

8 Principles for Teaching Leadership from the Bible

It is a foregone conclusion by many believers that leadership is easily taught from the Bible. It is and is not a true idea.

Leadership is definitely put on display and explicitly taught in the Bible. But, like all other subjects, it requires careful interpretation and handling with nuance. It is, in fact, a spiritual discipline for believers. Here are eight principles that you can use when going to the Scriptures to teach leadership.

- 1. The Bible is not a leadership manual.** It is unhelpful to define the Bible as something less than God revealing Himself. Though a divine leadership manual sounds like a great statement to make in a sermon or training event, it diminishes the Scriptures. We need to state that in the Bible, God includes authoritative teaching about leadership.
- 2. Identify the prescriptive teachings on leadership.** The Bible contains a great many passages that directly address leadership and how leaders are to do their work. For example, in Titus 1:5-9, Paul gives the qualifications for a man to serve as an elder in the church. It is a prescriptive passage about who can lead and how they are to do it.
- 3. Help people understand the descriptive illustrations of leadership.** Nehemiah, King David, Gideon, Simon Peter, and a host of other characters give us examples of godly leadership... sometimes. We must be careful to not take a point-in-time occurrence and use it as an eternal principle. Nehemiah is a prime example of how this can be used and misused. It is an epic story of how God used Nehemiah to complete a necessary task for the Kingdom of God. We must be careful to not simply turn the thirteen chapter book into a corporate leadership manual for success.
- 4. Deny the temptation to proof text clichés and moralisms.** If we lose sight of its nature, the Bible becomes a fable intended to make bad people behave better. The Scripture is the eternal truth of God that is rooted in the gospel. As it is addressed in the Bible, leadership must do the same. Root it in God's transforming work of the heart so that lives can be changed.
- 5. Keep the goal of leadership true to the Bible's goal.** No subject included in the Bible can have a different goal from the Bible. God reveals Himself for His own glory and He can consequently change us for our good. In teaching leadership, it is not to simply make a leader better, more competent, or nice. The Bible addresses leadership so that we can understand how God should be glorified through the person who is leading and the work that they lead.
- 6. Teach offensive and defensive leadership.** Leadership must be proactive. We take God's truth out to the fields of people's lives and apply it before trials come. Spiritual leadership also defends God's people and His work against the assaults of the God's enemies. Teach both sides of this equation without diminishing the other. Help leaders go on the offensive against evil and know how to defend the faith when attacked.

7. “Servant leadership” is a thing but not the only thing. In teaching, we tend to over-complicate matters or simplify them to their base part. The model of “servant leadership” is often proposed as the ultimate way of defining leadership. It is a way but not the only way. Many of the descriptive and prescriptive passages regarding leadership show us that leaders confront sin, stand against earthly structures of power, and challenge believers to press deeper into God’s mission. Teach that leaders serve within the context of all that they do.

8. Urgency is a hallmark. The godly leaders included in the pages of the Bible were people of action. They discerned the need for God’s transforming work to take root in the lives of those who followed them. Wasting time is evidenced in the lives of those disobedient to the mission of God. As you teach leadership, infuse the urgency of the unfinished task we face to deliver the gospel to the nations.

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