

This is the first in a series of six articles on leadership in the church by Ralph Mahoney, the founder and director of the World Missionary Assistance Plan. The entire series is based on the hard lessons he has learned during the years in which he has risen to his present position of leadership in the body of Christ. In "Learning to Wait" he describes some often overlooked principles which explain why God calls many people to be leaders, but chooses only a few of them.

LEARNING TO WAIT

by Ralph Mahoney

Do you want to be a leader, but you are afraid that your inadequacies will keep you from being successful at it? Do you fear that you are too weak to be a strong leader? Perhaps you have already been thrust into a position of leadership and are facing frustration or even failure. If so, take heart. God has good news for you.

FIRST PRINCIPLE - *God uses the weak.*

Is. 40:29 says, "He giveth power to the faint, and to those that have no might... He increases their strength." When God chooses a person to become a leader, He doesn't choose him on the basis of how clever, or how talented, or how educated he may be. In fact, these are things which God may destroy. It is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Cor. 1:19). Again Paul says, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many will see men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And ...things which are despised, has God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are."

There is a great lesson in this passage. Out of our weakness, our faltering and failings, God can work His wisdom. Out of our inabilities, God can work His ability. His strength is made perfect in weakness. I am astounded by the people God chooses to do particular jobs.

For example, He sent Paul to the Gentiles. Paul had studied under Gamaliel. He could recite the first five books of the Bible from memory. He was a Pharisee. He was, in short, a Jew par excellence. No one could have been more suited for the task of Jewish evangelism. But where did Paul meet with success? Among the Gentiles, not the Jews. All of Paul's natural strength, all his education, cleverness and talent had to be set aside. He had to learn instead to proclaim the gospel "not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The Gentiles among whom he worked had little appreciation of his great learning. Peter, on the other hand, though he first opened up the ministry to the Gentiles, was called by God to remain in Jerusalem and work among the most elite Jews in the entire Roman empire. What qualified him for this task? Certainly not his brightness or education. He was unlearned and ignorant -- a fisherman. But God qualified him for the job -- God alone.

How Does God Use Our Weakness?

The Old Testament law shows God's standard of righteousness. When we compare ourselves with this standard, we understand how unholy and sinful we are. Sensing our lack of holiness and our sinfulness, we are driven to Christ- who

embraces us in mercy and clothes us with His own righteousness. This is what Paul meant when he wrote the Galatians, "the law was our teacher to bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3:24). But whatever brings us face to face with our inadequacies, they can lead us, press us, free us to the power of God. "He gives power to the faint, and to those who have nothing. ...He increases strength."

How Do You Handle an Inferiority Complex?

Our inadequacies should drive us to Christ. They should not cause us to wallow in self-hatred, self-pity and introspection. God wants us to experience in sufficiency that comes from Him. He increases strength. His grace is sufficient for us. The Lord is our strength. We must avoid preoccupation with carnal "self" consciousness. It is an expression of the self life that says things like "God could never use me..." "I'm no good" ... "I'm just a useless washout." "This sort of self-consciousness can be a terrible thing if it becomes a controlling element in your life. Moreover, it is a barrier that will keep you from being a channel through which the power of God flows. So, we don't want to fall into the trap of thinking an inferiority

complex is what God blesses. The kind of weakness He responds to is "dependent weakness" that says, "I need God and I cannot get along without him." Like the Psalmist David, we cry out, "...my soul longs for thee, O God."

SECOND PRINCIPLE

God uses those who have exchanged their strength for His strength. "Even youth shall faint and be weary, young men shall utterly fail; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Is. 40:31).

The key word to understanding verse 31 is "renew". The word actually means "exchange." What the prophet is saying is, "they that wait upon the Lord will exchange strength." It means that, as we wait upon the Lord, our strength will be taken away and exchanged for His strength. It is not a matter of combining our strength with His, but a complete removal of our strength, and a putting on of His. God says, "If you're strong, I can't use you. If you can do it yourself, you don't need me." But to the poor and needy, God says, "I'm going to incline my ear unto your cry. If you'll learn to wait in dependence upon me, I will take your strength and replace it with my own, and in my strength you can get the job done." In 2 Cor. 12:7, Paul says, "Lest I be exalted above measure, through the abundance of revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet me. For this I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." And what did the Lord say to Paul's petition? "My grace is sufficient for thee: For my strength is made perfect (complete) in (your) weakness." Now you can understand why Paul says, "Most gladly therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." This is the principle by which the power of the gospel works. When we're weak, wholly dependent on God and spending much time in prayer, we are strong.

THIRD PRINCIPLE

God exchanges strength with those who wait on Him. "They that wait upon the Lord will exchange strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, run and not be weary, and walk and not faint" (Is. 40:32). Now, Let's talk about waiting upon the Lord. Waiting on God in prayer and inter-

cession can be likened to the law of displacement. If you fill a glass with water, and then drop stones into the glass, the law of displacement forces the water out as the stones replace the water.

In that same way, God comes to your life. He finds it filled with our strength, and He begins to drop in the stones of His strength. These stones of His strength displace both the negative inferiority complex, and the proud "Bless God, I can do it," attitudes.

The Furnace of Affliction

Someone may ask, how can I make God's strength fill my life? You can't. It works as you wait on God. It is a "natural supernatural" process. If you wait upon Him-- if you give yourself to prayer, He will exchange strength with you. Obtaining God's strength through waiting on Him is like growing up. Obviously no one can increase or decrease his height by thinking about it. When you were a child, you probably wanted with all your heart to be taller and older. Did your desire to grow up make it happen? No, of course not. Growing taller happened because you were alive. Given a suitable diet and environment, any creature will grow to physical maturity. The same is true of spiritual maturity. The process is inexorable.

If you light a fire underneath a kettle of water, the water will eventually boil. You may watch it closely and stir the water or you may go read a magazine. Which ever you do, the water will boil as soon as it reaches the proper temperature. The boiling water is the result of the action of the fire on the water -- not the water's concern about whether it boils or not. When we go through the fires of affliction or tribulation, things happen inside us -- merely as a by-product of going through the fire. We experience inner change. Our motives are purified. Our desire to sin is often burnt away. As Peter wrote, "...whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin ..." (1 Peter 4:11). As you wait on God, he turns on the fire of trials, tests and temptations and your life starts to heat up with two results. The dross of sin and self are burnt away. God's power begins to start working in you and through you with exciting supernatural results. These two things always happen when we wait on God.

Counting the Cost

If you are crying out for His power in your life, I hope you understand what you're asking for. Because, in Psalms 102:23, David says of the Lord, "He weakened my strength in the way." So, when you start crying out for His power, God asks, "Do you really mean it? Sign this contract and I'll give you my power." Then He comes along and smashes you to the ground, and you lie there dazed and shaking your head, and you say, "I rebuke you devil." But God says, "No, it isn't the devil, it's me. You asked for my power, and I'm going to show you how it works. My power is reserved for those who have no strength. You must be reduced to weakness. I will weaken your strength."

When Job was in the testings, siftings, and dealings of God, he never blamed the devil. The Bible reveals the devil as the source of much of his trouble, but Job never blamed the devil. He said, "Though God slay me, yet will I trust Him." Job recognized he wasn't dealing with the devil. He was dealing with God! When we start seeking for the power, the glory, and the life of God to be expressed through us, the answer to the petition does not come the way we expected it. We ask for patience, and He sends tribulation, because tribulation works patience.

God Comes to Us in Disguise

You pray, "Lord, I want your likeness perfected in me." And what does God do? He sends you to prison, like Joseph of old, and you start chafing under the bondage, restraints and restriction. And you say, "Oh, I'd like to get out of this place." But, no, God put you there. He's answering your prayer, but not in the way you thought He would. All that has come upon you is of God, coming to you in disguise. He heard your prayer and He came to answer it, but you didn't recognize it was God "working in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure." Your response to the circumstances God creates will determine whether you become bitter or better. The only thing that makes the difference is the "I". But God wants you to become better in the sense that it's now "no longer I, but Christ that liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). If, right now, you can embrace everything that seems to be adversity and say, "Oh thank you Lord, I see this is you; you are in the adversity, the tests, and trials, the difficulties and frustration. "If you can say, "this is you, Lord, then you are a candidate for receiving God's power and strength.

We have to recognize God in every trail that comes to us. And if we will, God will work in us to make the change He is seeking to bring about. Is. 48:10 says, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." The word "chosen" means "graded". When you do your lessons and turn them in to the teacher at the end of the term, you get a grade. How does God determine whether I pass from the first to the second grade? He determines that in the time of testing, trial and frustration that determines my grade. When the pressures get heavy, what's my response? If I respond correctly, God says, "Well done. You passed that grade. Now I have some harder lessons to teach you. You go on to grade two."

Yes, it's going to get harder, because, in every situation, God continues to grade, to choose, to make choice. The Bible says, "Many are called but few are chosen." Why are few chosen? Because in the furnace, most of us fail the test. So because we fail the test we are not chosen to pass on to a higher grade level to become a leader.

Conclusion

Here is what we've learned. 1) They that wait upon the Lord shall exchange strength. 2) God comes to us individually and corporately, removes our strength and replaces it with His own, and changes certain areas of our lives. 3) We must recognize that circumstances which seem contrary to us are the merciful hand of God seeking to do marvelous things in our lives. 4) In the furnace of affliction some will pass the test. Some will make the grade and be promoted. The Lord will say, "You've been faithful over little, I'll make you ruler over much."

Rev. Ralph Mahoney is the Founder and Director of World M.A.P. (Missionary Assistance Plan) At the time this series of articles appeared in the World M.A.P. Magazine, we obtained permission to reproduce them for the Body Of Christ in the BURNING BUSH NEWSLETTER. These have since been edited and included in a book under the title "The Making Of A Leader". This book may be ordered from World M.A.P., 900 N. Glenoaks, Burbank, CA 91502.



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