

Leadership Begins in the Heart

“Faithful, available, teachable” are the three qualities we always talked about on campus when I was a student. Would I do what I committed to do? Was I available for God to use me? And would I be teachable, willing to learn and be corrected in the process? These three qualities made for FAT disciples—the best kind.

Those three words haven’t vanished from our vocabularies, but they can lose their impact when we have been around for many years. “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” We nod inwardly at the familiarity of those words. What do those qualities look like as they develop in the lives of full-time workers? And am I still that kind of disciple?

For definitions let’s use these:

- **Faithfulness**—the ability to keep a promise or commitment
- **Availability**—the degree to which a person is accessible for God’s employ
- **Teachable**—ready and willing to be taught, the heart of a learner

Teachability and **availability** are two characteristics of humility, being able to see yourself in a right perspective before God and others. Humble persons will take God seriously, more seriously than they take themselves. They are responsive to what He is showing them in the Word and in their lives. They are obedient to take action on the things He wants them to do. They can hear and respond to the promptings of His Spirit. He tests us in these things to let us see what our obedience and the nature of our hearts are like.

Faithfulness plays out in our ability to maintain our “yes” to Christ and His calling on our lives. It is also demonstrated in our ability to say “no” to lesser things that could take our hearts away from one or both. It results in dedication to constancy of affection. It is also the test that Jesus applied to Kingdom living. “He who is faithful in a very little thing is also faithful in much; he who is unrighteous in a little thing is also unrighteous in much” (Luke 16:10). Sometimes because we have committed ourselves to serve Him fully, we can think that we have passed the faithfulness test.

Many times we think of leaders in terms of personality—outgoing, organized, motivating, inspiring, authoritative, etc. What’s important to the Lord is different. He is still looking for the faithful, the available and the teachable.

The Scripture says in I Samuel 16:7 that “the Lord doesn’t look at the things that man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” II Chronicles 16:9 says that “the eyes of the Lord search throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.” And Isaiah 66:2 says, “This is the one I esteem, one who

is humble and contrite and who trembles at My word.” The LORD is looking for those with hearts of humility, who are willing to do whatever He shows them to do.

We see another angle on this in Romans 11:28-12:8. The greatness and goodness of God is unsearchable. There is no one like Him, who is worthy of our worship, our love and our service. So it follows as a natural response to who God is that we offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices, being willing to be completely transformed as He renews our minds. When we are acknowledging all of who He is in our lives, we have the freedom to recognize that we are insufficient in and of ourselves. This **humility** involves the ability to see myself in a right perspective before God and others. The verses that follow describe the work of the Body. God has given gifts to different ones, and we are to serve wholeheartedly in the way He has created us. Humility means that I see myself with a right perspective.

If I see myself in a right perspective before God and others, I am aware that I do not have in me what I need to live as a follower of Christ. That awareness should lead to increasing **dependence on the Lord**. As I am maturing, walking in the Spirit means that I am experiencing the Lord as my Source of life, of strength. His access to me is 100 percent—I’m holding nothing back. I am filled. Proverbs 3:5-6 instructs us to “trust in the Lord with all of our heart and lean not on our own understanding.” Arthur Pink, author of *The Attributes of God*, has said that most Christians make their mistake by trying to find in themselves what can only be found in Christ. Is the inclination of my heart toward Him or toward my own abilities?

Walking in the power of the Spirit is one of our very rich and classic messages but can sometimes be reduced to a mechanical version of spiritual breathing. This emphasizes relieving guilt more than obtaining a true godly sorrow that leads to repentance. As I’m growing, my heart will be increasingly grieved for offending the Lord by my sin. It will be more about Him than about me.

Mother Teresa said, “If you are humble, nothing can touch you, neither praise nor disgrace, because you know who you are.” It means I can live life with nothing to lose. It means I can take steps of faith despite fear. II Corinthians 4:7 says, “We walk by faith, not by sight.” That means that when leaders make decisions to move forward, they do so not knowing the outcome, just like regular folks. I love the example of Peter stepping out of the boat in Matthew 14. I don’t think he had any idea what was going to happen; he was just intent on responding to Jesus.

Sometimes we think that leaders have it all together; they’ve got it all under control. Yet, the Spirit-filled life teaches us that it’s all about **yielding control**. We have Jesus’ example in Luke 22:41-42, as He was praying in the Garden for the Father to remove “this cup” from Him. “Yet not My will, but Yours be done,” was His prayer. In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes, “I

have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me....” And later in II Corinthians 5:14-15 he again writes, “He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” In fact, one of the greatest heart issues for someone whom God will trust with His agenda is a person’s willingness and ability to act on what the Lord says rather than relying on one’s own judgment. Here again we can come back to the idea of what kind of access God has to my heart, and what kind of teachability I demonstrate in response.

Walking in the light—I John 1:5-9 gives us a great picture of giving God access to speak to our hearts. Will I bring into His light whatever attitudes, emotions, longings, aspirations, struggles and sins I have in my heart? Will I let Him teach me and guide me into His truth? It is that kind of intimacy that one who would lead needs to develop. It is that kind of humble, teachable heart that the Lord wants to fully support.

The first question I need to ask myself as I think about developing as a leader is “How’s my heart?” Would God find me a **trustworthy steward** for His plans in a particular area of need? Am I still a FAT disciple? Now is a good time to ask these familiar questions.

John 1:14 and 17 say that Jesus is **full of grace and truth**. Somehow, we usually don’t have the same fullness of grace and truth that Jesus does. He has both in equal measure. Often we have one that we prefer. Some of us are “grace” people, and some of us are “truth” people. We usually have a good idea of which one we are.

Each of us will be able to identify areas where we do well and areas we don’t. If you’re not able to, ask a friend to tell you. To be growing in both grace and truth means that I am able to love people in the midst of their failures, let people know that I am *for* them even when I disagree with their ideas, and talk with them about difficult topics.

A good start for growing is to identify your weak side. It is not an option for a believer to say things to others in any old manner. The Word instructs us to do so in a manner that builds the other person up. Believers are instructed to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15,25). What is difficult about speaking truth and staying in a loving relationship at the same time? Practice in small ways—look for opportunities to take steps of faith, because growth in this area requires faith and taking risks. Take a risk to share something with some close friends. Take a risk to reach out to someone who is hurting even if you don’t know what to say. Take a risk to give something anonymously. Practice saying truthful things without being condemning or judgmental in your heart. Ask God for the ability to respect and honor those you work with, even when you disagree.

It is rare when a leader is able to accomplish something without other people. When God has laid something on your heart or in your lap, you will need to involve others. You may

find that God has already gone before you and worked in the hearts of others in a way similar to yours. Or you may have to build the team from the start.

As you embark on that faith challenge, there are three attitudes that are important in teamwork—**humility, respect and trust**. Humility and respect are two attitudes seen throughout the Scriptures. Trust is earned as we work together and witness each other's integrity in action.

So much of how we work with others connects back to how we are doing in our hearts and character. It's a great reminder that we cannot accomplish these things in our own strength. "Abide in Me....for apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

Tim Elmore, president of *Growing Leaders*, writes that true leadership....

-does not depend upon conferred authority, titles, positions, or fame

-can occur whenever a need emerges that sparks passion within someone

-may take on a variety of methods, styles and appearances because the outcome is what is most important to the leader

-works toward a breakthrough of impact or achievement

-occurs when one person acts upon the vision of a preferred future and then mobilizes others to join in the cause.