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Dynamics of Leadership and Followership

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The Bible is a leadership handbook par excellence. Unfortunately, “the dominant images and metaphors used to describe and define the nature of leadership in the church have been borrowed and carried over from other arenas such as business, without much critical reflection.” It is wrongly assumed that the characteristics and skills of Christian leadership are not different from leadership in other areas of society.

Blackaby and Blackaby rightly point out that “much secular leadership theory is based on presuppositions that may appear sound yet promote ideas contrary to the Scriptures. . . . Spiritual leaders who merely use secular methods may experience some degree of worldly success, but they will not fulfil their calling as spiritual leaders.” I submit the following three questions as a guide to how Christian leaders should conceptualize leadership:

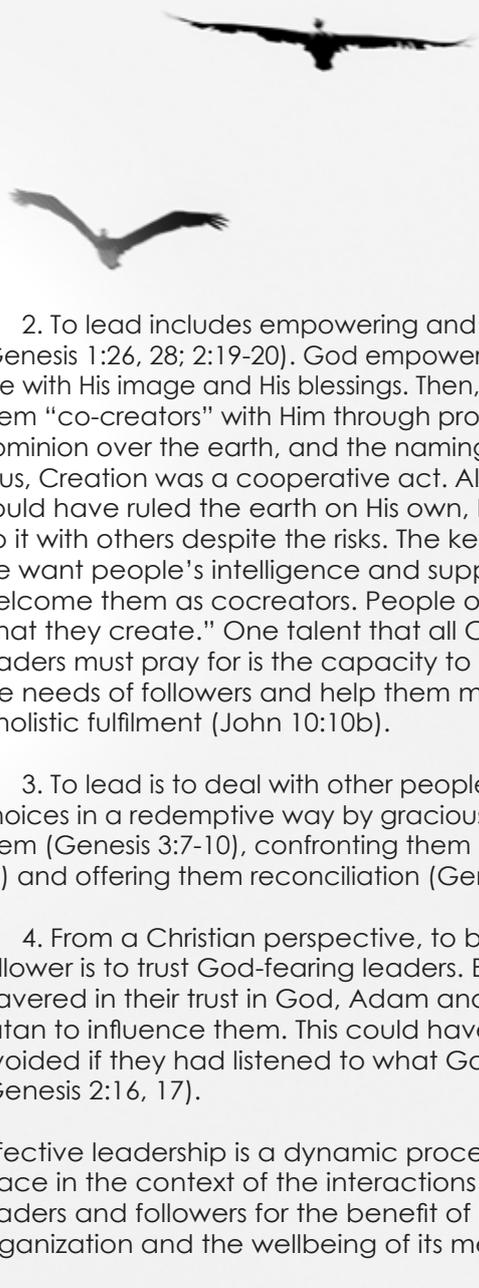
- (1) What did God say about leadership?;
- (2) How did God model leadership?; and
- (3) What does God look for in Christian leaders and followers?

The last two questions will inform this very brief reflection.

The Creation account is a good model for interactions between leaders and followers. Following are four of the insights that can be deduced from Genesis 1-3.

1. Leadership is a group process (Genesis 1:26). Commenting on this, Peter Northouse notes that, rather than being “a trait or characteristic that resides [only] in the leader,” leadership is “a transactional [and interactive] event that occurs between the leader and the followers. . . . When leadership is defined in this manner, it becomes available to everyone. It is not restricted to the formally designated leader in a group.”

DYNAMICS OF LEADERSHIP AND FOLLOWERSHIP



2. To lead includes empowering and delegating (Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:19-20). God empowered Adam and Eve with His image and His blessings. Then, He made them “co-creators” with Him through procreation, dominion over the earth, and the naming of animals. Thus, Creation was a cooperative act. Although God could have ruled the earth on His own, He chose to do it with others despite the risks. The key point is: “If we want people’s intelligence and support, we must welcome them as cocreators. People only support what they create.” One talent that all Christian leaders must pray for is the capacity to perceive the needs of followers and help them move toward wholistic fulfilment (John 10:10b).

3. To lead is to deal with other people’s poor choices in a redemptive way by graciously seeking them (Genesis 3:7-10), confronting them (Genesis 3:11-13) and offering them reconciliation (Genesis 3:14-15).

4. From a Christian perspective, to be a good follower is to trust God-fearing leaders. Because they wavered in their trust in God, Adam and Eve allowed Satan to influence them. This could have been avoided if they had listened to what God told them (Genesis 2:16, 17).

Effective leadership is a dynamic process that takes place in the context of the interactions between leaders and followers for the benefit of both the organization and the wellbeing of its members.

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