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## **Effective Christian Ministry Begins with Godly Self-Leadership**

**By Dr. Jeanine Parolini**

### **Introduction**

Leadership exists in many forms. Christian leadership is to follow the example of Jesus who served, suffered and sacrificed to lead others toward Godly redemption. Jesus remained true to His calling, even when it required His physical death, by keeping a deep personal relationship with God at the center of everything. Jesus consistently relied on God's presence, values and purposes while guarding His heart from evil. The world around Jesus was also chaotic and confusing. In the midst of that, Jesus cared well for His followers as he led them toward the collaborative moral vision that continues to transform people and our world today.

To honor Jesus, Christian leaders also need to keep these same principles of service, suffering and sacrifice on behalf of transformation at the forefront of their leadership. The leader's relationship with God, self, and others becomes vital to this process. This article discusses Godly self-leadership as a means to effective Christian leadership.

### **Our Relationship with God**

#### ***I need God in my life and leadership, I have to stop trying to do it on my own***

As Christian leader's, the key focal point of our leadership is seeing our need for God at every moment. God sees all things (Psalm 147:5, Isaiah 40:28, Hebrews 4:13). He is aware of everything inside of and surrounding the leader. God is also able to work out all things to the good of those who love Him and respond to His leading (Romans 8:28). Therefore when we engage God's insights and ability to work things out for good, our leadership results will be much better than if we attempted it on our own.

We don't do what God asks because He is controlling, demanding, and autocratic. We do what He asks because we believe in His love and His ability to see and understand more than we do. Entrusting our lives to Him puts us on a path toward ultimate fulfillment. By surrendering to Him we become more than we ever could on our own.

God grants His power to a Christian leader who seeks Him. God has power over all things, even if He chooses not to immediately reveal it to us (1 Chronicles 29:11, 2 Chronicles 20:6, Job 12:13-15, Job 26:14, 1 Corinthians 6:14). God has the power to bring life out of death and renew anything He decides to resurrect to new life. If we tap into God's power to redeem, we will lead with more power than if we act alone.

When we seek God we choose to do his life and leadership *with* God, and in this way we can avoid the pitfalls of pride and ego. Seeking to be aware of God first and foremost is the most important part of this journey. It is not about being perfect but seeking, looking out for and paying attention to God. This God-awareness is the path of humility as we surrender our mind, will, emotions and personality (heart) to God's leadership and attempt to lead like Jesus (Parolini, 2012).

In contrast, when we determine to do life and leadership on our own, we may be acting on behalf of our own pride and ego. God hates pride (Isaiah 2:12, Psalm 66:11, Proverbs 8:13, Proverbs 16:5, James 4:6) because it draws us out of relationship with Him and causes us to act independently. It is pride that causes us to lead without God's insights and power. Pride acts on behalf of evil and contributes to Satan's work in the world. For this reason, our focus as leaders needs to be on seeking God in each moment.

God is ready to renew us when we lose sight of our need for Him (Isaiah 40:30-31, Ephesians 4:22-24, Psalm 51:10-12, Psalm 103:1-5). When we seek Him, humble our hearts before Him, confess our forgetfulness, and ask Him to help us remember Him as we live and lead. He is ready to receive us, our apology, and our request (1 John 1:9). And most importantly, He is ready and able to help us.

Going at leadership and life alone, without God's intervention and without Jesus' role model, is the work of the obstinate soul, pride, ego, and Satan. There is no inner security in this way of life and leading. An insecure leader's ego fights against God while a secure leader humbles himself to God. As we consistently (and increasingly) seek God in this way, it sets the foundation for true inner security. Humbling ourselves to God's presence and Christ's example as we determine how to live and lead builds us up (Parolini, 2012).

As we seek God, we also need to receive God's love and let go of approval by the world. Because of Christ, Christian leaders are more susceptible to sacrifice than other types of leaders so we need an inner foundation to get us through this suffering (Parolini, 2012). Jesus said we would experience what He experienced (Romans 8:17, 1 Peter 4:12-13). Jesus' mission was and is all about the transformation of the human heart (Philippians 2:1-11). And the path to transformation involves serving, suffering and sacrificing. As we seek God and model Christ's leadership, we are on this same mission. God's loving presence is sustains us along the path.

***I receive God's love and value toward me, and I consistently need Him to battle insecurity***

Life in and of itself, has its share of joy as well as suffering. Christian leaders are not free from the realities of this world, and the leadership path is a lifelong journey. At the same time, God's loving presence can lift us above the realities of this world because He has the power to renew, redeem, and resurrect. The choice to let God's love deeper and deeper into the layers of our hearts is what lifts us up in the midst of serving, suffering and sacrificing. We can experience being lifted up by God's loving presence as we walk or skip or run or stumble along this path.

God's love, and a loving relationship with Him are the only things that can make us secure. God whispers to us that we are loved and valued by Him. No accomplishment, role,

compliment, remuneration, or person can give us this sense of inner security. Those who count on these things find themselves lost and empty inside, and they end up covering this up with pride and ego. God desires His leaders to look to Him for their inner security through His love and value.

God is the only One who can trade our insecurity for inner security (Philippians 4:6-9, 1 Corinthians 10:13-14, 1 Timothy 1:16). As humans, we quickly lose our inner security. This is normal and natural, and it engages our need for God. As we bring our insecurities to God, he trades them for love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, self-control, and faithfulness (Galatians 5:19-26). As we humble our hearts full of anxiety, fear, shame, guilt, and anger, God has the power to trade those awful feelings for His fruit of the Spirit. You can see where the leader who decides to do life and leadership on her own, without God, and does not make this exchange is left with a heart full of negative emotions. Where do those leaders go with those negative feelings and insecurities? I propose they resort to pride and ego and so that is why we see so much negative leadership in our world. God promises that as we run in the path of His commands, we will be set free (Psalm 119:30-32). To live and lead from a heart that is being released from insecurity and negative emotion, we need God to free us.

***Moving from my insecurity to Godly security is a lifelong journey and battle that requires God's power***

So much is written about emotional health and emotional intelligence, yet for Christian leaders, our key is in seeking God, consistently and increasingly receiving the love that God has for us through Christ (John 15:4-5), and modeling Jesus' leadership. This journey leads us to work through the emotional and spiritual battle of insecurity in an appropriate way. If we try to work through this battle on our own, we find that the emotions continue to haunt us or draw us into addictive behavior (Romans 8:5-7, Galatians 5:19-21). Addictions come with trying to comfort ourselves in inappropriate ways because we don't know how to or are not willing to deal with our emotions in healthier ways with God's help. Again, we try to do this hard work on our own. But God is the only One who can truly comfort us in our pain and insecurity. And He is the only One who can then exchange the painful emotions that cause insecurity for fruitful emotions that bring us true security through Him (James 1:21).

Serving, sacrificing and suffering will put pressure on a Christian leader's heart. The mind, emotions, will, and personality form the center of a person (New Bible Dictionary, 2000, Proverbs 4:23) and all effect the way we lead. The mind is the rational aspect of a person and can be brought to truth with Scripture and meditating on Godly wisdom. The will can choose to seek, remember, and move toward God. The personality can be developed and balanced through listening to God and broadened by relationships with others. Yet the emotions are feelings from lifelong experiences, and they can be tricky to maneuver. If emotions are not worked through properly, they may leak out in negative ways. When painful emotions are not properly dealt with, they can draw us into negative behavior, even addiction. Negative emotions over time can do incredible damage to us and to our relationships. Most people don't like to deal with emotional

pain, and so they look for quick fixes to feel better. But the journey of the Christian leader who aspires to emotional health is not a quick fix.

The path to emotional health is found in seeking the way, the truth and the life, summed up as Jesus Himself (John 14:6). Working through emotions with Jesus, will result in healing, even though it can feel like a roller coaster ride along the way. Yet this journey leads to a full and true life because God, through Jesus, is constantly renewing and filling up our hearts. Each day invites us to move toward God with our negative emotions in order to be filled anew with His fruitful emotions. Engaging with God in this way and working through emotions allows leaders to find their true passion. In contrast, when emotions are stuffed down inside a person, good emotions get tangled in with them and get lost as well, and passion gets shoved down too. God in his infinite wisdom knows how to deal with our tangled web of emotions to keep us moving toward the way, truth and the life. Without seeking God, we can miss out on true emotional freedom from insecurity as well as our passion in life.

## **Our relationship with ourselves**

### ***My relationship with God sets up my relationship with myself which is a key next step in leading others***

The reward of moving toward this kind of relationship with God is that it sets us up for a healthier relationship with ourselves. Godly self-leadership is likely to be the most significant aspect of leading well (Parolini, 2012). It is crucial to accept God's love and His value for us over time in order to have a good relationship with ourselves. This enables us to fight every leader's battle of the heart, against shame, guilt, anxiety, fear, self-hatred, anger, a lack of forgiveness, and the like (Ephesians 4:22-27, Colossians 3:5-10, Romans 7:23, 1 Peter 5:8, James 4:7). The goal is to let God's love and value for us flow into us so that these negative emotions don't leak out of us. It is a moment by moment, day to day fight, and we need to get on the solution side of it to keep our sanity in the midst of chaos. God is present in each moment to help us through this battle as He brings us His redemptive power to overcome. We need His power to have a good relationship with ourselves.

The vision for enhancing our relationship with ourselves then expands into guarding our hearts, measuring ourselves in terms of the fruit of the Spirit, and understanding our strengths and weaknesses (Parolini, 2012). Guarding the heart is keeping the mind engaged in Scripture and truth, engaging the will in choosing righteousness, moving toward balance with the personality, and being aware of and maneuvering through emotions. We can use the fruits of the Spirit to assess how we are doing internally, pray for God's power to overcome, and make adjustments. Additionally, using assessments to increase the understanding of our strengths and weaknesses enables us to lead out of our passion area as well as to work better with others (Parolini, 2012). These actions support a stronger relationship with the self and then with others.

## **Our relationship with others**

### ***My relationship with God and myself set me up for healthier (not perfect) relationships***

Our relationships with people are sustained by our relationship with God and then ourselves. When we become God aware and self-aware and then let God fill us, our relationships flow better with others. Flow does not mean absence of stress and tension. This world will consistently cause strain in relationships. At the same time, an inner security with God and within the self, even if it takes some time to get there, will contribute to healthy God-honoring relationships with others.

Maturing becomes the length of time it takes for us to reconnect with God or to get on track with ourselves. As we mature, this takes minutes or hours as compared to days, weeks, months or years. When leaders take too long to move toward God, center the self, and reconnect with others, the impact and drain on people and ministry can be so negative. The vision for maturity in Christian leadership is that we move forward more quickly with God and within ourselves to take the steps necessary to reconcile and collaborate (Parolini, 2012).

Most people desire to feel safety, trust and understanding from their leaders. Whether spoken or unspoken, most followers have these questions: Will you help me to feel secure? Do you know where you are going, how to get there, and how to help me come alongside of you? Are you willing to learn about me and listen to me too along the way? Will you follow through? Will you care about me and what is important to me too? These questions or needs come from the emotional realm and are a key reason we need to connect with the hearts of those who serve alongside us.

As leaders, we are constantly maneuvering through these questions from others whether we realize it or not. Our inner security with God and ourselves enables us to settle these questions with others we relate to. If we feel secure with God and within ourselves, we are more capable of helping others feel safe with us. There are aspects of another person's inner security that we won't have any control over. For instance, how someone feels about God or themselves is out of our control. Yet we can do our best to help them feel secure with us.

Creating a healthy environment around us means that we, as leaders, are secure with God and within ourselves so that we are able to care for others through providing safety, trust and understanding (Parolini, 2012). Compassion and empathy are just as important as vision and strategy to followers. Listening to those we lead and reflecting back to them what we hear them saying will help them to feel cared for and that they have influence with us. Focusing on safe and secure relationships is then what engages people in the vision and strategy.

The path of Christian leadership is one of serving, suffering and sacrificing. When we focus on gaining an inner security in our relationship with God, we set ourselves up for a more solid relationship with ourselves. Inner security means humbling the self by needing God, receiving His love and value, tapping into His power, and allowing Him to strengthen our relationship with ourselves in order to better engage with others on behalf of His mission. Christian leaders who honor these steps are more likely to lead effectively in behalf of Christ.

## **From my heart to your heart**

My intention in writing this article is to explain the journey as I have seen it lived out within the Bible, myself, as well as within the lives of thousands of Christian leaders I have interacted with over the years. I am on this journey with you. My passion is to invest in principled leaders and learning organizations, including churches and ministries, to see moral leaders take over as my generation gets a promotion to heaven. I pray for you as you go forward with God!

Dr. Jeanine Parolini

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## Additional Recommended Resources

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