

Episode 037

Leaders Who Grow Before God

Do you wish to see more success in ministry & churches? Effective leadership is vital to the success of all churches and ministries. If your church or ministry is to be successful, to grow, expand and have a greater impact, you have to grow as a leader. Improvements can only occur if we can improve. This requires growth on the leaders' part.

Now we know that God is sovereign. He does not actually need us to fulfil His mission. But in His wisdom, He has chosen to work through us. God seeks vessels through whom He can do great things. But when the vessels are blunt, ineffectual, inadequate – it hinders God's work. How much more can be achieved through vessels who are refined, sharp, prepared, effective? The Great Commission could have been achieved centuries ago, if only the Church was holy, glorious, effective.

Even Jesus had to grow before He was ready for His public ministry. Luke 2:52 (NIV) And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Using Luke 2:52 as a template, I will elaborate on the necessity of our personal growth and unpack on key areas that requires our attention. To have greater impact. To Transform Lives Everywhere, we need to grow. So my topic today is LEADERS WHO GROW BEFORE GOD.

1. Grow in stature

Jesus grew physically from a boy to an adult. He developed physically in every way, in size, ability, strength, coordination, healthily. He had to be fit enough, healthy enough for His given mission. To carry out an intense, gruelling ministry for some 3.5 years. Travelling by foot to many places, slept in all kinds of places mostly outdoor. Many times, when his disciples went to bed, he would be up praying! Jesus grew to be fit and healthy for His mission!



Similarly, are we taking care of our bodies in a way that will allow us to fulfil God's purpose for our lives? Are we fit and healthy enough for the mission God has given us? Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Are we treating it with the respect and care that it deserves?

1 Timothy 4:8 (NIV) "For physical training is of some value..." Physical training has some value and should be pursued diligently for the sake of the Gospel. Let's aim to be as fit as God would want us to be.

2. Grow in wisdom

Luke 2 recorded that at 12 years old, Jesus was found deep in discussion with Jewish teachers in the temple. They were astounded with His understanding of the Scriptures. At that age He was already wise in the things of God. Yet He still grew in wisdom!

In the Gospel, we see Jesus's wisdom in all kinds of settings. His knowledge and insight into Scripture was unparalleled. His wisdom in dealing with people is incredible. He always found the best approach in even the most challenging situations! Simply astounding!

Wisdom and maturity are intertwined. Growing in maturity requires growing in wisdom. Growing in wisdom requires growing in maturity. Every one of us need wisdom for life in general. As leaders, we need wisdom specifically in leadership. The more we grow in wisdom the more effective our leadership can be. In any specific area, the more we grow in wisdom, the more effective we can be.

Never assume that because we are doing ok, that we have enough wisdom now for our ministry or life. We ought to continue to grow in our knowledge, our skills and especially our wisdom. Don't stop learning. Don't stop growing in understanding and wisdom. In fact, pursue it!

Proverbs 2:2–5 (NIV) 2 turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding— 3 indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, 4 and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, 5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.



This Scripture has inspired much of my life, since I was a young believer - to pursue wisdom. This decision changed my life hugely. Because I determined to gain wisdom from God and His Word. I did exactly what the Scriptures taught. I cried aloud for insight & understanding from God, I searched for it like it was hidden treasure.

True wisdom is to be found firstly in God and His Word. Which is why I sought God for wisdom and searched His Word so deeply. It requires the discipline of reading, study, prayerful contemplation etc with God's help.

Please do not just do the ministry and think that by doing so you have being faithful. To be truly faithful we should aim to be as effective as we can be. In other words, we should aim to be continually improving in our ministry and life. Aiming to be as excellent as we can be.

Imagine appearing before God one day. God asks us if we have been faithful in what He has given us. And I say "Yes, absolutely. For the last 50 years I have faithfully sharing the Gospel. Every day I go to the same places. Every day I hand out the 4 Spiritual Laws. Every day I share the reasons for my faith." Then God asks, "Did you make any changes over those 50 years?" "Oh no! I was absolutely faithful to how I was taught to share the Gospel. I followed it faithfully to the tee."

God smiled sadly, "Over 50 years, you should have changed the way you share to be more effective. In 50 years, society changed. The way they communicate and think. Their issues have changed. The way you shared has become less and less relevant to them over time. Further, you should have been faithful to grow in what you did. You could have broadened into other ways to share the Gospel. You could have learnt to train others, multiplied the ministry. You were faithful with a method but you should have been faithful with the ministry."

So my challenge to all of us, myself included, is to continue to grow in wisdom so that you can grow in your life and ministry. Would you ask God today, what areas you need to grow in wisdom?



3. Grow in favour before God

Have you ever pondered about this? Jesus grew in favour before God! How is someone who is sinless, righteous, perfect in all His ways, grow in favour before God? I mean He already has God's favour! How could he grow in it any further?

Let me suggest that at every point of Jesus development there was a certain depth and quality in His relationship with His Father in Heaven. His faithfulness in His relationships with people around Him. In His responsibilities. In His mission.

Yet as He grew, His relationships grew. It evolved, it deepened in quality, it broadened in scope. So it gained even more of God's favour. His faithfulness to His responsibilities and His mission also grew. Its scope, in its impact and so on. It also gained more of God's favour. As a child, Jesus had God's favour corresponding to what a child could fulfil. As a man, Jesus had God's favour corresponding to what Jesus could fulfil as an adult.

What does it mean to grow in favour before God? We are to grow in right relationship with Him, in right standing before God, in right alignment with God's purposes. In other words, we are to grow in our RELATING, our BEING and our DOING.

As leaders we are meant to continually grow, to develop as God's servants. We should not be stagnant in our development. More than 30 years ago, I also sought to find favour before God. I was determined to walk rightly before God even though it may be costly. I wanted to be obedient to God's Word. It started from there. Then a few years later, I resolved that I will never say No to God. A few years after that I determined that I needed to better hear God's voice. Then I resolved to step out in faith in to the supernatural despite this being my weakest area of ministry. And so on. So that has been part of my personal journey to grow in favour before God.

Consider these questions.

1. Are we growing more intimately with God? Are we knowing God more as our Lord and also as our beloved Heavenly Father? In my Global sermon "1 Pet 2:9-12 Transformed To Transform Lives Everywhere", I shared about these aspects in more detail.



2. Are we growing more in Christlikeness? The more we develop in Christ-likeness, the more our leadership will mature and be much more effective. We will be more gracious, forgiving, humble, godly etc. We will grow in resilience, discipline, wisdom, perseverance and so forth. We will better represent Christ in our leadership. What we do comes out of who we are, it is a natural overflow. I explained this and much more in my leadership podcast in wilsonlailing.com on “Becoming A Christ-centred Leader”.

3. Are we growing in better understanding and better accomplishing God’s mission for our lives? In other words, are we becoming more knowledgeable, more skilful, more competent and ultimately more effective in God’s work? I taught about these aspects in my leadership podcast on “Breaking Your Glass Ceiling”.

In other words, are you growing as you should? In favour before God?

4. Grow in favour before men

I find it fascinating that Jesus intentionally grew in favour before men. Hence, we should seek to achieve favourable interaction and influence with men, where possible.

In the early days of starting our church in Brisbane, I intentionally wanted to build relationships with other church leaders. I had a strategy to gradually network with select pastors. I started with pastors of smaller churches then I leveraged upon that to meet with pastors of larger churches until I got to know the state leaders and national leaders. Now I interact with movement leaders. I did the same thing with politicians. I was intentional to grow in favour before men, for the sake of the Kingdom.

Here are 3 key areas that I believe will help us gain favour before men.

1. Growing in our integrity. For many respect a person of integrity. A person who is honourable, who keeps to his word, who is who they say they are. As Christian leaders, we ought to be that. Yet our integrity needs to grow deeper so as not to succumb to increasingly complex, challenging and intense situations. The greater my responsibilities and the higher my role in God’s Kingdom, I find myself facing some very complex situations. How do you navigate through it while maintaining integrity? That is why I have to deepen my convictions and have more wisdom.



2. Growing in our relational skills, to be an increasingly effective leader. Because we have to relate with wider groups of people. People with different personalities, backgrounds, cultures, religions, politics, agendas, etc. Jesus handled all of these with much wisdom and grace. Some of you may say, “But I am shy, quiet or awkward. I am not a people person.” I was a very shy and quiet person. Painfully shy in my teenage years. I was not a people person. But I determined to be an effective leader. So firstly, I resolved to overcome my natural shyness and quietness. I learnt how to go beyond my natural self, to talk and interact more and more with many types of people. I even took some responsibilities that forced me to deal with people. Secondly, I became a student of people. I read books and lots of articles about people to better understand them and how to work with them. I read about personalities, temperaments, behaviours, managing conflicts, leadership styles, etc. I observed how others interacted with people and learnt lessons from that. I practised what I learnt and learnt from my own mistakes. My relational skills are not innate, nor natural to me. I had to learn it, practise it, until it became a part of me.

3. Growing in our competencies, especially in areas of responsibility. People respect those who are good at what they do. When we excel in what we do, we tend to gain favour before men. Do you excel in what you do?

But note, we will never gain favour before all men. Most important, we must gain favour before God above men. When we are not secure in who we are before God, we tend to try to gain men’s favour first. I had to grow in my security before God myself, so I can have the right balance.

CONCLUSION

Growing leaders are needed. Fail to grow and we fail God. Growing leaders will lead followers who will also be inspired to grow. Growing leaders will tend to lead growing ministries. Growing leaders who grow in stature, wisdom, favour before God and men will do well for God and His Kingdom. Such growth requires both the grace of God and our disciplined application. Do our part and God will do His part. God bless!



Discussion Questions

These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. What impacted you in realising that Jesus also grew in stature, wisdom, in favour before God and men? Discuss.
2. What is the key point that stood out to you about growing in wisdom? Why?
3. What are your thoughts about the emphasis made here about the importance of growing in favour before God? Discuss
4. Do you agree that leaders should also learn to grow in favour before men? Discuss why or why not?

Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. What are some key steps you can begin to take in order to grow in godly wisdom? What is one perspective that you need to change in order to be more prepared to grow in wisdom?
2. What is the 1 or 2 areas that you need to grow in so that you are growing in favour before God? What steps can you take to grow in these?
3. What is the 1 or 2 areas that you should develop so that you can gain more favour before men? What are some of the steps you need to make to accomplish it?





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