

Leadership and Ministry (Judges 5:2)

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the divine necessity and characteristics of true leadership in the Church, illustrated through biblical examples like Moses.

Scripture: Exodus 17:9, Deuteronomy 33:16, Judges 5:2, Matthew 20:26-28, Romans 12:8, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Thessalonians 2:7, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:2-3

Topics: "Leadership", "Divine Order"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the critical role of leadership in both spiritual and practical realms, asserting that effective leadership is essential for overcoming challenges and guiding communities towards their divine purpose. He highlights that true leaders are chosen by God, not merely by human qualifications, and they often face significant opposition and personal struggles. The sermon draws on biblical examples, particularly Moses and Joshua, to illustrate the qualities of spiritual leadership, including humility, courage, and a deep connection with God. Sparks also discusses the importance of inspiration in leadership, as exemplified by Deborah, who, despite being a woman in a traditionally male role, inspired others through her prophetic insight and maternal concern for her people. Ultimately, the message calls for recognizing and embracing the divine order of leadership within the Church.

Transcript

"For that the leaders took the lead... bless the Lord" (Judges 5:2).

While there are few things fraught with more difficulties, perils, and involvements than leadership, there are few things more vital and necessary. The fact of leadership needs no argument. It is in the very nature of things. Every situation that arises of a serious and critical nature either finds its salvation by the spontaneous forthcoming of the spirit of leadership in someone, or becomes a disaster for want of it. When an emergency arises, people are either paralyzed and helpless because there is no one to give a lead, or are galvanized into action or confidence by the right kind of leadership.

But not only in emergencies does this factor show its importance. Both in any enterprise, mission, and service, and in any realm of responsibility, this - which is an elemental principle - invariably shows itself. We have much to say about its nature, its sphere, and its purpose, but first of all it is necessary that we should recognize and accept that leadership is a fact in the very constitution of life and purpose. It has been so from the beginning, and - in principle (if not in form) - has operated in every realm, not least in the Church.

In its right place, sphere, nature, and relationship it is a must; only chaos, confusion, and frustration can obtain where there is no spirit of leadership. Indeed, even where there may be a pretending to the contrary, it will be there somewhere if things are not completely stagnant or running to seed.

With all the desire and intention in the world to safeguard the unique and sole rights of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Church, we still believe that there is an essential place for, and need of, subject and subordinate (to the Lord) leadership. Moreover, this we believe not to be out of order, but in the Divine order.

The place and function of the shepherd in the Bible is to "go before", and the sheep "follow after". The Lord is truly the Chief Shepherd, but there are shepherds in the churches, and they have to lead. While James, John, and Timothy were apostles of the churches, they were recognized as having particular responsibility in a local church. If this can be proved to be true in any case, it must be accepted as: (1) expressing a certain personal leadership, and (2) not necessarily violating either the headship of Christ, the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, or the corporate nature of local responsibility. To argue otherwise is to say that it is impossible to have a corporate body of responsible men who recognize anointing for leadership amongst themselves - and to honor such - while not being under autocratic oppression. While we most strongly contend against autocracy, we as strongly contend that leadership even amongst responsible brethren is right, provided always that it is evidently anointed leadership and of the kind that is approved of God...

As is always the case, the positive is revealed in its importance by the opposition which it encounters. We have only to consider the leadership function of such as Adam, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Nehemiah, Paul, and a hundred others to understand the intense and many-sided antagonism levelled at them. Of course, the Lord Jesus as "the captain of our salvation" i.e., "the file-leader" is the supreme instance. Break, defeat, beguile, seduce the leader, and the battle is won - the forces are helpless. The focus of adverse attention upon leadership is its own testimony to its importance.

Then in approaching the question of what leadership is, we must say something of what it is not. Leadership (in the work of God) is not firstly on natural grounds. It is not - in the first place - a matter of personality, natural ability, assertiveness, enthusiasm, assumption, strength of mind or will. A blusterer is not a leader. A leader in God's work is not made or trained in the schools or academies. That may be so in the world's work, but we are dealing with spiritual leadership. Many natural things, inherited or acquired, may - or may not - be helpful subsequently, but God's leaders are not essential leaders because of certain natural qualifications.

Whatever may or may not be true in the natural realm, the fact is that God's leaders are chosen by Him. They, and others, may always have many questions as to Why, but that fact governs. God only knows why! When God does it, men have either to take account of it and accept it, or in repudiating it to be out of Divine approval. This is very true to the Bible, as we shall see.

What we have just said does not imply that there are no qualities in leaders. They go to school with God, and in a hard school the kind of qualities required by God are inculcated. Another general thing about leaders chosen by God is that they, while being human, are in many respects a class by themselves. They are pioneers, and pioneers are lonely people in more respects than one. In some ways they are difficult people. Their standard and measure has to be ahead of others, and as human nature generally likes not to be disturbed but would seek the easy way, the pioneer is often a bit too much for people. He is restless,

never satisfied, always pressing and urging forward. The keynote of his life is "Let us go on". His is not the easy way, and because human nature does want the easy way the leader is not always popular. The whole nature of man is either downward or to a quiet and happy mean and smugness. The pioneer is therefore not always appreciated, but often very much otherwise. He is so much contrary to this mediocre gravitation. A part of the price of leadership is loneliness.

Leadership is a divine imperative. In the work of God, true leadership is not by the choice or desire of those concerned. Very often it is against their inclination or desire, especially when they have been in God's 'school of discipline'. Indeed, the man who wants to be a leader, who forces himself into that position, who assumes it, and who would not rather be saved from it, will most likely be a menace. It will be clear to all that it is more the man than the Lord. His leadership - such as it is - will be forced, artificial, and lacking in unction. The God-chosen leader is a 'cannot' man in two ways. Firstly - like Moses and Jeremiah - he will genuinely feel and confess, "I cannot." But on the other hand, he will know that he cannot do otherwise; it is a Divine compulsion, a fire in his bones, an urge and energy not of himself. While he is on his job, he may give the impression of personal strength - perhaps of efficiency or even self-assurance - but he and God know the depth of his secret history: the overwhelming consciousness of need and dependence, the awareness of limitation, and the desolating realization of failure and weakness.

Leaders know deeper depths than any others, and their battle with self-despair is more acute. Yet it is a part of their leadership and responsibility that they hide their own personal sufferings and sorrows. Like Ezekiel and Hosea they have to anoint their face and in the hour of deepest sorrow go before the people "as at other times." The troubles must not get into their voice or manner; if they do, their influence has gone; for if people are going on to the greater fulnesses of Christ, the supreme virtue is courage, and it is this that a leader must inspire. His boldest times - before men - may be his times of deepest suffering before God. They know that they are involved in the 'impossible' but - in spite of themselves - they are committed; and for them compromise is unthinkable.

While writing this, I have come upon "The Making of a Pioneer", by the Misses Cable and French, and in it these lines occur in reference to the Pioneer:

"They are not an easy-going class of people and are subject to an inarticulate urge, the impact of a driving force pushing them forward to further effort and carrying them into what other men call 'impossible situations.' 'Appointed to pioneer work' is an expression which is a travesty of the true case, for no man can be called a 'pioneer' until he has proved himself to be one. The.... pioneer is heaven-ordained, not man-appointed."

It is in the very nature of true spiritual leadership that the leader has to have in his own being through experience that to which he seeks to lead others. He has gone the way before. He has tasted what he calls others to taste. He is no book leader; what he says to others and urges them toward comes out of his own life at great cost. The artificial 'leader' (?) can say the most extravagant things, can give all the theory and assume all the mannerisms; and he gets away with it and knows little or nothing of the real heartbreak. "The husbandman that laboreth must be the first to partake of the fruits," said Paul, but while this may apply to the reward of labor, it may also apply to the cost.

When we have said all as to that special class of pioneer-leaders in spiritual things, we must point out that even if we cannot count ourselves among them, you and I should be leaders in the sense that we inspire and are an incentive to others to "go on" with the Lord. While "followers" there are always others who can

be influenced by us, and the very essence of leadership is inspiration. May we all be leaders in this sense. Having introduced this matter of leadership in a more-or-less general way, we now proceed to look into it more closely in order to learn from Bible examples the principles which are basic to it and the features which delineate it.

Before coming to our first great example, let us emphasize the two common factors in spiritual leadership:

One is the fact of the sovereign act of God. In His choice of men for specific responsibility, God acts in the absolute right and independence of His own sovereignty. No one is allowed to question His act, His judgment, His reason. Sovereignty is unpredictable. God is answerable to no one, neither is He responsible to anyone. His thoughts and His ways are unfathomable, and in His wisdom He waits long past His acts for vindication. But it is always vindicated in the final issue. The second factor is that of God linking Himself with a vessel - a human vessel - and linking that vessel with Himself for a special purpose. This is the meaning of anointing in both Testaments. Anointing in which God so commits Himself to the vessel is always related to purpose, and man cannot touch that vessel or dispute its work without having - sooner or later, by sudden

intervention or the slowly-grinding mills of God - to reckon with God. It is here that we are forbidden to judge God's instrument on the ground of their humanity apart from God. We may think that they provide ground for adverse judgment, but if God is using them and is with them, it will only bring us into a controversy on the part of God with us if we touch His anointed - in word or deed. The Bible has many instances of this. Provided the vessel remains in meekness, God will take full responsibility for its defects and for its vindication.

Having said that, we can now proceed to the first example of leadership in the Bible. While the principle of leadership was at work from the beginning, leadership only had its full expression when there was a people needing and prepared for it. This full expression of the principle first came out in Moses.

Moses

What we have said regarding the sovereignty of God is unmistakable in the case of Moses. From his birth and preservation at birth right through his history, all the evidences of his being a "chosen vessel" are clear. He was where he was because God did it. Even when, out of sympathy and wrath, he essayed to assume the position of deliverer, that was negative, because this thing had got to be so utterly of God.

The endurance of Moses is a matter that is remarked upon in Scripture, but that endurance - as ours will be - was greatly supported by his later knowledge that he was where he was because God had done it, and it was not of his own choosing. How important it is that Christians - and especially Christian leaders - should be in a position to say emphatically that they know how true Christ was when He said, "Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you." This foundation of 'an act of God' is the only one to support the tremendous weight of responsibility and demand that leadership has to experience.

The second thing that comes out so clearly as making for leadership is the firsthand knowledge and experience of that out from which we are to lead others.

Moses had forty of the years in Egypt when the Pharaoh-complex of Joseph's time had so utterly changed from favor to hostility. He was born into that hostility and hatred and would have known from his mother and sister of his own Providential escape. He knew the palace and its tensions. He lived in the

atmosphere of mingled fear and animosity. He daily saw the conditions of his own people. As with Joseph, "the iron entered into his soul". No doubt that background contributed greatly to his later reluctance to go back, and his effort to find a way out of so doing.

It is not God's way to send inexperienced people into leadership responsibility. Such people are really handicapped and in serious weakness. A part of the training of any leader should be a firsthand knowledge of the world and its inimical forces, and a life with God in the midst thereof.

Many a servant of God has been profoundly thankful in after years that - in the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God - he had periods in conditions against which God reacted through him. This may apply to various aspects and phases of life. God places His servants in situations which are not His ultimate will for them, and the time will come when they react against what at one time seemed to be wholly or almost wholly of God. It is strange that it is possible at one time to believe a position to be wholly of God, and later to discover that it was only the provisional will of God to qualify for something quite other. Such servants of God take with them through life a very real inside knowledge which makes it possible for them to say, "We speak that which we do know." We could hardly exaggerate the importance and value of this factor in leadership.

The third factor in this leadership is a fundamental lesson that the work of God is essentially spiritual.

Moses was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians". He no doubt had natural endowments. He certainly had rich acquired qualifications. He was evidently a man of considerable physical strength. His natural disposition was to be thorough in anything that he undertook, as see him slaying the Egyptian and separating the quarrelling Hebrews. He was not lacking in zeal nor weak in initiative. But with all this, God did not take him up on those grounds. "Not by might, nor by power" are words which very aptly apply to Moses at the age of forty years.

"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." The real and eternal aspect of God's work is spiritual; therefore only spiritual men with spiritual experience and resources can do it effectively. God's true leaders are spiritual men and men of the Spirit.

All our natural ability, our training, our acquired qualifications; our strength, zeal, and learning will prove of little avail when we come up against the ultimate forces of the universe, which are spiritual. This Moses well knew when he came actually to his life-work.

Leadership is often born of the deep discipline of failure and self-discovery. The second forty years of his life served such a purpose and were no doubt deeply tinged with the bitterness of self-disillusionment. He was in a much safer place when he shrank from the responsibility than when he self-confidently tackled it in his own strength.

A further qualification for leadership as seen in the case of Moses is faithfulness, promptness, and humility in ordinary and unspectacular affairs.

Tending a few sheep at the back side of the desert by an erstwhile royal prince of Egypt for a considerable number of years could be a fair test of patience and lack of bitterness. The opportunity to help some defenseless women to get their flocks watered was neither beneath his dignity nor an annoying interruption in preoccupation with 'higher and more important matters'. He was not so disaffected by his disappointment as to be contemptuous of a humble piece of work.

High-mindedness is a disqualification for leadership. The Lord watches the out-of-sight life and determines His approval there. A true leader is not one who has to be shown and asked to do menial things, but one who sees a need and self-forgetfully lends a hand.

It is quite evident that God knew where Moses was, and that he was not a castaway servant. Moses had been inwardly disciplined in the school of inaction, a very hard school for his active and energetic type. The self-emptying had been a painful process, but it had effected God's intention and put him on that essential ground of spiritual leadership which is "no confidence in the flesh"; "all things are of (out from) God."

But the immediate point is that upon which the Lord's eye was looking during the time of waiting. That is, a spirit of service. It is so easy to be active and energetic when there is some big, interesting, or worthwhile job on hand, especially if it is in the public eye or alongside of others. But the real test is when things are quite otherwise, and we are right down to bedrock principle; the principle of conscientiousness without the influence of relatedness in responsibility and another's eye upon us. Service is a spirit, not an outward obligation. There is very little of the spirit of service left in the world now, but with God it has always been something of which He has taken particular account.

This is His law of trust and approval: "He that is faithful in that which is least."

Say what we may about Moses himself and of Divine sovereignty in his life, but let it be understood that Divine sovereignty does not bypass simple 'everyday' behavior in what may seem to be very insignificant matters. A whole life's vocation may turn upon a seemingly small issue. It is our spirit that God looks at. The few sheep at the back of the desert, a few helpless women in difficulty had a place in God's esteem which led to a true exaltation.

The episode of the bush was the crisis and turning-point in the life of Moses. We could say that the past forty years found their meaning and issue here, and the following forty their strength. There is an incomparable meaning in this, and the significance was immense; for here we are in the presence of the Triune God in combined operation unto the emancipation of an elect people.

When Moses, many years after, pronounced the blessings upon the tribes, the highly esteemed Joseph was to know "the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush" (Deut. 33:16). Moses came to understand that "good will" in all its redeeming love. What a basis and background for leadership!

Moses may not have understood all the New Testament meaning, but he came into the power.

What Moses was meant to understand - for his great responsibility - was that humanity in itself may be frail, weak, and as vulnerable as a bush of the desert; but if God links Himself with it in the power of the Holy Spirit, it can endure and live and triumph when naturally it should succumb.

Joshua

Joshua, like the One Whom he typifies, is the link joining the great salvation from, with the great salvation unto. Moses - in the main - had to do with the salvation from; Joshua entered into that, shared it, and then took it to the great 'unto' of its purpose.

The unto broke down in the case of Moses, although he laid its foundation. It broke down with the first generation who came out. They failed to go through. The New Testament repeatedly refers to this failure

in the most solemn warnings to Christians of this dispensation. In so doing, it reflects the very great importance of the leadership-work of Joshua, and thereby lifts Joshua and his special aspect of leadership on to very high and vital ground. Nothing less than the whole import of salvation, and therefore ninety percent of the New Testament is represented by the leadership of Joshua. True, in his own case, it failed of full realization, and Joshua did not lead them into the "rest" (Heb. iv. 8). But he did - in eternal principles - lead to the One Who has made his work complete, even Jesus...

There is no doubt that Joshua was the Old Testament counterpart of Paul; each in his different and respective sphere. The one, the earthly, temporal, and limited; the other, the heavenly, spiritual, and universal. In both cases the dominating issue was THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST as being God's supreme and all-inclusive purpose.

This was - and is - the object of the salvation 'out from'. Fail of this, and salvation has lost its most essential meaning and object. Fail of this, and we inherit all the reproaches resultant from the tragedy of Kadesh Barnea. Fail of this, and we are in the first letter to the Corinthians where - with this very example presented - a life-work can go up in smoke in 'the Day', and we be saved 'yet only as by fire'. Fail of this, and the most grievous things in the New Testament (see the Letter to the Hebrews, chapters 6 and 10, etc.) will apply to us. From both the Old Testament history and the New Testament admonitions, it is evident that it is possible to be saved in an elementary sense but lose the 'inheritance'; and it is the inheritance which justifies all.

Thus Joshua represents the leadership which, energized by the Holy Spirit, has in view and all-governing that FULLNESS into which Christ has entered and which He is - and has - for His people: Nothing less or other than that.

This is a tremendous thing, and it constitutes a very great vocation. It gives leadership its highest and fullest meaning... What Joshua really represents, then, is Christ under the anointing Spirit committed to the full purpose of God - the Heavenly Inheritance, God's FULLNESS in His Son. Who will say that to have even a small place in this work is not preeminently important? Here, then, leadership takes on its superlative meaning...

Let it be understood that for many years Joshua himself was in the school of leadership. He was being tested, proved, drawn out to be approved. This aspect of his history was in the wilderness, and forty being the number of probation, Joshua's leadership had its difficult and testing probation. No one leaps suddenly into this vocation. A great deal of history lies behind this ministry.

It will surprise no one that, with such a purpose in view, leadership is fundamentally linked with warfare. We first meet Joshua in connection with the withstanding of God's people by Amalek (Exod. 17). So early in the people's history, as they start with freshness toward the ultimate goal, evil forces arise to bar the way. Amalek took the initiative: "then fought Amalek".

It is in a time of conflict, when the enemy takes the initiative, that there is revealed what fighting spirit there is hidden amongst the Lord's people. Joshua was the embodiment of this spirit. He knew that this move of the enemy signified a disputing of the inheritance - that it was not just an incidental and unrelated thing. Defeat here had a long-range connection. Everything was involved. There would be many battles ahead and the approach of the full end would be marked by an intensification of conflict from which there would be very brief, if any, respite; but this very early assault involved the whole.

It would be a great thing if the Lord's people saw everything in the light of the full end and weighed what seems but incidental against the whole involvement of a defeat at any given point. How much hangs upon this spirit of leadership coming to light at a critical moment! Leadership, in Joshua's case, was hidden, so far as the record shows, until the hour of real need; then it is found to have been there - but latent. But there is little doubt that Joshua had A SECRET HISTORY WITH GOD.

So we come to a vital factor in leadership. It is a secret history with God which is motivated by a deep and intense jealousy for God's full thought. Later it came out in the revealing occasion when he and Caleb stood alone against all Israel.

The second occasion on which we meet Joshua is equally revealing as to his spirit. It is when Moses was in the mount with God. The forty days had proved too much for the patience of this vacillating and self-willed people. They broke loose, and Aaron's part in it was deeply discreditable (The story is in Exodus 32).

As Moses descended the mount, picking up Joshua on the way down, they heard the noise in the camp. It must have been loud and confused; indeed, very wild. Consistent with his very spirit, Joshua interpreted it as 'the noise of battle.' The war-horse thought he scented conflict. He was right, although the battle element was deeper than the appearance. They were making merry, but their very merriment was a battle against God.

Jealousy for God's honor will sense and see the really inimical and hostile elements in things like this. Anything that threatens to take the Lord's unique and utter place will make one like Joshua instinctively scent battle and rise to it in spirit. Joshua represents utterness for God and of God, and this always means battle. If the whole purpose of God concerning His Son and His Church really captures the spirit, compromise is intolerable and unthinkable. In thin, Joshua does foreshadow his great New Testament counterpart - Paul, and they very definitely meet in the latter's Letter to the Galatians.

The spirit of battle which characterized Joshua on the way down the mountain found its very definite materializing in the immediate act of Moses. His challenge of "Who is on the Lord's side?" found Joshua a wholly committed man. The test was a very grim and exacting one, but it is evident that he was wholly one with "the sons of Levi" in their uncompromising course.

The tent was pitched outside the camp and to it and Moses Joshua, with the sons of Levi, resorted at the call of Moses. This brings us to the next significant mention of Joshua: "....Joshua....departed not out of the tent." Joshua had chosen the place of complete separation and difference at great cost, and there he stayed.

The Letter to the Hebrews takes this incident up and applies it - on the one side to the compromising Judaizers, which it calls "the camp"; and on the other side to the non-compromising, committed devotees to Jesus Christ. It says that to the latter "outside the camp" is the place of "bearing His reproach".

Here, then, we have come on two more factors in true spiritual leadership. One is that the true leader is one who will never, however much it costs, be drawn into compromise. A leader must never be weak. He must never allow policy to override principle. He must never allow popular opinion to weaken his committedness. He must never allow sentiment to dilute his strength. He must never let sociability make him sacrifice supreme interests and spiritual or moral integrity under the cover and pretext of a false usage of Paul's words about becoming "all things to all men." 'Hebrews' says that "outside the camp" where

Joshua elected to be in the unpopular place, and it is always very testing to be unpopular. But leadership often demands this price.

The other thing which arises at this point in the case of Joshua is reliability. Moses - not in compromise - returned to the camp. Joshua abode in the tent. This is stated in the narrative evidently with a serious meaning. What the full meaning is may be left for us to consider, but this one thing is clear: you would always know where to find Joshua. If it were asked, 'Where is Joshua?' everybody would have the answer: 'Oh, he is - where he always is - in the tent.' If Moses needed him, he knew where to find him.

Leadership absolutely demands this characteristic of dependableness. What a strength it is to know that a person can be guaranteed to be in a definite spiritual position - right on the spot spiritually; not temperamental, vacillating, variable, or unpredictable. The multitude, especially "the mixed multitude", is like that - not consistently true for two days together. You never know how you are going to find them at any given time. To lead them into anything more of God demands this feature of 'abiding'. Yes, there may be discouragement, disappointment, provocation, and heartbreak, but true spiritual leadership rests upon an all-or-nothing basis, and deep down there is an abandon to purpose which is stronger than all that is against.

The leader may adjust on points and be open to progressive light, but as to the ultimate Divine vision, he will die rather than betray or recant. He is no time-server or opportunist. He cannot be bought off. He is going on or he is going out. He has seen, and he can never unsee. He says, "Here I am, I can do no other. May God help me"; or, "this one thing I do".

Such a faithfulness and undeviating committal is something in the very nature of the call and the vocation.

But with all his strength of purpose, Joshua, like his New Testament counterparts, was always in school learning fresh lessons on leadership.

Our next touch with him is very indicative of this. It is in Numbers 11. The Spirit of God is exercising His essential sovereign liberty. Into this sovereign activity certain 'laymen' are caught up; that is, men who are not recognized official prophets; they are not in the recognized place for functioning in such a way. Eldad and Medad come under the spontaneous movement of the Spirit and prophesy in the camp. Joshua is alarmed and scandalized. He rushes to Moses in his jealousy for that great man and cries, "My lord Moses, forbid them." To his amazement and disconcertion, Moses shows no sympathy with his jealousy and conventionality. Rather does Moses rebuke it: "Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets" - 'Do not be jealous for me.' In other words, 'Do not limit the Lord. Do not circumscribe the Holy Spirit.' The Holy Spirit will not be bound by jealous conventionality, nor by human fears as to what He may do next: "The wind bloweth where it listeth."

The situation is quite clear. Peter had to learn this lesson, and failure to do so fully only resulted in fettering the Church and some of its apostles. The absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit was something which meant an immense amount in the after life of Joshua and his leadership. If it is true that 'the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind', that is only another way of saying that the Holy Spirit will demand the right and liberty to overleap our prejudices, our stringencies of interpretation - indeed, anything and everything that makes Christ smaller than He really is.

The very leadership itself can be jeopardized and falsified if this lesson is not well and truly learned.

But our special point here is not the range of the Spirit's work, for the occasion to which we are referring was amongst the Lord's people. What we are especially pointing to as an essential law of leadership is the absolute sovereign rights and liberty of the Holy Spirit to choose His own ways and means, places and times. The government of the Holy Spirit without deference to any one or any thing other than His own nature and authority has to be recognized, acknowledged, and accepted in order to implement the Divine purpose.

Having summarized the general ground of leadership as represented by Joshua, there remains one specific and inclusive factor which is given peculiar prominence and emphasis at the beginning of the book which bears his name. It is THE VITAL FACTOR OF COURAGE. If the first chapters of that book are the preparation for all that follows, or the foundation thereof, then quite clearly courage is the dominant characteristic. Four times in the brief first chapter is this note strongly struck: three times by the Lord and once by the people. Courage is made a command and a demand. "Be strong and of a good courage" is the Divine command and requisite...

There had been the great 'Out.' Now there was to be the great 'In.' There had been the tremendous fact of redemption. Now there was to be the Purpose of it...

If the 'Out' had made immense demands for courage in the case of Moses, the 'In' was going to make equal, if not greater, demands in the case of Joshua. Every value to be secured and every step of advance toward fullness was going to be fraught with powerful and relentless resistance. The issue was no less than absolute dominion, and for this no quarter could be given by either side.

The salvation of the Church from the power of Satan's dominion is a costly and withstood matter. But the collective forces of his kingdom are stirred to any and every kind of resistance when it comes to a growing and additional apprehension of Christ and a larger measure of Himself in possession of His people.

Not only the frontal attack or withstanding, but the paralyzing insinuating of his own character in the form of covetousness, as at Ai; or the deceptiveness of compromise, as with the Gibeonites, are very effective methods. Let it be clearly recognized that the effect of the second of these - with a very long crippling carry-over - was to take the fight out of the Lord's people. It is a subtly effective manoeuvre of the enemy to make the Church accept a compromise without the need for battle.

So there was always the temptation to accept an untimely and too-early settlement and satisfaction. This, in the case of Israel, resulted in the terrible period of the 'Judges' - the disgrace of the Bible. Discouragement, impatience, and weariness were ever near to rob of FULLNESS and finality.

All this was in the knowledge of God when He laid such emphasis upon courage at the beginning.

We could say that perhaps the greatest weapon of the foe of spiritual progress and fulness is discouragement, and he well knows the menace to his interests of spiritual courage. We need not stay to do more than remark that spiritual courage is a peculiar kind of courage, and of a higher order than physical or even moral courage. The courage of Jesus when on trial - the courage to be silent - was more powerful than any other kind of courage. The courage of the Apostles on and after the Day of Pentecost was a victory over their own former cowardice and something that was above the natural. To meet the ultimate spiritual forces of this universe requires more than the best natural courage. The best human courage is no match for the Devil and his hosts, with their almost boundless resources of subtlety, malice, guile, cunning, strength, and tireless energy. Only, as with Joshua, a knowledge of the "Captain of the

hosts of the Lord" as being in charge, though unseen, will nerve the spirit of those in this battle.

That function of spiritual leadership to keep vision ever in view and to inspire to its attainment is in itself a battle with disappointment and despair. The leader has to infect others, like Joshua, through intermediaries, and be a constant inspiration to those in the battle... The leader has to get his courage at first hand from God, and this means many a secret courageous battle with depression. His temptation is very often and fierce to lower his standard, to lessen his demands, to modify his expectations, and to accommodate the situation so that it is not so exacting, but easier, for everyone.

In a thousand ways and in ever-recurring demands, courage is called for as the only way through.

Deborah (Judges 4 & 5)

It is a fairly far cry from Joshua to the Judges, and there is a terrible lapse from those days of triumph and conquest, as there was at the close of the Apostolic days. The Book of Judges is, perhaps, the most tragic book in the Bible...

That those were times of spiritual declension needs no arguing. That a primary reason for the declension was the absence of authority is definitely stated four times. It is as though the narrator focused all the trouble upon this absence of an authoritative leadership.

There seems to be more than the statement of a fact. The suggestion or implication is that it was more than an absence of leadership; it was a disposition. When it says that "every-man did that which was right in his own eyes", it seems to imply that that was how they were disposed to have it. They did not like the restraints of authority. They felt that leadership implied limitation; they made their own judgment the final authority. As they saw was the 'right' way - "right in his own eyes". It was independence run amok.

Possibly the loss of true spirituality and the enthronement of the natural mind had resulted - as it usually does - in an inability to see the difference between spiritual and anointed leadership on the one hand, and autocracy on the other. The dislike for, and resentment to, anything autocratic or in the nature of dictatorship makes people throw over and utterly repudiate law and authority, and become a law unto themselves. The unspiritual Corinthians gave this 'autocratic' interpretation to the authority which Paul said had been given him in Christ. To read his letters to that church is to see how he claimed and used that authority, but it is also to see that it was absolutely necessary to

their salvation as a church. But it certainly was not autocratic domination.

It is only lack of the spiritual discernment as to "things that differ", although they may appear alike - about which Paul said much to the Corinthians - that confuses things, and loses the values of what is God-given. On the one side, it was disastrous for Israel and meant four hundred years of confusion, weakness, and impotence. On the other hand, the salvation and periods of improvement were because the Lord raised up leaders.

When we come to Deborah, we have a significant and impressive thing. There is first Deborah herself, and then there are those to whom she refers when she says: "For that the leaders took the lead" (Judges 5:2). Deborah overshadows the whole story; therefore she must be seen for what she is: Being a woman in such a position, she must represent a sovereign activity of God. The Bible is quite clear that - in the normal order of God - women are not set over men. Normally it would be disorder if they were... In God's first order man is given the position of authority. But here in the case of Deborah, we have a woman by Divine

consent and approval in that place...

Deborah, while being a real person, is - in effect - the spirit or principle of leadership. This is borne out in that she is called a prophetess. What is the supreme characteristic of prophetic ministry? It is inspiration. So we see that leadership in Deborah's case was her power to inspire. Both Barak and the leaders who took the lead fulfilled their leadership by reason of the inspiration received through Deborah. Leadership is a matter of inspiration.

It is an endowment. Not all who take the position can fulfil it. It is a pathetic thing to observe someone in the position without the inspiration or anointing. That is why it is so wrong and dangerous for anyone either to assume the position or be put into it by vote or human influence.

Let our godly women realize that their function is not to rule and govern, but to inspire. Deborah said to Barak: "Hath not the Lord commanded...." She knew the Lord, and out of that knowledge she was the spirit of inspiration.

It is no small thing to see the purpose of God and to inspire to leadership in it. This can be done, as in the case of Deborah, without personally going into the forefront of the battle.

Our lesson, then, from Deborah is that, whether officially in the office of a leader or not, leadership is essentially a matter of the gift and power of inspiration: a contagious influence, an emanating spiritual energy, and a potent example.

How often is leadership regarded as an official thing. The leader must have a title, an office, an appointment. Deborah teaches us that leadership is the expansion of the mother-spirit to embrace the whole of God's people. "Until that I Deborah arose....a mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7). Not 'Till I a leader, a prophetess, a Divinely-chosen instrument arose' but "a mother." Hers was evidently a heart-concern, an affectional concern for the Lord's people.

We have earlier referred to the revolt against Paul's spiritual authority, but his answer to that was his love, even 'as of a nursing mother' (I Thess. 2:7,11), and any seeming severity was born of his very deep paternal or - spiritually - maternal concern for them.

This element must be in all leadership; the element of a jealous yearning over the spiritual interests of those concerned. "I arose a mother," said Deborah. The incentive of her inspiring leadership was the mother-passion for a spiritual family.

Back of all that appears and sounds otherwise in the prophets of Israel, there can always be detected this sigh and sob of a heart-relationship with a wayward family, in trouble because of its waywardness.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/leadership-and-ministry-judges-52/>

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