

PITFALLS OF LEADERSHIP

SUMMARY: To be an effective leader, you must avoid the pitfalls of leadership, which are the honor and dishonor of men.

Several years ago, a pastor in **Valparaiso, Indiana**, started visiting a man in the local nursing home. The man was a **VIP**, one who had been instrumental in starting the major industry in town. When he died, his family asked the pastor to do the funeral service. He was nervous, because he knew his church would be packed with dignitaries.

But the service went well, and on their way to the cemetery, he began turning in his Bible to the passage he was going to read at the graveside. While he was turning to **1 Corinthians 15**, the funeral director asked him a question. The pastor could tell he was impressed with the funeral message. In fact, the funeral director asked several questions, and the pastor answered each one.

The pastor was starting to feel pretty good about himself. After all, the funeral director had listened to hundreds of funeral services, and he singled out his as one of the best.

With that on the pastor's mind, he stood at the head of the casket with the family and friends of the deceased in front of him. He asked them to listen to the words of Scripture. Then he read with a sense of dignity **1 Corinthians 5:1** — **"It is reported commonly that there are fornicators among you!"** (Michael Hartwig of Valparaiso, Indiana, Leadership, Vol.19, No.3).

Pride goes before a fall, every single time! It is one of the pitfalls of leadership — whether it is in the church, the family, or the community. You do an adequate job. People tell you, **"You're the greatest."** If you are not careful, you start believing that stuff. A lot of leaders fall, because they start believing their own press reports. If you are in leadership, that's one of the things you have to watch out for. You have to...

WATCH OUT FOR THE HONOR OF MEN

Be careful of people's praise. Beware lest their admiration leads to pride.

If you have your Bibles, I invite you to turn with me to **1 Timothy 3**, where we see some of the pitfalls of leadership.

1 Timothy 3:6 — He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil (NIV).

Here, it is very clear: leadership is not for novices. It's not for those who are immature in the faith. Leadership, and especially leadership in the church, has to be reserved for those who have grown in their faith.

When I was planting churches, I made it a point to join a service club in the community where we were as a way to get to connect with people and serve them. Most of those service clubs had an unwritten rule like the **Kiwanis Club** I joined in central Kansas. We joked about it all the time in the club. It goes like this: Join Kiwanis this year, become president next year. You see, there are a lot of busy people in those clubs. So when somebody new shows up, the members of the club are

anxious to put the new guy in a position of responsibility. Why? Because nobody else has the time to do it.

Sad to say, the church is often run the same way. Church people are so busy (or so tired or both), that when somebody new shows up he or she is quickly drafted to fill a leadership position.

That's not good, because spiritual maturity takes time. Full-grown oaks are not produced in three years; neither are good quality leaders. Spiritual maturity takes time, and spiritual maturity takes improvement over time.

There was a woman who had been a school teacher for **25** years. When she heard about a job that would mean a promotion, she applied for the position. However, someone who had been teaching for only one year was hired instead. She went to the principal and asked why. The principal responded, **"I'm sorry, but you haven't had 25 years of experience as you claim; you've had only one year's experience 25 times."** During that whole time the teacher had not improved (**Bible Illustrator #995-996; 10/1989.8**).

There are some people, who have been Christians for 25 years, but during that whole time they have never really improved; they have never really applied the Bible to their own lives.

Ethel Barrett in her book **IT ONLY HURTS WHEN I LAUGH**, talks about **D. L. Moody** when he first became a Christian. At that time he developed such a hunger for God's Word, spent so much time reading it, and was so quick to obey it that he became a **"menace"** to some of the believers. His rapid spiritual growth was an embarrassment to certain people who, though they had been saved for years, never grew up in Christ.

Week after week in the church Moody attended, he would share a new experience he had with the Lord. Finally, some of the older saints who just couldn't stand feeling humiliated by his exemplary life, went to Moody's uncle and urged him to quiet down his nephew.

Ethel Barrett drew this conclusion about Moody: **"His robust spiritual health and bounding energy disturbed their napping; he was just too much. So, while they were sucking their thumbs, he was growing until he left them far behind; he grew more in a few years than they did in thirty."** (**Ethel Barrett, It Only Hurts When I Laugh; Bible Illustrator #995-996**)

Spiritual maturity takes time. But it takes improvement over time — not just the same experience year after year.

Where are you at as a believer today? Are you a NEW baby Christian? — Great! Welcome to the family! Are you an OLD baby Christian? — Not so great. But don't stay where you are. Begin today to apply God's Word to your life — Read it, study it, and obey it. Leave the baby stuff behind and press on to maturity.

Then and only then will you be able to take on leadership responsibility. Then and only then will you be able to help others grow in their faith. Only the spiritually mature are qualified to lead.

It's too dangerous for anyone else, because being in charge can make a person proud. Control can breed conceit, and conceit always leads to condemnation. Pride always goes before a fall.

1 Timothy 3:6 — He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil (NIV).

What happened to the Devil? He was at one time the highest archangel in heaven. He was in charge of all the other angels in heaven. God put him in the highest position of leadership there was. But that wasn't good enough for the devil. He thought he was better than that. In fact, He thought he could have God's position. When he went after it, God kicked him out of heaven.

Power is a dangerous thing to handle, even in spiritual matters.

Lord Acton, a 19th Century Historian, once noted: **Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.** In other words, pride goes before a fall every time.

Fred Smith, a world-class leader in industry, government and the church, once said, **"A true leader is committed to the cause, and does not become the cause. Staying personally dedicated to the cause can become extremely difficult, particularly if the cause succeeds. A subtle change in thinking can overtake the leader of a successful ministry. He or she begins 'needing' certain things to carry on the ministry — things that were not needed earlier."**

Then he writes, **"I admire Mother Teresa, who decided after winning the Nobel Prize that she would not go to accept any more recognition because it interfered with her work. She knew she was not in the business of accepting prizes; she was in the business of serving the poor of Calcutta. She maintained her dedication to the cause by refusing unrelated honors.** (Fred Smith, "Learning to Lead," Christianity Today, 1986, p.29).

When we forget the cause and start living for the applause, then we get into trouble. If you're a leader or if you want to be, then watch out for the honor and praise of men. More than that...

WATCH OUT FOR THE DISHONOR OF MEN, too.

Be careful lest you be disgraced. Beware lest your actions bring you shame.

1 Timothy 3:7 — He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap (NIV).

You see, all the devil wants to do is capture and control us even as he gives us the illusion that we are in charge.

Craig Larson talks about being at a lunch party on a warm, **Chicago** day in early September with a dozen of his fellow workers. The windows were left open, and soon a bee found its way in. After buzzing around for a while, it landed on some food on the table. Then someone took an empty bottle of sparkling grape juice and put the mouth of the bottle near the bee. Without a moment's hesitation, the bee flew to the mouth of the bottle and climbed inside the narrow opening. Immediately, Larson's colleague put the cap on the bottle and screwed it shut. The bee spent the rest of the party drinking at the bottom of the bottle, and as far as anyone knew, the bee was never released. (**Craig Brian Larson, www.preachingtoday.com**)

The people at that table were not concerned about the bee. Their purpose was not to make sure it enjoyed itself and had a good time. No! Their only concern was capture and control.

That's the way it is with Satan. He is not concerned about us. His purpose is not to make sure we have a good time. No! He despises us, and his only concern is capture and control.

Please, don't forget that when he tempts you with illicit pleasure outside the bounds of God's Word. If we choose to enjoy that pleasure, then we are walking into Satan's trap. It will not lead to joy and delight. It will lead to pain and disgrace.

Many of you have enjoyed the writings of **Mark Twain** — his **Huckleberry Finn** and other such stories. What some of you might not know is that Mark Twain was hostile to the Bible and the Christian faith.

Do you know what drove him away from Christ? Elders and deacons who owned slaves and abused them. Mark Twain heard these elders speak piously in church on Sunday. Then he heard them using foul language and saw them cheat others during the week.

He listened to preachers using the Bible to justify slavery. And even though he saw genuine love for the Lord in some people, especially his mother and his wife, he was so disturbed by the bad teaching and poor example of church leaders that he became bitter toward the things of God. They drove him away from the faith. **(Bible Illustrator #1790; 10/1987.5)**

Their reputation brought them reproach, and Satan reaped the benefits. If you are a leader or aspire to leadership, please guard your reputation; please watch out for the dishonor that comes when you stop living for the Lord.

Now don't get me wrong. We're not talking about perfection here. Most certainly. We're not saying a leader should never be criticized. Anybody who's been in any leadership position for any length of time knows that criticism comes with the territory.

We're not talking about criticism here; we're talking about **character**. So live your life in such a way that even though people might criticize some of your decisions, even though people might criticize your performance at times, live your life in such a way that they have no basis to malign your character.

Babe Ruth was certainly a leader in his field. He hit **714** home runs during his baseball career, but toward the end he was not as good as he had been. During one of his last major league games he fumbled the ball and threw badly. In one inning alone, his errors were responsible for five opposing runs.

As Babe Ruth walked off the field after that inning, booing and catcalls cascaded from the stands. Just then a young boy jumped over the railing onto the playing field. With tears streaking his cheeks, he threw his arms around the legs of his hero. Ruth didn't hesitate. He picked up the boy, hugged him, and set him down on his feet with a playful pat on the head. Suddenly the booing stopped. In fact, a hush fell over the entire park. In those brief moments, the crowd saw a different kind of hero: a man who in spite of a dismal day on the field could still care about a little boy.

(Adapted from Alfred Kolatch in *Guideposts*, August 1974, *Leadership*, Vol. 4, no. 1; BI# 4289-4300; 12/1997.1295).

You see, it's character that counts even more than your accomplishments.

So if you aspire to the heights, then watch out for the pitfalls. If you want to lead, then watch out for the honor and the dishonor of men.

Steve Green, who sang six years with **Bill** and **Gloria Gaither**, tells about getting to know some of the work crews in the large auditoriums where their concerts were held. The Gaithers prefer concerts-in-the-round, which means extra work for the "riggers," who walk the four-inch rafter beams — often a hundred feet above the concrete floor. Their job is to hang the sound speakers and spotlights. For such work, understandably, they are very well paid.

Steve Green says, "The fellows I talked to weren't bothered by the sight of looking down a hundred feet." "What they didn't like, they said, were jobs in buildings that had false ceilings — acoustical tile slung just a couple of feet below the rafters. They were still high in the air, and if they slipped, their weight would smash right through the flimsy tile. But their minds seemed to play tricks on them, lulling them into carelessness."

Satan's business is not so much in scaring us to death as persuading us that the danger of a spiritual fall is minimal. No wonder God's word warns us, "**Be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour**" (1 Peter 5:8). (*Leadership*, Vol. 6, no. 1; *Bible Illustrator* #3153; 12/1997.1147).

If you aspire to the heights, then watch out lest Satan bring you down.

SOURCE — Philip Green