

DYNAMIC SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Leading Like Paul

J. OSWALD SANDERS



DISCOVERY HOUSE

P U B L I S H E R S ®

Feeding the Soul with the Word of God

Dynamic Spiritual Leadership: Leading Like Paul

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A MAN JUST LIKE US

“We . . . are only men, human like you.”

ACTS 14:15

The strong, sure, and charismatic leadership so desperately needed in our confused age seems to be conspicuously lacking. One concerned citizen, disturbed by prevailing conditions and the inability of his nation's leaders to find a panacea for their ills, made this comment: “The critical juncture found none but second-rate actors on the political stage, and the decisive moment was neglected because the courageous were deficient in power, and the powerful in sagacity, courage and resolution.”¹

That sounds strangely contemporary, yet it was written a century ago by one Friedrich Stiller. Have things changed essentially in the intervening years? Our Lord's graphic words are proving true, accurately diagnosing conditions today: “On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea” (Luke 21:25).

World conditions have worsened immeasurably since the

time this statement was made, but the same appraisal of the situation would be appropriate. Each generation has to meet and resolve its own leadership problems, and today we are facing an acute crisis in leadership in many spheres. Crisis succeeds crisis, yet our leaders come up with few solutions, and the prognosis is by no means reassuring.

The church has not escaped this dearth of authoritative leadership. Her voice, which once sounded a clarion call of hope to beleaguered humanity, is now strangely muted, and her influence in the world community has become minimal. The salt has largely lost its savor, and the light its radiance.

Merely to bemoan this state of affairs is counter-productive. A more constructive approach would be to discover afresh the principles and factors that inspired the dynamic spiritual leadership of Paul and the other apostles in the golden days of the church. We need not only to discover them, but to endeavor to apply them to our own situation. Spiritual principles are timeless; they do not change from generation to generation.

“WARTS AND ALL”

A friend once remarked to me, “Isn’t it a humbling thing to see one’s own faults running around on two little legs?” When we see them embodied in someone else, our faults become painfully obvious to us. Similarly, we more readily grasp spiritual principles when we see them embodied in personality than when formulated as mere academic propositions.

This is why one of the most rewarding Bible studies is to trace in the lives of men and women just like us the interplay of divine providence and human personality—to discover how

the conditions and experiences of early life were controlled and shaped by a skillful and beneficent Hand.

We must be grateful that divine inspiration has ensured the preservation and selection of the providential factors involved. The plain, unvarnished facts are recorded in a straightforward manner, and with no attempt to retouch the photograph. The Bible is careful to portray its characters as they really were, “warts and all.”

It is in our Lord and not in Paul that we see the ideal of leadership, for he is a Leader *par excellence*. There are some, however, who find Jesus Christ’s very perfection daunting and rather discouraging. Because he inherited no sinful nature as we do, they feel that this fact conferred on him a vast advantage, and removed him from the arena of their earthly struggles and failures. He seems so far above them that they are able to draw very little practical help from his shining example. While this viewpoint springs from a misconception of the nature of the help Christ is able to extend, its results are very real.

In the apostle Paul God has provided the example of “*a man just like us*” (James 5:17). True, he was a man of towering spiritual stature, but he was also a man who knew failure along with his success. Even as he cried out in his despair, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” he exulted, “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25).

These and similar outpourings of his heart bring him into our street, where we can more easily indentify with his experiences. He was not “an impossible, lofty saint,” but a frail, fallible man just like us—someone who can speak to our need.

Thus in Christ we find inspiration from a real Man who