**Becoming a Leader of No Reputation**

**R. Scott Rodin**

**I have been asked to reflect on my five years in the presidency at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and to do so honestly, I need to begin with a confession.  I was wrong.**

**I was wrong in my understanding and preconceived notions of leadership in Christian ministry.  I was wrong in my expectations of others and myself.  And I was wrong in my motivations, which may be the hardest thing to admit.**

**Five years ago, if you had asked me for a Scripture that epitomized the leadership ideal, I would likely have pointed you to Nathan’s directive to King David, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.” (2 Samuel 7:3)**

**Now I would point to a different verse.  In speaking of Jesus’ incarnation, Paul tells us, “he made himself a man of no reputation, taking on the very nature of a servant.” (Phil 2:7)  The verse does not say that Jesus became a man of bad reputation, or questionable reputation, but simply of ‘no’ reputation.  That is, reputation, image, prestige, prominence, power, and other trappings of leadership were not only devalued, they were purposefully dismissed.  Jesus became such a man.  Not by default or accident, but by intention and design.  And it was only in this form that he could serve, love, give, teach, and yes, lead.**

**I have come to believe that true Christian leadership is an ongoing, disciplined practice of becoming a person of no reputation, becoming more like Christ in this unique way.  I will speak here to five areas where I have begun to learn what it is to be this sort of Christian leader.**

**#1. Anointed vs. Appointed**

**We have employed the business model of doing careful searches looking for Christian leaders whom we can appoint to office. Once in place, we then anoint them and ask God to bless their work.**

**God selects leaders in the opposite order.  Samuel anointed David before appointing him King. Appointment without anointment always led to disaster.**

**Christian leadership requires nothing less than a complete, wholesale sell-out of your life in service to God and God only.  It is the ‘losing of your life’ to the work God will do in you to benefit others.**

**There is a unique presence of God in the lives of those God anoints and calls to leadership through that anointing.  Without it, we are continually thrown back upon ourselves to make things work.**

**God’s anointed will do anything God asks… anything.  God’s anointed will seek God’s will with a passion. God’s anointed will love what God loves and hate what God hates. It also means hating sin in every form and coming against anything that stands between God’s loving plan and its accomplishment.  God’s anointed are servants first, last and always. God’s anointed have only one passion, to know and do God’s will that He might have the glory.  In this way, God’s anointed are people of no reputation.**

**#2. Fighting the Need to Increase**

**When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he made the declaration, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”**

**The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross… It is not a leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest.**

**Perhaps the hardest place to decrease is in the influence and the power we hold over people and decisions. By overestimating our own worth, we help our people depend on us for everything.**

**For the Christian leader this means that our self-confidence must be founded in our faith in Christ and our desire to be like Him in every way.  We must be confident that "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it." (Philippians 1:6) We will have no need to seek for increase in our positions of power. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3) and therefore it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (Galatians 2:20).**

**Truly godly leaders seek no glory for themselves, but find great joy in seeing others prosper.  They take no account of their reputation, but seek that Jesus’ face be seen in all they do.**

**#3. Being and Doing**

**God in his very nature is defined by relationship. Relationship is what defines us.**

**Jesus was concerned about people over product, relationship over output, and transformation over transaction.  And from beginning to end, Jesus was a servant.**

**What is most important to God is not what we do but who we are. In Christian terms this means that the leader is transformed first!  Before God can do a great work in an organization, that work must be done first in the heart of the leader.**

**Godly leaders undertake their work with a deep humility and a keen awareness of their own weaknesses and shortcomings.  They know themselves well, seek accountability, pray fervently and watch carefully for red flags and warning signals.**

**The greatest tool for effective Christian leadership may be a mirror, and a group of friends to be sure you are looking into it with clarity and focus.**

**#4. Leadership is a Miracle**

**In "Leadership Prayers" by Richard Kriegbaum he prays:**

***“I love you, God.  You know I do.  How natural it is to love you.  You are perfect.  You are beautiful, pure, powerful, absolutely truthful, and kind.  You have been so generous to me that just saying thank you seems pitiful sometimes.  But far more powerful in my life is knowing and feeling that you love me.  You know exactly and completely who I am - all my ugly thoughts, my mangled motivations, my pretending, my irrational fears, my pride, and my unfaithfulness - and you still love me.  I know you love me.  You know me, and yet, because you love me, you let me lead others.  I do not understand it, but I am grateful.”***

**When God uses any of us to lead effectively, it is nothing short of a miracle. Throughout history God looked to the least, the weakest, the outcast, the untalented, the sinful and the rejected to give great leadership at historic times.   If we are honest as leaders, we know that we are not capable of leading as the size and complexity of our call demands.  We know that there are others more talented, more prepared, more spiritual and more courageous than are we.**

**All that we bring will fall woefully short of what is required, and we will be ever thrown again into the grace and faithfulness of God to work the miracle of leadership in and through and even in spite of our small pile of skills and talents.**

**#5. Seeking the Right Applause**

**“It doesn’t matter if the world knows, or sees or understands, the only applause we are meant to seek is that of nail-scarred hands.”**

**Leaders are exposed to opportunities to generate applause.  Our job is to never take the criticism too personally and not accept the praise too easily.  Leaders do not inflict pain, they bear it.  Leaders do not absorb praise, they re-direct it.**

**It is at that intersection between doing what God was telling us to do vs. doing the expedient and popular that true leadership takes place.**

**Before leading is about vision-casting or risk-taking or motivating others or building teams or communicating or strategic planning or public speaking, it is about lordship.  Where Jesus is singularly and absolutely lord of our life, we will seek to be like him and him only.  That will be our sole calling.  We will be called to our work, and that work will carry God’s anointing.  We will be called to decrease that Christ may increase.  We will be called to be people of God before and as we do the work of God.  We will be called to pray and look for the miracle of leadership that God may work in our midst.  And we will be called to strain our ears for that one sweet sound of two nail-scarred hands affirming all that we do in his name.**

**May we become leaders transformed into the likeness of Christ, leaders of no reputation.**

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