

BOOK REVIEW

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Spiritual Leadership. By J. Oswald Sanders. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007, 208 pp., \$12.00 paper, ISBN: 0-8024-8227-9.

Leadership in the church is as challenging today as it was in the first century. The principles that produce sound leadership need to be studied and applied judiciously in the Lord's church. Are leaders made or born? This question is answered sufficiently in this book on spiritual leadership. God can take the raw material of a human life and shape it into a vessel of honor for His name. Was Moses born to lead? Or, was it the hand of God shaping his life through many decades that eventually produced a true leader? Leadership is based upon both natural ability and sound spiritual principles. These principles shape the human spirit and make us fit for leadership.

Sanders does a commendable job of assembling the majority of principles that are necessary for leadership. While the book does not claim to be exhaustive, it is complete. In twenty-two chapters, each readable and succinct, the author sets forth principle after principle that, if taken seriously, will prepare one for leadership in the church.

The principles stated are supported with examples. While one may not readily relate to each of these examples, they serve to show that principles relate to real life people and circumstances. The principles are not meant to be isolated from real people, but rather to be integrated into the lives of the saints to help develop character and leadership. Because of this fact, this book serves not only the person aspiring to be a preacher or an elder in the church, but any sincere Christian looking to grow and to learn how to be a more effective leader at home, in the church, or even on the job.

The edition before us is a revised edition. In this edition, the wording has been updated, the references documented and it has been developed into a book that could be used in small group discussions on leadership. There are questions at the end of each chapter. Also, there is a small group study guide at the end of the book. These features make the book desirable for classroom use.

Chapter one addresses the difference between honorable ambition and selfish ambition. The word "ambition" comes from a Latin term meaning "campaigning for promotion" (13). Ego-centric ambition is condemned by the Lord. However, a strong desire to pursue service in the kingdom of God is praised. When we are ambitious to do the Lord's will, our desires are harnessed in the pursuit of a noble cause. True greatness in the kingdom of God is found in service to God and others and not in being served.

Chapter two declares at the outset, "Real leaders are in short supply" (17). Where do you find sound, qualified leaders? God makes them (18). Leaders are shaped by the power of God's Word and His purposes. Leadership is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears (19). The heart must be clothed with humility and a willingness to please God.

Chapter three focuses on the term "servant" and what it means to spiritual leadership. Generally, a servant is considered the lowest person in honor and respect. Not so in the kingdom of God! In God's kingdom, the servant is truly the greatest (Mark 10:43-44). God is involved in raising up leaders. The cost of leadership involves the cup of suffering. Leadership in the kingdom of God is not glamorous or easy. Jesus is the premier example of service (John 13:15)

and suffering (I Peter 2:21). Sanders lists six qualities of Christ taken from the prophecy of Isaiah 42. They are: dependence, approval, modesty, empathy, optimism and anointing.

Chapter four discusses natural and spiritual leadership. The first three words of this chapter capture the essence of leadership, “Leadership is influence...” (27). Leadership is the ability to influence others to follow the leader where he desires for them to go. Other definitions of leadership are given. “Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose, and the character which inspires confidence” –Bernard Montgomery (27). “Fleet Admiral Nimitz said, “Leadership may be defined as that quality that inspires sufficient confidence in subordinates as to be willing to accept his views and carry out his commands””(27). John R. Mott gave this description of a leader, “a leader is a man who knows the road, who can keep ahead, and who pulls others after him” (28). President Harry S. Truman (1945-1953) said: “A leader is a person who has the ability to get others to do what they don’t want to do, and like it” (28). Since leadership involves the complete person, both natural and spiritual qualities are involved. However, both natural abilities and spiritual principles are God-given. Sanders answers the question, “Are leaders made or born?” by stating, “Surely, both” (29).

Chapter five answers the question, “Can You Become A Leader?” Jesus chose men who were from among the common people of His day: workers, fishermen, unspoiled, uneducated, but with fervent devotion and faith. How do you evaluate leadership potential? Sanders lists twenty-seven questions that can be used to answer this question. Through self-examination, assessment can be made of overall leadership ability.

The leadership example of the apostle Paul is developed in chapter six. In I Tim. 3:1-7, Paul lists some of the qualifications for spiritual leadership. These qualities are divided by Sanders into social, moral, mental, personality and domestic qualifications. He also addresses the issue of maturity stating that a “novice or new convert should not be pushed into leadership” (44).

Chapter seven takes a look at the leadership example of Peter. Scripture thoughts are taken from I Peter 5:1-7. Peter is a good example of the process of developing leadership. Jesus worked closely with him and day by day shaped his mind and heart into a great leader of God’s flock. Peter affirms that leaders among God’s people are shepherds. They must be humble. They must not be dictatorial. They must provide a worthy example for the people that they lead. They must not be distracted by worldliness.

Chapters eight and nine develop essential qualities of leadership. Sanders develops the following characteristics of spiritual leadership in chapter eight: discipline, vision, wisdom, decisiveness, courage, humility, integrity and sincerity. In chapter nine he adds: a sense of humor, righteous indignation, patience, friendship, tact and diplomacy, inspirational power, executive ability, good listening skills, and the art of letter writing.

Sanders believes that an effective leader must be Spirit-filled. In chapter ten, he defines “to be filled with the Spirit” to mean, “the Christian voluntarily surrenders life and will to the Spirit” (80). Here I would caution the reader. The Holy Spirit leads men to develop the qualities of spiritual leadership in conjunction with the Word of God and faith in that Word. The Holy Spirit does not miraculously instill leadership qualities in the person aspiring to spiritual leadership. The spiritual gifts including things such as prophecy, healing, tongue speaking, etc. were miraculous and limited to the first century (I Cor. 13:8-10).

Chapter eleven takes up the subject of prayer. Prayer is a “joyous necessity” in the life of the spiritual leader. Jesus spent full nights in prayer (Luke 6:12) and he used prayer in most of

the significant moments of His life. Prayer is a powerful means of enlisting God's help in leadership roles.

Time management is the focus of chapter twelve. Sanders states, "Our problem is not too little time but making better use of the time we have" (94). The author tells us to map pursuits and determine priorities and make sure the most important things are accomplished. Do not assume tasks that God has not assigned. Procrastination is the thief of time. "Do it now" is the motto that leads to success.

In chapter thirteen, the author turns his attention to the subject of reading and books. Spiritual leaders must be disciplined students of the Bible and good books that fill him up with insights that can be shared with others. In answer to the question, "Why read?", Sanders quotes Harold Ockenga as saying, "Read to refill the wells of inspiration" (103). Bacon's famous rule for reading is also given: "Read not to contradict or confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tested (sic), others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested" (103). The leader should read to acquire new information, to have fellowship with great minds, and to be inspired. The choice of books to read involves discrimination. The author recommends: biographies and books that challenge us to grow. Sanders gives eight strategies for improving retention in reading that are worth every person knowing and practicing (107). He recommends reading a book three times. He also recommends writing a brief analysis of the book on the inside back cover (107).

Every leader should strive to do his/her best for God. Chapter fourteen addresses the notion of striving for excellence in leadership. Be zealous and fervent in spirit. How can leadership be improved? The leader must care for: administration, spiritual tone, group morale, personal relationships, problem solving and creative planning (112-113).

In chapter fifteen, Sanders develops the idea of the cost of leadership. There is a price for every great achievement. The cost of leadership involves: self-sacrifice, loneliness, fatigue, criticism, rejection, and pressure and perplexity.

Chapter sixteen deals with the responsibilities of leadership. What is the true leader concerned with doing? The author mentions: service (focusing on the welfare of others), applied discipline, guidance, and initiative. Sanders lists five guidelines for applying discipline that are worthy of note: (1) first conduct a thorough and impartial inquiry; (2) then consider the overall benefit of the disciplinary action to the work and to the individual; (3) do all in the spirit of love—be considerate always; (4) always keep the spiritual restoration of the offender in view; and (5) pray it through (127). He also lists fourteen rules for life by Benson that are insightful (129).

In chapter seventeen, Sanders addresses five tests of leadership: compromise, ambition, the impossible situation, failure and jealousy. These tests must be passed in order for the spiritual leader to be pleasing to God.

The capacity to recognize the special abilities of others as well as their limitations is another aspect of leadership. Chapter eighteen deals with delegation of responsibilities to others. Can a spiritual leader pass the "control" test? Moses passed this test (Exodus 18). By broadening the base of leadership, more can be accomplished.

How do you approach the difficult time of transition between leaders or replacement of leaders? Sanders did not overlook this important consideration and addresses it in chapter nineteen. He begins this chapter by stating, "The ultimate test of a person's leadership is the health of the organization when the organizer is gone" (143). This is very true and leaders must prepare for the time when they no longer will be able to function or they depart from this life.

Chapter twenty deals with the need for reproducing leaders. Paul was mindful of passing his faith and his message on to the next generation of men who would be able to instruct others in the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:2). Training programs are needed whereby a new generation is instructed in spiritual principles of leadership.

Sanders takes up the topic of leadership perils in chapter twenty-one. What are some of these perils? Pride, egotism, jealousy, popularity, infallibility, indispensability, and elation and depression are all mentioned. The spiritual leader, like Paul, must be mindful of the things that would disqualify him from his work, defeat him and destroy him. (I Cor. 9:27).

Finally, Sanders addresses the example of Nehemiah. He briefly considers the man and his methods in chapter twenty-two.

The book concludes with a section on chapter notes and an index of both persons and Scriptures mentioned in the book. Overall, this book will give any student a good overview of the subject of leadership and point out areas where work can be done and improvement can be made.