

## [511: A Bad Leader Can Teach You to Be a Good One](#)

Have you ever been in a bad situation, one from which you could not escape or see any reason for being there? I have and so did King David. We have been talking about servant-leadership these past few weeks, so let's continue with that theme as we discuss the answer to the question I raised.

### **A BAD LEADER**

We can all agree that King Saul wasn't a good leader. While he started strong, he ended miserably. Saul quickly became David's nemesis after David had served under his command. While David faithfully served Saul, the king was increasingly envious of David and actually tried to kill David on three separate occasions. When that failed, Saul spent years using the armies that should have been devoted to fighting the Philistines to try and hunt down David.

Although David knew he was to be the next king, he had to endure persecution at the hands of the current king. Many urged David to take matters into his own hands to remove Saul and some tried to act on David's behalf. David resisted each temptation to do so, choosing rather to wait for God to put him on the throne rather than put himself there.

Why did God put David in such a position? Why did David suffer so long at the hands of a man whom God had rejected as king? What was God doing during that time?

It's clear what God was doing. God was teaching David how to lead from the firsthand example of a bad leader. David learned more about leadership from Saul than from anyone else. What did he learn? He learned how *not* to lead!

Could this be the answer to your current dilemma, which finds you far away from the fulfillment of a purpose that you understand and think you are ready to embrace?

### **TALK IS CHEAP.**

There are many who say, "If I was in charge, this would happen or that would not happen." That kind of talk sounds good. Even the leaders in Jesus' day said the same thing:

["And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets" \(Matthew 23:30\).](#)

The problem is that this talk is cheap. If you don't decide what kind of servant-leader you will be *before* you have money and power, you are doomed to replicate the same miserable leadership style that you had to endure to become a leader yourself. You don't believe me? Read what Jesus said in response to those potential leaders:

["Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue them from town to town." \(Matthew 23:34\).](#)

God will eventually give you a chance to lead, just he did David. David learned his lessons well and decided what kind of leader he was going to be while Saul was still pursuing him. What's more important, David actually became that kind of leader. He learned his lessons well. Jesus' contemporaries duplicated the same mistakes of the past because they didn't learn good leadership skills from their bad leaders. When they refused to learn, they were doomed to repeat history.

Why are you where you are right now? Why is your situation so tough? Part of the reason may be so that you will learn how *not* to lead when you finally get the chance. If people are being stingy with you, learn to be generous now. If no one expresses thanks to you now, remember how it feels and say thank you when you are in charge.

If that's what God is teaching you, then you can embrace your current situation more enthusiastically because it's simply part of your servant-learning training. When you learn the lesson, God will move you on. Just don't be guilty of saying today that things will be different when you are in charge. Make it happen tomorrow when you have the chance. If and when you do that, the hard lessons of these days will be well worth the price you are paying to become the servant-leader that God wants you to be. Have a great week!

## **512: A Promise Kept, A Lesson Learned**

Have you ever wondered why you endured such difficult lessons at the hands of poor leaders? We discussed that last week when I showed how King David learned more about leadership from King Saul than from anyone else - he learned how *not* to lead. Yet there is no guarantee that you won't be a tyrant even though you suffered at the hands of one. Let's look to see whether or not David learned his lesson and became a servant-leader after serving a dictator.

### **A PROMISE KEPT**

When David became king, he inquired if there were any descendants of Saul still alive whom he could bless: [“Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” \(2 Samuel 9:1\)](#). This was a dangerous question, for most kings would seek out the relatives of the former king to kill them to avoid any rivals claiming the throne. We don't have to read long to discover David's true motives when he found that there was a man named Mephibosheth who was Saul's grandson:

[“Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.” Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?” Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul’s steward, and said to him, “I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master’s grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table.” \(Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.\) Then Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table like one of the king’s sons. Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba’s household were servants of Mephibosheth. And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table; he was lame in both feet \(2 Samuel 9:7-13\).](#)

David fulfilled his vow to Jonathan by being a blessing to Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, who was lame in both feet. David had all the power in the world, but he used that power not to build his own kingdom but to help others share in his kingdom. That is the difference between servant-leaders and dictators. Even if you are a kinder, gentler dictator, you are still a command-and-control leader. You cannot empower others if you keep your power to yourself or use it to build your own kingdom.

### **A LESSON LEARNED**

David remembered what it was like to be persecuted at the hands of Saul, but he did not repeat the mistakes of the past. He made a bold break with the common mindset of leadership in his day and forged a new path. David did this in part because of his vow of friendship to Jonathan who lost his life being loyal to Saul, his father. He did it also because he had learned a painful lesson at the hands of a poor leader and David determined that he was going to be a good one.

The choice is yours, but the time to decide is now. If you are a leader, are you being true to the leadership lessons you learned from despots in your past? If you are not a leader yet, don't wait until you have money and power to decide what kind of leader you will be. David made a promise when he had no power or position, and when he had both, he was true to his vow. I implore you to follow his lead and decide right here and right now that you will be a servant-leader. Like David, you need to break with the traditional mindset of modern leadership thinking and go a new way. Have a great week!

## **513: Persuasive Power**

Greetings from Kenya! I am in the country for a few weeks, along with a team of ten from my church in the States. I am leading the team but also serving them by using all my expertise and experience to make this trip a memorable one for them. In other words, I am a servant-leader on this trip. There is no question who is in charge, yet my leadership comes from a position of service and experience, not power.

We have looked at Jesus, David and Timothy as models of servant-leadership. This week, let's look at the Apostle Paul.

### **"I COULD ORDER YOU"**

Paul wrote a short letter to a man named Philemon about a runaway slave named Onesimus. It seems that Onesimus ran away from Philemon his owner and became a believer in the meantime. Paul was writing because he was sending Onesimus back to Philemon, but he wanted Philemon to receive the former slave not as a slave but as a brother. It is not clear why Paul was sending Onesimus back, but his wish was clear: He wanted Onesimus to return a free man and not a slave. Let's read what Paul wrote to understand how Paul acted as a servant-leader on this issue:

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you.

I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask (Philemon 8-21).

### **PERSUASIVE POWER**

Paul could have ordered Philemon to do what he was asking, but he preferred rather to appeal and persuade. That is a key trait of servant-leaders. They have power but they use it sparingly. They are not reminding people who is in charge, but allowing people room to make their own decisions based on the facts. This does not mean that servant-leaders are "soft," and that everyone gets to do what he or she wants in a particular situation. It simply means that servant-leaders understand that their leadership power exists to empower others and not establish the leader's authority, position and legacy. They use their position to persuade so that people grow and learn to make their own decisions rather than relying on what leaders command them to do.

Servant-leaders prefer to persuade people of the rightness of their decisions and allow time for people to arrive at their own conclusions, without coercion and force. It may take longer, but the results are much better than the command-and-control methods employed by many. This does require faith, however, for the servant-leader must believe in the rightness of his or her decision, but have faith that the God who convinced him or her can also convince the followers.

What is your style of leadership? What style would you like to have? I choose the path of the servant-leader because I have seen the results of leaders who do not serve and they are often detrimental to the growth of the followers. I urge you today to consider developing a servant-leadership style, not just when it is convenient, but as a lifestyle and leadership philosophy. Have a great week!

## **514: My Leadership Philosophy**

Do you have a leadership philosophy? Have you outlined a set of values that will guide your decisions as a leader? We have been discussing servant-leadership the last eight weeks, and now it's time to ask yourself, "How will I apply what I have learned?" To help you do that, let me share with you how servant-leadership has impacted my life and work.

### **MY LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY**

In 1999, I wrote down this leadership philosophy to guide my leadership role and duties:

I was born to lead, but I work hard to be the best leader that I can possibly be. I exercise a team approach to leadership that values the input and worth of every individual. As a leader, I share finances, success and credit with all those who contribute. I also serve others so that they can become all that God wants them to be, using any power I have to empower them. I do this without concern for my title, remuneration or recognition. I look for ways to influence and persuade others without resorting to power tactics or manipulative techniques.

Can you see the principles we have outlined the last two months in that statement? That paragraph for me is not just something I put down on paper and forgot about. It is a living document that has directed all I do.

There are two primary activities that emerged from my leadership philosophy and those are writing and teaching. I found those two consistent with the kind of leader I want to be. Both involve persuasion and empowering others. When I write, the reader is free to read or not read, to agree or disagree. They can obtain an insight from my writing that works on them over time without me standing over them, insisting that they agree with my insight. They may also take what I write and re-write it without giving me credit for the original idea.

When I teach in a classroom, there is some power involved, for I ultimately assign a grade that signifies how well the student has grasped the material. Yet even there, I have worked to be vulnerable, open to dialog and disagreement, and non-authoritarian in my approach to learning. I put time into making my presentations entertaining and informative, something that people look forward to attending.

Of course, my seminars have been a different story, for there no grade is assigned. People can learn or not learn, approve or not approve of what I teach. I assume full responsibility to have seminar content that enriches those who attend. I always want to give people more than they expected they would receive.

### **AND NOW YOURS**

Do you have a leadership philosophy, one that is written down that you can look at from time to time? If you are a leader, don't assume you are applying what you know to be right and true. Write it down and show it to others, asking them whether or not you are living up to your own standards. If you aren't yet a leader, all the more reason to define what kind of leader you will be now, before you have money, power or fame.

Don't get hung up on writing a philosophy that is in a correct format or has a certain number of points. Just jot down concepts that describe what kind of leader you will be. It may be longer or shorter than mine, it may include some of my values or it may not. The most important thing is that you spell out how the principles of servant-leadership will guide your path in the coming years.

There is a leadership crisis in the world today and there is only one thing you can do about it. Become a better leader, a different leader, and then inspire others to do the same. That is what I have done and you are reading this as a result. Can you allow God to work these principles in you and then can you have the courage to apply them, when most others choose a different leadership path? I hope you can, but all I know is that I am committed to this leadership style and will continue to perfect it as God gives me grace to do so. Have a great week!

## **515: Pharaoh Was A Servant-Leader, Part 1**

When I mention Pharaoh, who comes to mind? It's probably the Pharaoh Moses encountered in the book of Exodus. That Pharaoh, however, isn't the one I want to focus on, for there is one Pharaoh in the Bible who was a great example of a servant-leader. I am referring to the one who was Joseph's contemporary in Genesis 37-50. It may surprise you, but this Pharaoh was one of the best leaders in the Bible and has something to teach us about servant-leadership! Here's why.

### **EGYPT IN JOSEPH'S TIMES**

Egypt in Joseph's times was the most powerful nation in the world. Pharaoh had oversight over a large population and army. When Joseph first arrived, Egypt prospered and there was no end in sight. Yet, God was doing something that would shape history for centuries to come. He wanted to move His people, Abraham's family, to Egypt from where they would make their exodus back to the Promised Land centuries later.

To accomplish that purpose, God sent Joseph ahead of his family to Egypt on a mission. While Egypt enjoyed their prosperity, Joseph was imprisoned – and then the drama played out that led to Pharaoh's famous doubleheader dreams. If you remember, Pharaoh had two dreams, one where seven gaunt cows devoured seven fat cows, the other where seven lean heads of grain consumed seven healthy heads. Joseph helped Pharaoh understand that these dreams indicated seven years of famine would follow seven years of plenty.

The period leading up to the dream, the dream interpretation and the dream application all give us valuable lessons for servant-leadership that we would do well to emulate.

### **PHARAOH'S LEADERSHIP LESSONS**

Take the time to read [Genesis 40:1-5, 20-23](#); [41:1-4, 33-57](#); [47:1-4](#). What can we learn about Pharaoh from these passages? (We will look at five lessons this week and five next week. That will give you time to read the passages above and to reflect on what you read. Or you can go to my website and read all ten lessons at one time [here](#).)

**1. Pharaoh wasn't afraid to lead his people.** When Pharaoh had his dreams, there were no problems in Egypt. There was plenty of food and he learned from Joseph and his dream that there would be seven more

years of plenty. The famine wasn't even close to starting, but Pharaoh made firm decisions concerning the future. He began to prepare for the famine seven years in advance of its coming. What's your seven-year plan for your organization? Your life? Do you even have one?

**2. Pharaoh made quick decisions when he found the right person.** There was no procrastination when Pharaoh decided to act. Too often, leaders hesitate to gather more information. Pharaoh knew he had found a "star" in Joseph and acted quickly to secure his services and wisdom. Good people are hard to find. When you find them, hire them! You will still have to manage them or else you will eventually have a mess on your hands. Delegation doesn't mean abdication of responsibility. It means you hold your team accountable for results, but don't micromanage the process.

**3. Pharaoh understood personnel issues and effectively used probation, restoration and release.** In Genesis 40, Pharaoh was angry with his cupbearer and his baker. Rather than "fire" them immediately, however, he took time to reflect on the situation. Too often, leaders can let personality conflicts or misunderstandings affect the relationships with the management team. Pharaoh could make quick decisions when needed, and I am sure he had a temper. In the case of these two "employees," however, he waited one year. In some sense, he put them on probation. After a period of time, he "released" (all right, he executed) the baker and restored the cupbearer.

Don't let your personal preferences regarding personnel issues rob your organization of its best talent. Learn to establish a "cooling off" period before making final decisions. Let the employees or team members know that they are on probation. Then when you've made your final decision about the future, don't linger any longer. Make it known to everyone. It is significant that, using this process, Pharaoh made the best choice, for the restored cupbearer was the one who introduced Pharaoh to Joseph, the man with the plan.

**4. Pharaoh spent time with his team.** Pharaoh restored the cupbearer at his own birthday party that he held for his officials. The king of Egypt spent social time with his leadership team! It appears that they also talked some business while they met. It seems that Pharaoh never had his officials too far away from him at any point in time, so he could get their feedback and input. How close are you to your "team"? You don't have to be their friend, but you do need to be their partner and associate.

**5. Pharaoh partnered with his opposite.** Pharaoh didn't fill his staff with people like him. He brought in some "opposites." Pharaoh was obviously a visionary; he therefore hired a good operations man in Joseph to carry out the day-to-day plans of the kingdom. Partnering with your opposite can be difficult, for they see reality and life in contrast to your viewpoint. They can, however, see what you can't (and vice versa), however, thus strengthening the team through diversity and friendly dissent. Over the years,

I have worked at not just tolerating people who aren't like me, but celebrating them! I need people who don't think or look like me to build an effective team (that means women and persons of color). How diverse is your team? If your family member fits this need and has the skills, then employ them. If they don't, spare your organization the pain of a bad hire by not employing them.

There you have the first five servant-leadership lessons from the story of Joseph's Pharaoh. Read and study the passages I mentioned this week and then tune in next week for the next five lessons from this outstanding leader, one who understood that servant-leadership was the best manner in which he could lead his people.

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Read the last eight entries on servant-leadership [here](#).