

Leadership: A Service of Love
Baylor Academy of Leader Development and Civic Engagement
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The Why of Leadership: Love

Leadership involves many elements: persuasion, strategy, charisma, energy, talent, perseverance. But what is at its core, constituting the very heart of leadership? Why do we lead? What is our principle motivation?

Tonight, we focus first and foremost on the why question of leadership, and its ramifications for the what, how, when, and where. As with so much in life, when we get to the crux of the matter, we are awestruck by the simplicity that we find. The answer to the why of leadership is overpoweringly simple, yet perhaps precisely because of its simplicity, we fail to understand, or at the least, actively remember it in our leadership pursuits.

Why do we lead? Because we love. As Christians, love is central to who we are and what we do. The two greatest commandments in Scripture are about love, and we're told all the law and prophets hang on these two commands. As Gordon Hugenberger, the Pastor of Park Street Church in Boston, says, the Word of God is about love; the rest is just footnotes.

Everything summates in love, and so should our motivation to lead. The outgrowth of our love for others is a passion to serve them, and from this passion to serve, leadership takes bloom.

Our reasons for leadership are often complex, a hodgepodge mix of pure and not so pure motives. Pride, envy, and the chase for power, prestige, recognition, and greatness for their own sakes tempt us, often penetrating in subtle ways into our calculus for why we do what we do. Both failure and success can have undesirable consequences for our motivations to lead. Failure can cast self-doubt on our ability to make a difference, making us reticent to put our delicate pride and personal vulnerabilities on the line, and depleting our passions and energies for carrying on the important work we have set about to do. Success, on the other hand, can lead us to place too much confidence in our own capacities and whet our appetite for glory and recognition for their own sakes.

History is replete with leaders who, along the trajectory of their leadership, became misdirected by impure motives and desires, losing the vision that inspired them to lead in the first place.

Examples include Coriolanus, whom Plutarch tells us in his *Makers of Rome* responded to his exile by the Roman people by taking up arms against the country he had previously so valiantly defended as a military leader. In the United States, Richard Nixon's downfall as president came as a result of substituting a greed for power and control for the more praiseworthy virtues that initially led him to devote his life to public service. Here at Baylor, one need look no further than the scars caused by the recent internal strife brought about by leaders on different sides who were devoted to the university, but whose motives went astray and who put pride and personal vendettas ahead of the good of the university.

The What of Leadership: Service

With love being the why of leadership, the next question is, what is leadership? Leadership is service, or more specifically, a particular manifestation of service. Think of a large circle, which represents service. Completely self-contained within that larger circle is a smaller circle called

leadership. Leadership cannot be understood outside the paradigm of service. We lead because we serve, and we recognize that at times, our highest form of service is to use the gifts and passions God has given us to lead. So to triangulate what we have been talking about with respect to the relationship between love, service, and leadership, love inspires us to serve, and sometimes, the best service we can provide is leadership.

Nathanial Greene provides an exceptional example of such leadership. An ardent patriot of the American cause, Greene originally was denied a leadership post in the Rhode Island militia because of a physical defect. Nevertheless, the talented young Greene, who, despite his young age and lack of military experience, perhaps knew, as a result of his voracious reading habits, as much about military history and tactics as anybody in the Continental Army, still was dedicated to serving the cause in which he believed. So he enlisted as a low-ranking soldier, and after serving a number of months amongst the enlisted men, his abilities were recognized and he was swiftly promoted to the rank of general. As the war progressed, he became one of Washington's most trusted generals, eventually ascending to the second highest position in the Continental Army. Greene's crucial leadership role in the American Revolution came about because he was committed to service, and when the opportunity arose, pursued service in the form of leadership.

The How of Leadership: Personal Relationships and Involvement

If love is why we lead, and service is what leadership is, then what are the implications for how we should lead?

If you love someone, and you want to serve them, the first step is to get to know them - to know something about their culture, history, language, needs, and aspirations. Sounds simple, but it is critical. Before we begin brining about the change we want for someone else, we need to know them well enough to see if they want the change, whether the change would be good for them, and consider how we can work together with those we are serving to bring about the desired change.

Think about Waco. We're here. We want to bring about meaningful change. So what do we do? One option is to meet with students, and maybe a faculty or staff member from Baylor. Then we identify the areas of need that we wish to address and begin developing a plan for addressing them. With that plan ready to go, we start moving forward, assuming the people of Waco will not only be on board with something in which they had no say, but that they'll embrace the plan as being good for their interests.

If we are leading out of love, however, we will choose another way. The first step is to recognize areas where improvement is needed, and then start talking with like-minded folks to see strategically what can be done. With an area of interest identified and with a range of possibilities for addressing that area recognized, we should begin the crucial, yet admittedly time-consuming, process of meeting with community leaders and others who have a stake in addressing the issue. Collaboratively, we build bridges, focusing not on who gets the credit, but on maximizing participation and establishing a vision that we pursue in a manner consistent with the vision itself. All the while, we build relationships of trust with those whom we are serving, learning to view them as partners without whom real change cannot be sustained.

Using Student Government as an example, the motto is "Students Serving Students." Really, the better way to understand the role of leaders in Student Government is to be "Students Serving **with** Students." If the change being brought about is to last, and empowerment is to be part of the

process, then the leadership provided must not consist merely of doing something for someone, but doing it with them.

The When and Where of Leadership: Now and Here

Genuine leadership of this sort is a lifelong endeavor. The causes and communities might change, but the importance of leadership now will not. There is always more responsibility than people willing to take on such responsibility. If we love those around us, then the time to contribute our gifts and talents to making a positive difference is now, and the place for leadership is here.

After all, the Golden Rule is to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. What does that mean? Well, let's look at the issue of addressing poverty, as an example. If we, who are privileged with abundant resources and opportunities, are not willing to trade our lot with the poor amongst us, then can we be content to see the poor suffering from their woes, and yet, do nothing, even though they continue struggling with hardships we would not be willing to accept for ourselves? If we are to treat our neighbors as ourselves, and if we desire in our own lives to pursue our dreams and full potential, then we must help the less fortunate among us address the inequalities and hardships that thwart their own efforts toward self-actualization.

What is true of leadership in battling poverty is true of leadership in many other areas as well. While none of us can do everything at once, we can each be involved in making a difference in some area for someone. When viewed in concert, these commitments of love have the capacity to effect meaningful, revolutionizing change. As Robert F. Kennedy said, while speaking to a crowd in apartheid South Africa during the 1960's, we may not be able to effect overwhelming change ourselves or even see the fruit of our particular contribution. But we can and will make a difference if we stay committed.

"It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal or acts to improve the lot of others or strikes out against injustice he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest wall of oppression and resistance." – Robert F. Kennedy

Conclusion:

Leadership is difficult. We will encounter many obstacles, periods of active resistance, personal attacks, and struggle with the inertia of our own loss of focus or interest. Shakespeare says, "When the sea was calm, all ships alike showed mastership in floating." What do we do, then, when, as so often is the case with worthwhile leadership efforts, the sea is not calm? What sustains us during these times? What motivates us to continue leading, when we're tired, distressed, and confused? Perseverance comes from our inspiration for taking on leadership responsibilities in the first place. Love for those we are leading and the immovable anchorage of a passion to serve are what sustain us, reminding us that for all the complexities that effective leadership entails, in the end, having the right motivation for leadership is the most important part. After all, Paul tells us in I Corinthians 13 that love "always perseveres." So will we as leaders if love is at the heart of our leadership.