



# Gospel Ministry Wisdom

## Lesson 8

### Assuming Leadership and Gaining Support

There are three basic components to any true church: God, the people and leadership. I contend that *God* is not a variable. He is "*the same, yesterday, today and forever.*" I do not believe that *people* in a church are a true variable. Through the centuries from Adam and Eve, people have remained constants; all fallen sinners with essentially the same strengths and weaknesses. In my opinion, the true variable in a church is *leadership*. With good leadership, some churches thrive. With poor leadership, those same churches crater. I do not believe that God arbitrarily wants some churches and preachers to succeed and others to fail. I do not believe that the problem for failing churches and preachers is in heaven; I believe it rests in leadership.

Men of God will one day give an account for their stewardship. For men whom God puts into the gospel ministry, stewardship embodies vision, planning and pastoral leadership. It will be those who stood up and took the *oversight* of the work of God who will do well in the day of reckoning. It seems to me from lots of years watching that these are also the ones who seem to do best down here on earth.

Let me again point out that leadership means not only being out front, it also means someone must be following. Embedded in the concept of gospel ministry is the expectation of reaching people. Both evangelism and discipleship have to do with reaching people. There's a somewhat holy and pious but flawed spin to the idea that "*My job is to preach and take care of my business; I don't have to worry about results.*" Yes, that is our assignment. We are to be faithful and to let God take care the results; but we'd better not ignore the fact that no results or few results most likely indicate that we are not doing our job correctly. Our preaching may be poor, we are not offering strong and clear-cut leadership, our attitude may stink or we may be incompetent. When people are not following us, it is a grave mistake to assume that we are doing everything right and they are the problem. No true man of God can ignore results, and whether or not people are following. It is sad to say, but preachers as a whole are a rather cavalier bunch who are very quick to blame others for their own failures. Remember Maxwell's statement, "*If you're out front and no one is following, you're just taking a hike.*" To be a true leader and an effective man of God, in one way or another people must be following you: with you, supporting you, on your bandwagon. If not, your ministry is failing.

As a missionary or pastor, assuming leadership and gaining true support takes time. People may get excited and swoon over you for a little while, but popularity can be very fickle. You have gained true leadership only when people see your weaknesses but in spite of them respect and trust you enough to follow through for the long haul. Leadership is not a *flash in the pan* or temporary excitement by people with closed eyes.

I am about to talk about the transition from title to reality. I will limit this talk mostly to pastors and a church situation; however, the principle applies to other situations pretty well across the board. When a church calls a man to be the pastor, he has received a leadership position, but not leadership. He has a

title, but not reality. The call and the title merely give a preacher an opportunity to prove his leadership. Though the title seems to instantly go to the head of a good many pastors, they have proven nothing yet. Assuming true leadership is a process, not an instant act. It is a grave mistake for a pastor to assume too much power and leadership before he has earned it. There are reasons why it takes time.

## **I. HEARTS ARE WON, NOT CONQUERED.**

### **A. Respect and trust are earned, not seized.**

1. A pulpit can be seized by force, charm and politics.
2. But, hearts can't be seized that way.

### **B. It is easy to think you have the hearts of the people when you don't.**

1. People will pretend and flatter you when the affection is only skin deep.
2. With power and intimidation, you can **make** people follow you for a while. Many parents **make** their children go to church and do lots of other things, but the children are not doing what they do by choice. They *have to* for now, but almost always the day comes when they quit.
3. Church members are often like that. When push comes to shove; and they have the right opportunity, they would turn on you. It will become obvious that they **never were** really followers.
4. It is a big mistake for a pastor to delude himself into prematurely thinking that because he's the pastor he is the true leader of his church. Rude awakenings are usually not very much fun.

## **II. HEARTS ARE NOT WON BY ONE SINGLE ACT.** (A single act may lose hearts, but not win them.)

### **A. A great act or performance is a starter, but only a starter.**

1. A *sugar stick* sermon, a glorious revival, verbose praise and a steady flow of "I love you" are good, but they don't make you the leader of anybody let alone a whole church.
2. All they do is open doors of opportunity. That's what happened when David slew Goliath. The people were in an excited frenzy over what he did, but at that point he was a long way from being their King.
3. A courtship and wedding merely put a couple in position to have a good marriage, a college degree opens doors of opportunity to good jobs and a pulpit puts a man in position to win hearts and gain followers. Woe be unto those who at this point think they have arrived!

**B. Hearts are won by a consistent combination of desirable traits.**

1. Though these are not nearly all, they are some of the traits that win hearts.
  - a) Integrity.
  - b) Honesty in word and deed.
  - c) Consistency.
  - d) Faithfulness.
  - e) Unselfishness.
  - f) Loyalty.
  - g) Dedication.
  - h) Dependability.
  - i) Humility.
  - j) Purity of character and lifestyle.
  - k) True love, caring and compassion.
  - l) Genuineness void of pretense.
  - m) Clear vision and direction.
  - n) Objectivity; no double standards.
  - o) Continuing growth.
  
2. I think it important at this point to point out leading traits that turn people away.
  - a) Hypocrisy.
  - b) Inconsistency.
  - c) Bias and double standards.
  - d) Selfishness.
  - e) Disloyalty.
  - f) Arrogance, pride and conceit.
  - g) Dishonesty.
  - h) Stagnation.

### **III. EVEN WHEN MANY RIGHT THINGS ARE IN PLACE, WINNING HEARTS TAKES TIME.**

#### **A. People have to see and hear reality in you.**

1. It does not happen because you expected or demanded; it happens only when they become convinced that you are for real. Believers!
2. In churches it usually takes about five years before you earn people's trust, before you are really "Pastor."

#### **B. Many pastors hurt themselves with impatience.**

1. They expect a *title* to immediately, quickly bring respect and trust. It never does. Regardless of what is expected, *respect and trust* can only be earned.
2. Keep in mind that it is one thing to respect the office of pastor; it is quite another thing to respect the person in the office of pastor. The office and the person holding the office are not one and the same. Your people may have very high respect for the office, but have very little respect for you. Their respect and trust for you will depend on how you consistently behave before them.
3. The harder you prematurely demand and push your church for respect and trust, the longer it will take you to get it. If you push too hard for it, you may never get it.
4. Respect and trust must come naturally. You cannot rush it.

### **IV. THE PRIVILEGE OF LEADING IS A GIFT THAT CAN ONLY BE GIVEN.**

#### **A. You become a true pastor, the leader, only when people follow you by their own free will.**

1. They trust you, believe in your integrity, competence and vision.
2. They have seen you tested. They saw you stand and do right again and again.
3. Deep down in their hearts, they finally decided you were for real.

#### **B. They gave you their trust. You became a true man of God (pastor); in fact, not merely in name.**

1. They respect you, not merely the office you hold. You are their pastor in fact; not merely in position.
2. They know you are not perfect, but they believe you are for real. They've seen your heart; and of their own free will, they gave you theirs.
3. They are following you because of who you are, not because of the position you hold. People like this will follow you over the mountain tops, but they will also follow you through the valleys and storms of life.

There are a few people like that in my life. For years, I have not been pastor of a church where they are members, and I have never once asked them to call me *pastor*; but they do it spontaneously. I am thinking of one man who has never been a part of any church where I have served as pastor, but for a long time he has called me "*Pastor Hutson*." I consider this to be one of the greatest honors that I have ever received.

Out front with someone following! It takes time to earn trust; but only when you earn their trust will they of their own free will follow you as their pastor.

Next time we are together, I plan to talk to you about "*Organization, Delegation and Sharing*." Many good pastors whom I know struggle with delegation. Most of them know they need to delegate, but *how* to delegate escapes them. Hopefully with the background that is now before us, order and sense can be brought to this complex issue. It is certain that without delegation, a church will stagnate. One man can handle only so much; sooner or later he will *top out*. It's just a matter of time. King Solomon wisely said, "*Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fail, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up,*" **Ecclesiastes 4:9–10**. Surely pastors who do not delegate are in this picture.