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Growing Great
LEADERS

I want to begin this morning by telling you the story of a lady I knew who found herself in her car in the middle of a terrible snow storm, and she became extremely distressed. Suddenly, however, as a snowplow roared passed her, she remembered something her dad had once told her. He said, “If you ever get stuck in a snow storm, wait for a snowplow, and then follow it. So she darted in behind the snowplow and followed it for about 45 minutes. Finally, the driver of the snowplow stopped and got out. Confused, he asked her, “What on earth are you doing, Lady?” She quickly explained to him that, if she ever got stuck in a heavy snow storm, her dad had told her to follow a snow plow. “Oh... ok,” the driver nodded. And then he said, “Well, I’m all done with the Wal-Mart parking lot now; are you gonna follow me over to K-mart?”

What is the point? Simply this: If we are ever going to get anywhere in this life, we have to be very careful whom we follow. If, for example, our leaders are going in circles, so also will the crowd that follows them. As Jesus asks in Luke 6:39, “*Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?*”

At the same time, however, within the church, there are few blessings of the Lord greater than the gift of godly leadership. And although many points could, of course, be made from our text for this morning, I think we will agree that the most obvious lessons we can extract from it are the fundamental importance of church leadership and our great need to pray for our leaders.

-- Read Luke 6:12-16

-- Pray

If you and I really want to know what is truly most important to us, I have what I think is a surefire suggestion. All we have to do is think about the times in our lives when we have prayed most fervently. That is, we need only reflect on those instances of life when we have passionately poured forth in earnest prayer to God. Perhaps it was during financial crisis, indicating the importance of money and security. Perhaps it was during an election year, revealing the importance of government and politics or the love of country. Maybe it was on account of the birth of your children or before getting married, indicating great affection for and concern about family. For those who have been redeemed through faith in Christ Jesus, at least one such occasion must surely be the day on which we truly understood our sin-sick condition and cried out to God for His mercy and the forgiveness that can come only through the finished work of our Lord, Jesus Christ. In any event, the intensity and persistence of our prayers is a sure indication of the desires in our hearts.

Given this litmus test of desire, I think we can safely say that the leadership of His church is of the utmost importance to our Lord. Why? Well, of all of the prayers of Jesus Christ that are recorded in the New Testament, few, if any, surpass the intensity with which He seems to have prayed on this critical night before the morning on which He called the twelve disciples. What is more, all throughout the Gospels, Jesus consistently prays most fervently about two things: The first is His prayers about the cross, and the second is his prayers for these twelve men, who would become the very first leaders of the

church He came to earth to establish. Read with me again verses twelve and thirteen: *“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.”*

From this passage, we are certainly blessed to hear the Holy Spirit piercing our consciences with the paramount importance of leadership in the church, are we not? Since the topic of leadership in the church so clearly occupied a significant place in the heart of Christ, and since the selection of church leadership manifested itself in such an uncommon and intense night of praying, should not the same emphasis in prayer fall heavy upon our own hearts as well?

We need not doubt that there is deep and lasting significance in this special mention of our Lord’s protracted praying on this occasion. Indeed, we can be certain that there is, in this night of prayer, a lasting lesson about leadership to us as the body of Christ. Therefore, if you hear anything from this message today, please hear this: Leadership in the church should and must be a matter for most urgent and earnest prayer. And as we realize the extreme importance of praying for church leadership, I think we are blessed to consider that task in two stages, the first of which is this: First, we ought to...

1.) Pray for leadership to be established.

The simple, yet profound, fact that Christ spent the entire night praying on the night before He selected His disciples is extremely instructive for us today. These men Jesus would select would become the very Apostles, through whom He was going to establish and build His church. Not only that, but they were also the men through whom the Holy Spirit would inspire the writing of the New Testament. These leadership responsibilities, of course, were of the greatest possible importance, and, therefore, Jesus gave the process of selecting these leaders the greatest possible attention in prayer. And so it should also be for us. For even today, Christ is calling people to lead His people, and, if we would be imitators of Him, then we must faithfully and fervently pray about their selection. If we would be like Christ, then we ought to be earnestly asking God to raise up from within us godly, effective leaders and put those leaders in positions where they will bring Him the greatest glory.

Thus, as we read about Jesus’ protracted night of praying in verse 12, I pray that we will all recognize the obvious implications it makes about the fundamental importance of choosing church leadership very carefully, because of all the many problems and daunting challenges facing the church of Jesus Christ in this nation, I don’t suppose any of them is as severe as the problem of unbiblical leadership. But, hold on, you might say, “What about the infiltration of unbiblical morality into the church; isn’t that the biggest problem?” Or, “What about all of the divisiveness among the followers of Christ, isn’t that more severe an issue?” Another might object, saying “No, our lack of passion for the Gospel and our paltry concern for lost souls is the biggest problem facing the church today,” or “Our arrogant disregard and diminishing of God’s Word is at the heart of the church’s problems in Western culture.”

And to all of these, I would say, I agree. All of these are major challenges facing the church at large and pitfalls that we, as the body of Christ in Carmi, IL, must ardently and wholeheartedly avoid. However, as terrible as they are, I am still not sure that any one of those issues is as serious a threat to a given congregation as poor, unbiblical leadership.

Think about it: Even if unholy, secular morality attempts to sneak its way into our church (which, by the way, is happening in churches everywhere all the time), if those in leadership know God’s Word, if the leaders love God’s standards, and if they are united in wholehearted determination to be holy as God is Holy, then, by God’s grace, unbiblical morality will be allowed no foothold and the truth of Christ shall triumph. The can also be true of divisiveness, paltry evangelism, and incorrectly handling God’s Word. Now, as I say that, please understand that even the very best leaders of any church will never be perfect in

this life because they are human. However, if they are truly qualified by God with holy character and spiritual maturity, and if they remain vigilant in their duties, then that church will be just as surely blessed by God with a mission that is being accomplished for His glory. Should we not, therefore, cry out to God, asking Him to show us whom he has called to lead us and imploring Him to bless those leaders with every skill and ability to be used of Him for the glory of His kingdom?

For, just as certainly as godly leaders are one of the greatest blessings God gives His people, so too the peril of many churches is a whimsical, ungrounded approach to establishing leadership.

-- Being on the nominating committee at FBC in Laramie

-- The criteria for selecting leaders were expedience and convenience, not God's Word and prayer.

Brothers and sisters, this absolutely must not be the case with us. We know, do we not, that God's Word gives us instruction about how to establish church leadership? God has set forth requirements, not suggestions, about the character of those who would lead. Not only that, but, over the past few weeks, have we not also studied, the prolonged, passionate prayerfulness with which Jesus approached the selection of the Apostles?

Oh, let us, then, never be impulsive, erratic, or half-hearted about the task of appointing leaders within our fellowship. Rather, let us turn to God's Word and do our very best to honor the requirements there listed. Let us pray for our leaders, and never capriciously appoint people in the absence of prayer. Let me ask you: Is it our sincere desire to be used of God to move forward in the mission He has given us in a pure and undefiled way? Then let us never forget to pray that God will establish among us the leaders He has chosen for our congregation, and for our denomination, and for the cause of Christ all around the world.

Now, please understand that in highlighting this need, I do not in any way mean to imply that I believe we currently have a major leadership problem in our church. No, quite the contrary. In fact, I find myself frequently thanking God and praising Him in my prayers for blessing me and this congregation with such a devoted, godly group of deacons, with whom I have the privilege to pray, plan, and minister. In addition, I thank Him for all of our teachers, committee members, and other volunteers who walk in God's Word. However, I do mean to suggest strongly that if we fail to be faithful to the biblical means by which God has commanded us to establish leadership—that is by the requirements of Scripture and through faithful prayer—consequences will surely be close behind. Let us, then, pray for leadership to be established.

Not only so, but let us also...

2.) Pray for leadership to be empowered.

To illustrate this point, please look with me at verse 13-16:

“When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.”

One of the very first things we might notice about this list is that it is comprised of remarkably ordinary men. Look at it and notice that there are no wealthy men mentioned here, nor are there any men listed here who were, at that time, famous or influential. These men had no special education. Not one of them was a Pharisee, nor a priest, nor a teacher of the law, nor were any of them rulers or elders among the people. Listen to the response given to these Apostles by the religious leaders of their day in Acts

4:13: “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” You see, in reality, there was nothing special at all about them... except for the fact that these twelve ordinary men had been called to action by our extraordinary God. Through their selection, it is almost as if Jesus was saying, “Give me twelve ordinary men, and I will change the world.”

Could it be any clearer, then, that the ability to lead the church for the glory of Jesus Christ does not ultimately reside in the hands of men whom the world calls great? No, the power for leadership in the church rests in the grace of God working through ordinary people whom He calls and empowers. The kingdom of God is simply not dependent upon the strength of this world. As Zechariah 4:6 declares: “*This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.*” You see, authentic power for the church comes not from people, but from the Spirit who empowers His people. In other words, the power to lead and succeed comes from God and not from us.

Allow me to state this in everyday examples. In a practical sense, this truth means that any power that I, as your pastor, have to preach the Word of God for your benefit and for God’s glory comes solely from His Spirit at work within me, and certainly not from myself. Similarly, any power that our deacons have to chart the direction and vision of this church and to meet the needs of this congregation is not something they gather from within themselves. On the contrary, it must be something that they receive as a gift from God. The same principle holds true for committee members, Sunday school teachers, LIFE Group leaders, and the leaders of our men’s, women’s, and children’s ministries. The strength to lead comes only from God. 2 Corinthians 4:7 puts it this way: “*But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shine within us—is held in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own.*” Therefore, we must pray for our leaders and workers to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

(Summary)

I pray that we can now see why it so very imperative that we all gather together in faithful prayer for leadership // Can I ask you this morning to commit to doing just that for the glory of God? Will you pray for me? Will you pray for Brad? Are you currently devoted to praying for our deacons, our committee members, our teachers, and ministry leaders? Will you so devote yourself to prayer today?

-- Make use of the Scripture Prayers for leadership in our Prayer Journals.

Can I please implore you to be faithful to the model Christ has given us and pray for our church leaders? Let us all pray that God will graciously establish leaders among us and empower them to lead us into His marvelous mission for our lives and the life of our church.