

**11<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

## **Leadership in the Old Testament**

**1 Kings 19.9b-18; Mark 9.2-9**

Bill Hybels the founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in the United States, one of the largest churches in that country with a membership in tens of thousands, believes that the church is the most leadership intensive enterprise in society. A lot of businessmen are surprised at his opinion. They think they are the true leaders and the hardest form of leadership. The basis of Bill Hybel's belief is positional leadership – having status and rank and power, often doesn't work in volunteer organisations. There is no leverage. In other organizations, the person who has position has incredible leverage. In the military, leaders can use rank, and if all else fails, throw people into the brig. In business, bosses have tremendous leverage in the form of salary, benefits, and perks. Most followers are pretty co-operative when their livelihood is at stake. Only a brave few stand up to their bosses and even say stuff your money, your leadership stinks, I'm off.

But in voluntary organisations, like the church and all the organisations that happen under our roof, the thing that works is leadership in its purest form: influence.

Psychologist Harry Overstreet observed, 'the very essence of all power to influence lies in getting the other person to participate'. Followers in voluntary organizations cannot be forced to get on board. If the leader has no influence with them, then they won't follow.

John Maxwell, who wrote the book the 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, said that at one meeting where he was speaking to a group of company presidents and chief executives, one participant asked for advice on finding the best leaders in his organization. Maxwell's advice was to ask candidates to lead a volunteer organisation for six months. If those leaders can get people to follow them when they have no leverage – recruiting employees to volunteer, serve the community, work with this voluntary organisation and so on – then you know that they can influence others. That is the mark of true leadership ability.

I love the leadership proverb that says, 'He who thinks he leads, but has no followers, is only taking a walk'. If you can't influence people, then they will not follow you. And if people won't follow, you are not a leader. No matter what anybody else may tell you, remember that leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less.

We continue our look at the theme of leadership in our sermon series for this month. Today we consider models of leadership from the Old Testament and we are looking at the character of Elijah. On this Transfiguration Sunday when the church remembers the story of how Jesus was transfigured, revealed in his full glory, the disciples saw a vision of him next to Moses and Elijah. Moses represented the law and Elijah represented the prophets. In the Jewish faith Elijah was revered as the prophet of the Lord so I will spend some time looking at his life and what it reveals about leadership for us.

A bit like marmite, People either loved Elijah or hated him. King Ahab called him 'O troubler of Israel'. His wife, Queen Jezebel wanted him dead. But the people who loved God flocked to this man and sought his leadership.

His leadership was characterized by fire. he possessed a fiery passion for God and his truth. And his most memorable action as a leader occurred when he confronted the false prophets of Baal on mount Carmel and called down fire from God to consume the sacrifice he offered. How appropriate it is that his time on earth ended with being swept up in a chariot of fire sent by god to carry him to heaven.

Elijah's life was also characterised by his influence and magnetism. When he humiliated the prophets of Baal, he won over the people. But he did more than that. He attracted people who were like himself groups of prophets followed him, including his chief protégé Elisha, who ultimately asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

And Spirit is key to Elijah, indeed the key to whom was seen as leaders in the Old Testament. People tried to discern who was anointed, who had god put his spirit on? Christians believe that at Pentecost the Spirit came on all believers giving different gifts to be the body of Christ. Before that time, it was believed that god only gave his spirit on anointed individuals called to do certain task for God.

What made Elijah draw like-minded people to him? All leaders attract people. Highly charismatic ones often attract large numbers of people, but even modest leaders have a following. If they didn't they wouldn't be leaders.

Not all leaders affect people in the same way, nor do they use the same means of influencing others. The greatest leaders connect on multiple levels with follower's minds, hearts and wills.

That seemed to be the case for Elijah. His charisma affected people on every level. A perfect example is his defeat of the false prophets of Baal in 1 Kings chapter 18. It was a power encounter between Elijah's God and the god Baal for the Israelites allegiance. Which god would light a fire for the sacrifice. Elijah connected with the people first by calling down fire from heaven. Even confirmed sceptics in the crowd received proof that God was real. But that alone was not enough. To give his message more emotional impact, Elijah drenched his sacrifice in gallons of water. As a result, they declared 'The Lord, He is God'. Elijah's connection on a volitional level, their will power, can be seen in his cry 'seize the prophets of Baal, which the people did in order to execute them. Mind heart and will.

Charismatic leaders come in all shapes and sizes. There are Adolf Hitlers and Mother Teresas, Ahab's and Elijah's. Charisma is like money. It's neither good nor bad. It's a tool. Elijah used his charisma to attract likeminded people in order to fulfil his mission and extend his influence beyond his leadership time on earth. Your natural tendency as a leader will always be to attract people similar to yourself values, age, attitude, among other things. That was true of Elijah in that he attracted people who loved God and who were gifted in prophecy. But secure leaders – ones who acknowledge and accept their weaknesses and preferences as well as their strengths and passions – also attract people who complement their ministry.

For example, secure 'big picture leaders attract detail people. And strategic leaders attract relationally talented person-centred people. When a leader is not threatened by people who shine in areas where he or she is weak, they are able to attract and retain those people.

There are signs that Elijah was insecure as a leader. The passage we heard read in 1 Kings 19 comes after the chapter of his greatest triumph in defeating the prophets of Baal. He does this fantastic act but Queen Jezebel still wants to kill him. So, he flees into the desert afraid. He

says 'I've had enough Lord. Take my life. I am no better than my ancestors'.

He's just been used by God to do this amazing miracle and now he is stricken with self-doubt and insecurity. I am no better than my ancestors!

He falls asleep then an angel comes and touches him: get up and eat.

It is a salient warning. If you are feeling low and insecure, first of all deal with your physical needs. Rest, eat well. If you are stressed find time out to relax and gain perspective. If you have been neglecting your physical needs sort it. You may be irritable and grumpy because you are dehydrated or your blood sugar is low. Do us all a favour and sort it. You have seen that TV advert of the football player who starts acting like a Diva until someone throws him a chocolate bar and then he returns to normal.

But look at what happens next. Elijah starts moaning to God in a bout of self-pity. 'I have been very zealous for you Lord. But now I am the only one left and they want to kill me too'.

God tells him to go out and stand on the mountain and wait for him to pass by. God is not found in the wind or the earthquake or the fire but in a gentle whisper God

speaks to Elijah. Another salient reminder that often we look for God in the big dramatic things: miracles, answers to prayer, big rallies and meetings, knock down experiences. But more often than not God speaks in the still small voice.

The lord says to Elijah Go back the way you came. Anoint Hazael king, anoint Jehu and anoint Elisha to succeed you as prophet. And by the way I have 7000 followers in Israel. Get your facts straight. You're not the only one.

In other words, God straightens him out. His overblown sense of self-importance gets diminished and he once again is able to serve God effectively.

Every person has an image of themselves in their mind. For some people self-awareness comes naturally, and their image of themselves is quite accurate. For others, nothing is farther from the truth than who they think they are.

Accurate self-knowledge takes time and internal effort. It requires growing, exploring, and taking risks. And even a

leader who understands themselves pretty well sometimes needs an adjustment in their self-preoccupation.

Charismatic leaders do have a tendency to want to be on show and be the centre of attention. They are not always content to simply let other people think what they want about them. Some people spend a lot of time worrying about what others think and some devote tremendous amounts of time and energy and money to hiding who they are so that people will have higher opinions of them. Political leaders, entertainers and professional athletes are notorious for having this focus, and they hire image consultants, PR firms and spin doctors to handle it. The weaker or more insecure a leader is, the more they try to get others to perceive that they are different from the way they really are.

There is no trace of image cultivation in the record of Elijah's leadership recorded in the Bible. These so-called heroes of scripture, the great leaders in the bible all have their character flaws. Scripture is so honest. There is no hiding place with God.

Elijah has just discovered that. God sets the facts straight. Then challenges him with new purpose and direction. He has had his spiritual high of defeating the prophets of Baal.

He may have thought his time was up, there was nothing left for him. But God gives him a new purpose and tasks to do.

The anointing of Elisha as his successor is an interesting tale. Followers do not naturally line up with a leader whose vision they don't respect. Both Elijah and Elisha possessed a vision to serve God for the sake of the people of Israel. When Elisha had the opportunity to share Elijah's work, he turned away from his old life of farming and adopted Elijah's vision of leadership as his own. Elisha expected to do great things for God as Elijah had. That charismatic leadership he wanted to rub off on him. He expected a double portion of the anointing that was on Elijah.

People follow leaders because they believe that leaders can take them where they want to go. For their part, leaders enlist followers because they understand that followers help them realize the vision. Together they contribute something to fulfil each other's expectations. But without a strong commitment to each other leaders and followers cannot achieve their mutual goals. Elisha followed Elijah for ten years. Ten years following your mentor. That's dedication. Three times when Elijah offered to release his

protégé Elisha responded by saying ‘as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave’. There was a mutual connection, commitment for mutual advantage.

Elisha saw something in Elijah that made him want to stick around for that length of time. A lot of people tend to think of leadership only in terms of action. But leadership is so much more than that. Leadership is not just something you do; it’s something you are. And that’s one of the reasons that good leaders have charisma and magnetism. People are attracted to who they are, as much as to what they do. All leaders desire results but being must proceed doing. What you are able to do as a leader comes as the result of who you are.

You can see a kind of consistency in the life of Elijah. No matter what God asked Elijah to do, he did it. Whether it was denouncing the king’s actions, facing an angry mob of false prophets, travelling into the desert without provisions, or anointing successors. Who he was, what he did and the results achieved all lined up. And that consistency drew people to him like a magnet. Leaders get into trouble when they put desire for results before their willingness to develop themselves in areas of competence and character. Elijah was a spirit anointed leader who did

great works. But he was also a flawed leader racked by self-doubt and self-pity but which drove him to honest encounters with God that help him grow in self-awareness and character, sending him back with new purpose and direction.

We have had a glimpse of a charismatic leader who draws people to be followers. But we have also seen in the life of Elijah that leadership is who you are before it’s what you do. Effective leadership begins with being yourself before God who alone can give you meaning and purpose. May God continue to give us followers or leaders his Spirit and his meaning and purpose.