

## **So you say you want to be king? Deuteronomy 17:14-20, 1 Samuel 8:1-9**

Portions adapted from: Biblical Imperatives For Leadership In The New Normal, Contributed by Dr. Madana Kumar.

So you say you want to be king? From my own childhood days, I recall the story of Max, in Where The Wild Things Are, who learned that even being king of the wild things can be lonely and was glad get back home to his milk and cookies. From my children's days it would be young Simba, who "*just can't wait to be king,*" but who first had to learn that with the role comes much responsibility. Now with that song stuck in your head, let's talk about God's requirements for those who would be king and sadly how few of us have ever lived up to His standards.

But you say, I have never wanted to be king, so how does this message apply to me? Well if you just exchange the word "King" for "leader" or "leadership," you will come to realize that at several points in our life we all get to be king or queen and the leadership choices we make then will influence how the next generation views leadership. Because basically, **leadership is the power to influence others.**

Think about any leader, good or bad, it doesn't matter, whether Mahatma Gandhi or Hitler, Osama Bin Laden or Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, Saddam Hussein, Donald Trump, Joe Biden, or Vladimir Putin. Whatever leader comes to mind, ask yourself **what do they do as leaders?**

The answer is that they influence the thoughts and actions of their followers. How they do it – or should do it – might be very different, which is the topic of today's message. But the fact that **leadership is influence** cannot be argued against. So whether you consider yourselves a "mere house-wife", a student, a teacher, or just another minion in the workplace, as long as you have an opportunity to influence someone, you are a leader. Thus, this message does apply to every one of us, irrespective of whether we hold a title or a position or even a job.

In our Deuteronomy text, God was looking into the future when He had Moses outline the qualities of a king that the people should want to have leading them.

The king should be **God chosen**  
Not greedy for **power** or **prestige**,  
or **wealth**. **Humble and**  
**Never departing** from God's way

- Most importantly, the people should let God choose their king. This is where we first get the idea that pastors should also be “called by God.” Because as God told the prophet Samuel, while people look at the outside, God looks at the heart.
- This godly king must not crave military power, which is why he should not want too many horses.
- Nor should he overly desire international status, which is what the God’s warning against having too many wives was about; in that they would turn the king’s heart away ... which is exactly what happened to King Solomon.
- Nor should he be greedy for personal wealth; a desire which his position would entice him to abuse.
- This is the one I like: while our Bible says “have written for him,” most other translations say that the first thing this king must do after being crowned, is to **personally write out – in front of priestly witnesses - his own copy of God’s laws which he is to keep close at hand and read from constantly.** When you have hand written your own copy of God’s laws, you will not quickly forget them.
- This constant reading of God’s laws will then help keep him humble, not self exalting and will also keep him faithful to following God’s ways.

Not hungry for power, prestige, or wealth. Humble and closely following Gods’ word, these are good qualities to have whether you are president of the United States or just king of your own castle; especially the one about being constantly guided by reading from your own personal copy of God’s Word. So let’s take a closer, Biblical, look at a few of these leadership qualities.

**POWER versus Servanthood: Leadership has always been associated with power, but for what purpose, to serve self or to serve others?** Human history has shown us that power is more often misused than used for the benefit of others. Our Bible includes many examples of both the proper and improper use of power by leaders.

The very first reference to the power inherent in leadership can be found in the opening chapter of Genesis, where God blesses Adam & Eve, telling them to “**fill the Earth, subdue it and have dominion over it,**” which according to some people is exactly what has now caused so many problems in our modern world (1:28). Filling, subduing, and having dominion, all carry negative connotations these days. So did God make a mistake?

Not when you realize that God gave humanity this blessing BEFORE the fall, when the idea of “*subduing and having dominion*,” was very different from what we now think in today’s fallen world; the clue being that after having so blessed Adam and Eve, God

planted a garden and placed them in it to care for it and protect it. Thus, Godly leadership then and now should always be considered a matter of **serving as a steward for God**, using your power to responsibly care for His creation ; just as Jesus said of Himself that He "*came to serve rather than be served*" (Matthew 20:28). Godly leadership is in using one's power to serve others.

But then sadly after the fall, humanity's thinking became rebellious and self-serving; which is why the Ten Commandments needed to be given and also new guidelines for leadership. The first post-fall guidance for leadership was given in today's text from Deuteronomy (17:14-20). Interestingly, these guidelines are more about what the leader should not do and who the leader should not be. This was in a way a future prediction of how fallen leaders would misuse the "*subdue and have dominion*" command given in Genesis.

We see this potential for misusing the power of leadership further highlighted in 1 Samuel (Chapter 8). Approximately 400 years after Moses, the Israelites having grown tired of being led by Judges (representatives of God), demand of Samuel that they now be given a King to rule over them like "all the other nations."

Samuel initially gets angry, but God informs him that they are not rejecting him as judge but rather God's rulership over them. So the old judge should go ahead and give them their king – after warning them how that king will misuse his power.

Thus, in the verses following today's text, Samuel warns the Israelites that their king, will to take their money, their land, their livestock, their sons and daughters to use it all for his own pleasure and on the day that you complain to God about your king, He will not answer.

So God's Leadership guidelines that started with "What to do," after the fall became "What not to do". Then came the prediction and warning about the misuse of power that mankind is likely to experience. History shows that king after king sadly followed this pattern of misuse of power. The first Israelite king, Saul, misused his power to disobey God. David, their second king, known as "*a man after God's own heart*," misused his power to get a wife (as if he didn't have enough). Solomon the third king, misused his power to please his wives and concubines, which brought the kingdom to the edge of bankruptcy. And then there was Rehoboam, Solomon's son, united Israel's fourth and last king, who had a clear choice placed in front of him. After he was crowned, the people complained to Rehoboam that Solomon's rule had been too harsh and they urged him to, "*lighten the yoke that your father put on us.*"

Turning to his elder advisers, Rehoboam asked how he should respond. They told him, "*If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to*

*'them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever.'* (1 Kings 12:7) Then asking his own friends for their thoughts and they told Rehoboam to reply,

*'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'* (1 Kings 12:10-11).

Guess who's advice Rehoboam followed?

It was this remark that split the kingdom apart. Most of the tribes seceded to form the nation of Northern Israel, leaving just the tribes of Levi, Judah and the half tribe of Benjamin, to form the southern nation of Judah. The history of both Israelite nations mostly went downhill from there, with Northern Israel being defeated and exiled from the land in 722b.c., with Judah following in 586b.c.

As the elder advisers tried to inform Rehoboam, **godly leadership is not about personal power and privilege but about servant hood and stewardship. You serve and lead for the people's good not your own.**

We see this kind of leadership exampled in the Apostle Paul's first best friend. On his way to Damascus to persecute the followers of Jesus, the fanatic Jew Saul of Tarsus has his own dramatic "come to Jesus" moment and becomes a Christian. Thereafter, he gave powerful witness in the Damascus Synagogues to Jesus as the Messiah. But, when he returns to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles, they were understandably still afraid of him. It was a man nicknamed Barnabas – "Son of Encouragement" – who stood as guarantor for Paul and brought him to the apostles (Acts 9:27). But Barnabas does not stop there, he also accompanies Paul on his first two missionary journeys; investing much time and energy into helping this new believer grow in his faith and witness. While we know ultimately who becomes more famous, we don't read of any bitterness from Barnabas. Barnabas, just another member of the Jerusalem congregation, was a humble God-fearing, other-centered servant leader.

We don't see much of this leadership in Washington these days and sadly even amongst some of our most prominent Christian leaders. As the truism says, *power corrupts and ultimate corrupts ultimately*; which is why putting pastors up on pedestals is such a dangerous practice. I am afraid that the prestige affects their thinking until with very few exceptions, many prominent leaders fall into disgrace after beginning to rationalize that they personally are an exception to the rules that **servant hood, humility, integrity, and simplicity are key elements of godly leadership** (Humility: Ephesians 4:2, Integrity: Job 27: 3-6, Simplicity: Luke 12:15).

Let's look even closer at this idea of servant leadership in our own everyday lives. When we look around, we can see people who just live **a life of survival**. These people add no value to themselves or to others; they just go through the day because

the day exists. Then of course there are the success oriented people who get up in the morning to go out and achieve something new, to attain something different. They want to invent some new gadget, get a PhD, or whatever. These are the types that corporations love and encourage. These are the types we picture as leading **a life of success**. At the outset, there may seem to be nothing wrong with this type, but the problem with success oriented people, is they end up adding value only to themselves and not necessarily to others. But there is one more type of person who wants to live a **life of significance**. A life of significance is when we add value to ourselves with the explicit purpose of adding value to others.

- We acquire knowledge so that we can teach the un-learned,
- We acquire wisdom so that we can help the foolish.
- We acquire wealth so that we can give to the poor.
- We build health, so that we can serve the sick.

There are also many Biblical illustrations of such people: Noah, Joseph, King Hezekiah, Esther, Daniel, and most all of the prophets. There are many places in Scripture that urge us to be **significant**, to be salt and light, to make a difference in our world (Philippians 2:3-4, Matthew 5:13-14, John 15:8, John 15:16, 1 Peter 2:12).

This is the kind of leader our world needs more of. The people of the world are desperately hungry for servant Leaders. This is what they are protesting for right now South Africa and Cuba. This is what they have long been deprived in North Korea, Iran, Haiti, and dare I say even in the United States?

If we look again at God's leadership guide, we will see how Jesus reversed our entire history of misusing of power, turning it upside down, when He gave the "*Not-so-with-you command*" to His disciples

Jesus called them to Him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. **It will not be so among you;** but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.' (Matthew 20:25-28).

It is interesting to note that there is only one place in the Bible where Jesus explicitly says that He did something to set an example for others to follow. During the last supper while His disciples were still arguing over who would get to be "greatest" in the kingdom of Heaven.

**I have set you an example,**  
that you also should do as I have done to you.  
If you know these things,  
you are blessed if you do them.

*Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ....*

*After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, '**Do you know what I have done to you?** You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.** Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed **if you DO them.** (John13:4-17.)*

Notice that Jesus' focus and command was on what we should be doing; leading by example, leading by service.

Here then is the summary of today's message and what you should take home to consider. The idea of "Servant Leadership" is as ancient as Adam and Eve, but has seldom been achieved in our fallen world. Those who have succeeded have only done so through their dependence on God's leadership in their own lives; helping them to develop these qualities of servant hood, humility, integrity and simplicity.

For us Christians, there is no other alternative. Jesus says "**not-so-with-you**" for any other way of leading, or living, other than servant leadership, which He both demonstrated and commands us to practice by His example of taking the basin, and washing the feet of His followers including the one He knew was soon going to betray Him.

Can we learn to Live, Love and Lead like Jesus? As He said, *if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.*

Let us pray about this.

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