

The ABC of Christian Leadership: Don't Omit the Obvious

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By Deborah Brunt



In Rodgers and Hammerstein's classic movie, *The Sound of Music*, Maria, the new nanny for the Von Trapp family, finds that the children don't know how to sing. So she teaches them the musical scale in song: "Let's start at the very beginning. A very good place to start. When you read you begin with A-B-C. When you sing you begin with do-re-mi."

Suppose Jesus came to earth, to find that God's children didn't know how to lead. What do you think he might identify as "a very good place to start"? Where did he, in fact, teach us to start?

I'll tell you a sad hint: You won't find the answer anywhere in most current Christian books on leadership. Maybe the authors of these books think the principle so obvious that it would be wasting people's time to mention it. Yet, Jesus counted it crucial. He repeated it often. He said, in essence, "When you lead, you begin with following me."

While on earth, Jesus cultivated 12 men to be apostles. Ultimately, he would entrust the twelve with authority and send them out to be key leaders in his church. Yet, initially, Jesus said one thing to Peter, Andrew, James, John, Matthew and the rest: "Follow me."

In Luke 9:23, Jesus told all of us where to start, including any who aspire to lead: "He said to all of them, 'Those who want to come with me must say no to the things they want, pick up their crosses every day, and follow me'" (GW).

Even a cursory look at all levels of leadership in our churches, denominations, networks and ministries reveals that what should be foundational is often absent. Seeking to lead, we can and often do try to cultivate the personality, skills and traits associated with leaders. Yet for all our learning about leading, we often do not know how to follow God. Even more tragic, we don't know that we don't know.

In Isaiah 3:12, God cries, "My people, your guides lead you astray." In Matthew 15:14, Jesus warns, "If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

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If we fail to follow God, whether from rebellion or ignorance, we will lead people the wrong direction. We'll fail as leaders in God's eyes. On the other hand, when we're following God fully, even if we don't see ourselves as leadership material, he can equip any one of us to lead.

Years ago, I was approached about taking a leadership role for which I felt utterly inadequate. As I sat before God, listing all the reasons why I could not do it, he led me to Scripture after Scripture that affirmed, "No, you can't, but I will be with you. I'll do it through you." Finally, I protested, "But, Lord, it doesn't make any sense." In my spirit, I heard him say: "So will you follow me?"

When God asks that question, you have only two possible answers. Reluctantly, I answered yes. As soon as I agreed to follow, the Lord made it his responsibility to show me how to lead.

In the years since, he has continued to remind me: The moment I stop following him, that moment I cease leading well. When I recognize my error, turn around and follow him again, I'm once again on track to lead the right way.

Of course, you can omit the obvious and still be a popular leader, or a powerful one, or both. But don't do it. Don't be a leader who pursues having followers and blindly leads them into a pit.

Instead, lead like Caleb, the man in the Exodus generation whom God said, "has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly" (Num. 14:24). With Joshua, Caleb tried to lead the Israelites into Canaan a year after they all left Egypt. When the people turned back, Caleb continued to follow God during 40 years of wilderness wanderings. Entering Canaan at last, Caleb led his clan to conquer an unconquerable mountain and to receive in full the inheritance God had given.

You too be blessed to start at the very beginning and to follow God fully all the way to the end.

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Deborah Brunt explores key truths for living life. The author of eight books and more than 1,500 published articles, she writes courageously, prophetically, redemptively. Visit her at <http://www.keytruths.com> and at <http://keytruthsblog.wordpress.com>

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