

## **The Greatness of a Leader**

---

**Rich Nathan**

**June 28-29, 2014**

**Strength in Weakness: Leadership Lessons from the Life of Paul Series**

**Acts 20:13-38**

For those of you who are sports fans, you know that one of the perennial arguments among fans involves who is the greatest player of all time in a particular sport? Who was the greatest baseball player of all time – Babe Ruth? Willie Mays? Hank Aaron? Who is the best basketball player of all time – Bill Russell? Michael Jordan? LeBron? Larry Bird?

One way that sports fans rank players is by how complete a player was. Can they do everything that their particular sport demands at a really high level? So, for example, in baseball, complete baseball players are called 5-tool players. They can hit the ball consistently. They hit for power. They can run; that is, they have speed on the base paths. They can field their position really well. And they have cannons for arms. They hit. They hit for power. They run. They field. And they throw. By the measure of complete ballplayers, Willie Mays, Ken Griffey, Jr., and Mickey Mantle are really high on the all time list. Right now, one of the most complete ballplayers in years is 22-year old Mike Trout of the California Angels.

Basketball also measures players by how complete they are. Are they great at passing, scoring, rebounding, defending, blocking shots, getting steals, leadership? By the measure of completion, Oscar Robinson, Larry Bird, LeBron, Michael Jordan all rank really high. They could do everything really well.

The Washington Post had an article recently about the qualities that make a great teacher. Among the qualities for a great teacher, this school teacher listed the following:

Great teachers have a passion for teaching

Great teachers have a love of kids

You know, some people are passionate about their subject, but they don't like kids. Or their classroom management style is one of intimidation. They need to love their students.

Great teachers share their joy about a particular subject with their students

It doesn't matter what the subject is. Have you ever taken a class from someone whose subject area you thought would be incredibly boring, but because they loved it so much, they made you love, or at least, like it.

Great teachers have a work ethic that doesn't quit.

Teaching is a hard draining job.

Great teachers constantly struggle to always improve.

Great teachers are organized.

Almost every area of life has a ranking, a way of measuring a set of qualities that are intrinsic to this particular area. E-Harmony listed

7 Qualities of an Ideal Partner

Great looks was not among them. Neither was tons of money. Not even a great car. What are they thinking? So, what was E-Harmony's 7 Qualities of an Ideal Partner?

Maturity  
Openness  
Honesty and Integrity  
Respect  
Empathy  
Affection  
Sense of Humor

And, of course, when you are ranking people, one of the most popular arguments among historians concerns how to rank American Presidents. What are the traits we look for to determine presidential greatness?

Siena College has been conducting a US President study for the last 32 years. The study asks historians, political scientists and presidential scholars to rate the presidents in 20 areas. I will just give you some of the areas that they rate presidents on.

Integrity  
Intelligence  
Luck  
Court Appointments  
Domestic Accomplishments  
Handling of the US Economy  
Relationship with Congress  
Ability to Compromise  
Communication Ability

## Avoiding Crucial Mistakes Foreign Policy Accomplishments

You can immediately see that some really intelligent presidents were awful leaders, or shot themselves in the foot because they had no integrity. Presidential historians usually rank Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, Teddy Roosevelt, Jefferson and Washington at the top of their lists.

But, what are the traits that make a great Christian leader? We know what a complete baseball player, or a complete basketball player should look like. We have an idea of what makes a great teacher, or a great romantic partner. We even have an idea of what makes a great president. But what are the qualities that make for a great Christian leader?

I've called today's talk, "The Greatness of a Leader." Let's pray.

Before we look at the scripture, let me give you background to this text in Acts 20. Acts 20 is the only text we have in the Book of Acts which contains the speech directed just to Christians. All the other speeches we have in the Book of Acts are directed towards those outside the church. This is the only speech that is directed to Christians. And when we read over Paul's speech in chapter 20, we discover that it has a lot of the same kinds of themes and language that his letters do. A lot of folks are puzzled when they read Paul's speeches in the Book of Acts and compare them to Paul's letters. They don't have the same feel. They don't use the same language. But this speech of Paul's sounds very much like the Apostle Paul in his letters. What's going on?

I think we can take a leadership lesson here from the Apostle Paul. Very simply, we talk to insiders very differently than we talk to outsiders. So often, Christians do great harm to the cause of Christ because they write letters to the editor of the Dispatch that are filled with insider language about what Jesus Christ wants. Their language is incomprehensible to those outside the church. What you might say in a small group, what Paul says here in Acts 20, as he is speaking to the elders in Ephesus, what Paul writes in his letters to the church is very different than what Paul says when he is preaching the gospel to those who do not yet know Jesus Christ.

Be wise in your communication! If you are communicating to an audience outside the church, make sure your words are chosen so as to be understood.

Well, with that as a background, let's look at Acts 20:13-16:

Acts 20:13–16 (NIV)

13 We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. 14 When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene.

15 The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Chios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. 16 Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

What we have here is a very detailed account by Luke, who wrote the Book of Acts, of this sailing trip around the western coast of Turkey. Because of weather and geography, what they were doing was island-hopping. They were sailing south and docking at one island and then sailing further south and docking at another island – back and forth across the western coast of Turkey.

But v. 13 says something really interesting.

Acts 20:13 (NIV)

13 We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot.

Here is the deal. There was this peninsula – Troas was in the north and Assos was in the south, about 20 miles away. Paul’s team members all boarded the ship to sail the long way around the peninsula, but Paul decided to cut across the peninsula and walk alone those 20 miles. Why did he do that?

One commentator suggests that the reason Paul did this was because he was concerned about his safety and security, something which if you read on a little bit in this chapter, you know that safety and security were not priorities for the Apostle Paul.

Why did Paul send his companions on by boat and he walked by himself the 20 miles? I think we find the reason in v. 28 where we read:

Acts 20:28 (NIV)

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Great leaders take care of themselves

I don’t mean that great leaders use people, or fleece the sheep, or are selfish, self-centered, self-serving. But what I see in Paul walking alone and what I hear from Paul’s words when he tells the elders in Ephesus to take care of your own souls, is that great leaders

Refuel themselves

It is so easy for leaders in particular, but Christians in general, to be so busy working for God that we miss God in the work. The great temptation of Christian leadership is to try to do something great for God, and in the process lose your relationship with God. Have you ever experienced that, friend? Virtually, every pastor and Christian leader I've ever talked with has experienced that at some point or another.

What we see here is Paul's insistence on periods of solitude – of aloneness. 'You guys go ahead, he says, I'll meet you there and I'm going to walk alone.' You see, the great temptation in leadership is to always be with people. There's no solitude. There's no time alone with God. Now I know this is a really novel concept in America – SOLITUDE – ALONE TIME. But anyone who wishes to be a Christian leader for the long haul absolutely must practice some discipline of aloneness, where there's time taken just to drink in the presence of God. Whether we're talking about out taking a walk at a park, or taking a walk on a bike trail, or sitting by a lake, staring at the oceans-waves, just being alone on a bench in a park somewhere. The problem of so many of our so-called vacations is that we spend all of our time running around like lunatics seeing things. Visiting Disney World is not solitude. You don't hear God's voice in the Small World ride with that song playing 1000x. Having constant stimulation, or spending a week with your parents, your siblings, and then 14 children in 1 house on the beach is not solitude. Driving for a day with little kids in the back seat is not solitude. Most of us need vacations from our summer vacations. We take weeks getting ready, clearing our desks, packing and when you come back if you're a worker than you're going to be hit with this wave of your desk piled up.

You know, I think many people in our culture run from being alone, from solitude and quietness. We're actually uncomfortable being alone just with ourselves and God because we don't like what we find when we slow down enough to look inside. I think many people run from solitude. They must keep so busy and active and have noise constantly in the background and constant diversion because being alone only reminds them of that great internal hole that's in their soul. Being alone only reminds them of their problems. Being alone makes them conscious of their inner-emptiness. And this is not just for the unchurched and the non-Christian. I think there are many Christians who have never really learned how to find God, to make good contact with God in alone times and find the thought of solitude terrifying.

Let me ask you a personal question. Are you afraid of being alone? I don't mean are you afraid of being alone because you're afraid of being attacked. Are you afraid of being alone because you don't like being alone with your own thoughts? Are you afraid of being alone because your relationship with God is so distant and unreal that you would really be alone when you're alone? You would feel lonely. Do you insist on constant activity and noise and diversions because slowing down scares you?

One doctor wrote a book some years ago in which he talked about the need for us in the West to have margins in our life. He said that the problem in today's world is that we're

all running so close to the edge. Everyone is pushed to the edge financially, emotionally, spiritually that if we have a crisis, in the normal run of affairs, a crisis comes up we have no reserve tanks to draw from.

Alone time, solitude, allowing ourselves the space to refuel emotionally, spiritually and physically, so there's something in the tank, alone time is the time when we recharge - when we renew – when we focus. Alone time is a time when a leader or a person hears the voice of God. You can't hear the voice of God in a crowd. You can't hear the voice of God when the noise-level and stimulation-level around you is at some ridiculous decibel level; when the RPM's are spinning so fast that you can hardly hear yourself think.

I talk to so many individuals who are so frustrated because they say 'I never can hear the voice of God'. What I would ask you, 'How much alone time do you have when it's just quiet?' Just quiet in your house or just quiet where you're by yourself. Certainly this is difficult if you have little ones who follow you into the bathroom, so you're not even alone in the bathroom or alone in the shower. I wonder how many of you young moms or young dads have ever considered hiring a babysitter – not just so that you could go out for dinner together, which is important, or so that you could run errands, which is important, but I wonder how many of us have ever considered that we need a sitter or mom and dad trade off with the kids just so you could be alone with God. Many of us need, more than anything alone time.

Let me bring this down to earth. How many of you spend even one hour a week where you are alone and you're not doing anything other than being with God. Maybe taking some time to personally worship Him, singing some worship songs, perhaps listening, praying. How many of you take even one hour a week where you're not sitting in front of a television set tubing out or not looking at a computer screen, where the headphones are off, where you're not talking with another person on the phone or Facebooking or texting? Where you're not even studying the Bible, but you're just being with God. Opening up your soul, drinking in His presence.

Here's an idea. If you are frequently on a plane for your job, why not take an hour of your flight time just to be quiet, to not do work, to just sit there and read God's Word, put your head back and pray, listen to the voice of God. Maybe get yourself a little journal and write down what you're hearing from the Lord.

If you have to drive any distance to get to work, or you drive for your job, turn off the radio, turn off your iPod and just spend time being quiet, alone with God. There's almost nothing more important in contemporary life than the discipline of solitude, being alone with God. That's what Paul was doing when he was walking. That's what Jesus frequently did. He withdrew from the crowds. And that's what we need to do.

Here is another way to think about refueling ourselves. For those of us who travel frequently on planes, you know what the Flight Attendant always says at the beginning

of the flight. “In case of a loss of cabin pressure, oxygen masks will descend from above” and then what? What do they always say? “First secure your mask and then assist children” or someone else we’re traveling with. They understand you can’t help someone else, ultimately, if you yourself are passed out from a lack of oxygen.

So often Christian leaders are trying to help someone else while we, ourselves, working with such a deficit of spiritual oxygen. We haven’t been breathing in the presence of God. No wonder what we exhale towards the world does not bring spiritual life. Paul says, “Keep watch over yourselves.” First, take care of your own soul. Ministry flows out of who we are, not just what we say and not all of our activity. Ministry flows out of who we are at the core. And who we are at the core will be revealed over a period of time. We’re either empty boxes giving out of deficit, or we’re regularly being refueled and refreshed by the Lord. That’s why Jesus sent the disciples ahead so he could just be alone with the Father. That’s why Paul sent the others by boat so he could walk alone with God.

Keep watch over yourselves. Great leaders don’t just refuel themselves, great leaders guard themselves.

#### Guard themselves

Acts 20:22–24 (NIV)

22 “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

Now, I want to tackle this idea of guarding ourselves in two directions. First, there is what I think we read here in v. 22-24,

#### Unavoidable suffering

We Christians think to ourselves: When I’m called by God to do something, and I obey the Lord, then the results are going to be amazing. There is going to be extreme fruitfulness because I obeyed the Lord. My team is going to get along great. My ministry is going to be received. And if I find myself in a situation that is way less than amazing – my team is falling apart, my family has gotten sick, the work is going poorly – well, then, I probably missed God somewhere along the line. Maybe I didn’t hear from God to begin with. And we start second guessing ourselves. Have you ever done that, friend?

The assumption is that if I’m experiencing pain, if I’m experiencing frustration then I must not be in the will of God. This assumption has almost nothing to do with New

Testament Christianity. Paul says that the Holy Spirit has told him that prison and hardships are facing me in every city. He is being led by God into hardship. Try to tell that to those who preach a health and wealth gospel. All the prosperity teachers, who teach that if you are in the will of God, you will always experience increase and abundance. Paul says hardship and suffering are waiting.

There is this incredibly naïve and false gospel that is being preached to the undiscerning that if we are doing the right thing, if we're doing what God wants, then we will always experience blessing and increase.

I've often described spiritual warfare as the sudden awareness that we are not on the field of life by ourselves. To use a football analogy, we work through the plays. They go brilliantly in practice. They seem so simple to execute. OK...you run down the field, break for the end zone, I'll throw you the pass and it will be a touchdown. And then it is game time. And just as you catch the ball, someone has their helmet in your chest and you are slammed to the ground. The ball pops free and you think you have a broken rib. What happened?

There's another team on the field. We do not live life unopposed.

You see this all the time. You resolve to go on a diet. You are sick of not being able to fit into your clothes. You know you need to lose weight; it would be good for you. OK. You say, "I'm going to do it! I'm going to start walking. I'm going to start counting points for the meals that I eat. I'm so looking forward to being in shape."

And then the food that is your downfall; the bread, the chocolate, the ice cream – it's suddenly everywhere. At work they throw a surprise ice cream social and everyone is walking around eating ice cream cones. As you drive home, there is the Dairy Queen sign pleading with you. It says, "Treat yourself." You race by the DQ to get home safely into your house. And parked in front of your house is the ice cream truck. What's going on?

There is another team on the field. This is the way it is with Christian leadership. You say you want to be a Christian leader. You've been affected by what Christ has done for you and for the world. You want to help other people find what you've found. So with the best of intentions, you set out to become a leader, to become a small group leader, or a women's group leader, or a men's group leader, or a kids' leader. You say, "Yes, I feel like I should volunteer some time mentoring in the Columbus Public Schools, or helping to teach in Children's Ministry. I want to offer some time in the community center as a lawyer, or as a physician, or as a teacher. I'm going to help out with teens. I just don't want to be a taker in life." You are resolved to be a giver, to pay back something.

So far so good. Your desire to do good is wonderful. And maybe the group that you lead begins with a bang. You have a wonderful first few meetings with the women in

your group, or the first few volunteer activities that you participate in are really satisfying. But then you discover that the grade of the road has changed. You are no longer on level ground. You seem to be working harder. You notice that you are going uphill. People stop coming to your group. They don't call. You originally had 8 people and now your group has shrunk to 3 people. Or your mentoree in the public school is not particularly responsive. She just sits and stares at you while you try to engage her. And finally 15 minutes into the meeting with you, she says, "How long do I have to sit here with you? I want to go and be with my friends." That's when you feel really valuable.

There is a relational conflict in the ministry you've just joined. A few people are not getting along. And each of them is recruiting you to take their side. Or maybe you received an angry email or letter from someone you spent time with trying to help. They tell you all the ways you have failed them. Someone helpfully communicates to you that you are not nearly as gifted, or as godly as their old leader. That's always an encouragement – to hear that someone else is much nicer than you. They always seemed to say just the right word to encourage; the unspoken message, "unlike you, you miserable dog." "They were such wonderful leaders unlike you, who are barely a Christian."

I always felt the presence of God when they led worship. My son was so happy when your predecessor was the Youth Leader. Now he doesn't want to go at all. I don't know what's happened.

Here is what you are going to find. Leadership, especially Christian leadership is much harder than you ever thought. There is unavoidable difficulty, unavoidable suffering.

But guarding ourselves is not just guarding ourselves from naïve assumptions about what ministry ought to look like. When the Apostle Paul says in v. 28

Acts 20:28 (NIV)

28 Keep watch over yourselves...

I think he's talking about

Avoidable suffering

In the Old Testament book of Song of Songs, the male lover says to his beloved,

Song of Solomon 2:15 (NIV)

15 Catch for us the foxes,

the little foxes

that ruin the vineyards,  
our vineyards that are in bloom.

There are little foxes that will destroy you if you are a Christian leader that we can avoid, if we submit ourselves to God. There are avoidable little foxes that will destroy you, if you are a non-leader. What are the little foxes that will take us out and certainly out of ministry and out of Christian leadership? I think of these as the three scarlet A's of leadership.

Affluence

Arrogance

Adultery

Years ago, a man who became my spiritual father in the faith, a man by the name of John Wimber, who started the Vineyard Movement, warned me when I began ministry against three things that could take me out. He said, "Rich, watch out for

Gold, glitter, and gals

We're talking about:

Money, power and sex

How many scandals, how many fruitful leaders, how many business leaders, how many political leaders, how many spiritual leaders have been done in by a lack of self-control regarding money, power or sex?

What makes a great leader?

Guard against affluence

Acts 20:33–35 (NIV)

33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Greed, extravagance is always in the New Testament a mark of a false teacher; not a Christian leader. Without judgmentalism we have to examine the financial habits of Christian leaders. Paul says that, 'My example is of being a great giver.' You want to be a leader? Are you a great giver? Do you financially give more than what is expected?

More than your fair-share? Friend, I say this with all affection, but you are not a Christian leader until you are a giving leader. If you are a small group, or women's group, a ministry leader, a children's leader, a worship leader and you are not at the very least tithing which is 10% of your income, then something is desperately wrong. How are you going to lead other people into the Christian life, which is fundamentally a life of giving? Christ gave Himself up for us. How can you lead others into the Christian life if you're not a model giver?

When we're examining how people live, are you living the life of extravagance in terms of what you wear, in what you drive, in where you live and how you go about doing things? Very, very practical I just find it really interesting that Paul does not point to his great prophetic giftings, his mystical experiences, his visions as being one of the qualities that is essential for being a great Christian leader. What he points to is great giving; handling your money well.

How do they handle money? How do they spend money? How do they give? And if you're weak here, you don't have to beat up on yourself and say, 'Gee wiz, I'm a horrible person.' Just repent! Which is a good thing. It's a liberating thing when we see something that's wrong in our life. We just say, "God, I acknowledge it. I'll tell you the truth about my spending or my giving habits. And God, give me the strength to really change this area. I make a commitment today to make some alterations in my spending, in my shopping, in my giving habits."

If you're a young person and you're planning on being a future Christian leader; you're married; you get together with your spouse and make a plan for regular substantial financial giving to the cause of Christ. If you're single you can do that just between you and God. Financial discipline – not spending more than we earn, being generous with what we make is absolutely essential for Christian leadership.

Christian leaders not only need to guard themselves against money; we need to guard ourselves against power.

#### Guard against arrogance

What we are talking about is the arrogance of power. Look at v. 19,

Acts 20:19 (NIV)

19 I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents.

Being a leader can be a very heady thing. As you climb the pinnacle of power, you can be seduced. A little organizational power has turned the most mild-mannered people into absolute tyrants. People get into certain positions and they start demanding their own way. "I am the leader. Its my way or the highway." Power is so dangerous. The

only way to exercise power well is to constantly humble ourselves before God and other people. Because, you see, power begins to seduce us into arrogantly believing that

I'm special and I don't need to play by the rules, even God's rules.

Power can seduce us into arrogantly believing that

I earned my position and it wasn't given to me by pure grace.

Power can seduce us to arrogantly believe that

I am indispensable and that God could not work his will without me.

To guard against arrogance, we need to fall on our faces before the Lord, regularly confess that all that I am and all that I have is by sheer grace. Who am I that God should call me to lead? Paul says in v. 28:

Acts 20:28 (NIV)

28 Keep watch over yourselves ...

We need to

Guard against adultery

How many political leaders have been taken out because of adultery? How many military leaders have been taken out because of adultery? How many Christian leaders have been removed from ministry because of adultery?

I haven't the time to turn here with you, but jot down in your notes Proverbs 5-7. The writer of Proverbs is warning people against sexual sin. One of the things that the author does is he rehearses the consequences of adultery for us. Here's what's going to happen, if you go that way. You can't play with fire and not get burned! The bottom line in the book of Proverbs, the bottom line of all that life teaches is that it will not go well for you. Rehearse this line in your mind when you are tempted to sin sexually: This cannot end well. It may start off great, but it cannot end well. You cannot rub your hand against the moral grain of the universe without picking up splinters. You can't spit in God's face and have it go well for you!

When we talk about a complete Christian leader, the basic quality of a great Christian leader, a great Christian leader takes care of themselves, a great Christian leader takes care of the church.

Great leaders take care of the church

Acts 20:28–31 (NIV)

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Paul uses a number of words to describe a Christian leader. In v. 17, we read:

Acts 20:17 (NIV)

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.

The word for elder is

Presbuteroi = Elder

...from which we get the denomination Presbyterian. Presbyterians have elder-led churches. Paul talks about these people not only being elders, but being overseers in v. 28:

Acts 20:28 (NIV)

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Sometimes that word is translated “bishop.” It is from the Greek word

Episkopos = Overseer, bishop

...from which the denomination Episcopal. The Episcopal denomination is a bishop-led denomination. Episkopos is a compound word:

Epi = Over

Skopos = See

Skopos is where we get the word “telescope” or “microscope.” A telescope or microscope is something you see through.

And finally, the third word the Apostle Paul uses to describe a Christian leader is shepherd. He calls the Christian leader elders. He calls them overseers. And he calls them shepherds. V. 28:

Acts 20:28 (NIV)

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

We often use the word pastor which means the same thing. It's from pasture which is where shepherds graze their flocks. Now, we'll explore these three words in just a moment, but it seems to me that these words are interchangeable to Paul. They're used of the same people. Sometimes people are called elders; sometimes they're called bishops; and sometimes they're called pastors. What I find unfortunate is that some churches claim to have more biblical forms of church government because they use one of these words rather than another. We're more biblical because we don't call our leaders pastors, we call them elders; we call them bishops.

The New Testament can be used to justify a variety of forms of church government. Most of what we find in the contemporary church scene in terms of church government can be totally explained in terms of the historical and cultural context in which that particular form of church government arose. Rather than the Bible driving a form of church government, often it is culturally derived. And I think that God allows flexible church governments and he keeps the issue of church government pretty ambiguous in the New Testament so that it can fit a variety of cultures and a variety of ways of understanding authority.

Let's look at these terms quickly. First of all,

A great leader is an elder: a comprehensive model

An elder literally means someone who is older. Paul appointed elders everywhere he planted churches. The essential quality for elders was people who modeled the Christian faith. They were folks who were a few steps ahead, who had certain character qualities worked into their lives they could say with the Apostle Paul,

1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV)

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

It doesn't mean that to lead you have to be perfect, that you have no problems. Leadership in the church essentially is an issue of modeling. It is not an issue of gifting. It is modeling. It is embodying a set of qualities that God wants to see widely distributed in others. It doesn't mean you have it all together – no leader does. It doesn't mean

that you don't have weaknesses – every leader has them. But a leader is someone who in their own lives is sincerely endeavoring to submit their entire lives to Christ.

A great leader is an elder.

A great leader is an overseer: a comprehensive message

Paul says in vv. 20-21:

Acts 20:20–21 (NIV)

20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. 21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

Paul preaches everything that would be helpful, everywhere – in public and private – to everyone, Jews and Gentiles. And then in vv. 28-31:

Acts 20:28–31 (NIV)

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Paul's message was comprehensive. It wasn't just positive, constant affirmation all the time. There is certainly lots of affirmation in Paul, lots of messages regarding how much God loves people, how much Jesus Christ did for us, how much he values us, cares for us, prays for us. But the comprehensive message of an overseer is not just positive all the time. It also includes warnings. Leaders are overseers. They're watchmen against wolves.

Back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century shepherds would build towers to scan the countryside to get an advance warning to dangers to their flocks – flash floods coming or wolves.

Photo of a savage wolf

Paul says in v. 29-31,

Acts 20:29–31 (NIV)

29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Notice that leaders defend the flock not just against wolves coming from the outside, all the currents of culture, the individualism, the moral relativism, the materialism, the sexual craziness of 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. But notice that wolves arrive from inside the church. There is always a need to protect the church from false teaching that can come from within the church. Some leader poisons the church with a health and wealth gospel. Another leader poisons the church with a false view of the person of Christ, denies the deity of Christ, denies the full humanity of Christ. Another leader comes along and poisons the church with a false view of God's grace. It doesn't matter if we sin or not, grace will free us from all the consequences of our sins.

Great leaders are elders. They display a comprehensive model. Great leaders are overseers. They have a comprehensive message.

A great leader is a shepherd/pastor: a comprehensive ministry

Let's look down at vv. 36-38:

Acts 20:36–38 (NIV)

36 When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. 38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

This scene of Paul kneeling on the beach with the elders and they're hugging and weeping because they know they won't see one another again, has to be one of the most tender scenes in the Bible. It certainly ranks up there with the Father's embrace of his prodigal son, or Jesus weeping by the tomb of his friend, Lazarus.

You know, there are a host of different giftings in the church and these different giftings all are employed in leadership. People are all different. Some people are great teachers. They really explain God's Word well. Some are very evangelistic. Some have great administrative gifts. Some leaders are great counselors; you just feel like you could tell them anything. Leaders have different temperaments. Some are really extroverted. Some are introverted. But no matter what kind of gifting a person has, or what kind of temperament they have, there is one thing that should be present in every person who is called to lead in the church. They ought to have a pastor's heart. They ought to have the heart of a shepherd.

If the leader doesn't have a pastor's heart, a shepherd's heart, the kind of heart that you see displayed here as Paul kneels on the beach and hugs the people and they're all weeping together. If someone doesn't have that kind of tender heart, even if they're preachers or evangelists, they have a title of women's leader, men's leader, or small group leader, they have a reverend in front of their name, they are not full-orbed Christian leaders. Because Christian leaders, at least complete Christian leaders, have pastoral hearts.

What I mean by a pastor heart is a tender, sincere, intimate loving concern for God's people. When I think about the heart of a shepherd, I think about what I said several weeks ago that Christian leaders have the heart of a father, a heart of a mother. If you are a Christian leader, you have to see yourself as a spiritual father or a spiritual mother. It is interesting that many of the great leaders in the Bible were shepherds. Same word again, pastors – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Patriarchs of Israel – were all shepherds. Moses was a shepherd. King David was a shepherd when he was called to become king. Jesus calls himself the good Shepherd, who lays his life down for his sheep. God is saying that he wants this heartbeat in every one of his leaders.

Now, if you want to understand what exactly shepherds do, so that you can understand Christian leadership better, I would just have you write down in your bulletin Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34.

#### Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34

Here is what I get out of Ezekiel 34. Here are some of the actions that derive from the shepherd heart of a leader.

- Search for the lost sheep.
- Deliver the captive sheep.
- Feed the hungry sheep.
- Rest the weary sheep.
- Bind up the hurt sheep.
- Strengthen the weak sheep.
- Protect the defenseless sheep.
- Work justice for the abused sheep.

And in looking at Psalm 23,

- Guide the directionless sheep.
- Restore the tired sheep.
- Comfort the anxious sheep.
- Prepare a table for the frightened sheep.

Can you see why we need pastors and Christian leaders? If someone is lost, if someone is addicted, if someone needs to be taught, if someone needs to be comforted and encouraged, if someone is weary or hurt or weak or has lost direction, needs guidance, is being abused, is anxious, is frightened – that’s what Christian leaders are for.

So what does a complete leader look like? What are the basic qualities of a complete a great Christian leader? Great Christian leaders take care of themselves. They refuel themselves. They guard themselves. And great Christian leaders take care of the flock. As elders, they provide a comprehensive model of the Christian life. As overseers, they communicate a comprehensive message. And as shepherds/pastors, they have a comprehensive ministry. They love and care for God’s people. Let’s pray.

---

## The Greatness of a Leader

Rich Nathan

June 28-29, 2014

Strength in Weakness: Leadership Lessons from the Life of Paul Series

Acts 20:13-38

- I. Great leaders take care of themselves
  - A. Refuel themselves
  - B. Guard themselves
    - 1. Guard against affluence
    - 2. Guard against arrogance
    - 3. Guard against adultery
- II. Great leaders take care of the church
  - A. A great leader is an elder: a comprehensive model
  - B. A great leader is an overseer: a comprehensive message
  - C. A great leader is a shepherd/pastor: a comprehensive ministry