# The Call to Leadership

After researching churches in America for a number of years, George Barna concluded, “The American church is dying due to a lack of strong leadership. In this time of unprecedented opportunity and plentiful resources, the church is actually losing influence. The primary reason is the lack of leadership. Nothing is more important than leadership.” As I look at the leadership of SonRise, I am so thankful for the men and women that God has put into place to lead our congregation. The fruit we have seen over the years has been because of the tireless labor and faithful prayers of people like you who have used your gifts for the glory of God.

I have always heard that a church rises and falls on leadership. If SonRise is going to continue growing toward being the church that God has called us to be, it means that we as leaders must do our part to lead well.

This devotional book is offered to encourage you as a leader and to guide you on a brief spiritual journey. Part of the journey speaks simply to God’s role in your life as a leader. Part of it speaks specifically to us as we prepare to begin another phase of our *That They May Know* campaign.

I hope you will prayerfully read through the pages of this devotional over the next seven days. I have offered some “Further Thought” statements at the conclusion of each devotion that will help you assimilate some of these concepts into your life and ministry.

# Leading On Purpose – Day 1

Acts 13:36 “For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep.”

Can you imagine coming to the end of your life and knowing that you had fulfilled God’s purpose? What is your purpose as a leader? Martin Luther King, Jr. saw his purpose as bringing about civil liberties: “I have a dream.” President Ronald Regan saw part of his purpose as dismantling communist Russia: “Gorbachev, tear down this wall.”

God said in Acts that David served His purpose and then died. Can you look back at the last week of your life and say that you served God’s purpose? What about the last month or year? Wouldn’t you like to come to the end of your life and know that you have served God’s purposes?

Knowing that you have served God’s purposes may seem overwhelming, but it’s certainly something worth considering. Before Christians can know that they have served God’s purpose in their generation, they first have to know God’s purpose. That seems like a given, but Christians can sometimes just mark time instead of make progress. I’m grateful that as leaders, you have already made the choice to move forward and fulfill God’s purpose for your life. Now our challenge is to influence others to do the same.

We need to know God’s purpose for our lives individually, but we also need to know God’s purpose for our lives as leaders. John Maxwell said, “Leadership is influence–nothing more, nothing less.” This definition indicates that in the truest sense of the word, everyone is a leader. We all influence somebody.

I like the definition of spiritual leadership offered by Henry and Richard Blackaby: “Spiritual leadership is moving people on to God’s agenda.” It is this definition that I want us to make our focus for this short devotional book.

Our job is to move people on to God’s agenda. This of course means that we first must know God’s agenda, and then we must consider how to leverage our influence so that people will follow us as we follow God. I want to challenge you over the next seven days to consider your role as a leader. I encourage you to seek to understand your purpose before God. Are you properly using your influence to move people on to God’s agenda? Are you willing to avail yourself to God today to be open to His leadership in your life? Will you look for ways to influence others so that they too are following God with all of their heart?

**Further Thought…**

* What is God’s agenda?
* What are some specific ways that God has used you to move people on to His agenda?
* What changes do you need to make in your life in order to fulfill God’s agenda to be more effective as a spiritual leader?

*Lord, thank you for your call on my life to be a spiritual leader. Help me to fully understand my role and how I can better live it out day by day. Please show me any hindrances in my life that are keeping me from faithfully fulfilling my call. I surrender myself completely to you. Amen.*

# Your Spiritual Leadership Quotient – Day 2

John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

We are familiar with measuring one’s I.Q.–Intelligence Quotient, but what about measuring one’s L.Q.–Leadership Quotient? An I.Q. is a score designed to assess human intelligence. What if there was an L.Q. that would help us to know whether or not we could be successful leaders? While there is not a score, there is an ingredient that guarantees leadership success: Jesus Christ.

William Carey, the father of modern missions, once gave a stirring speech in which he said, “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.” The greatest thing we can expect from God is God Himself. While there are certainly skills we can learn that will help us to be stronger leaders, our leadership quotient has more to do with God’s sufficiency than our abilities.

You might consider God as being the X-Factor. He is the secret ingredient, the star player, or the surprise strategy for success. Many times we feel so inadequate to tackle a certain task or engage a particular problem. We feel unprepared to step into our leadership roles and accomplish something for the Kingdom. We must remember that God Himself is the X-Factor.

Since God establishes our L.Q., we must learn how to seek Him and how to surrender to Him. Seeking God comes from an intentional plan of Bible reading and prayer, but it also comes from incorporating prayer and Scripture into our daily lives. By this I mean that prayer and Scripture become a 24/7 experience with God instead of just an event with God that we may have on our “to do” list.

As we seek to maximize our L.Q. through daily surrender, prayer, and Scripture intake, we realize that God is leading us to expand our leadership potential to also lead others to seek Him. Leadership is never done in a vacuum. God is always calling us to take other people along on the journey. How are you using your L.Q. to lead others to bear fruit for eternity?

It is always an easier task to put together our plans for moving a ministry forward than it is to discern God’s plans. Have you ever experienced the difference between these two extremes in your life and ministry? One produces activity that seems like a good thing, but the other produces fruit that *is* a good thing.

While a person’s I.Q. seems to be established and doesn’t improve with effort, L.Q. can be greatly enhanced in the life of a leader who learns to seek God. I have seen some of the most unlikely people become incredible leaders through the power of Jesus Christ and a life that is surrendered to Him.

I believe God is calling you to maximize your Leadership Quotient. Are you willing to respond?

**Further Thought…**

How can you strengthen your personal Bible intake and daily surrender?

Is prayer and Bible reading more of a task in your day instead of a lifestyle? How can you change prayer to a *life* instead of an *event*?

How are you using your Leadership Quotient to influence others to bear fruit for the Kingdom? Ask God to show you someone you can mentor to grow in his or her spiritual life through consistent Bible reading and prayer.

*Heavenly Father, I know that you are the Difference Maker in my leadership, and I want to fully surrender to You. I pledge myself to regularly spend time in your Word as I seek to fill my mind and my heart with your truths. Please guide me as I seek to model spiritual growth and mentor others to bear fruit for your Kingdom.*

# The Power of Influence – Day 3

2 Timothy 2:2 “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

Influence can be good or bad. I remember being influenced to do both bad things and good things in my life while growing up. From trying out chewing tobacco (bad) to telling others about Jesus (good); influence had a part in shaping my life.

God has called us to provide godly influence to the lives of people around us. Basic discipleship is the process of influencing others by entrusting them with the truths of God’s Word. God’s strategy for building His church hinges upon us influencing others toward Him.

Church leadership is also the process of influence. I stated in an earlier devotion that we are called “to move people on to God’s agenda.” That is influence.

How do we influence? Most of the time, our influence has the greatest power through the context of our relationships with other people. We can influence the people we know to seek after God. We can influence them to join in on what God is doing in our church. We can urge them to seize the opportunities before us to make a difference in the world through the ministries of SonRise by helping them to see the bigger picture.

You may think that you do not have much influence over others, but the fact is you do. Although you may not influence hundreds of people (though you may), you do influence at least one, two, or three. What would it look like if you influenced one person at a time to follow Jesus and get involved in the ministries of our church? Let’s say you connected with one person every three months and met together with that person for the purpose of prayer, discipleship, and encouragement. It’s possible that you would even lead this person to faith in Christ. Your goal would be to help that person develop a passionate relationship with Jesus and to get on board with what God is doing through our church. Let’s assume that after three months, the person with whom you are meeting could go out and begin meeting with someone else to urge them to faithfulness in their spiritual walk with Christ.

At the end of three months, there would only be two of you. At the end of three years, however, there would be 4,096 people serving the Lord, growing in their faith, and connected to the family of SonRise. There is certainly exponential power in influence.

**Further Thought…**

* How have you influenced people to grow in their relationships with Christ or to get involved in church?
* We believe that God is leading us to improve our building so that we can be more effective at reaching people with the gospel. The preschool renovation will help us reach young families. How can you influence others to get on board with SonRise in the effort to reach these families?
* Do you feel like your influence at SonRise, or in the world for that matter, is not very big? How can you begin influencing one person today?

*Lord, the challenge of reaching people with the gospel is difficult but important. Help me to see daily the opportunities I have to influence others toward Christ. Show me how I can be involved in leading families to have a passionate relationship with Jesus. Amen.*

# Listening for God’s Voice – Day 4

1 Samuel 3:10 Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

You are probably familiar with the story of little Samuel hearing God’s voice. In a few verses before God spoke to Samuel, the scripture says, “Word from the Lord was rare in those days.” I wonder why it was rare. Is word from the Lord rare today? How does it make you feel when someone tells you that God told them something?

In *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby urges Christians to know that while God is a speaking God, we must be listening Christians: “If the Christian does not know when God is speaking, he is in trouble at the heart of his Christian life!” We must hear God speak today, or we do not know the direction we are to go. If we cannot hear God speak, we do not know how to lead God’s people.

Dallas Willard addressed this challenge:

Hearing God? A daring idea, some would say–presumptuous and even dangerous. But what if we are made for it? What if the human system simply will not function properly without it? There are good reasons to think it will not. The fine texture as well as the grand movements of life show the need. Is it not, in fact, more presumptuous and dangerous to undertake human existence without hearing God?

We are called to be a spiritual leader moving people on to God’s agenda. That only happens as we walk with God daily and listen to Him speak. God speaks through a variety of means, but He speaks most clearly through His Word.

Through the *That They May Know* campaign, we are seeking to fulfill God’s call to make disciples (Mt 28:19-20). While God has a lot on His agenda, one thing is that He wants all people to become disciples. The next phase of the program is focusing on developing fertile spiritual soil in the hearts of preschoolers so that the gospel can be firmly planted and one day take root.

The renovation aspect of the program is to provide adequate space for preschool ministry, but the emphasis of the campaign must go beyond remodeling. While God may have a variety of messages for us through His Word, His Church or His people, one crystal clear message is that He wants us to make disciples. Will you open up your spiritual ears to see how God wants to move you on to His agenda to make disciples? How might God want to use your place in ministry to lead others to a passionate relationship with Jesus Christ? I believe God is leading each of us to be an influence on the SonRise family. We can work together to be more faithful in reaching preschoolers and their families with God’s message of hope?

**Further Thought…**

* Do you think God still speaks today? If so, how?
* What is your response to Blackaby’s comment that we are in “trouble at the heart of [our] Christian life” if we cannot hear God speak? What does that mean for you?
* Are you making disciples? What can you do to be more available for this important calling?
* Would you be willing to pray about your role as a disciple maker? Would you be willing to make yourself more available to God to reach families in our community with the gospel?
* Will our next stage of renovation help us accomplish the mission of SonRise? How?

*Thank you, Father, for speaking today and guiding my life and leadership. Please show me ways I can be more tuned in to your voice. I want to be an effective disciple maker. Please show me ways I can be more effective as a discipler, especially in reaching out to families in our community.* *Amen*

# The Bigger Picture – Day 5

Philippians 3:13-14 “Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

“You can’t see the forest for the trees.” Has anyone ever told you that? It’s so easy to get caught up in the minutia of daily existence and fail to keep our eyes on the big picture. If we are going to be spiritual leaders moving people on to God’s agenda, then we must understand the principle of the big picture.

What is the big picture of leadership? Do you ever forget the big picture through being distracted by the demands of the details of day-to-day living? The Apostle Paul seemed to have learned the importance of focus. He said that he is forgetting what lies behind. We all know the paralysis of the past. Both failures and victories of the past can keep us from moving forward in the present. The nostalgia of the “good ole days” and the sorrow and pain of our former struggles can be the greatest enemies of fulfilling the real goals God has put before us.

Of all the things that Paul could have done, he said that there is one thing he is really focused on: pressing toward the prize of the upward call in Christ. He even said he was “straining” toward this goal. What is the prize? Ultimately, the prize is Jesus, nothing more–nothing less.

In this passage, Paul refers to the prize as being the “upward call of God.” He is straining toward fulfilling his call, which will eventually be an eternity with Christ. While Heaven is our home, earth is our mission field. Our upward call is not just looking forward to eternity, but it is also making a difference in our world now. You may have heard of someone being “so heavenly minded that they’re no earthly good” (the opposite can also be true). Well, God has called us to spend our lives straining to fulfill our call on earth.

While our calls are somewhat unique, they also have some strong similarities. As leaders, we are ultimately called to lead others to also fulfill the upward call of God. This means leading others to develop a passionate relationship with Jesus Christ and to keep their eyes on the prize. There are great consequences in the lives of those we lead if we fail in our mission. Oswald Sanders said, “If those who hold influence of others fail to lead toward the spiritual uplands, then surely the path to the lowlands will be well worn.”

Think about Sanders’ statement in light of our upcoming campaign. While I’ll deal more with this in tomorrow’s devotional, we need to see that we have the challenge, privilege, and opportunity to influence boys and girls to begin the journey to the upward call of God. It starts in the preschool ministry, grows through the children’s ministry, and matures in the youth ministry.

If we get bogged down in the nonessentials, we will never fulfill the essentials. We must keep our eyes on the main focus of leadership: fulfilling the call of God on our lives to lead others to a passionate relationship with Jesus. Regardless of how you fulfill this call (children’s ministry, worship leadership, teaching, etc.), we must keep our eyes on the prize.

**Further Thought…**

* Think specifically about your ministry. In what ways might you lose sight of what’s really important?
* What does “straining toward the prize” look like as you serve to fulfill your leadership responsibilities?
* Will you commit yourself to God to fulfill His call on your life and not get bogged down in the nonessentials?

*Lord, I know how easy it is to get distracted by the nonessentials and miss the joy of fulfilling your will. Please help me to daily set my sights on the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

# The Next Generation – Day 6

Matthew 19:14 “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the Kingdom of Heaven.”

When I went “in view of a call” to my previous church, my son, Timothy, was kept in the nursery while I preached during the main service. He was three years old at the time. The preschool worker who kept him told us later that before he left the classroom, she pulled him aside to talk. When she knelt down on the floor to get eye-to-eye with him, Timothy said, “You didn’t know I could be so much fun.”

Working with children can be fun. It can also be frustrating, irritating, and exhausting. I wonder if the disciples were focused on the negative side of dealing with children when they told some parents that the Master was too busy to take time out of His schedule to deal with any children. Jesus set things straight by letting the disciples and the parents know that children are His priority. He even said that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them. Interesting.

Sometimes we see diaper changing, toy cleaning, nose wiping, and kid corralling as a hindrance at worse and babysitting at best. Jesus sees it as Kingdom work.

Studies have been done that show us that most people become Christians in their childhood. The International Bible Society indicated that 85% of people who become Christians commit their lives to Christ before the age of 14. The Barna Group points out students between the age of 14 and 18 have only a 4% probability of being saved during this stage of their lives. You can see why Jesus rebuked his disciples and called for the children.

It’s so easy to get focused on our own generation, that we forget that God has called us to consider the generations that are to follow us. If you think about it, some of the greatest church struggles of our day have been over generation focus. Think about the fallout from the “worship wars” where churches argued over music style. Consider battles fought over appropriate dress (I don’t mean indecent dress, but jeans, ties, dresses, etc.).

Generation focus not only shows up in negative behavior in churches; sometimes it’s seen through low volunteerism or poor budget allocations. Some older adults drop out of preschool duty because they have “served their term” in their younger years. It can hinder our mission in reaching the next generation.

Sometimes as leaders, we also wear ministry blinders. We tend to view our church through our perspective and not consider the essential role of other ministries. Every ministry is intertwined. Think for a moment about how you can use your leadership to help other ministries be effective.

God has called us to be world changers. Even if children’s ministry is not your particular area of leadership, you can use your influence to make it a priority at SonRise. If Jesus took time to reach out to children, we should all make reaching and discipling children a part of our ministries in some fashion.

**Further Thought…**

What does children’s ministry look like if it’s just seen as babysitting? How would it be different if we saw it from Jesus’ perspective?

What is your role in children’s ministry? If your leadership in the church has nothing to do with children’s ministry, how can you leverage your leadership to impact the next generation?

How can you encourage people in your sphere of influence to get on board with the next phase of our capital campaign?

*Lord, help me to always see Children’s ministry from your perspective. Please show me how I can use my leadership influence to help others serve in children’s ministry and participate in the next phase of our campaign. Amen.*

# Good, Better, Best – Day 7

Ephesians 5:15-17 “Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

“Good, better, best. Never let it rest. ‘Til your good is better, and your better, best.” I’m not sure where I first heard that little poem as a young person, but the message has stuck with me: Don’t be satisfied with mediocrity. It’s easy for us to get stuck in the first mile and forget that God has called us to go the second mile.

I suppose the real question is what is the best for spiritual leaders? We know from a previous devotion that spiritual leadership is *moving people on to God’s agenda*. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in our own agendas that we misconstrue accomplishing our goals as being a success. Henry Blackaby reminds us of the real goal of spiritual leadership:

The primary purpose of spiritual leaders is not to achieve their goals but to accomplish God’s will. Max Depree says, “Reaching goals is fine for an annual plan. Only reaching one’s potential is fine for life.” Leaders can achieve their goals and yet be out of God’s will. Reaching goals is not necessarily a sign of God’s blessing. Spiritual leaders do not use their people to accomplish their goals; their people are the goal (Blackaby, 122).

Since the goal is moving *people* on to *God’s agenda*, the “best” of spiritual leadership then involves determining God’s agenda and working to move people from their goals to God’s purpose. God’s agenda is always about people. It’s never about budgets or buildings; it’s always about people. Budgets and buildings are tools to accomplish God’s purpose. If our campaign focus is just about renovation, we will never focus on the real goal which is transformation–transformation of lives to be more like Jesus.

The next phase of our campaign focuses on strengthening our ministry to preschoolers and their families. By improving our preschool ministry area, we are creating a better tool to guide people to develop a meaningful relationship with Jesus. While a better preschool space will not accomplish that objective by itself, it will be a useful resource to move us toward that goal: transformation.

As today’s scripture verse states, the days really are evil. There is a sense of urgency to fulfill the will of God through our ministries. How can you do that as it relates to the *That They May Know* campaign?

**Further Thought…**

What are signs in our culture that reflect the urgency of Ephesians 5:15-17?

In an effort to accomplish the mission of this campaign, there are several things you can do. You can pray for our church and specifically for this campaign. You can give sacrificially to help us reach our goal of $400,000. And you can encourage others to give while they are keeping their eyes on the real objective of transformation. Are you willing to commit to accomplishing those objectives?

Will you complete the pledge form and express your part in the *That They May Know* campaign?

*Lord, I do not want to miss accomplishing the best through my leadership. Please show me how I can participate in doing your will every day and how I can help others to do the same. I know part of your will is reaching boys and girls and their families with the gospel message. Please guide me and my family as we give sacrificially to the campaign. We ask for your leadership as we make a financial pledge. Amen*