

## LEADING WITH HUMILITY -EMBRACING THE TENSIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY AND SERVANTHOOD

Admittedly, leading with humility can be a bit of a challenge -for any leader. Current definitions of both leadership and humility can often cause these realities to seem at odds with one another. Culturally speaking, when we think of the modern expression of today's dynamic leader, we associate with it characteristics like decisiveness, stage presence, high-level articulation, determination, action, initiative, win-at-all-costs, take-no-prisoners, never-say-die, big-time dreamers, executive-level wardrobes and a confidence to match. These are probably not the same descriptions with which we would tend to associate with the humble. Instead, we may use terms like kind, gentle, servant-minded, forgiving, passive, back-row-types, quiet, turn-the other-cheek, good listener, encourager, patient and even doormat. Rarely would we be inclined to choose humility as the primary qualification for hiring a CEO, lawyer, coach, military leader or political figure. This is telling, as it reveals a gross misunderstanding of what humility really entails.

The Bible has this to say. *"But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."* -Mk.10:42-45

The first thing I notice here is that Jesus recognizes two opposing distinctives when it comes to defining greatness. The first in the gentile world. In other words, those who were outside of the covenant rule of God and therefore did not exalt His word as their standard. The second, within the community of Jesus' own disciples. Greatness was equivalent to servanthood and giving one's life for another.

The second is that Jesus does not condemn the reach for greatness, instead He affirms it through qualification. He says, *"This is what greatness looks like."*

Thirdly, Jesus recognized that God Himself has instituted leadership. He said that sheep follow the voice of their shepherd. He commissioned His own disciples to lead the post-resurrection church. It is He who appoints some to be pastors and teachers -to give leadership to His own people. He designated the spiritual headship of the husband in the marriage covenant and requires that children obey the instruction of their parents.

Because leadership involves taking initiative, decision making and walking in authority it can be hard to understand how extending preference to others, modeling gentleness and honoring another factor in. And yet, in the economy of God's kingdom these are essential. Jesus noted that the way of man is to associate greatness with dominance or *lording* one's authority over another. The church does not consist of an organizational hierarchy where one's worth is attached to one's title. The church functions when its proper orientation is to esteem one another in love as we recognize the unique giftings and callings each possess. In addition, leadership does not necessarily require a title, pulpit or a boardroom. Leadership involves the recognition of one's God-given responsibility and the requirement to fulfill that responsibility as a faithful steward in God's household. One's leadership designation by God is directly related to one's responsibility -also given by God. Because leadership comes with authority, it is important that we use our authority not only to accomplish the purposes for which we are called, but according to the guidelines established in scripture. As an example, parents are required to raise godly offspring, hence God has commanded children to honor and obey their parents. Women are to submit to their own husbands as husbands are given a spiritual headship by Christ. Neither this headship nor parental authority give us the right to act or speak in a way that contradicts God's commandment to love one another, instead the husband functions in this headship in such a way as to model, encourage and nurture in His wife the love that Christ Himself has for her. And so, with parents. Our leadership ought to produce in our children a joyful responsiveness to the message of the gospel and to its requirements.

Humility is not a passive submission to authority at all costs. True humility doesn't stem from a distorted view of one's worth based on one's personality traits, deficiencies, education, or social or economic status. Humility is a response and a choice. For the Christian humility begins as we are fascinated with the brilliant beauty of God and our response is to exalt Him far above ourselves. But it also includes the recognition that we are created in the image of this glorious One -and so are those around us. For this reason, we rejoice in who He has created us to be. We affirm that God sees us as lovely and has willingly crowned us with unique gifts, abilities and assignments. We realize that this is true of every person and so our leadership -including the authority we walk in- reflects this truth. We exercise our leadership in conjunction with what God desires to produce in the people underneath our care as a result of our words, deeds and decisions. Humility involves, not a rejection of our worth, but a radical acceptance of it combined with a love for God that will not allow us to exalt ourselves above Him nor demean those that we are called to serve through our leadership role.