

Leading the Church in the 21st Century

Part One

By Aubrey Malphurs

(Number 2, May 10, 2001) What is a leader and are you one? What is leadership and is what you're doing in ministry considered this? The answers to these questions aren't easy, yet they're crucial to those who strive to be fully functioning followers of Christ. If we're to minister effectively in the 21st century with a dynamic sense of leadership, we must understand and clarify the issues surrounding exactly what it is to be a leader. Furthermore, we can't answer these questions without arriving at and communicating clear and concise definitions. In this article, the first in a series dedicated to the subject, we'll define what it is to be a leader and exactly what leadership is.

The terms leadership and leaders have become commonplace in today's ministry world, and people are captivated by the idea of them. Everyone seems to be talking about them and how to develop leaders, but few are defining what they actually mean. However, if we believe in developing leaders in our ministry, then it's important we know exactly what we're referring to. We must know what we're trying to accomplish, and whom it is we're attempting to develop.

To their credit, a few writers and speakers provide us with definitions. While these can be helpful, they are based on subjective experiences and anecdotal observations and, thus, often provide us with different, conflicting meanings.

So how can we arrive at a clear, concise definition? The answer is twofold. First, we look to the Scriptures and what they teach about leadership. As Christians, they serve as our primary source for information on the subject. Second, we look to the results of good leadership research that has surfaced over the past 100 years in business and educational contexts.

But wait just a minute! Why consider human research along with Scripture? That seems a little presumptuous doesn't it? Again, the answer is not easy. On one hand, the final word on any concept is Scripture, not man's empirical research. We must always look to God's revelation and discover what it says about leadership. On the other hand, God reveals much to mankind in the form of natural revelation.

This "natural revelation" is what people have discovered and found to be true over time through research in fields such as medicine, physics, and, in this case, leadership. While biblical revelation is superior to natural revelation, we can look to natural revelation to discover leadership truths. We must realize that had God not given mankind the ability to discover truth in this world and in his creation, the world would have ceased to function. Doctors wouldn't be able to operate on the human body, planes would not fly, and scientists wouldn't be able to send men to the moon and back. Thus, we can conclude that all truth is God's truth, and that he reveals it not only in the Bible but through mankind as well (Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:20-21).

As these doctors and scientists have tapped into God's truth in natural revelation, so researchers have accomplished the same in the field of leadership. Not all leadership research is true, but enough is to warrant study by Christian leaders.

So, in gleaning information from the Bible and research, we can now begin to form an accurate definition of a leader and leadership:

- A Christian leader is a servant with the ability and credibility to influence people in a particular context to pursue their God-given direction.
- Christian leadership is the ability and credibility to influence people in a particular context to pursue their God-given direction.

In the upcoming issues of Connections, we'll work through and explain the concepts that are common to both definitions. Meanwhile, here are some questions to think about: Do

you agree with these definitions? If not, what are the reasons? What is your definition of a leader? Are there some people who are super leaders that might be able to lead others regardless the ministry situation they find themselves in?

On one final matter, Dr. Keith Willhite (who teaches in the Pastoral Ministries Department at Dallas Seminary) and I are putting together materials for a handbook of contemporary weddings, funerals, and other special occasions. They include ceremonies, services, vows, eulogies, baptisms, and baby dedications. If you have developed any of these from a more contemporary perspective, and are willing to submit them for our consideration, please e-mail them, along with a brief description of yourself and your church, to the following address: amalphurs@dts.edu.

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