



STEP OpenGate 2022

Session 2 - Leaders love God

Nick White, 2022

What matters most?

Do you have a hero? Someone you look up to, aspire to be like?

I want to tell you about my hero.

Local man, born just 5 or 6 miles from here. Born into privilege, but faced great difficulty in his personal life, his parents died when he was a child, despite education, he didn't learn to read until he was 12 – possibly he was dyslexic, his four elder brothers died by the time he was 21, and leadership and responsibilities he had not expected were thrust upon him, at a time when his country was being invaded and ransacked. Through most of his adult life he suffered debilitating disease, and yet he persevered. Anyone know who my hero is?

Alfred the Great – born in Wantage, King of Wessex, 871-899, and later in life the first recognised high king of England.

After numerous defeats, and being pressed back to the far West of his kingdom, he regathered an army and defeated the Viking invaders – the Danes – at the Battle of Edington. He then made peace, supported the Viking leader, Guthrum's conversion to Christianity, and became sponsor – Godfather – at this baptism. But he didn't just fight and organise his kingdom's defence. He saw the crucial importance of education – he established a school for promising boys of all free-born classes, he oversaw translation of the Bible and other religious and educational books into Old English. He worked to improve the quality of church leadership and gathered spiritual men around him. What motivated him above all? Let me read something from Asser's Life of Alfred.

For Christian leaders, what is the most important thing?

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?'

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.' Matthew 22:36-40

If we are going to be who God is calling us to be, we need to be leaders that love God.

If we want to see the Kingdom come, it will be through Spirit-filled leaders and churches, who are marked by their love for God.

We will look at four examples of leaders in the Bible who were marked by their love for God, and then seven characteristics of leaders who love God.

David, a man seeking God

Talking of David, 1 Samuel 13:14 says: "The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart."

The Bible tells us that God is searching for us:



- 2 Chronicles 16:9: “The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”
- John 4:23: “The true worshipers will worship [...] for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”

God is searching for you, but he also wants us to seek after him.

One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple. Psalm 27:4

David was a man who loved God, he looked to partner with God, he wanted to have the same heart as God. There was a joining of hearts together and God wants to do the same with you.

Daniel, a man of integrity, serving God and others

Daniel, amazing young person, abducted from his homeland, taken to serve Nebuchadnezzar. And yet never taking his heart off the Lord God he was actually serving. Prepared to stick to what he believed, even at great personal risk – speaking truth to power as he brought prophetic challenge to Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Constantly coming before God in prayer, in the midst of busy life and work.

So much that could be said about Daniel, integrity was key to his faith.

Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the chief ministers and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the chief ministers and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.’ Daniel 6:3-5

Mary, a woman whose devotion to God led to costly obedience

Gabriel appears with this amazing promise – the implications of which are so huge – risking her upcoming marriage, her place in society, potentially even her life. Her response:

“I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” Luke 1:38

Costly obedience spills out into overflowing praise:

*‘My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me –
holy is his name. Luke 1:46-49*

Jesus, a man of the Spirit

Theological interlude: God the Trinity is love in his essential nature.

- Jesus is God the Eternal Son, eternally begotten of the Father, made flesh, made one of us, human. One of the fascinating things we see in Jesus’ life and ministry was that though he was God, he operated, he lived life primarily as a human empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus was an ‘anointed’ man of power who would bring salvation, e.g. Isaiah 61.1: “The Spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me, to proclaim good news, bind up the broken hearted, freedom for the captives.”



- Jesus was an ‘anointed’ man who would usher in a new age of Spirit-anointed people, e.g. Joel 2

For the day of the Lord will come, to bring in a new age of the Spirit, because of a new anointing:

- Tongues
 - Prophecy
 - Intergenerational
- The birth of Jesus was crackling with Holy Spirit manifestation, e.g. babies leaping in wombs, virgin birth. There was a longing for the Holy Spirit.
- The ministry of Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit: healings, deliverances, forgiveness, baptising others with Holy Spirit – but a ministry started by 40 days in the wilderness, with God.
- The lifestyle of Jesus was sustained by time spent in the Father’s presence by the Holy Spirit.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1:35

Jesus gave them this answer: ‘Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. John 5:19

Seven characteristics of leaders that love God:

1. Fix their eyes on God

- Jesus becomes our all, our everything – we are commanded to love God, to put Him first.
- One way we are leaders who love God is that we talk to Him and we listen to Him.
- There is a calling to build, grow and invest in our relationship with God.

Hebrew 12:2: “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus ran this course before us and he pioneered the way. We are called to follow in his footsteps to keep our eyes fixed on him. To be like David – people with a heart after God.

2. Know their limitations

- Genesis: we are image and dust
- We can’t do it ourselves but it’s God working through us, it’s the filling of the Holy Spirit that enables us to do what we are called to do.
- We can let pride and self-ambition take over and we become less reliant on God, we think it’s about God partnering with what we are doing, when it should be us partnering with what God is doing.
- “We have nothing to offer but our spirituality”

3. Are full of the Spirit

It follows on from this that, we need to be leaders that are immersed, dunked, fully soaked in the Holy Spirit. We need to be leaders that are constantly refilled. The Holy Spirit will help us to love God, help us to fix his eyes on him.

- John 3: people need to be born of the Spirit - Nicodemus was a religious leader but didn’t know he needed to be full of the Spirit



- John 1.33: people need to be baptised in the Holy Spirit- John baptizes with water but Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. We need to be immersed in the Spirit, so that the life of the Holy Spirit will then flow out of us
- John 7.37: people drink the Spirit so that life flows out of them: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink, out of his inner most being comes rivers of living water” - Drinking in and giving out
- Acts 2: All are filled
 - All manifest the Holy Spirit
 - All transformed, praising people
 - All speaking in tongues

Danger of running on empty, particularly as leaders, giving out.

4. Obey God

Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

‘All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:23-27

Should go without saying that leaders obey God. Like Mary, willing to put suffer personal risk to obey God.

Obedience to the clear commands of the Bible.

Obedience to the quiet nudges of the Holy Spirit.

Think about a time when you God has led you in some way.

Leaders are in tune with what God is saying and doing; they look for the promptings and nudges of the Holy Spirit.

When reading our Bibles, or in our prayer lives, it’s the Holy Spirit who highlights things to us.

It’s the promptings of the Holy Spirit that give us a nudge to pray for someone, that bring us wisdom at work in situations where we don’t know what to do, or the Holy Spirit who goes before us and brings people to the point of salvation.

5. Serve God and others

Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’ Matthew 10:25-28

Jesus demonstrated this in so many ways, not least his shocking actions at the last supper of washing the disciples’ feet.

- Servant-hearted leaders.
- But with boundaries.



6. Have integrity

- Are you a donut or a doughnut? Many leaders look good on the outside, but it's what's inside that really matters.

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Tim 4:12-16

- Remember Daniel

7. Are hungry for more of God

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:7-14

- Leaders are hungry to know more of God – to go deeper in relationship with him.
- Leaders are hungry for God to break into situations. Are we constantly looking for God to break in?
- Let's not be content with settling for what we have.
- Let's fill up on what will sustain us. Not just a posh little plate with a tiny bit of food, but a banquet.
- Are we leaders that are calling God down from heaven and asking Him to move?

Conclusion

Leaders set the tone! What tone do we want to set?

First and foremost, we are leaders that love God and display that love. Let us set a tone of fixing our eyes on Him, being filled with the Spirit and recognising His promptings. God wants us to come away with Him, to be carried away by His presence.

Questions

- Who are my heroes?
- Which of these seven characteristics stuck out to me?
- How can I love God more?