

Episode 024

Becoming A Christ-Centred Leader

Introduction

In Christianity, particularly evangelical circles it has become quite common to speak of being Christ-centred. There is a danger that it may become an over-used term, as if it might protect us from veering off from doctrinal and practical orthodoxy. Leaders, in particular, should not adopt a shallow embrace of this concept. Rather we should far more deeply explore and develop deep convictions on the essential importance of being Christ-centred in our leadership. For leaders should shoulder a greater responsibility to represent Christ.

As spiritual leaders we should not only attempt to carry out the mission given to us by Christ. For sadly, far too many Christians leaders throughout history have attempted to do the work of the Kingdom without embodying the heart of Christ. This has led to great distortions in the Christian mission. Consider this. It is not possible to adequately pursue the mission given to us by Christ unless we adequately embody Christ in our hearts and in our leadership. For the Christ-given mission is as much about the heart as it is about the task. Without the heart, the mission becomes more of a task and very soon gain agendas which are foreign to God's heart.

If leaders are to lead in God-honouring ways for God-glorying outcomes, the more we leaders must centre ourselves in Christ. So how do we become more Christ-centred in our leadership? What are some of the key elements?



1. It means developing Christ-consciousness.

We cannot truly journey to be Christ-centered unless we start by learning to be Christ-conscious. The phrase WWJD is an excellent attempt to bring us one step closer to this. Such consciousness develops the deeper we develop our relationship with God. The challenge is to be so conscious of God's preferences that it will impact upon our decisions, attitudes, etc. In our decisions, we should ask, "WWJD?"

Col 2:6-7 (NIV) "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, {7} rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

How much are we actually living in Him? Dependent upon and drawing strength from Him? How connected are we with Him throughout our daily life? The more conscious we are to Christ, the more sensitive we become to God's perspectives about matters and to be led by His Spirit.

How prayerful are we each day? Seeking to be in His Presence? Seeking to be aware of the Spirit's leading? I have discovered from personal experience that I have to be intentional otherwise the busyness and pressures of life and ministry will divert my attention toward more pressing matters.

2. It means pursuing Christ-priorities.

As we develop in Christ-consciousness, we should also develop in Christ-priority. This means we put Christ's priority ahead of our own. This is what it means to die to ourselves. Mat 16:24 (NIV) "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Unless we die to ourselves, our priorities will compete with God's. This is not to say that we should not do anything for ourselves. God wants us to take care of earthly matters as well, because it is part of taking care of God's matters. But make sure it is God's.



It is critical that leaders learn to put God's priority first. Otherwise, we will not truly lead for God. We will lead partly for ourselves and for God. It could end up tainting God's work! We have to watch our hearts all the time! I have found that my carnal self simply refuses to stay dead for long. It has to be a daily crucifixion. Rom 14:8 (NIV) "If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." The challenge is to continually die to ourselves each day. To also be aware when our carnal self has popped up again.

Let us lead for God. Let us advance God's priority first. Paul could declare in Gal 2:20 (NIV) "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

How do we know that we are having Christ's priority first? Firstly, when Christ's agenda is our primary concern, over our own. This would be evident in the way we make plans, schedules, resource allocations, etc. Personally, we have tried to structure our lives so that we optimize our capacity for the purposes of the Kingdom. Whether it be our children's schooling and activities, our financial resources, even our holidays, etc. For example, I believe it is important to have family time away like holidays. Yet we plan our holidays around the timing of important church activities. In fact, we tend to take short breaks and try our best to minimise being away on Sundays.

Secondly, our heart is to be faithful and diligent servants and stewards of whatever responsibilities God has given us. For we recognize that all we do, we do unto the Lord. Thirdly, we are steadfast in our determination that our service is not a means to accumulate benefits to ourselves. I think it is unfortunate that there seems to be some Christian leaders who build their wealth from their ministry. I believe in adequate compensation for ministers as we should take care of them. But to build wealth is a different matter. Fourthly, we will not take criticisms and setbacks so personally because it is for Christ anyway. For when our hearts and minds are set upon pleasing Christ, we are less concerned about even our reputations.



Great leaders are those who have learnt how to advance God's priority. No leader is perfect. We have varying success in putting God's priority first. But if we are to be greatly used of God, we have to die to ourselves in order that Christ may shine through! Then Jesus will truly be LORD.

3. It means developing in Christ-likeness.

It is extremely difficult to put Christ first and live His ways unless we are being transformed into Christ-likeness. 2 Cor 3:18 (NIV) "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

When what we do comes out of what we are, it is a natural overflow. When our deeds reflect our hearts, it comes from a place of passion, motivated by our values and beliefs. But if our deeds do not align with our hearts, from who we are, it often causes stress. That is why it is more challenging to pursue Christ-priorities if we are not also developing in Christ-likeness. The greater intensity of the Christ-priorities, the greater our Christ-likeness ought to be. Otherwise, the greater the discrepancy, the greater the stress it eventually creates. I have known leaders who have responsibility to lead groups or organisations in ways and directions which do not adequately align with who they are. The strain it creates can be enormous.

That is why as leaders, we must be willing to submit our hearts to God each day and allow Him to transform us inside out. The more we grow in Christ-likeness, the more we can be used of God. It is more than dying to ourselves. It is more than living for God. It is becoming more like God. In our values, perspectives, attitudes, convictions and character.

Further, 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.



How do we develop in such Christ-likeness? Firstly, there must develop a genuine desire to know Him more and love Him more. Secondly, one has to value growing in Christlikeness. We need to perceive it as a crucial goal to pursue. Thirdly, we have to be intentional to observe and discern God's heart and perspectives as we read the Scriptures. As we ponder about God's dealings with us and others. Fourthly, to let those revelations impact our hearts and transform us. By allowing the grace of God, through such revelations to work into our hearts, our convictions, our perspectives.

I have found the above to be essential in helping me on my own personal journey towards Christ-likeness.

4. It means leading as Christ would.

As our particular concern is about leadership, we ought to be intentional to learn to lead as Jesus would. The key is to discover the principles by which He led, rather than simply imitate the methods He used. The key is to put on a leadership filter as we prayerfully study the Scriptures to discern His leadership principles.

Consider how Jesus encountered each of the 12 disciples and His interactions with them before He selected them to be His apostles. What could we learn about His team selection principles? Consider when Jesus sent out the 72 disciples to preach the Gospel. What can we learn about His equipping principles? Consider when His disciples argued amongst themselves about who was greater, what principles can be learned from the conflict resolution approach Jesus took in addressing it? When Peter had a crisis of confidence after denying Jesus, how did Jesus help Peter through it?

Consider how Jesus dealt with the Pharisees and other religious leaders, what can we learn about addressing opposition to our mission? What can we learn from the incident when the crowd wanted to make Jesus king? What can we learn about dealing about mission diversion?

While there is wisdom in leading from our strengths and personality, yet there is also room to grow into a more Christ-like approach in our leadership especially in the principles He used.



5. It means inspiring and nurturing Christ-likeness in others.

As we become more Christ-centered, let us lead others towards Christ-centeredness. That is the essence of Matthew 28:19–20 (NIV) 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” True disciples of Christ follow Him and grow to be more like Him.

The more we grow in God, the more we can be an inspiration to others. The more we grow in Christ, the more we can lead others in His way. For that ought to be part of our leadership mission, to help others be disciples of Jesus Christ, becoming more and more like Him. A key mission of my life is to help nurture Christ-like disciples. As a leader, my heartbeat is to inspire others to follow and grow in Christ-likeness and also to go forth and multiply themselves. This way, we will help fulfil the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

When we have Christ-centered leadership and the church has Christ-centered members, the church will be eager to carry out God’s priorities. Everything we do will be for His glory. People will not be striving after personal agendas, but will flow together to fulfil the purposes of God. Which is why God seeks leaders who are growing to be more and more Christ-like. You can be one of them.



Discussion Questions

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

1. “It is not possible to adequately pursue the mission given to us by Christ unless we adequately embody Christ in our hearts and in our leadership?” What are your thoughts about this statement? How important do you think the connection is, between fulfilling the mission and embodying Christ?
2. Why do you think that becoming more Christ-conscious is an essential part of becoming a Christ-centered leader? Can you think of more reasons beyond what was given in this lesson?
3. What are your thoughts about this statement “Unless we die to ourselves, our priorities will compete with God’s” Consider your own context. Have you found this to be true?



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 2 key steps you could take to be more Christ-conscious and Christ-obedient in your life. Work out how to take those steps and work out a time to aim towards.
2. Can you identify 2 major obstacles in your life that hinders you from dying to self thus hindering you from giving God the priority He deserves? What will you do about these obstacles?
3. What are 2 significant areas in your life that you ought to grow to be more Christ-like? Could you talk to God about it? Then what actionable steps can you take to grow in these areas?



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