

The Three Marks of a Dangerous Leader

Rich Nathan
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The Making of a Leader
1 Timothy 6:3-5

Do you know anyone who you would consider to be a bad leader? I don't mean just ineffective or weak, someone who is bumbling and inept like Michael on the show "The Office". I mean, do you know anyone whose leadership style is toxic? A leader who is positively dangerous to everyone they supervise and everything they touch. Can you call anyone to mind who you consider to be a dangerous leader?

A dear friend of mine told me about a former boss of his. My friend was the head of a subsidiary of a large corporation. His boss from corporate would come to town on a monthly basis to check things out. Now, this boss was an ethical dumpster fire. He would fly into town on a Friday afternoon, walk through the plant and then take off for the weekend. He had a mistress in town – the boss was married – and he took her out to restaurants and expensive hotels on the corporate credit card. On occasion he would take the other executives out to an expensive restaurant. But rather than it being an enjoyable evening, the boss would get drunk and then go around the table tearing in to each executive about why they were losers and how amazing it was that they weren't fired on the spot.

The topper was that the boss came to town for the annual Christmas dinner. It was held at Muirfield Village Golf Club, you know, the championship course in Dublin. All the company executives and managers were there, dressed up with their spouses. So, this out-of-town boss gets up to give his little Christmas speech and toast to his hard-working staff. He stands up at this Christmas dinner and says, "I hope you had a great evening tonight, because some of you won't be here in the New Year. We're engaged in massive lay-offs, so many of you will lose your jobs. Enjoy yourself! Have a great evening!" This guy should have had his own reality TV show.

Do you know any leaders in business, in media, in government, in churches, have you ever encountered or read about a leader that was not only inept, but this leader was positively dangerous?

Psychologists have come to a consensus about the five basic dimensions of human personality. Psychologists call these the Big Five.

- Extroversion

By extroversion, we're talking about gregariousness, enthusiasm, social dominance. The second trait is neuroticism.

- Extroversion
- Neuroticism

By neuroticism, we're talking about things like anxiety, emotional instability, depressive tendencies, negative emotions. The third is conscientiousness.

- Extroversion
- Neuroticism
- Conscientiousness

By conscientiousness, we're talking about someone who is industrious, disciplined, rule-abiding, organized. The fourth is:

- Extroversion
- Neuroticism
- Conscientiousness
- Agreeableness

By agreeableness we're talking about warmth, care for others, compassion, modesty. And finally, there's openness.

- Extroversion
- Neuroticism
- Conscientiousness
- Agreeableness
- Openness

By openness we mean curiosity, imagination, receptivity to new ideas.

Let's just take two of these basic personality traits would be displayed in a toxic leader. Let's take the trait of agreeableness. A toxic leader might be described as remarkably disagreeable. They are callous. They lack empathy. They will not walk in anyone else's shoes. They are arrogant and cruel – they have no problem stepping on others.

Or how about the trait of openness? A toxic leader would be someone who is remarkably incurious. They would have no desire to learn new things. They can't or won't change their minds. They won't admit to weakness or making mistakes.

Again, is there anyone that would come to mind for you, like my friend's boss, that you would say, "This is a toxic leader, this is a dangerous leader. This is someone who is very disagreeable. They are incredibly closed to new information or profoundly insecure."

The Apostle Paul was keenly aware of the issue of dangerous leaders as it applies to the church. As we continue in this series that we've titled "The Making of a Leader", in the text that we're going to be looking at today, the Apostle Paul is going to give us "The Three Marks of a Dangerous Leader".

Let's pray.

1 Timothy 6:3-5

³ If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴ they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵ and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

In verse 3, Paul gives us the first mark of a dangerous leader.

1 Timothy 6:3

³ If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching

In other words, if you want to steer clear of a dangerous leader, Paul's first exhortation is to:

Examine what the leader teaches

In verse 3, where it says that the dangerous leader is someone who does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord. The word "sound" is a translation of a Greek word from which we derive the word "hygiene". Paul says that what we ought to be looking for from a leader is healthy teaching, life-giving teaching.

The church is described in the New Testament as the Body of Christ. And just as you would want to drink clean water, pure water as opposed to polluted water, just as you would want to eat safe food that is not spoiled or contaminated food, the Body of Christ, the church, needs to be fed with healthy, hygienic, life-giving teaching. One of the ways that you can discern whether the teaching in a church is healthy or unhealthy and dangerous is to simply look at the health of the body.

If you are sitting under healthy teaching for a year or five years, ten years, it will help you live a more Christ-like life. Healthy teaching will empower help to get free from destructive behaviors. Sitting under healthy teaching will make a person more loving, it will improve your relationship with God, help you to walk closer to God, help you to care about the things that God cares about. Unhealthy teaching will make you more bitter, more judgmental, more fearful of others, more closed off to the things of God – more attached to the world and less attached to the kingdom.

Paul says the kind of instruction we ought to want to sit under is sound health-giving instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ. We don't know if Paul meant by "instruction of our Lord" that Jesus is the subject of the teaching or if Jesus is the source of the teaching, probably both. But we're talking about sitting under life-giving teaching that is Christ-centered. There are few things in a church that are more important to producing a healthy body and a healthy church than healthy teaching. We are shaped by what we listen to. That's why we need to give thought to what we listen to on the radio, on TV – what we expose ourselves to online. We will become like what we take in.

Virtually every book in the New Testament warns us about listening to false teaching. Let me give you just a few examples. Listen to Jesus:

Matthew 16:11-12

¹¹ How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ¹² Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul warned the church in Ephesus to be on guard against false teachers.

Acts 20:29-31

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.

Some years later, Paul writes to Timothy, the leader in the church of Ephesus, about the same problem of false teaching. Here's what we read:

1 Timothy 4:1-2

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ² Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

The Apostle Peter warns us about false teaching:

2 Peter 2:1-2

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

John warns about false teaching in:

1 John 4:1

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

If you wanted to discover one of the most often repeated themes in the New Testament, it is avoid false teaching. If you listen to lies, if you listen to false teaching you will become spiritually, relationally, emotionally, and even physically unhealthy. The church will become more and more unhealthy.

Most of the letters in the New Testament were written to combat false teaching. For example, Galatians was written to address the problem of legalism. Colossians was written to battle with the growing problem of Gnosticism. 2 Thessalonians was written to combat false teaching about the second coming. 1 and 2 John were written to Christians who were faced with this Gnostic heresy. Warnings against false teaching are everywhere in the New Testament and much of the New Testament was written to combat false teaching.

This is a surprise to us in the 21st century because we live in an age of inclusivity, an age of tolerance, an age where the sharp edges of truth are rounded off. Most people today feel very uncomfortable with the notion that anything is false or anything is a lie or that there is such a thing as truth.

Some false teaching is obvious. Some people just flat-out deny the faith. But most false teaching is not like this. The reason the Bible tells us to be on our guard is because most false teaching doesn't scream at you, "I'm denying the Christian faith! I'm false, I'm dangerous! Don't listen to me!" Most false teaching is like the drug commercials on TV that we see. Do you watch those drug commercials? They've got a new product with a strange name like Excrementa. And the commercial has this incredibly happy scene – it's a sunny day and the man is tossing a Frisbee to his Golden Retriever and there's a happy family at a barbeque. Another couple is walking hand-in-hand in the park. There's happy music playing. While you're absorbed in the scene, the announcer very quietly says, "Excrementa may cause dizziness, vomiting, shortness of breath, blood clots, in some cases, even death." Then there are some people walking on the beach

and then you hear, “Excrementa may cause your head to explode, your limbs to fall off and your face to melt. If any of these things happen, stop taking Excrementa or contact your physician immediately.” With the distraction of all these happy, healthy people and happy music, the warnings are quickly scrolling by and if you’re not paying attention you can miss them. – Yes, that’s what I want – Excrementa!

False teachers come to us with a smiling face, beautiful clothes, a few Bible verses pulled out of context, uplifting music, and an emotional appeal. How can we be more discerning about false teaching?

Discerning false teaching

To me, the mark of false teaching is that it’s always unbalanced teaching. It’s distorted. I don’t know if your kids ever take photos of themselves on Snapchat or some other app that look something like this: (picture)

It’s not that the facial features aren’t there. They are just out of proportion. Certain things are blown up and they cover 95% of the face and other parts are shrunk down to 5%. I’ve always understood healthy teaching as balanced teaching. False teaching is unbalanced, distorted teaching. Like what? I think, for example, of hyper-grace teaching.

Hyper-grace

Grace is a fundamental doctrine in the New Testament, especially in the teaching of the Apostle Paul. The message of grace rang through Paul’s letter to the Romans, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians. We read so many passages like this in the New Testament:

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

How can you go wrong teaching grace? Well, you can go wrong! Because the New Testament itself warns us about a distortion of grace. For example, we read this in the book of Jude:

Jude 4

⁴ For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

False teaching perverts the grace of God. Distorted grace becomes an excuse for us to continue to do what we know God hates. Distorted grace is just a salve that we

regularly apply to our consciences as they are screaming at us to turn back to God. Distorted grace is a “get out of jail free card” that we use over and over again instead of true grace which is transforming power that changes us into the image of Jesus. If grace is not accompanied by a regular call to live a holy life then it can quickly become unbalanced, false teaching. And a church that feeds on distorted grace will be characterized by immorality. Our Lord Jesus Christ calls us by his grace out of darkness into his marvelous light.

When I think about distorted, unbalanced teaching, I think about:

Hyper-holiness

In some churches, the message seems to be: you can never be secure in your relationship with God. You always have to do more, you always need to try harder. You are never doing enough! You must clean up your act before you could ever be loved and welcomed by God. To put it in theological terms, some churches and individuals seem to build their justification and acceptance with God on the state of their sanctification – how holy they are. You see lots and lots of Christians who never feel at peace with God, never feel accepted by God, never able to rest simply upon the merits of Jesus Christ. Salvation is not based on what we do, it’s based on what Christ did. Christianity is his life for my life. His deeds in place of my deeds. His death in place of my death. That’s what we build our life on. Grace does transform us. Grace does make us holy. But we need to get the order right. It’s because I’m accepted by God and loved by God that I want to live according to God’s design. It’s not that I live according to God’s design and then am accepted by God because of that!

One more example of false teaching. When I think of distorted teaching that is really common in the world today, I think of hyper-prosperity teaching.

Hyper-prosperity

Hyper-prosperity says that God doesn’t want any of his children to ever suffer! God wants all of us to be always wealthy all the time. All these prosperity teachers spread this health and wealth message, especially through television, not just here in America, but throughout the majority world. I always want to ask these prosperity teachers who promise success in business, beautiful cars and beautiful homes, successful romances and healthy bodies all the time to anyone who has enough faith and gives money to the ministry. I always want to ask those folks who teach this prosperity message these questions.

My first question is this: you say that we ought to live as a King’s Kid. Prosperity teachers say our Father in Heaven is King of the Universe, you ought to live like a King’s Kid. I always want to ask them how did Jesus the King’s Kid live? Jesus is the ultimate

King's Kid. How did he live? Did he live in a mansion? Did he drive a Jaguar? Did he suffer? Was he always popular? Isn't Jesus our model on how we ought to live?

My second question to prosperity teachers would be this: what does God give prosperity for? Yes, God does bless some of us with material resources. God blesses some of us with significant influence. He blesses some of us with significant power. But why does God give wealth and influence and power? Is it so that we can serve ourselves and build bigger and bigger homes and buy more expensive toys and boss people around? Or does God give us these blessings so that we can serve others, and serve God's purposes with the resources God has given us?

Here's the third question I'd like to ask: What do you do with all the people in the Bible and all the people in history who have walked closely to God, who have been faithful, who pray, and yet who have suffered in this life? The reason why the Book of Job is there in the center of the Bible is because there is a mystery in life. The Bible writers acknowledge in books like Job and many of the Psalms and throughout the New Testament that this world is not operating the way it should. The Kingdom of God is not fully here. Sometimes the righteous get it in the neck and the wicked prosper. Only the return of Christ will fully balance the scales and establish perfect justice. It is absolutely not the case that if you only pray enough and give to our ministry that your business will absolutely grow and you will be healthy and wealthy.

Listen if you have been in a church with really unhealthy teaching or maybe you were in a cult that negatively impacted your relationship with God – we have a support group for you. It's called Redefining Christ.

Redefining Christ

Contact Gina Harding at redefiningchrist@gmail.com

The first thing the Apostle Paul tells us concerning dangerous leaders is to examine what the leader teaches. Second, he tells us to:

Examine how the leader relates

1 Timothy 6:4

⁴ they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions

Dangerous leaders stir up controversies. They separate people from each other. They leave devastation in their wake. And why is that? Paul says because they are conceited

and understand nothing. The New English Bible puts it this way about the dangerous leader: he or she is

a pompous ignoramus

That's not mincing words is it? A dangerous leader is a pompous ignoramus.

Are you familiar with the Dunning-Kruger Effect? It's something that two Cornell University psychologists came up with about 20 years ago. They discovered in their research that some people are so incompetent at something that they are unable to recognize their own incompetence. In other words, you can be so dumb that you are unable to see how dumb you are. There's another aspect to the Dunning-Kruger Effect and that is that you actually are wildly overconfident because you have no standard by which you can measure yourself or measure competence.

The dangerous leader is not just ignorant. The dangerous leader is arrogant. Paul speaks about the pompous ignoramus. Jim Collins, one of the great business writers of this generation, wrote a book some years ago called *Good to Great*. He talked about why some organizations are great and others just never make the grade. Collins researched hundreds of companies and one thing that he discovered about corporations that are not great was that their CEOs were often extraordinarily arrogant people.

In a study, a researcher discovered that the size of the CEO's picture in the annual report was inversely related to the company's success. The bigger the picture of the CEO, the less successful the company. In many of the really successful corporations, the CEO had a little photo of himself or herself with a letter from the CEO. Whereas, with the less successful company there was a two-page spread with a gigantic picture of the CEO.

When you walk into a church and you see massive pictures of the pastor filling the lobby, when you see a person's name splashed all over everything, when the pastor or leader takes credit for everything, never thanks anyone, you should say to yourself, "You know what, this may be a dangerous leader."

Another way to discover an arrogant leader is this: an arrogant leader is unwilling to learn anything new. They are incurious. Healthy leaders are lifelong learners, always reading, always learning, always open to change. I love meeting people who are lifelong learners – they maybe in their 50's or 60's or 70's or even their 80's but they're still reading and learning and growing. Examine what the leader teaches. Examine how the leader relates. And third:

Examine how the leader lives

1 Timothy 6:5

⁵ and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

What's the problem here? What's Paul warning us against? It's the perennial problem of selling religion. Christianity becomes a way to make a buck. Jesus hated the selling of religion. In one of his most famous acts, Jesus overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the temple. Instead of helping people get near to God, instead of leading people in the way that they ought to live, instead of caring for folks who are on the margins, religion became a way for certain leaders to line their pockets.

Jesus hated the selling of religion. Here's what he accuses the leaders of his day of doing. He said:

Slide Luke 20:47

⁴⁷ They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

I think of the egregious example of one television evangelist who asked his congregation to raise \$60 million for him to buy a new Gulf Stream jet. This evangelist is known for his custom suits and his luxury homes, his jets for flying around the country.

The New Testament warns us over and over again that if you want to spot a dangerous leader, often one of the marks is often going to be greed. Dangerous leaders are remarkably greedy. Enough is never enough. A big house is not enough. It's got to be a mansion. A good car is not enough. It's got to be a luxury car. That's why Paul talks to us about who we should choose as leaders, he says this:

Slide 1 Timothy 3:3

³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

You know what makes a leader safe? The cross of Jesus Christ.

Teaching that regularly comes back to the cross is going to be balanced teaching. You can't subscribe to prosperity teaching while spending much time in the presence of a crucified Messiah who is suffering, bleeding and dying.

You can't subscribe to hyper-grace or hyper-holiness errors while coming to the cross. The cross reveals a God who does not overlook sin or say it's no big deal. Rather, sin must be paid for. But at the same time the cross shows us a God so loving that he was willing to pay the cost of sin himself. God doesn't choose between grace and holiness.

And the cross takes care of the problem of being a “pompous ignoramus”. You can’t be in the presence of the crucified Messiah for very long without asking why did Jesus a perfect, good, innocent man, have to die such a horrible death? And the answer is – he didn’t die simply for all the awful and stupid people you and I like to judge. As I stand at the foot of the cross I realize I am one of those awful, stupid people that Jesus died for and so are you.

It’s the cross of Jesus Christ and coming to the cross in humble faith that rescues a person from being a dangerous leader.

Gospel call.