sometimes struggling people just need someone to support them, to hold them up for a time.

11. Motivate.

Hebrews 10:24 says that we are to “consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds.” The word translated “spur on” carries the idea “to motivate” or “to cause to be excited about something.” At times the greatest help we can be is to provide motivation to spur others on to action, or to rekindle their excitement in serving God.

12. Build up.

This means “to promote spiritual growth,” as used in Romans 14:19; 15:2, and 1 Thessalonians 5:11. It is a generic concept, and may well represent one of the primary goals of ministering to others. Building up is accomplished by the application of other principles.

13. Be a model.

First Thessalonians 1:5-7 and Titus 2:7 illustrate the importance of being a model for others to follow. Development is enhanced when the person can actually see the right behaviors and attitudes exemplified in us.

14. Encourage.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 we are commanded to “encourage the timid.” The word used here denotes consolation and comfort, with a greater degree of tenderness than indicated by *parakaleo*.

15. Strengthen.

This means “to fix” or “to make fast.” Peter was told by the Lord to strengthen his brothers in Luke 22:32. See Acts 15:32; Rom. 1:11 and 1 Thess. 3:2.

16. Bear with.

See Rom. 15:1; Eph. 4:2 and Col. 3:13. This means to endure provocation while suspending our own negative reactions. Bearing with others is important in ministering, especially to those who struggle. It provides a safe atmosphere where people can be themselves without fear of rejection. In 2 Timothy 2:24 it means patient when wronged. In 2 Timothy 4:2, Timothy was told to correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience.

17. Correct.

This primarily means “to correct or instruct as with a child.” The verb is used of family discipline as in Hebrews 12:6-7, 10. According to 2 Timothy 2:25 we are to correct with gentleness.

18. Supply what is lacking in one’s faith. See 1 Thessalonians 3:10. This implies that we first carefully explore areas of struggle in another person’s relationship to God, and then set about to help the person mature in those areas.

19. Consider.

This word is used in various contexts in the New Testament. It means “to perceive clearly,” to “understand fully,” or “to consider closely.” In Hebrews 10:24 we are told to “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good works.” This important facet of ministering requires that we commit ourselves to gaining a deep understanding of the person. In most cases it is impossible to know how to motivate another person effectively without this depth of understanding.

20. Dispense knowledge.

See Prov. 15:2, 7. The wise leader is sensitive to the right time to impart knowledge (Eccl. 3:7) and the right manner (Prov. 16:21, 23).

21. Speak a kind word to the anxious. See Prov. 12:25 and 15:23. Anxiety seems to be a part of the age we live in. We can help others out of their anxiety by the use of kind words.

22. Rebuke.

See Prov. 25:12; 15:31; 27:5-6 and 28:23. Two components are involved in the process: the wise rebuker and the listening ear. As leaders we must gain the right to be heard before rebuke will be accepted.

23. Understand.

See Prov. 18:2. The wise leader takes pleasure in understanding others. This requires that we refrain at times from talking about ourselves and our opinions.

24. Teach.

Sometimes leaders are reluctant to have a teaching role. We don't want to set ourselves up as having superior knowledge or understanding. And yet, teaching can be a very important part of the helping process. Colossians 3:16 tells us to let the Word of Christ richly dwell in us as we teach one another. Also, see 2 Tim. 2:24-25 and Prov. 9:9.

Conclusion

Do you want to be more effective in helping others? Your effectiveness will be directly related to your ability to apply scriptural principles of ministering.

1. Take time to evaluate yourself realistically with regard to the attitudes spoken of in Scripture.
2. Solicit feedback from trusted friends and family, to see yourself in these areas through their eyes.
3. Then begin to evaluate your performance as a leader in the specific methods mentioned.
4. Choose one attitude and one method in which you want to grow to be more effective in your ministry of helping, and begin to work on them.

(Note: Many of the references in this article are quoted from the RSV, which often translates the Greek more literally than the NIV).