

“THE MARKS OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP.”

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Text for the Sermon: Acts 1:1-14

Introduction:

Most of you know the drill.

“Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. Welcome aboard Allegiant Flight 226 bound for San Diego. Our captain has informed us that our flying time to San Diego today will be approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes at an altitude of 33,000 feet.

We want to review with you at this time some of the safety features of our MD-83 aircraft. You can follow along with the laminated card in the seat pocket in front of you. During landing and take off we ask that you keep your seat back in the full and upright position and that your tray table be stowed and locked. There are six exits, two at the front of the aircraft, two over each of the wings and one at the rear of the aircraft. In case of emergency floor lighting will direct you to the exit nearest you.

In the unlikely event of cabin depressurization, an oxygen mask will automatically appear in front of you. To start the flow of oxygen, pull the mask towards you. Place it firmly over your nose and mouth, secure the elastic band behind your head, and breathe normally. Although the bag does not inflate, oxygen is flowing to the mask. If you are travelling with a child or someone who requires assistance, secure your mask first, and then assist the other person.”

Today we start a new leadership year together and I hear several important lessons about leadership in this pre-flight emergency instruction. The *first* lesson is that people tend to ignore leaders and not pay attention to their instructions until there's a crisis.

Second, when we are traveling together in community it's important for all those who are in any kind of leadership role to be well connected to the source of life before they try to assist others in getting connected. I understand that on an airplane you have less than a minute before your mind starts to get fuzzy and confused. That's why they want parents to put on their masks first, so they can be better able to help their children.

Getting connected and staying connected is very important. Leaders have to take care of themselves, of their own soul so they can help others.

To guide us in this, turn with me to the laminated card called Acts 1 where we find several excellent marks of spiritual leaders, marks that will enable them to lead us toward the goal that God has set before us.

I want to talk about leadership this morning at all levels, and especially about the kind of leadership we will need if we are going to be a transforming community from generation to generation for the Glory of God.

While what I have to say applies specifically to pastors, elders and deacons, it also applies to teachers, ministry volunteers, moms and dads, employers, leaders in any capacity.

Since we are already at 33,000 feet, I am going to fly over this text and land on several verses to help us get a picture of spiritual leadership in our churches, homes and communities.

First, a spiritual leader is a student of Christ Jesus (Acts 1:1).

Acts 1:1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.

Luke wrote two volumes in the NT: Luke and Acts. Luke was a student of all that Jesus began to do and teach. Here is how he starts out volume one.

Luke 1:1, 3-4 (ESV) Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us ... [3] it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, [4] that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Be a student of Jesus like Luke, a question asker, an observer, an inquirer, a learner. Make Jesus your life study; make Jesus the main subject of your life. Learn, grow, dig deeper, hang around those who know Him and have been following Him. Write, journal, reflect, meditate, pray, act, serve, be involved, and be intentional.

A leader does all these things and leads others in doing the same.

Second, a spiritual leader is a lover of God (Acts 1:1). That's what the name Theophilus means, literally "God lover" or "friend of God." What a name? Oh that that would be said of all of us and of this church, that we are lovers of God.

A leader is a lover, first of God and then of God's people. A leader cultivates a love for God and His people. A leader embodies the two great commands, "to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Make God your first love, be a Theophilus, a lover of God.

Third, a spiritual leader is chosen by God and is profoundly aware of it (Acts 1:2, 24).

Acts 1:2 ... the apostles whom he had chosen.

Acts 1:24 Lord ... show which one of these two you have chosen.

To be a godly leader there must be a sense of God-appointedness and not self-appointedness. The apostles were chosen. They didn't make application, they didn't sign up. They didn't

answer a classified. There were no posters declaring, “Wanted, a few good men.” They were minding their own business, absorbed in their own lives, caught up in the need to sustain themselves and their families.

God sovereignly, radically interrupted their worlds and turned them upside down. Here we encounter again the sovereignty of God who acts according to the pleasure of His own counsel and will.

And here we encounter Jesus who establishes and builds His church in His time and place. Jesus is the one who chooses and calls His disciples. As He says in John 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit” (ESV).

A spiritual leader is humbled that it’s God who decides and chooses and ordains, not us. A leader gets it that it really is all about God.

Spiritual leadership is not a profession, it’s a divine appointment with a divine purpose planned long beforehand.

Fourth, a spiritual leader is a waiter.

Acts 1:4 he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.

Jesus tells the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit. This is so important that Jesus says don’t even dare to leave home without it. Don’t set one foot outside of Jerusalem until you have received from God what you will need to do God’s work. It’s His work that we are called to be a part of.

Isaiah 40:31 They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

This magnifies again a vision of the sovereign greatness of God and the humble dependence of us who are creatures, servants, followers, clay vessels and not the potter.

Fifth, a spiritual leader walks by faith and not by sight (Acts 1:9-11).

Acts 1:9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

This is an important connection for leaders. Jesus is taken from us so that we will have to walk by faith and not by sight, by what is unseen, not by what is seen. How we live and work and lead will be by faith and not by sight.

Now when we say that we walk by faith, that does not mean that there are no visible evidences. The apostles had them. Jesus “presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

To walk by faith means that based on the past visible acts of God and based on the testimony of many eyewitnesses, we completely trust Him now to do all that He promised.

1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

I have seen Jesus. I have seen the clear evidence of His presence: in my own life, in His salvation. In His Word and in His Church, in your lives, in incredible acts of grace and kindness and forgiveness. I was talking to Pete and Betty Weg Friday and they told me about how much of a blessing this church has been to them the past few weeks. They have seen Jesus in you.

Sixth, a spiritual leader is a pray-er (Acts 1:14) and a reader of Scripture (Acts 1:20; 2:16).

Acts 1:14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.

Acts 2:16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel

All spiritual leadership is rooted in helplessness, in a real sense of desperation that says I can't do this, I need help. Prayer says that if anything good is going to happen here, it will be God who does it. Prayer is the mark of a submitted, surrendered person.

Leaders lead best, at church or home or work, who humble themselves in prayer – constant, daily prayer. The best leaders appeal to a higher authority. Prayer sends us upward into the power of God. The best leaders don't just stand tall, they bend low. They were devoted to prayer.

We read in both chapter one and chapter two how Peter when he speaks, he speaks from Scripture. The decisions and plans they make are motivated by God's Word.

At Pentecost there were accusations and criticisms. There were conclusions being drawn about what was going on. Some were saying they were drunk. There have always been attacks, accusations, false assumptions and conclusions, misguided perspectives.

We need leaders and teachers who know the Scripture, who can articulate the truth, who are not afraid of theology, who know God and His Word, who understand God's ways as revealed from Genesis to Revelation. Leaders who love and embrace the truth and are truth-seekers. Leaders who pray Psalm 119:18, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."

But what's in here doesn't just come to us automatically. Pray that He would give us a hunger and a thirst, that He would open our eyes to the depth and power and significance of the Word of God.

A spiritual leader prays over and over again for spiritual illumination and insight. If he doesn't do this, his faith will grow weak and his love will be lacking and the God-glorifying purposes of his leadership will diminish.

In order for leaders to keep their minds clear they will have to breathe the pure air of prayer and Scripture. That means they will have to take time and push out the world and its demands to breathe God.

Let me give a quick, practical example on the home front. Mothers are leaders. They plan, organize, make decisions, execute, implement, and on and on. And the nurturing, giving nature of mothers means that they often don't take care of themselves. It's like they are trying to put on their child's oxygen mask without taking the time to put on their own. This is a recipe for burnout, exhaustion, frustration, depression. Moms must take time to read, pray, sit down, go for a walk, lock themselves in their room, find some time and place to take care of the soul and be in fellowship with God so that they can lead those who look up to them. And good dads will help this happen.

Seventh, a spiritual leader is Spirit-filled (Acts 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-4).

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,

When God calls us to Himself, what He calls us to do is impossible without God. As I said earlier, this is so important that Jesus says don't even dare to leave home without it. Don't set foot outside of Jerusalem until you have received from God what you will need to do God's work.

Jesus is saying, "What I am calling you to do, you can't do in your own strength and wisdom. You can't do it alone, you can't do it with any of the human resources you have or can acquire. None of that is sufficient or adequate. You need something that you do not have and can't get apart from me giving it to you."

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

This means that what we do, we will do in His strength and power and by His grace. This means that He gets the glory and credit and we get the joy.

Conclusion and Application:

This is what it means for leaders to be connected to the source of life and ministry. The analogy of the oxygen mask is helpful here. When do you need an oxygen mask? When you are at high altitude. If we stay in low level flight we don't need the oxygen masks. There is a sense in which we can pull off leading and living life with our own strength and wisdom, but it is a pretty low level of living.

If we want to soar, if we want to get closer to the sun, to the glory we will have to put on the oxygen mask. If we want to live closer to the brink of eternity, we will have to drink more deeply from the things of God. We will have to connect to God and His resources and live life completely submitted to and dependent on Him. We will need leaders who put on the mask first and then help the rest of us with ours.

To the Saints, I say, remember your leaders.

They are a gift from Christ to His church which is very precious in His sight. They are an expression of His love, His care, part of His leading and feeding. They are God's faithful provision for the fulfilling of His vision for us.

Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. This honors God and brings blessings and unity to our fellowship.

Pray for your leaders. Pray for the joy of our leaders. Joyless leaders are no advantage to you. Pray that they will be overwhelmed with the knowledge of God's love for them. Pray for the Spirit to fan into flames the gifts that are in them for the sake of Christ and His church.

To the Leaders, remember the saints. Remember your high calling and whom you serve and why.

Behold the flock of God. His sheep have been gathered by the blood of God's Son.

And the Great Shepherd of the sheep has chosen you and called you by God's Spirit to serve. Give it the same energy, zeal, and passion that Christ does.

Keep watch over yourselves and do not neglect your souls. Spend time daily with Jesus, the one who loves you, has called you and purchased you with His own blood.

Be Christ-centered. Do all you do in the full awareness of Christ. Be biblically grounded. Guard the good deposit. Be zealous for the truth, full of the Holy Spirit.

Remember we are servants who serve the saints for the sake of the Savior who died for them and lead them to the Savior.

Acts 20:32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.