

What Makes an Effective Leader?

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August 16-17, 2008

The Making of a Leader: Leadership Lessons from the Life of Moses

Exodus 32

When I was 17 I graduated early from high school so that I could earn some money. I went to work at the central office of a department store chain in New York City. On the first day I was there I was given a job that no one should ever give to a 17-year old. I was asked to add up the sales in the company's books. Along with a half dozen other teenagers, we would be given these huge ledgers and were told to tally up the sales figures that were in these huge ledgers.

I don't know what you were like when you were 17. Maybe you had an incredible work ethic even when you were working with six other teenagers. I know my work ethic left something to be desired. But after working five hours doing nothing but adding numbers on an adding machine, I began making up totals. I just would eyeball a page of figures and say, "Well, these looks like it adds up to about \$31,742 give or take \$25,000."

The manager of our highly professional unit never came out of his office. I think he was afraid of the seven teenagers who worked there. The buyers for the company were stealing the place blind. They were literally walking out with crates of merchandise – boxes of basketballs, armloads of suits, coats and shirts. The department store chain was out of business within the year. Terrible management!

Have you ever worked in a place with bad leadership – weak, utterly ineffective management?

There is a website www.WorkingAmerica.org and they recently had a bad boss competition. Listen to a couple of these stories. A guy named Robbie wrote in and said:

I am a fast food manager. I really like my job. One night I was working 3rd shift and I got a phone call. My wife was hysterical and was screaming into the phone. I finally got out of her that our house was on fire. She and our son were at home and smelled smoke from upstairs. She found the whole upstairs fully ablaze. I called my boss at home and told him that my house was burning and that my wife needed me right now. He said to hang on and he would call me back. Five minutes later he called me back and said that he couldn't find anyone to cover for me and that I needed to stay to close up that evening. He said that if business was slow we could close 15 minutes early.

I asked him if he would be able to come in because the fire engines were coming to my home. He said he couldn't come in because he was watching a movie with his family. It was 'Family Night' and he wasn't going to ruin it by driving to the restaurant. I said thank you and hung up the phone. I shut off all the equipment, lights, and computers and posted a note on the window saying that my house was burning and that I had to leave. I was fired the next day from that job.

Or how about this story from a woman named Joan:

Several years ago I was an office manager at a company. My boss asked me to organize an outing for our employees. I thought it would be nice to have an evening at a major league baseball game. So I set the date for two months out and I got a reduction on tickets for the group. I also organized carpooling, got a set amount of cash to give to each employee so that they could purchase snacks. I handed out the tickets.

Well, the date arrived and it rained. My boss informed me that I had picked that particular date because I knew it would rain! My title was changed from manager to assistant manager and I was given a reduction in pay. A few months later he asked if I would organize a company picnic. This time he told me that I better make sure that it didn't rain!

VIDEO – Ineffective Leader – Michael Scott in “The Office”

About a third of all employees say that they have either bad bosses, lazy bosses, or dishonest bosses. I've been doing a series on leadership from the life of Moses that I've called “The Making of a Leader.” Today we're going to compare and contrast two very different leaders – Moses and his older brother, Aaron. I've called today's message, “What Makes an Effective Leader?” Let's pray.

Exodus 32:1-6

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.” 2 Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” 3 So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” 5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.” 6 So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

Let me begin this talk on effective leadership by looking at the kind of people that Aaron, the older brother of Moses, and Moses were called to lead. What were these people like? What you see in these people is a wonderful Old Testament picture of what all fallen people are like. They are impatient.

Exodus 32:1

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

They were impatient for Moses to come down. They are filled with ingratitude.

Exodus 32:1

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

This is the Moses who was their great deliverer from Egyptian slavery, the same Moses who led them through the Red Sea. Moses went up on Mt. Sinai to get the Ten Commandments. These folks have incredibly short memories. "We don't know about this fellow Moses, what has he done for us lately?"

Impatient. Filled with ingratitude. They were idolaters.

Exodus 32:1

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

They weren't satisfied with the invisible God. Or even his visible presence in the cloud or the fire. "Make us idols."

And they were immoral. Verse 6:

Exodus 32:6

So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

The phrase there is a euphemism for engaging in sexual orgies which accompanied some fertility rites in Near Eastern pagan religions.

So, what you have here is what I call the line of descent, a spiral down beginning with impatience that leads to ingratitude that leads to idolatry, which leads finally to immorality. As I said, this is an Old Testament picture of all of fallen humanity. What does the world look like when you look at the world through a theological lens, or the lens of the Bible? We look out at the world, what does the world look like? Or a different way to ask the question: What is the cause of all of the immorality that we see splashed through the media and on a million websites online and in our own personal lives so that it is the unusual person who is not significantly sexually broken? What is the reason that when you go through the grocery store line with your 7-year old you have to distract them from looking at the magazine covers that trumpet stories like: "Sex So Good Your Neighbors Will Complain," or "His 240 Sexual Secrets." 240...Can you imagine having 240 secrets about anything?

How does the Bible analyze our slide as a country into immorality? We read of a line of descent, a spiraling down. How did you get to the place you're at in your own sexual life where you've pounded into your soul pornographic addiction, or sexual immorality of one kind or another? We read of a spiral down, a line of descent in Romans 1. Look at this with me.

Romans 1:21

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Here is the line of descent. Romans 1 doesn't mention impatience, but it begins with ingratitude. It starts with an unwillingness to say thanks to God for what we have, to be grateful for our own spouses, to be grateful for the situation we are in. The next step down is idolatry.

Romans 1:22-23

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles.

And the final step down is immorality, verse 24:

Romans 1:24

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

There is a spiral down, a line of descent that begins with impatience and spirals down to ingratitude, idolatry and finally immorality (you see the same line of descent in Romans 1 beginning in verse 21).

But it starts with impatience.

People are impatient

Exodus 32:1

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

Compare verse 1 with verse 8:

Exodus 32:8

They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

Have you discovered that God measures time differently than you do? What you consider to be an impossibly long period of time to wait for an answer to prayer, God considers quick. God's blessings do not come with the speed of a bullet. All through the Psalms the writer underlines the need to wait for God.

Psalms 130:5-6

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. 6 I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

And when Israel was conquered by Babylon and dragged off into captivity, Jeremiah spoke to his countrymen and said this:

Lamentations 3:24-26

I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." 25 The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; 26 it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Jeremiah understood that God would bring the people back to Israel, but that it would take time. It would take a long time. One thing that's really clear is that God will not be rushed. Without a willingness to wait for the Lord for his answers and his timing, you are going to be completely frustrated in your relationship with the Lord. God never promises us that our present circumstances are going to make sense to us. Sometimes we have to wait for months or years before what we are going through right now becomes remotely understandable.

I would make just a brief aside before we move on regarding the line of descent. The first concerns decision-making. You find yourself in a situation where you are facing a major life-changing decision and you are feeling pressured to make

a quick decision. My experience over 20 years of pastoring with hundreds and hundreds of people is that decisions made under the gun, hasty decisions that have to be made under the pressure of an immediate deadline are almost never good decisions. I've almost never seen a hasty decision turn out to be a good decision. We need to wait for the Lord's direction.

People come to us over the years and say, "Why do you require premarital counseling before we get married? Can't we shorten the runway? Our jumbo jet of a relationship with all of our tons of baggage packed into the hold can lift off successfully by flying vertically. We don't need a runway. Why do you require six classes or mentoring? We want to get married and we want to get married this month." "I was just offered a job out of the blue in another city, but they want an answer from me by next week. It means I'm going to have to move."

God will not be rushed. You can't rush spiritual growth in your life. You can't rush relational growth. You can't rush wise decision-making. People are impatient. You can't make yourself grow today. You can get on the road of growth. But then there is the daily-ness of walking it out, one step at a time. And they are filled with ingratitude.

People are filled with ingratitude

Exodus 32:1

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

People have incredibly short memories. As we read in Romans 1 one of the marks of a decadent society is that no one pauses to say thank you to God or to people who have helped them along the way. We're too busy moving on to the next success, the next achievement, the next project to send a little note of appreciation to thank a friend or relative, or a member of the church for an act of kindness. We forget to make calls of appreciation to recognize someone for what they've done. We forget to say thank you to our spouses, our husband or wife's act of kindness to us. We forget to say thank you to friends for encouragement. Most of all, we forget to say thank you to God.

You are in a very dangerous spiritual state if you don't find yourself on a daily basis pausing to say thank you to God for the blessings in your life. Because it means that you've moved from a relationship in which what you have from God has been given to you by grace, to a relationship of entitlement where you begin to believe that you deserve all the good things in your life.

I read a quote about ingratitude in which someone said:

An ungrateful man is like a hog under a tree eating acorns but never looking up to see where they came from.

One of the terrible things about being an atheist is that when you are overwhelmed of feelings with gratitude because your baby who was supposed to die suddenly and for no explanation gets better, or because you get to walk along a beach with a friend or a loved one and look out over the water as the sun rises or set, the terrible thing about being an atheist is that when you are overwhelmed with feelings of gratitude, you have no one to say thank you to.

Impatience ("I can't wait for you, God, to take care of my desires.") leads to ingratitude ("I'm not thankful, God, for my present blessings.") which leads to idolatry.

The people are idolatrous

Exodus 32:1

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

Exodus 32 is all about people worshipping the Golden Calf and in doing this they violate the first two commandments of the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:3-6

"You shall have no other gods before me. 4 "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You know, idolatry is by far the most frequently discussed problem in the Bible. Not only does it show up in the first two commandments of the Ten Commandments, but this problem of idolatry that comes up here with the Golden Calf shows up throughout the historical books in the Old Testament in Judges, in Samuel, in Kings. It shows up through the prophets. It shows up in the Psalms.

Idols in the Bible are never just a matter of some object made of metal, wood, or stone. The prophet, Ezekiel, talks about idols of the heart in Ezekiel 14:3:

Ezekiel 14:3

Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?

And in verse 4:

Ezekiel 14:4

Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: When any of the Israelites set up idols in their hearts and put a wicked stumbling block before their faces and then go to a prophet, I the Lord will answer them myself in keeping with their great idolatry.

And in verse 5:

Ezekiel 14:5

I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.

What do we mean by idols of the heart? Let me use a really common situation which contemporary therapy would call "co-dependency," but is more biblically labeled "co-idolatry."

Co-dependency = Co-idolatry

Co-idolatry is when you have is when you have two people whose idol patterns reinforce and strengthen each other. You see this all the time in marriage. So, take the classic situation of an alcoholic husband, who is a drug abuser. Maybe he is also having affairs and his wife who keeps bailing this guy out, rescuing him, accommodating husband's behavior. What do we have going on in the husband's life? We have a whole collection of idols. The husband has an idol of pleasure in his life. He just can't say no to pleasure. And he has an idol of escape where he constantly runs from pain and frustration. And he also has an idol of being the self-righteous judge and condemns his wife's clinging and nagging. And then he has the idol of people-pleasing, gaining acceptance through being validated by other women and friends in a bar.

And what about the wife's idols? Maybe she has an inordinate desire for her husband's love. She believes that this marriage is crucial for her survival. Maybe she overvalues her respectability of being married and not being left with kids. Or maybe she overvalues people's opinions of her. She doesn't want to live with the shame of single parenting. Or she loves playing the judge of her husband.

The fact is that often when we see a significant problem in someone's life or see a significant problem in a marriage, you are probably looking at an individual, or a married couple who is infested by idols. Idolatry is the number one problem for people who are in rebellion against God in the Bible. There is no problem that

fallen human beings have that is more common than idolatry. We are idol factories. We are constantly producing more idols in our lives.

Today in our contemporary therapeutic culture we don't call things idols. And even many Christian counselors and pastors and well-meaning friends will often avoid the term "idols." Today in our therapeutic culture where we've substituted psychology for God's Word we speak about needs. We have a need for acceptance, a need for love, a need for security, a need for validation, a need for significance. You can search the Bible from beginning to end and you will never find the word "need" used in its contemporary psychological therapeutic fashion. The Bible never pictures human beings as walking around with all of these needs like an empty ice cube tray with a dozen little holes that need to be filled.

Instead, in the New Testament the Bible uses the word "desires," not needs. "Desires." That's the New Testament word for idols. We see this word "desires" frequently in the Bible:

Galatians 5:16

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Ephesians 2:3

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Ephesians 4:22

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;

1 Peter 2:11

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

The bottom line, friend, is that you are not a walking basket of needs who gets tripped up because you are attempting to meet your legitimate needs perhaps in a slightly illegitimate way. Who could fault you when your spouse is not meeting your needs; or your friends or your church is not meeting your needs; who could fault you for going out and trying to meet those huge needs that mom or dad never met? If you are a person with all these needs that must be met, well, it's understandable if you go out and try to meet those needs. That's not who you are.

The Bible says instead that you and I are people with sinful desires or a sinful craving. There is a driving power in our lives that the Bible says comes out of our flesh, out of our sinful nature, urging us on. It is this power of sinful desire (not

needs), lust, craving, a desire to possess and dominate and satisfy ourselves that is at work, rooted in our love of ourselves, that turns us away from loving others and loving God. You cannot be called to repentance for needs. That's why we find them so difficult to overcome. Who can repent of your need for acceptance, or your need for security? There is no repentance in that kind of worldview.

But you can repent of sinful desires and sinful lusts – the desire to be the center of attention, the desire for more than what God is giving you, the desire for sex with someone who is not your spouse, the desire for praise or property or position. And all of this leads to immorality. We commit spiritual adultery. Our hearts turn from God and that leads to physical adultery. The line of descent!

Now, how do you lead people who are characterized by these things – impatience, ingratitude, idolatry, immorality? These folks are any pastor's nightmare. Yet these four things are a picture of the church. This is a picture of the raw material that every pastor and Christian leader is called to work with. If you want to be a shepherd, then welcome to the sheep. If you want to lead, the Bible says, "Let me introduce you to your followers."

Well, how do you lead when the folks you're trying to lead are impatient and ungrateful, who have the attitude of "What have you done for me lately?" and they are filled with idols and they are immoral?

We meet Aaron, the ineffective leader.

Aaron is an ineffective leader

He is weak in relationship to people and their demands.

Aaron is weak in relationship to people and their demands

Exodus 32:2-4

Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." 3 So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

When Aaron is confronted about it, here is what he says in verses 22-24:

Exodus 32:22-24

"Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. 23 They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't

know what has happened to him.’ 24 So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

Aaron capitulates to the demands of the people. Ineffective leaders are leaders with no backbone who constantly capitulate to the pressure of those they are trying to lead. We see this all the time with ineffective parents, don't we? Mom or dad, who is just held hostage by their 3-year old little dictator, and mom and dad constantly capitulate to the whining and temper tantrums and threats of a 3-year old who is going to hold their breath, or their teenagers who nag, pout or threaten.

We see this ineffectiveness in life with people who just seem to have no boundaries. They can't say no to the absurd demands of others. A friend demands that you drive them across town and wait for 4-5 hours while their car is being worked on because they don't want to pay the money to take a cab, even though they could afford it. Or they don't want to take the time to take a bus. You feel like you are being a doormat on which your child, your spouse, or your friend, or your boss constantly wipes their feet. The Bible has a phrase for that. It is called:

The fear of man

Here is what it says in Proverbs 29:25:

Proverbs 29:25

To fear anyone will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.

The fear of man, today we would call it “people pleasing.”

The fear of man = People-pleasing

Before Aaron made an idol out of the Golden Calf, he made an idol of the people and their demands. The people were ruling Aaron. And often it is people who rule us, not God. People! People tell you what to think, what to feel, what joke to laugh at, how to act, what to wear.

Peer pressure is another way to talk about the idol of the fear of man. It is the inability to say no to demands. It means that you've made an idol out of the person you can't say no to. Your unwillingness to bear witness to Christ at work or you're your family means you've made an idol out of the people's opinions that you're hiding Christ from.

Even when we get upset with what we're like, the way we speak, the way we look, what we have is often rooted in the idolatry of other people. We're upset

with the way we look in other people's eyes. Their opinions rule us. Aaron is weak in his relationship to people and their demands.

And Aaron is an ineffective leader because he is weak in relationship to God and his holiness.

Aaron is weak in relationship to God and his holiness

Exodus 32:3-5

So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." 5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord."

Aaron thought that he could mix and match biblical faith – faith in the Lord with pagan idolatry. He wasn't willing to follow God exclusively. Mix and match religion. You take a huge heaping of a contemporary, therapeutic set of concepts and we'll mix them with our own opinions and the opinions of friends. And then we'll label that some Christian gravy. The only way to escape this mess is for God to get bigger in our eyes than people are. And the way for God to get bigger in our eyes is for this book to get bigger in your heart and mind than the opinions of your spouse, or the opinion of your parents, or the opinions of your friends, or your own view of things.

God will get bigger in your heart when this book gets bigger in your heart. I would challenge you to carry around a little pocket Bible and read it frequently when you have break time at work or at school, or on the bus. Get your self a set of Bible CDs and listen to them in the car. Start carrying little Bible verses on index cards that you can memorize and deal with key issues in your life.

And Aaron is weak in relationship to himself and his own sin.

Aaron is weak in relationship to himself and his own sin

Exodus 32:21-24

He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" 22 "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. 23 They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' 24 So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

When he is confronted, he doesn't come clean. He doesn't say, "I did it." This capacity for rationalization is amazing. "Moses, it's not my fault. It is the people's fault." He shifts blame.

In fact, verse 24 is really funny, in a perverse way.

Exodus 32:24

So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

"Moses, I threw the gold into the fire and it just happened. This calf just came out. It just happened. I don't know how it happened."

"You don't know how, Aaron? Let's roll back the tape. You worked in fashioning these golden calves for a week. You smelted the metal. You carved the wood. You fashioned the shape of the calf. This making of the Golden Calf was a product of 1000 individual steps. It just happened? You had to make so many individual choices along the way for this calf to appear. It just happened?"

This week I was confronted by three situations of adultery – one involving a fellow pastor in another state, the second involving the spouse of a long-time friend, and third a couple in this church. And in every case when these folks were confronted by their adultery, they did what Aaron did. They went through this rationalizing process: "Well, you need to understand the pressure I was under." "You need to understand the failure of my spouse." "You need to understand that it was not entirely my fault." "I never planned it, it just happened."

So we roll back the tape and we can find 313 choices. You've been pounding and forming your soul, shaping your heart, for months and years forming your desires and indulging your lusts, filled with ingratitude and idolatry.

You know, brothers and sisters, I've been pastoring this church for 21 years. I've been in Christian leadership for three decades. I can count on one hand the number of people who when caught in a sin made no excuses for themselves. "I did it! No one made me do it. I did it. I did it because I've been pounding certain desires into my heart through hundreds of choices. I did it because I could. I did it because I wanted to. I did it because it came out of me. The desire wasn't external to me. It was internal."

One of my friends, who I greatly admire, found herself pregnant out of wedlock. Her boyfriend waffled back and forth regarding marriage – marriage, no marriage, marriage. Finally, he bailed. I talked with my friend and rather than being filled with recriminations and self-pity, she simply said, "You know, Rich, I have no one to blame other than myself. I didn't have to sleep with him. I didn't have to hook up with this guy. But I was playing fast and loose with God, coming

to church playing the Christian game, but also doing my own thing. And I got caught. I don't blame him." How unbelievably refreshing! How absolutely unique!

Moses is an effective leader

Moses is an effective leader

What makes Moses an effective leader? First of all, effective leaders serve a great cause.

He served a great cause

Exodus 32:9-10

"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. 10 Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

Moses is offered by God the prospect of being the foundation of an entirely new nation. Get rid of the people of Israel, Moses, and I will start all over with you. And all of my plans to redeem this world will be funneled through you. And Moses said, "No thanks, God. I don't deserve this."

I don't know if you are familiar with the great business writer, Jim Collins, but he wrote a fantastic book on leadership a few years ago called *Good to Great* in which he describes what he calls "Level 5 Leadership" – the great leader, the one at the very top of the pyramid. Here is his definition of the "Level 5 Leader":

Level 5 leaders are incredibly ambitious, but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution and not for themselves.

In other words, great leaders are absorbed not with themselves, or their own perks. They are caught up in a cause greater than themselves. You see in so many leaders something very different – leaders are consumed with their own popularity, and their own press clippings.

Lee Iacocca, for example, saved Chrysler from the brink of catastrophe. It is one of the great turn-around stories in American business history. But then his attention turned away from serving the company that he was leading to serving himself and his own press clippings. He began appearing on the *Today Show* and *Larry King Live*. He starred in a bunch of commercials. He wrote a book called *Iacocca*. His personal stock soared, but the company went into the tank.

You see this with Christian leaders. The church and its well-being get lost in the glorification of the leader and the expansion of his or her ego.

Moses was someone who subordinated his interests to the good of the people. If you want to be a great leader, the question to ask is there something bigger than me, bigger than my salary, bigger than my recognition that I'm giving myself to?

And Moses prayed great prayers.

He prayed great prayers

Exodus 32:11-14

But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. 13 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' " 14 Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

You know, great leaders, at least great Christian leaders are great prayer-ers. Leaders' strength, vision and effectiveness doesn't come from them, it comes from God. You can't become a great prayer-er unless you believe one simple thing, that prayer makes a difference. If you approach life and you say, "I could exhaust myself, I could run myself ragged, I could continue to be stressed and depressed and overwhelmed, I could strategize and plan, fret and brew. But another approach to my day or to my life is that I could pray because prayer makes a difference." Do you believe that?

It just doesn't make a difference emotionally. That's the popular approach to prayer in the 21st century. Prayer is psychologically beneficial. It helps to reduce your stress. It is good to pray because it will lower your blood pressure. It may boost your immune system. Some people meditate. Some people do yoga. Some people have a few glasses of wine in the evening. You Christians, you pray. Hey, whatever works for you and floats your boat. That's great!

Prayer may have all of these physical and emotional benefits. Prayer is more than that. Prayer actually changes things external to our minds. We are speaking to a real God who actually answers prayer. When you say that to someone in Columbus, you say, "I believe in a God who when I pray actually responds and answers prayer," the answer you might get back is "Well, any response you get is just a coincidence. The fact that a rooster crows doesn't mean he makes the sun come up. Your prayers have no effect on the world outside of you. All you so-called answers to prayer are just coincidences."

I love the old English Bishop's response to this charge of mere coincidence. He said:

When I pray, great coincidences happen. And when I don't, they don't.

That's my experience. That is the experience of every one of God's children who prays. When we pray we see these extraordinary coincidences. "Amazing! I just prayed about that!" And when we don't pray, we don't see these coincidences.

The fact is, friend, God gives us the dignity of being fellow workers with him in this world. Sovereign God, who could do everything apart from us, chooses to collaborate with us in the working out of his plans through our prayers. This is awesome! To think that all-knowing, all-wise God, who knows our needs before we pray, desires to discuss them with him so we can work together towards the solution. God wants to use us in all of our fallenness, in our brokenness, to bring his kingdom into the world. God does not want to work around you. He doesn't want to work in spite of you, or apart from you. He wants to work through you and through me – for justice in this world, for peace, for reconciled marriages, and salvations and healings.

And the main way that God works through you and me is in prayer. Great leaders are great pray-ers.

And great leaders have great courage.

He has great courage.

Moses confronts the people in verses 19-20:

Exodus 32:19-20

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. 20 And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

And he confronts his older brother, Aaron, in verse 21:

Exodus 32:21

He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?"

Great leaders stand up to the pressure. They can take the heat in the kitchen. They are absorbed with God so that people in proportion have shrunk down to

their proper size. Great leaders are not people pleasers. They have backbone. Moses and Aaron faced the same situation, people who were immoral, ungrateful, impatient, and who were idolatrous. But Moses was caught up with a great God. He was able to stand up and call the people and call his brother to accountability before that great God.

At some point, every leader is going to be presented with the question: who is going to run the show? Mom, is it going to be your 5-year old who runs the show or you? Who is going to call the shots in your home? Dad, is it going to be your teenager, or you? Whose will is going to win in your family, in your dating relationship, in your business? Whose will is going to win, God's will or the will of people?

Now you need to stand in the presence of our great God long enough to be fortified to stand up to whoever intimidates you. You need to put God's great Word in you to strengthen your backbone with whoever you regularly bow down to. At some point every leader has to face people down.

I had to deal with this a few decades ago. We had just as a church purchased a small church building south of Morse Road right off of Cleveland Avenue. And when we purchased the church building, we also purchased a few of the people who attended at that old church building. They just stayed with the building.

One day I was at church and one of the members that we purchased along with the building came in. He said, "I was just in the sanctuary. Where is the pulpit?"

I wasn't raised in church and so I wasn't exactly sure what he was talking about. I said, "Let's go in and take a look at the sanctuary and you can tell me about what you're concerned about."

We walked into the sanctuary and he said, "Look up there. Young man, where is the pulpit?"

I tried to be gracious and I said, "Oh well, don't worry, we haven't gotten rid of it. We just put it in the back storage area. It is still there."

He said, "Young man, I want that pulpit out next week."

So I tried to be gracious again. I said, "Well, I'm small and the pulpit is really large. That's why I decided to use a small podium."

And that's when he said those fateful words, "Young man, you're going to find out who pays the bills around here soon enough! I want that pulpit out in front next week!"

So I looked him in the eye and I said to him, “That will never happen so long as I’m pastor. The pulpit is staying in the back room!”

Effective leaders stand up to people. They hold folks accountable for their sin. They hold people accountable for results. They have backbone because they are consumed by the desire to please an audience of one, the living God. Let’s pray.

What Makes an Effective Leader?

Rich Nathan

August 16-17, 2008

The Making of a Leader: Leadership Lessons from the Life of Moses

Exodus 32

1. The People: The Line of Descent (Exodus 32:1-6; Romans 1:21-22)

- a. The people are impatient
- b. The people are filled with ingratitude
- c. The people are idolatrous
- d. The people are immoral

2. Aaron: The Ineffective Leader (Exodus 32:2-5; 22-24)

- a. Weak in relationship to people and their demands
- b. Weak in relationship to God and his holiness
- c. Weak in relationship to himself and his own sin

3. Moses: The Effective Leader

- a. He serves a great cause (Exodus 32:10)
- b. He prays great prayers (Exodus 32:11-14)
- c. He has great courage (Exodus 32:19-21)
- d. He is a great lover (Exodus 32:30-32)