

“Be Led to Lead”  
Part 3  
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As we come to this third week of this sermon series Be Led to Lead, I am honored and extremely grateful to be a part of this church family. I am grateful because over the past few weeks I have witnessed your love and care for one another. I have witnessed your leadership, whether you knew you were leading or not. And I am extremely grateful to Jesus for his love and grace in all of our lives, for it is only by His grace that we are here today.

Let's pray: *Thank you, wonderful and merciful God, for bringing us into this community to learn, grow, and love you and our neighbors. Thank you for your amazing grace in our lives. Open up all of our hearts, souls, and minds today to hear your word for us so that we can follow you better and influence others for your Kingdom. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.*

The past two weeks we have learned together that every human being is a leader at some point in their lives because leadership is not just a role, but it is an influence process. Whether we consciously know it or not we are all following someone and in turn someone is following or being influenced by us. Week 1, we learned about these four foundational truths for this series:

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 on Jesus in their own lives.

Why I am reminding you of these things? Because I do not think we can hear those four things enough in our lives. I think we need to be reminded of these every day because it can become so easy for us to get pulled away, distracted, or so buried beneath the weight of our responsibilities and our lives that these truths get pushed aside. As disciples of Christ, we need to be intentional about knowing who we are following and who is following us. We need to be intentional about living lives that are influencing others to follow Christ as we follow Christ.

An integral part of being led to lead is knowing the status of our hearts. As followers of Christ, we need to check our hearts. What is our motivation for influencing others? What is the motivation of our hearts. Proverbs 4:23 warns us, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” Everything we do flows out of the motivation of our hearts...for good and for bad.

I recently started playing Fantasy Football with my sisters. We are in a league with a few other friends and there are not really any of us who entirely know what we are doing. Half of us have never played Fantasy Football before this year. The basics of Fantasy Football, from what I understand in just my three weeks of playing it, is that each person in your league drafts or is drafted a team. They then can adjust their roster each week to confirm what quarterback, running back, wide receivers, tight ends, kickers, and defense they want to earn them points. Each week your team plays against another team in your league and whoever scores the most points wins. Essentially you are guessing which real life players will do well in real life games to gain imaginary points for your imaginary team. (If someone else has a better explanation of Fantasy Football, please help.) So, after two full weeks and my team being in third place, I started seeing a difference in how I watch football games and football highlights. Instead of looking at teams as a whole,

I am solely focusing on key players and whether or not they will get me points or not because I want to win. I am a competitive person. I want to win. And from this motivation to win I am not always gracious in my reactions to their performance. In fact, I am more concerned with how they perform and gain points for myself, than I am for them as human beings...other people created in the image of God.

My heart in those moments is only looking to serve myself. Not God and not his Kingdom. Brothers and sisters, if we are going to impact the world for Christ, if we are going to be leaders in our homes, schools, workplaces, soccer fields, friend groups, classrooms, etc., then we need to check our hearts. Who are we seeking to serve ourselves or Christ? If we are seeking to serve ourselves then those who follow us will then in turn seek to serve themselves. Isn't this what we are seeing in our nation and world today? People who are so self-focused and only care to satisfy their own wants and desires. And I am not just talking about millennials or Generation Z, I hear the way we can point fingers at other generations and blame them for the problems of the world. The truth is it's not just any one group of people that seek to serve self and self only, but it is all of humanity that seeks to serve itself. That is what sin brought to the table folks. Adam and Eve sought to serve themselves only by partaking of the forbidden fruit, hiding from God, and then blaming everyone but themselves for their own actions.

How we influence others comes directly from the motivations and desires of our hearts. So, what is the desire of our hearts, your heart, my heart? Jesus tells us what this is to be in Matthew 22:34-37. "Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'" What is to be the motivation and desire of our hearts...to love God and to love people. It's that simple. Love God, love people as you love yourself. Simple and yet complex and difficult at times.

Difficult because we have a tendency to edge God out from being first in our hearts. We have a tendency to let pride and fear become the motivation in our lives. We let toxic pride and fear edge God out of our hearts. Remember what we learned years ago in a sermon series on pride...please remember "I's" drive everything. We cannot truly love God above all if we have ourselves at the top of the list, and we cannot love others if we view ourselves "more than" or "better than" them. This is not the way Jesus taught us to lead in our relationships for "the Son of Man came to serve and not to be served. (Mark 10:45)." If the motivations and desires of the heart are all about us then those who we are influencing will learn and imitate those desires and behaviors.

For some, this pride may not be as evident as it is in others or you may not think that this applies to you. Let's look at the opposite then. Toxic fear...thinking too little of yourself or not wanting our bad behavior or weaknesses to be exposed or found out. Fear that seeks the approval from everything and everyone except from God. Fear that compels us to build up walls and barriers to protect ourselves and that prevent others from getting to close.

It has been my experience that fear is one of the biggest hindrances to people seeing themselves as leaders. It has been the biggest hindrance in my own life. Fear that we will not do something right. Fear that we are ill-equipped to speak on or teach on a subject or to speak truth into a certain situation. "Who am I to tell this person what to do?" "I have not been in this situation before so I will just avoid talking about it in case I say something wrong." We fear that others will see that we are not as good and perfect as we can make ourselves out to be. We fear that other people will not understand the struggles that we

are facing so we don't open up, taking away the opportunity to let others lead us or to lead others through their similar experiences. Toxic fear is a negative motivation from the heart.

Even this fear is connected with a false pride...not wanting to be exposed as less than. Notice the "I" Factor. Are we beginning the majority of sentences in our conversations with "I" or are we turning conversations back to ourselves? Those questions I just asked a minute ago were filled with "I's". Please remember I's drive everything! This week pay attention to your conversations and be mindful of if you are directing a conversation back to yourself. Are your conversations filled with "I", "my", or "me"? What are the circumstances that are leading our thoughts and conversations to be that way? Are they coming out of a place of pride or fear?

One of the first things Rev. Meagan stated at the beginning of this series was that she hears the statement "I am not a leader" all the time. One of those times probably came from me at one point in my life. I'm not a leader. My personality and gifts are not always the best suited for leadership in a conventional sense. I struggle to make decisions and to assert myself. I struggle to take charge of situations. Being a leader whether life role leadership or in the professional sense is not something I would ever choose on my own. I am a follower. I follow rules, directions, and those I deem more equipped than I am. And you know what, that actually helps me be a better leader...so long as the one I am following is Christ. Please don't misunderstand I am not trying to bring attention to myself and that I am better than I am because I fall short on the daily. There has not been one day of my life that I have gotten this perfect. I have veered off the path more often than I would have liked.

I share this because in our weaknesses God is strong. God created us with gifts, abilities, and a purpose that he works through to lead others. It is not in our ability to influence others, it is his ability that does the work, we just need to get our heart aligned to his will and work. We need to let His Spirit work through us. We need to accept how God made us and say, "Yes, Lord, use me." Author Bill Robinson writes in his book "Incarnate Leadership: 5 Leadership Lessons from the Life of Christ" about leaders and nature vs. nurture. He writes, "The answer to the nature-nurture question gives us hope for change. Both nature and nurture shape the way people lead. Social scientists and parents with more than one child agree: DNA is a pretty potent influence on the way people behave. And I don't think we can change the water in our gene pool. We have to lead with our gifts and our calling. When King Saul offered David fancy armor to fight Goliath, David declined. He played to his strength. He stuck with his slingshot. He must have spent a lot of time developing his technique. I doubt he was just born a good shot. And so it is with good leaders. They don't waste time longing for different armor. They develop the gifts God gave them. They hone and improve those gifts. They never stop learning how to use their gifts more effectively. And they change. They get better. And they get nervous at the first sign of stagnation."

God has given each one of us specific gifts and abilities to be used for his purposes to his glory. This is how Paul encouraged the Ephesians and encourages us today. Paul writes, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." God created us with a purpose and to be influencers in this world. He calls us to lead others while following him. This will look differently for each of us as we use the specific gifts that God has given us. Look at the people God called to follow him throughout Scripture. Were Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Jonah, Isaiah, Elijah, Joseph, Mary, Peter, John, Paul, Mark, Luke, Matthew, etc. all the same? Heavens no! They were all different with all different skill sets and personalities. Peter was rash and often acted first and thought about it later. Whereas Luke

was a doctor who was a little more reserved and thoughtful in how he told others about Jesus.

One thing they all had in common and what we can learn from is that their heart said yes to God. They made room for God and exalted him only. As followers of Christ, in order to follow God and in turn lead and influence others for God's kingdom we need to have the right EGO. Rather than "edging God out" with our pride and fear, we "exalt God only" as the object of our worship, as the source of our security, self-worth, and wisdom, and as the audience and judge of our life decisions. When we are exalting God and our goal is to exalt God, then our lives will influence others and point them toward Jesus and not ourselves. We will better understand that the Lord is our strength and not ourselves because God is the source of our security and self-worth. God drives out fear as we learn to rely on him and not on ourselves. The promises of God to go before us, alongside us, and behind us will always ring true as we follow him.

As we seek to follow the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength we may need to ask ourselves these questions when we struggle with this idea of ourselves as leaders:

1. Is God good?
2. Do you believe that God has a good plan and purpose in your life?
3. Do you believe that anyone or anything can change God's plan for your life?
4. Do you believe that God loves you?
5. Do you believe that God will always love you regardless of your performance or the opinions of others?
6. Do you believe God will use everything in your life for His glory and your good just as He promised?
7. Do you trust Him?
8. Do you love Him?
9. Are you willing to set aside recognition, power, and instant gratification to honor God by doing the right thing?

If you said yes to these things, then you are ready to influence others for Christ, not by your own power or might. Not by claiming power and authority for yourself, but by releasing your power in exchange for Christ's power in your life and heart. God has given each of us a platform in this time and place to be influencers for His kingdom. Young or old, retired or still working, parents of young children, empty-nesters, single, married. Whatever. God is calling us to follow him and to lead others to him. How you going to answer God's call on your life? How am I going to answer God's call on my life? May our answers be the same as Isaiah's (which we read earlier and will sing later), "Here am I, Lord, send me."

Let's pray: *Good and gracious God, we thank you that it is by your strength alone that we can lead others to you. May each of us today examine our hearts and place you first. May you be exalted above all in our lives. May we turn to you as our source of security, self-worth, and wisdom. May we seek to please you and your approval above all. Help us to guard our hearts and point others to you. We thank you that you have given us everything we need through Jesus Christ. This day, may we recommit our hearts to you. Amen.*