

# Great Leaders Of The Bible And How They Led

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**Issues:** We can look closely at our Lord Jesus Christ-and at two other servants of God in the Bible as well-to find dependable secrets for how to influence others spiritually.

## **JESUS**

**The Power of His Goodness** Simeon the aged, when he held the child Jesus in his arms in the temple, prophesied that by contact with Him the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed; and this was one of the most outstanding features of Christ's subsequent life. None who came near Him could remain indifferent. They might hate or they might love, they might admire or they might scorn Him; but in any case they are compelled to show the deepest that was in them.

So Jesus, by His mere presence among men, brought to the surface their deepest thoughts and feelings and made them display the best and the worst which their hearts concealed.

We get the most authentic glimpse of the moral stature of Jesus by observing the impressions he produced on the minds of others in the great moments of His life. At the gate of Gethsemane, when He encountered the band sent to arrest Him, the traces of the experiences which He had passed through in the garden were still upon Him, and the effect of His rapt and tragic air was extraordinary. At the sight of Him "they went backward and fell to the ground."

All through the last six months of His life, indeed, He seems habitually to have been invested, through brooding on His approaching fate, with an awful dignity. His great purpose sharpened His features, straightened His figure and quickened His step; and sometimes, as He pushed ahead of the Twelve, absorbed in His own thoughts, "they were amazed; and, as they followed, they were afraid."

Earlier, however, even in the serene beginning of His ministry, there were manifestations of this overpowering moral dignity. When He drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple, why did they flee crouching before Him? They were many, while He was but one; they were wealthy and influential, while He was but a peasant Yet there was that in Him which they never thought of resisting.

They felt how awful goodness is. There is a majesty in indignant virtue before which the loftiest sinners cower.

Christ made the evil in those who opposed Him show itself at its very worst. Pilate, for example, applied to the case of Jesus only the same principles of administration which he had made use of in hundreds of other cases-the principles of the self-seeker and time server dressed in the garb of justice. But never did these principles appear in all their ghastly unrighteousness till he released Barabbas and handed over Jesus to the executioner.

The inhumanity and hollowness of Sadducee and Pharisee were never seen in their true colors till the light which streamed from Jesus fell on them and exposed every spot and wrinkle of the hypocrite's robe. Christ's very meekness provoked them to deeper scorn of His claims; His

silence under their accusations made them gnash their teeth with baffled malice; the castigation of His polemic made them cling to their errors with more desperate tenacity.

Although the presence of Jesus repelled some, it exerted on others the most powerful attraction, and the most characteristic feature of His character was moral attractiveness. He repelled those who were wedded to their sins and unwilling to abandon them, but He attracted all who in any degree were feeling after a new and better life.

Jesus naturally exerted this kind of influence in the strongest degree. Wherever there existed any tenderness or susceptibility toward what is high and pure, it was stimulated by His presence. Conscience, hearing His voice in its prison, woke up and came to the windows to demand emancipation. As the presence of a physician armed with a cure for some virulent disease excites a sensation among those afflicted with the malady-who communicate the news of relief to one another swiftly-so, wherever Jesus went the heavy-laden and the aspiring heard of Him and found Him. In publicans and sinners, and even in Pharisees, unaccustomed movements showed themselves: Nicodemus sought Him by night; Zacchaeus climbed into the sycamore tree to see Him; the woman who was a sinner stole to His feet to bathe them with her tears.

Jesus was engaged in a splendid work, Whose idea and results touched the imagination of all who were capable of anything noble. He was wholly absorbed in it; and to see unselfish devotion always awakens imitation. He was the author and leader of a new movement, which grew around Him, and the enthusiasm of those who had joined it drew others in.

The same power belonged in remarkable measure to all great spiritual leaders-to Saint Paul, to Savonarola, to Luther, to Wesley, and many more-who, filled with the Holy Spirit have been able to lift men above the instincts of pleasure and comfort and make them willing to deny themselves for a great cause. And no earnest life, in which the enthusiasm Jesus burns, fails to exercise in some degree the same influence.

It is one of the healthiest features of our day that all thinking people are growing sensitive about their influence. To many the chief dread of sin arises from perceiving that they cannot sin themselves without directly or indirectly involving others-and it would be to them the greatest of satisfactions to be able to believe that they are doing good to those with whom they are brought into contact, and not harm.

This is a feeling worthy of the solemn nature of our earthly existence, and it ought certainly to be one of the guiding principles of life. Yet it is not without its dangers. If allowed too prominent a place among our motives, it would crush the mind with an intolerable weight and cause conduct to appear so responsible that the spring of energy would be broken. It might easily betray us into living so much for effect as to fall into hypocrisy.

The healthiest influence is unsought and unconscious. It is not always when we are trying to impress others that we impress them most. They elude the direct efforts we make, but they are observing us when we are not thinking of it They detect from an unconscious gesture or chance word the secret we are trying to conceal. They know quite well whether our being is a palace fair within, or only a shabby structure with a pretentious elevation. They estimate the mass and weight of our character with curious accuracy; and it is this alone that really tells. Our influence is the precise equivalent of our human worth or worthlessness.

A man may strive for influence and miss it. But let him grow within himself-in self-control, in conscientiousness, in purity and submission-and then he will not miss it. Every step of inward progress makes us worth more to the world and to every cause with which we may be identified. The road to influence is simply the highway of duty and loyalty.

Let a man press nearer to Christ and open his nature more widely to admit the energy of Christ and, whether he knows it or not—it is better perhaps if he does not—he will certainly be growing in power for God with men, and for men with God.

James Stalker

from "Christ as an Influence" in *Imago Christi: The Example of Jesus Christ* (1890)

## NEHEMIAH

### Helping Others Get the Job Done

Under Nehemiah's leadership, the Jews in Jerusalem rebuilt in fifty-two days the city wall that had been torn down for 150 years. The key to his effectiveness was the way he modeled-in faith and action-the qualities which the Jews needed to successfully rebuild the wall.

These qualities were evident in how he prayed, how he planned, how he initiated work, and how he motivated and sustained the workers.

*Prayer*-Nehemiah was a great man of prayer. His prayers had a sense of urgency, and they also included confession—"I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you" (Nehemiah 1:6–7).

From his prayers we see that his compassion and convictions had their root in God and his promises. This kind of prayer creates a sanctified atmosphere for planning.

Through deceit and personal slander his persistent enemies tried to thwart the work he was leading-yet Nehemiah consistently responded to these attacks with prayer:

They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat (Nehemiah 4:8–9) They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands." (Nehemiah 6:9)

*Planning*-When King Artaxerxes first asked Nehemiah what he could do about Nehemiah's concern for Jerusalem, Nehemiah replied with a detailed plan. He had considered beforehand what resources would be needed, and where they should be obtained.

*Initiating the work through faith*-In the midst of opposition, Nehemiah carried out one of the most important actions in launching spiritual work-he made a declaration of faith. He said to Jerusalem's enemies,

*The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.* (Nehemiah 2:20)

*Motivating and sustaining*—Nehemiah motivated the people by identifying with them. After being in Jerusalem only three days and making an inspection of the ruins, he said to those who would be doing the work of rebuilding, "You see the trouble we are in . . . Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace" (Nehemiah 2:17). He identified himself with their needs—both the need for a new wall, and their need for self-esteem. He was saying, "We're in this together."

Then he brought God into the picture: "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me" (Nehemiah 2:18). And the people replied, "Let us start rebuilding."

Nehemiah also pointed them toward God when their work was being threatened by enemies. "Don't be afraid of them," he said. "*Remember the Lord*, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes" (Nehemiah 4:14).

Nehemiah transferred the people's focus from their own weakness and low self-esteem to God, and what he would do. When one of their critics said that the wall they were building could be broken down by a mere fox, Nehemiah prayed, "Hear us, O our God, for we are despised . . . Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins *from your sight*, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders" (Nehemiah 4:4–5). His prayer reminded the people that God would vindicate them.

The result was that they were freed to work: "So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart" (Nehemiah 4:6).

## **PAUL**

### **A Leader Who Suffered**

*Though always linked with words of triumph and hope, Paul's statements concerning his suffering nevertheless present his life as an often painful ordeal:*

I die every day—I mean that brothers.

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

To keep me from becoming conceited . . . there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

Let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race. It seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena . . . To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. Outwardly we are wasting away.

(1 Corinthians 15:31; 2 Corinthians 11:23–30 and 2 Corinthians 12:7; Galatians 6:17; Romans 9:2–3; 1 Corinthians 4:9–11; and 2 Corinthians 4:16)

### **A Leader Who Worked**

*Paul set an example in honest labor—both in manual toil to provide for his own needs, and in his labors of love as a messenger of the gospel.*

You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak.

We work hard with our own hands.

Is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?

I make myself a slave to everyone.

I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well.

Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. (Acts 20:34–35; 1 Corinthians 4:12, 1 Corinthians 9:6, and 1 Corinthians 9:19; 2 Corinthians 12:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; Colossians 1:29; and 2 Timothy 4:7)

### **A Leader Enabled by God's Grace**

*God's powerful grace miraculously transformed Christ's enemy into Christ's relentless apostle.*

I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

God . . . set me apart from birth and called me by his grace.

I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus.

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder.

He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you.

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly.

Whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

(1 Corinthians 15:9–10; Galatians 1:15; Romans 15:15–16; 1 Corinthians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 3:2 and Ephesians 3:7–8; 1 Timothy 1:13–14; and Philippians 1:7)

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**On Your Own:**

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**Your Influence**

1. James Stalker wrote of the "overpowering moral dignity" of Jesus which powerfully affected others around him-showing up the ingrained wickedness of some, and stimulating and attracting others who were more noble. Do you agree with his observations? Why or why not?

2. Since you have within you the presence of Christ, how much do you think you should affect other people in the same way he did?

3. In helping motivate others around you toward spiritual development, what is one way you can demonstrate identification with someone's needs?

4. What is one way you can help others focus their attention on God instead of on discouraging situations around them?

5. In these three areas on which Paul's words about himself are quoted here-suffering, working, and being enabled with God's grace-what kind of statements would you write about *yourself*