

Tools for Wise Leadership

A programme of TWR-Africa, produced by TWR-Zimbabwe, presented by Rev Dr Roy Musasiwa

Series 12: Self-Leadership

Talk 05: The Leader's Sense of Identity

Welcome to the programme **Tools for Wise Leadership** as we focus our attention on the important issue of self-leadership. We have been emphasizing that in order to lead others well you have to lead yourself well first. The heart, the head and the hands must work together to effect true Christian leadership. On heart issues we noted that “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” These heart qualities were typified by Jesus Christ, the greatest example of leadership that the world has known. Then Paul was able to say, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

Today I would like to focus on having a firm understanding of who you are. It is doubtful that you can be said to have self-leadership without this unshakable conviction of your identity. Here is a disturbing phenomenon. Many people change their identities and therefore their behaviours to suit the environment they are in at a particular time. This is true in all parts of the world, but this phenomenon particularly disturbs me when I think of Africa. There is a claim that at least 80% of Christians in Sub-Sahara Africa are church-going Christians. Unfortunately many Christians shift from praise and worship on Sunday to venerating ancestral spirits during the week. They go where the wind is blowing. This is an aspect of failure to appreciate who one is. We let the world define us instead of living by our understanding of how God has defined us.

This does not only apply to religious affiliation. It also applies to the way we conduct ourselves in different situations, ways which often conflict with our identity as children of God. One Christian uses dirty language when he is in the company of those who do in order to be accepted by that company. Another Christian adopts aspects of their political party belonging, or their racial or tribal belonging in a way that denies or undermines their Christian ethical standards.

Such a denial of our own true identity can happen to the best of us if we do not exercise enough self-leadership. It happened to Peter more than once. Before Jesus was crucified Peter denied him three times out of fear. The same fear caused Peter to act inconsistently. In Gal 2:11-13 Paul says,

“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, Peter used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group... When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?’”

You see difficult situations can make some Christians continually alter their positions if such Christians do not exercise enough self-leadership. A story is told of two pastors on a long journey. As they walked they got lost and had no idea where they were. No village was in sight, so they had no one to ask the way. As they started really starving they eventually saw a Mosque at a distance. As they headed towards it one of the pastors suggested a change of names so that the Moslems in the Mosque would be more inclined to feed them. He gave himself the name Mohammed. The second pastor refused to alter his identity on account of hunger and said he would remain as Peter. When they got to the Mosque “Mohammed” started greeting and acting like a Moslem. When the two requested for food the leader of the Mosque called his fellow worshippers and said, “Please take Pastor Peter and give him as much food as he needs. But as for Mohammed our fellow Muslim

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he has to join in the rest of our 40 days of Ramadan fasting, so you cannot give him any food.” The moral of the story is never change your identity to suit the situation. Stand firm and be the person God created you to be.

Standing firm and being the person God wants you to be is exactly what Jesus demonstrated. At one time he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They answered, “Some say you are John the Baptist. Others say you are Elijah, and still others say you are Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Then Jesus asked them, “What about you. Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered, “You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because no person taught you that. My Father in heaven showed you who I am.”

So according to Jesus, self-understanding is very important for the Christian leader. That self-understanding is partly expressed as **Self-image**. Self-image talks of how you see yourself, your qualities, faults, habits, attitudes. It answers the question: What am I? Unfortunately so many people have a negative view of themselves which makes them reject who they really are and want to live on another person’s identity because they see that identity as being more positive than their own. But that is also a recipe for ineffectiveness as a leader.

What is the root of a negative self-image? Once the root is dealt with, the rest of the person will start to change. What we know from personality studies is that the way other people treated since we were born (or even before birth) has a huge impact on self-perception later on in life. So ask yourself how you were influenced by any of the following:

- Did your mother raise you or were you raised by other people, not your real mother? Maybe the little child in you felt abandoned when your parents died. One Christian leader once testified that when her parents died the little child in her saw this as abandonment by parents who had regarded her as so ugly she was not worth being raised up by them. Into adulthood this person continued feeling unworthy until she discovered and dealt with the bitter root of rejection.
- Were your parents together during your upbringing or was there separation or divorce? Again, divorce or separation could have been the bitter root of a negative self-image. You might not have experienced what other children experience in their upbringing.
- How did your parents and siblings speak to you? Were you shouted at? Called names? Scolded? These childhood experiences stick in the subconscious. You subconsciously believed the negative names that you were called. Even as an adult the subconscious belief arising from the name-calling is still there. Even your real name, if it carries negative connotations, is still subconsciously affecting your self-image.
- How were you treated at school by teachers? Or by other students? This treatment, too, could have left a damaging effect on your sub-conscious which is still with you today.

A negative self-concept weakens our confidence in ourselves and in our work, and this in turn weakens people’s confidence in our ability to help others. You see there is a rule of life that says that you cannot give what you do not have. You cannot love others if you have not received love. The people who are always conflicting with others, and who are always criticizing and not appreciating others probably grew up with a sense of rejection. A negative self-perception is bound to affect the way you lead others. It is therefore critical that you go to the root of that negative self-perception and start seeing and accepting yourself in the way God created you.

Now that you know these things, blessed are you if you put them into practice. Let’s make a date for the next instalment of **tools of wise leadership**.

Discussion Questions for: Series 12 - Talk 05 - The Leader's Sense of Identity

For this series of *Self-Leadership* you can use the following study questions to guide you in deepening the impact of this series:

Study Question 1: for Personal reflection

What does this episode mean to you personally as a leader?

Study Question 2: for Group Discussion

What does this topic mean you as a group of leaders?

Study Question 3: for applying the topic

What can you apply from this topic in your role as a leader?

Summary:

The focus is on conviction, identity and self-image which contribute to a confident leader.

Discussion Questions:

Study Question 1: Personal reflection

Do I display a positive self-image? Or do I live a life of double standards?

Study Question 2: Group Discussion

Are you firm in your conviction and have a leadership style that displays determination?

Study Question 3: Applying the topic

What is the root of a negative self-image? How can I overcome it?

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