

Bible-Centered Leadership

By Dr. Paul G. Leavenworth

J. Robert Clinton in his book, *Having a Ministry that Lasts: Becoming a Bible-Centered Leader* bases his definition of a Bible-centered leader on the following primary Bible passages (Clinton paraphrases):

1. **A Lasting Source** (Isaiah 40: 8) – “The grass withers, the flower fades; but the Word of our God will stand forever.”
2. **The Guarantee About That Source** (II Timothy 3: 16-17) – “Every Scripture inspired of God is profitable for teaching, for setting things right, for confronting, for inspiring righteous living, in order that God’s leader be thoroughly equipped to lead God’s people.”
3. **The Proper Response to the Guarantee** (II Timothy 2: 15) – “Make every effort to be pleasing to God, a Bible-Centered leader who is completely confident in using God’s word with impact in lives.”

From these passages Clinton defines Bible-centered leadership as,

“a leader whose leadership is informed by the Bible, who has been personally shaped by Biblical values, has grasped the intent of Scriptural books [and passages] and their content in such a way as to apply them to current situations and who uses the Bible in ministry so as to impact followers.” (p. 26, 30)

There are four components to this definition. Let’s examine each of these a little more thoroughly. A Bible-centered leader is a disciple:

1. “Whose leadership is informed by the Bible.” Knowing the Bible is important, but just knowing the information is not enough. The Bible is a source of truth, but the truth is intended to set us free from our selfishness.

So leadership that is “informed by the Bible” involves knowing the information in the Bible, but it does not stop there. It involves a “transformed” life that demonstrates the power of the words by manifesting character qualities like “justice, mercy, and faithfulness.”

2. “Who has been shaped personally by Biblical leadership values.” With a general understanding of the Bible and “transformational” growth as a disciple/leader, the Bible-centered leader begins to gain insight into God’s kingdom design for life and leadership. This process takes place in the context of real life and real leadership challenges.

We may not like the process very much, but if we learn to cooperate with God we can be transformed through our trials and not destroyed by them. This process will also bring to light Biblical values that will inform our understanding and decision-making processes as leaders. This leads us to our next component of Bible-centered leadership.

3. “Who has grasped the intent of Scriptural books [and passages] and their content in such a way as to apply them to current situations.” From a transformed life and awareness of our Biblical values, we will become more sensitive to the “contextualization” of Biblical truth to leadership application. This process involves developing a framework, more than a system or formula. Remember that the “righteous live by faith” (Hebrews 10: 38). Leadership is a faith journey (based on trust).

Ultimately, we need to center our lives and leadership on the person of God and learn to TRUST him to be faithful to his nature, which is sovereign, loving, and faithful. He is faithful to keep his promises “in his time and his way.” We need to learn how to hear his voice (primarily through his Word) and obey it by submitting to him if we are to become effective Bible-centered leaders.

Over time, we will give up our formulas for the real adventure of trusting God in faithful reliance upon his word and spirit to empower us for life and leadership. This leads us to our last component of Bible-centered leadership.

4. “Who uses the Bible in ministry so as to impact followers.” As we have already seen, the Bible has its own “impacting” power. The Bible claims that it is the source of “true Truth” (Francis Schaeffer), and it claims that this truth can “set us free” from sin and, at least in part, its consequences. Paul states that:

“Thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” Romans 6: 17-18, NIV

Wow! Do you see the significance of this claim? Because of obedience to the truth, people can be set free from the “slavery of sin” to experience a new “slavery to righteousness.” Paul is using “redemption” language here. Redemption (*apolutrosis*) refers to a “loosing away” from one authority structure to another. It literally means to buy a person out of slavery.

There is also a personal impacting power that comes from a life that is being transformed by the truth. As we grow in God’s grace we learn to be “controlled” by his spirit (Ephesians 5: 18). The control of the spirit leads to the manifestation of the “fruit of the spirit” (Galatians 5: 22-23).

In other words, we no longer have to be defined by our selfishness (and its many dysfunctional qualities). We have been “bought out” of the slave market of sin and given a new redemptive nature. We can now become defined by the power of God through his word and spirit!

This is really GOOD NEWS! We can be free from our selfishness, from having to always get our own way (which I have learned does not work out so well), from manipulating others, from performance-oriented insecurities, from fear of failure and rejection... and on and on. We can be free from all this and have the privilege (and honor) of impacting others in kind.