

Biblical Imperatives For Leadership In The New Normal

Series

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Scripture: 1 Samuel 8:11-18, 1 Samuel 18:7-9, Genesis 1:28, Luke 12:15, Ephesians 4:2, Matthew 20:25-28, Job 27:3-6, 1 Kings 12:1-10, John 13:1-17, Deuteronomy 17:14-20

Denomination: Evangelical/Non-Denominational

Summary: The New Normal is a reality, and we keep hearing about it often. How about leadership in the new Normal? What will it look like?

Biblical Imperatives for Leadership in the New Normal

After hearing the topic, some you might be thinking, what does leadership got to do with me? But before you switch off and start doing something else, give me a minute. Leadership as I use it never about position or title or designation. "Leadership is influence. Nothing more, nothing less", says leadership Guru John Maxwell, and I agree whole heartedly. This will become evident when you think hard about any leader, Good bad or ugly, it doesn't matter, think about the whole spectrum from Mahatma Gandhi to Hitler, Osama Bin laden to Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela to Saddam Hussain, Donald Trump to Narendra Modi. You think about any leader, and ask the basic question, what do they do as leaders? The answer is evident. They influence the thoughts and actions of their followers. How they do it might be very different, (and that is the topic of today's message). But the fact that Leadership is influence cannot be argued against. So if we first agree on that definition, all of us watching/ listening to this message are leaders. It doesn't matter whether you consider yourselves a "mere house-wife", or a student, or a teacher, or an individual contributor in your workplace. As long as you have an opportunity to influence someone, even one person around you, you are a leader. And hence this message applies to all of us irrespective of whether we hold a title or a position or even a job.

Hope that encourages you to stay on a little bit more.

New Normal is a term that we hear a lot these days. There are arguments and counter arguments as to whether the new normal has already come or are we still waiting for the new normal to settle in. Will church congregations be the same again? Will offices be the same ever again? Will the old normal ever return? Will we ever return to the hugs and handshakes and high fives and holding hands? We don't have answers to those questions now. We don't know when we will have any answers if at all. But one thing is for sure, the way we influence in the new normal will be and is different from how we influenced in the old normal.

My studies reveal four tenets of Leadership for the New Normal. What I will try and do is to establish the parallel Biblical Imperatives against those four tenets of leadership for the new Normal. Let us jump into it right away.

Tenet no 1 is about Power. As all of us are aware, Leadership and Power has always been married. Leadership has always been associated with power. However human history shows that Power has often been misused than used for the benefit of others. So that is the Tenet no 1 for the New normal. "The

New Normal will transform the way power is used by Leaders". The followers are not going to accept the Power Elite concept where power is concentrated in a few people. People will look for power to be used for "with them" rather than "over them". Socialised power, power that is used for society's benefit will be the ask as against individualized power where power is used for selfish motives. In corporates employees will start looking for higher purpose than just profit. Power that is used to generate profits at any cost will not be tolerated. The desire for goodness will increase as will the forces against greed. This is the corporate trend that we see for the New Normal.

So what about us Christians? The good news is that Bible has already warned us against the misuse of power. To understand this, let us look at God's Leadership Sketch. In a way, Genesis 1:28 could be treated as the very first definition of the Leadership. If you read Genesis 1:28, you realize that the command is about subduing and have dominion over all living things on earth. This definition sounds incorrect and inappropriate in the current context. So did God make a mistake? We know the answer. This question might sound rhetorical. But to appreciate this command we must look at the timeline when this definition was given. You will quickly realise that this command was give before the fall. You see, before the fall, the understanding of "subdue and have dominion over" would have been very different from what we understand in the fallen world. So let us see what happened after the fall. After the fall, God understood the tendency of human beings to misuse the freedom and wisdom given by him and that is why the laws were given. Along with several laws that were given to mankind post-fall, there is a law given about leaders too. The first post-fall definition of leadership is seen in Deuteronomy 17: 14-20. Interestingly this definition is more about what the leader should not do, who the leader should not be etc. This was in a way the prediction of how the fallen leaders will misuse the "Subdue and have dominion over" command given in Genesis 1:28. And we see this further explained and highlighted in 1 Samuel Chapter 8, where the Israelites come and demand that they be given a King. And the reasons are simple. All other nations around them have kings and they felt embarrassed that they didn't have a King in comparison. So Samuel gets angry, but the Lord tells him that He can give them a King if that is what they want. But the Lord asks Samuel to warn the people about what the king will do. The 8 verses from 1 Samuel 8:11-18 read like a contemporary leadership picture. Samuel effectively tells them that once they have a king , the king is going to take their money, their land, their livestock, their sons and daughters and use it for his own pleasure. But the people were adamant and insisted on having a King.

So Gods Leadership sketch that started with "What to do" command in Genesis 1:28 soon became, after the fall "What not to do". and then came the prediction and warning about the misuse of power that mankind is likely to experience. And History shows that Kings after Kings fitted beautifully into this pattern of misuse of power. While Saul misused the power to disobey, David , the great man after God's own heart, misused power to get a wife (as if he didn't have enough). Solomon misused power to please his wives and concubines. And the classic example is that of Rehoboam, who had a clear choice in front of him. 1 Kings 12:7 gives him the advice that "If you chose to serve these people today, they will be your servants forever". But He choses to use the "Power" that he had inherited and "subdue" the people. You will see this trend in the long line of rulers in the Bible.

We will come back and complete this sketch a little later, but let us jump to the Tenet no 2 of Leadership in the New Normal. What the pandemic has done is to make people realise that life has a higher purpose. Ironically the lockdown and the social distancing etc has made us recognize our interdependence all the more. Now, more than ever, we are aware that the actions of someone else can

harm us even if we are not at fault. That is what Tenet no 2 is all about. Followers will not tolerate Self-centered leadership. There will be a increased demand for making leadership about others rather than the leaders themselves.

From a Biblical perspective again, this is not something new. We have a two great examples. The first one is about Saul and David. The Bible documents that Saul loved David (1 Sam 16:21). But all that love turned into hatred when people started praising David more than Saul (1 Samuel 18:7-9). Saul just could not tolerate the fact that the village boy to whom he gave a chance to come into the palace, a boy who he promoted, could become better than himself. We see another Saul in the new testament, who becomes Paul and then wants to go and meet up with the apostles. The Bible says that the apostles were all afraid of Paul (Acts 9:26). To me it looks natural. This was the guy who was going around putting Christians in prison not too long back, and then one fine morning he wakes up and claims to be a Christian himself and wants to meet the apostles. I would have been afraid of him if I was one of the apostles. It was man named Barnabas who stood guarantee for Paul and took him to the apostles. (Acts 9:27). Barnabas does not stop there and accompanies Paul in his early missionary journeys, to Tarsus, Antioch (Acts 11:25-26), Jerusalem (Acts 12:25) an again Antioch, Seleucia, Cyprus, Salamis and Paphos (Acts 13:1-7). We see here Barnabas investing his time and energy into this new believer. We all know who ultimately who becomes more famous, but we don't read about any bitterness from Barnabas about the same. Barnabas demonstrated an other-centered leadership style.

Let us quickly look at the Tenet no 3 of Leadership in the new Normal. According to my studies, the followers will look for leaders to have a set of values and who live by certain values. Again the Bible is full of such commands. Bible asks all of us to adhere to certain values. Prominent among them are Humility (Ephesians 4:2) Integrity (Job 27: 3-6) and Simplicity (Luke 12:15) , what Chris Wright calls as HIS. Let me expand just on Integrity. I have told you this story before. A couple gets call from the principal's office about their son who is in 2nd standard. All of you know what feelings you have when you get a call from the principal's office. The parents go to the school with trembling and fear and sit in front of the Principal. The Principal tells them that their son steals pencils, erasers and stuff like that from his classmates. The parents are embarrassed and apologetic. The father is particularly incensed. He says to the principal; "Madam, I am very disappointed at my son, and shocked at his behaviour. I don't now why he should do that, because everything he needs and much more than what he needs, I can bring it from my office and give him." You get the idea where the boy's value lessons come from, don't you? We may laugh at this story. But don't you think that we live in a culture where Integrity is seen as "adjustable". Don't we live in an adjustable culture? Don't we differentiate between small breach of integrity vs big breach of integrity? Don't we consider integrity as not-so-black-and-white but could be 50 shades of grey? This is why I love Job. Now all of us know that the book of Job is a happy ending book. But before the happy ending, when he was really in trouble, his friends come and speak to him elaborately running to several chapters in the book . What they are essentially telling them is this. God is a good God, and if you are suffering, it can only be because you have sinned, you have messed up, you have done something wrong. So just confess that and God will make things alright. I live Job's answer in Job 27:3-6. I love the way the Message translation puts it. Job 27:3-5 (MSG) 3 But for as long as I draw breath, and for as long as God breathes life into me, 4 I refuse to say one word that isn't true. I refuse to confess to any charge that's false. 5 There is no way I'll ever agree to your accusations. I'll not deny my integrity even if it costs me my life. I want you to read this again, and ask ourselves, how many of us can really say that honestly? How many us can say that I will not deny my integrity even if it causes my life. But that is God's standard of Integrity. So the third biblical imperative is Can

we really say that we are HIS? Humility, Integrity and Simplicity.

Let us go to the forth and last tenet of leadership in the new normal. This is about the type of lives we lead. I have spoken about this in this church before. When we look around, we can see people who lead a life of Survival. People who add no value to themselves nor to others. People who go through the day because the day exists. There is a second category of people, especially among Christians, who de-value themselves so much. They go around saying, I am worthless, I am nothing, I am a worm etc. They have a very low sense of self-esteem. Then of course there is the worldly type of people who get up in the morning and go out and want to achieve something new, want to attain something different. Want to get a new gadget, a PhD or whatever. These are the types that corporates love and encourage. These are the types we call who lead a life of success. At the outset, there might seem that there is nothing wrong with this type, but the problem with life of success is they end up adding value to themselves, and not necessarily to others. This is where the forth type of life comes in. The life I call as the life of significance. Life of significance is when we add value to ourselves with the explicit purpose of adding value to others. We acquire knowledge so that we can teach the un-learned, we acquire wisdom so that we can help the foolish. We acquire wealth so that we can give to the poor. We build health, so that we can serve the sick etc etc. My studies show that in the new normal, people will not follow leaders who have a pure success motive. The COVID pandemic has taught us to ask the question, what have you done to others? And this trend will continue. This is the tenet no 4: People will ask that the success motive be replaced with a pursuit of Significance. The Biblical parallels on this are many. There are several places where the Word asks us to be significant. Philippians 2: 3-4, Matthew 5:13-14, John 15:8, John 15:16, 1 Peter 2:12 etc are just some examples of that.

So there we have the four tenets of leadership in the new normal. The world outside is asking the question, is there a leadership philosophy that meets these tenets? Is there a leadership philosophy that enables influencing not by using power, but service? Not self-centered, but other-centered? Is based on values? And asks us to lead a life of significance as against success? That is where Servant Leadership comes in for the world. As Victor Hugo said, "There is nothing as powerful as an Idea whose time has come." The world is realizing that the time for Servant Leadership has come.

So how about the Christian Answer? The beauty is that the Christian answer has been there for more than 2000 years. If we look at God's leadership sketch that we saw earlier, we will know that Jesus reversed the whole misuse of power and turned it upside down, when he gave the Not-so-with-you command in Mathew 20: 25-28. And then Jesus sealed it with the feet washing incident in John 13:1-17 and gave a new command to serve. It is interesting to note that there is only one place in the bible where Jesus explicitly says that he did something to set an example for others, and it is in John 13:13-17. John 13:13-17 (NKJV) 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. 16 Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. I have searched almost 24 different translations of the Bible to see if John 13:17 is translated differently. No. All of them say, blessed are you if you do accordingly. Focus being on action here.

So here is the summary of the message dear brothers and sisters. For the world, Servant Leadership is one of the alternative leadership philosophies for the new normal. For us Christians, there is no other

alternative. Jesus says not-so-with-you for any other way of leading, or living, and he asks us to follow his example of taking the basin, and washing the feet of his followers including the one He knew was going to betray Him soon.

Can we learn to Live , Love and Lead like Jesus in the New Normal?

Let us pray.