

Leadership Letter 19

(Note: this is the 19th in a series of "Leadership Letters." You can read previous letters at our web-site. Go to www.GraceGlobalNetwork.org and look under the "encouragement" section.)

Training the next generation

If you've been around me very long, you've heard me quote 2 Timothy 2:2. Paul writes, *"And the things you've heard from me, in the presence of many witnesses, entrust them to faithful me, who will be able to teach others also."*

But Paul didn't invent the idea of training the next generation. Joel 1:3 states, *"Tell your children about these things, then let your children tell their children, and let your grandchildren tell their children."* Psalm 78:5-7 says, *"For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments."*

We must train the next generation of leaders. Years ago I was challenged with this statement: *Christianity is only one generation away from extinction.* We know that Jesus promised the gates of hell will not prevail against God's church – but from a human perspective, if we do not raise up and train up the next generation of leaders, the church will fail.

Moses learned this lesson. You remember the story in Exodus 18. God had just delivered the nation of Israel from under Egypt's control. They begin to journey in the wilderness, and conflicts arise among the people. What do you do when you have conflicts? You go see a judge ... and so Moses began to sit as the judge of all the people. Remember what happened next?

Exodus 18:13-27 ¹³ *It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening.* ¹⁴ *Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?"* ¹⁵ *Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶ When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws."* ¹⁷ *Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. ¹⁸ You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. ¹⁹ Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, ²⁰ then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. ²¹ Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²² Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.*

²³ *If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace.*"

²⁴ *So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. ²⁵ Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²⁶ They judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge. ²⁷ Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land.*

The results of training the next generation of leaders? (1) Moses was relieved of a tremendous burden so he could focus on the things God had called him to do. (2) Moses didn't burn out. (3) The enterprise was successful.

God says we have a responsibility to pass on what we know to those younger than us. That's a responsibility for all of us – not just parents, but everyone. This responsibility is of extreme importance to you as a pastor. God is calling you to pass on everything he has shown to you to a new generation that will outlive you. What have we been called to pass on? Knowledge, perspective, conviction, skills, and character.

Jesus modeled all five of these in how He trained his disciples. Whenever I prepare a message, I'm thinking about each of these five elements. But you don't have to be a pastor to help people grow in these areas. Teachers, supervisors, parents, and just older friends in your congregation – all of us – need to be passing on these five building blocks to younger generations.

1. Help them to acquire knowledge

Proverbs 16:16 says, *"It's much better to have wisdom and knowledge than gold and silver."* In other words, it's better to be smart than wealthy. It's better to have knowledge than money.

Psalms 119:97-100 says,

⁹⁷ *O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. ⁹⁸ Your commandments make me **wiser** than my enemies, for they are ever mine. ⁹⁹ I have more **insight** than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. ¹⁰⁰ I **understand** more than the aged, because I have observed Your precepts.*

Do you notice those three words: *wisdom, insight, and understanding*. That's what produces knowledge. How do you help those you are mentoring acquire knowledge? There's lots of ways you can do it. You can take them on trips with you. You can go to the library with them. You can pass on books to them that are important to you.

Still, the most important way to pass on knowledge to the next generation is for you to be interested in it as well. Learning is contagious. You've got to want to learn. You must model it. As a leader, this should be second nature to you. *All leaders are learners.*

What's the most important knowledge to acquire? Knowledge about God. The Bible says in Proverbs 1:7: *"Knowledge begins with respect for the Lord."* Knowledge of

everything else is important. In fact, God wants us to know as much about as many different things as we can, but He wants us to know him more than anything else. The most important knowledge you can pass on to the next generation of leaders is knowledge of God. I expect that's a vital part of your ministry.

2. Help them broaden their perspective

What is perspective? Perspective is seeing life from God's point of view. That's not the natural way for us to see things. We normally see life from our point of view. That's what causes all our problems.

Perspective answers the "why" questions of life, just as knowledge answers the "what" questions. The more you get God's perspective on life the more you understand why what's happening is happening.

How do you help people gain perspective?

Introduce them to the Bible. Help them to become a Bible reader because God's perspective is in his Word.

Introduce them to wise people. The quality of their lives will be determined by the relationships they choose to have.

3. Help them cultivate convictions

The people who changed this world – for good or bad – were those with the deepest convictions. They were passionate people. When you have convictions, you can accomplish almost anything.

If young leaders don't have convictions, they'll be captivated by culture. This culture basically has four values: pleasure ("I want to feel good"), possessions, ("I want to make a lot of money"), prestige ("*I want other people to envy me*"), and power ("*I want to be in control*"). We can't allow the next generation to be captivated by these values. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 16:13, "*Hold tight to your convictions. Give it all you've got. Be resolute*" (The Message). The New American Standard Bible translates it, "*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.*" Real men are alert, strong and stand firm.

So what to do we do? *We share our convictions passionately.* Convictions are caught not taught. If you're excited about your convictions, those whom you lead will be as well. Convictions grab people.

More important though is that *convictions must be modeled.* In other words, you be what you want them to become. Jesus talked about this in the Gospel of John. John 17:19 says, "*For their sake I dedicate myself completely to you, Father, in order that they too may be completely dedicated to you.*" Jesus modeled conviction for us. Now we must model it for the next generation of leaders.

4. Help them develop skills

Skills answer the “*how*” of life. And today’s young leaders need our help in developing both learning skills and life skills. Young men need to learn people skills, decision making skills, and eventually how to raise children and get along with a spouse.

You see, hard work doesn’t guarantee success. We’d like to think it does, but it doesn’t. I know a lot of people who work hard and are not successful. Why? Because it’s not hard work that brings success. “*If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success*” (Eccl. 10:10). The Bible says skill will bring success.

So how do you help people develop skills? There are three ways.

First, *identify their S.H.A.P.E.* (spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences). It’s how God has wired us. Want to change the destiny of a young person? Help them understand what they’re good at.

Proverbs 22:6 says, “*Train a child in the way he should go.*” The Hebrew term “*the way*” here literally means “in his natural bent,” the way he’s naturally wired by God. If you try to train a young person in a way that opposes his S.H.A.P.E., you’re doomed to failure.

Once you’ve helped them figure out what they are good at, you *help them practice what they are good at*. The only way you develop skill is by doing it over and over and over again. Whether the skill is hitting a baseball or preaching a sermon, the more you do it, the more skilled you become.

Then you *trust them with responsibility*. You’ve got to let them do it on their own. People respond to responsibility. If you treat young men like babies, you’re going to have to diaper them the rest of your life.

5. Help them establish character

This is the pinnacle. God says you’re going to take your character to heaven so that’s what’s important.

The Bible says, “*Take on an entirely new way of life, a God-fashioned life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you.*” (Ephesians 4:23-24, The Message) This is one of God’s five purposes for our lives – to grow up and develop the character of Christ.

How do you help young leaders establish character? There are many ways. Let me just give you two.

Protect their minds from evil thoughts. Garbage in – garbage out. Proverbs 15:14 says, “*A wise person is hungry for truth while the fool feeds on trash.*” The Bible says we want to keep youth innocent regarding evil, so that they become mature in what is good.

Don't protect them from difficulty. We grow through tough times. We build character not by having everything go our way. Failure is not fatal. Everybody's got to learn that. Allow your disciples to learn from their failures.

Anytime you're around somebody younger than you, you can do these five things: help them acquire knowledge, gain perspective, cultivate convictions, develop skills, and grow in character.

Chris Curtis is the founding planter and senior pastor of Trinity Community Church north of Tampa, FL (tcclife.org). I asked him to address the topic of training the next generation of leaders from his experience at TCC. Here's what he said:

What responsibility would you be most apprehensive to release to someone who is young and inexperienced? I cannot think of anything that would give me more hesitation than turning over the Sunday morning sermon. But following that as a close second would be giving someone the reigns to lead the worship service. "We get one community gathering, one shot at possible newcomers, one setting where everyone gathers simultaneously to lift our hearts in worship asking God to pour grace on us, possibly the only clear explanation of the gospel someone will hear, one opportunity ... and we would risk the most important moments of our week on a rookie?" Those were some thoughts that were screaming in my ears 15 minutes before one of our recent worship services as I was going over last minute preparations with Eric.

Eric is a young man with an authentic heart for God wrapped in a magnetic personality. He has wrestled with the idea of ministry for years and has arrived at a place of simple availability and I had a risky idea: let Eric lead our service. As a solo church planter it can be a struggle to find someone gifted, willing and trustworthy to serve in this crucial role while knowing it is not healthy to do everything yourself. I think I had found that in Eric. So, at lunch one day I pitched my idea explaining his responsibilities for about 30 minutes. He accepted upon the condition that I coach him through, which I had already planned on doing. I then sent the following via email on Thursday before his first Sunday: the announcements, the call to worship, what is involved in an invocation, prayer requests to mention, the elements needed for the significant amount of time we spend in prayer and directions for Scripture reading. Over the next few days he worked through it on his own and we met again on Sunday morning for a final review.

To say the least, the risk paid off ... big time! Finally, I do not have to bear the load of the entire service on my own, Eric has found something that gives him a level of fulfillment in serving and the people responded very favorably to his leadership. If someone can get a chuckle out of people on a Sunday morning during the announcements at the beginning of the service (which, in my opinion, are the most difficult 5 minutes of a service) you have a gift as rare as a samurai. His prayers were very meaningful during which I heard several people verbally agreeing with him and I have never seen him more engaged in worship than that first morning. All leaders know that serving can be a "means of grace" for us because it can force us to be engaged when we might not be otherwise. That certainly happened to Eric. It can be difficult at times to feel a deep sense of gratification in ministry but God graciously granted me that

*feeling through mobilizing Eric for this role in our **missional community of faith.***

A lot of what we do isn't going to matter five minutes from now much less five years or 500 years from now. But when you're building into a life, that's the most important thing you can do. It'll last for eternity. It has eternal implications.

Who can you help?