

Helping Leaders to Lead Well

Their Responsibilities and Ours

Outcome: To accept the biblical understanding of a leader's authority, with a willingness to submit to our team leaders and to support them in their ministries of leading a team.

Role play of team meeting

Discussion of highlights

1. What are our present attitudes or our feelings towards people in “authority” over us?

Past and present influences and how these have affected our attitudes about leadership and towards leaders:

- * my own personal upbringing & cultural context -- trained to respect and obey leaders
- * suffering in the past for some -- in a country or in a home where “leader” meant dictatorship, cruelty, brutality, fear of leader's power, subjection by force and fear
- * raised in the freedom of a democracy -- “personal rights” is the slogan and focus of people's thinking -- leaders are there to ensure that the rights of individuals are protected
- * present move in today's culture to focus upon personal freedom -- and denigration of the function of a leader -- self-assertion

Discussion question: How have these influences and experiences affected our thinking (consciously and unconsciously) towards “leadership” in general?

2. Who are called “leaders” in the Scriptures?

Write down as many as you can think of.

Different examples:

- * husbands -- Eph.5:22-24
- * parents -- Eph.6:1-3
- * heads of clans or tribes
- * leaders of groups of people, e.g. leader of worshipers
- * leaders of God's people Israel, e.g. Moses, a king (e.g. David)

- * a governor or king, e.g. Rom.13:1ff; 1 Peter 2:13-17
- * a master or employer, e.g. a slave-master, see Eph.6:5-9; Col.3:22-4:1
- * elders or “overseers” (shepherds) -- 1 Tim.3:1; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4
- * other

One common factor for all of them -- they are all HUMAN and imperfect!

Various factors that influence the quality or effectiveness of their leading:

- * their cultural background, cf. Matt.20:25 -- which in turn is influenced by their sin.
- * their personality, e.g. Nehemiah (a very strong leader)
- * their different weaknesses, e.g. Saul (one who feared the people -- 1 Sam.15:24) versus David (who was committed to honouring the Lord’s name -- 1 Sam.17:45-47.
- * their sinful character that often brought sorrow and tragedy upon the people they led, e.g. the many unrighteous kinds of Israel & Israel such as Ahab with Jezebel

Conclusion: It is taken for granted that all human leaders will have different weaknesses and personality flaws. God’s teaching to His people concerning their responsibility to follow leaders is not based on some assumption that they always act in righteous and positive ways.

Discussion question: Where would our “mission leaders” or “team leaders” fit into this biblical background?

3. What are the core responsibilities of leaders and the core responsibilities of followers?

What are the core responsibilities
of leaders and followers
in their relationship to one another?

Personal Bible study:

Make brief notes in response to the following two questions:

- 1) Read and meditate upon 1 Thess.5:12-13; Heb.13:17.

Questions: What are the key words used in God's Word to describe our responsibilities as followers towards our leaders? Describe any particular situations where you believe that you would not be required to obey these commands.

- 2) Read and reflect upon 1 Peter 5:1-6; Matt.20:20-28.

Questions: What are the responsibilities of leaders towards their followers? What should OM/IT team members do if their leaders fail to live up these biblical commands?

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4. What does the Bible say about the “authority” of God-ordained leaders?

What is the nature of “authority” (i.e. the authority of any leader) according to the Scriptures?

How much “authority” does a leader have?

1. Authority and submission is rooted in the relationships within the three Persons of the Triune God:

* God the Father commissions the Son -- Heb.3:1; John 20:21

* Jesus in His submission to His Father -- John 6:38-40; Heb.5:8-10. JESUS is the prime example for us on how we are to think about authority and submission -- to follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to submit to God’s authority with sincere trust and love -- cf. Mark 1:22

* The Spirit in submission to the Father and the Son -- John 16:12-15.

Conclusion: Authority is from God.

2. Authority and submission is also inherent in what the Bible teaches concerning the Kingdom of God: God is the absolute Ruler and King -- He rules over the lives of His citizens/people. Their responsibility is to obey the will of their King

cf. attitudes rooted in SELF -- “my will”, “my way”, etc.

Conclusion: God governs His world with authority.

3. Authorities have been established by God -- see Rom.13:1. Their authority is a delegated authority -- and within defined parameters. Leaders who go beyond those boundaries turn into “tyrants” and seek to control the lives of people in a way that is NOT in keeping with God’s plan, e.g. pastors who try to control the functioning of homes & families; governments and dictators who seek to control what an individual person believes and how he or she is to behave, e.g. within the family.

4. The essential nature of Satan as the adversary is pride -- seeking for his own glory -- the adversary who opposes God -- who rebels against God -- who has set himself up against God’s authority and works to tempt us to follow him in rebellion against God, including by rebelling against the leaders He has appointed. Those who oppose God-appointed leaders -- who refuse to submit to them and follow them -- are in actual fact siding with the devil and cannot bring blessing.

5. What is God’s purpose for a leader’s responsible exercise of authority?

Why “authority”?

Learn from the results or fruits:

1. What happens when leaders exercise authority in a positive manner and followers submit and obey?

* order and harmony, see 1 Tim.2:1-3

* work is accomplished joyfully, cf. Heb.13:17

* God's name is honoured by the witness of His children working together in unity, see John 17:21

2. What happens when leaders govern or lead in an ungodly way or followers rebel?

* chaos

* disharmony and dissension -- a fruit of the sinful nature, see Gal.5:19-21

* the name of the Lord is dishonoured

* the work of the Lord is hindered

* God judges the rebels -- Numbers 12:1-16; 14:1ff.

6. In what ways can we help leaders to lead us well?

1. **Understand and empathise with the struggles and difficulties of leadership.**

2. **Put off wrong attitudes and habits regarding leaders:**

a) Gossip -- either initiating it or listening to it

b) Complaining to team members about the leader's mistakes and faults; also going to your team leader to complain about team problems, team members etc.

c) Seeking to manipulate or control your leader in order to get your own way

3. **Put on right and affirming attitudes towards your leaders:**

a) Accept them as appointed by the Lord

b) Submit to them "in the Lord", even if you think you feel your idea is better than theirs

c) Understand their particular strengths & weaknesses/imperfections -- accept them as they are

d) Have realistic expectations -- understand they are still in the process of growing in grace

e) Pray frequently for your leader

N.B. We bless ourselves when we allow leaders to lead! Read Heb.13:17 again!

4. **Discover right and affirming ways to communicate with your leaders:**

a) Communicate clearly:

Share what you are thinking or considering

Share struggles privately, at the right time & place

Share humbly your ideas or differences of opinions or what may be troubling you (eg. how the leader's comments or words may have hurt you -- though not taking every single hurt

- b) Understand his/her personality type -- be sensitive to approaches that turn a leader off, eg. long preliminaries vs. straight to the point
- c) Express sincere support for your leader -- encourage him whenever & wherever possible
- d) Do not come on heavy, aggressively, emotionally or critically -- if you are feeling very upset & emotional about some issue, then it is advisable to wait until your emotions have cooled before making your approach
- e) Be open to listen to the leader's advice, correction & counsel
- f) Never, ever attack a leader in front of the team

7. How can we face difficult situations with leadership responsibly?

See "Ten Christian responses to Christian leaders".

Several examples of difficult situations:

- a) When your leader appears to make frequent wrong decisions (at least in your eyes)
- c) When you have a leader from a different cultural or denominational background
- c) When your leader is very slow to make a decision or procrastinates often in making a decision

1. Counsel for leaders:

* Search your own heart -- see in criticism even a grain of truth -- be continually willing to learn -- be humble and confess your mistakes freely -- don't defend yourself

* Trust in the Lord to stand behind you and to work things out in time -- He loves and supports His shepherds & leaders

* Do NOT take the situation into your own hands -- and use human strength or force

* Do NOT vindicate yourselves

* Do NOT see the rebellion as primarily against you personally but against the Lord -- they will one day need to give an accounting to Him for their rebellion and failure to submit -- 2 Cor.5:10

* Pray for your followers -- for their attitudes and ways

2. Counsel for followers:

- * Submit and follow by faith trusting in the Lord -- see Col.3:18 -- the connection between submitting to the Lord and submitting to man -- even if you think you know better or your plan seems more likely to succeed
- * Be respectful at all times
- * Affirm and encourage as often as possible
- * Express appreciation generously -- it does miracles for your own work and well-being
- * NEVER set up some sort of opposition group to a leader or become a part of one
- * Share your grievances directly with the leader -- humbly and openly
- * Do NOT follow any human leader if they seek to direct you towards a pathway of sin, e.g. to be false, to lie, to commit fornication or adultery etc. Cf. Acts 4:19-20. God is the higher authority at all times. Our first and ultimate task is to submit to Him and obey His commands
- * Pray for your leader
- * If we cannot or aren't prepared to submit to a leader or a leadership team, be honest with yourself and realise that you may need to seriously think about the consequences -- either you change your attitude or you find a leader or leadership team with whom you can work and to whom you are prepared to submit -- rather than becoming party to a rebellion

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Team life and Relationships with Leaders

Small group discussion

Discuss together the following team life scenarios, seeking to agree together on an appropriate plan of action. Write down your plan of action to be shared with the group later.

What would you do . . .

1. If your country leader appears distant and cold towards you, leaving you feeling as if he doesn't really enjoy having you in his country team?
2. If when you arrive, you find that almost your entire team is talking negatively about your field leader referring to him as a "very poor leader"?
3. If your ministry leader happens to be a lady, and you come from a church and/or cultural background that does not permit women to have leadership over men?
4. If your field leader appears to be a man of few words and doesn't communicate very often with his team except to discuss business?
5. If your leader puts off making decisions leaving you "hanging" and uncertain of what to do?
6. If your team leader appears to favour particular members of his team (leaving you feeling excluded)?

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