

Finding Today's Men of Issachar

BY DAN SCHAFFER

The tribe of Issachar described in 1 Chronicles 12:32, consisted of “men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”* Exploring our own times can be discouraging, unless we discover what to do.

The church is not winning the current generation of nonbelievers to the faith, nor is it keeping those who grow up in church. According to Thom Rainer in *The Bridger Generation*, if current trends continue, the church will win less than four percent of those born since 1984, and we will retain only about six percent of those young people now growing up in the church. If this trend continues, the church will have very little impact on the culture as it moves further into the new millennium.

George Barna writes, “The church is paralyzed by the absence of godly leadership.”¹ Leadership cannot address the challenges facing the church without a clear understanding of where the church needs to go and who can take it there.

For most churches, the issue of leadership is not seen as significant. “Only two percent of Protestant pastors name personal or lay leadership development, vision clarification and vision communication, or strategic development of ministry as top ministry priorities.”²

Effective leaders with a clear vision are key to this crisis. But where does church leadership begin? First, leadership must answer the question, “Is the building of men into godly, mature leaders foundational to the church?”

One way to evaluate the church’s position on this important question is to examine the church budget. If only one or two percent of the church’s budget is allocated for ministry to men, then building men into mature leaders is not a priority for that church.

When Jesus set out to build His church, He regularly set aside time away from the crowds to meet with His disciples. These were significant times of teaching and learning where Jesus reproduced His heart and vision in His disciples. By following His model, we find the groundwork for producing church leaders.

BUILDING LEADERS

What is biblical leadership?

If building male leadership is foundational to the church, a definition of biblical leadership is in order. Biblical leadership is best described as influencing others effectively for the kingdom of God. Yet, in many churches this is not the type of leadership seen. Rather than modeling servant leadership, many churches exhibit a controlling, top-down form of leadership. The contrast of these two leadership styles is illustrated below:

POPULAR LEADERSHIP

Controlling through:

Position

Privilege

Power

versus

versus

versus

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Serving through:

Calling

Responsibility

Influence

The most important leadership criterion.

In instructing His disciples, Christ gave what may be the most important characteristic of a leader: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matthew 20:26,27). Jesus clearly identified being a servant as the first criterion of one who leads. When I look back on my history in the church, I find few, if any, incidents where servanthood was the primary criterion used to choosing leaders. We are more inclined to choose men who have influence in the church and community, men who have money and are leading companies in the business world, rather than choose men who have distinguished themselves by serving. Servanthood is the main qualifier Christ gave for leadership. Could it be that those in church leadership need to return to Christ’s basic leadership standard to address the crisis in the church today?

Leaders are reproduced, not produced.

In manufacturing, if you find the right process and add the right raw materials, the right product should come out. Based on this knowledge, those in leadership hope that if they share the right message in a classroom or sanctuary or use the right discipling tool, men’s lives will be changed and godly leaders will be the result. But was this Jesus’ model?

His model was one of reproduction, where He lived what He wanted to be reproduced in His disciples. In every way He became the living Word. While His disciples walked with Him over a 3-year period, His words, actions, and character were formed in them. In a very real sense, after His resurrection, the disciples became Christ to the church.

What the church needs is a change in the way it views leadership—apart from selfish ambition or pride. Biblical leadership must be viewed through the lens of Christlike servanthood. But to do that, men must step forward with their eyes fixed on Christ and with a desire to serve others. Men must come together in relationship with one another, as Christ did with His disciples, and model what it means to pursue God and live for Him.

It has been said that we teach what we know, but we reproduce what we are. As leaders, we must be willing to allow God to reproduce His life in us so we can be used to reproduce His heart in others. Only when the Holy Spirit has reproduced a passion for God in us can we be the messengers of God’s love to others.

How does a servant leader lead?

If leaders accept the view that they must be servants with God’s character and model

of leadership reproduced in them, what principles should a servant leader demonstrate?

Following are seven principles Christ illustrated in Luke 10 as He released the 72 disciples to announce the Kingdom and heal the sick:

1. Focus on those who are positioned below you. (Honor those above you; focus on those below.)

2. Communicate the vision. (Help your team understand and own the vision.)

3. Set clear parameters for them to function within. (Help them avoid obvious pitfalls and understand their responsibilities and authority. Responsibility is shared; authority is always given in greater measure than would be needed to accomplish the responsibility.)

4. Release them to accomplish the mission.

5. Watch the process and remove any roadblocks that impede their progress. (Don't control; allow freedom for them to grow.)

6. Celebrate their victories. (Don't take credit, even if it was your idea.)

7. Help them focus on who they are, not on what they do. (What they do is not nearly as important as who they are. What we do should flow out of who we are as children of God.)

Servant leadership, combined with the principles just described, provides the tools to create the environment necessary to move the church forward and out of its present crisis.

What do leaders produce when they lead like Christ?

In 1 Kings 12, Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was crowned king over the nation of Israel. The result of servant leadership is revealed in the context of this story. The people came to Rehoboam and asked that the burden of domestic service and taxation Solomon had put on them be lightened. He wisely went to his father's advisors, men who had nothing to gain, and asked them what he should do. They replied that if he would give the people a positive answer and lighten their load, it would bring trust and unity to the nation. Rehoboam rejected their advice and went to the young men with whom he had grown up. These men had a great deal to benefit if the domestic service and taxation continued. They convinced Rehoboam to tell the people that the load he would place on them would be much heavier than that of his father. This heavy-handed, authoritarian leadership produced an immediate reaction—self-interest, division, and rebellion in the people. In many cases, the leadership model in the church produces the same results.

Christ's prayer in John 17:21 states that unity in the body of Christ enables the world to clearly see Jesus at work in us. Could it be that our leadership style is causing the very disunity that is keeping our culture from seeing Christ? No issue is more important to the church at large than building leaders who can lead us back to servant leadership and unity. The church's impact on society will be largely determined by how we address this issue.

How do we identify and train men who can change this generation and generations to come?

Many churches lack the means to lead men from immaturity to maturity in Christ. If a man comes to your church needing to be discipled, will he be disappointed? How can we develop a pathway to spiritual maturity, and what should it look like?

See the sidebar in this article “The Church Leadership Growth Path for Men.” The progressive timeline at the bottom of the diagram moves from left to right. The timeline illustrates the elements of the pathway starting with the premise that building men into godly leaders is foundational to the church. Next, there must be a core of men living out their pursuit of God who can lead others in that pursuit. Third, leaders must know the interests and needs of the men in their church. Fourth, men must be challenged to accept the call to leadership so their lives can impact other men (this is where most men’s ministries start and the point where the next generation of leaders must be identified). Fifth, men need to discover their own gifts and how to best use them in service to others. Last, leaders need to see where God is working and join Him.

Above the church pathway is the leadership loop, illustrating the cycle that must accompany the pathway. A leadership core is essential; but if leaders do not reproduce themselves in future generations of leaders, they will wear out, growth will be limited, and ministry will suffer. It is critically important for each generation of leaders to go through the same process of growth so they share the same vision and move in the same direction. Church must have leaders who understand the importance of propagating leadership.

WILL YOU BEGIN TO IDENTIFY AND EQUIP MEN OF ISSACHAR?

The future of the church may well depend on how effectively you identify and equip leaders in your church. Will you accept this challenge?

For more information and help on building men, visit the HonorBound web site at www.honorbound.ag.org/ or call 417-862-2781, ext. 4170. For further information contact Building Brothers at www.buildingbrothers.org, or call 303-972-2775.

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*Scripture references are from the New International Version.

ENDNOTES

1. George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Books, 1998), 101.
2. George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2001), 246.

The Church Leadership Growth Path For Men

