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THROSTUR THORDARSON

SHOULD A CHRISTIAN LEADER ALWAYS WAIT ON GOD TO ACT?

I approached the upscale restaurant wearing my best suit and with a stack of business cards in my pocket. I could never afford to eat at this place, but I had not come for dinner. This was an event organized by the Chamber of Commerce to introduce new members to the business community. Networking, it was called, similar to speed dating, where you briefly meet people before you turn to the next person. You exchange business cards, say a few intriguing words about yourself, and hope this brief encounter will eventually advance your career.

Church is not immune to similar practices. An ambitious pastor might be tempted to engage in “speed churching,” where he moves rapidly from one church to another. He never stays long enough to be confronted with major problems nor upsetting the saints, but stays long enough to make friends and patch over a few wrinkles at church before moving up to greater responsibilities.

A local elder might approach it differently. Instead of jumping from one church to another, he might accept more responsibilities with great humility and a heavy burden for the church. He might sacrifice his life for the good of the church, even while delighting over the responsibilities and honor bestowed on him, ever wanting more. He might even feel that the church could not function without him.

What May Be Driving These Behaviors?

Our common desire to lead, to be in charge, and our personal ambitions are rooted in a special gift given to us at creation. When God made Adam and Eve, he declared “let them have dominion over” all the earth (Gen. 1:26, 28, KJV). Thus it is natural for us to want to dominate and lead out, to be involved in decision-making processes. This is a good gift

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from God. It is only with the entry of sin that this gift becomes problematic. Lucifer revealed that selfishness is the heart of sin (Isa. 14:13, 14). Selfishness and a desire to have dominion are a potent and dangerous combination inside and outside the church.

Moses had received the best training that was possible to receive. He was the darling of the court, had proven himself as an excellent leader, worked his network, and was poised to become the next ruler. In his heart he knew that God had chosen him. He knew that he was there for a purpose, and prepared himself well. He was willing to give up the prestige, the million-dollar salary, and the power that came from being Pharaoh. Long before Peter ever penned the advice, Moses was ready to serve God's people, not because he must, but because he was willing (1 Pet. 5:2). Centuries before Paul wrote to Timothy, Moses "set his heart on being a leader" (1 Tim. 3:1, NIV). This was a good thing, and the calling was true. There was only one problem—one that may still persist today.

Moses acted on his own training, intuition, and experience, and forgot to wait on God. While training, intuition, and experience are of great value in secular circles, church is different. Other rules apply, and other realities govern. For God does not think as we do. God does not act in the same way men do. God does not see life from the same perspective as we do (Isa. 55:9). He is eternal, all knowing, patient and loving—and He does not want anyone to be lost. Therefore the question begs to be asked: "Is a leader always to wait for God to act, or are there times when a leader can and should act on his/her own intuition?"

How Long Do the Called Wait for Jesus to Act?

It is good to prepare for leadership, and it is good to desire to lead, but in the church, how long do the called wait for Jesus to act? Moses waited in the wilderness until he thought he was forgotten by God. Joseph languished in prison until he was sure that his dreams had died. Daniel was carried into exile, where his royalty counted for little. Abram left home and walked away, with no idea where he would go. Were all of these waiting on the Lord? Or were they acting on their own judgment and circumstances? Would their lives have been different if they had waited patiently? How would they have demonstrated a waiting attitude?

There is another fact that is easy to neglect. Jesus is the true head of the church, both on the local and on the global level. Thus He has the right to make decisions and lead anyway He sees fit. His leadership style is different from ours. While He has the answers and the right to govern,

He does not claim that right, instead allowing us to take the reins, even if in so doing we damage His church. Jesus always defers to His human leaders until we slow down, drop to our knees, and ask Him to step in while we step out. Jesus, the marvelous ruler, gives us full authority and waits for us to give it back to Him. Why does He do so?

Ellen White (1889) made a revealing statement regarding leadership attitudes:

The Lord has shown me that men in responsible positions are standing directly in the way of His work because they think the work must be done and the blessing must come in a certain way, and they will not recognize that which comes in any other way. (p. 726)

Perhaps we need a regular reminder that Jesus is not dependent on men and women to lead His church. He chooses to invite us to work beside Him, to share in the delight and frustration of bringing salvation to a lost world. We are tagging along for the ride, and Jesus can call and equip any person He chooses.

How does one network with other church leaders while continuing to seek God's will? Is it possible that a leader might act primarily for personal gain instead of seeking God's will? When a leader deliberately networks in the church, there is an ever-present danger that such contacts end up fueling personal gain rather than God's eternal goals. There are times when a leader is convinced of what is right and how the board or constituency meeting must act, and she must weigh the amount of influence to exert in order to ensure the "right" outcome. But is additional influence really necessary if God is in charge, or can such intentionality become an affront to God and a danger to the church?

Jesus demonstrated the attitude that we are to have. Fully divine, with every right to claim authority, He did not consider reputation, authority or power to be something to hold on to. Instead, He humbled Himself, gave up everything, and subjected Himself to the full authority of His father. He walked to the cross, lay down on the ground, opened His arms, looked into the eyes of His executioners, and told them He was ready. This humble attitude is what God desires. Complete obedience and absolute disregard for self preservation is expected in God's service. Is such an attitude possible in the life and work of a Christian leader?

Saul was a Benjaminite, from the least of its clans (1 Sam. 9:21). Being tall was not sufficient qualification to make him a leader, and his self-concept was low. Yet God called Saul and had Samuel anoint him in secret (1 Sam. 9:27). As soon as Saul was anointed, God changed his

heart (1 Sam. 10:9). God immediately qualified the called. Divinely called leaders will always be qualified, while qualified leaders may never be called. The example of Elijah and the 7000 alternatives (1 Kings 19:18) who were qualified but were not called by God illustrates this truth. How does God select a person to lead?

Is (or Was) Casting Lots God's Preferred Way of Choosing Leaders?

Later, Samuel then summoned the people to Mizpah, where God would select a leader. It isn't likely that many modern-day nominating committees have resorted to casting lots. After all, casting lots is associated more with gambling than with God choosing a leader. But in selecting Saul in secret and then publicly choosing him as king, God endorsed casting lots as a way to allow Him to choose a leader, and simultaneously validated the process. Instead of considering casting of lots as a last resort, would it be prudent to embrace this as God's way to put His stamp of approval on the selected leader in modern times?

In the New Testament, the apostles took up the same procedure for replacing Judas, demonstrating this practice as valid for the New Testament church. They also decided to specify a unique criterion in order to identify candidates before placing their names before God in prayer: They wanted to choose a man who had been with them the whole time Jesus was among them. Two names were proposed, and after seeking God's will, they cast lots, and God chose Matthias (Acts 1:21-26). The beauty of this process is that we cannot control the selection, political maneuvers are removed, and personal ambitions are set aside. This allows us to observe God in action.

Can Modern Day Churches Cast Lots for Officers?

My church was struggling to select delegates for a constituency meeting when a board member suggested that we cast lots. So we set the criteria for inclusion and identified qualified candidates. After prayer, a young child drew names. The result was a very qualified and diverse nomination. One person chosen had never served before, and a board member stated that it was useless to ask him because he would never accept to serve. But we decided to give the candidate an opportunity to respond. I will never forget his answer when I explained how he was chosen and asked if he would serve: "How can I say no, when God has called me?" He served at the session and came back beaming with joy, delighted over the proceedings and happy to see God at work.

How Does One Wait Patiently on the Lord?

Jesus is the head of the church. He has invited us to serve with Him, but waits for us to humbly defer back to His authority, just like He demonstrated. Any elder or local leader, as well as elected officials of the church, would do well to sit back and wait for God to call them. There is always the possibility that an attempt to ensure the right outcome may only serve to delay the coming of Jesus. Therefore, all our wisdom and brilliant ideas should remain personal until God, without any help from us, chooses to place us on a committee or in a leadership position. He knows what we want to do, and He knows what He wants to do. So, how does a godly leader remain still, be at peace, and wait for God? Is that a momentary experience, or should he wait for a long time? Should a Christian leader always wait for God to act? And how does she know when to act in harmony with God and not from personal desire?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. How do you think Moses' life would have been different if he had waited for God to act rather than killing the Egyptian?
2. The vision God had given Joseph of his future seemed to be crushed as he languished in prison. Have you ever felt like the dream God has given you has been crushed? Reflecting on the life of Joseph, what do you think is the right thing for you to do?
3. When a Christian has prepared well, and has a desire to act, how long should he wait for God to place him in a position of leadership?
4. How can I know that my plans and ideas are truly the ones that God wants me to follow, and not just my own personal agenda that will end up restricting God's action?
5. What is the role of networking for a Christian leader serving in God's church?
6. Have you read Psalm 37 recently? Why not read it over and over again? It may help you to get the emphasis off of yourself and move your into more of an attitude of trusting God. Try it and share with someone what happens in your heart.

Reference

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