

Leadership Is a Miracle

From The Steward Leader by R. Scott Rodin

One of the greatest gifts I received during my term as seminary president came from my colleague Ron Sider in the form of a book titled Leadership Prayers by Richard Kriegbaum. The honesty and humility in the prayers bear witness to the heart of a godly leader.

In his prayer for trust, Kriegbaum offers these words:

I love you, God. You know I do. How natural it is to love you. You are perfect. You are beautiful, pure, powerful, absolutely truthful, and kind. You have been so generous to me that just saying thank you seems pitiful sometimes. But far more powerful in my life is knowing and feeling that you love me. You know exactly and completely who I am—all my ugly thoughts, my mangled motivations, my pretending, my irrational fears, my pride, and my unfaithfulness—and you still love me. I know you love me. You know me, and yet, because you love me, you let me lead others. I do not understand it, but I am grateful.

As I read these words back through the lens of my experience, I come to the conclusion that when God uses any of us to lead effectively, it is nothing short of a miracle. When we place the complex and demanding role of a godly leader next to an honest self-awareness of our sinfulness and incompetence, we are thrown wholly on the grace of God and his faithfulness if we are ever to lead anyone anywhere. This miracle is comparable to what occurs both in the

value of Scripture and in the effectiveness of our preaching and teaching. In both, human words are taken up by the power of the Holy Spirit to become the words of God. In both its inspiration and its interpretation, the words of Scripture rely completely on the activity of the Spirit of God. When the Spirit lights up the human word, hearts are changed, people are transformed, and God's work is done.

The same is true in our preaching and teaching. We study and prepare as we are trained to, but in the end our preaching becomes effective only when the Spirit of God takes up our feeble human words and uses them to touch hearts and change lives. When it happens, it is a miracle! On the other hand, when the written words of Scripture or the spoken words of the preacher/teacher stand alone, apart from the work of the Spirit, our ministry loses its power. It becomes our words, our interpretation, our exegesis and our proclamation. And slowly and naturally into these words of ours seeps the ugly thoughts, mangled motivations, pretending, irrational fears, pride and unfaithfulness noted in Kriegbaum's prayer.

We must approach leadership in the same dependent humility. The sole responsibility of the steward leader is joyous, responsive obedience.

Throughout history God looked to the least, the weakest, the outcast, the untalented, the sinful and the rejected to give great leadership at historic times. I don't think he has changed that approach today. If we are honest as leaders, we know that our capacity to lead is easily exceeded by the size and

complexity of our call. We know that there are others more talented, more prepared, more spiritual and more courageous than we are.

But great, godly leaders have always worked at that miraculous intersection where humility and faith meet the awesome presence and power of God's Spirit—and the miracle of leadership happens. It doesn't mean we don't prepare ourselves, hone our skills and seek to be the best we can be for the kingdom. What it does mean is that, in the end, all that we bring will fall woefully short of what is required, and we will be ever thrown again into the grace and faithfulness of God to work the miracle of leadership in and through—and even in spite of—our small pile of skills and talents.

When God uses us to lead effectively, we should fall on our knees in wonder and thanksgiving that we have seen again this miracle worked in our midst. However, it is far too easy for us to take ownership of the miracle and to believe that the results are due to our own wonderful abilities and innate leadership qualities. If and when we make this subtle yet devastating shift, we become owner-leaders, and the effectiveness of our leadership for the kingdom is over. We are on our own, cut off from the power and preservation of the Spirit.

Most every leader will find him- or herself at that place at some point in his or her work, and it is a terrifying place to be. Godly leadership is the miracle of God's use of our earthen vessels for the glorious work of his kingdom. To miss this miraculous aspect of leadership threatens everything we do as leaders, and our office or study or whatever place we prepare, will become the loneliest place on earth. I have come to better appreciate the miracle of godly

leadership and its connection with self-awareness, the need to decrease and the power of God's anointing as a defining characteristic of the steward leader.

- The author makes the following statement following Richard Kriegbaum's prayer; As I read these words back through the lens of my experience, I come to the conclusion that when God uses any of us to lead effectively, it is nothing short of a miracle. What elements or components of this prayer would cause him to make this statement?
- Why is this true? "When we place the complex and demanding role of a godly leader next to an honest self-awareness of our sinfulness and incompetence, we are thrown wholly on the grace of God and his faithfulness if we are ever to lead anyone anywhere." 1 Corinthians 2:14 can help us understand this.
- What is the "dependent humility" and "joyous, responsive obedience", the author is referring to here. "We must approach leadership in the same dependent humility. The sole responsibility of the steward leader is joyous, responsive obedience."
- Can you name a few of the great godly leaders in biblical history who we "the least", or "unqualified" for the assignments God called them to? How can this be encouraging to us?
- What danger comes from this thinking? "It is far too easy for us to take ownership of the miracle and to believe that the results are due to our own wonderful abilities and innate leadership qualities."

-

Rodin, R. Scott. The Steward Leader: Transforming People, Organizations and Communities (pp. 21-22). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.