

LEADERSHIP THE LORD'S WAY

By Craig Merrill Director, BYU Master of Business Administration Program

As we serve and lead in the way the Lord has directed, regardless of our calling, we will both bless and be blessed.

When Brother Jones and his son were assigned to home teach the Williams family, they began making monthly visits. Through those visits, Kim, a daughter in the family, learned that they cared about her. She had many questions about the gospel and enjoyed conversations with them.

One summer when Kim was struggling to know if she had a testimony, Brother Jones, along with another holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood, was asked to attend Young Women camp. Kim later said how much it meant to her to have her home teacher there. She told her family that she had gained a testimony of the Savior's love for her when Brother Jones and another priesthood holder, at her request, gave her a priesthood blessing at camp.

Her home teachers were, in the truest sense, friends to the Williams family. Their influence mattered to Kim and her parents—and to the Lord.

Leadership and Callings

In today's world, it is common to measure one's personal growth by ever-greater positions of responsibility

in the workplace or by pay raises that signal increasing personal accomplishment. We often look at visible positions of responsibility as an indication that a person is an important contributor. It is not surprising then that many people struggle to know how best to measure their growth in spiritual matters.

I have heard many Latter-day Saints question their own standing because they have not been called to leadership positions in the Church. But is our progress properly measured by leadership callings?

In fact, leadership does not require a calling. Some people who exert the uplifting and encouraging influence that constitutes true leadership do so with no calling or position. Doctrine and Covenants 121 teaches some important lessons about leadership:

"We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.

"Hence many are called, but few are chosen.

"No power or influence can or

ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

"By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile" (verses 39–42).

It is common to confuse leadership with telling people what to do. That can lead to unrighteous dominion. It would not be appropriate to say, "You must do as I say because I (who hold the priesthood or am called by the priesthood) said so." An important lesson of section 121 is that a true leader does not give direction and expect it to be followed simply because of position. Rather, priesthood leadership is about invitation. A kind invitation, based in pure knowledge and love unfeigned, will always be a greater motivation than "Because I said so."

It is true that leaders who tend toward issuing orders can get a lot done. But they are not leading in the way the Lord has revealed. And they are not developing the independent ability and confidence that should exist among those they are leading.



True Leadership

Notice that a calling or position of authority is not listed in verses 41 or 42 as one of the proper ways to wield power or influence. Rather, the power and influence of a true leader are exerted through persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, kindness, and pure knowledge. These characteristics of true leadership can be exhibited by all, regardless of calling or position.

Leadership callings are much like training wheels on a bicycle. The training wheels allow a child to learn how to balance and ride with confidence. A leadership calling puts people in a position to learn how to love, be patient, and persuade through pure knowledge and kindness. They may also learn that any attempt to compel behavior is accompanied by withdrawal of the Spirit and decreased effectiveness.

After our release, we will find out if we have grown and learned while in our calling. Have we learned to love and serve others without the calling being the impetus? Have we learned to serve with power as an influence for good simply because of who we have become?

The Lord will call on us repeatedly throughout our lives. He knows our hearts. He will call on us when He needs our particular skills, knowledge, or sensitivity to the Spirit. He will call on us according to our willingness to hear His voice and love as He loves.

When we learn how to be an influence for good in the Lord's way, we will become people who lift others simply because that is who we are. Callings will not be the primary reason for our good influence. Yet, when asked, we will serve well where we are assigned in the Church.

BEING A FAITHFUL DISCIPLE

"All Church leaders are called to help other people become 'true followers of . . . Jesus Christ' (Moroni 7:48). . . .

"Leaders can best teach others how to be 'true followers' by their personal example. This pattern—being a faithful disciple in order to help others become faithful disciples—is the purpose behind every calling in the Church."

Handbook 2: Administering the Church (2010), 3.1.

Whether we serve in the Sunday School or in youth programs, as a home teacher or a visiting teacher, or even as a bishop or a Relief Society president, our service to others will be an expression of our love of the Savior. As we serve and lead in the way He has directed, regardless of our calling, we will both bless and be blessed. ■