

THE POWER OF HUMILITY

Leaders need to be strong to attract followers. What preacher wouldn't like to be Peter on the Day of Pentecost? Peter's powerful sermon came from the Holy Spirit's influence. Little more than a month earlier, on his own, Peter denied that he had ever known Christ.

While self-confidence and a polished presentation are desirable leadership qualities, people may be turned off by an image that's too perfect. A teacher who appears to have it all together might intimidate learners who struggle with human imperfection. Like the apostle Paul, leaders sometimes need to expose their thorn in the flesh. Three times, Paul asked God to take his thorn away, but the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

The following examples may suggest ways to show strength through humility.

Admit wrongdoing. "I was a jerk last week," the preacher said as he confessed his role in a misunderstanding with his family. Later he reported that "after I apologized, the climate in the home greatly improved." His honesty and humility encouraged congregational members to be more sensitive to other members of their own families.

Sometimes the consensus or an actual vote of the church goes against the convictions of the leader. An attitude of resentment may result. The first step to restoring harmony is to correct the attitude through prayer. After all, there usually are pros and cons to every issue. Sharing the process of overcoming a negative attitude will show strength rather than weakness.

Turn a negative into a positive. Just before he was to open a new facility for people who were mentally and physically challenged, the leader had an accident in which he lost both hands. After he learned to deal with his own limitations, he said, "I can better understand others with limitations, and they understand me because now I'm one of them."

Reveal your struggle with sin. While explaining that human tendency is no excuse for sin, the pastor said, "I sometimes have the urge to wring someone's neck." He explained that a natural reaction did not allow him to act out his feelings. Instead, he made a covenant to yield his temper to the power of the Holy Spirit and challenged his listeners to do likewise. At the same time, this public confession held the preacher accountable to control his anger in private.

Stories of personal struggles will affect listeners even more if leaders explain how they got through some of the problems common in today's society. Someone struggling with substance abuse will be encouraged to learn that someone else's battle ended in victory. People facing illness are inspired by a story of how faith helped someone else deal with a similar illness. In tough economic times, it's heartening to hear how God supplied daily needs for someone else.

Allow learners to outdo the leader. A group of Christians was making a list of the ways in which Christians can emulate Jesus. After a while, a usually quiet man said, "Forgiveness." The leader exclaimed, "Would you believe, I've had all week to think on this lesson and didn't even think of something as important as forgiveness?" That one incident fostered more active participation in class discussions by learners. "This class is 400 percent more interesting when you get involved," one man said.

Avoid the dramatic. As a pastor approached another pastor's desk, he inadvertently discovered a note on the sermon outline that said, "Cry here." The incident came under



discussion in a small group. “How well do you think that went over with his listeners?”

“Well,” someone said, “my pastor cries sometimes, and it seems okay.” Someone else from the same congregation said, “Yes, but when Pastor Maxwell cries, I want to cry, too.” There is a difference between human-directed drama and a Holy Spirit-directed expression of emotion that comes from the heart.

Ask for help. “I’m scheduled for serious surgery in a few days,” the counselor told a group of young prison inmates during a Bible study. “I’d like for you guys to lay hands on me and pray that my surgery goes well.”

Afterward, one of the inmates said, “I’ve never had anyone from the outside ask me to pray before. Thank you for your confidence and respect.”

Soliciting the prayers of congregational or group members for wisdom in dealing with a situation strengthens the bond between leaders and followers. Admitting that you don’t have all the answers for a decision that affects the church is more effective than saying, “God told me it should be done this way.”

Point to Jesus. After explaining to his listeners that he was not the Christ, John the Baptist said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). A high-profile preacher agreed to serve a church as interim pastor for only two months. During that brief time, he focused on Jesus and demonstrated His love

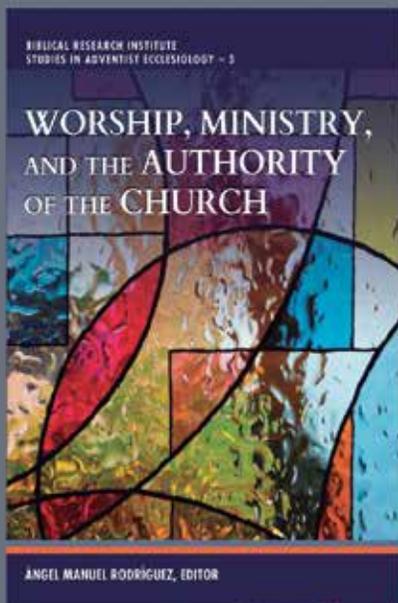
so fully that the congregation was well-prepared to work with the new senior pastor.

Develop new leaders. When the discipleship pastor resigned, one member said, “Although she was such a dynamic person, she won’t be missed as much as other pastors because she trained so many other people to help fill the gap.” Instead of demonstrating her own speaking skills, she often solicited congregational members to insert their testimony into a teaching session.

Serve others. Jesus said, “The greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 23:11). The leader of a Christian writer’s conference was a skilled communicator who touched the hearts of his listeners. His strongest points, though, were made not in the classroom but in the dining hall. After quickly finishing his own meal, he became the busboy to clear the tables as others finished.

Pastors with busy schedules cannot participate in every service project, but occasional involvement in different endeavors sets a good example for others. Leaders do not need to hide their imperfections. By being vulnerable and demonstrating humility, they can build a stronger relationship with those they serve. ED

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