

One of my favorite leadership books is "Be, Know, Do: Leadership the Army Way" by Frances Hesselbein and General Eric K. Shinski (USA Ret.) This book takes a close look at the official Army Leadership Manual and applies its principles to the corporate and civic leadership realms. Here is the Army's definition of leadership, "Leadership is influencing people, by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization". (pg 5) This definition has three words that stand out to me: influencing, operating and improving. Influencing: motivating and loving others in the mission for the mission. Operating: creating plans, developing systems and managing their execution so that the mission is achieved. Improving: adding value to those around you and to the organization for the betterment of the mission.

So what does a missional leader look like in a local church? Here are four foundational characteristics of those leaders who are seeking to align themselves and their churches with God's missional purposes.

1. They are passionate followers of Christ.

Their leadership flows out of their relationship with Jesus and his missional call on their lives. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing". (John 15:5 NIV) Cultivating spiritual intimacy is essential for leaders to live a vibrant missional lifestyle. For the leader to hear and obey God they must first love God.

As a new believer I read a lengthy biography of George Mueller written by A.T. Peirson. George Mueller lived during the 19th century. He was a rebellious young man who came to faith in Christ at the age of 20 and shook up the world with his humble faith and his passionate devotion for God. Four things that motivated me out of that biography were:

1) God uses broken vessels. George Mueller wasted the first twenty years of his life in hellish activity and God redeemed his life for his great cause.

2) God's plans are different than ours. He wanted to be an overseas missionary but God kept him at home to be a missionary to orphans. I found it quite interesting that he was a great supporter and friend of J. Hudson Taylor.

3) His persistent and argumentative prayer life: A.T. Peirson writes: "This method of holy argument--ordering our cause before God, as an advocate would plead before a judge". George Muller was such a passionate follower that he wrestled with God on the behalf of those he was trying to reach and serve. This lesson brought such freedom to my prayer life.

4) His spiritual habits inspired and still inspire me. His primary spiritual habit was to read his Bible on his knees and pray his way through every word. A.T. Peirson writes,

"The passion of George Mueller's soul was to know fully the secrets of prevailing with God and with man. George Whitefield's life drove home the truth that God alone could create in him a holy earnestness to win souls and qualify him for such divine work by imparting a compassion for the lost that should become an absorbing passion for their salvation. And let this be carefully marked as another secret of this life of service-- he now began himself to read the word of God upon his knees, and often found for hours great blessing in such meditation and prayer over a single psalm or chapter."

Missional leaders are passionate followers of Christ. They embrace their brokenness. They are wholly dependent on God to work through them. Their intimacy with God is unfettered and their spiritual habits are a lifeline that keeps them connected to the Lord of the Harvest.

2. They inspire others to worship God.

These leaders understand that the goal of their lives is to glorify God, to spread his fame and to lead others to worship God personally and corporately. Worship in its base form is simply putting God first in

your life. The Apostle Paul appealed to the Christians living in Rome, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship". (Romans 12:1 NIV) Missional leaders understand that worship is primarily a lifestyle, a series of intentional decisions one makes to allow God to have first priority in their lives.

They inspire others by pointing to Jesus and unashamedly calling others to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and risen Lord. In their own worshipping lifestyle they model what it means to put Jesus first in their day, their decisions, in their finances and their relationships. In their leadership they guide the church corporately to become a worshipping community by designing and executing a well thought out spiritual formation process and by creating culturally relevant worship services that touch the human heart, lift them into the presence of God, thus bringing God honor and glory. In their preaching they help people transcend their ordinary routines and transform their minds as they seek to live a worshipping lifestyle.

3. They serve out of their unique giftedness.

They are comfortable in their own skin. They understand that God, in His sovereignty, has bestowed upon them a unique personality, a unique story and a set of spiritual gifts, through the Holy Spirit, for the purpose of fulfilling God's missional purposes through the local church. The Apostle Paul tells us how to think about ourselves in light of our unique gifts when he wrote, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you". (Romans 12:3 NIV)

First, we are to refrain from thinking of ourselves too 'highly' because when it comes to spiritual gifts there is no ground for an inflated view of ourselves because the gifts are given by God, for God, and His mission. Second, we are to think with 'sober judgment' which means, sound thinking or a healthy perspective when it comes to our giftedness. In light of this healthy perspective the missional leader celebrates what God has given them, determines to develop those gifts to their fullest potential and becomes humbly dependant on the rest of the body of Christ because they understand that all the gifts are needed for God's mission to be fulfilled.

Missional leaders create a gifts oriented culture by celebrating all the gifts that God has given to the body. They provide pathways for others in discovering how their unique personality, life experiences and spiritual gifting fit in God's missional purposes. These leaders also come alongside and challenge people to use and sharpen their gifts to their utmost potential. The Apostle Paul wrote these words to a young leader, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God". (II Timothy 1:6 NIV) They are urgently calling God's people into service because every gift is needed to fulfill the mission of making more and better disciples around the world.

4. They have a heart for the lost all around them.

In Acts 17:16 we read, "While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols". (Acts 17:16 NIV) While waiting for his traveling companions, he wandered the streets of Athens, the intellectual capital of the world and the center of sophisticated Greek culture. As he strolled through the city his heart began to stir deep within him causing him great pain and personal distress because of all the hopelessness he encountered every time he came across the lifeless idols throughout the city. One man described Athens as a junkyard of idols. People giving their lives, their time, and resources to images made by the hands of men.

Missional leaders see the world through a different set of lenses. They see the world through the eyes of a God who is on mission and cries out to a lost world "Where are you?" and "What is this you have done?" (Genesis 3:8, 13 NIV) They see the world through the heart of a God who so loved the world that he gave and he gave his Son sacrificially so that those who came to him would experience the very life of God. (John 3:16) This deep stirring within their souls causes missional leaders to act and to freely accept the call and the challenge from Jesus when he said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you". (John 20:21 NIV)

The Apostle Paul's heart was broken not only for the lost souls of Athens but for the whole world. This is why he wrote, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings." (I Corinthians 9:19-13 NIV) In Athens Paul figured out how to reach sophisticated Greeks. In Jewish circles he knew what to do to reach his fellow Jews.

Missional leaders not only feel the burden of God's mission but they also act on the burden and act upon it sacrificially. Leading a missional church is not for the faint of heart. It takes courage to push yourself beyond your comfort zone and to lead the church beyond its personal limits. Brokenness, inner turmoil and sacrifice will always be part of the leader's life.

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Gary Rohrmayer

FirstSteps Network

Your Journey Resources & Coaching
319 Lake Shore Dr.
Lindenhurst, IL 60046
847-507-5322
blog: www.garyrohrmayer.com
web: www.yourjourney.org