

Session 6

August 29, 2021

LEAD OTHERS TO SERVE

1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:6-14

Anyone in leadership knows how hard it can be to pass responsibility on to the up-and-comers. We know the principles and understand the importance, but things like pride and fear often hinder us, making the transfer of leadership awkward (or downright painful!) for everyone involved. In this week's text, one of God's greatest prophets literally passes on his mantle to his successor. In the process, we can see some helpful principles for identifying new leaders and transferring leadership to them smoothly and effectively.

Understand: God's leaders are always in the making (1 Kings 19:15-18). While not part of the focal text, the context of Elisha's rise to prominence begins while Elijah is still quite active in his role. God's word of encouragement following Elijah's journey through the valley of despair (see last week's lesson) indicates that God already had prepared both *kings* (political leaders) and *prophets* (spiritual leaders) to continue the work of restoring Israel. Where had they been all this time? Among the 7,000 faithful that Elijah forgot about! Unbeknownst to them (and Elijah), God chose them and had been preparing them all along for the roles of leadership they would assume.

Understand: God's leaders come from unexpected places (19:19). As a pastor and former IMB missionary, I was amazed at the way God used volunteer mission trips to indicate and validate up-and-coming leaders, especially among high school youth. But I learned quickly not to try to out-guess God. Those young people who were popular and influential in their youth group often "crashed and burned" under the stress of cross-cultural mission work, while less popular, seemingly less influential kids often rose to the top and shined. As commentator Matthew Henry pointed out, the newly appointed prophet Elisha was found "not in the schools of the prophets, but in the field; not reading, or praying, or sacrificing...but plowing."

Understand: God's leaders are part of the workforce (19:19). Having twelve teams of oxen meant the field was large and the workforce was substantial. Elisha was not sitting in the shade overseeing the work, but driving a team himself. He was not only fully invested in the outcome of the family's venture, but humble enough to work alongside the family's servants.

Understand: God's leaders are fully committed (19:20-21). Once the mantle was on his shoulders, Elisha knew he had to (literally!) kiss his family goodbye. In these verses, we see the transition to leadership taking place. Elisha first graciously closed the previous chapter of his life. The symbolism is unmistakable: the oxen he used to plow are now sacrificed and eaten. The yoke that held them together was burned to ash. Once the previous chapter was closed, it was time to move on; "then he left, followed Elijah, and served him."

Understand: God's leaders learn from the past and look to the future (2 Kings 2:6-14). By this time, the Lord had revealed that Elijah's role as His prophet was drawing to a close. Three times in the first six verses of 2 Kings 2, Elijah urged his protégé to stay back while he moved on. And all three times, Elisha responded the same way: "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." This loyalty was born of both *personal affection* for Elijah, as well as *practical application*. Simply put, Elisha was soaking up as much "profit from the prophet" as he

possible could. Elisha's seemingly selfish request of "two shares" (v. 9) was the traditional inheritance bestowed upon the firstborn son. Hence, Elisha was asking to be considered the firstborn son of the prophet; a heartfelt request that would honor Elijah. But by asking for "two shares" of the old prophet's *spirit*, Elisha was also looking forward, convinced that he would need more of what Elijah had to complete the task that Elijah had begun.

For reflection: *While this lesson focused on the "up-and-comer" Elisha, what can be said about the attitude and actions of the "old timer" Elijah? What lessons can be learned for those ready to turn the mantle of leadership over to others?*