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The Real Deal: Be An Advocate For Others

*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of
all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

Proverbs 31: 8-9

Leadership Is Alive

Leadership speaks. It acts. It's a voice on behalf of the voiceless and a righteous advocate for those who are marginalized within our society.

Ethical leadership has a conscious. It feels. It possesses spirit and soul. It's alive. This brand of leadership laughs, cries, and intervenes. It's a leadership that is fearless. It champions the needs and aspirations of all human beings because they are made in the image and likeness of their Creator.

I've read many books on leadership, and none compare to the Bible. The Book of Proverbs contains timeless tips for effective mentoring in regard to leadership roles, responsibilities, and priorities. In one such verse, an insightful mother instructs her maturing, leadership-bound son in a set of non-negotiable attributes. She tells him two things to avoid as a leader: sexual immorality and substance abuse.

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Wise Advice

Many people would agree it's still wise advice, even though it's close to 3,000 years old. In fact, most leaders today don't fail in their leadership posts due to incompetency and skill deficiency; rather, many plummet because of shortcomings that are tethered to a lack of moral character. This wise mom then goes on to sum up what she thinks will set her son apart from the run-of-the-mill-leader of the day: “Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31: 8-9)

These might not necessarily be what you might consider capstone attributes to embody, but when you understand that leadership is a gift we give to others, in how we love them, it makes sense because love is not just

a feeling. Love is action. Love is being ambitious for the success of others. That's what 1 Corinthians 13 (the "love chapter" of the Bible) is all about.

Stewarding Your Influence

Over the years, I've always been impressed when I meet a young leader whose goal in life is not to just acquire more influence so he can acquire more affluence or a more favored reputation among his or her peers. I love to hang around leaders who get that leadership is not about them, but others! It's so simple, yet incredibly profound. The only thing more excit-

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ing than that is to be part of a constellation of leaders who, together as a group, share this value and thereby create a type of team synergy that is cultivated when they gather together.

I respect leaders who strategize on how to acquire more finances so they can give more money away, or gain more status so they can leverage their influence on behalf of those who have nothing. I celebrate leaders who use their reputation as a force that catalyzes groups of people together to assist the under-resourced and alleviate the suffering of those in the throes of social injustice and inequity.

Life is a blessing and a marvelous privilege, and yet it is filled with regal responsibility. Therefore, we should steward our lives well. Each of us has only one life to live. Life is more than one big party of feeding our fascinations and obsessions. Life has a higher calling and purpose than that.

Wisdom

An old proverb says there is more wisdom at one funeral than at 10 parties. In essence, there is a kind of wisdom that only comes from entering into the reality of the pain and suffering of others. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “the Church is her true self only when she exists for humanity.”

I’ve gained more wisdom and appreciation for life sitting on the floor with a refugee family who has very little education, barely any food, and bleak employment possibilities, than I have sitting around with people postulating about their accomplishments and strategic business plans. Don’t get me wrong, I value strategic planning, but life is more than speculations and plans. It’s more than making money for money’s sake. It’s more than architecting a lifestyle of safety, convenience, and comfort. If we are not careful, we can be so busy making a living that we fail to make a life.

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Suffering

Suffering will change you, but not necessarily for the better. I know many people who are actually more bitter than better. It is what we learn through pain and suffering (ours and others’), and how we allow those gems of learning to be deposited into our hearts and minds that provide the possibility of becoming better as people and experiencing personal transformation and growth. It’s as we enter into the pain and suffering of others that our view of ourselves and of others changes.

Pain and suffering have the possibility of changing us for the good like nothing else.

Righteous Advocacy

This is where the heart of “righteous advocacy” is birthed. This kind of advocacy is not birthed in a classroom, a seminar, or at a party. It takes root as leaders understand and feel firsthand how others have to live in a world of social inequity and injustice. It’s understanding that others’ pain and disillusionment can be eradicated. It’s as leaders allow these unjust experiences of others to disarm their own self-protecting mechanisms that keep them in the ethereal world of self-absorption and excuse-making. It’s dur-

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ing these encounters that perspectives, goals, and motivations are forever changed. Suffering has the possibility of bringing deep systemic change (for the good), but only if we let it.

This kind of leadership is what the world needs: leaders who have more moral character than public charisma, more deep-seated values and passion for others than carefully-crafted sound bytes and personal projections, and more concern for the equity and justice for all than for the quest of peer approval and the drive to be popular in the eyes of the world.

This kind of virtuous leadership is no small undertaking. Although it is humble, at times it’s a force with which to be reckoned. Although it is gracious and principled, it also knows when to clear its throat and speak up for the destitute and those who are hurting. This leadership stands for the equity of all and fiercely defends the forgotten. It rallies resources for the under-privileged. It will not allow apathy and self-absorption to distract its mission, or to shut up its voice on behalf of the voiceless.

Leadership Is a Gift

This kind of leadership is a gift that the leader gives to others. These “gift-giving” leaders come in all shapes and sizes. They are men and women, young and old, urban and suburban, but their common denominator is a willingness to roll up their sleeves and make a difference in the lives of others, one life at a time. Bonhoeffer said, “one act of obedience is better than 100 sermons.” Mother Teresa was once asked how she thought she could change the world. She responded, “I’ll start with the face God puts in front of me.” Today, let us not shrink back. Let us not be quiet. Rather, let us be an advocate for the downtrodden and a dealer of hope to the hopeless.

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