

Life Lessons for Leaders



From II Kings

Ted Grosbach

ATTITUDE

II Kings 1: 1-14

We all know that “attitude” plays a major role in the success or failure of any enterprise or undertaking. We speak of someone having a “bad attitude.” In the church, we often refer to this as having a “bad spirit.” And the Apostle Paul spoke of the importance of having the “mind of Christ” in his epistle to the Philippians. Whether or not these three terms all specifically point to the same thing or not, the idea is clear: attitude denotes one’s perspective, one’s mind-set, and one’s position on any subject. We can be viewed as clearly for something or obviously against something simply by the way we carry ourselves in attitude.

Leaders, especially, carry an important responsibility regarding their attitudes. By definition, leaders are different; they are “in the lead,” out in front, and stand before the rest of the church congregation in whatever roles they play in the Kingdom. They are constantly watched and regularly assessed by church membership because the members need a model by which to gauge their own willingness to participate in the overall work of the body. Whether or not a leader wants to be a model before the others, he will certainly be such a model—either for the good or for the bad.

A leader’s attitude speaks plainly and loudly before others, impacting the overall effort.

Therefore, the impact of a poor attitude in leadership can only spell disaster for church ministry. On the other hand, a good and proper attitude and outlook on the part of church leadership virtually guarantees a successful outcome! In leadership, one’s attitude speaks plainly and loudly before others, greatly impacting the overall effort of any project or undertaking.

Opening the Book of II Kings is the curious story of King Ahaziah of Israel. He was the son of the terribly evil-minded Ahab and his equally pernicious wife, Jezebel. I Kings 22:52 tells us that Ahaziah “...walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.” It goes on to say, “...he served Baal, and worshipped him.” His father and mother had reared him to worship a false god, even while they witnessed the miraculous acts of the true God of Israel. Many times Ahab (and no doubt his son) had seen the mighty works of God as displayed through the ministry of the prophet Elijah. In fact, the story of Elijah and Ahab is a perfect metaphor revealing the power of the

good will of God overcoming the evil will of flesh. There are not many types in the scriptures that are as clear as these two.

The reign of Ahaziah is brief: only two years. But II Kings chapter one tells us a story that is worth noting—especially by leaders of today. In only these few verses, **we can see three attitudes that are totally unacceptable to God.** Not only is God not willing to accept these attitudes in Christian people (especially leaders), but He cannot accept them because they are contrary to His very nature and will. In other words, as God cannot lie or deceive, neither can He nor will He accept these three carnal attitudes. In this lesson we will explore these three spirits or attitudes that are totally unacceptable in today’s church leadership.

Not Allowing God to Be God

In verse 2 we read of a grievous accident that befalls Ahaziah. He has fallen through the lattice at the palace. Either he had broken through a skylight, or some kind of ceiling material. But one thing is clear: he fears he is dying of these wounds. He then sends messengers on his behalf to seek out the god of Ekron, named Baalzebub because he wanted to know whether or not he would recover from the injuries. Herein we see a major problem for Ahaziah, and the first attitude that God will never accept.

There is no doubt that Ahaziah knows about the true God of Israel. He had certainly heard the stories told by both his father and mother of Elijah and “his God.” In I Kings 21 we can read the tender story of Ahab’s deep repentance after being warned by Elijah regarding a bleak future for the king and queen. Ahab had heard about and then witnessed the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah in I Kings 17:1 concerning a three-year drought that would come to Israel. And most of all, he had personally been witness to the mighty miracle of God’s fire descending from heaven to consume the sacrifice of Elijah on Mount Carmel. Yes, Ahab knew Elijah and he was well acquainted with Elijah’s God; and yes, he had certainly shared his troubles with the prophet to his son, Ahaziah. They both knew that there was a God in Israel, but neither acted on this truth.

While Ahaziah’s messengers are starting their journey to Ekron, Elijah finds them and interrupts their journey with his own message back to the king: *“Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?”* To know that God is real, that He is powerful and merciful, and yet not allowing Him the freedom to act in His power and mercy in and through our lives is an attitude that is simply unacceptable to Him.

Real leaders have already acknowledged that the Lord is supreme in their lives. But acting on this knowledge is another thing. We are very self-sufficient people. Leaders are those that are ahead of the pack, a bit different from the rest. Leaders are people that have already

recognized some of their gifts and talents for the work of spiritual ministry. In other words, they know beyond a doubt that there is a God “in Israel.” But do we allow Him total freedom to act as He wants? While it is true that Jesus expects us to find solutions for many of life’s problems simply through our knowledge and experience with Him, He also knows that we must seek Him at all times in all things to ensure that His will is done in our lives. In other words, we may not always spend three days in prayer and fasting to find an answer to a simple question, and in fact may be able to quickly discern the necessary action in some situations. But there are also times when we must be ready and willing to seek His will without compromise. We need to know and submit to the God that is in our midst. That is what leaders do—that is who leaders are. Ahaziah failed in this. He was too used to the family tradition of looking for the so-called power of Baal. He had learned to lean on a different strength than God’s.

So, how do we act in times of need? Whom do we seek in a crisis? Where does our hope and strength lie? We speak of our Lord Jesus as the Almighty One, but do we allow Him to be the God of our lives? Anything else will always be unacceptable to such a loving and able Saviour.

Not Submitting To Spiritual Authority

Actually, this is only part of the second attitude that God cannot accept. It is one thing to be unaware of spiritual authority. It is certainly sad when someone knows nothing of the power of God and how it operates in true spiritual ministry. But it is another thing to know about it, but not submit to it. And this was Ahaziah’s second big mistake.

When the king’s messengers returned to the palace, they had something to tell Ahaziah—something not from Baalzebub, however, but from Elijah. Upon hearing the message, Ahaziah asked a curious question: *“What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words?”* It seems that somehow there was something in the words of the messengers that hinted at who the author of the message was. When they described the prophet (they themselves did not know him,) Ahaziah instantly recognized that it had been Elijah that met them on the road. *“It is Elijah the Tishbite.”* There was no hesitation as the king immediately recognized the description of the man. To know about the man is one thing, but submission to the authority of the man’s ministry is entirely another!

Submission to spiritual authority represents so very much of a leader’s walk with God. It shows that we are part of the overall vision, that we have confidence that our leaders are fully capable of taking us to further accomplishments, and that we desire to be part of this important work. It is a plain and obvious statement that we believe in the program and by doing so we set an impacting example before the other members of the church. The reverse of this is equally clear: we do not believe the vision is a good one; we have no confidence in

leaders above us; and, our example is one that desires no part of the work of God. This is simply unacceptable in the Kingdom of God. Leaders are influencers. Whether for good or evil, leaders will always have a potential of influencing others.

Real leaders are influencers.

In today's Church, we speak often of mentoring other people. But mentoring is more than words. It is most often by actions instead. In fact, for mentors it is certainly true that "actions speak louder than words." So in our submission to the spiritual authorities in our lives, we set a clear example for all those that look to us for silent guidance.

Commanding the Will of God

The third and final error of Ahaziah in this story is his attempt to negotiate with Elijah after he had heard the prophet's message of doom. The king quickly dispatched a captain with fifty soldiers to call Elijah for an audience at the palace. Let us closely look at the king's command. In verse 9, the captain opens the scroll and proclaims the words, "*Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down.*" There are two big problems with this edict, however. The first we have already discussed—referring to him as the man of God while not submitting to this fact. The second represents the third attitude that God will never accept: commanding the will of God according to our own desires.

Who was the king in Elijah's life? It certainly was not Ahaziah as he brought no spiritual authority to the benefit of his kingdom in Israel. Instead, his reign had brought even more idolatry and despair. There was but one true king of Israel for Elijah, and that was the God of Israel. Moreover, when the king commanded him to come down, he was in reality commanding something over which he held no control. There was no submission to the authority, and therefore there would be no dialogue opened with that authority.

Once again, we can see how Elijah's ministry clearly represented the will of God. Just like Ahab, his son's stubborn refusal to yield to this ministry was a clear representation of the carnal will of humanity. When flesh orders the Spirit and will of God, there will only be one loser! Not only does Ahaziah try this approach one time, or two times, but has to send a third captain with a third group of fifty soldiers because the first two groups are destroyed by fire from heaven at the command of Elijah. In fact, Elijah challenges the words of the king in the first two messages by answering, "*If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty.*"

Humility and meekness are two qualities that leaders desperately need. Clearly, submission to the will of God is the manifestation of real humility. Meekness, however, is more often misunderstood. Many writers have given many meanings for the words *meek* and *meekness*. But what are they scripturally? Leaders would do well to study them carefully.

Meekness does not refer to being “soft” in terms of lying down and allowing others to trample over us. It is not an attitude of softness always in speech or action. In reality, the “softness” that so many people connect to meekness is actually the spirit that is like the potter’s clay: soft enough to be molded in the Master’s hands. That is biblical meekness. That is why Moses is called in Numbers 12:3 “...*very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth.*” He was simply the man that God could use for such a monumental task as leading the Israelites out of Egypt and toward the promise. However, it was Moses’ stubborn striking of the rock instead of speaking to the rock that kept him out of the promise. The problem was a momentary lapse in real meekness that snared Moses.

Paul starts off chapter 10 of II Corinthians with an exhortation to cast down imaginations and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. But he does this by saying, “*Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ...*” In other words, Paul knew that the key to walking with Christ was in accepting His will for our lives without fear and without reservation. In the same manner that Jesus yielded completely to the will of God for His earthly life, we must yield to Him for our earthly ministries. Leaders cannot overlook this principle. The apostle continues the thought in Ephesians 4:1-2, “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness...*” Without real meekness, there will never be a worthy fulfilling of our vocations.

To dare to command God to change His will in order to conform to our desires is both presumptuous and spiritually dangerous. Of course there will be times where we pray for things that we do not need. There will be times where we are earnestly contending for things that God has not shown us to be His will for our lives. These are times when we are seeking the will of God and simply praying in the meantime for what we think is necessary and right. But the real test of a leader comes in total submission to God’s will once revealed.

Some well-intentioned preachers have tried to use Isaiah 45:11 as a justification for commanding the works of God. “*Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.*” This is, however, the very opposite of what many think. The context here is not one of actually telling God what to do. It is in fact God challenging Israel to match Him in His ability! God had seen enough of Israel’s self-sufficiency, of their so-called lack of need for Him. He had noted their complete lack of acknowledgement

concerning His unique greatness, and was challenging them to “go ahead and try to tell Him what to do next!” This was not a blank check to order whatever we want and command God to bring it to reality.

The real challenge for a leader will always be two-fold in this respect: to find the will of God and then to commit to its accomplishment. That’s a major part of what makes leaders so different from the rest. We of all people must stay committed to the divine plan. If we do not, who will carry it forward?

The challenge for a leader is to find the will of God and commit to it.

When the third captain arrived and saw the carnage of the first 104 soldiers who had died in trying to coerce the man that represented the will of God, everything changed in a moment. This wise captain threw the scroll aside, fell to his knees, and begged, “O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight.” Better words were never spoken! He had quickly recognized the authority that the prophet represented and immediately submitted himself to it. And just as quickly, an angel told Elijah to “Go down with him.” In other words, here was a man that was ready to yield to the will of God. Here was a man that Elijah could walk with. Here was a man that demonstrated true meekness.

It is in Philippians 4 where Paul tells us that he can do all things through Christ (verse 13.) But in the preceding verses we can understand what brought him to that conclusion:

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

It sounds a bit like attitude, does it not?

JUST WAIT HERE

II Kings 2:2-10

We might never think of God as a “compromiser.” We preach and teach against the thought of compromising in areas such as doctrine, holiness, faith, etc. And while it is true that the Lord would never compromise, would He offer compromises to those He loves? Were there instances in the scriptures where God offered men and women a way out, the easier way, less of a challenge?

Paul told us in I Corinthians 10:13, *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”* In other words, He alone knows what we can bear and what we cannot. He knows exactly when it is just too much. But He also knows when it’s just too little. So, whatever is put on our plate we are able to consume—but only with His help. And therein is a key point for leaders. When we do not seek His help and guidance, how could we possibly know when enough is enough? Or, how could we realize that we are capable of even more?

God alone knows a leader’s capabilities.

In recalling the story in John 21 of Jesus with His disciples at the seashore, we might ask why the Lord Almighty asked Peter if he loved Him. Surely the Omniscient One knew whether Simon loved Him or not—but did Simon Peter know? It was easy for Peter to say yes the first time, even the second time there was little hesitation. But the third time Jesus asked the question, Peter was troubled: *“Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.”* The Lord knew that Peter was capable of loving him with all of his heart, but He also knew the steps that He would have to lead Peter through before he could arrive there. And so it is with today’s leadership.

We may think that we know our capabilities, but until we are truly put to the test, how can we really be sure? But God knows! And He is willing to take us where we need to go to show us what we can be and do because of His power in us. Failing during these times of testing and proving does not always mean that we have sinned and fallen from His grace. They might simply be tests by which we qualify for more and more usefulness in the Kingdom, a means by which we realize that with Him, truly, all things are possible. It’s easy to say, but much more difficult to live!

And so we find three times in II Kings chapter 2 where Elijah offers Elisha opportunities to stay behind. Three times he would be asked to remain in a place of safety and relative comfort while the senior prophet forged ahead in the will of God. Elisha would have to decide for himself whether he would pursue the blessing and the anointing that he felt he was called to. Did God know what Elisha was capable of? Without a doubt He did, but did Elisha? Would he reject every offer of gentle compromise in order to be the man of God that prophecy had already declared he could be?

Just Wait Here At Gilgal

Elijah's first command for Elisha to stay behind was at Gilgal, the beginning of their journey. But the place was symbolic of another beginning as well, for Gilgal was the place where the Israelites first crossed over the Jordan River after the exodus. It was the beginning of the inheritance of the promise given, and therefore Gilgal stood as a symbol of a new beginning and a new promise. Whether or not Elisha understood the symbolism here is not easy to say, but one thing we do know is this: he would refuse any offer that might separate him from the master prophet, the one who was a symbol of God's promise for Elisha's life and future ministry.

Leaders are not the kind of people that remain comfortably back at the beginning of a promise—they are always moving toward the promise and constantly discovering more and more of what God might dare to do in them and through them. Only God knows how many of His promises to churches go unfulfilled because leadership fails to seize them and make them their own. To sit idly by as the Lord wants to perform His will in a mighty fashion is not something that true spiritual leaders condone. There will always be more for these leaders—more challenges, more anointing, more ministries, and more opportunities.

Leaders are always moving toward the promise.

Without a doubt, there were times when Elijah must have encouraged Elisha to pursue the dream and the vision of the prophecy concerning his taking over the "mantle" of Elijah. But it seems that Elijah left most of this responsibility with his protégé. Even at the initial meeting of the two in I Kings 19, Elijah emphasized in verse 20 that the decision to follow him or not was completely in the hands of Elisha. And here, at Gilgal, this had not changed at all. The decision to keep on following and keep on pursuing an excellence in ministry lay with Elisha. This was something that Elijah could not do for his student.

Is it any different today? Real leaders are those that will seize the moment, grasping opportunities that the Lord makes available to them. They are those that long to not only hear about the promise, but they want to become part of the fulfillment of such a promise! So why

then had Elijah asked Elisha to remain behind? There had to be a demonstration of the resolve that Elisha claimed to have. In other words, he had to be put to an actual test. Theory is great but practical experience is just as necessary.

Also worth noting is that Elijah informed Elisha that he was going to Bethel—the house of God. Remembering that Elijah so clearly represents the will of God, it is imperative that church leadership understand that this same zeal to follow the will of God to the house of God is still vital today. While senior leaders may speak of their experiences with the Lord, other leadership should aspire to their own precious times with Him. Like David was, so should we be—glad when they say, *“let us go into the house of the Lord.”* But even that would not be enough for Elisha.

Just Wait Here At Bethel

There are not many things more comfortable and secure than being in a revival-minded church! Being a leader and part of a growing congregation is an exciting place to be. But it’s too easy to let this place become a “comfort zone.” One of the reasons that local churches stop growing is that the leadership becomes satisfied with what they have already seen accomplished. But look at the resolve in the young Elisha. He tells Elijah, *“As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.”* Here we can see three important elements for a leader who would join himself to the promise of God:

- As the Lord liveth = the leader knows Who the Lord is and what He wants to accomplish (the promise)
- And as thy soul liveth = the will of God for the leader becomes a reality in his life and ministry (Elijah represented the will of God for Elisha)
- I will not leave thee = the commitment, the dogged determination to see the promise realized by taking hold of the will of God in the leader’s life.

The impact of such a leader in a local church is almost beyond measure. This kind of influence becomes invaluable. Without such leadership, churches become complacent and gradually lose all sense of real direction toward the fulfillment of a promise. God-given promises are not always automatic—they are often conditional in nature. In many places in the bible, God’s promise consists of “If you will, then I will...” In other words, His bounty is unlimited and His desire to pour it out is unquestionable, but who will ready himself to receive it? Who will position himself for more and more usefulness in the Kingdom?

God-given promises are often conditional.

Interestingly enough, we are told in II Kings 2 of the “sons of the prophets” who stood by and seemingly knew that Elijah would soon be taken off the earth. They even warned Elisha of this very fact. It seems that to them the departure of Elijah by the hand of the Lord was a dangerous thing that Elisha must consider. But Elisha shrugged it off, saying “*Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.*” What a clear description of Elisha’s inner feelings this proves to be! His faith told him to keep his tenacious hold on the promise, but he also knew that it would be better not to listen to the taunts of these sons of the prophets. After all, they might tempt him to yield to the flesh and to join them on the sidelines as mere observers of what God would do, rather than active participants. These so-called sons of the prophets knew something of the will of God, but never became part of it. Sometimes leaders must simply stop their ears from listening to the doubts and fears of those that are only spectators to the work of God. After all, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Leaders cannot afford to listen to the doubts and fears of the spectators.

Perhaps it was starting to become clear now to Elisha. He had been asked to remain at the place symbolic of the beginning of the promise while the prophet travelled on to Bethel. Now he was being asked to stay at the place symbolic of the house of the Lord while the prophet went to Jericho—the place of victory. Perhaps now Elisha was beginning to see the progression of faith and fulfillment that must work in a leader’s life if he will ever be part of the promise’s fulfillment.

To wait at the house of God while others experienced the victory was not going to be acceptable to a man like Elisha. Jericho represented the ultimate evidence of God’s power to overcome evil and to bring real victory. And Elisha would not be denied this. But God (and Elijah) had even more to demand of Elisha.

Just Wait Here At Jericho

“For the Lord hath sent me to Jordan,” Elijah declared. Jordan must have represented many things to many people. It was the crossing of that river that brought the children of Israel into the promised land of Canaan. It was Jordan where the Ark of the Covenant divided the waters so that the Israelites passed through on dry ground. But perhaps greatest of all, the river represented a dividing line, a true place of separation from others. For Elijah, crossing the river meant crossing from this life into the next. But for Elisha it meant crossing from one stage of his anointed life into the next. It was a separation that God had brought him to, and he had done well in refusing all offers thus far to remain behind.

Being at a place of victory is certainly a privilege for a leader. To see what God can do in a local assembly to change a community, and to see the change in the lives of the believers is truly an awesome experience. But to leaders with the spirit of Elisha, the victories are not the ultimate objective. They are only part of the goal. Perhaps instead of looking for the victories of God, we should be pursuing the God of the victories! As God is free to work in the leadership of the church, He will be allowed to work in whatever ways He chooses. Victories will be there without a doubt. But these victories will simply be part of the overall plan that He is accomplishing through His church.

Being part of the beginning of the promise, being an important part of the house of God, and being at a place of victory are all segments of a leader's growing ministry. But there was still one more challenge that remained.

*God will bring some
leaders to the place of the
impossible.*

Until now, Elisha could have returned, he could have compromised, and could have remained as he was before. But in being there with Elijah and walking across the dry riverbed of the Jordan, he was agreeing with the ultimate calling that God had in store for him. There would be no turning back until the mantle had been passed to him. So this had been what the journey was all about—three chances to say no or to say yes! As fifty men of the sons of the prophets stood by at a distance, only Elijah and his faithful follower approached the riverbank.

They had gone as far as they could go on their own. Now they had come to the place of the impossible. With no bridge and no ferry there was literally no way to cross over and make the separation process complete. But of course God had a way in mind. And this is what He wants His leadership of the church to understand. In order to fulfill His plan and accomplish His will, it must include bringing leaders to the place of the impossible from time to time. But they will only be qualified to be there if they have already passed by the beginning of the promise, the house of God, and the place of victory.

A Double Portion

At last, on the other side of the river, Elijah asked the question, "What shall I do for you?" Here, and only here, was Elisha able to state clearly what he had been seeking all along. It's just too easy to talk of all the grand things that we want God to do for us while we are yet inexperienced and very naïve regarding true commitment and sacrifice. But for leaders that are ready for challenges and who are positioning themselves for more and more usefulness in ministry, what will God do for them? And what will He do with them?

Elisha's answer was clear and certain—he wanted a double portion of the spirit that propelled Elijah forward in the work of the Lord. He wanted to be completely surrendered to the call of God in his life. He wanted to be a real leader.

DEAD PROMISES

II Kings 4:8-20

In a biblical context much can be written about promises. From the very beginning of things God has worked His plan according to various promises that He had purposed to bring to pass. Some of these were destined to become reality. Other promises have died along the way, never having been nurtured and cultivated by the saints. Man's participation with God in His plan and according to His promises has always been a vital element in the accomplishment of much of what He has desired to do. As early as Genesis 3, a promise is given regarding the ultimate triumph by the son of man over the adversary. But by Genesis 4, Cain has already disqualified himself and his heritage from becoming part of that promise's fulfillment. It was not that God purposely excluded Cain from the process. It was simply a poor judgment and decision made by a corrupt and spiritually bankrupt individual. A man makes a decision for or against the Lord, and then the fruit of that decision comes to pass. That is the way it has always been.

There are all kinds of promises recorded in the scriptures. There are promises of victory and defeat, those of famine and those of bountiful harvest.

There are promises for Israel and those for the Church. There are promises for the faithful and also those for the disobedient. It is no wonder then that the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 4:28, *"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of the promise."* Today's Church stands as living proof of a promise made long ago: *"...upon this rock I will build my church..."* This is the Church that was destined to be the bride of Christ, and it was all done through a promise. Ephesians 1:4-5 tells us, *"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will..."* It was all planned and promised—but what if no one had agreed to the plan and lived by the promise? What if the disciples had failed to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father? What if that special day of Pentecost had merely been like all of the others that had taken place in Jerusalem for so many years?

Leaders are children of promise.

Sure enough, someone had to participate with Him in the good pleasure of His will! Paul writes again in Ephesians 3:10-12, *"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and*

access with confidence by the faith of him.” In other words, the Church should know what it is destined for, what its vocation is, and what its purpose is that was determined so long ago. This Church was brought about by a promise of God and by the faith of men and women just like ourselves.

The leadership of this great Church must understand when others struggle. They must pursue and persevere when others lag behind. They should press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God. They are called to be different and they should act according to the promises already given concerning their role and function in this body of believers. To fail this risks limiting the effectiveness of the promise for today. While it is certain that there is a Church spoken of in the last chapter of the last New Testament book, will we be part of it? The promise is sure—but what about its fulfillment?

Leaders persevere when others falter.

An Unexpected Promise

In chapter 4 of II Kings, we find the wonderful story of the good lady we call the Shunammite woman. She stands as a great example in just about everything she does. To begin the story, she recognized the presence of God that seemed resident in the prophet Elisha. She even urged her husband to build an extra room for Elisha for those times when he would pass by on his journeys. It seems that she wanted this abiding presence of the Lord to rest a while in her own home. She never asked for anything in return—she was simply content knowing that God’s presence would bless her home and her marriage. Anything to be closer to God was what she wanted, no more and no less.

But one day, a much unexpected promise came her way. Elisha announced to her that she would bear a son at the same time the following year. Her husband was an older man, and it seemed clear to her that she was destined to have no children by the marriage. So when this unexpected promise of a son came by the lips of the prophet, it was just too much to believe so quickly. We might be tempted to judge her harshly for not immediately accepting the announcement of the pregnancy. But in being fair, it was not something that she had asked for, at least not out loud. Perhaps in her tender and God-fearing heart the longing had been there for some time, but “reality” had also done its work of convincing her that this was something not possible anymore. But not too long after, she began to feel the stirrings of a little life inside her. So, whether she believed it or not, this promise was a sure and unconditional one. She would bear the child. She had, after all, positioned herself for a blessing, and here was the manifestation of all that she had secretly hoped for by entertaining the presence of God in her

humble home. Her hope that Elisha’s short stays would produce fruit had not gone unnoticed by the Lord nor his prophet.

.Leaders today sometimes find themselves in a similar place spiritually. No doubt we all love God. We say that we are dedicated to believing Him and following after all of His great promises. But we also struggle with the “reality factor.” Just as the Shunammite struggled at first to wholly believe the unexpected promise, we also might struggle concerning what God announces. On the one hand, we know and we testify that with God, all things are possible. On the other hand, we know that certain things will simply never be! “I’m too old, I’m too young, I’m too busy, I’m too uneducated, I’m too poor, I’m too rich, I’m single, I’m married,”—all of these become living excuses and reasons why unexpected promises are so difficult to quickly embrace. But one thing remains certain: God has always worked through His promises made to His believers. And church leaders must first of all be real believers. We preach a great God with a great power that wants to perform great and wondrous acts. We know that He has promised many things to His Church. Are we ready to receive an unexpected promise?

God has always worked through His promises.

Perhaps “unexpected” really speaks of a promise that is very personal. We all know about the promises made to the Church, but what about the individual members of that Church? Many leaders know, for instance, that God’s will is to truly anoint and equip leaders in the Church for the work of the ministry. But some of these same so-called leaders balk at the fact that they are targeted for this same anointing! When a local church experiences growth and true revival, there may very well be members of that assembly that are experiencing no personal growth whatsoever, and neither are they participating in helping to produce that revival. The power may be all around us, but it may never get in us. We need leaders that can expect the unexpected. And why shouldn’t we? If we love God, if we create a room for His presence to abide in, and if we cherish those special times when He “turns into the chamber,” why should we not also expect Him to miraculously intervene in our lives and single us out for something extraordinary?

The Death of a Promise

But unknown to our good Shunammite woman, a problem was developing in the head of that little promised son. We may not know just what the sickness was that so seriously attacked the boy’s head. But we know that on one of his very first visits to the field where his father was reaping the harvest, when he was barely old enough to enjoy an excursion away from his mother’s watchful care, he suffered a terrible pain in his head.

Problems in the Church, problems with the promise, and problems at the time of harvest all seem to start with problems in the “head.” Leaders enjoy the privileges of authority, but they are also heavily responsible for the carrying out of the work. If problems attack the Head of the administration, the promise will suffer and might even die. Let us not be naïve regarding the attacks of the adversary against the leadership of God’s Church. If the enemy can succeed in bringing problems to the head, the body of the promise is doomed to die. Leaders must guard against this danger. We must always be working on our leadership skills. Better communication and better trust among leaders are paramount in the successful growth, development, and general health of the promises given by our Lord.

While the young promised son barely had time to cry to his father about the problem with his head before he collapsed, the father made a quick decision: *“Carry him to his mother.”* Verse 20 is such a sad one. He was brought to his mother where he laid on her lap until noontime before finally dying in her arms. What a time for her! This unexpected promise that now had become so much a part of her life was now taken away from her. Problems in the head of the promise had killed the promise. As tragic as the situation appeared, however, the Shunammite woman lost no time in taking clear and decisive action.

The Restoration of a Promise

Without hesitation, she took the promised boy and carefully laid him in the room of the prophet, on the very bed that Elisha used during his visits to her home. Then she called for her husband to make preparations for her to travel. She had to go and find the author of this promise that lay dead at home. The husband had little faith for what she wanted to do. He suggested that there was no reason to go to the prophet. It was not the right time of year and there was no occasion for this special trip by his wife. To him, the promise was dead, and that was the end of the sad story. But for her, this was only another stage of the process.

Leaders must sometimes revisit the source of a promise.

Arriving at Mount Carmel, she was greeted by the prophet’s servant with an inquiry as to the health of her family and her home. But she wanted to waste no time with the servant of the man of God—she needed the man of God! She needed to revisit the source of this promise. She needed to remind him that the promise had not originated in her, but that it was Elisha and the promise of God that had brought her a son. Now that this son had been taken away, the problem was no longer hers, but his!

Leaders have to recognize the importance of knowing the source of the promise. Knowing the source means knowing that God has foreseen the promise as part of His overall plan to

build His Church. Knowing the source of the promise means knowing that He gave the promise for a good reason and that the reason is still valid, even if the promise seems to be dead or dying. Knowing the source means knowing that the leaders are the ones responsible for clinging tenaciously to the promise, even while others may be making funeral preparations for a dead promise. As long as the source is remembered, hope for the promise still remains.

Why, after all, would Elisha make such a promise in such extraordinary circumstances, only to see the same promise die after only a few short years? What part of the overall plan was that? This promise was not something natural that the woman had brought on herself. It was not a self-made promise. It was clearly a sovereign act of an Almighty God. So if the promise seemed dead, this was a problem for the same Almighty One! And that is why she so speedily brought the problem to Elisha. The question was not “what will she do with the problem?” It was “what would he do with the problem?”

Of course, we are not talking here of actual sons born to actual mothers. We are speaking about promises made to this great Church and its many parts. These promises are made as part of His global scheme, His plan in carrying out His divine and supreme will. When an actual God-given promise seems to be dying, it is time to carry the promise back to the source in prayer and in faith that He will act. He chose us when He gave the promise—so why would He now be excluding us from the same promise? If the promise is a conditional one, that is, if it’s a promise that depends on our own participation, then we as leaders can agree once more to participate, no matter what others might wish to do. We can once again be a part of the promise’s fulfillment. If the promise is an unconditional one, we simply have to hold on to it by faith and watch it come to fruition. But whichever is the case, leaders cannot simply watch a promise expire in their arms.

Leaders can sometimes help resurrect dead promises.

Young boys have sometimes been resurrected. Promises, too, can sometimes be resurrected. But the attitude and the steadfastness of true leadership must play an important role in this. In the same house where the promise was first given, and by the hand of the same prophet that first made the promise, the boy was restored to his loving and grateful mother. We can only hope that this young man lived up to God’s expectations. For surely he had been given to a special woman of special faith.

Likewise, God’s precious promises have been given to a special Church with special faith. Leaders must hold on and never let go of such a God-given treasure. Sometimes, we simply must take them back to the source.

WINDOWS IN HEAVEN

II Kings 6:8-16 & 7:1-2

In the last lesson we mentioned that the Shunammite woman, in the hour of her desperate need, sought for the man of God rather than the servant of the man of God. There is a huge difference in the two terms. Despite all the biblical exhortations we can find encouraging saints to develop to their fullest and despite all the preaching and teaching that is done in church congregations by well intentioned pastors, some church members never really excel. They will be saved without a doubt, but they may never really comprehend how much different their relationship with Jesus Christ could be if totally given to Him. There are many saints that do very well at following the leadership of the Church without becoming leaders themselves. And this is not to say that every saint must become active in the direct leadership of the church. There will, after all, have to be followers! But there is that great difference between a man of God and a servant of the man of God as we read about in II Kings.

First of all, there was Elisha's servant, Gehazi. He was the servant of God's servant that the Shunammite woman would not waste her time with.

When she needed an answer, she needed it from a true servant of the Lord, not the servant of the servant of the Lord. Gehazi does not stand out as much of a force in his brief career with Elisha. He made a terrible mistake in usurping Elisha's authority and lying to Naaman in chapter 5:20-23, a mistake which would cost him his health and any future ministry he might have had in the eyes of Elisha. He could not see with spiritual eyes, and so he failed to see what we now call "the bigger picture."

Leaders are able to see the "bigger picture."

Jesus spoke of two kinds of people in Luke 8:10, *"Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand."* Firstly, there would be true disciples that would seek to know everything that Jesus had to share with them. And they would have it. Secondly, there would be those that simply did not care deeply enough to go the extra step and find out what Jesus was really saying and doing. Though they might "see," they would really never see the bigger and more accurate picture of what God was doing.

Jesus was in actual fact referring to the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10: *"Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."* Israel of both Isaiah's day and Jesus' day had failed to take what God had given and had never really

seen nor heard what God was saying and doing among His people. But let us not forget that they were very “religious” people. They were good followers of their religious leaders, making all the sacrifices at the appointed times, but to no avail. What they were offering to God was unacceptable because they were asking and offering the wrong part of themselves. God wanted them—their hearts, their souls, their minds, and all their strength. But they missed the bigger picture and satisfied themselves with a shallow look at the kingdom of heaven. They had become fat and had “heavy ears,” unable to hear what the Spirit was saying to them.

While in today’s Church it may not seem as grievous as Isaiah 6 or Luke 8, the same tempting syndrome remains: it is far easier to simply be a servant of the man of God than to become a man of God oneself. And this is another area in which leaders must distinguish themselves. Gehazi was content to listen to the prophet, and relied on him to tell him what to do. He sought nothing deeper than that and never looked for a deeper relationship with the God that Elisha so evidently knew. Gehazi needed his own walk with God instead of relying on Elisha’s relationship with God to save him.

Leaders must find their own deep relationship with the Lord.

Getting Away With It

One might wonder that none of the eleven other disciples of Jesus had any idea of who might be the betrayer on the night of their last supper with Jesus. And herein lay the problem for Judas Iscariot. Since none of the disciples questioned his behavior, since none of the others had discovered that from time to time he was stealing from the small treasury that he was entrusted with, he must have assumed that no one knew nor cared about his conduct. But why did he never question what Jesus thought? Why assume that he could get away with his carnal deeds unnoticed by the Omniscient One? Poor Judas was merely serving who he thought to be a servant of God, in lieu of becoming such a servant of God himself. And the same was true for the misfortunate Gehazi. As long as Elisha walked with God, all that Gehazi thought was necessary was to stay in Elisha’s good graces. But there was an Almighty One that was watching everything! This shallow servant traded everything for a few pieces of silver and some new clothes. He never saw things the way that Elisha saw.

But we also know that God is not a respecter of persons. The opportunities to fellowship with Him are open and unlimited for every man and woman alive. Unfortunately, some will continue to choose an easier way and simply rely on others to make all the necessary decisions for them. They will never see the big picture, and will always remain in the danger zone that destroyed men like Gehazi and Judas, assuming that when they are in the wrong, someone will

come and inform them! True leaders walk with God in the fellowship of His Spirit. The Holy Ghost and the Word of God will guide us and will reprove when necessary. “Getting away with it” in the eyes of others will never be enough for good leadership.

In the tenth chapter of the Book of Mark we can read the brief story of the man called Bartimaeus. Seizing upon the opportunity, with but one chance to personally commune with the One known as the Saviour, Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus with all of his heart. He wanted one thing and one thing only—too see. It is no wonder then that when Jesus called for him to be brought, the first thing that Bartimaeus did was to throw aside his old garment. After all, he was on his way to a certain healing, one that would forever change his life. What need of an old beggar’s garment would there be for a man that would soon see like Jesus saw? Sometimes, leaders must simply pray for spiritual eyesight—that they might see as the Master does.

One of the definitions for the gift of the spirit that is called “discerning of spirits” is the ability to judge or to see through to the other side. In other words, sometimes we might have to rely on spiritual sight to help us to see all the way through a tough situation. These are the times when nothing else will do, just an ability to see the way that God sees will carry us through to the other side. Leaders should pray regularly for the Lord to give them the right kind of sight.

Open His Eyes

In the sixth chapter of II Kings, we find the fascinating story of a Syrian king that has tried and tried to exercise a superior strategy and defeat the army of Israel, but to no avail. Two different times he has shared his battle plan with his top commanders in secret, only to find out later that Israel had somehow been informed of the same plans. Learning that it was not a spy amongst the generals but a prophet in Israel that was informing the king of Israel in both instances, he sends a great host of soldiers to capture this prophet, our friend Elisha.

On the morning of the imminent attack, it is the servant of Elisha that first sees the enemy poised and ready to invade. His cry of despair is loud and without any hope, “*How shall we do?*” Seeing the same army and the same imminent attack on their city, the prophet, however, sees a different reality. He saw the army of heaven in full array and ready to fight on their behalf. In fact, he saw more that were with them than those that were against them!

Elisha goes even further and kindly prays for the servant, asking God to open his eyes. And there lies the difference between men of God and those that merely want to serve men of God. The difference is

*More than mere
spectators, leaders are
participants in the work of
the Lord.*

true vision. To hear and to understand, to see and to perceive, and to be part of the work of God instead of a spectator to it is what makes a man of God different.

We all desire leaders around us that will walk in humble submission to the directives of the church administration. But we should also desire that these leaders have their own personal relationship with God that allows them to see with the eyes of the Spirit. We need men and women in leadership that have an understanding of the vision that God has given us for the Church and her work. We must have leaders that can see as God sees, and who understand exactly what the Lord is trying to do in our midst. We need our eyes opened at every level of leadership in the Church. And perhaps this is another meaning for the term, “windows in heaven.”

Pour Out Or Look In?

In Genesis 7:11, with the boat built by Noah completed and ready to save him and his family, the bible tells us, *“...the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.”* In Malachi 3:10, Israel is told, *“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”* In both instances it is clear that God was pouring out something from heaven—rain or blessings. But there is another aspect to windows. Not only are they useful for pouring out things from within, they are also very good for looking inside!

Leaders use the windows of heaven for “looking in.”

The servant of the king in II Kings 7:2 used the same terminology in doubting the prophecy given by Elisha concerning the deliverance of Samaria. The prophet had assured the king that in only one day’s time, the city would go from utter starvation to an abundance of food. Elisha had seen what God was doing in the city. He knew that the Lord had His perfect plan to carry out. He knew when and how the city would be rescued from its terrible plight. But when he made his God-inspired declaration, a servant of the king rejected it outright by asking the question, *“Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?”* Once again, the difference between the man of God and this servant of the king’s house was simply vision.

All men of God must also be servants. The point is, however, that no leader should simply “serve” without a personal understanding of and connection to a God-given vision. Had the king’s servant been able to look in the windows of heaven with Elisha, he would certainly not have doubted the miracle that was to save Samaria. Sadly enough, instead, he was able to see

the miracle the next day, but he was unable to partake of it. The same miracle that delivered the city also brought his death.

Real Unity

Oftentimes, while we busy ourselves with talking about unity, and urging saints to walk in unity, we neglect the real aspect of unity that God expects of His Church. The Church is one body, all parts interconnected and acting to benefit the other parts. This body is also moving in one single direction toward a common goal. That is real unity. And this takes vision. Unfortunately not all the members of this great Church seek for or find such a vision that is so important. But leaders can share this vision. They can ask and it will be given. They can seek and they will find. They can knock and it will be opened. This is what sets them so distinctly apart from the rest. They have understanding because they can see. And they see because they sought for and they found the vision. They are more than just servants of the men of God. They are men and women of God themselves. They are still servants, but more than that, they are friends. Jesus summed it all up in John 15:15, *“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”*

BAD ADVICE FROM THOSE YOU LOVE

II Kings 8:16-19

Solomon rightly declared in Proverbs 27:6, *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”* The word that is translated as “deceitful” in the King James Version is the Hebrew word, *athar*, meaning “abundant” or “plentiful.” In other words, Solomon had come to realize how often people will lie, cheat, and manipulate others for their own gain. Someone once said that these kinds of deceivers “justify the means by the end.” They are willing to do just about anything to achieve their desired goals. And, according to Solomon, these tactics are used all too frequently.

We as leaders are able to list many things as our “enemies.” It goes beyond just the devil and his associates. There is an entire world full of agents that work as enemies to the saints of God. Temptation and lust are clearly our enemies. But feelings, such as fear, discouragement, and doubt can also act singly or together as enemies to our souls. They can deceive us into thinking that all is lost, or that in certain circumstances and in some situations that God is unable or unwilling to help us and save us. How many good friends of ours that once worshipped together with us are now fallen back into the old practices of sin and carnality? And what agents worked toward that goal of condemning their souls forever? So it is not just Lucifer and his demonic forces that we resist. Even bad advice from others can war against us in many ways.

*Leaders must guard
against bad advice from
others.*

Paul wrote in II Corinthians 10:3, *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh.”* And again in Ephesians 6:12, he wrote, *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”* But we are confronted with the agents of these wicked powers that operate in and through other people. While it is true that we do not fight against the people that are being used by these evil seducers, we do need to recognize that we must resist their influence that would compromise or even destroy our faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, sometimes other people can be used as agents to defeat our Christian witness. And for leaders, this must be addressed.

Not many verses in II Kings are written regarding the life and reign of Joram (also known as Jehoram,) once king of Judah. He was the son of one of the great kings of Judah, the famous Jehoshaphat. Many a good and positive sermon have been preached in regards to Jehoshaphat, and in many ways he has stood as a good example of a man that was dedicated to

the service of God. But his son, Joram, has a completely different witness. And there are several lessons that church leaders can learn from this man's wicked life. In this chapter, we will look at mistakes that were made and point to lessons that leaders should learn from them.

The Firstborn Son

As was the custom and tradition in Judah, the firstborn son was entitled to many things that other sons were not. In this case, Jehoshaphat had several other sons to whom he gave great wealth and possessions. But the kingdom was given to Joram. In II Chronicles 21:3, we read, *"And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah; but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he was the firstborn."* Much can be said about custom and tradition and how they have helped us maintain certain cherished standards in society and in the religious world. But when it comes to choosing godly leaders in today's Church, there are other criteria that are much more important. Real spiritual leadership is chosen because it has been qualified to lead. There are many lessons in many books written about such criteria by which we choose church leadership and this lesson is not intended to teach any new criteria. But we must remember always that these criteria exist!

Real leadership in the Church is spiritually qualified.

There are simply too many churches that have leaders that have achieved their positions and responsibilities through means other than spiritual qualification. Because one is older does not make him qualified. Because one is a friend of the pastor does not mean he is qualified. Because one has financial leverage does not make him qualified. In other words, spiritual demonstration and God-given anointing should not be neglected in choosing and using leadership in the Church. Unfortunately, Jehoshaphat followed tradition and designated Joram as his successor, and thereby ruined a kingdom!

To make matters even worse, we read in II Chronicles 21:4, *"Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Israel."* For Joram, there would be no one allowed to compete with him for his newly given position. He tried to guarantee his success by eliminating any other potential competitor. In the Kingdom of God, no such spirit can succeed.

Too Much Too Soon

The next thing we notice about Joram and his ascension to the throne is that it was premature. In II Kings 8:16 we see that Jehoshaphat was still alive when Joram assumed his

throne. Evidently, three years before his father died, Joram had already made himself king. And as we already saw in II Chronicles, he immediately “strengthened himself” and assured that no one would challenge his rule.

Leaders in today’s Church must recognize that there is a time and a place for moving upward in positions of responsibility and authority. We cannot rush it. These positions must be “grown into” by personal dedication and valuable practical experience. Faithfulness and submission to spiritual authority go a long way in establishing a potential leader’s future role in the work of God. To rush this is to invite trouble in the church. Paul warned Timothy that pastors should not be chosen from among the novices, for they might be lifted up with pride and fall. He also advised Timothy in regard to the deacons to be chosen: they must first be proved. In other words, they needed time to develop and discover their potential and their commitment to the work before they should be given leadership roles. Joram waited for none of this. He made his move, took possession of the kingdom from a man that had done much good for Judah, and reigned in a wicked manner for a brief number of years. His legacy is one that should not be emulated.

*Leaders grow into places
of responsibility and
authority.*

Wrong Models, Bad Mentors

“And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the Lord.” We can only guess why he married Athaliah. She was the daughter of two of the most infamous biblical characters, Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel. These two stand as symbols of everything carnal and idolatrous. They followed Jezebel’s family gods to the ruin of Israel. Ahab was a man that listened to the bad advice from his loved one to the destruction of his family, his kingdom, and himself. Jezebel was a domineering woman that seemed to be the “tail that wags the dog.” And these were the models and mentors for young Joram and his new bride, Athaliah.

Athaliah had had time to learn very well from her mother, Jezebel. She had watched as her mother manipulated her father into things that he should have avoided at all costs. She had seen the effects of what such an unregenerate wife of a carnal husband could produce. This was her model for womanhood and for marriage. A poorer example could scarcely be found! And she brought this, no doubt, into her union with Joram. Joram had already displayed traits that were dangerous to the future of Judah, but with Athaliah at his side, the results would prove to be even more disastrous.

It all seems even stranger when we know that Jehoshaphat had many good traits and that many times he displayed an admirable character of what a godly man should do and say. The great story in II Chronicles 20 of the deliverance of Judah from the enemies of Moab and Ammon shows us what Jehoshaphat was capable of, and what he evidently tried to live by. His prayer in the same chapter reveals a man that wholly leaned on his God, and was submitted to doing His will as much as he could. But how could such a man as Jehoshaphat give his son in marriage to a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel?

The Bible alludes to some strange alliances that Jehoshaphat makes with Israel. We may not know what drove him to make such compromising covenants with a wicked nation like Israel at that time. But it seems that these joint ventures were made with good intentions, only to experience bad results. Leaders must remember that the kisses of the enemy are deceitful and plenteous. Perhaps the marriage of Judah's man with Israel's woman was initiated in this light. But for whatever reason it was finalized, it proved to be a disastrous mistake. The Bible says in I Kings 22:44, "*And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel.*" At best, this is a curious alliance. Israel by this point in time had become very idolatrous and completely backslidden in nature. How could a good king of Judah make such a peace? He took bad advice from those that he thought loved him.

Principles must be learned and established in the lives of church leaders. And these principles will always be true and right, no matter the situation and no matter the advice that is given, even by those that we love. We simply cannot afford to be swayed by the opinions of others that are not proper mentors and models, men and women who are not dedicated to the service of the Lord. Leaders should walk closely with godly pastors and other leaders that are part of the vision.

Leaders live by principles.

And so Joram chose the house of Ahab as his model and rejected his father as his mentor. He took counsel from Athaliah (just like his father-in-law did from Jezebel.) He leaned toward the bad advice from the woman he loved and it brought him to ruin. Ironically, Athaliah was not a woman that had the best interests of her husband at heart at all. She had her own agenda (very similar to her mother.) We read in II Kings 11:3, "*And Athaliah did reign over the land.*" She worked and manipulated people after her husband's death until finally she could rule as a queen in the land. In the first verse of that chapter we are told that she killed all the "royal seed." She had lost her husband and her son that she had hoped would rule the nation, and now was willing to murderously plot and scheme to keep her family in power. A daughter-in-law of Ahab ruling in Judah was the result!

It is easy to see therefore, where many of Joram's problems began. He leaned on a model of wickedness and listened to the counsel of an ungodly woman. His loved ones only provided the worst advice. Leaders must learn from this.

Eight Years Lost

Joram's reign in Judah was brief and deplorable. By listening to the wrong people and modeling his rule after the wrong leaders, he managed in only eight years to bring Judah to a new low point. The son of a good man had done everything wrong and died in a horrible physical and spiritual state. In II Chronicles 21:20 we read, "*...and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired.*" He died with no one crying at the funeral. No one except perhaps his wife would miss him, and even her love for him turned out to be in question. True leaders will leave their footprints behind them—a legacy that shows the good that was done during their time of leadership. They impact lives in a positive sense, and leave behind something that is better than before.

Leaders impact lives in a positive sense.

Today's church leaders must learn from their own mistakes as well as the mistakes of others. If there is one thing that poor Joram left behind for us, it is the opportunity to study his mistakes and learn by them. Let us find good mentors that can steer us forward in the work of the Kingdom. And let us walk by faith according to the positive models that God has given us.

There is plenty of advice out there. The world shares its views with us about how we should live. The desire of the flesh is a strong one that must be resisted on a daily basis. We have friends and acquaintances that we truly care for, but they may from time to time offer very bad advice that would only hinder our good fight of faith. Christian leaders must find true direction, true anointing, and surround themselves with true fellow believers that will help them on their journey. Joram never recognized this and he lost everything.

A BOW AND ARROWS

II Kings 13:14-19

Joash did not live an exemplary life. He was the king of Israel and for the most part had continued in the ways of his forefathers, never sanctifying the backslidden nation from its practices of worshipping false gods. Like many kings before him, he lived a compromised life, knowing on one hand that the God of Israel was a mighty and divine judge, but on the other hand never trying to purge Israel and its capital, Samaria, from their evil and customary idolatrous forms of worship. Knowing about God and submitting to Him were two different things for Joash.

Not much is said concerning Joash and his tenure of rule in Israel. His is an unremarkable reign. But one story stands out and is carefully chronicled by the writer. The famous passage of Elisha and Joash shooting an arrow of deliverance out of a window, and the beating of arrows against the ground as a sign of promised victory against the Syrians has been preached and taught many times. But what can leaders learn from this story?

It had been in II Kings 9:1 where we last read about the ministry of the great prophet, Elisha. He had sent a young man to anoint a man named Jehu who would become the next king over Israel. But here in the story of Elisha and Joash, it is forty years later! No mention has been made about Elisha's travels or works during all that time. We know of course that he must have been actively pursuing the will of God and the calling upon his life. But nothing is recorded during this period of time. Only when he is now old and dying do we pick up the story once again of the amazing ministry of this good man of God.

This story is also the only recorded meeting of Joash and Elisha. Certainly, during the closing years of Elisha's life, his ministry must have been curtailed somewhat. No doubt he was travelling less and less as the years went by. And finally, he was confined to his chambers as death grew closer. Interestingly enough, it was at this point where Joash came to pay his respects to one of the greatest of the prophets.

Back To Basics

We may not know for certain what brought Joash to Elisha's deathbed that day. Was it a fear of imminent attack by enemy armies? Or was it simply in honor of the prophet after the king heard that Elisha was gravely ill? We can know, however, that he did indeed come and that he was deeply moved by the reality of Elisha's imminent departure

*Leaders learn to focus on
what is really important.*

from this life. And we can recognize something valuable in this. In a moment of time, Joash suddenly realized how precious this man of God really was to Israel and its future. Nothing had brought them together before then, but Joash was compelled to act when he heard of Elisha's dangerous state and began to focus on what was really important. And this is something that leaders can learn from.

There is an old saying: "You don't know what you have until it's gone." This is what was foremost in Joash's mind when he heard about Elisha's sickness. What would become of Israel after his departure? Who would become the oracle of God for the nation? How could he reign in security without a word from the Lord of hosts? The successor of the great prophet Elijah, the man that picked up Elijah's mantle across Jordan and did even more spectacular works than he, was now about to die. Joash was about to miss an opportunity and he had to do something quickly.

We can return to the basic truths in a very short time. Sometimes it is a crisis that brings us to reflect on what is really valuable in life. Sometimes it is simply a good look at reality that brings us to that point. But it can happen suddenly and we can get back to the basics in very short order. The truth is that we become very easily distracted with the affairs of everyday living. We get caught up in the cares of life, in our personal success, our careers, our day to day business, our families, our homes, and our dreams of the future. It is like we live two different lives at the same time: the spiritual and the natural.

But Paul put it very plainly though in Romans 8:6, "*For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*" And it's just too easy to be carnally minded! Leaders must maintain a spiritual focus and intensity that does not wane. In all these lessons we have stated that leaders are different. They must be different.

They must be spiritually oriented and spiritually directed and spiritually empowered. Joash was none of these, but in a moment of time he came to the point where he had to go back to the basics. For once, he saw what others before him had seen: that true men of God were invaluable to a nation's welfare. And this man of God was soon to die. It doesn't take much time to get things back into perspective. It just takes focus. Leaders need to have the ability to focus on getting back to the basics. They should remind themselves regularly of what is really important in life and gear their energies toward that.

Leaders need to return to the basics from time to time.

Where Is The Passion?

Joash's realization that he would soon lose an important and anointed presence in Israel brought him to Elisha's house. Upon arriving, he wept and cried out to the prophet in doubt of

his nation’s future security. And this gave him an opportunity to change his life. Back to the basics also means having a new chance to make things right. When we refocus on God’s will and what is right for our lives and ministries, all becomes possible once again. In other words, in a short amount of time, Joash had come to the threshold of a completely new life. In one meeting with the prophet he could have reset the priorities of life that he had neglected thus far. Unfortunately, Joash and his focus did not endure very long. There was another element in his life that was lacking, and without which Joash would never be the king that he could have become. This is where leaders of today must closely watch where Joash failed.

Elisha clearly saw and heard the despair of Joash and quickly acted. Perhaps he thought that Joash was about to embark on a new journey with the true God of Israel. The Lord moved Elisha to perform a symbolic action that would stand as a prophetic declaration for Joash and the nation he ruled. Elisha commanded that Joash take a bow and some arrows. As Joash began to draw the bow, Elisha placed his own hands on those of the king and commanded Joash to shoot the arrow eastward toward the home of the Syrian oppressors. The symbolism became even clearer as Elisha declared that this was an arrow of the Lord’s deliverance for Israel from Syria.

We would do well to understand that God is the bow and we are His arrows. It is His power that launches us into the fray. It is His wisdom that directs us precisely toward the target. They are His hands that guide us in all that we accomplish for His Kingdom. This is clear enough. But leaders cannot make the same mistake that Joash did.

This symbolic scene of prophecy could not have been complete without a second action on Joash’s part. There was something else that Joash needed to display if he could be part of an enduring change in Israel. And he would have but one opportunity to show that he was ready for that. Elisha commanded the king to take the remaining arrows and to beat them against the ground. The king obeyed, but in a minimal sense. Perhaps he found it too humiliating to stoop down and do such a silly thing. Perhaps he thought that the number of times that he smashed the arrows into the ground was not important. But the prophet was not at all happy with what Joash had done. He rebuked him for only striking the arrows three times and explained that this act stood as a prophecy concerning how many times Israel would be delivered from the Syrian army. This is where Joash missed everything. While it is true that God plays His part in all that we do, we must not forget the parts that we play! And this requires a certain passion for the work of the Lord. We have to believe in it and we have to give ourselves to it—but we also must participate in it with passion.

*Leaders should be those
 with a zealous passion for
 the work.*

Just One Chance

Had Elisha kept encouraging Joash to strike harder and longer, the king probably would have continued to beat the ground with more and more intensity. But Elisha only asked him one time. And the result was probably more indicative of the true level of passion in the king's heart regarding the spiritual and natural success of the nation of Israel. Ask any congregation one time if they believe in a great revival in the Church. There will be several that respond with an "amen." Continue to ask and there will be many more that begin to cry out with more and more passionate "amens." Why is this? The first response, once again, may be more indicative of our real level of passion toward the work of God. If we are truly part of it, it is because we truly believe in it. Leaders should carry a passion in their hearts about the privilege of participating with Him in His harvest. Nothing can substitute for a leader's passion for godly living. Nothing can replace real Holy Ghost directed zeal in the life of church leadership.

The passion of King David in his 18th Psalm is worth reading over and over. He speaks there of his battles against his enemies and the victories that his Lord had given him. He expresses no doubts about his chances for success when empowered and directed by God. It is a shame that Joash had not studied David's writings. It is always sad when leaders lose their passionate approach to this precious work with which we are entrusted. Evangelism and edification continue to be the ministries of the Jesus' Church, and we cannot look at these lightly. Some of what forms leaders in to a closely knit brotherhood is the common passion that propels them in the task. Matthew Henry in his famous commentary on the Bible says of Joash, "By condemning the sign, he lost what was signified." By refusing to carry out the command of the prophet with true passion and zeal, Joash lost the intensity of "what could have been." It is always sad to see people reflect on "what could have been." It is sad because this is obviously a declaration that they failed to do something that they should have done, and that now they are contemplating what would have been different if they had acted differently. Joash had an opportunity—and he failed to seize upon it. Yes, he did defeat the Syrians three different times due to his action with the arrows. But how much more victory was really needed? How much more could he have accomplished? When is enough really enough in the life of a leader?

Leaders seize God-given opportunities.

Logs on the Fire

A good man once said that it was much easier adding logs to a fire that was already burning than it was to build the fire in the first place. Leaders are responsible for throwing logs onto the fire to keep it burning strong and hot. If the fire goes out in a local church, it is very hard to

rebuild it. Passion for the work of God in leaders is irreplaceable. If we are only asked but one time to participate with God in His victorious deliverance, let us do it with all of our might. This will probably ensure that we will be asked the second and the third time. Joash could have placed another log on the fire that was quickly extinguishing itself in Israel. He could have made a lasting difference. In a moment of genuine focus and a quick return to basics, he had created an opportunity for himself and his kingdom, but he lost it in another mere moment of indifference.

“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men,” Paul wrote in Colossians 3:23. And again in Philippians 2:13 we read the words of the great apostle, *“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”* Joash came very near to having the will to do what God wanted when he came and lamented the sickness of Elisha. But his lack of zeal for the work of God kept him from doing His good pleasure. What could have been changed if he had done differently? Perhaps nothing, perhaps a lot. It was his moment and his chance for something extraordinary, but he failed to grasp it with the resolve necessary to see real change and progress in his life. May we as leaders pursue with zeal and passion the calling of God and never have to look back sadly and ask, “What could have been?”

A STRANGE ALTAR

II Kings 16:10-15

“Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like David his father.” --II Kings 16:2

Throughout the history of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, there were many kings in Judah that tried to walk with God. While the large majority of Israel’s kings were wholly given to idolatry, there were men like Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoash, Amaziah, and Azariah in Judah’s monarchy that at least attempted to keep their nation on the right path. Even Ahaz’s father Jotham could be included in the list of kings that were mostly favorable toward God. But there were also men like Ahaz that abruptly departed from what they were taught by their fathers and by the word of the Lord and led Judah into ungodly practices and idolatrous forms of worship. Why is that? What causes a leader to ignore sound teaching and proven principles to chase after something false and carnal?

The Right Judgment

No doubt someone like Ahaz felt he was doing the right thing when he was in fact doing the wrong thing. We have all met people who genuinely felt they were doing what was right when everyone else recognized that they were living in sin and rebellion. It all comes down to judgment. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 11:31-32, *“For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”* The apostle was speaking of an ongoing responsibility of judging oneself, a part of the process of sanctification. In other words, real Christians must constantly assess their walk with God, determining whether or not they are progressing, are stalled, or actually are backsliding. Are we on fire for God, or are we gradually growing colder in a poor spiritual condition? Are we neglecting to analyze our walk with God?

Leaders find godly principles by which they may judge themselves.

But how and by what shall we judge this progress or lack thereof? Leaders know the meaning of Hebrews 4:12, *“God’s Word is living and powerful. It is sharper than a sword that cuts both ways. It cuts straight into where the soul and spirit meet and it divides them. It cuts into the joints and bones. It tells what the heart is thinking about and what it wants to do.”* (New Life Version) To properly judge ourselves, we must run to God and see from His perspective. But many people never learn this and therefore find other ways of making these

judgments of what is right or wrong for their lives and actions. Some look to other people and what they do as examples of the right conduct. Some look to religion or philosophy to find a means to judge whether their lives are just. People are very good at finding ways to justify or excuse what they do! But one standard remains for real Christians, and especially so for leaders of today's churches.

The famous story in II Chronicles 34 of King Josiah in Judah tells of a man that latched hold of the right standard and judged his life (and the life of the nation over which he served as king.) Upon finding a long-lost copy of the Pentateuch hidden in the walls of the Temple during its construction, and after having studied it and finding where Judah had departed from the will of God, he repented for himself and for the nation. He made the judgment of Judah's sin based on what was revealed in the Holy Scriptures. An entire nation was turned around by this deep and necessary judgment by one of the best kings recorded in the Bible.

Poor Judgment

But Ahaz does just the opposite. Not impressed by what he had already learned regarding the God of the Jewish people, he created his own standards by which he could judge his success or failure. And this always destroys good leaders. The list of mistakes that Ahaz made is a long one indeed:

- In II Kings 16:3, *"...he walked in the way of the kings of Israel...according to the abominations of the heathen..."* This simply means that he copied what others did instead of acting on his own according to what he knew about the true God.
- In II Kings 16:7, *"So Ahaz sent messengers to Tilgathpileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up and save me..."* He appealed to the enemy for salvation instead of looking to the only genuine Saviour.
- In II Kings 16:8, *"Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria."* He sacrificed the holy vessels of the Temple in order to purchase a temporary truce from the enemy instead of appealing to the Almighty for real deliverance.
- And in II Kings 16:10, he *"...saw an altar that was in Damascus..."* And this is where things went seriously wrong.

Having nothing pure and holy by which to judge his actions (which would affect an entire nation of people) he adopted what seemed right to him at the time. In this case, what attracted his attention was a strange altar that he encountered during a visit to the Syrian capital, Damascus. It must have been quite impressive to draw the attention of someone

*Leaders are not seduced
 by strange altars.*

who had personally seen the glory of the Temple in Jerusalem. Perhaps it was not only the beauty of this strange altar that captured the imagination of Ahaz. Perhaps he also felt an intense and wicked spiritual desire for this object of idol worship. Perhaps he thought that this altar had helped the Syrians to become the nation that had nearly overtaken the city of Jerusalem. Perhaps he felt as though the brazen altar at Jerusalem had lost its usefulness and its power. But we can be sure that he replaced all thoughts of God and His true Kingdom with a strange altar that he found in the enemy's capital.

Leaders must remember this: in the midst of all the innovation and creativity that are part of a leader's life, he must remember that some things must never be replaced. Godly actions and ministry must be founded upon godly principles. These are irreplaceable. There are certain standards that we must cling to and live by. And no modern versions, no fancy attempts at duplication, and no seductive substitutes should be allowed in a leader's holy temple.

Back to Jerusalem

While still at Damascus, Ahaz sent to Jerusalem a drawing of the design of this strange altar that he found in Syria and commanded the priests in Judah to make his own copy. Upon returning to his home, he found the altar already built and ready for use. Almost immediately Ahaz offered sacrifices on the strange altar. But then, things became even worse.

Ahaz commanded the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem to move the brazen altar from in front of the Holy Place, the position that it had been meant to occupy since the conception of the Tabernacle and Temple form of worship. In denial and rejection of all the design plans that Moses and others had received from God, the king moved the old altar of sacrifice and repentance from its place and installed his own new altar there.

So many things have changed since the Book of Acts. Methods of evangelism change as time goes on. We adopt better ways of doing what we are doing. We genuinely need to analyze the effectiveness of our methods of evangelizing and edifying in an honest effort to do a better job than ever of carrying out the Great Commission. But in our rush to improve our methods and strategies, we must be absolutely strict and adamant in never substituting our own new altars for the one that stands before the Holy Place.

*A leader's worship begins
at an altar of sacrifice and
repentance.*

The Way In

The only way into the place that was known as holy in the Temple days was by passing the altar of sacrifice. The brazen altar was a special place that stood for two fundamentally

essential things: sacrifice and genuine repentance. Without these two important elements, no one was ready to go further toward the Lord. There was simply nothing else deemed acceptable. And that principle has never changed, and it never will change! Yes, we must constantly improve our work, even “modernizing” it when spiritually and administratively necessary, but we must leave the brazen altar in its place—steadfastly guarding the entrance to the manifestation of the presence of God.

Of course we need genuine Christian leaders in today’s churches. But in order to have genuine leaders, we must have genuine principles that are drawn from the everlasting Word of God. We must have something that gives us the standard by which we can judge our walk with Him and our works for Him. The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:24, *“And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”* The Bible stands as that standard of holiness and it is the definition of true righteousness. Nothing else can substitute for it.

True repentance and genuine sacrifice are becoming more and more rare in these modern times. It seems sometimes that people have found an “express” kind of repentance and a shallow form of sacrifice. But the standard set by the Word of God stands as strong as ever. Deep humility and a willingness to go into the harvest are two very necessary attributes for a leader of today. And no amount of intelligence, notoriety, or wealth can

Leaders recognize God’s principles that never change.

substitute for these. It is in this light that Paul wrote these words in I Corinthians 1:26-29, *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.”* He had previously remarked that the apostles preached “Christ crucified.” Sacrifice may have seemed foolishness to the Jews and the Greeks, but it was an imperative part of what a real Christian needed to experience in the early Church. Has this changed? Will it ever change?

The Way Out

Ahaz, on the other hand, replaced the brazen altar with his own. He proclaimed that he would offer his sacrifices every morning and every evening at his strange Syrian altar, and that he would merely use the old brazen altar “to enquire by.” In other words, he claimed he knew

what sacrifices should be acceptable and he would use the old altar strictly at his convenience and for his own reasons. As early as Genesis 4 we read of the unacceptable sacrifice that Cain tried to make to God. It was good in and of itself, but it was unacceptable because it was not what God had asked of Cain. God gently admonished Cain in verse 7, *“You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”* (New Living Translation) How can we know how to do what is right without a personal knowledge of God’s Word and His Spirit to direct us? How had Ahaz forgotten what happened to Cain?

Making the Wrong Changes

In II Kings 16:17 we read, *“And Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones.”* So moving the brazen altar and replacing it with his own self-made one was still not enough for Ahaz. Once a leader starts down the road of changing God’s system, any evil thing becomes possible. By removing the lavers off of their bases, he had eliminated the washing and ritualistic purification of the priests who served the house of the Lord. Solomon had built all of this in I Kings 7 and had dedicated it in chapter 8 to the perpetual glory of the only true God. But in just a short amount of time, a carnal king named Ahaz changed everything. When we start making changes based upon our own wisdom and our own desires, where will it all end? But if we follow the pattern as established by the Lord, we have a sure destiny.

And still it didn’t end for Ahaz. In II Chronicles 28:25 we read, *“And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers.”* And again in verse 23, we see plainly the fruit of his self-styled form of ministerial service: *“For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. **But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.**”*

Of all the saints in God’s Church, the leadership, most of all, must recognize the need to keep God’s system of worship and service a sacred one. We may be tempted at times to modernize this system, but we would do well to remember that some things never change. Real repentance and genuine sacrifice will always remain part and parcel of a true leader’s life and ministry. Anything else will only be a poor and unacceptable substitute.

JUST A PIECE OF BRASS

II Kings 18:1-4

Just as amazing as Ahaz's turning to idolatry after his father's good reign in Judah is the story of Hezekiah turning Judah back to God after Ahaz's death. We often blame one generation for the failure of the next, but the truth remains that anyone can turn to God at any time! Though a witness of all the idolatry that his father, Ahaz, had introduced into the nation of Judah, and seeing all of the abominations that he practiced, when Hezekiah assumed the throne he immediately began making great strides in bringing Judah back to a pure worship of the only true God. The writer of II Kings even gives us an extra compliment toward this valuable king in verse 3, "*And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did.*" To compare a king with David was a certainly a great commentary on the spiritual orientation of the man.

It is important that we establish in our thinking the good spirit of this man, Hezekiah. This king would set in order new priorities for a nation that had been horribly deceived and compromised by his wicked predecessor, Ahaz.

Despite all of the pressure to continue doing things as his father had done, Hezekiah turned wholeheartedly to God and quickly began to purge Judah of all of their idolatrous worship. All that he would do in his official capacity would actually be based on his spiritual perspective. And leaders need to note this carefully.

*Leaders base their work
from a spiritual
perspective.*

We are in our respective places of responsibility because of who we are. In other words, we are first of all spiritual men and women, and after that we take our respective roles in church leadership. It should not be the other way around! Our positions do not make us spiritual. In fact, for someone that is struggling spiritually, a place of authority or a leadership position will often be abused and misused. Much damage has been done when these so-called leaders have been put into places of authority before they were spiritually qualified. We must remember that, first of all, we are who we are.

No Hesitation

One of the early things we see in Hezekiah's life is the immediate action he takes against what is wrong. There was no compromising here for Hezekiah. While it is true that making changes can be a very sensitive subject, and while it is also true that we often must be very careful concerning when and how we make such changes, there are also times when we must simply begin to change what is wrong. And this was what Hezekiah understood. There was no hesitation on his part when he took the throne.

We studied in the last lesson how deeply Ahaz had taken Judah into idolatry. We read how he erected altars to false gods throughout the land and how he heavily influenced the backsliding of an entire nation. We know that Ahaz was one of the worst kings that Judah would ever know. Yet his son takes immediate action toward the good! Leaders should be people of action. Positive measures must be taken to lead the work of God in the proper direction. Leaders stand responsible for that if nothing else. They must carefully analyze the present and past, and then responsibly plan for change. But all of that would be to no avail if they failed to actually implement the changes. Hezekiah serves as a good example of a man of positive action. He certainly felt the pressure from those that worshipped with his father. He certainly felt the resistance to the changes that he wanted to make. But nothing was going to prevent him from what he knew to be right—he had to take Judah back to God!

Leaders are men and women of action.

Sometimes we see that some churches practice things and operate so-called ministries that are very ineffective. These never really worked, they were never really efficacious toward the ministry of evangelism and edification. So why do they continue to be practiced? Often, it is simply because leaders are reluctant to change what has been practiced in the past. “After all,” they say, “this is what we have always done here.” But that will never be a good reason to do anything. Leaders must do what is right first of all. Yes, it should be done carefully and with the right spirit and attitude, but it must be done. That is our greatest responsibility as leadership in today’s Church. A pastor that is dedicated to making such positive change, and a team of leaders behind him that agree as to what will carry the church forward become a powerful factor in the overall impact and success of the work. In any work there will be resistance by people that are afraid of change. But a clear outlook based on a spiritual perspective in a leader can make all the difference.

A Snake and a Pole

During the exodus from Egypt and Israel’s march toward the promised land of Canaan, the Israelites were both hot and cold. They enjoyed times when they clearly focused on God’s goodness in delivering them from their oppressive past. But other times, they murmured and complained against God and showed their total dissatisfaction with what He provided for them. Numbers 21 is one of those times.

In this passage they complained about the food, the heavenly manna that to them had become monotonous and boring. They feared not having either bread or water in the wilderness, and as the murmuring grew louder and more popular, God sent serpents into the

camp to bring their attention back to reality. The reality was simply that they were in the hands of God to bring them into the promise. They had to rely on their Saviour. And to begin to long for the leeks and the onions of Egypt, and to begin to look backwards instead of forwards was totally unacceptable in the eyes of the Lord.

More than once they had cried out, “Who shall give us flesh to eat?” And finally, in Numbers 21, God had heard enough. Their problem was one of spiritual perspective. They were not seeing things the way that God saw them. They refused to adopt His way of thinking. They failed to understand the whole object of the journey. They could not see the future of Israel and the promise’s importance in the overall scheme that God had ordained from the beginning. While these failures may seem innocent enough, leaders had the responsibility of walking with Moses and his God according to the divine vision that he had gotten from God. There was, after all, a distinct goal that they were seeking. But it had all come down to food and water in Numbers 21. So God took action and sent the fiery serpents to bring the Israelites’ attention back to the deliverance of God.

Leaders walk with other leaders in a God-given vision.

When many people began to be bitten and die from the serpents’ poison, the others cried out to Moses for help. They repented of their murmuring in rapid fashion and asked Moses to intercede on their behalf. The answer from God was for them to make an image of the same serpent that caused such havoc and to mount this image on a pole. And thus we have the beginning of the brazen serpent that we read about in II Kings 18.

Those bitten had but to gaze upon the brass snake and they would be healed and saved from their demise. That was all it took—one look to the pole and the serpent and he would live once again.

Jesus refers to the same brazen serpent in His discussion with Nicodemus in John 3:14. In a similar manner to the way in which the Israelites looked up to their salvation from the curse of the serpent, Jesus declared that the Son of man would be lifted up for a similar salvation from sin. So clearly, the brazen serpent had been in the plan of God all along. But for Judah, during the reign of Ahaz probably, the serpent had become more than just a symbol of God’s deliverance.

Worshipping a Snake

Remembering that Hezekiah’s father, Ahaz, had spread various forms and practices of idolatry throughout the nation of Judah, it is easy to imagine the situation we read about in II

Kings 18. After all, the worship and reverence of serpents was often practiced in the other nations around Israel. Egypt had for centuries practiced such a deification of the serpent. To them it was an important religious symbol. In Phoenicia it was the same thing. Perhaps it was this that brought Ahaz to bring the brazen serpent out of storage and put it into a new form of worship.

There seems to be no mention of the serpent on the pole between Numbers 21 and II Kings 18. But suddenly it is there and it is being treated as an object of worship for those in Judah. In fact, it is included in the list of things that Hezekiah aimed to destroy. So how and why did an object of deliverance become an object to worship? And what can leaders learn from it?

Keeping the pole as a reminder of what God had done in answer to Israel's prayer for deliverance was one thing. But to turn it into an idol was something entirely different. Even today, however, we continue to make the same kind of mistake. Sometimes, a miracle can become more important than the Miracle Worker. Some Christians spend a lot of energy and time focusing on and boasting about what God has done for them, rather than in a real relationship with Him. And sometimes, a God-given miracle can become a symbol of our "good standing" with God. But God does many miracles for many kinds of people. To confuse the grace of God (that which He freely gives us for His purpose) and let it become a symbol of how we are "obviously" accepted by Him is a grave mistake. He does what He does because of who He is. And we are who we are because of who He is.

*Leaders understand the
grace of God.*

The Israelites had looked to the brass serpent in repentance and humility before God. It was a focal point only for them. But it was God that saved them and kept them alive after the fiery sting of the snakes. To change the focal point into the object worshipped was a huge transgression and Hezekiah knew this. To revere and to worship the cross on which Jesus was slain would be a similar mistake. We must look to Him, not to the tree on which He was cruelly suspended.

When a spiritual act becomes an object of worship, there is a problem. When leaders focus more on what they do than who and what they are, there is a problem. When leaders think that what they do is more important than the One for whom it is done, there is a problem. And when what we do becomes more important than the reason for which it was done, there is a major problem.

Worshipping God

Praying for hours and hours seems very honorable indeed. But when one's prayer life becomes an object of self-worship, real trouble is brewing. Worshipping exuberantly is certainly the proper thing to do, but when we worship "better than others" there's a real issue that needs to be dealt with. We read in Mark 12:41, *"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much."* And they no doubt were proud of what they gave so abundantly. But in this case, what was being given had become more important than to whom it was given. And God in the flesh was there to observe first-hand the attitude of these "givers."

But verse 42 paints a different picture: *"And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing."* Here was a woman with little to give, yet according to Jesus she gave more than all of the others who had given! The difference was in the reason for the giving. The rich did it to establish themselves as holy. The poor widow did it simply because she was holy. We do not pray to prove who we are—we pray because of who we are. We do not worship to prove anything—we worship because we love Him. And leaders do not work for God to make themselves acceptable—they work because they are the children of the King and they love His work!

Nehushtan

Interestingly, the Greek word that is translated as "money" in Mark 12:41 means literally, "a piece of brass." It was nothing more and nothing less. It was not worthy of worship nor of boasting. It was simply something that God had blessed the woman with to extend her meager life on the earth. She made it no object of sacred status. To do so would be like Judah in II Kings 18. Leaders give into the treasury because they themselves are already given to God.

So Hezekiah called the brazen serpent on the pole exactly what it was all along. It was "Nehushtan," an ordinary piece of brass. It was no more and no less. It had been something that God had used to bring the attention of the Israelites back to Him during the crisis in the wilderness. That was all. It had been symbolic of God's willingness to deliver from sin. That was all. For Judah to lift it up and worship it was all wrong.

It was not an easy undertaking for Hezekiah, but he acted nonetheless according to what he knew was the right thing to do. And it changed a nation. Leaders today are responsible for refocusing our thoughts and desires back to the God of our fathers. We know what is right, and we cannot accept the worship of "what we do" to stand as a replacement for our own personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Let us not erect the pole and the serpent once again, for it is just a piece of brass.

SHOWING OFF

II Kings 20:1-19

In the last lesson we looked at how Hezekiah, a great leader in Judah, took immediate and decisive steps in correcting the nation and bringing Judah back to God. We discussed many things about his character and principles that he based his actions on when considering what needed to be done. Hezekiah certainly had a noteworthy history and is recorded as one of the best kings that Judah had.

But there is one particular thing that this good king did which stands out as a very poor example for today's leadership. And while Hezekiah "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," this particular transgression caused problems not only for him, but for those that followed him.

Leaders should reflect from time to time on the fact that what they do has not only immediate effects, but often lasting results. We hear adult church members, for example, who speak of what they learned when they were still children in a Sunday School class somewhere. Perhaps those teachers had not considered that one day, many years later, their students would still be talking about what they did in those classes.

Leaders know that what they do has long-lasting effects.

One of Hezekiah's chief concerns during the latter part of his life was the fact that he had no sons to inherit the throne. There was no one to follow him and continue his good legacy. Ironically, it was this preoccupation that ended up causing part of the problem that would affect his posterity.

There is a distinct period of fifteen years in Hezekiah's life. The last years of his life were given to him in direct response to a prayer that he made after he was visited by the man of God. What he did during those years, and the result of that prayer, are both good and bad. Leaders should look at both sides of this man's actions and learn from them.

The State of Dying

While at the young age of about 39, Hezekiah became very ill. In fact, the situation was so serious that the prophet Isaiah was sent to the king to tell him of his imminent death, and to set his house in order. Usually, part of setting one's house in order would include preparing the

family for the death of their loved one and making sure that they would be provided for. But again, there were no sons. This, combined with the gruesome reality of his soon coming death caused Hezekiah to turn his face toward the wall and pray.

The state of dying is surely a singular event. There is nothing more certain than our death, but people usually live as if it is something that will never take place. It is somehow much easier to live as though we would never die. And this kind of life philosophy wreaks havoc with our spiritual perspective. Spiritual perspective is our way of seeing things the way that God sees them. It is our point of view from a spiritual angle. It means knowing how to live based on the reality of eternal life. To deny death will mean living in an undisciplined and unprincipled manner. Paul encouraged us in Colossians 3:2 to *“set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.”* He said that this was because we were in actual fact already dead, and that our real lives were hidden with Christ in God. So, the real life is actually hidden, and what we often think is real life (the here and now) is actually part of dying in order to reach the place where we will never again die.

The state of dying therefore can have a huge impact for the good in someone’s “life.” Once presented with the thought of imminent death, everything normally changes in someone’s spiritual perspective. Once stripped of the promise of continuing life, Hezekiah, like many others would quickly see things God’s way. Once the luxuries of life are no longer part of our earthly existence, it is easier to have the right spiritual outlook on what is “really real.”

This state of dying does not, however, have to come only at the point of physical death. It can also come from a spiritual vantage point, a place of genuine understanding that our lives are hid with Christ in God! No man’s flesh desires anything but the best things in this life. But a real Christian’s spirit will seek for the things that are from above. We know in our minds that this life is temporal, but we all live as if it is the goal to live on earth as long as we possibly can. With constant help from the Lord and His Word, we can focus on the reality of eternity and overcome the cares of this life. It is never an easy thing, but a necessary one. Our preoccupations with providing for our comfort in this life often outweigh our dedication to the life that is in Christ Jesus. And once again, here is where leaders must be different.

*Leaders stay focused on
the reality of eternity.*

The Prayer

Facing the loss of life and the loss of legacy, Hezekiah prayed an agonized prayer that is certainly worth noting. In II Kings 20:3, we read, *“I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart.”* There are many prayers recorded in

the Bible where men and women “remind” God of what has already taken place. But in reality, who is being reminded? It is the one praying that suddenly and once again recalls better days when all was well between him and his Lord. Hezekiah remembers days when he walked with God in a perfect state of submission and obedience. He remembered the great days of his life when the favour of God was on him and now wished for the same fellowship with the Lord.

When the Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:13 that he was “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto things which are before,” he wasn’t simply saying that he was forgetting the entire past. But there were parts of his past that had to be forgotten if he was to seize the promise of the future. The context of that passage is that of his religious experience as a Benjaminite, a Pharisee, and as a zealous persecutor of the Church. Those days were now over and needed to be forgotten. These kinds of things were not beneficial at all to Paul, and in fact, were deleterious to his spiritual perspective.

So at death’s door, Hezekiah is back to the basics of righteous understanding and reminds God (and more so himself) that his service with God was the most meaningful of his brief life. Prayers like that change things! And they do not have to be prayed only while on one’s death bed. In actuality, we live on a death bed every day of our lives. From the moment we are born in this world, we begin the process of dying. It may come quickly or it may be delayed for many years, but it is a certainty. Hezekiah’s prayer would be applicable to us at any point of our lives—“Lord, remember how I have walked with You, and give me more time to serve You if You so choose. If not, I am ready to go to You now. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours be done.” That is spiritual perspective and Hezekiah had found it once again.

The Extension of Life

The immediate result of this prayer was an extension of Hezekiah’s life, another fifteen years to serve the Lord as he had once done. Truly nothing could be greater in this life on earth than to have a genuine understanding of the grace of God as it operates in our lives. A real revelation of purpose in this life is invaluable. For many people this is only a vague and unreachable dream. But it is the will of God for our lives. He wants us to know Him, and to know what He wants to do in and through our lives with Him on earth. But it requires faith, perseverance, and obedience to achieve it.

Are there any accidents of birth? Certainly there are none from God’s perspective. Each precious life is given for a reason and for a purpose. We often, however, fail to realize the reason and the purpose, and so see many lives that are lived as if they were accidentally brought forth, with no clear direction and with no hope for an eternal reward. There is no greater loss in this world than that. But what about in the Church?

The same problem and tragic loss of purpose exists within the ranks of God's army of saints. There are many church members that have at best a glimpse of eternal purpose, but who do not fully understand just how impacting their lives could be if surrendered to Him. But leaders are different! They know what God is capable of, and they know that in a life that is committed to doing His divine will, truly all things are possible! Every day that is given us by God is in reality an extension of life. It is also a new opportunity to seek and to do the will of God. Leaders understand this.

The Sign

To accompany the promise of an extension of Hezekiah's life, there was a sign given to him. Perhaps because the miracle for Hezekiah was in being given more time to live, the sign would be regarding time. Incredibly, the shadow of the sundials everywhere began to move in the opposite direction. Maybe God was telling Hezekiah that time was given by Him and by Him alone. Men have no control over time; they must simply work within the limits that God has ordained for them. Just as surely as a sundial's shadow moves forward, our lives draw closer and closer to our death. But on this day, Hezekiah would watch as God miraculously altered time and altered the destiny of his life.

Far away from Jerusalem, however, others were watching the shadows too. In Babylon, the soothsayers and the magicians and the astrologers were certainly wondering what amazing event was taking place before their eyes. Not long after, they must have heard that Hezekiah had been healed of his lethal sickness, and that the sign that they had witnessed in Babylon had been done in Jerusalem by the prayer of a prophet and by the hand of Hezekiah's God. This surely interested them. Among the many religious beliefs of this heathen nation, the Babylonians believed in the god of the sun. And to know that this sun had moved in the opposite direction for Hezekiah's benefit touched them deeply. In their minds, perhaps Hezekiah had received special favour from their god of the sun. Perhaps he had influence that they had only dreamed of.

Not only were the religious men of Babylon interested in this amazing event, but the military strategists also were paying attention. Babylon was then a rising power and a threat to the region, and any alliances that they could make to further their ambitious goals would be valuable. So the prince in Babylon sent a seemingly kind and flattering letter of congratulations to Hezekiah—congratulations for his recovery, and no doubt based upon the sign of the sun. And now real trouble began for Hezekiah.

Leaders should not be so naïve to think that their enemies do not know what God is doing in their lives. What is a comfort and a sign to us is often a signal to the adversary that action must be taken to compromise our stance with the Lord. And this was certainly the case in Jerusalem

that day. To the Babylonian way of thinking, favour with the sun god and the power of recovery from deadly illness for Hezekiah was a real threat to their goal of regional expansion. They needed allies and they needed certainty that Hezekiah would not hinder their objectives of conquest. Something needed to be done and it needed to be done quickly. So they flattered Hezekiah with their official letter, and II Kings 20:13 tells us that “Hezekiah hearkened unto them.”

What business did Hezekiah have with them? What possible good could come from listening to their congratulatory letter? What can we leaders expect from our adversary except lies and deception? Just as certainly as Babylon wanted to form an alliance with Hezekiah, the enemy will try to form alliances with those in today’s Church that are genuinely a threat to what the devil wants to do in our midst. Power with God means trouble for the kingdom of darkness. Assurances from God will be met by lies and seduction from the other camp. Promises and signs that God gives to us become signals to the adversary that he must take action to undo what God is effecting. We all know what Hezekiah should have done. He should have called the letter exactly what it was—an attempt to undermine the power of God that worked through the king’s life.

Leaders know that assurances from God are also signals to the enemy.

It is truly a remarkable passage of scripture in Matthew 16 where Simon Peter declares rightly that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The revelation on Peter’s part is one that we still celebrate. But it was also a signal to the devil that time was short. Only a few verses later, the same Simon Peter makes a carnal assessment of what Jesus was explaining. Jesus was describing to the disciples the means by which ultimate victory would take place. It had to come by His self-sacrifice for the sins of all. It had to be by suffering at the hands of the chief priests, by a cruel death at Calvary, and then by a powerful resurrection. But Peter could not see through all of this. He told Jesus in verse 22, “...*this shall not be unto thee.*” He had a compromised and carnal way of seeing the same objective of victory, and certainly it would not come by surrendering the Master! Already, the enemy was trying to dilute the power of Peter’s revelation of who Jesus really was. But in verse 23, Jesus answered it the way Hezekiah should have answered the Babylonians: “*Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*”

Showing Off

Instead of seeing that the Babylonians had another vision and another ambition that had nothing to do with him, he fell victim to the charm of their letter and began to contemplate

what they said. The Bible does not say what the contents of the letters were. It does not describe the gifts that were sent from Babylon for Hezekiah. But it does describe the king's reaction to all of it. He "hearkened unto them." It somehow touched his heart enough that he opened a dialogue with the Babylonians. He evidently wanted to hear more flattery (and even more lies.) It felt good to him that someone as far away as Babylon cared for him and his health. No doubt the Babylonians had expressed how impressed they were with how Hezekiah's God had interceded and brought such a great miracle. And in all of this thinking, Hezekiah began to equate his touch of God with his own personal goodness. After all, perhaps the Babylonians were right, he must have thought. God did, in fact, consider him so important that He would even cause the sun to go backwards in its path across the sky.

So Hezekiah opens up to the Babylonian representatives all of the treasuries of the royal household. He shows them how wealthy he is, and how much he owns. He somehow began to feel more and more important in the eyes of these visitors. Verse 13 of II Kings 20 concludes by saying that "...there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not."

Hezekiah should have simply glorified God for the gift of added life and then gone on to serve Him like never before. But here he sought instead to impress idolaters and unbelievers with the blessings that God had given him. Leaders must be careful to never abuse the grace of God. We are blessed for a reason, and the blessings are to be directed toward God's intended target. We have what we have for a specific reason. To use it for any other reason, including the attempt to impress other people is simply wrong. And in reality, in thinking that he was showing how good God was to him, he was in truth showing the Babylonians how good he was.

Though the Bible tells us that he hid nothing from the eyes of his guests, we might wonder if Hezekiah showed them anything of a spiritual nature. Did he try and introduce them to his God? After all, they had expressed their awe at what Hezekiah's God had done for him. Why not use this time to describe how the same God could change lives in Babylon? If these visitors were in earnest, why not introduce them to Isaiah who had brought the prophecies? Surely he would know what to do about these Babylonians. But instead, it was really all about Hezekiah and his greatness. Even Christians can sometimes be tempted to boast about their own goodness when talking about the greatness of God. "I am so spiritual that God did this for me." "I prayed and this is what God did." Sometimes the key word in statements that we make about God is the word "I." Hezekiah had misused the blessing. In II Chronicles 32:25 we read, *"But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem."*

In Luke 8:18, Jesus explained an important principle that operates in His kingdom. It centers on two kinds of people: those that have and those that have not. The man that has is the one who takes what God gives him and uses it for the right purpose. He will be given even more. But the man that abuses what God gives (the one that has nothing in reality) will one day be stripped of what he “seems” to have. To put it plainly, we must use it or lose it. And Hezekiah, in a moment of tempting self-importance, lost it.

Leaders use what God gives them for the right purpose.

The Compromise

After the error came the reproof. Isaiah arrived on the spot and demanded the reason for entertaining the foreign representatives. As Hezekiah explained what had happened and what he had done to impress the Babylonians, a new prophecy came forth from the man of God. The sad truth was that everything that Hezekiah had shown the enemy would one day be lost to the same enemy. Even the sons that Hezekiah had longed for and would see due to the extension of his life would also be taken away to Babylon. What a tragic turn of events in the life of a very good man! How easily and quickly things had changed. A seemingly small act on Hezekiah’s part had brought a promise of a horrible and a lasting result. And it would not only affect Hezekiah in the present, it would even more seriously affect his posterity.

A leader should have something to leave behind for the future. There should be indelible marks made by the lives of true Christian leaders that have touched the lives of others. To think that our lives might be spent with no long-lasting and positive results is a sad thought indeed. What we do in leadership will have an effect for the good or for the bad. That is certain.

Hezekiah compromised what the prophet said in verse 19 by asking the question “*Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?*” In other words, he thought that it was alright if the problem did not affect his regime, only cursing someone else in the future. But one of his primary responsibilities was to create a brighter future for those that were to follow him and to create something that would benefit his sons instead of cursing them.

It is almost too simple to state, but it is nonetheless true: leaders lead. We will either take people forward with us as we help accomplish the task and as we stretch the vision even further, or we will cause others to regress and grow more and more unusable in God’s hands. It is our responsibility and it is our choice. Hezekiah was a good man who made a simple but destructive decision. Let us learn from it and not make the same mistake.

SEEKING THE GOD OF DAVID

II Kings 22:1-2

There is little doubt that Josiah was truly one of the greatest kings in the Old Testament. In fact, in II Kings 23:25 we are told, *“And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.”* There aren’t many compliments like that regarding the Old Testament kings! In fact, it is interesting to note that these same words of admiration are used as a command in Deuteronomy 6:5 and again by Jesus in Mark 12:30 regarding what the people of God should aspire to. Evidently, Josiah had fulfilled the “first commandment.”

Josiah was the great-grandson of Hezekiah, also a very good man that we have already studied in these lessons. Oddly enough, however, the two kings between Hezekiah and Josiah, his father and grandfather, were two of the worst kings ever to reign in Judah! So what was it that broke the chain of evil-mindedness that had prevailed in the royal family for the past two generations? What spirit or attitude would bring Judah’s top leader back into alignment with the will of the Lord?

He was only eight years old when he assumed the throne and therefore must have had someone that acted as a regent, someone to guide him through the affairs of his kingdom. Certainly someone was responsible for steering Josiah in the right direction in his early years. But there is something specific that Josiah did that really made all the difference. By the time Josiah reached the age of sixteen, he had decided upon a life-strategy that would change everything for himself and for Judah.

In II Chronicles 34:3 we read, *“For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek after the God of David his father...”* Certainly, David was not his father by today’s definition, but David was there in the family lineage. Many generations before Josiah, the great King David had ruled in Jerusalem and had brought the nation to the pinnacle of its godly influence in the region. His psalms were well known. His legend was renowned. He had become the standard by which other kings were judged. Their records of achievement were matched against his before their epitaphs were written in the Bible. But not every king lived up to the standard that David set. Moreover, many of the kings never even tried to follow after David’s way of living for God and the way he directed Judah toward real righteousness.

But while Josiah was still young, he began not only to copy what David might have done many years before, but he began to look for the same God that had sustained and blessed the great monarch. This is the first of two necessary steps that godly leaders must take as they

endeavor to seek for excellence in their relationships with the Lord. In the beginning of a leader's walk with God, he is still newly discovering the wonderful things that can be experienced in the Kingdom of God. A leader knows about God, has been filled with the Spirit of God, but is still learning about this great Saviour. We could say, therefore, that in the beginning of our relationship with the Lord, we are learning about Him not only by our own limited experience, but we are also learning about Him from other saints. The perfection, the power, the holiness, and the righteousness of God are being taught to us by others as well as by reading and studying the Bible. While we are discovering Him for ourselves, we are also being shown His goodness and mercy by the lives and teachings of others.

The God of David

Somehow, Josiah simply knew that David held the keys to the real kingdom. Somehow he knew that the power of God had worked in David's life to such an extent that the nation of Israel had become not only a regional power in its day, but also a center of true worship of the true and mighty God. And Josiah wanted that same type of reign during his life. But how would he go about pursuing it? He was only sixteen years old. His father and grandfather had been horrible examples of what a king should be. Where could he look for change?

The Bible simply tells us that he began to seek for the God of David. And there is the key for every young or new or inexperienced or potential leader in today's Church. The only thing that we can do at the beginning of our leadership experience is to seek the God that the Church presents. He, at first, may be simply the God of the pastor. He might be the God of the church service. We know that He is real. He has even filled us with His Spirit. But we cannot say that we quite know Him in His fullness—not yet. We must walk with others as they walk with Him. The Apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthian saints in I Corinthians 4:16 to be followers of him, not just followers of Jesus. Of course, he meant for them to follow Christ, but how could they know Him at this fragile and tender time of their spiritual relationship? It would be easier if they imitated the connection that Paul had made with the Lord. Paul, by his actions, would be the one that would show the Corinthians a model to pursue—a model of excellence regarding the bond that a saint of God could find with His Lord and Saviour.

New leaders follow other leaders as they follow Christ.

Again, in Philippians 3:17, Paul says, *"Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample."* It is easy to tell people that they should follow Jesus, but it's not so easy for them to accomplish it! They need examples, they need models, and they need elders that show how it can be done. Young leaders should have someone to

emulate. And elder and experienced leaders should be those examples to others. Paul goes on in Philippians 4:9, *“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”*

So Josiah began to seek after the God that he had recognized in the life of the hero of Judah. We read in II Kings 22:2 that Josiah *“...walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.”* Josiah knew that the presence of God had not been revealed in the lives of his father or grandfather, and so he had to look somewhere else. His model would be King David and his God.

There will always be a need for real mentors in the Church. New leaders will always need a pattern to follow after. And experienced leaders will always have the opportunity to influence and impact the leadership of tomorrow by what they exhibit today. By following after the God that is correctly portrayed by the pastor, the present leadership, and by the Church in general, new or potential leaders will be able to learn how to obey, how to submit to spiritual authority, and to see how the God of David can become the God of Josiah.

Obedience and Submission

For many people these two words, obedience and submission, represent something negative—something to be feared. They think that submission to authority is the loss of personal freedom, and that obedience means subjecting oneself to the whims and feelings of another. But to aspiring leaders, these words portray opportunities to find true fulfillment and purpose in life. In fact, obedience and submission actually “establish” true leadership.

When we submit in the Church, we are submitting to the system of spiritual authority that God instituted. We are saying that we believe that God is directing His Church and that we want to be part of what He is doing. We are declaring that we believe in the present leadership of the Church, and therefore we will submit ourselves to that leadership. There should be a God-inspired vision that directs the efforts of every Christian assembly, and we are submitting ourselves to the authority of that vision. How could the Philippians follow Paul if they doubted his authenticity as a Christian leader and apostle of the Lord? But if he was in fact an apostle, how could they refuse to submit to the authority that accompanied the position?

Leaders prove themselves through submission and obedience.

When we obey the leaders above us, we are demonstrating our submission. To say that we are submitted, but to act in opposition to the vision is incongruous. But many people try this way of living for the Lord. For leaders, however, it cannot be tolerated. There is too much at

stake: for them and for those that they are destined to lead. So when leaders submit to and obey other leaders that are truly in the vision, they are preparing themselves for further usefulness and further excellence in the work of the Lord.

Even while young and inexperienced leaders follow the God of Paul or the God of the pastor in submission and in obedience, they are in reality following their own God. And one day a transition will take place in their lives—when they are no longer seeking someone else’s God; they will have found their own.

The God of Josiah

While Josiah was walking in the way of David, he was actually finding his own way. Seeking the God that had changed David’s life changed Josiah’s. Looking for a bond such as David had with the Lord led Josiah to his own personal and deep relationship with God. The transition was beginning to be successfully accomplished!

Leaders certainly need their own personal relationship with God, but it may start with emulating another leader’s commitment and dedication. And once again, this shows how important a senior leader’s influence on younger leaders really is. Peter wrote in his first epistle that men should understand the example that Jesus left, and that they should follow in His steps. But if Peter had not walked with Jesus and had not proved that it was truly possible, who would have tried to follow? Paul had told the Corinthians to follow him as he followed Christ. If leaders do not show the way, what god will others try to follow?

Leaders begin to find their own way by following.

It was in the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign when the Lord gave him the opportunity to change everything in Judah. This was ten full years after the young Josiah had dedicated himself to seeking the God of David. By this time Josiah had already begun to purge the nation from its idolatry. He destroyed the high places of false worship. He broke down the altars that were used to sacrifice unto other gods. He was intent in his mission to do what David would have done. For ten years, he gave his energies to ridding Judah of the wicked influences that had taken the nation into the deplorable state that he inherited as its leader. But during these ten years he demonstrated to God that he had rightly determined the priorities that must rule his life. These priorities had worked for David, and Josiah was convinced that they would work for him as well.

As a final act of his commitment to turning Judah back to the God of David, he ordered the repair of the Temple. He was ashamed that certain parts of the Temple were in such a broken

down condition. The glory of God that had been so manifest during the time of David was something that Josiah wanted more than anything. So he determined to fix what was wrong. He had already begun to seek the God of David for himself—now he would seek the presence of David’s God for all of Judah. And in doing so, he would finally discover the God of Josiah.

And so the carpenters and the masons began to do their work. It wasn’t long after the work began that the high priest was informed that certain scrolls had been found during the repair work. Evidently, these scrolls had been hidden in the walls of the house of God during its construction. And for many years, the Pentateuch, the book of the law, had been absent from Jerusalem. Apparently no copies remained at that time. But when a good man with a deep desire to know the God of David set about to repair the house of the Lord, God gave him more than he could have dreamed. There, hidden in the walls that were being repaired was a treasure of inestimable value—the law of God.

Immediately Josiah knew that everything would be different. He would have the opportunity to bring Judah back into compliance with the will of God as described in the book of the law. He would be the king that would give God the chance to show His greatness and power once again in the nation of Judah.

We can read about the transition that Josiah successfully made—from the God of David to the God of Josiah—in II Kings 22:18-19: *“But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, as touching the words which thou hast heard; because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord.”* God had heard Josiah! He now had his own walk with this great God. He was no longer just the God of Josiah’s forefathers. He was no longer just a God that others could talk about. He had become the God of Josiah.

True Christian leaders will find their God. Paul told us in Philippians 3:10 that he wanted to know God *“...and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings.”* And he found that power and suffering. He knew God. For many years, Paul only knew about the Jehovah of the Old Testament. He worshipped the God of Israel. But beginning on the road to Damascus, Paul began to look for another. Paul cried out in humble repentance in Acts 9:5, *“Who art thou, Lord?”* And step by step, prayer after prayer, and year after year, the answer became more and more clear, and more and more personal, *“I am Jesus...”* Josiah found his God. Paul found his God. And leaders will find Him, too.

*Leaders must find their
God.*