

LESSON 17 - GODLY LEADERSHIP

Are You Modeling Godly Character, Raising the Cultural Standard?

By Brian S. Holmes

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Godly leadership is essential for followers of Jesus yet many misunderstand what it is and why we’re all called to excel at it. In this lesson we’ll discuss: 1) what leadership is—and isn’t; 2), how to prioritize your leadership focus; 3) the primary attributes and qualifications for Christian leaders; and 4) how to influence godly leadership and raise the cultural standard around you.

1. What Leadership is—and Isn’t. Leadership isn’t management. It’s not about who’s “in charge.” In the words of management consultant Peter Drucker, “Management is doing *things right*; leadership is doing the *right things*.” Leadership is about direction. It’s about what’s being focused on and why. I like an illustration given in Stephen R. Covey’s book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Leaders*. Picture a group of workers cutting their way through the jungle with machetes. They’re the workers, the problem solvers, cutting through the trees, clearing a path. The managers are behind them, sharpening machetes, holding machete swinging training programs, organizing who’s cutting what kind of tree. The leader is the one who climbs the tallest tree, looks around, and yells, “wrong jungle!” But often the managers yell back, “Be quiet! We’re making progress!” Leading isn’t about managing tasks or having an official position or title. Good leadership is about knowing the right direction and courageously pursuing it, even in the face of opposition. *Godly* leadership is about knowing what’s *actually important* to God and doing that. Despite having you to do it alone, or if the “official” leaders are progressing in the wrong jungle.

2. How To Prioritize Your Leadership Focus. Since leadership is knowing and pursuing the right direction you do need to manage *how* you pursue it. Often people think leadership and immediately think of leading others. I think this is wrong. Godly leadership first begins with learning how to be led by Jesus. Our ability to lead ourselves and others rightly begins with our surrender to Jesus’s lordship and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Submit to Him and consecrate yourself as holy unto God. Let Him transform you and get your sinful habits and desires under control first before even thinking about trying to lead others. Led and empowered by God’s Spirit, your first duty is *leading yourself*. Follow an inside-out approach. PRIVATE leadership *precedes* PUBLIC leadership. Crawl before you walk. Start in the center and work outwards. Start with yourself, then your marriage, then your household, then your immediate family. You must get these under control and going in the right direction *before* trying to work outwards towards larger endeavors. Then start with your circle of influence, your church, your social following, your city, and then work outwards towards wherever God leads you for His Kingdom. To solve future issues continue returning to the center first and then work outwards.

3. Primary Qualifications and Attributes of Christian Leaders. Far more important than talent, skill, knowledge, or spiritual gifting is *godliness*. Godliness means being like God. This happens by being relationally close with God—knowing God and being known by God. This will manifest in a life of love of God and neighbor and moral excellence. When leaders were appointed in Exodus 18:21 they chose those who were, *“able, who fear God, were trustworthy, and who hate bribes.”* When leaders were appointed in Acts 6:3 they chose those, *“of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.”* Paul gave qualifications for overseers, deacons, men and women in 1 Timothy 3. He emphasized being above reproach and unquestionable in character. We’re to be single or monogamous and faithful to one spouse, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, dignified, able to teach, sober (not a drunk or addicted to alcohol/drugs), not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not conceited, not greedy or a lover of money, not double-tongued (meaning two-faced, hypocritical, or contradictory in position). Leaders should first properly manage their own children and household, be mature in the faith, thought of well by outsiders, and be faithful to Christ with a clear conscience. Paul’s letter to Titus adds also being holy, disciplined, pure, kind, and a lover of good. They should have integrity, sound speech, not be a slanderer, show courtesy toward all people, be obedient and submissive to those in authority, holding firm to sound biblical doctrine, a model of good works. Titus 2:12 says that God’s salvation is, *“training us to renounce godliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives.”* 1 Timothy 4:7-8 says, *“train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”* Titus 2:14 says Christ, *“redeemed us from all lawlessness... to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”* Our godliness is what God cares about so leaders must be godly and influence others towards this aim. While talent, education, and gifting will help them lead *better* we must emphasize and prioritize godliness as the most significant attribute and primary qualification.

4. Influencing and Building Godly Leadership Culture. Influencing others and shifting cultural standards happens from the inside-out and the top-down. You need to *lead by example*. Inside-out means start with your personal life and works outwards. Top-down means they’ll follow your example. You can’t expect them to do what you’re not already doing. Prioritize teaching God’s glory, morality, and will above other truths. Help them feel the weight of God’s holiness in light of their sin. Emphasize *both* God’s grace and forgiveness as well as His righteous standard, justice, and wrath. You must hold yourself, and teach others Christ’s high standards. Those you seek to influence need to see from you, learn, and believe that victory over sin and godliness is possible for those who belong to Jesus. They need to feel like you personally, the church or small group, is a safe place for them to let their guard down, be open to share their struggles, and seek guidance, healing, and prayer at. They need to know they won’t be condemned, judged harshly, or gossiped about, but listened to, loved, supported, encouraged, and built up. Strive that everyone feels this way from senior pastor to the newest member.

Let’s pray. Jesus, lead me the right direction, to do the right things. Make me a godly person that influences others to be godly. Reveal to me, right now, what to focus on first. In Your name. Amen.