

LEADERSHIP PROFILE — NEW TESTAMENT STYLE

by Frederick J. Finks

What are the necessary qualities that enable some pastors to grow large and healthy congregations while others struggle along in failing pastorates barely able to meet the pastor's salary and pay the electric bill? It is my belief that the old adage "Leaders are born, not made," is totally erroneous. Let me state at the outset to avoid any misunderstanding that there is no magical scheme that will transform overnight an ordinary pastor into a "Super Church-Growth Giant," nor are there any phone-booth secrets where a quick change artist can emerge as a caped crusader for God, ready to right all the wrongs of the world. There are likewise both pastors and churches that can not and will not grow — some because of location and disease, others because they are not willing to pay the price involved in growth. I do believe, however, that there are certain characteristics that can be adapted by any pastor who is serious about growth. Each pastor will need to make adjustments and corrections depending upon his own personality and make-up.

Harold J. Fickett asserts, "There are three requirements for a good program within the church. The first is leadership, the second is leadership, and the third is leadership."¹

Leadership is crucial and there is no way to deny its importance. Take any group of two or more and observe the interaction. Someone will assume the leadership position if no one is appointed and will become the recognized leader of the group.

In many churches across America today there is a lack of effective leadership. The result, and in many cases the primary reason for ineffective leadership, is "in-house" struggles. The pastor, the deacon board, the trustees, etc., are all seeking power positions. In healthy churches, leadership has been earned and the respect for authority has become accepted. "In America, the primary catalytic factor for growth in a local church is the pastor."² "There is no substitute for dynamic, aggressive, positive, inspiring leadership! Almost without exception, the lack of success means the lack of effective leadership."³

This is not to say that the pastor is the only key to a growing church. In fact, quite the opposite is true. But he is vitally important and considered to be the single most important factor. There are certain characteristics and approaches in ministry that support the foundation for growth and enhance the leadership ability of

pastors. These areas include spiritual renewal, spiritual gifts, and leadership style.

Spiritually Renewed

Many pastors today would readily admit that they have often felt unworthy to be involved in ministry. "It is normal for the pastor of a growing church to deny that he is a primary key to growth. For one thing, this is due to sincere Christian humility. These pastors are men of God."⁴ God, for some unknown reason, has entrusted mankind with all its weaknesses and imperfections to carry forth the perfect plan of God. It was with Peter's simple statement "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"⁵ that Jesus said he would build His church and not even the gates of hell could overpower it.

Thus God continues to look for people to lead His church — people who will be renewed and committed to the ongoing proclamation of His Word. It is crucial that these leaders be in tune with God. Failure to do so invites disaster. The task of ministry is so unlike any other occupation known to man. . . .

We dare not measure spiritual success by worldly standards. What is a successful ministry? In other vocations, the success of a man is usually measured in terms of the visible results which he is able to produce, the esteem in which he is held by his colleagues, the salary which his services are able to command. In spiritual ministry, we dare not apply the usual formula. It is not what my colleagues think of me that counts, but what does God think of me? . . . Basically and ultimately, there is only one criterion of success. Am I fulfilling the will of God in my life?⁶

Spiritual renewal is therefore one of the most important characteristics of the spiritual qualifications necessary for ministry. The dangers that face the pastor who is out of tune with God will result in failure and frustration.

J.I. Packer presents a three-phased approach to bring renewal and a growing relationship with God.

First, knowing God is a matter of personal dealing, as is all direct acquaintance with personal beings. Knowing God is more than knowing about Him; it is a matter of dealing with Him as He opens up to you, and being dealt with by Him as He takes knowledge of you. . . .

Second, knowing God is a matter of personal involvement, in mind, will and feeling. It would not, indeed, be a fully personal relationship otherwise. To get to know another person, you have to commit yourself with his concerns. . . .

Then, third, knowing God is a matter of grace. It is a relationship in which the initiative throughout is with God as it must be, since God is so completely above us and we have so completely forfeited

all claim on His favour by our sins. We do not make friends with God; God makes friends with us, bringing us to know Him by making His love known to us.⁷

Personal renewal comes by opening up oneself before the Living God and by making a commitment for a personal encounter with God to discover His will, His direction, and His leadership for ministry. It is not a one-shot encounter. It is a constant, everyday involvement. Spiritual renewal offers both encouragement and a renewed sense of worth. Effective leadership is spiritual leadership. It is not going it alone. It is not trusting in human knowledge, personality, gifts or abilities, rather it is trusting in God, being led by Him, receiving His gifts and incorporating them into the Church with God's blessing.

Spiritual Gifts

A second characteristic of the successful pastor centers around the concept of spiritual gifts. What exactly is a spiritual gift? "A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ according to God's grace for use within the context of the Body."⁸

Briefly, spiritual gifts are characteristics enhanced by the direction of God, given to all believers for the uplifting and unifying of the church. Spiritual gifts are not given for self-glorification, nor for individual use apart from the body. They are given to support the body, to make it more rounded. Individual spiritual gifts complement one another as they are practiced corporately. Spiritual gifts are important if the church is to be equipped for effective ministry.

The use of spiritual gifts has often been severely limited. No doubt the main reason lies in the failure of the church to teach persons about spiritual gifts. Another reason lies with each Christian's failure to search out his own particular gifts.

The largest accounting of spiritual gifts is found in Paul's letters: Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. For this study on leadership, the passage that best applies is that of Ephesians 4: "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."⁹

The *apostles* were recognized by the early church as those who had been with Christ and, as such, were his representatives commanding authority. They possessed the Spirit of God in that they performed signs and wonders, were responsible for healing, and spoke boldly of the resurrection of Christ. They were responsible

for spreading out from Jerusalem with the gospel, for beginning new churches, and for choosing men to do the work of ministry.

The *evangelists* were those who proclaimed Christ's message to those who would hear and become disciples. Philip, an apostle, was instructed by an angel of the Lord to go to a desert road in Gaza. Here Philip encountered the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Philip preached unto him the words of Christ, whereupon the Ethiopian requested baptism. Following this, "Philip found himself in Azotus; and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea."¹⁰

The *pastor*, or *pastor-teacher* as some refer to him, is one who is directly responsible for the care and shepherding of a body of believers. The pastor has two main responsibilities: guarding himself lest he fall into sin and shepherding the flock.

These gifts of leadership mentioned in Ephesians 4 were given ". . . for the equipping of the saints for the work of service." This meant that the apostles were to be responsible for training others to lead. Effective leadership was shared leadership where other believers were given the responsibility, along with the apostles, to participate in the work and ministry of the church.

As seen through this very limited search of the Scriptures, leadership in the early Church was placed in the hands of spiritually capable men who possessed spiritual gifts of leadership.

Today there is still a need for spiritually endowed leaders to take charge of God's work within the church. The scriptural mandate of Timothy and Titus with qualifications for elders (leaders) above repute, is still mandatory today. To ask for, or to accept anything less, will not do. If the church is to grow, quality must be invested in leadership.

It would be well if each present-day denomination and each local church would take this list and lay it alongside a list of the leaders prescribed by the church's official organizational structure and, before God, make a comparison. Are the lists comparable at all? How does the church actually function compared with what the Word of God says?¹¹

It is important to note that there is no one form of church organization to be found in the New Testament. However, the one concept that is found in every system is spiritual leadership. Howard A. Snyder says of such leadership, "All leadership in the church, therefore, is based on spiritual gifts."¹²

Lloyd Perry has a good description of an effective pastor:

An evangelical pastor is expected to be an informed man, thoughtful, apt in independent investigation, and well oriented in respect to all truth. He is to be a man of integrity, truthful, honest, self-

controlled, and morally pure. He is to be a man who is emotionally mature. He should be gracious, cheerful, positive, and cultured.

As a Christian, he should be committed to Christ, sensitive to the Spirit of God, and faithful in using the means of grace. He must be rooted in biblical truth, conscious of his position within historical Christianity, aware of his responsibility to the whole Christian community, and constant in his witnessing for Jesus Christ.

As a servant of Christ in the church, he ought to be oriented sympathetically toward the problems of his contemporaries and be alert to ways in which God's Word may be applied in specific concrete situations. He must be able to communicate the Gospel effectively. He should be able to provide challenging leadership. There should be a positive relationship maintained with the denomination in which he labors, and he should be appreciative of the traditions and contributions of other denominations.

An effective pastor is a very important factor in getting a church on target. He should be God's man in God's place in God's time.¹³

If the pastor is to be successful in his calling, he must become an expert in his field. A brain surgeon dare not fly by the seat of his pants unless he wants to lose (literally) his constituents. Likewise, the pastor must prepare himself to be the most effective leader according to his God-given abilities. This involves recognizing personal gifts and learning to use them to their highest potential.

Many pastors also fear what spiritual gifts may do to the church. There is justification for this feeling since the use of certain spiritual gifts can cause division when used improperly. There are biblical guidelines for using spiritual gifts. As has been previously pointed to, spiritual gifts are given to Christians for the common good. The three main passages on spiritual gifts all give reference to this:

... for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.¹⁴

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.¹⁵

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.¹⁶

Spiritual gifts are for the body. Any exercise of spiritual gifts other than in and for the body is non-biblical and detrimental to the whole body as well as the individual.

Spiritual gifts are God's way of blessing the church through the Holy Spirit. He equips the church for ministry. His spirit fills and renews the person, giving the full awareness that God is in control and bringing all things together in unity. Discovery and utilization of these God given gifts are important to the success and health of a growing church.

Servant Leadership

The third characteristic of a successful pastor deals more with the style of ministry. There are many styles and patterns for ministry, but my personal feeling is that one particular style outweighs all the rest and is most closely aligned with my own theological position. That style has become commonly known as the Servant-Leader.

In the thirteenth chapter of John, Jesus presents a beautiful example of the servant-leader by washing the feet of His disciples:

You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.¹⁷

Lawrence O. Richard in *A New Face for the Church* devotes a chapter on "Leadership in the Church," in which he states several important facets of the servant-leader:

. . . scriptural leadership requires the leader to be completely open in his relationship with others, and that he become deeply involved in their lives. . . . The ability of a leader to help and guide others never rests on his own accomplishment or perfection. . . . The servant-leader must share himself and give himself in his ministry to the church. Nor is there room for impersonal leadership, that withdraws from depth relationship with others in the body.¹⁸

There is indeed a pattern of leadership and authority that exists within the context of New Testament Christianity as presented by Jesus that reflects a dramatic change from that of normal human relationships.

Where the disciples argued about priority and place of prominence, Jesus responded,

You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slaves of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.¹⁹

It would do well for pastors to adopt these principles expressed by Jesus as relevant to the authority in the church today. All too often there seems to be a struggle for leadership. In too many cases, the pastor is drawn up on one side and the congregation or deacon board on the other. There is some misconception that the two are natural enemies. Some congregations develop the misunderstand-

ing that since they have homesteaded this church, no one (including the pastor) can change things without their approval. And thus they are locked into battle, dueling to the death or at least as long as it takes them to run the pastor out of town.

Likewise, some pastors act as if they are the means of salvation to their newly inherited charge. Whereas other pastors failed miserably in moving the congregation off dead center, such would not be the case this time. No matter what it takes, no matter what the cost, this time change will come even if it means driving some families away or splitting the church.

The above two scenarios unfortunately have been acted out all too many times in congregations across the country. It is a classic case of humanistic leadership versus servant-leadership.

Servant-leadership requires a completely open and honest relationship between all parties. There are no hidden agendas or power plays going on behind the others back. Servant-leadership requires forgiveness and healing.

An experience in my early years as a pastor almost caused irreparable damage to my church, some individuals, and myself. It was over an incident that was quite small, but because of a misunderstanding it had grown into gigantic proportions seeking to devour everyone. After that unnerving experience our church began to practice a kind of caring and openness that continued through my entire pastorate there.

Our Board of Directors and myself covenanted together to deal swiftly and honestly with every problem no matter how small. Whenever gossip surfaced, the truth was investigated by talking to those involved. When someone expressed concern or alarm over a given situation, they received a pastoral call to deal with it immediately.

New families who began attending our church were informed of our concern for every individual and their problems. If they thought something was amiss they were to feel free to bring it to our attention. It soon became apparent to everyone that we indeed cared about their feelings and would work together in solving any problem openly and honestly.

Now I would be naive to think that we were able to please everyone and wrong to suppose that every problem was solved before someone had hurt feelings, but I am convinced that we made a tremendous impact on more lives than not. People felt comfortable to disagree without becoming angry or resorting to threats. Modeling of servant-leadership on the part of the pastoral staff and Board of Directors found its way into the hearts and lives of the people.

So it is with leadership today. Pastors who are willing to pay the price will see results. It takes no magic combination of personal

traits, but a Godly willingness to follow Christ's model. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant. . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."²⁰

"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."²¹

FOOTNOTES

¹Harold L. Fickett, *Hope for Your Church: Ten Principles of Church Growth* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), p. 83.

²C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1976), p. 55.

³Robert Schuller, *Your Church Has Real Possibilities* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1974), p. 48.

⁴Wagner, op. cit., p. 56.

⁵Matthew 16:16 (NAS).

⁶Melvin Hodges, *Grow Toward Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960), p. 8.

⁷J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), pp. 34-36.

⁸C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1978), p. 42.

⁹Ephesians 4:11-12 (NAS).

¹⁰Acts 8:40 (NAS).

¹¹Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p. 94.

¹²Ibid., p. 85.

¹³Lloyd Perry, *Getting the Church on Target* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), pp. 10-11.

¹⁴Eph. 4:12 (NAS).

¹⁵Rom. 12:4-5 (NAS).

¹⁶I Cor. 12:7 (NAS).

¹⁷John 13:13-17 (NAS).

¹⁸Lawrence O. Richards, *A New Face for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 114-15.

¹⁹Mark 10:42-45 (NAS).

²⁰Philippians 2:5-8 (NAS).

²¹John 13:17 (NAS).