

Agape Leadership: Lessons in Spiritual Leadership from the Life of R.C. Chapman by Robert L. Peterson and Alexander Strauch, Lewis & Roth Publishers: Littleton, CO, 1991. (58 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Aim to *Live* Christ.

Evans even gave Chapman preaching assignments, but Chapman’s friends told him that he had no great preaching gift—he sounded too much like a lawyer!

His initial failure in the pulpit, however, did not deter Chapman. He concluded, “There are many who preach Christ, but not many live Christ. My great aim will be to *live* Christ.” Chapman couldn’t have chosen a better goal in life, because no one brings greater pleasure to God the Father than someone emulating His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. [page 14]

2. Taught What Was in Scripture.

When I [Robert Chapman] was invited to leave London and go minister the Word of God in Ebenezer Chapel, then occupied by a community of Strict Baptists, I consented to do so, naming one condition only—that I should be free to teach all I found written in Scripture. [page 16]

3. Knew the Bible Very Well.

One cannot teach the Bible unless one knows the Bible, and Chapman certainly knew the Bible! Believing the Bible to be the very voice of God, Chapman spent much of every morning reading the Bible and meditating on what he read. He mediated on the Word until it became part of his soul. In his *Meditations*, he commented, “It is one thing to read the Bible, choosing something that suits me (as is shamefully said), and another thing to search it that I may become acquainted with God in Christ.”

Chapman would not accept a doctrinal position until he was convinced of its compatibility with Scripture. He carefully based his doctrinal positions on his study of the whole Scripture, not just a cursory reading of selected scriptural portions. J. R. Caldwell records:

Mr. Chapman chiefly emphasized the reading of and mediation upon the whole of Scriptures. He used to say: “Every error may be based

upon *some* part of Scripture taken from its connections; but no error can stand the test of all Scripture.” [page 16]

4. The Bible Is Manna for God’s Children.

Chapman’s own words best express his regard for the Bible:

The book of God is a store of manna for God’s pilgrim children ... The great cause of neglecting the Scriptures is not want of time, but want of heart, some idol taking the place of Christ. Satan has been marvelously wise to entice away God’s people from the Scripture. A child of God who neglects the Scriptures cannot make it his business to please the Lord of Glory; cannot make Him Lord of the conscience; ruler of the heart; the joy, portion, and treasure of the soul ... If the Bible be used aright by anyone, it will be to him the most pleasant book in the world. [page 17]

5. Taught Directly from the Bible.

Chapman’s personal love of Scripture directly affected his teaching ministry. He had found the Bible to be the exclusive, sufficient source book for all of life’s matters. Therefore, his main objective at Ebenezer was to teach the congregation directly from the Bible—something not commonly done in his day. He felt that most churchgoers had received too much teaching on denominational tradition and knew too little about what the Bible said. [page 18]

6. Children to Grow to be Well-pleasing to God and Knowledgeable in God’s Word.

In one of his last sermons, Chapman advised parents to not only pray for their children’s conversion, but to pray that they would grow to be well-pleasing children of God who know the Word. “There are so many people who are satisfied with just knowing they are saved,” he said. “Tell them not to be satisfied with this. I want them to study the Word, and grow in the knowledge of God. Tell them I want them to *become intimate* with the Lord Jesus Christ.” [page 18]

7. The Bible Grows More Precious with Time Spent.

There are mysteries of grace and love in every page of the Bible: it is a thriving soul that finds the Book of God growing more and more precious.—
RC Chapman [page 19]

8. To Be Drawn Away from Scripture.

Satan has ten thousand devices for drawing us away from the Scriptures.—
RC Chapman [page 19]

9. Apollos and Barnabas Combined.

This beautiful blending of the pleasant fruit of the Spirit and the solid teaching of the Word explains Chapman's success. He was a mixture of the New Testament characters, Apollos and Barnabas. Apollos "was mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24) The name *Barnabas* means 'Son of Encouragement' (Acts 4:36), and Scripture records that Barnabas was a "a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:24a). [page 20]

10. Grace and Unblameable Life Needed for Ministry.

For those who are to exercise any office in the Church—that of evangelist, pastor—it is not knowledge and utterance only which are needed; but also, and above all, grace and an unblameable [lifestyle]. [page 20]

11. Our Joy in Christ.

Our joy in Christ speaks a language that all hearts can understand, and is a testimony for Him, such as mere knowledge and utterance can never give. [page 21]

12. Bold as a Lion and Gentle as a Nurse.

Chapman was never rough or harsh with people. Describing him, a friend said that Chapman was "bold as a lion and gentle as a nurse." His model for handling others was God Himself. "Let us be thankful," he said, "for the kind, tender, patient way of God in training us for glory." [page 21]

13. Thoughtful of Others' Time.

Chapman always thought of the good of others. For example, he began and concluded meetings on time, for he knew that many of those attending were

servants who were expected to return to their duties at a specific time. Unlike many others of his day, he scheduled annual Christian conferences to serve the needs of those who attended rather than for the speakers' convenience. He always ended conference meetings on time to allow adequate for participants to catch their trains home. [page 22]

14. Expressed Warmth and Love for others.

Even Chapman's voice expressed his personal warmth and love, which was captured in the memory of a friend who recalled, "I can hear his loving voice even now exclaiming, 'I'm delighted to see you, yes, delighted to see you. Welcome, my dear brother!'" [pages 22-23]

15. Ruling a Family According to Christ.

Chapman said, "There is more glory brought to God by a man ruling his family according to Christ, than even by a just potentate ruling a kingdom." [page 23]

16. Self-reform First.

To reform the Church of God we should always begin with self-reform. Schisms and divisions will increase so long as we begin with reforming others. Wisdom is only with the lowly. – RC Chapman [page 25]

17. Christians Should Be Baptized, but Not for Participation in Communion.

Chaman's personal view was that all Christians should, as an act of obedience and public witness, be baptized by immersion following conversion. He did not, however, find scriptural evidence that baptism or a certain mode of baptism was necessary for church membership or participation in Communion. He believed that all true Christians—born of the Word and of the Holy Spirit, sharing a common life provided by the Holy Spirit—were already members one of another and free to participate in Communion. It was, he believed, the local church's scriptural obligation to welcome all whom Christ had already received, even if their understanding of baptism was different (Romans 15:7). [pages 29-30]

18. Love Is Patient.

How many ugly, God-dishonoring church divisions and power struggles would be avoided if we only remembered that “love is patient” (1 Corinthians 13:4) and that church leaders must be “gentle” (1 Timothy 3:3). [page 31]

19. Oneness of the Body of Christ.

Like few other men in history, Chapman understood the central truth of the oneness of the body of Christ. This was not just another theological tenet or theory in his systematic-theology book; he did everything he could to express the oneness of the people of God. It affected it all he did. [page 33]

20. Agape Love More Important than Material Things.

Of all the situations that a church might encounter, none tests its affections and real principles like the possibility of losing its earthly possessions. Indeed, some accuse “the Church” of being the most materialistic, self-seeking, and money-centered organization on earth. (In too many cases, that is indeed true.) But to Chapman and a congregation being schooled in the art of agape love, matters infinitely more important than one’s rights or material possessions were at stake. [page 34]

21. Love the Whole Church.

Chapman deeply loved the church—the whole church of Jesus Christ—not just one party or sect within it. He did not have the narrow sectarian spirit that so many who claim to follow the Bible exhibit. [page 36]

22. To Not Respond with Discipline Is to Dishonor God.

A major part of the pastoral task, and often the most trying, is dealing with people’s sins. Agape love does not ignore sin, for love must never be separated from holiness and justice. Thus, when a member of the church continues in unrepentant sin, refusing counsel and help, the church must respond with discipline. To not respond with discipline is to dishonor God, disobey the Word of God, and fail to properly love the erring member, but church discipline often causes very bitter feelings. [page 39]

23. The Holy Spirit Wins Hearts by Mercy and Forgiveness.

In reproving sin in others, we should remember the ways of the Holy Spirit of God towards us. He comes as the Spirit of Love; and whatever His rebukes, He wins the heart by mercy and forgiveness through Christ. [page 39]

24. Lived in the Heavens.

When some of Darby's followers tried to argue that Chapman was deficient in some doctrinal basics, Darby reproved them saying, "You leave that man alone; he lives what I teach." On one occasion, Darby said, "We talk of the heavens, but Robert Chapman lives in them." [page 42]

25. Humility Brings Fellowship.

Humility is the secret of fellowship, and pride the secret of division.—RC Chapman [page 43]

26. Humility Forgets Injuries.

Pride nourishes the remembrance of injuries: humility forgets as well as forgives them.—RC Chapman [page 43]

27. Mutual Prayer for One Another.

When mutual intercession takes the place of mutual accusation, then will the differences and difficulties of the brethren be overcome.—RC Chapman [page 43]

28. Forgiveness Is an Imitation of Christ.

To forgive without upbraiding, even by manner or look, is a high exercise of grace—it is imitation of Christ. [page 44]

29. Stephen Pleading for His Persecutors.

The best testimony that Stephen bore was his last: not when preaching and working miracles, but when he pleaded for his persecutors; for then he most resembled the Lord Jesus in patience, forgiveness, and love.—RC Chapman [page 46]

30. Injured by Another, Better the Sufferer.

If I have been injured by another, let me think [to] myself—How much better to be the sufferer than the wrongdoer!—RC Chapman [page 46]

31. Hospitality a New Testament Command.

The New Testament's injunctions to hospitality are all given in the context of love. Hospitality is a uniquely practical and observable expression of agape love. What could be more contradictory than a Christian church that inhospitable, unfriendly, and cold?

Tragically, most Christians do not realize that hospitality is not an option; it is a biblical command. That is one reason why the New Testament requires anyone who would be a church leader to be hospitable (1 Timothy 3:2). If spiritual leaders are not hospitable, then their congregations will be inhospitable and our churches will become Sunday-morning religious institutions rather than the household of God (1 Timothy 3:15). [page 47]

32. Table Talk for Spiritual Growth.

There, too, the "table talk" was turned to spiritual ends as I have never to the same degree elsewhere known. An ordinary meal became an agape [love meal], more helpful than many a long meeting. [page 48]

33. Washing One Another's Feet [Boots/Shoes].

One of Chapman's customs was to clean the shoes or boots of his visitors. After he showed arriving guests to their rooms, he would instruct them to leave their boots or shoes outside their doors so that he could clean them by the next morning. Typically they would object to his doing such a menial task, but he was quite insistent. One guest recorded Chapman's answer to his objections: "It is not the custom in our day to wash one another's feet; that which most nearly corresponds to this command of the Lord is to clean each other's boots." [page 50]

34. Bear Street Chapel Touched Those Beyond It.

One result of Chapman's generous hospitality was that Bear Street Chapel become a generous, caring congregation that touched its community—as well as many others outside of it—for Christ. [page 50]

35. God's Praise Beyond That of Man.

What is most precious in the sight of God is often least noticed by men.—RC Chapman [page 51]

36. Minister to the Poor.

From the time Chapman became a believer, he began ministering to the poor. His concern for the poor continued to the end of his life. He was always keenly sensitive to anyone hurting or in need. He was a compassionate man, freely giving of his time and possessions. Chapman did not believe that such behavior should be at all unusual for a Christian and preached this message to others. [page 52]

37. Gave from Everything He Owned.

Chapman was personally generous as well. A friend once gave him a new coat, but Chapman soon gave it to a poor man who lived nearby. In time, his friend asked about the coat, and Chapman confessed that he had given it away. He often quoted the Scripture, “Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none; and let him who has food do likewise” (Luke 3:11). For him, these were not empty words; he took them to heart. [page 53]

38. Christ the Head of Chapman's Congregation.

Chapman also refused any clerical title or status for himself. He firmly believed, as he often preached, that Christ was the Head of the congregation and that He was always present as Chief Shepherd to guide and protect the flock. Thus, he and the other elders viewed themselves as undershepherds of Christ, their Leader. Hence, prayer was a major responsibility of the congregation's ministry, because prayer was the means by which they could know the Chief Pastor's will. [pages 57-58]

39. Responsible to Develop People's Faith.

He also believed strongly that it was his responsibility to help people develop their faith in the Lord. [page 58]

40. Learned to Teach God’s Word on the Job.

At that time, churches rarely provided formal training in spiritual leadership. So those who desired to teach God’s Word learned “on the job.” Just as Chapman had first begun preaching under the guidance of Harington Evans at John Street Chapel in London, so Chapman helped the men at Ebenezer develop their preaching, pastoral, and evangelistic skills. “To make a good soldier,” said Chapman, “put him in the front of the battle; a good seaman, let him have the stern. So with the Christian.” [page 58]

41. Hake and Chapman Fellow Colleagues.

Among Chapman’s fellow colleagues, William Hake stands out indisputably as Chapman’s best-loved friend. Chapman felt that he had more in common with Hake than anyone else he had ever met: “Our hearts were presently knit together in the fellowship of the Spirit ... Each found the other a lover of Scriptures, and bent upon obedience to the Lord without reserve.” [page 60]

42. The Patriarchs of Barnstaple.

... the two men worked together for twenty-five years, until Hake’s death. Together, they systematically visited nearly every home in Barnstaple, conducted home Bible studies, opened their separate homes to missionaries, and helped the many smaller churches growing around Barnstaple. They had such an impact on the people of Barnstaple that townspeople often referred to them as “The Patriarchs.” [page 61]

43. Wanted Others to Be Raised Up for God.

How great victory was that which Jonathan must have gained over himself, when he rejoiced to see David raised above him! He discerned the mind of God in David, and had so learnt to delight in God, that he did not see in David one who was to outshine him, but another faithful man raised up for God and for Israel.—RC Chapman [page 62]

44. Prayed for Hudson Taylor Daily.

Chapman counseled many prospective missionaries, including the young Hudson Taylor. Chapman greatly encouraged him to proceed with plans to evangelize China. When Taylor set up the China Inland Mission, he named

Chapman as one of the first “referees” of the mission. (Referees were supporters and advisors who would answer inquiries about the mission.)

Through the years, Taylor visited Chapman several times in Barnstaple. Chapman also encouraged Taylor through letters. One undated letter reads:

My dear brother Taylor, consider our claim on you. We desire fellowship with you in your work. Oh! Come and speak to us your brethren here. Say when you can come...God delights to fill our open mouths!

When they met again in 1872, Chapman greeted Taylor with the words, “I have visited you every day since you went to China,” meaning he had prayed for Taylor daily. [pages 68-69]

45. Pressing Forward.

[To a young missionary heading the field Chapman said,] “Keep low, look up, and press forward.”—RC Chapman [page 70]

46. Acting on God’s Word in Difficulty.

If we act only because our path is clear of difficulty, this is not Faith. Faith acts upon God’s Word whatever the difficulty; and to walk by faith brings highest glory to God.—RC Chapman [page 70]

47. Discipline and Order in the Lives of Christian Saints.

The late Martyn Lloyd-Jones made this tremendously significant observation:

I defy you to read the life of any saint that has ever adorned the life of the Church without seeing at once that the greatest characteristic in the life of that saint was discipline and order. Invariably it is the universal characteristic of all the outstanding men and women of God...Obviously it is something that is thoroughly scriptural and absolutely essential. [page 71]

48. Need Fresh Supplies from God Daily.

Chapman fed his spirit daily. He believed that because the Lord’s servant is “continually ministering to others, he must be receiving fresh supplies from

the God of grace through all channels. Mediation on the Word and prayer should occupy the chief part of his time.” On most days he read and mediated on God’s Word for several hours. This time of study and fellowship with God was the source of his spiritual strength as well as his personal knowledge of God’s Will. He also made prayer his constant business. He spoke to God about everything that was on his heart and would pray anytime, regardless of what activity he was doing. [pages 71-72]

49. Take Good Care of God-given Bodies.

He ate simply and sparingly, and fasted on Saturday. Chapman often remarked that our bodies are to be used for God’s service and that we must, therefore, take good care of them. [page 72]

50. Accountability for What We Have.

God holds us accountable for what we have, and not for what we have not. If I have only ten minutes to read the Word, do I employ those ten minutes according to my accountability?—RC Chapman [page 74]

51. Daniel, an Example of Prayer and Meditation.

Daniel made prayer and meditation of the Scriptures the chief business of his life; yet, if we consider the circumstances in which he was placed, we shall see that few ever had greater obstacles than he in the way of seeking God.—RC Chapman [page 74]

52. A Godly Man.

Above all else that we can say of Chapman, we can say that he was a godly man. For a Christian leader, there is no higher commendation. Ultimately, there is no greater power to move people for God than the example of a holy, godly life. [page 75]

53. Weekly Lord’s Supper to Keep Christ Central.

In sermons, mediations, and hymns, Chapman dwelt much on the Cross. That is one reason why he initiated, very early at Bear Street, a weekly Lord’s Supper to keep Christ central and remember Him, “Who is our life.”

54. Singing an Integral Part of Bear Street Chapel.

By 1837, Chapman published a collection of his hymns, which the church at Barnstaple used for many years. Singing was an important part of worship at Bear Street Chapel. On Thursday nights there was singing practice at Chapman's home. Such practice greatly facilitated the Sunday-morning singing, especially teaching new songs to the congregation. Bear Street Chapel had become a mature, worshiping church. [page 76]

55. Prayed About Everything.

Likely all godly men, Chapman was a man of prayer. "If we have not the spirit of supplication and thanksgiving," he wrote, "let us begin with the spirit of confession." Chapman prayed about everything; no matter was too small for him to pray about. His delight in prayer overflowed into his hymns. [page 76]

56. Chapman Confident in God's Workings.

One of his favorite sayings was, "When I bow to God, God stoops to me." Those who knew Chapman saw ample evidence of his confidence that God would stoop to him and listen to his prayers. Describing Chapman, a missionary acquaintance wrote:

When first traveling in Spain, not knowing a single Christian in the whole country, he was not discouraged, but trusted in God. Years afterwards, when he saw the doors opened for the preaching of the Gospel ... he was not in the least surprised; he had asked for it, and had patiently waited for the answer. [page 77]

57. Live Christ as Long as Chapman Was Able.

With no desire to become an old man who mourned lost opportunities or looked back at what might have been, Chapman determined to live for Christ as long as he was able. In his later years, he accomplished that goal through fervent, intercessory prayer. Considering intercession to be "my chief business now," he spent much time in prayer, and requests came to him from around the world. [page 78]

58. Known Widely for Love, Wisdom and Compassion.

Although Chapman wanted no to revere him, his love touched so many people that fame became his legacy. Charles H. Spurgeon called him “the saintliest man I ever knew.” By the end of his life, Chapman was known worldwide for his love, wisdom, and compassion. He had become so well known in England that a letter from abroad addressed only to “R.C. Chapman, University of Love, England,” was correctly delivered to him!
[page 80]