

Leadership Equipping Thoughts



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The church growth world has recently been rocked by scandals involving two of the most well-known mega church leaders in the Chicago area. Both oversaw several mega church campuses and led great organizations promoting leadership worldwide. Now their ministries and reputations are in tatters. They also leave in their wake countless Christians who are disillusioned and shaken in both their faith and ability to trust leadership.

It is easy to place blame on the megachurch environments that promote celebrity branding and facilitate unaccountable leadership, but let's be real here. I am sure there are plenty of unhealthy leaders who lack integrity in smaller churches as well. I have friends who lead churches in urban environments where it seems like there is a small church on almost every street corner. The rate of scandal there seems higher due to there being so many more churches than the Mega church world.

Others may blame churches that are not part of traditional mainline denominations. After all, if you are part of mainline denomination you will be immune from leadership scandals. Well, we know this isn't accurate either; just ask the countless number of children who have been abused over the decades at the hands of Catholic clergy.

What are we to make of this? The root of the problem isn't so much a big or small environment. The problem is the lack of integrity in leadership.

I believe there is a deep cry in culture for authentic leaders with integrity. Culture is decaying as we are rocked by sexual harassment scandals and a continuation of the breakdown (or never forming) of family. People grow up without family leaders who provide security and identity, and who are role models of a healthy life.

David was an example of a leader who wasn't perfect yet sought integrity in his life. May God raise up an army of leaders with this same desire.

***Psalms 25:21** Let integrity and uprightness preserve me.*

***Psalms 78:70-72** He also chose David His servant...He brought him To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance. (72) So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart.*

While there is no such thing as a perfect leader, God has called leaders to be authentic and possess integrity.

- **Integrity** has to do with consistently holding strong moral and ethical revelations from God that engenders trust from the people around you.
- **Authenticity** has much to do with living in a state of agreement between what we teach, believe, and live. It is a genuineness both inside and out, private as well as public.

Real success and integrity in leadership is when those who know you the best love and respect you the most.

Integrity was part of Jesus' great impact.

John 1:14 MSG** The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, **Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.



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Authentic leaders face struggles and testing, but their faith, character, and core vision remains intact. The way they live their lives backs up what they proclaim. They don't faint or abandon what God has shown them in the days of testing. It is what makes them authentic. They possess integrity.

Success doesn't prove a leader's authenticity and integrity as much as testing does. I read a great book on leadership years ago "The Making of a Leader" by Robert Clinton in which he examined the life of about 1000 leaders mentioned in the Bible. Only 30% of them finished well. For those who finished well, their authenticity and integrity were proven over the long haul. They faced and overcame difficulties without abandoning their beliefs and integrity. The other 70% abandoned the core of who God made them and how He called them to live.



I came across a great example a while back of a leadership team who possessed authentic integrity. I was at a service in which a man brought up an eldership team to have the congregation pray over them as they were heading on a retreat. It was very touching as he cited the passage in Hebrews 13 about local church leadership. *Hebrews 13:7-17 Remember those leading you, who have spoken to you the Word of God, whose faith follow, **considering the end of their conduct...** (17) Yield to those leading you, and be submissive, for they watch for your souls, as those who must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.*

With tears in his eyes and his voice quivering he said, "We know these men, we know their lives; they have laid down their lives for this church over and over again. We want to live in a way that the Bible says, 'that they could serve us with joy and not grief.' Let's honor and pray for them as they go to this retreat."

This was both touching, and a fresh revelation of what Paul said was an important part of authentic leadership. Those they lead eat the fruit of their integrity in their everyday life.

1 Thes 5:12-13 "Know (to perceive with the eye) those who labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord, and give you instruction that you esteem them very highly."

The fruit of leader's lives should reflect what they proclaim

Jesus tells us that the fruit of leader's lives is the most accurate indicator of truth or falsehood.

Matthew 7:15-16 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (16) "You will know them by their fruits.

Paul echoed this in dealing with false apostles in Corinth who were trying to discredit him. He appealed to the church, contrasting the fruit of his own life which they had personally observed with that of the false apostles (2 Cor 10-11).

He makes a similar appeal to the Thessalonians about "knowing the lives of those who lead them" (1 Thes 5:12-13).

He also instructs Timothy to live a life of integrity - "show yourself an example as you prescribe and teach these things" (1 Tim 4:11-12).

This is one of the challenges in the rise of the online world. There has never been a time in which teachings and ideas from both good and bad leaders is accessible to so many. The reach is far beyond people "personally knowing their lives " (1 Thess 5:12-13). With over 580 million Christian blog sites along with an unknown greater number of Christian social media sites, both good and bad leaders are speaking to many. We have an internet smorgasbord of just about any kind of theology coming from people whose lives are unknown by those who are reading them. Even the "friends" that post online only offer projections of themselves rather than the reality of who they are.

Leaders should have some accountable place in real relational life among God's people where their theories are practiced, and their lives are observed. Just because one can preach or write well doesn't mean they are living well!

Here are a few ways we can pursue a life of integrity and authenticity.

- **Cultivate a real life with God engaging the Spiritual disciplines of private prayer, Bible reading, study, etc.** A leader's first state of integrity is in their private life before God. Your private life before God is the platform for your public life before people.
- **Be honest with yourself and others.** Walking in a life of transparency with others is what the Bible speaks of as "walking in the light" (1 Jn 1:1-9, Jas 5:16 etc.). This includes fellow Christians and fellow team members (Eph 5:21). It also includes those "over you in the Lord" (1 Thes 5:12, Heb 13:17 etc.). Leaders need to be honest and real. Admit your shortcomings. People think highly of this type of honesty more than false pretenses. Don't hide things. We have an important saying, "Every pastor needs a real pastor."

- **Always do what is right in a way to honor God, not please people.** Sometimes it means not doing the popular thing or the thing people like. Being a people pleaser will lead you away from being a God pleaser.
- **Stay true to walk in the revelation God has shown you.** Leaders must avoid shopping for a pragmatic belief or method that increases the size of their church. What has God shown you to pursue? It usually isn't something that changes by the direction the wind of popularity is blowing. Authentic leaders with integrity usually are motivated over the long haul by core revelations from God that cause them to endure hardships without letting go of those revelations. After all, it isn't about your personal success; it is about the advancement of the Kingdom of God.
- **Follow through on promises and take responsibility for those you are unable to keep.** If this happens frequently, you are probably making too many promises to look good in front of others.
- **Regularly ask those close to you for an honest evaluation of your life.** Are you living consistently what you believe, preach, and teach? Are you humble? Are you treating others with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), the ethic of God's love (1 Corinthians 13:1-10), and the humble "mind of Christ" (Philippians 2:1-10)? Humbly repent and continue to invite others to speak into your life.



Integrity before God and mankind is the highest aim in a leader's life. As the Bible says, "A good name is better than riches" and "better than any other thing that can be put on our lives" (Proverbs 22:1, Ecclesiastes 7:1, Acts 2:47).

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