

## Some Descriptions of a Spiritual Leader

### 1. A spiritual leader is a leader

In a certain sense, everyone is a leader, since (virtually) everyone has some measure of influence upon others. So, though it is true that we can speak of leaders as being (to various degrees) passive or active, a leader in the truest sense of the word is active. He takes the lead (in the words of John 10:4, "he goeth before them"). Leaders do not watch things happen, they make things happen. If you do not lead, someone else will, and that someone else may not lead spiritually (see, for example, Acts 20:30). It is just as sinful for those called to lead to not lead as it is for those called to follow to not follow. Leaders know the destination, the driving directions, and how to get others to ride with them. Leaders set the agenda. While they are not dictators in the common, connotative sense of the term, they are to dictate the direction of the group they lead (they are the ones who in essence say, in the words of Isaiah 30:21: "This is the way. Walk ye in it"). A spiritual leader leads by example (John 13:14, Phil. 3:17, 1 Thess. 1:7, 2 Thess. 3:7-9, 1 Tim. 4:12, 2 Tim. 3:10, Heb. 13:7, 1 Peter 5:3).

### 2. A spiritual leader is spiritual (Acts 6:3)

This is what, of course, distinguishes a spiritual leader from a secular leader. This point begs the question, what makes one spiritual? One who is spiritual is one who is saved and, thereby, indwelt by God the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9 and Jude 19). One who is spiritual is Spirit-filled, or controlled by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). One who is Spirit-filled is one whose mind is filled with/controlled by Scripture (compare Ephesians 5:18 and following with Colossians 3:16 and following). One who is spiritual is one whose life is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

### 3. A spiritual leader is a servant

Spiritual leadership is servant leadership (Matthew 20:20-28//Mark 10:35-45, Luke 22:24-27, and John 13:1-17; see also 1 Peter 5:3a). Pastors are ministers (it has been said that M.Div., a Master of Divinity degree, actually stands for **maintenance division**). The word, deacon means servant. Moses is called the servant of the Lord (Joshua 1:1). So is Joshua (Judges 2:8). So is David (Psalm 119:17). Paul was fond of calling himself a slave of Christ (see, for example, Romans 1:1; see also 1 Cor. 3:5-7), as were many of the other apostles (James in James 1:1, Peter in 2 Peter 1:1, and Jude in Jude 1). A spiritual leader that is in a position of authority should be authoritative, but not authoritarian in the exercise of his authority. He should direct, not domineer. He should lead, not lord over.

### 4. A spiritual leader is selfless

He recognizes that though positionally he may be his followers' superior, personally they are his equal (see 1 Cor. 11:3 and 1 Peter 3:7). He is simply a member of the body with a specific role/calling/equipping (to be a player-coach). He seeks to fulfill his responsibility as inconspicuously as possible. He is not like Diotrephes, who

loved to be first (3 John 9). He realizes it's not about him, but about Him (1 Cor. 3:7). In fact, he often has no natural desire to be a leader, but is supernaturally given such a desire. A. W. Tozer once said: "A true and safe leader is likely one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and by the press of the external situation."

### 5. A spiritual leader is a shepherd (Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2a)

He does what he does, not because he longs for a position of leadership, but because he loves the people he leads. Consequently, he watches over, guides, provides for, and protects the flock that follows his leadership (Psalm 23 and John 10), even at great personal cost (John 10:11). It is interesting to note how some of the greatest leaders in the Bible (Moses, David) led sheep before they ever led people.

### 6. A spiritual leader is a steward (Titus 1:7, Heb. 13:17, and Jm. 3:1)

He has been given a sacred trust, for which he will be held accountable.

### 7. A spiritual leader has spiritual followers

A leader has followers. It has been said that if some is leading and no one is following, then he is simply taking a walk. According to Charles Swindoll (Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication, p. 40), "In her book D. E. Hoste, Phyllis Thompson does a masterful job describing the characteristics of spiritual leadership. She wrote, 'I suppose if you really want to know who is a spiritual leader, you ought to look around and see how many who are spiritual are following him.'"

### 8. A spiritual leader may be loathed as much as he is loved

Someone might aspire to a position of leadership because he perceives that to be a boss is to be beloved. Those who have been and are leaders know better and will tell you otherwise. A wise pastor under whom I served would often say that once a person sticks his head above the crowd to lead, someone will undoubtedly throw a rock at it. Think of the criticism that such leaders as Moses (Exodus 16:2, Numbers chapters 12, 14, and 16, and others), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:19, 4:1-4, 7-8, and others), Paul (see, for example, his defense of himself in 2 Cor.), and, yes, even Christ (John 8:41 and 48, Hebrews 12:3, and 1 Peter 2:23) endured. It has been said that leaders need to develop "alligator skin." While leaders, indeed, need to develop tough skin, they must never allow their tough hide to keep them from having a tender heart. "Maturity is moving from a soft skin and a tough heart to a tough skin and a soft heart" (cited in Charles Swindoll, Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication, p. 261).

### 9. A spiritual leader is a follower (1 Cor. 11:1)

There is one and only one ultimate spiritual leader, the Lord Jesus. Therefore, every other spiritual leader is ultimately a follower, being a follower of Christ, and seeks to lead others to Christ. Pastors, for example, are under-shepherds of the Chief

Shepherd. Not only are spiritual leaders ultimately followers (of Christ), but they are also those who have learned to follow. Leadership is not an inherited right, but an earned responsibility. For example, many pastors were first assistant pastors, youth pastors, or the like. Joshua was Moses' servant (Numbers 11:28) before becoming his successor (and once having become his successor he remained the servant of the Lord). This is in keeping with the biblical principle, "test first, task second" (based on passages such as Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 16:10-12, 1 Tim. 3:10, and others). A follower first; a leader last. Having been found to be faithful followers, they have been entrusted with the stewardship of leadership. They've "been there, done that" (and in relation to their followership of Christ, they "are there, doing that"). Since all spiritual leaders are ultimately followers, they lead by following, that is, they show others how to be followers. Pastors show how to follow by following Christ. Deacons show how to follow by following the lead of their pastors. The spiritually-minded men of the church show the rest of the congregation how to follow by following the leadership of their pastors and deacons.

### **10. A leader is forward - and future-focused**

Like the apostle Paul in Phil. 3:13, he forgets (that is, does not pay attention to) what is behind and focuses on what is before. He does not let the problems of the past prevent him from making progress in the present towards the finish line of the future. As did Paul in Phil. 3:14, he keeps his eyes on the prize, his gaze on the goal, his focus on the finish line. He is not a museum man (one who is always living in and longing for the past), nor is he a maintenance man (one whose primary purpose is the perpetuation of the present). He is a man with ambition to accomplish a mission (one whose focus is on the future). A leader is a visionary. He has "the capacity to create a compelling picture of the desired state of affairs that inspires people to perform" (Warren Bennis). He knows where to go and how to get there. He is not the blind leading the blind. He first envisions, then ventures.

### **11. A spiritual leader is born and made**

The question is sometimes asked, Are leaders born or made? Is leadership more a matter of nature or nurture? The answer is both. Some are natural leaders, having been equipped by their Creator with the innate capacity to attract allegiance. Once converted, this capacity becomes a spiritual gift. Yet, even though this may be so, one who has this capacity is commanded to cultivate it (Romans 12:8). Though the aptitude of leadership may be latent, the ability to lead still needs to be learned. Even if one does not have the gift of leadership per se, he can and must lead when called upon to do so, much like a pastor is called to do the work of evangelism (2 Tim. 4:5), even though he may or may not have the gift of evangelism (Ephesians 4:11). While leaders are made, a spiritual leader is never a self-made leader. Rather than being self-made, a spiritual leader is Spirit-made.

### **12. A leader is a realistic optimist**

While not blindly optimistic, he has a positive perspective. His glass is half full, not half empty. He has a "can do" attitude, figuring out how it can be done, not how it can't be done. He sees an opportunity in every obstacle, not an obstacle in every opportunity. He understands the adage, "outlook determines outcome." Optimistic in outlook, while not oblivious to obstacles, he outlines how to overcome obstacles and obtain the objective.

### **13. A spiritual leader has courage created by conviction**

He is convinced that God has called him to and equipped him for the task, that he has (in the words of Esther 4:14) been providentially placed by God in such a place as this for such a time as this and for such a purpose as this (he is the right person in the right place at the right point in time for the right purpose). He is a man of faith, not fear (you can't have one with the other, Matthew 8:26). His faith is in the Word of God and in the God of the Word. His authority comes from an apprehension of the fact that he has been divinely authorized to act (Joshua 1:9 and Matthew 28:18-20); his authority to lead comes from his authorization by the Lord. The more completely convinced he is from God's Word of what God has called and commissioned him to do, the more confidently and courageously he will lead. The more clearly he is able to communicate this commission, the more competently he will lead. He is not afraid to fail, nor afraid to try to keep from failing. He is not afraid of his followers, but of the One he is following. He is not afraid to fight when the cause is right (while he may prefer to be a lover rather than a fighter, he is a leader, so he will do both). He is a man with moxie, like Athanasius in the 4th century, who, when told that the whole world was against him in his fight against Arianism and its heresy that Christ was created, replied, "Then I am against the whole world!" Or like the 19th century missionary, John Patton, who, when he expressed his desire to serve as a missionary in the South Seas and was told by an elderly Christian man, "The cannibals! You will be eaten by cannibals!" replied, "Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is to soon be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms. I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms. And in the great day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer."

### **14. Spiritual leadership is mainly manly**

Men are to be leaders in the home (1 Cor. 11:3, Ephesians 5:22-24, 6:4). Men are to be leaders in the church (1 Cor. 14:34-35, 1 Tim. 2:11-12; see also the 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1 qualification lists for pastors and deacons, which are male gender-specific). God has uniquely made men with the physiological and psychological make up to lead. Women can and certainly should be spiritual leaders to other women (Titus 2:3-5) and children.