

The Book on Leadership by John MacArthur, Nelson Books, Nashville, 2004
(41 Quotes Selected by Doug Nichols)

Introduction

The Servant Leader

1. What makes a leader?

Rank? Status? Celebrity? Caste? Clout? Style? Is leadership automatically bestowed by a box on the organizational chart? Where do position and power figure into the formula for leadership? And what is the ideal model for leaders? Is it the corporate CEO? The military commander? The head of state?

Jesus answered all those questions in a few words. His views on leadership are conspicuously out of step with the conventional wisdom of our age: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28).

According to Christ, then, the truest kind of leadership demands service, sacrifice, and selflessness. A proud and self-promoting person is not a good leader by Christ’s standard, regardless of how much clout he or she might wield. Leaders who look to Christ as *their* Leader and their supreme model of leadership will have servants’ hearts. They will exemplify sacrifice. [Page v]

Character not Style

2. Leadership is not about style or technique as much as it is about character.

Want proof that effective leadership is not just about *style*? Notice that a number of divergent leadership styles are modeled in Scripture. Elijah was a loner and a prophet; Moses delegated duties to trusted people whom he kept close to him. Peter was brash; John was tenderhearted. Paul was a dynamic leader, even when being carried about in chains. He influenced people primarily through the force of his words. Evidently, his physical appearance was anything but powerful (2 Corinthians 10:1). All were men of action, and all used their diverse gifts in markedly different ways. Their leadership styles were varied and diverse. But all were true leaders. [Page vii]

3. Paul's example of Christlike Leadership

I have based most of this book on autobiographical and biographical material drawn from Acts 27 and 2 Corinthians. These passages show Paul at his best as a leader. Some who merely scan these pages might be tempted at first to think, *This is all about Paul; it's not really about me*. But it's actually about what we *ought* to be. Paul himself said, "I urge you, imitate me" (1 Corinthians 4:16). "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (11:1). He was a true example of the Christlike leader.

We'll start with several chapters examining how Paul's leadership was manifest in the most unlikely of situations – in a shipwreck, where he was the lowest-ranking person onboard ship. And yet he rose to the occasion and demonstrated extraordinary powers of leadership.

The second part of the book will examine principles of leadership from several key passages in 2 Corinthians. My interest in leadership was heightened and my understanding of leadership principles was sharpened when I preached through that wonderful epistle. As we shall see, it is filled with keen insight on how to lead people.

The third part of the book rounds out our study of leadership with two key passages, one from 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and one from Acts 6:1-7. These two closing chapters feature key insights about the leader's character and personal discipline.

What we learn from the apostle Paul is the same thing Jesus taught: that character – not style, not technique, not methodology, but *character* – is the true biblical test of great leadership. Entrepreneurship is wonderful, but the most skilled entrepreneur in the world without character is no true leader. Strategic planning is important, but if you don't have leaders whom people will follow, your strategic plan will fail. The clarity of a well-drafted purpose statement is crucial, but the true spiritual leader must go beyond merely clarifying people's focus. The real leader is *an example to follow*. And the best example to follow, as Paul knew, is the one who follows Christ. [Page xi]

Chapter 1. Earning Trust

4. Lack of Leaders with Character and Integrity

The problem is that we live in an era where the very definition of *character* has become fuzzy. People bemoan the loss of integrity in general terms, but few have any clear idea of what "integrity" entails anymore. Moral standards have been

systematically obliterated. Ours is the first society since the decaying Roman Empire to normalize homosexuality. We're living in the first generation in hundreds of years that has legalized abortion. Adultery and divorce are epidemic. Pornography is now an enormous industry and a major blight on the moral character of society. Virtually no clear moral or ethical standards are universally accepted anymore. No wonder principled, uncompromising personal integrity is hard to find.

But I'm optimistic. I'm convinced this is an era of unprecedented opportunity for the church – if we'll take advantage of it. The leadership vacuum is screaming to be filled. If godly men and women will step out and *lead*, people are prepared to follow the right kind of example. Hostile times and adverse circumstances are no impediment to a true leader. In fact, great adversity can be turned to great advantage by the power of an influential leader. [Page 4-5]

5. A True Leader is concerned for Others

A leader is not someone who is consumed with his own success and his own best interests. A *true* leader is someone who demonstrates to everyone around him that their interests are what most occupy his heart. A real leader will work hard to make everyone around him successful. His passion is to help make the people under his leadership flourish. That is *why* a true leader must have the heart of a servant. [Page 12]

Chapter 2. Taking the Initiative

6. In Times of Crisis, Take the Initiative

But it was Paul who seized the initiative and spoke out. He recognized the danger and pointed it out clearly. He had no rank. He had no particular right. He had no title. He had no authority. But he realized there was a problem, so he took the initiative and tried to bring clarity to the situation. That's leadership. Leaders rise in times of crisis by taking the initiative. [Page 20]

7. The Example of Nehemiah

Nehemiah was the epitome of an effective leader. He was a starter. He was strongly motivated. He knew how to organize and motivate followers. He overcame obstacles. He was practical and wise and determined. He was a man of action, but thoughtful, too. All those qualities are essential to effective leadership. Combined, they made Nehemiah the kind of man – like the apostle Paul – who was not afraid to take initiative. And therein lay the secret of both men's success. [Page 26]

8. Good Judgment vs. Gamble

A leader uses good judgment. According to the world's view, a leader is a risk taker – a dice roller.

Leaders *are* often called upon to take a certain amount of legitimate, calculated risk. But a good leader never makes a decision that is a pure gamble. Wise leaders don't wager with their people. They don't subject their people to unnecessary hazards. [Page 27]

Chapter 3. Taking Courage

9. A Good Leader Knows the Scriptures

We can't expect angelic revelation, since that was unique to the apostolic era. They didn't have the New Testament. We do, and that is where God still speaks. Every leader who is a Christian has far more than any worldly leader, because we have God's truth and His Spirit as our teacher.

All of this means that a leader must *know* the Scriptures. He must *believe* with an unshakeable conviction that God's Word is true. And he must be able to *communicate* the truth of God's Word with confidence and conviction. [Page 34-35]

10. Speak God's Truth with Authority

People are looking for authority they can trust. And people who love the truth will follow someone who communicates God's truth with authority. There's no need to tiptoe around facts, evade hard issues, or equivocate on clear matters. If you know the truth, speak it with authority! That's what true leadership does.

You wouldn't hear Jesus say, "I'd like to share something with you. I have a thought that might be worth your consideration." He amazed people by the way He spoke with authority. Of course, He had inherent authority, because He was God incarnate. But His manner of speaking contrasted starkly with that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Matthew said, "The people were astonished at his teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (7:28-29). The scribes were accustomed to quoting rabbinical opinions as their source of authority. They treated truth as theory, often quoting many different possible interpretations of the law and rarely speaking definitively about anything. Ultimately, they substituted human opinion and human tradition for the authoritative truth of Scripture (Matthew 15:6).

Jesus came on the scene and, by contrast, He quoted no one's opinion. He said things like, "You have heard that is was said... but I say to you..." (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 43-44). He spoke with divine authority. He had the truth of God. and He said so plainly: "I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him" (John 8:26).

The wise spiritual leader stands on the very same authority. For us, it's not, "I say to you..."; it's, "Thus saith *the Lord*." But it is the very same authority. And when you do that correctly and accurately, you life up others and ennoble them.

That's what Paul did. He was not abrasive. He was not abusive. He was not arrogant or self-aggrandizing. But he was confident in the promise of God, and his words conveyed that confidence. [Page 36-37]

11. Leaders Empower Others

A real leader's aim is to make everyone around him better. He makes them stronger, more effective, and more motivated. [Page 37]

12. Leaders Encourage Others

Optimistic enthusiasm inspires followers. People will naturally follow a leader who arouses their hopes, and they will just as surely back away from someone who is perpetually pessimistic. [Page 39]

13. Pessimism Discourages Others

You cannot be an effective leader and be pessimistic. People who are cynical and gloomy debilitate everyone they speak to. They're like bloodsucking leeches. They make people pale, weak, and passive.

By the same token, you cannot be a good leader and bore people. [Page 40]

14. There should be Optimism in Church Leadership

My realm of leadership, of course, is the church. I was recently reading a book on church leadership in which the author began with a dramatic pronouncement that if the church doesn't reinvent itself, adapt to postmodern culture, rethink its whole mission, and retool its methodology, the church will go out of existence in fifty years' time.

Of course, that is ridiculous. Christ said He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). Are we supposed to take seriously this man's warning that the church will go out of existence in fifty years if we don't reinvent our techniques?

I'm not at all pessimistic about the true church. I'm optimistic about it, because I know God's truth will triumph. I believe that church will be exactly what God intends it to be – glorious. Christ Himself “loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot of wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). That is going to happen. Christ's purpose for His church will not be thwarted. [Page 40-41]

15. The Blessings of Good Leadership

And the men in Paul's ship were blessed because of him. Though they were lost at sea, without a clue where they were or where they might end up, they now had hope. They had a leader in whom they could be confident. They had someone who was not afraid to step up and take initiative. They had someone who had demonstrated good judgment, who could speak with authority, who knew how to strengthen others, and who gave them encouragement and enthusiasm. All Christians should be leaders like that. [Page 43]

Chapter 4. Taking Charge

16. Leaders Remain Effective under Pressure

True leadership is tested and proved in crises. The real leader is the one who can handle the stress. He is the one who can solve the problems, bear the burdens, find the solutions, and win the victories when everyone else is merely flustered, confounded, and perplexed. [Page 45]

17. Influence, not Position

Leadership is not something automatically conferred by title or by rank. Again, leadership is *influence*. It is a matter of ability, not position. [Page 46]

18. A Leader Takes Responsibility

Paul did not for one moment imagine that God's sovereignty nullified human responsibility. He clearly did not assume that if God has decreed the end, it simply doesn't matter what men do. He didn't think, *If God wants to save the passengers on this ship, He will save them without my efforts.*

Paul understood that God has not merely decreed the *end*; He decrees the *means* as well. And in the normal course of events, God uses ordinary means to accomplish His will. In this case, the means God chose for saving the passengers required the crew to stay on the ship. Without skilled hands when daybreak came, getting to the shore would be virtually impossible for the remaining passengers. God's sovereignty did not nullify the sailors' responsibility. In fact, God's decree is the very thing that established their responsibility. [Page 50]

19. A leader never compromise the absolutes.

When God has spoken, there can be no compromise. It's one thing to compromise on matter of preference. It's entirely different to compromise on matters of principle.

Compromise is good and necessary in most human relationships. In marriage, for example, couples often have to compromise to handle disagreements on matters of preference and opinion. In secular government, compromise is sometimes necessary to break executive and legislative logjams. In business, compromise is often a vital part of closing a deal. The person who refuses to compromise under any and every circumstance is obstinate, unreasonable, and selfish. That sort of strong-willed inflexibility is sinful and has been the ruin of many relationships and organizations.

But when it comes to matters of *principle* – moral and ethical foundations, biblical absolutes, the axioms of God's word, God's clear commands, and truthfulness of God Himself – it is *never* right to compromise. The true leader understands that and knows where to hold the line. [Page 51]

20. The Absolute Authority is the Word of God

Too many people are timid and fearful of confrontation in circumstances like these. Not the real leader. Real leaders have a clear understanding of what is absolute and what is negotiable, and they hold the line on the principles that truly matter.

For the *spiritual* leader, the absolutes are established by the Word of God. A leader who applies all the other principles of leadership can perhaps achieve a

measure of pragmatic effectiveness. But *this* principle will test your true mettle as a leader. No one can be truly effective spiritual leader unless he understands the essential truth of Scripture and refuses to compromise its absolute authority. This principle applies, I am convinced, not just to pastors and church leaders, but to Christians in any walk of life who desires to be good leaders. [Page 52]

Chapter 5. A Leader's Devotion to His People

21. Loyalty to God and His People

Loyalty is a great virtue. We often forget that simple truth in the cynical age in which we live. Our society is so rife with corrupt leaders and so hostile to the concept of authoritative truth that loyalty is often perceived as a weakness rather than a merit. Rebellion and defiance have been canonized as virtues instead. "Who can find a faithful man?" (Proverbs 20:6)

But Scripture exalts loyalty. Loyalty is owed, first of all, to the Lord and to His truth, but also to those who stand for the truth. Second Chronicles 16:9 says, "The eye of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts is loyal to Him." [Page 69]

22. The Lord's Example of Faithfulness

What do we mean by *loyalty*? Authentic loyalty is not blind devotion to mere man. It is, first of all, an allegiance to truth and duty. But it involves devotion to the obligations of love and friendship as well. It is among the most godly and godlike of virtues, because God Himself is eternally faithful (2 Timothy 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:24; 2 Thessalonians 3:3).

Loyalty is essential to leadership. The wise leader cultivates loyalty by *being* loyal – loyal to the Lord, loyal to the truth, and loyal to the people he leads. Nothing is more destructive of leadership than the leader who compromises his own loyalty. [Page 69-70]

23. Loyal Leaders Motivate

Leadership is all about motivating people to follow. Therefore everything in leadership hinges on the leader's relationship to his people. It is possible to motivate people simply by sheer force, but that is not real leadership; it's dictatorship. And it never really achieves the goals of leadership. That can be accomplished only by a loving loyalty. [Page 70]

24. Lord Nelson's Example of a Loyal Leader

Lord Nelson defeated Napoleon's navy at the Battle of Trafalgar, thwarting Napoleon's planned invasion on England. Nelson began that battle with the famous signal, "England expects that every man will do his duty." He could demand such devotion because he gave it. In fact, that victory cost Nelson his own life. He cultivated faithfulness and mutual loyalty in his men. A few years earlier, after a glorious victory at the Battle of the Nile, he had written to Lord Howe, "I had the happy fortune to command a band of brothers." That is the spirit of true leadership. [Page 71]

25. A leader has empathy for others.

Empathy is the ability to identify with another person so much that you feel what he feels (cf. Hebrews 4:15). It is essential to true compassion, sensitivity, understanding, and comfort. [Page 72]

26. A Leader Encourages in Times of Failure

Leaders must give their people room to fail. People need encouragement rather than scorn when they struggle. They respond to the one they serve when he has sincere empathy in their anguish and disappointment. People need to be built up when they fail, not further flattened. The wise leader doesn't ever need to run roughshod over people. Leadership is ultimately *about* people, not just sterile objectives and strategies that can be written on paper.

That certainly does not rule out legitimate reproof and correction when needed (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16). But reproof and correction can be done – and should be done – in a context of empathy and edification. [Page 73]

Chapter 6. Paul Defends His Sincerity

27. A Good Leader is not Ambivalent

Good leaders must be able to make decisions in a way that is clearheaded, proactive, and conclusive. They must also be able to communicate objectives in a way that is articulate, emphatic, and distinct. After all, a leader is someone who *leads*. Anyone can waffle. Anyone can be timid and ambivalent. The leader, by contrast, must give clear direction. People will not follow if they are not certain their leader is himself certain. [Page 81]

28. A leader knows when to change his mind.

These twin principles go hand in hand. While leaders must be definitive and decisive, they must not be utterly inflexible. The best test of a leader's wisdom is not always the *first* decision he makes. Everyone makes bad decisions at times. A good leader will not perpetuate a bad decision. Circumstances also change, and a good leader must know when to adapt to circumstance. [Page 82-83]

29. Charity

In the words of Augustine, "As severity is ready to punish the faults which it may discover, so charity is reluctant to discover the faults which it must punish."
[Page 84]

30. Remaining Compassionate and Humble

That is the price of leadership. It is a costly, lonely, and often thankless calling. Jonathan Edwards ministered faithfully in Northampton for twenty-four years. He pastured his people through the remarkable revival of the Great Awakening (which Edwards's own preaching and writing had in no small way helped to ignite). Then his church dismissed him by an overwhelming vote, because he taught that only those who have made a credible profession of faith in Christ ought to partake in the Lord's Table.

At the end of his life, Charles Spurgeon, possibly the most effective Baptist preacher who ever lived, was censured by the Baptist Union in England because he opposed the encroachment of modernism in that organization.

But the leader must nonetheless remain gentle, compassionate, empathetic, and humble. If he becomes resentful, repressive, or ruthless in his treatment of his people, he will lose his effectiveness as a leader. [Page 86]

Chapter 10. How Not to be Disqualified

31. The True Prize

Notice what Paul said about earthly athletes: "They do it to obtain a perishable crown" (1 Corinthians 9:25). A pine wreath. Something that was not even comfortable hanging around the winner's neck. These days, the most prestigious prize for a runner in an Olympic gold medal. I'm told the material for which they are made is worth about \$110. These are perishable prizes. They have little intrinsic value. Even the intangible rewards are short-lived. And yet athletes make amazing sacrifices to win them.

When I was in college, school athletes were paid nothing. At my school there were not even any amenities that went along with an athletic scholarship. But there was a record board in the school gymnasium, and it was every athlete's wish to get his name on that board.

I had a decent career in college football and was able to set a few school records. I remember going into the gymnasium when I graduated from college and looking at that record board. My name was there in multiple categories in the various sports I had played. It seemed like a big deal at the time.

But then just a year later I returned for an alumni event, and I looked at the board and noticed that several of my records had already been broken. That would have been heartrending enough, but when I came back a few years later, the board was gone. Not long afterward, the school went out of existence. The final blow to my glory as an athlete came in 1971, when a major earthquake shook my football trophy off a shelf and broke it beyond repair. My wife, Patricia, swept up the pieces and unceremoniously put them out with the trash. [Page 149-150]

32. Discipline

Why is discipline important? Discipline teaches us to operate by principle rather than desire. Saying no to our impulses (even the ones that are not inherently sinful) puts us in control of our appetites rather than vice versa. It deposes our lust and permits truth, virtue, and integrity to rule our minds instead.

We belong to an undisciplined society. The world we live in has enthroned the notion of personal rights and made restraint seem evil. But even in such a culture, those who rise to leadership will usually be the ones who practice a measure of self-control. [Page 153]

33. Endurance

The athlete has two things going for him: First, he knows how to subdue the body; and second, he has the mental toughness to keep pursuing his goal. Paul was saying that what makes a great athlete is the same discipline necessary for an effective leader.

But, he said, it is a perpetual discipline. If you slack off or give up before reaching the finish line, everything will be lost. That is why we must press on (Philippians 3:13-14) and run with endurance (Hebrews 12:1). [Page 159]

Chapter 11. Who is fit to Lead?

34. When to Delegate

It is simply not wise leadership to try to manage everything with hands-on oversight. Leaders who take that approach invariably frustrate their people by micromanaging, and they sabotage their own effectiveness by getting bogged down in details. A few things demand your hands-on attention, but good leadership demands that you delegate the rest. There is no other way to get all the work done and keep your attention on your priorities. [Page 170]

35. How to Delegate

When you delegate duties to others, remember to delegate only what you are willing to let go of. And then give the people you delegate the freedom to fail. Don't take back what you have delegated. But teach them when they fail that they need to be quick to learn to make a good second decision. As they learn to do things with excellence, you can delegate more, and do it with confidence. [Page 172]

36. Leaders Pray

We're not inclined to think of prayer as work. We tend to think of prayer as inactivity. But it is not. Good praying is hard work, and prayer is the first and most important work of all ministry. All other activities of ministry are utterly futile if not bathed in prayer.

Prayer itself is, after all, an implicit recognition of the sovereignty of God. We know that we cannot change people's hearts, so we pray for God to do it. We know that it is the Lord who adds to His church, so we pray to Him as lord of the harvest. We know that "unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1). [Page 173]

37. Servant Leaders train Disciples

This is the whole point of servant leadership. We are servants, leading and training other servants; thus, the ministry becomes a self-perpetuating school for servants. Jesus modeled that kind of discipleship during His earthly life, and He always maintained the perfect balance, never neglecting prayer or ministry of the Word for the sake of meeting mundane needs, but never letting people's needs go unmet. [Page 175]

38. Stress Character more than Ability

Notice that the men chosen to oversee that vital third priority were chosen for their character and reputation, not because of their social stature, their experience in the business world, their raw abilities, or any of the other criteria churches today often employ in selection leaders. A lowly slave of unimpeachable character is more suitable for spiritual leadership than a business magnate whose integrity is questionable. A man is qualified for this role because of what he *is*, not merely because of what he *does*. The stress is always on character more than ability. Purity, not personality, is the key issue. [Page 175]

39. Choose Men of Character to Lead God's People

All of this underscores the supreme importance of having the right kind of leaders. Mere talent could never have such a powerful influence. This wasn't about style or strategy or flowcharts. It was about choosing men of character to lead the people of God, so that the work of the ministry would get done in the right way, but the right people, devoted to the right priorities. [Page 177]

Chapter 12. The Measure of a Leader's Success

40. Remain Faithful to God and Gospel of Christ

Paul measured his own success as a leader, as an apostle, and as a Christian by a single criterion: He had "kept the faith"- meaning both that he had remained faithful to Christ and that he had kept the message of Christ's gospels intact, just as he had received it. He had proclaimed the Word of God faithfully and fearlessly. And now he was passing the baton to Timothy and to others, who would be "able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). [Page 184]

41. Leaders Also Need Others

What we have in the closing paragraph of 2 Timothy is an abbreviated sample of the network of people whom Paul depended on in his ministry. Here we are reminded that none of us who would serve Christ can do so alone. We are not islands. Although Leadership is sometimes a lonely calling, the true leader must never be isolated from people. Just as people need leaders, leaders need people. Leadership itself is by definition a process of them building. [page 185]

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