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RECOGNIZING RIGHTEOUS

Leadership

One of my earliest recollections of my father is of him sitting on the stand as a member of our ward bishopric. From that early memory through his years as a bishop, a high councilor, and a husband and father, I knew him as a righteous servant of God. As my home teaching companion, he modeled for me how to be kind in word and how to give love in service.

On one occasion we were visiting a home where the husband, after welcoming us, spoke of his wife and the illness she was experiencing. Through his tears, he asked my father to join him in giving his wife a priesthood blessing. The Spirit was strong, and the feeling of love seemed to burst the walls of the home. I will never forget the burning in my heart as I listened to the words of the blessing.

Our family is the beneficiary of a legacy of service from my father's example of priesthood watchcare and loving kindness. His pattern of Christ-centered living



extended far beyond his Church relationships and was an example of how we can live and righteously lead others by applying the principles taught by the Savior and the prophets.

The Perils of Adulation

In addition to learning from leaders in our own lives, we can turn to the scriptures, which are filled with stories that demonstrate the blessings of following righteous leaders and the consequences of following wicked leaders.

that, you'll get along all right and [you] will go forward with a love for the people and a great respect for them and [you will] try to accomplish what your office demands of you.”¹

The scriptures document examples of the effect of adulation. Consider the accounts of Rehoboam and Jeroboam, both kings of Israel who lost their vision of the Lord's pattern while trying to protect their leadership positions. Rehoboam, who came to power following the death of his father,

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One of the most oft-observed failures of leadership comes when we place too much emphasis on being *recognized* as a leader. Thinking that we are more important than others can be perilous to us and to those we lead. It is vital that we not become trapped by the enticement of recognition or adulation.

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) counseled: “It is so very important that you do not let praise and adulation go to your head. Adulation is poison. You better never lose sight of the fact that the Lord put you where you are according to His design, which you don't understand. Acknowledge the Lord for whatever good you can accomplish and give Him the credit and the glory and [do] not worry about that coming to yourself. If you can do

King Solomon, rejected the counsel of the “old men, that stood before Solomon” (1 Kings 12:6; see also 2 Chronicles 10:6) to lighten the burden of the children of Israel. Instead, he imposed additional hardships on them (see 1 Kings 12:11; 2 Chronicles 10:14), thinking that he could establish order and retain his hold over the people. His focus on his own might led to continuous contention with the leaders of other tribes.

The northern tribes felt threatened by Rehoboam's actions and appointed Jeroboam to be their spokesman. Angered by the unrighteous rule and decisions of the king, Jeroboam determined to persuade the people that they should follow him, abandon the house of David, and establish a separate kingdom in the north called the kingdom of Israel. To capture the attention of the people, he revived a previously followed form of worship. He ordered the creation of golden calves, and he appointed false priests, thereby diverting their faith from the Lord to things of this world (see 1 Kings 12:27–31; 2 Chronicles 11:14–16). As the people were diverted to “high places” for idol worship



and to “groves” for immorality (2 Chronicles 14:3; see also 1 Kings 14:15), they yielded to unrighteous patterns of leadership. The kingdom of Israel suffered until it was destroyed and most of its inhabitants scattered in 721 B.C.

The Blessings of Righteous Leadership

Not until Rehoboam’s great-grandson Jehoshaphat became king of Judah was righteous leadership reestablished in that kingdom. When the people were threatened by several invading armies, Jehoshaphat declared a fast and then approached the Lord in earnest prayer: “O our

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God, . . . we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee” (2 Chronicles 20:12).

The Lord’s answer did not come directly to the king but rather through His prophet Jahaziel. Through him the Lord said to Jehoshaphat, “Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s. . . .

“The Lord will be with you” (2 Chronicles 20:15, 17).

Jehoshaphat humbly received the counsel of the prophet and bowed in thankful prayer before the Lord. Jehoshaphat then taught some important principles to the people that we would be wise to consider in our own lives: “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper” (2 Chronicles 20:20).

The word of the Lord was fulfilled, and the people of Judah were protected. As Jehoshaphat’s armies stood on the field of battle, they sang songs of praise to the Lord and watched as the invading armies fought so fiercely among themselves that they destroyed one another (see 2 Chronicles 20:22–24). In a similar way, we can be protected from the evil influences of this world if we will listen to and follow the words of the living prophets.

Jehoshaphat applied another principle of leadership when

he condemned and “took away” the “high places,” where idol worship occurred, and the “groves,” where immoral acts were committed (2 Chronicles 17:6). Similarly, each of us within our own circle of influence can have an impact on the evil influences that quietly creep into our homes, neighborhoods, and communities. Each of us can also reduce or eliminate the worldly trappings—idols—from our lives and our homes. As we replace worldly influences and invite the Spirit to fill our homes and hearts, we lead the fundamental organization of society—our family—in the paths of righteousness.

Finally, Jehoshaphat sent Levites and priests throughout the land to teach the people from “the book of the law of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 17:9)—the scriptures of that day. He focused the attention of the people on the word of God as a guide for righteous living. Because God came to the aid of the people, “the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah” (2 Chronicles 17:10; see also 2 Chronicles 20:29).

Jehoshaphat teaches us behaviors to emulate in our own leadership roles at home and in the Church. His example shows us that humble, effective leaders:

- Care about and willingly serve others.
- Pray to and express faith in God.
- Are morally trustworthy and act responsibly for the good of all.
- Point people to the scriptures and teach them to always seek wholesome learning.
- Follow the living prophets and obey the Lord.
- Do not yield to the temptation to seek for recognition or exercise “unrighteous dominion” (see D&C 121:39).

Just as my father’s example helped me understand the consequences of living and leading righteously, so those who followed Jehoshaphat were blessed to learn the principles that would lead them back to their Heavenly Father. This course of action is as true today as it was then.

Studying and applying the righteous patterns of leadership, service, and worship taught in the scriptures will help our homes become sanctuaries of safety and fortresses of faith for our precious loved ones. May we have the wisdom in our leadership roles to shun our own reflection and instead seek to radiate the light of the Savior. ■

NOTE

1. “Messages of Inspiration from President Hinckley,” *Church News*, July 1, 2000, 2.