



The Covenant Leader: Leading faithfully

The seventh in a series of nine leadership devotionals based on the fruit of the Spirit

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Scripture Passages

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” (Psalm 136)

“Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. You will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people.” (Proverbs 3:3-4)

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13-14)

Theme: The Covenant Leader: Leading faithfully

A Scorpion befriended a Ladybug who became a loyal companion to him. A time came when she struggled to cross a challenging and dangerous river, and so the Scorpion offered to take her to the other side on his back. He had come to care for her and promised he would never harm her. But, safely across the river, he allowed his tail to dip upon her with its venomous sting. As she lay in greatest pain she said, “...but you promised...why?” He shrugged and said, sadly, “Because it is my Nature.”¹ I’m sure many of us can relate to the ladybug in Aesop’s fable. We’ve all felt the sting of betrayal at the hands of others and have suffered the deadly effects of unfaithfulness’ venom as another piece of our innocence dies. We long to be cared for, to have safe passage across the rivers in our lives, to be loyal and to receive loyalty in return. We want the

¹ <http://www.aesopfables.com/cgi/aesop1.cgi?4&TheScorpionandtheLadybug>

assurance that everything's going to be alright, that all's right with the world; we want to trust. We want covenants that endure our fickleness and frailty. But in this world scorpions abound. They seem to be everywhere – at work, in our communities, even in our homes; people who are not true to their word, do not fulfill their commitments, do not quell their selfishness, who knowingly or unknowingly, cause great pain. And, as the Scorpion admitted, it's our nature to do so.

But there is One whose nature is reliable, whose loyalty and faithfulness never fail, who cannot deny His own faithful nature (see 2 Timothy 2:13) and it is into His image that we are being transformed (compare Romans 8:29-30). Therefore, let us look at God's faithfulness as the model for our own. In Psalm 136, the Hebrew word used to express the eternal, active nature of God's is *hesed*. It appears 26 times in this Psalm to draw attention to and illuminate God's kindness and faithfulness as “the foundation for His actions and His character.”² *Hesed* expresses such an all-encompassing realm of attitude *and* action that it “can equally well be translated by love as by grace or faithfulness.”³ In Psalm 136, it is used to capture God's eternal provision for man and all of creation and His rulership over heaven and earth. “The psalmist affirms that every aspect and moment of Israel's story – from creation...to exodus...to wilderness journey...to possession of the land...to the present moment (vv. 23-24) including the daily meal (v. 25) – is pervaded by and dependent on God's steadfast love.”⁴ “Because of God's *hesed*, “The entire span of creation to God's redemption, preservation, and permanent establishment...happened and will continue to happen because of the Lord's covenant faithfulness and kindness.”⁵ For the Hebrew that YHWH manifest *hesed* toward Israel throughout her history would be self-evident and self-explanatory. They would have understood *hesed* as the ‘fundamental relationship which God established with his people by the covenant’⁶ and would have sung Psalm 136 as a song of praise for His “amazing grace and the incomparable good news that God steadfastly and eternally loves and provides for the world.”⁷ And they would have also understood that in the covenant, “*hesed* must be reciprocal, for God expects his people to give proof of it in their relationship with him and with others”⁸ for these relationships with others, “husband and wife, parents and children, ruler and subjects, etc.” are each considered as covenants.”⁹ So pivotal were loyalty and faithfulness to the covenant that God instructs His people to “bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart” (Proverbs 3:4). Like a chain of gold or silver fastened around the neck adorns the wearer and which is “not easily lost (and) is continually in one's view,”¹⁰ God wanted His people to be always aware of His loyalty and faithfulness to them. By writing them on the

² Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, The Complete WordStudy Dictionary, Old Testament. (Chattanooga: AMG 2003) 360.

³ Jean-Claude Margot, “And His Love is Eternal (Psalm 136).” The Bible Translator 25 (1974): 214 18 Feb. 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion

⁴ The New Interpreter's Bible: A commentary in twelve volumes. Vol. IV (Nashville: Abingdon 1996) 1224.

⁵ Baker and Carpenter 360.

⁶ Maillot and Lelievre in Margot 214.

⁷ The New Interpreter's Bible 1226.

⁸ Margot 215.

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Matthew Poole, A Commentary on the Holy Bible Volume III: Matthew-Revelation. (Peabody: Hendrickson 1985) 217.

tablets of their hearts, the people would then internalize His *hesed*, making it an integral part of themselves. Then God gives the reason this is to be done in verse 4: “You will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people.” God didn’t call them to be faithful for its own sake; He called them, as He calls us today, to faithfulness for His sake and for the sake of others.

But what of the Christian today? Do we really know that “Believers are those incorporated into Christ through their faith in Christ’s faithfulness and so are recipients of the promise to Abraham?”¹¹ Do we really believe that “we are forever supported and held by arms that are both loving and faithful, because in what matters most, our future is not at all unknown. (That) We are kept by God’s enduring, unfailing love – and that can be counted upon.”?¹² Can we, like the Israelites, sing God’s praise because we have personally known *hesed*, “the redemptive and providential care of the God of heaven... (and) know that this God secures (our) lives and puts food on the table each day.”¹³ Do we understand that through faith in Jesus for our salvation we have entered into the New Covenant relationship with God that is to be reciprocal, just as His covenant with Israel was reciprocal because God never changes, nor can His *hesed*? These are difficult questions but our answers reveal important clues about our own capacity for faithfulness.

In the fourth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel we see an important turning point in Jesus’ ministry. After John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus made his home in Capernaum (verse 12-13) and, “From that time Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’” (verse 17). As he preaches from that time on, his teaching focuses on life in the kingdom and attitudes and actions of those who would reside there. The beatitudes (Matthew 5: 2-12) provided a glimpse of life on earth in the Kingdom of grace as fulfillment of and in contrast to life under “the law” (verse 17). Revolutionary and liberating though that was, what Jesus says next, however, is truly amazing. After describing the kingdom’s burdens and blessings, He declares that all those living in the kingdom are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” He did not say they should aspire to be salt and light or would become salt and light at a later, undisclosed time, but they were, as of that moment, salt and light. For the listener, this would have been deeply meaningful because, “the priests were instructed that for offerings presented to God they were always to sprinkle them with salt...(so) the priestly law gave the instruction (Leviticus 2:13; compare Numbers 18:19): ‘You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be lacking from your offerings; with all your offerings you shall offer salt’ Because salt was used as a preservative, ‘covenant of salt’ came to be the term used for a perpetual covenant.”¹⁴ So when Jesus told them they were the salt of the earth it meant “they were to be that permanent, living people-covenant which

¹¹ L. Ann Jervis, “Galatians 3:19-25 as an Argument of God’s Faithfulness: Reading Paul’s Rhetoric in Light of His Strategy.” *Word & World* 20.3 (2000): 288 17 Feb. 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

¹² Patrick Miller, “Between Text and Sermon: Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26.” *Interpretation* 49 (1995): 391 18 Feb. 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ Adrian Leske, “The Beatitudes, Salt and Light in Matthew and Luke.” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 30 (1991):836.

would draw others together in a living relationship with God”¹⁵ and the faithfulness required of them under the old covenant is reconfirmed in the new covenant relationship with Jesus. And Jesus warned them that living faithfully to the new covenant would result in persecution, just as the prophets who were faithful to the old covenant were persecuted (v 11-12).

Jesus then tells them they are the light of the world. This metaphor would have been equally familiar to His Jewish audience because of their expectation that Messiah would bring light to the darkness (see Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6) and that Yahweh’s *kabod*, His brilliant presence, would return to and be reflected in His faithful people¹⁶ corporately as the “city on the hill” and individually as a lamp in a house (Matthew 5:14-15).

Now, because they are already salt and light by virtue of God’s faithfulness to the covenant, Jesus wanted them to understand what their *unfaithfulness* to the covenant would produce; bland salt and darkness. It is possible for salt to lose its identifying quality which is its integrity - its flavor. “This does not occur suddenly, of course, but so gradually that those to whom it happens do not perceive themselves as changing and cannot identify later a single time or place when their faith ceased. Certainly the loss was not intentional; it was more a matter of drifting away, or like the case of Sampson who rose from sleep to go out against the Philistines not realizing that in the night he had been shorn of God’s strength.”¹⁷ For the kingdom citizen, failure to pay attention to our integrity, to compromise our principles even once represents a lack of faithfulness, depleting our “saltiness” and lessening our value to God (see Matthew 5:13b). As for His light in us, we are choosing moment-by-moment whether to hide it or reflect it out into the darkness, in faithfulness to the covenant of blood we accepted so that others may see the effects of His light in our lives and be drawn into the covenant relationship with us (Matthew 5:16).

Since 1981, James Kouzes and Barry Posner have studied leadership in the corporate world and have consistently found that honesty is the most sought-after leadership attribute.¹⁸ They write, “It’s clear that if people anywhere are to willingly follow someone...into battle...into the boardroom...the front office or the front lines-they first want to assure themselves that the person is worthy of their trust...that the person is truthful, ethical, and principled...they often use ‘integrity’ and ‘character’ as synonymous with honesty.”¹⁹ And indeed, Kriger and Seng’s research bears this out with “integrity” being listed among the top core spiritual values being sought in organizations today.²⁰ Derived from the “Latin *integritas*, meaning wholeness, soundness, untouched, whole and entire,” integrity “capture(s) a character trait in which people are true to

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Fred Craddock, “Two Arenas for Faithfulness,” *The Christian Century* 107 (Jan. 1990): 98.

¹⁸ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lost it, Why People Demand it*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 2003) 13-14.

¹⁹ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 2002) 27.

²⁰ Mark Kriger and Yvonne Seng, “Leadership with inner meaning: A contingency theory of leadership based on the worldviews of five religions,” *Leadership Quarterly: An International Journal of Political, Social, and Behavioral Science*. 16.5 (2005): 775

themselves, accurately representing-privately and publicly-their internal states, intentions commitments.” (This might be problematic if being “true to self” means being true to the false self, which it most likely does unless one consciously yields to the authentic self being shaped into the image of Christ. The Scorpion wanted to be behave differently but in the end, his nature determined his actions. And so it is with ours.) It suggests “a regular pattern of behavior that is consistent with espoused values-practicing what one preaches, public justification of moral convictions, even if those convictions are not popular, (and) treatment of others with care, as evident by helping those in need; sensitivity to the needs of others.”²¹ Sounds straightforward enough, so why isn’t there more integrity (faithfulness) in our organizations? What is the agent that compels faithfulness? “Nothing but love. You talk to me about infidelity – of infidelity in the marriage relationship, or in business. What is its reason? There is no love. Love makes such infidelity impossible. Where love is sentinel, I shall always be at the post of duty. Where love is the inspiration...I shall never fail in faithfulness to my compact with friend, or lover, or acquaintance. I shall never fail in my business integrity if love stands sentinel over all my actions”²² just as God’s love stands sentinel over His actions toward us!

And so our ability to maintain our saltiness and to reflect God’s light comes down to our faith in His *hesed*. If I believe that he is faithful, I will be faithful toward others. I won’t be afraid to stand firm in my beliefs because I know He will take care of me, my family, finances and career. I most assuredly can trust my unknown future to a known God and love Him freely within the bond of our covenant. Faithfulness comes down to what’s “between you and God...If your trust in God can’t be shaken, you will build trust wherever you go. When all your leadership successes are memories and you draw your last breath, this is the only thing that will matter: the assurance that God is with you and that what you did counted.”²³

Ignatius reminds us that our covenant of faith requires more than just talking about it, we have to live it. Living out our lives in faithful commitment to God in response to His love toward us produces the fruit by which men will recognize us. This is all that matters in life and is our human reflection of God’s *hesed* to the world

Leadership and Organizational Development Concept

Authentic leadership

Moral leadership

²¹ Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, Character Strengths and Values: A Handbook and Classification. (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association 2004) 249-250.

²² George Morgan, “The Fruit of the Spirit,” ed. Warren Wiersbe. Classic Sermons on the Fruit of the Spirit (Grand Rapids: Kregel 2002) 19.

²³ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, eds. Christian Reflections on The Leadership Challenge. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 2004) 97.

Wisdom of the Ages

“For the beginning is faith, and the end is love. Now these two, being inseparably connected together, are of God, while all other things which are requisite for a holy life follow after them. No man [truly] making a profession of faith sinneth; nor does he that possesses love hate any one. The tree is made manifest by its fruit; so those that profess themselves to be Christians shall be recognised by their conduct. For there is not now a demand for mere profession, but that a man be found continuing in the power of faith to the end.” ~ Ignatius, “Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians” Chapter 14: Exhortations to Faith and Love.

Example of the Devotional

When Michael was hired as the Director of a struggling Human Resources department, he knew that his first job would be to gain the trust of his staff for they had been working under the direction of a man who lacked integrity and who had caused significant damage to the employees’ and to the department’s reputation by his own unethical behavior.

Michael spent the first week in his new job just observing the interactions between his staff members. He then worked side-by-side with each employee learning their job and learning about them, as individuals. He assured them that he was doing this so he could learn as much as he could before he started making recommendations to them. At first the staff did not trust his motives but complied with his request. Within a month, Michael had learned the particulars of every job in the department and had made many observations to himself about possible improvements.

At his first staff meeting, Michael asked his staff to write down what they needed from him to in order to do their own jobs more effectively. To his surprise, every staff member wrote that they wanted to spend more time with him discussing their particular job and how they could improve processes and their own performance. The time he had invested in getting to know them and the challenges they faced had produced new relationships with each of them through which they perceived his genuine interest in them and in their success. Michael also asked them to jot down two goals they had for themselves at work. Again, to his surprise, one person wrote that she aspired to be Michael’s replacement someday! She apologized for her bluntness but wrote that she felt “safe” telling him about this goal.

Realizing the importance and value of spending time with each staff member, Michael initiated weekly meetings during which each staff member was free to bring whatever concerns, ideas and goals they had to him. In this context, he coached each employee in ways to improve her functional area. He also started working with Mary to identify and provide the experiences and competencies she would need in order to assume a Director role someday. During one meeting with the receptionist, he learned that she felt isolated from the rest of the staff because she had to wait until they returned from lunch before she could go. The former

Director had told her there was nothing that could be done since the phones had to be answered by a “live person” throughout lunch but she just wanted to tell Michael in case he could help her think of a solution. The next day, to her utter amazement, and every Friday after that Michael relieved the receptionist for lunch so she could go out with the rest of the staff. In a way it was a small gesture but one that spoke loudly of Michael’s love for his followers to them and to anyone whose call was answered by the Director.

As he worked within the relationships he had forged with his staff, he began to identify areas of his own job that could be performed more efficiently by some of the staff members and began to enlarge their jobs to encompass those elements. In time, some of the members realized what he was doing and asked him if he was worried that he was working himself out of his own job! He assured them that he knew what he was doing and that he was more concerned about their fulfillment and about the department’s improved productivity and responsiveness than his own job. In time, as he worked through the final steps of officially eliminating his own position, Michael announced to the staff that Mary had been offered a promotion to Director at a sister company.

Application of the Devotional

Unlike our other cases that illustrate the absence of fruit, this scenario takes us into the realm of faithfulness in action. Michaels’ love for people enabled him to see his relationship with them as covenantal and to respond to them as God had responded to Him throughout his life; faithfully. He was truly the salt in the organization that drew people closer to each other and a light that showed people a different way of being together.

Undaunted by politics, appearances, skepticism, or pride Michael’s love for the people that worked for him flowed spontaneously as he worked faithfully according to God’s standards without being analytical or deliberate about it. He simply loved people enough to grow and develop them toward their full potential, even if it meant sacrificing his time and ultimately his own job to give them what they needed. He provided safe passage for them from the place where he first encountered them to the place where he left them and beyond for his gift of faithfulness would serve them well beyond their affiliation with him.

Practical Exercises

I’ve copied one of the most striking statements of faithfulness I’ve encountered below. As you read it, take time to think about the times you’ve unknowingly broken faith with God by thinking or acting in ways that are contrary to the faith you profess. You might consider times when taking on too much resulted in broken promises or retracted offers of help. Or you might be reminded of times when you “felt led by God” to get out of the promises you made. God always keeps His promises and expects us to keep ours, too. Or you

might recall making commitments without really knowing what you were getting into and then finding a way out because the cost of keeping it was too high.²⁴

Faithfulness demands honoring our commitments to God and to others even when it's not convenient or comfortable. And faithfulness requires standing firm in Gospel values, even when it means being labeled "intolerant" or "narrow minded." Do people know they can count on you to keep your word and to stand firm in your beliefs, regardless the cost? Does Jesus?

Richard Foster quotes Augustine as writing, "The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works."²⁵ When considering a spiritual discipline that would cultivate faithfulness, perhaps confession would be helpful. Because confession "brings an end to pretense ... (and) leads to change," it will cause us to examine our "saltiness" more carefully and to pursue God more faithfully.

Fellowship of the Unashamed

I am a member of the Fellowship of the Unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I will not look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.

My past is redeemed, my present is exciting, and my future is secure. I will no longer abide low living, sight-walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tame visions, dwarfed goals, & cheap grace.

I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I do not have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live in Him, lean on Him, love through Him, and labor with Him.

My pace is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions dear, my Guide reliable, and mission clear.

I cannot be bought, compromised, deterred, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

²⁴ Gina Fadley, "Let Your Yes be Yes." Youth With a Mission (YWAM) Global Leadership Team conference, August 2005. Available online at <<http://www.YWAMAFRICA.org/lounge/articles/Leadership/gina-06.htm>>. Accessed 18 February 2007.

²⁵ Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. (San Francisco: Harper Collins 1998): 143.

I will not give up, back up, let up, or shut up until I have preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up, and stayed up for the cause of Christ. I must go until He returns, give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He comes. For when He comes to get His own, He will have no problem recognizing me. My colors will be clear. ~Dr. Bob Moorehead²⁶

Suggested Further Reading

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²⁶ Available online at <<http://www.gospeltruth.net/unashamed.htm>>.