



Gospel Ministry Wisdom

Lesson 5

Pastoral Leadership and Vision

I am the architect of one of the most infamous missionary questionnaires to be found anywhere. It is designed to help me find out who the man is. I want to know that he is doctrinally sound, that he is morally clean and qualified, that he is a man under local church authority and that he has a good work ethic. I am also interested in what kind of spirit he has. Right in this group of heavyweight considerations for supporting a missionary is another BIG issue: *does he have a plan?* If he does, I want to hear about it. If he doesn't, I will not ask my church to support him. It doesn't matter that he is doctrinally sound, morally pure and a people person sent out by local church. I know that without a plan he is doomed to fail. A man with a plan has at least looked at where he's going and thought about it.

Though leadership is not all wrapped up in a plan, the absence of a plan strongly suggests there is no vision and leadership. This session is about leadership and vision. Gospel ministry is a leadership position. Gospel ministers are in the public eye and expected to lead; by God and by people. Dr. Lee Robertson who was used so greatly of God at Highland Park Baptist Church and Tennessee Temple Baptist College in Chattanooga, Tennessee said, "*Everything rises or falls on leadership.*" In both directions, I have seen it happen over and over again. If your ministry fails, it will not likely be because you were doctrinally unsound or illiterate. It will probably be because you lacked vision and leadership. This session is not an exhaustive discussion in leadership, but will be an honest look at two core aspects of leadership: vision and a plan.

I. LEADERSHIP INVOLVES VISION.

A. A leader is being out front!

1. Sometimes physically.

a) It's the *example* mentality.

- (1) An *out front* example sends the message that you are not *too good* to do what you expect others to do. It takes away the *high and mighty, I'm better than you* superiority, hierarchy image.
- (2) An *out front* example inspires. Israeli generals.
- (3) Many ministers *shoot themselves in the foot* right here. When the work is to be done, they seem to always conveniently have something else to do.
- (4) People learn best by examples. *Show me how it's done; let me **see** you do it.* Most training starts with a physical example, *hands-on* training.

2. Always mentally.

- a) Sometimes age, time and other factors prohibit being out front too physically. For many years, King David was physically at the front of the battle lines, but when he was old, his men did not want him to keep going out there physically. **2 Samuel 18:2-3.**
- b) Even when a leader is not physically out front, he will always be out front in his head. He will see what others do not see, and will almost always be the first to see it.

3. In one way or another, true leaders are almost always out front, ahead of the pack.

- a) Once the leader is no longer able to stay out front, he is no longer the leader; someone else will be out front, and the leader loses his leadership role. He then becomes merely a figurehead.
- b) When that happens consistently, followers lose their allegiance to the old leader and begin to follow the one who has become the true leader. An excellent case in point is King Saul and young David. Obviously, in such cases all kinds of jealousies and problems can arise. This is common in churches where a strong-willed member, deacons, heavy giver, more biblically astute member or other person is out front of the pastor.

4. Someone will always be out front, in charge.

- a) Maybe openly, maybe from behind-the-scenes, but someone is always directing the show. That person (or group of persons) is the true leader.
- b) This is true from the family to the nation. It is always true in a church.
- c) If the pastor does not lead the church, someone will. When things do not go well, the pastor will get the blame for what some other person engineered. In most cases, it was a deficit of leadership that allowed them to go in the direction and do the thing that produced problems and undid the pastor, yet in his opinion he's innocent and it's their fault.

5. Being out front is inseparably tied to vision.

- a) I am in no way speaking of divine revelation.
- b) I am speaking of seeing opportunities, recognizing potential, recognizing trends, seeing solutions, seeing what's missing, seeing what most others do not see, and generally being the first to see those things. Vision is especially the ability to see *the big picture*.

6. For a pastor, vision is:

- a) Seeing where his people are and what they spiritually need.
- b) Seeing direction and where things are headed.
- c) Seeing where the church should go and how to move it forward.

- d) Seeing what needs to be corrected and improved.
- e) Seeing how to solve church problems.
- f) It is recognizing potential threats and dangers.
- g) It is that wonderful ability to know when to wait and when to move.
- h) For a missionary, vision is seeing how to plant a new church, seeing how to reach a country or a people of a different language and culture.

B. Someone is following a real leader.

1. John Maxwell said, *“If you are out front and no one is following, you’re just taking a hike.”*
 - a) If no one buys into the vision, it is essentially useless.
 - b) To be of worth, vision must have implementation. Regardless of how visionary a person is, if no one follows, his vision amounts to no more than *pipedreams*.
 - c) Keep in mind that there is a great difference between unrealistic visions of grandeur, and the vision to see opportunities and other things of worth and value.
2. There are several reasons why many visionary preachers never seem to attract very many followers.
 - a) Many of their dreams are absurd and unrealistic, out of touch with reality.
 - b) Hypocrisy in them keeps people from buying into their dreams.
 - c) Their bad character and morals turn away followers.
 - d) Their attitudes and examples are too poor.
 - e) Also, even in otherwise good preachers, a lack of vision and clear direction will not attract many followers. It is hard for most people to follow someone who doesn’t seem to know where he is going or how to get there.
 - f) Another reason why many dreams are not realized is lack of a plan.

II. LEADERSHIP INVOLVES A PLAN.

A. A plan is a necessary part of vision which produces followers.

1. A plan provides a means by which vision or a dream can be realized. Innately people expect their leaders to produce *plans*, realistic ideas for *how to get it done*. It is that way in a church; the pastor is the chief leader.

2. A plan is a part of being *out front*. It's a part of "**seeing**." *The plan* sees/envisions how the dream can come true. The plan does not have to be perfect or flawless; it may need many alterations and upgrades, but it provides a means for getting from *Point A* to *Point B*.
3. A man of God who is a true leader will often seek counsel in how to get it done, but he will ultimately come up with a plan.
 - a) For the church growth which he envisions.
 - b) For improving conditions within his church.
 - c) For building a new building and for paying for it.
 - d) For dealing with a rogue member and other problems.
 - e) For winning people to Christ and reaching new members.
 - f) For bringing his vision into reality.
4. Failure in a man of God to offer a plan turns away potential followers.
 - a) A man of God with no vision and no plans is considered impotent.
 - b) A man of God with lots of vision and no plans is considered a blowhard.
 - c) My experience on a Pulpit Committee. *"If this church calls you to be our pastor, what would you do to turn around this church and take it off its path to the church graveyard?"* Candidate, *"If you have any ideas or plans, I would be happy to support them."* The thinking of the pulpit committee? *We are looking for someone to follow, not for someone to follow us.*

B. For a man to do well in the work of the ministry, he desperately needs to develop a mentality of vision and planning.

1. He should see the way to go and develop a plan for getting there.
2. He should be the person with initiative, the one who is out front in efforts to see the plan implemented. It is a grave mistake for a pastor to wait for someone else to come up with a plan and seek to implement it.
3. I shall now illustrate vision and leadership in a church setting whether it be in a deacon meeting, a committee meeting, a general men's meeting or a church business meeting.
 - a) The approach that illustrates pastoral leadership.
 - (1) The pastor sees a need, something that should be done.
 - (2) The pastor develops a plan to address the situation.
 - (3) In the meeting the pastor enunciates the need and presents his plan or solution.

- (4) The pastor answers questions or objections to his plan. Those who oppose and object are in the awkward position of opposing and tackling the pastor.
 - (5) From the group the pastor seeks input and amendments for improvements which will strengthen his plan.
 - (6) The pastor asks for the support of the committee or body before him.
 - (7) The pastor makes assignments and he delegates responsibilities for implementation of his plan.
- b) The approach that illustrates a pastoral leadership vacuum.**
- (1) The pastor sees a need, something that should be done.
 - (2) The pastor takes the need to the body before him and opens the floor for a plan: ideas, input, a solution.
 - (3) A strong or negative member, someone who wants to show his intelligence or authority, someone who is opposed to the pastor or someone who is prone to speak without thinking opposes the matter altogether or offers a plan of his own.
 - (4) The pastor believes the plan is bad, the opposition is wrong and knows the plan is contrary to the direction he wants to go. Now the pastor must publicly tackle the person who offered the plan. That can quickly disintegrate into hostility and an ugly situation.
 - (5) Most pastors are too weak and unwilling to allow a fight. They either drop the matter or acquiesce to the poor plan.
 - (6) The pastor is defeated. The real leader won, and in the process further solidified his position as the true leader in the church.
 - (7) This scenario continues to repeat itself.
 - (8) The pastor becomes increasingly defeated and discouraged.
 - (9) The church languishes.
 - (10) The pastor decides that *God is calling him to another church*.
 - (11) The church gains a reputation for being a *Pastor's Graveyard*, and the pastor gains a reputation for being an unstable *Rolling Stone*.

The real core to this very typical church/pastor scenario is a weakness or lack of pastoral leadership, the absence of an *out front* pastor with a vision and a plan. Pastoral leadership would solve many church problems; and keep many preachers (and their families) from untold disappointment, hurt, hard times and grief.