

We Need Leaders Who Walk with a Limp

Several years ago, I met a traveling evangelist whose popularity was on the rise. People packed auditoriums to hear this best-selling author preach her signature sermons. But popularity doesn't always guarantee Christian character. This celebrity preacher had a serious pride problem.

Once, when a church invited this person to speak in a conference, the pastor sent the church's van to pick up the speaker at the airport. But when the van arrived, the preacher refused to ride in it—and then she gave the driver a list of high-end luxury cars she was willing to ride in. Never mind that Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem on the back of a rented donkey. This preacher needed a Mercedes!

Most Christians today are more discerning about preachers than we were 20 years ago. We've seen too many scandals involving Christian celebrities who fell from grace after developing inflated egos. But with the rise of social media—and the overnight fame that can result from videos on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok—pride is making a comeback. I want to send a gentle reminder that Jesus still expects ministers to walk in humility.

Jacob was a man who was called by God, but like most of us he had a pride problem. He was controlled by self—by his insecurities, anxieties, resentments and personal agendas. But God took care of that on the banks of the River Jabbok. The angel of the Lord came to Jacob there, and he “wrestled with him until daybreak” (Gen. 32:24).

Jacob saw God face to face in that encounter. But the result of that famous wrestling match was a life-defining injury. With his hip dislocated, Jacob walked with a limp from that

day forward. His disability was a daily reminder that God had prevailed over his carnal nature. Presbyterian theologian Frederick Buechner described the incident in Genesis 32 as the “magnificent defeat of the human soul at the hands of God.”

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I believe many of us need to visit the River Jabbok today. Too many of us walk with a prideful strut. We are smug and cocky. We preach too much about ourselves and not enough about Jesus. We need God to overpower us and subdue our fleshly pride. We need to walk with the limp of total dependency on God.

We also need to examine our pronouns. These past few days I’ve been soaking in 1 Thessalonians. I was struck by the pronouns Paul uses as he exhorts the new Gentile believers to follow Jesus faithfully. Instead of saying “I,” “me” and “my,” Paul repeatedly says “we,” “us” and “our.” He even opens his letter by saying: “Paul and Sylvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians” (1:1).

The apostle Paul, probably the most brilliant theologian who ever lived—the courageous missionary and selfless martyr—included his disciples in the spotlight, and he shared his platform with them. Beware of leaders who live in isolation, and never speak of their need for others!

Paul was not a rock star. He didn’t hog attention or demand applause. He didn’t have an unhealthy addiction to the crowd’s approval. He stood beside Sylvanus and Timothy, linked arms with them and formed a team—because he needed them. Paul said:

- “OUR gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power” (1:5);
- “OUR coming to you was not in vain” (2:1);
- “WE proved to be gentle among you” (2:7);

- “WE were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also OUR own lives” (2:8);
- “WE wanted to come to you” (2:18);
- “But now WE really live, if you stand firm in the Lord” (3:8);
- “For you know what commandments WE gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus” (4:2);
- “WE urge you brethren...” (5:14);
- “Brethren, pray for US!” (5:25).

This is one of the marks of true humility. A genuinely humble leader is willing to work together with other leaders, and even to take a back seat rather than exert authoritarian control.

A Christlike leader doesn't have to be the center of attention. A leader whose ego has been crushed by God doesn't push his own agenda, nor does he crave attention.

Have you allowed the Lord to overpower your ego? Is there too much “me” in your vocabulary? God has an appointment with you at the River Jabbok. Let the Holy Ghost crush the “I.” God is raising up “we” leaders today who understand the importance of humility, authenticity and healthy teamwork.

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