

The Price of Leadership

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The Making of a Leader Series

Numbers 11

There is a target on the back of those who want to become leaders. In fact, let me just expand that and say that there is a target on the back of anyone who determines in their hearts that they want to get much closer to Christ. I've seen this over and over again. Someone determines that they want to get nearer to Jesus. They say, "I want more of his presence. I don't want to settle for what I've experienced." You start allowing yourself to believe that even at your age, with your life experiences, that you could have the relationship with the Lord that you've always wanted. What you are going to discover is that there is pushback.

You say, "I am resolved. I'm going to spend time with God." And what we inevitably find is pushback. The apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:12:

2 Timothy 3:12

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

And the apostle Peter echoes this in 1 Peter 4:12:

1 Peter 4:12 (The Message)

Friends, when life gets really difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job. Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner.

I've often described spiritual warfare as the sudden awareness that we are not on the field of life by ourselves. To use a football analogy, we work through the plays. They go brilliantly in practice. They seem so simple to execute. OK...you run down the field, break for the end zone, I'll throw you the pass and it will be a touchdown. And then it is game time. And just as you catch the ball, someone has their helmet in your chest and you are slammed to the ground. The ball pops free and you think you have a broken rib. What happened?

There's another team on the field. We do not live life unopposed.

You see this all the time. You resolve to go on a diet. You are sick of not being able to fit into your clothes. You know you need to lose weight; it would be good for you. OK. You say, "I'm going to do it! I'm going to start walking. I'm going to start counting points for the meals that I eat. I'm so looking forward to being in shape."

And then the food that is your downfall; the bread, the chocolate, the ice cream – it's suddenly everywhere. At work they throw a surprise ice cream social and everyone is walking around eating ice cream cones. As you drive home, there is the Dairy Queen sign pleading with you. It says, "Treat yourself." You race by the DQ to get home safely into your house. And parked in front of your house is the ice cream truck. What's going on?

There is another team on the field. This is the way it is with Christian leadership. You say you want to be a Christian leader. You've been affected by what Christ has done for you and for the world. You want to help other people find what you've found. So with the best of intentions, you set out to become a leader, to become a small group leader, or a women's group leader, or a men's group leader, or a kids' leader. You say, "Yes, I feel like I should volunteer some time mentoring in the Columbus Public Schools, or helping to teach in Children's Ministry. I want to offer some time in the community center as a lawyer, or as a physician, or as a teacher. I'm going to help out with teens. I just don't want to be a taker in life." You are resolved to be a giver, to pay back something.

So far so good. Your desire to do good is wonderful. And maybe the group that you lead begins with a bang. You have a wonderful first few meetings with the women in your group, or the first few volunteer activities that you participate in are really satisfying. But then you discover that the grade of the road has changed. You are no longer on level ground. You seem to be working harder. You notice that you are going uphill. People stop coming to your group. They don't call. You originally had 8 people and now your group has shrunk to 3 people. Or your mentoree in the public school is not particularly responsive. She just sits and stares at you while you try to engage her. And finally 15 minutes into the meeting with you, she says, "How long do I have to sit here with you? I want to go and be with my friends." That's when you feel really valuable.

There is a relational conflict in the ministry you've just joined. A few people are not getting along. And each of them is recruiting you to take their side. Or maybe you received an angry email or letter from someone you spent time with trying to help. Someone helpfully communicates to you that you are not nearly as gifted, or as godly as their old leader. That's always an encouragement – to hear that someone else is much nicer than you. They always seemed to say just the right word to encourage; the unspoken message, "unlike you, you miserable dog." They were such wonderful leaders unlike you, who are barely a Christian.

I always felt the presence of God when they led worship. My son was so happy when your predecessor was the Youth Leader. Now he doesn't want to go at all. I don't know what's happened.

Here is what you are going to find. Leadership, especially Christian leadership is much harder than you ever thought. At some point, if you become a Christian

leader, you are going to ask yourself the questions: what in the world was I ever thinking when I decided to become a Christian leader? Why did I ever sign up for this?

I've been doing a series on leadership over the course of the summer taken from the life of Moses in the Old Testament. It is a series I've called "The Making of a Leader." And today what I want to do is pull the entire mystique back around leadership and talk about some of the hard realities that will come into virtually every leader's life. I've called today's talk, "The Price of Leadership." Let's pray.

Numbers 11:1-6

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. 2 When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down. 3 So that place was called Taberah, because fire from the Lord had burned among them. 4 The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. 6 But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"

These days we are so conscious of leadership failure, especially the public failures of people like Senator John Edwards, Governor Elliot Spitzer, and President Clinton, and so many pastors whose names and faces and stories have gotten splashed across newspapers around the world. We constantly talk about leadership failures as a country. I've certainly taught on this.

But we rarely talk about what happens to leaders when the people fail. It is not just leaders who fail, sometimes the people, the followers fail.

The price of people's failure

And when you read the story of Moses, what is remarkable is how well Moses stood up despite the repeated failures by the people. See, it is not always the leader who fails. Sometimes the failure is on the part of the church – that's what's going on in a lot of churches in America, or on the people you are trying to help. Sometimes the problem is not the teacher; sometimes it is the student or the group attender or the client.

In Moses' case, we do find repeated failures by the people. The people worship the Golden Calf. The people break the Sabbath. The people are repeatedly complaining. And they hook up with women outside of the nation of Israel. Why were these people so difficult?

You need to remember that Israel was a community of ex-slaves who had all of the attitudes and behaviors of a group of people who lived under 400 years of oppression. What happens to people when they lose their human rights generation after generation? What happens to people when they lose their basic dignity as free people? When leaders constantly betray you? When you have no hope for tomorrow? When you have no vision? When the only thing in life is just to survive? What kind of people would you expect the people of Israel to be as a nation that has just come out of centuries of slavery?

So, applying this principle of ex-slaves to today, what would you expect as people flood into the church or into your group, or clients, or people in a volunteer setting? What would you expect from folks coming out of years of slavery to sexual sin or alcohol, or drugs, or just raw unbelief and self-centered living? Christian leaders are always leading a community of ex-slaves with all of the dysfunctions and negative behaviors that ex-slaves exhibit.

Let me put it differently. Let me take a different tack on why people are so difficult. And why the people, not just the leader, but the people often fail. I read a wonderful article this week by a Jesuit priest titled *The Courage to Accept Acceptance*. And here is what he said:

One of the deepest needs of the human heart is the need to be appreciated. Every human being wants to be valued. Every human being craves to be accepted, accepted for what he or she is. Nothing in human life has such a lasting and fatal effect as the experience of not being completely accepted. When I am not accepted, then something in me is broken. A baby who is not welcomed is ruined at the roots of his or her existence. A student who does not feel accepted by his or her teacher will not learn. A woman who does not feel accepted by her colleagues on the job will suffer from ulcers or be a nuisance at home. Life without acceptance is a life in which a most basic human need goes unfulfilled.

What are the symptoms of a person who is craving acceptance? Here are some of the symptoms:

- Boasting: In a subtle or obvious way they provide themselves with the praise they want so badly.
- Rigidity: A lack of acceptance causes a lack of security on the path of life and as a result a lack of courage to risk one step to either side of the path.
- Masturbation or any Superficial Joy: Deep down there is so much lacking that the person endeavors to get whatever they can out of life in an easy way.
- The Desire to Assert Themselves, the Frightful Power to Impose Themselves, the Excessive Need for Attention, the Tendency to Feel Threatened, to Exaggerate, to Gossip, to Suspect Others: These are other symptoms of a lack of acceptance.

Why are people so difficult? It is because at the foundation most folks never have discovered what it feels like to be totally accepted.

Let me share with you a picture that I felt God give me this past week. It was a picture of some house buyers, who are driven by their realtor to look at a house in the city that is for sale. The house turns out to be one of those ramshackle houses in the city where some of the siding is falling off. The front railing is detached from the porch. The house actually has holes in it that you can see through from the outside in. The sidewalk is cracked. The potential buyers begin to point out all the flaws in the house.

The seller of the house comes out and tries to pretend that everything in the house is really OK. There's no problem with this house.

And as that picture rolled through my mind, I felt the Holy Spirit speak to me and say, "Rich, you are that house. There are obvious flaws that other people can see; don't bother pretending that you are some mansion when you are just a ramshackle house with a host of flaws." By the way, your house is right next store to mine and it is in similarly bad condition.

Here's the deal. God comes along to the house. He knows all of the flaws. He knows problems that the owner of the house isn't even aware of. God knows all of the problems with the foundation; all of the holes in the roof; all of the leaky plumbing in our lives. But God comes along and says, "I want that house. I'm going to buy it. More than that, if you let me, I'm going to move in." It is an awesome act of faith to allow yourself to believe that God knows everything wrong in your life – everything, and that he still wants you, he still accepts you as you are, and he wants to move right into your life. Oh, he's going to do repair work. But knowing what he knows about us, he still accepts me and he still accepts you.

People are so difficult because we don't believe this. We believe that we have to keep pretending that we are mansions even when are just run-down shacks. We run from the truth about ourselves because we have never really accepted our acceptance from God.

Let's look more carefully at Numbers 11:1-3:

Numbers 11:1-3

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. 2 When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down. 3 So that place was called Taberah, because fire from the Lord had burned among them.

The price of complaining

Have you noticed as you read through the story of the people of Israel that they are always complaining; they are always grumbling about something. I heard a joke once about a guy who joined a monastery and took a vow of silence. He was allowed to say two words every seven years. After the first seven years, the leaders of the monastery brought him in and asked for his two words. The man said, "Cold floors." They nodded and sent him away. Seven more years passed and they brought him back in for his two words. He cleared his throat and said, "Bad food." They nodded and sent him away. Seven more years passed. They brought him in for his two words, and he said, "I quit." The leaders of the monastery said, "That's not surprising. You've done nothing but complain since you got here."

You think you have a reason to complain about your work? Take a look at the working condition of these people:

Working conditions of people

Have you ever been around a chronic complainer? They just drain the life out of you. There actually is a clinical category for chronic complainers. Chronic complainers are called socio-affective recognition addicts.

Socio-affective recognition addicts

They are people who complain for the purpose of drawing attention to themselves, or feeling appreciated or valued. Certainly chronic complaining is a mark of emotional and spiritual immaturity. We saw this a few weeks ago when we took a look at Philippians 4:11-13:

Philippians 4:11-13

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

I said that spiritual and emotional maturity is marked by the ability to rise above your circumstances, to not be controlled by how things around you are going. Maturity means that what is happening internally in you is stronger than what is happening externally to you. Children complain about being too hot or too cold, or being hungry or bored, or frustrated because things didn't go their way. But spiritually and emotionally mature people are able to maintain an inner equilibrium because what is in them is greater than what is around them.

What has happened with the people of Israel is that through repeated choices they have developed a complaining spirit. It's chronic. They are so used to complaining. They are so used to grumbling that nothing is good any more. And of course, if you see this critical complaining spirit in your own life, or in the life of someone you love, the cure for complaining is its polar opposite. It is the practice of gratitude. It is learning to be thankful to God and to other people. I've repeatedly said through this series that gratitude is unnatural for us self-centered, complaining, critical people. Gratitude is unnatural. It has to be practiced. It is like learning a foreign language. It is like learning how to play the piano. It is like training yourself to write with your weaker hand. It is not natural.

If you want to stop being a complainer, you have to practice gratitude. You have to wake up in the morning and begin the day by lying in your bed and saying thank you for what is good in your life. And throughout the day, remembering to say thank you to God. And at the end of the day, reviewing the day hour by hour and where you saw the blessing of God, where you experienced the movement of God in your life, saying thank you for a good conversation, for a meal enjoyed, for driving without traffic, for the ability to purchase something you wanted. Hour by hour, whenever you experience something good, say "Thank you!"

It is important concerning the words that come out of our mouths – complaining, criticism, gossip, speaking against people, slander. It is important to remember that our words are always spoken in the presence of God.

Our words are said in the presence of God

Look at this with me in verse 1:

Numbers 11:1

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.

And in Numbers 12:1-2:

Numbers 12:1-2

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 2 "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the Lord heard this.

Do you know, friends, that everything you say and everything I say, everything I do and everything I do, is being said and done in the presence of the Lord? The Lord hears your words and he hears my words. He sees what you do and he sees what I do. Calling to mind that all that we do in life is being done in the

presence of the Lord should affect our behavior. You know what it is like to be cruising down the road and all of a sudden see a police car off to the side. You immediately slow down. Your behavior changes when you are in the presence of a police officer. What you say changes depending upon who is listening.

If you call to mind repeatedly that Jesus is in the room as you speak, he hears you. He hears your complaining. He hears your criticism. He hears your thanksgiving and your encouragements. His presence ought to affect our behavior.

And then there is:

The price of comparisons

Numbers 11:4-6

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. 6 But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"

Now what are the rabble saying here? The rabble, by the way, are those who give no thought to God. They don't care what God thinks. They don't care about the presence of God. They don't care about the impact of their lives or their words on anyone else – who they're hurting, or who they're offending. And what are the rabble saying? What is their basic complaint? Their basic complaint is that they long for the good old days.

You can't be a leader very long without having someone come up to you and tell you that the old days were better than these days. I sure liked the church, Rich, better in 1998 than in 2008. I sure liked it better in 1988; in 1978 – the good old days. I liked worship the way it was before. I liked children's ministry when so-and-so taught. We have such selective memories. For those of you who long for the good old days, if that's the way you think about life – Oh, the past is so much better than the present...let me tell you what you were doing and saying back in the good old days. Back in 1998 or back in 1988 you were saying, "Oh, I wish for the good old days..." We always look at the past through rose-colored glasses.

You know what the problem is in our attachment to the good old days, our reverence of some moment in the church's past, or in our own spiritual past, our own past in family life? Do you know what the problem is? The problem is that our love of the past can easily become an idol replacing a relationship with God today. A relationship with God is always lived today. Hebrews 4:7 says:

Hebrews 4:7

God again set a certain day, calling it "Today." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

A relationship, a true relationship with God is always present tense. God reveals himself at the burning bush to Moses by the name "I Am." "Yahweh" which means "I Am." It's not I Was; the Lord is not trying to recapture some moment from the past. It is I Am. If you want to know the Lord, you must know him in this moment, the present moment.

I read a story about an English boy who lived in London during WWII. His father went off to war and his mother hung a picture of the boy's father in his room. Every night his mother sat there while the boy said his prayers. And then his mother would say every night, "Now, get up and give your dad a kiss." And so the boy got up every night and kissed the photo of his dad before he went to bed.

Well, after a few years his father came back home. Mom and Dad sat in the room while this boy said his nightly prayers. And then his mother said, "Aren't you forgetting something? You need to give your dad a kiss." And so the boy dutifully got up and went over to the photo of his dad and gave the photo a kiss. His father was in the room and yet he went over the photo and kissed the photo.

And friends, that is what we're like when we revel in some past spiritual moment. God is in the room. His presence is with you today, in this moment. Jesus wants your devotion now. He doesn't want you kissing a photo of the past today when he is with you right now.

And so how does Moses respond to the complaints and comparisons?

Numbers 11:10-15

Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. 11 He asked the Lord, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? 12 Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? 13 Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' 14 I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."

The price of playing God

What we find in these verses is Moses as a leader finally becoming completely overwhelmed by the criticism and grumbling and comparisons of the people. So there is this torrent of dreadful questions:

- God, why have you brought this trouble on your servant?
- What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me.
- Did I conceive these people? Did I give them birth?
- Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms?
- Where can I get meat for all these people?
- Must I carry these people? They're killing me.
- Kill me, Lord.

Parenthetically, one of the things I love about the Bible is how absolutely honest it is about our heroes' faults. The Bible never air-brushes or photoshops leaders. We see them as they are. There is Abraham lying and Sara doubting, and Jacob cheating. There is David committing adultery and Jeremiah complaining; Peter denying the Lord. The Bible is the story of God coming and working through people like us – real people, not marble statues.

And here is Moses complaining to the Lord. And what I read in his complaints is Moses paying a heavier price for leadership than he needed to because of what he's doing to himself. It says in verse 12 these words:

Numbers 11:12

Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors?

Here is the problem with Moses' complaint. God never asked Moses to carry the people. In fact, at the beginning of the journey when the people were at Mt. Sinai, God said he was the one who was carrying the people in Exodus 19:4:

Exodus 19:4

'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

And after the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and were right on the edge of the Jordan River to cross into the Promised Land, we read this in Deuteronomy 1:31:

Deuteronomy 1:31

In the wilderness. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place."

God never said to Moses, ‘You carry the people.’ What the Lord did say was, “Moses, I am carrying the people. They are not your burden; they are my burden.”

How much leaders need to hear this. God is carrying the people, not us! So often leaders are paying a heavier price than they need to because we are taking onto ourselves loads that the Lord never asked us to carry.

How many Christian leaders, and parents, and spouses and friends try to play Savior? Isaiah 43:11 says:

Isaiah 43:11

I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior.

God tells us that he is the Lord and apart from him there is no Savior. And yet, parents, spouses, friends say: No, I think I will take on the role of Savior.

There was a woman who was the wife of a professional. She was the mother of several children. Her husband was an alcoholic and her children followed suit. Most of them became drug addicts or alcoholics. This woman had a deep faith, but her life was filled with monitoring her family, keeping most of them dependent upon her. Most of her children lived with her well into their late 20's. Even though she was over 60, she served them faithfully, did all of their laundry, fixed spectacular meals every night.

She rescued them from the consequences of their addictions by paying their speeding tickets, by hiring lawyers to deal with their legal troubles every time their abuse got them in trouble. She ran interference for her husband with his firm. She protected her children from coaches and teachers. She changed churches four times to protect her kids from judgment. The ultimate crisis came for her when, despite all of her efforts, she couldn't any longer control her addicted sons. They ended up going to treatment centers or halfway houses. Then she had to face the hole in her own soul. She became sick and lost weight. She became depressed. One time she was even suicidal. Everything valuable about her was outside of her—her attempt to rescue and fix. This woman had lived her life pretending that she was the Savior.

Some people would call that being a good devoted mother. Oh, she was admired by so many people. And yet, the psychological community was on to something when they labeled her behavior addictive. They have said about such people that they are co-dependent. I call her co-idolatrous; her idol of fixing and rescuing strengthens and reinforces her son's idols of drugs and alcohol use.

Years ago in our small group leaders training manual, I developed a set of contrasts between playing Savior, in which we feel responsible for others—children, friends, spouses, parents—and acting like a Christian, in which I see

myself responsible to other people. When I believe that I am responsible for another person, I feel that I must fix them; that I must rescue them; that I must control them; and that I must protect them. Your 25-year old son is not able to consistently hold a job or drinks too much or is making a bad decision regarding their love life. Parents who are Saviors have to leap in to fix and to rescue, to make the choices for their children. Friends feel responsible to fix their friends.

I must fix this other person's feelings because they are depressed.

There must be something wrong with me as a small group leader because people in my small group are still broken and I have been able to fix all of the people in the group yet. I have to fix this person's financial situation because they've made terrible financial decisions.

I must fix this person's marriage.

When I am responsible to another, I don't try to fix them or control them or rescue them. I see my role as to encourage them, to share with them, to confront them at times with the truth. But always decision making and the ultimate responsibility for how life goes rests with them, not with me. I am not the Savior. I care for them, but he cures them. I share with them, but he saves them.

How many Christians really impede the salvation process that God would work in their spouses' lives or their children's lives by trying to manipulate the process of salvation and work it or overwork it beyond God's timing and God's plan at the moment?

Well, my spouse is unsaved, so I will leave Bible verses pinned to his pillow. Oh, that will be a great encouragement when they lay down at night and the last thing they see before they drop off to sleep is "You will die in your sins unless you also repent."

To not play Savior means that you trust him enough to patiently work in someone else's life. Playing God is destructive in all dimensions. To take just the example that I am beginning with, playing Savior, being a Savior when you are not is exhausting. It is tiring trying to fix someone who doesn't want to be fixed. Trying to control everything and protect from all of life's harms. It is exhausting. You have to be a really big person to be a Savior.

It is not only exhausting, it is anxiety provoking. Call it concern if you will, Moms say it is just maternal instinct, but if you are not free, if you are constantly wracked with guilt, if you are fearful, if you are not relaxed and at peace, you are probably slipping over into the Savior syndrome.

Or men, so that it doesn't sound to you like I am just picking on mothers, you play Savior too when you think that you always have to come up with the solution, the

answer, the exact fix for your wife's or girlfriend's problems. She shares something with you and you immediately have to be Mr. Fix-it, Mr. Home Improvement. You believe that in all circumstances you are right. Saviors always have to come up with the answers for every single problem and always have the exact appropriate advice. But when we know that his job is to cure and our job is to care, well, we can begin relating to a person rather than devising the answer. We can; perhaps, men even share a feeling for a moment [but only a moment!]. I know you are depressed. I know you are upset. I am concerned about you. Rather, than reach for the solution, we reach for the other person.

You are not only doing damage to yourself, do you know that people who play Savior and who play God create resentment in others? Folks do not want to be controlled by another person. They don't want to be fixed. Have you noticed that? Moms, after serving so much you produce a child that just kicks away from you. Why? Because no one wants to be smothered that much. Or, if they allow it, they become completely dependent and emotionally immature forever. We do damage to people when we try to play God.

You say, "How do I take on burdens that God never gave me?"

One other way that Christian leaders add burdens to themselves is by trying to control the result of ministry after we've done it. Have you ever watched someone bowl? You go to a bowling alley and watch people after they release the ball from their hand. You see people doing all this body English trying to steer the ball after it is rolling down the alley. No...no...no...move over here. That's what so many folks are like after they get done with some particular activity. Instead of releasing a teaching to the hand of God, or releasing an evening with your small group, or a counseling appointment to the hand of God, what many leaders do is to go back over and second guess and try to steer the results. What you are doing for God, let it go. Once you bowl, let it go. Try to be helpful. Try to be an encouragement to someone. But then let it go.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30:

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Well, here is the last price in this text.

The price of being place on a pedestal.

Numbers 11:24-30

So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent. 25 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again. 26 However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. 27 A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” 28 Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!” 29 But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” 30 Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

God hears Moses’ complaint about the burden being too great for him. And so the Lord says, “OK, Moses, this is not going to be a solo effort. I’m going to put my Spirit on lots of other folks.” Here’s the problem. While the Lord is working through lots of other people, Moses’ faithful disciple, Joshua, tries to protect Moses’ reputation. “Other people are trying to get attention, Moses. There are other leaders horning in on your success, Moses. I’m going to follow you. I’m going to protect you. You are unique; you are indispensable to the health and wellbeing of our nation. You are special. I’m going to put you on a pedestal and protect you, Moses.”

What a dangerous place to be. Again, it is totally appropriate and right to offer compliments to a leader. It is something else entirely when you start believing or communicating that any person is indispensable to the ongoing work of the Lord in a church, in a group, or in a ministry. And it is unbelievably dangerous for any person to begin to believe their press clippings and to think of themselves as indispensable.

Chuck Swindoll, the famous radio preacher and now-president of Dallas Seminary, once shared a poem about the danger of being made indispensable. It goes this way:

Sometime when you’re feeling important,
Sometime when your ego’s way up;
Sometime when you take it for granted
That you are the prize-winning “pup”;
Sometime when you feel that your absence
Would leave an unfillable hole,
Just follow these simple instructions,
And see how it humbles your soul.
Take a bucket, fill it with water,
Put your hand in it up to your wrist.

Now pull it out fast and the hole that remains
Is the measure of how you'll be missed.
You may splash all you like as you enter,
And stir up the water galore,
But stop and you'll find in a minute,
It's right back where it was before.

You are not indispensable. I'm not indispensable. No one is indispensable except for Jesus Christ. He is the only one we always need. He is the only leader that we can't do without. Christ is the only person we ought to ever put on a pedestal. He is in first place. He is #1.

And you know, Christ deserves all honor because he paid the ultimate price of leadership. In order to lead us, a community of ex-slaves with all of our criticisms, complaining, and longings for the good old days, in order to lead us with all of our addictions, games-playing, Christ paid the ultimate price. He paid the price of going to a cross. He was condemned to death. He was beaten. He was spit at. He was mocked. He was forced to carry his cross the place of crucifixion. It was so heavy that he stumbled under it and fell. When he fell, the crowds laughed. They jeered at him and said, "You claim to be able to save others; how about saving yourself."

He was publicly stripped naked. His skin was shredded from being repeatedly beaten. And then after having been absolutely humiliated, he was nailed to a cross where he struggled to breathe. He experienced the wrath of God for our sins. And then he had a spear run through his side causing his heart to burst.

And he died an awful, torturous, humiliating death. He died so that you and I who are complainers, and critics, and terrible followers could be brought into God's family and experience God's love forever.

Do you want to know why Jesus is such a great leader? It is because no one ever paid a price to lead like our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

The Price of Leadership

Rich Nathan

August 30-31, 2008

The Making of a Leader Series

Numbers 11

- 1. The Price of People's Failures (Numbers 11:1-6)**
- 2. The Price of Complaining (Numbers 11:1-3)**
 - a. Our words are said in the presence of God (Numbers 11:1, 12:2)
- 3. The Price of Comparisons (Numbers 11:4-6)**
- 4. The Price of Playing God (Numbers 11:10-15)**
- 5. The Price of Being Placed on a Pedestal (Numbers 11:24-30)**