

"Be Led to Lead"
Part 1
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I hear it all the time. "I'm not a leader." I hear it even in our church board meetings. "I'm not a leader." "I'll help, but I'm not a leader." Please answer this question for yourself. Who has had the most significant influence on your life, the person who has played a major role in who you are today as a human being? To influence someone means to impact someone, affect someone, or reach someone with a message. So, who has had the most significant influence on your life? Research shows that at least 75% of us did not think of a manager or supervisor or teacher or pastor – someone we would traditionally think of as a 'leader.' Most of us identify a father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, or dear friend as the person who has had the most influence in our lives.

Here's one of the truths I am building on for this new series of sermons entitled, "Be Led to Lead": Every human being is a leader in some part of his/her life – because leadership is an *influence* process. Anytime you seek to influence the thinking, behavior, or development of someone in your personal or professional life, you are taking on the role of a leader. In fact, the only way to avoid leadership is to isolate yourself from the outside world.

When you as a parent call the children to the dinner table kindly or harshly, you are leading. When the center tells the goalie, "Good try, you'll get the next one," that's leadership. When the fan along the sideline screams at the ref, others are being influenced to do the same. That's leading. When a person welcomes someone new to our church family, puts your hand out to share your name and asks the other's name, and shows the way to a small group classroom, that's leadership. When you are big enough to come up for a children's message and you help someone else find a spot on the steps, and you really try to listen to the story, you are serving as a leader for the other children. The words you speak and the way you speak them are influencing others around you. The way you care for your spouse is leading the way others think about their own marriage. The care you take with the things God has given to you is leadership. Someone is watching and learning from you. When you are crushed in spirit, grieving a loss beyond what you think you can bear, and yet still trusting God, praising God, and choosing to honor God even in your grief, your influence on others around you goes deep and wide. Every human being is a leader in some part of his/her life – because leadership is an *influence* process.

Let's pray: *Thank you, Loving Lord, for saving us, teaching us, and leading us. Help us to open our hearts to the call you have on all of our lives to influence the people around us for Jesus' sake and for the building of the Kingdom of God. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

The foundational truths for this sermon series are these:

1. Jesus is the ultimate leader.
2. As his disciples, Jesus should be the one we are following.
3. We are all leaders.
4. By the example of our lives, we are either leading others towards or away from the leadership of Jesus in their own lives.

We are all following someone - which is a pretty unimpressive thing to say in this time in history with all the different media and social media opportunities. We follow TV series, news teams, friends, we follow celebrities, we follow musical groups & bands, we follow organizational pages, we follow sports teams, you name it. But how much influence what and who you follow has on your life is not easy to measure. We might think we're not being influenced by that show or that person or that organization's posts, and yet, over time, is it possible that something is shifting inside of us of which we aren't even aware? Absolutely! Absolutely!

There's a young, female author, speaker, and wildly successful business-owner named Rachel Hollis. Rachel has well over a million followers on social media, and her book "Girl, Wash Your Face," was recently number one in the Religion & Spirituality category on Amazon. She says she is a Christian and references the Bible and her faith throughout the book. But here are several of the main themes in her book (now books):

1. You come first and your happiness depends on you. You are meant to be the hero of your own story.
2. Sin is not the problem.
3. Your way to God is any way you choose.

Folks, the Bible is our instruction manual, and these themes are not biblical. They just aren't. They may sound great, they may be quite attractive if you're looking for a 'let me do life my way' guidebook, but if you follow such suggestions for your life, the freedom that God made you to enjoy will evade you. Anytime we buy into the lie that 'my happiness, my success, my salvation, my anything' is all up to me, we are putting ourselves on the throne in the center of life and rejecting God's perfect plan that brings perfect peace. Who we follow matters. To believe that we are not affected or not influenced by the continuous notifications of a new post and then reading those posts from someone whose beliefs go against God's Word is a lie from the pit of hell. We are influenced. We are.

How many school-age students have been affected by their coach? Have been affected by their coach taking a knee during the national anthem? Have been affected by their coach taking a knee during the national anthem because their sports heroes, NFL players, took a knee? Have been affected by their coach taking a knee during the national anthem because their sports heroes, NFL players took a knee, because Colin Kaepernick took a knee in protest of racial violence in our country? I protest racial violence too, in fact I protest violence of any kind, but not in a way that disrespects the symbol of our country's freedom and those who sacrifice to protect it.

Just as I finished writing those last sentences on Friday, I was called upon to go pick up my granddaughter Taylor at school (less than a mile from my house). While waiting for her in the office I noticed the back of a woman's t-shirt. Here it is:



Now, I get this. If you are a patriotic person, you might want to wear this message on the back of your shirt. Which means there are people behind you, literally following you and reading it, but maybe you are influencing their thinking to follow along with your message too. A message that says, "If you don't think like I think, get out of my life." Is that the kind of influence we want to have on the people around us? Let me rephrase: Is that the kind of influence Jesus wants us to have on the people around us? "If you don't think like I think, get out of my life."

And then, after doing a google search I found this shirt (image isn't very good). The message is the same: If the flag or the cross offend you, get out of my life.



Please listen carefully to these paraphrased words from 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 with a few added phrases to help us make the application: "If we speak with the tongues of men and angels, but do not have love (as our purpose), we have become noisy gongs or clanging cymbals (in other words, our voices are nothing but annoying, repetitive noise). If we have the gifts of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge (about how to lead people); and if we have all faith (in our ability to lead), so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, we are nothing. And if (we engage in selfish and self-centered acts of self-promotion and) we give all our possessions to feed the poor and if we surrender

our bodies to be burned, but do not have love, it profits us (and the world, and the kingdom of God) nothing."



If Jesus wore t-shirts, I think this would be his. Right? Jesus led with love. He led with love, and if we are following him, then our leadership will be love-based leadership. Not self-inspired leadership. Jesus inspired, love-based leadership. Why? Because it works! It works! More than 2000 years have passed since Jesus was here physically on earth with us, but he still has more followers than any leader the world has ever seen.

As disciples of Jesus, meaning followers of Jesus as our ultimate, primary leader, we want the outcome of our leadership and influence (and remember that we are all leaders in someone else's life), to be showing people God's love. Leading like Jesus is not about skill and education and age and experience – leading like Jesus is a matter of the heart. Leading like Jesus is about loving like Jesus. It is about thinking how we can best influence the people around us to want to know him, love him, and follow him by their own decision to seek him with all of their hearts.

Last week I read the story from Mark 5 about the man who was possessed by demons and who was self-destructing that Jesus came and healed. He came into his right mind and wanted to go with Jesus in the boat when he was leaving the region. Of course he did! Jesus changed his life! But Jesus said to him, *"Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."* (Mark 5:19). The new disciple wanted to lead by following Jesus the way he wanted to follow him. But Jesus led him to lead where he would have the greatest impact – where he could influence others the most – right where he was!

My challenge for all of us this week is two-fold: First, I challenge us to think carefully about who we are following. Like, really. Who is the one out front? *Really* out front? Because if we are truly his disciples, the one in the very front should be Jesus. Not Pastor Meagan. Not Laurie. Not Gary. Not your small group leader. Not your coach or your boss. Not your spouse or your best friend, no matter how great a Christian they may be. Out front should be Jesus. Who are you following, really, in regards to your business practices, the way you manage the time God has given you, the way you are serving him in his church, the way you are influencing your family and the people in the organizations you serve, etc.? Who are you following?

Secondly, I challenge us to think about who is following us, who is listening to our voice, who is watching our actions – and are they learning more about Jesus by following us? Are they seeing the real Jesus through our lives – the One who says, "Love God, Love People?" Is that what they see in our lives?

We all are leaders. No matter how young or old we are, no matter whether we are employed, retired, or working at home, no matter how rich or poor we are, no matter the color of our skin – we all have influence. Are we being led by **Jesus**? Or are we just being led.

Engage your mind, church. Engage your heart. Evaluate carefully. Who are we following? And how are we leading the people who are following us?

Let's pray: *Your Word is a lamp for our feet. Help us to read it, to listen to it, and to follow you. Forgive us for the ways we ignore what you say is right and best to do. Forgive us for the ways we transpose your truth with our opinions. Forgive us for not being great examples for the people around us, being more self-centered than Christ-centered. Help us to always remember the influence we can have on others as we give our lives to you, fully and completely, without excuses and without restraint. Thank you for your promise that when we seek you, we will find you, when we seek with all our heart. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*