

Tools for Wise Leadership

A programme of TWR-Africa, produced by TWR-Zimbabwe, presented by Rev Dr Roy Musasiwa

Series 10: The Leadership Style of Jesus

Talk 5: Courageous Leadership

Welcome to the programme **Tools for Wise Leadership**. We have so far discussed various aspects of the leadership style of Jesus. He was a man of authority – especially authority of competence and authority of character. He recognized the need to be confirmed by the Father, his disciples and outsiders. He acknowledged the contribution of others, including giants from the past and the contemporary people who have made a difference to his ministry. Then of course Jesus came as a shepherd. He knew his own sheep, and his sheep knew him. He was committed to the sheep, putting the interests of the sheep before his own.

More than any other Shepherd of his time Jesus demonstrated courage. It is this quality of courage that we want to concentrate on today.

An illustration of courage that Michael Youssef gives is how he treated Nicodemus, as recorded in John 3. Nicodemus was a very influential man; the Bible calls him a “man of the Pharisees” and a “ruler of the Jews”. He was, in other words, a member of the Jewish ruling council called the Sanhedrin. That made him a very important man in the eyes of the world.

Now, what would you have done if you had been visited by such a man? Many people would go out of their way to give Nicodemus a high place of honour. What is more, how would you respond if such a man as Nicodemus begins his visit by saying, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." A typical person would say something like, “My Lord Nicodemus, I feel highly favoured that a person of such high stature should visit me. You have very deep insight, sir. I am highly impressed that you have been able to so quickly recognize that I come from God, and that God is with me. You are a blessed man indeed.”

That is how an average person might have responded to Nicodemus. But how did Jesus himself respond? We are told, “In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again’.” Jesus did not flatter Nicodemus. In actual fact Jesus was saying, “Nicodemus, you are religious, but your religion will not get you anywhere. If you want to see the Kingdom of God you must be born again.” Jesus lovingly confronted Nicodemus with the truth about his condition. That is not how salespersons are taught to sell their ideas. They are supposed to find something favourable to say, to complement the other person.

It took the courage of conviction for Jesus to be truthful with someone in such a high position as Nicodemus. Conviction always requires courage. A leader of conviction is not a people-pleaser – just saying something in order to sound nice and acceptable. Too many people are so afraid to disappoint others that they try to accommodate other people’s views just in order to be acceptable to them. If you do not have conviction you will talk to someone representing another religion and you will say something like, “You know both of us are right. It’s just a different way of understanding the same truth. The way you understand truth complements the way I understand it.” But not so with Jesus. He did not compromise his convictions for the sake of pleasing Nicodemus or anyone else. Jesus spoke the truth in love, but he did not compromise.

Jesus did this with all the other people he had to interact with. He did not try to soften up prospective disciples with promises and flattery. At times he actually discouraged prospective disciples from following him by pointing out the rigors and costs of discipleship. Matt 16:24-25

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says, “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.’” In other words Jesus did not want anyone to follow him without knowing what the future held for his followers. He had the courage to be truthful.

In church history an outstanding example courage of conviction is that of Martin Luther the father of the Reformation movement in the 16th Century. He defied the Pope, the church of his day and other religious and secular leaders over their departure from the Word of God. But that made the authorities angry at him, and they accused him of being the one who was a heretic. In 1521 he appeared before the German Court in the city of Worms to answer charges of heresy. He was presented with a list of his “errors” and offered forgiveness if he would renounce his beliefs. His response took courage. Knowing that he was likely to be sentenced to death he nevertheless responded:

Unless I am convicted of error by the testimony of Scripture, I cannot and will not recant anything, for to act against our conscience is neither safe for us, nor open to us. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. So help me God. Amen

Martin Luther paid dearly for his courageous stand. He was excommunicated by the pope and condemnation as an outlaw by the Emperor.

If it takes courage to be truthful, it also takes courage to do the right thing. There are many times when it is far easier to follow the crowd. That way one is more acceptable. The world wants conformers and hates those who stand out and act differently. That is exactly why religious leaders hated Jesus. He dared to heal people even when it was the Sabbath. He was seen talking to a Samaritan woman. What sort of a Rabbi was he? But Jesus continued to do what he did because he had the courage of his convictions and would not just flow with the crowd.

Christian leader, let me ask you. How prepared are you to be in the minority if that is God’s will? One thing for sure is that being in the minority is not comfortable. Just check out the experience of Joshua and Caleb. They could have made things easier for themselves by supporting the other 10 spies who brought back a bad report. Following the opinions and practices of the majority would have made them acceptable to the majority. By choosing to be different, they were subjected to persecution. In Numbers 14:10 we are even told that by daring to be different the whole assembly talked about stoning them. That was the cost of doing the right thing, and Joshua and Caleb were prepared to pay the cost.

Much more so did Jesus pay the cost of doing the right thing. The ultimate cost was death. Leaders sometimes have to pay the ultimate sacrifice for doing the right thing. Jesus did it. Many of his followers were killed in the persecution that arose against the church. These are examples of the cost that leaders sometimes have to pay for courageously doing the right thing and being different from the world.

I hope that you are inspired by the example of Jesus as a courageous leader. It is an example that we have also seen being exercised by Joshua and Caleb, by Jesus’ disciples and by the Reformer, Martin Luther. It is courage to believe and live according to one’s conviction, even when it means being in the minority. When you exercise such courage you may be unpopular and you may have to suffer. But you will earn the respect of those who are looking for just such a leader to inspire their own convictions as well.

Let’s explore more aspects of the leadership style of Jesus in the next programme. But until then practice these tools of wise leadership.

Discussion Questions

The *Leadership Style of Jesus* helps us to understand how Jesus was leading. Three types of discussion questions can help you process the lessons from *Tools for Wise Leadership*:

Study Question 1: for Personal reflection

What does this episode mean to you personally as a leader?

Study Question 2: for Group Discussion

What does this topic mean you as a group of leaders?

Study Question 3: for applying the topic

What can you apply from this topic in your role as a leader?

You may know young leaders in your community that would benefit by talking about leadership issues. How about inviting them to discuss the questions for the **Talk 5 - Courageous Leadership**

Study Question 1: Personal reflection

In which areas of your life have you had to display costly courage?

Study Question 2: Group Discussion

When you look at the Christian Church to today, who can you identify as courageous leaders?

Study Question 3: Applying the topic

How can you prepare yourself to face difficult situations that are going to require a Jesus kind of courage?

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