

Leadership in the Local Church
By David F. Sims

Strong leadership is essential in groups of people; the Bible says that we are like sheep in need of a shepherd (Matt. 9:36). Certainly Jesus is our Good Shepherd watching over us from heaven, but each local congregation needs leaders too. Ideally, each congregation should have its own elders. But even if we don't have elders, we can still have leaders, and we desperately need them.

There is a saying that 20% of the workers do 80% of the work. There just aren't enough people stepping up to lead and do the work. The few leaders are compelled to take on more than their "fair share" of the work. This happens when the folks who *ought* to be leading *aren't* leading. It happens when members who ought to step up, instead step away. It happens when those who are *able* aren't *willing*. It happens when an opportunity arises, but no one raises their hand to volunteer. And so, in the absence of willing leaders, those responsibilities fall upon the real leaders...the ones who are willing. What does it take to be a leader in the local church? Here are some suggestions.

Leaders lead. They don't follow the crowd down the easy path that leads to destruction. Neither do they sit idly by doing nothing. They know how to follow, and can be the best of followers, but when given the opportunity to lead, *leaders lead*.

Leaders serve others first. They do not glorify themselves (1 Thess. 2:6), nor seek for their own gain. Leaders are servants, not masters (Luke 22:26). Consider the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), who accepted considerable inconvenience and personal sacrifice to help someone in need.

Leaders accept the responsibility of leadership. They don't pass the blame. They don't make excuses. Rather, they take the initiative and are diligent in their duties (Rom. 12:8). They know that by being a leader, they may be subject to criticism from others, and that they will be held to a higher standard by others (the proverbial "glass house.") Leaders know they are subject to stricter judgment from God if they err in their teachings (James 3:1). They understand the awesome responsibility of watching over the souls of others (Heb. 13:17). In spite of these challenges, leaders embrace the responsibility of leadership.

Leaders are trustworthy stewards (1 Cor. 4:2). They are honest and have nothing to hide. They speak with candor and develop a reputation for integrity. The book of Proverbs frequently praises the man of integrity. At the same time, leaders are discreet in handling private and delicate matters. They do not gossip or speak ill of others.

Leaders are reliable. There are some brethren who can be counted on to fulfill the responsibilities levied upon them; there are others who may or may not get the job done. Too often a duty has been assigned to a brother that was left undone, or was done at the last hour, resulting in undesirable consequences. Nehemiah appointed men whom he knew to be reliable to be in charge of storehouses in Jerusalem (Neh. 13:13). If you aren't dependable, you'll soon find that brethren don't want to entrust important responsibilities to you anymore.

Leaders plan ahead. They consider different paths and consequences, and plan accordingly to prepare for and take the right path. In regards to assembling with the church, they plan to arrive on time, and they make that plan happen; if the plan doesn't work out, they revise the plan. If they have a role in the service, they have their words or songs already chosen before they arrive, so they can spend time greeting brethren before service, rather than sitting alone trying to put together a song list or a short message to say at the Lord's table. Leaders are rarely caught unprepared.

Leaders are authoritative. They apply the authority of the Scriptures, as Jesus did (Matt. 7:29). They use that authority for building up the local church (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). If you aren't using the authority of the Scriptures to serve the church, you aren't the leader we need.

Leaders are visible. They are present in every meeting possible. They get out and meet people. And when they are not present, everyone notices because everyone misses their contribution as a leader. Just as the sheep know the shepherd by sight and sound and smell, so also the brethren know their local leaders.

Leaders are doers (James 1:22). They don't wait for something to happen...they make things happen that need to happen. If the building needs maintenance, leaders get it done. If a class needs a teacher, leaders step up. If a member needs a visit, leaders don't have to be asked to go...they already plan to go.

Don't confuse leadership with having a vote in the business meeting. Having a vote is not the same as leadership. Women can be leaders in their sphere, even though they do not vote in the business meeting. There are plenty of men voting in business meetings who aren't real leaders, and there are plenty of men who don't attend business meetings but still serve as leaders to various degrees.

There are many who could be and should be leaders, but they are not. They are able, they are qualified, but they are not willing. God prepares us for leadership through our life experiences, equips us with the tools for leadership through the Bible, and gives us the opportunity for leadership in the local church. It is a shame that God's investment is wasted on such people who refuse to lead.

The bottom line is this: we need more leaders in the local church. Will you be one? Will you step up and bear the burden of leadership? Will you relieve the existing leaders who do more than their fair share? Jesus loved the Church enough to die for it. If you are able and qualified, can you not at least love the local congregation enough to step up and lead while you are yet living?