

The Making of a Leader

Rich Nathan

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Strength in Weakness: Leadership Lessons from the Life of Paul Series

Philippians 3:1-11

During this past year we've had the privilege of witnessing some great leadership moments. There was the inspiring institution-changing leadership of Pope Francis, who graced Time Magazine's cover as its "Man of the Year."

Picture of Pope Francis Time Magazine Cover

What makes Pope Francis such a transformational leader for me, at least, is his incredible humility. One of the first acts of his papacy was to wash the feet of a young Muslim female prisoner, for which he was criticized –washing the feet of a Muslim? And a woman no less? And then there was the spontaneous kissing of the head of a severely disfigured man and the numerous shunnings of all of the trappings of power – paying his own hotel room, moving out of the papal apartments, picking up his own dry cleaning, wearing ordinary shoes, driving a Ford Focus. Pope Francis understands the way power ought to be exercised.

God gives power and influence not for our own sakes, but for the sake of others.

And then there is the story of Antoinette Tuff, who most folks have never heard of. Are you familiar with Antoinette Tuff?

Picture of Antoinette Tuff

Last August, this Georgia elementary school clerk single-handedly talked a 20-year old gunman into laying down his weapon. She is a bookkeeper and she engaged this would-be killer with confidence, with compassion. She taught the world how to show grace under pressure, poise in the face of fear, meeting evil with kindness – all great leadership lessons. Her principal said, "Her name says everything about her. She's tough! She's always been that way."

Or how about Malala Yousafzai?

Picture of Malala Yousafzai

You may be familiar with Malala; she is the Pakistani teenager, who was shot in the head by the Taliban in late 2012 because this 15-year old girl was courageously fighting for other Pakistani girls to be able to go to elementary school and learn to read. For that she was shot in the head. But she recovered and went on to write an incredible memoir. She won the Sakharav Prize for Freedom of Thought from the European Parliament and was up to win a Nobel Peace Prize. But she has gone around the world as a 16-year old advocating for the education of girls.

The world desperately needs more Malala's and Antoinette's and Pope Francis'.

Where is the great leader, who will move this country past the gridlock and pettiness and political point-scoring that paralyzes our government today? Where is the great leader, who can transcend their own ethnic and religious background and bring peace to the Middle East? Where is the great leader, who can restore confidence and competence to public school education here in the City of Columbus? Where is the great leader, who will make America deal with the scandal that only 52%, just a bare majority of black teenage males graduate from high school in four years?

We need great leaders to lead our businesses, to lead our military, to lead our universities, to lead our sports' teams, to lead our churches, to lead our families. What makes a great leader? Every leader has their own style, their own personalities. Some operate more from command, some more from consensus. Leadership is not a matter of style.

I read an article in Forbes Magazine in which business leaders were interviewed about what makes a great leader. The article mentioned a number of different traits that make someone worth following. Chief among them are honesty and integrity. They said employees need to know where they stand with you all the time. People need to know that when push comes to shove, the leader will do the right thing, even if it is unpopular, even if it is hard. Other traits that were mentioned included focus - knowing where you're going - confidence, clarity, care for people.

What makes a great leader? Daniel Goleman, the author of several books and numerous influential articles and publications like the Harvard Business Review, would say that from his research of 200 large global companies, intelligence, toughness, vision are required for success, but they are not sufficient. What Dan Goleman has discovered is that great leaders are emotionally intelligent. You can have great training; you can have an analytical mind, but truly effective leaders are emotionally intelligent. They are self-aware. They're self-regulated. They're motivated. They have social skills.

Because leadership is the crying need not only of this hour, but of every hour, I'm going to begin a leadership series today in which we look at one of the great leaders of all time, a man who would be found on almost everyone's list of the most influential leaders in all of history. I'm starting a series today on the Apostle Paul. I've titled this

series **Strength in Weakness: Leadership Lessons from the Life of Paul.** This phrase is taken from Paul's own words in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10,

2 Corinthians 12:9–10 (NIV)

9 But [God] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul's life can be summarized as a life of finding God's strength in his own weakness. I've called today's initial talk in this series, The Making of a Leader. Let's pray.

There is an incident from the life of Paul that is recorded in the Book of Acts that I think is emblematic of the really rough treatment that Paul has received at the hands of his critics in the past few centuries. Paul is in Jerusalem. He is preaching to a crowd that erupts in anger. Here is what we read in Acts 23:10,

Acts 23:10 (NIV)

10 The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them.

Paul is being ripped apart today by his critics. There are any number of books that accuse Paul of not understanding the message of Jesus. We read books with titles like: “From Jesus to Christianity: How Paul Changed the Message of the Simple Peasant Named Jesus.” Critics accuse Paul of being intolerant. And most ridiculous of all, they accuse Paul, the Jewish rabbi, of being anti-Semitic. It should be sufficient to say that without Paul Christianity would have remained a sect of Judaism which would not have become a universal faith. Without Paul we would not understand the way of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Without Paul we wouldn't understand the meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ. The gospels tell us that Christ died on a cross, but Paul tells us what the cross means. Without Paul we wouldn't understand the implications of the resurrection. From the gospels we would have known that Christ was risen from the dead. But it is only from Paul that we know that we will rise from the dead with Christ.

We know from the gospels that Christ established his church. But it is only from Paul that we know how the church is supposed to be organized. We know from the gospels that Christ promises to give us the Holy Spirit. But it only from Paul that we know the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We know from the gospels that we are to be baptized, but it is only from Paul that we understand what baptism means.

So rather than twisting the words of Paul to suit some 21st century political agenda, we're going to spend the next few months actually considering who the Apostle Paul

was and what made him such a great leader. We get our information about Paul from the Book of Acts which is a history of the early church. And we get our information about Paul from Paul's own letters. Paul was one of history's great letter writers.

Up until a generation ago, people actually wrote letters. It is really unimaginable in an age of 140-character tweets and texts that say things like:

Text Writer 1: idk, wut do u think we should do?

Text Writer 2: idc, lets do wuteva

Text Writer 1: kk, c u at bro

Our 21st century texts probably won't have the staying power of history's great letters like Paul's Letter to the Romans. Now let's consider a few things that made Paul such a great leader.

Philippians 3:1–6 (NIV)

3 Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

Apparently, some Jewish Christians went to the city of Philippi just as they had gone to Galatia earlier and they were teaching that Gentile men needed to be circumcised and all Gentiles needed to keep the whole Jewish law in order to be saved. Paul challenged the Philippian Christians to reject this teaching. So what made Paul such a great leader? First, let's consider:

The credentials of a leader

Who is Paul? What is this man's background? What were the influences in his life that made him such a great leader?

We read in Acts 21:39 Paul's words:

Acts 21:39 (NIV)

39 Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.”

Tarsus was right on the Mediterranean in Southeast Turkey. It was the place where one of history’s great love affairs began. It was in Tarsus that Mark Antony met Cleopatra for the first time. Tarsus was a city very much like Columbus, Ohio. It was a city of about 500,000 people which was very large in the ancient world. And it was a university town. It attracted people who valued education. It was prosperous. It was a crossroads city with a great road that went through the mountains to the north connecting up various trade routes. Again, it was a town very much like Columbus, Ohio.

James Hunter, who is probably the most astute Christian writer about culture living in America today, says that cultural change frequently happens not in the very center of power, but on the edges. So cultural change frequently doesn’t happen at Harvard which is right at the center of power, but can emerge from places like NYU, or OSU, or UCLA. The reasons that centers of power protect this status quo, Hunter argues, is that frequently it is educated elites who don’t necessarily occupy the very top echelon of prestige or power that are the most influential in making change happen. Those at the edges of power are willing to shake things up and have less to lose.

Paul came from a city like that. It wasn’t Rome. It wasn’t the most prestigious university town, but it was elite. It was educated. And Paul was one of the educated elites from Tarsus.

What else do we learn about Paul?

Philippians 3:4–6 (NIV)

4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

Paul is offering his Jewish credentials in fighting off the attacks that are coming from outside from Jewish Christians who are upsetting the church in Philippi saying that Paul was not Jewish enough. Paul is laying out his credentials. What are his credentials?

Philippians 3:5 (NIV)

5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

He is saying he was raised in a Jewish family that obeyed the Torah, the Hebrew Bible, in which God said to Abraham that he wanted all of Abraham’s male descendants to be

circumcised on the 8th day of their lives as a sign of being in covenant relationship with God. So Paul was raised in a Jewish family that kept the Jewish law.

He said he was of the tribe of Benjamin.

Philippians 3:5 (NIV)

5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

Why is that significant? Well, we don't exactly know why he is mentioning it, except it may be another credential. See, Jerusalem and the Temple were located within the boundaries of the land that God gave to the tribe of Benjamin. And Paul's Jewish name, Saul, was after the most famous Benjamite in history, King Saul, the first King of Israel. And as we're going to find out next week, just as King Saul persecuted David and tried to kill him, so his descendent, Saul, persecuted and tried to kill the followers of the Son of David, the Messiah Jesus Christ. Paul really followed in his forefather's footsteps.

Paul goes on to say that he was a Hebrew born of Hebrews.

Philippians 3:5 (NIV)

5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

Now, in Paul's writings and in the Book of Acts calling someone a Hebrew is a more specialized term than calling them a Jew or an Israelite or a descendent of Abraham. In Acts 6:1 we read this:

Acts 6:1 (NIV)

6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

Hebrews, or Hebraic Jews, is used in contradistinction to the Hellenistic Jews. We're talking about two groups, both Jewish, but who had cultural differences and linguistic differences. The Hebrew Jews went to synagogues where the language spoken in synagogue was Hebrew. That's the kind of synagogue I was raised in. The Hellenistic Jews who went to synagogues where the language spoken was Greek. Many Jews go to synagogue today and all of the prayers are read in English. The Hebrew Jews would have spoken Aramaic, a Semitic language associated with Hebrew in their homes. That's what Paul's native language would have been. Aramaic. In fact, when Paul meets Christ on the road to Damascus, Christ speaks to him in Aramaic. The Hellenistic Jews would have spoken Greek in their homes. So Paul would have grown up knowing three languages, at least – Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek.

And in Philippians 3, Paul goes on to say that he was a Pharisee.

Philippians 3:5 (NIV)

5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

Paul had a great education. He was trained under one of the most famous rabbis in all of history, Rabbi Gamaliel. We read this in Acts 22:3,

Acts 22:3 (NIV)

3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.

Paul was a committed follower of God’s Law as it was taught to him by the leading Rabbi of his day, Gamaliel. He was trained in all the rabbinic methods of interpreting the Old Testament. He grew up among the best and the brightest. And he made use of his education. V. 6:

Philippians 3:6 (NIV)

6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

Paul, the great leader, did not just come from a university town, from great parents, study under a great teacher, but Paul also took advantage of his education. He went for it by choice. He defended Judaism against what he saw was an invasion of a foreign heretical message, namely the message of Jesus and his followers. He defended the truth. He poured himself out for his faith. He was zealous.

Jim Collins in his really influential book titled Good to Great describes what he called a Level 5 Leader. He says that a Level 5 Leader, a great leader, is incredibly determined and ambitious. But their ambition, their zeal, their drive is not for themselves or for personal promotion, it is for the institution, the cause that they’re leading. Paul is a Level 5 Leader. He was zealous; he was passionate; he was white hot; he was determined; he was driving, but not for himself or his position or title, for the corner office and the trappings of power. Paul was ambitious for God, at least, for his understanding of God.

Let me pause here and ask you a question: have you ever looked over your own past, the people, the places, the influences that made you who you are today? Friend, have you ever said to God, “God, what might you want to use from my past whether you’ve got a great education from one of America’s great schools, or you got educated in the school of hard knocks; whether you learned from others, or you learned from your mistakes, what is it in your life, friend, that if you submitted it to God, if you said to God,

“Here, here I am, use me,” what might God want to use in your life to influence others toward the kingdom of God?

Maybe it is your sensitivity towards other people’s pain. Maybe it is your intellect, your way with words, the fact that you wear well with others. Maybe you’re a great listener. Friends, have you ever looked over the scope of your life and said, “Well, here is who I am. Here is what shaped me. Here are my credentials. Here’s my background. God use this, even if you consider it a mess, use this to influence others.”

And then we need to reflect not only on the credentials of a leader, but the opportunities of a leader.

The opportunities of a leader

You know, the truth is, friends, that you could be the most talented person in the world, but if you’ve never given an opportunity, if you are in a situation where every door is slammed in your face, the world may never know of your talent or genius. I think of brilliant women, who are living today in Saudi Arabia, who are never given a chance to receive an advanced education, no opportunity to shine in their own country, much less the world. I think of talented children and teenagers who are growing up in war-torn areas like Syria or Afghanistan, or Iraq, or the Central African Republic. I think of undocumented immigrants – some taken to America as children, hardworking, bright, who are kept from attending universities because they don’t have a social security number, kept from joining the military and defending the country they love. Greatness in leadership is not only a matter of your internal qualities, but of your opportunities. The individual intersects with the circumstance. The man or woman meets the moments.

What were the opportunities that Paul had for his leadership gift to shine? Paul lived in a moment in history very much like our own. First of all, the world was generally at peace. Much of Europe, the Middle East and North America was, for the first time, under the control of one power, namely Rome. It was called the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace. The Roman world was patrolled at its borders by the Roman Army. And so people within the Roman Empire generally lived secure lives. Had Paul been born a century earlier while Rome was going through its civil war, who knows if we would have ever heard of Paul. But he was born at just the right time, during a time of Roman peace.

Transportation around the Roman Empire was incredibly easy because of the great roads built by Rome that were very much like the Interstate Highway system that we have today. People and ideas could easily travel from one place to another because of the Roman roads just as people and ideas can easily travel today because of the ease of modern transportation and because of the Internet.

And the Roman Empire spoke a common language, Greek. Everyone was educated in Greek, even the educated people in Rome where the common language was Latin. The educated people in Rome were educated in Greek. There was a domination of one language. Paul didn't have to spend years learning a new language in order to communicate the gospel message wherever he went. And Greek is a sensitive nuanced language. It is perfect for communicating difficult theological or philosophical truths. Today, the dominant language for the educated around the world is English. Ideas and business can be conducted in many places around the world in English.

Paul was living at a time where people were disgusted with Greek and Roman religion as they reflected on the cruelties, the adulteries, the deceits, the lies attributed to the gods. Educated people were looking for something better. Is there a God who tells the truth? Is there a God who is not like people with all of our weaknesses? We live in a time where people are also hungry spiritually? Are there any answers that will give guidance to our lives beyond the shallowness of the entertainment culture? Anything that will give us hope in an age of cynicism and addiction?

So we have the Roman peace. It is hard for ideas to spread in a time of war. We have the Roman road system. People and ideas easily traveled. Ideas spread on the road system. We have a common language. We have a general despair over the spiritual state of the Roman Empire.

One more opportunity that Paul had was that in his day the Jewish people were spread everywhere throughout the Roman Empire. In every major city there were Jewish synagogues. And the Hebrew Bible that Christians call the Old Testament, had been translated into Greek and many Gentiles were attracted to the spirituality of the Jews, who lived in their midst. There were many Gentiles who hung around the synagogues. There were many Gentiles in urban areas that were reading the Bible. And we're going to find that for the Apostle Paul, preaching in local synagogues became part of his strategy for reaching the world for Christ.

Let me stop here. Let's think about this for a moment. Friends, have you ever reflected on your opportunities? What are your God-given opportunities for influence? I asked you a moment ago if you had ever done an inventory of your credentials, the things God might want to use to influence others for Christ. But what are your opportunities? Maybe you own a business or you work for a company; how can you influence customers or clients for Christ? Maybe you are a teacher or a professor, or an administrator in a school. What are your opportunities to influence people towards Christ with other faculty, or administrator, or with students? Consider your circle of influence in your neighborhood. You might be part of a mom's play group for your kids, or you serve as a coach for a team, or you work in a hospital around a multitude of patients and fellow healthcare providers. Friends, have you ever taken five minutes to consider all of the opportunities that you have – in your family, in your neighborhood,

through your writing, your music, business, or dormitory to blog, to write, to speak influence others for Christ?

Great leaders don't only have internal credentials and external opportunities, great leaders face challenges with courage and determination.

The challenges of a leader

Christianity did not spread unmolested without violent challenge in the 1st century. Yes, there were incredible opportunities because of the Roman peace and because the Roman roads, language and so on. But there were huge challenges. Virtually, every part of Christianity was an affront, it was an offense, to Judaism. Certainly, there was an offense and an affront from the main Christian claim that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, the fulfillment of all the hopes and dreams of Israel. This man, who was hung on a cross, was God's Messiah, the Savior of the world. That message of a crucified Messiah has always offended people.

Just this past week I traveled to Washington DC to do some advocacy work on behalf of immigrants living in America. Our church is filled with immigrants. Vineyard Columbus not only tolerates in our church, but celebrates immigrants. One of the things I am most grateful for as a gift of God is the diversity that God has given to this church. This past Monday I was in Washington and while I was there I got together with my first cousin, who I haven't seen in decades. Of course, like all of my family, she is Jewish. She said, "Rich, what is it that I hear about you becoming a Christian? What's that all about?" And so I told her my story as I've done many times in my family. And never once has one of my family members said, "Of course, Jesus is the Jewish Messiah! Of course, this man who was crucified is the Savior of the world. How can I receive him?" There's an offense. There's an affront. I can feel it as I'm talking.

Paul was going around saying that Gentiles didn't need to keep the whole Jewish Law, that men could be incorporated into the people of God without being circumcised, that women could cook and serve up for their families food that wasn't kosher, and that was OK with God; that worship would be on the first day of the week and not on the Sabbath. All of these things were offensive and affronts to Judaism.

And to the Romans all the offense of Christianity was even greater because at a time when the Romans were saying, "Caesar is Lord," Christians were saying, "No, he isn't. Jesus is Lord!" Christians were accused of being unpatriotic, unRoman because they refused to support the state-sponsored religion. Most of the Romans didn't believe in their gods, but every good Roman did offer sacrifices to the Roman gods as part of their civic obligation. And people back then belonged to trade guilds. There were guilds for metal workers, guilds for builders and cooks, and these guilds would gather together in large professional groups. We call them conventions or unions today. They would eat and drink together and do fellowship together, and as part of what they did as trade

guilds, offer sacrifices to the gods. So early Christians who refused to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods found themselves at odds with their government and at odds with their professional colleagues.

What makes a leader great? Great leaders face their challenges with courage and determination. And even though it costs them, they don't back down.

I was rereading a wonderful book by the preeminent Presidential historian, Michael Bechloss, titled Presidential Courage.

Book Cover: Presidential Courage by Michael Bechloss

He tells the stories of various presidents and the moments in time when they needed to step up and exercise courage and the challenges of their day. I was re-reading the story of Abraham Lincoln. Talk about a man who faced challenges his whole life. He lost his mother when he was 9. He lost the love of his life, Ann Rutledge, as a young man. He had a really challenging marriage to a woman, who was probably mentally ill, and who fell apart after the death of two of her sons, Eddie and Willie. Willie died during the White House years of Lincoln. When Lincoln was elected to office, he immediately faced the challenge of the South seceding and then attacking a federal Fort. And he faced the challenge of the Civil War going really badly for the North for three years. He faced massive rallies against him, riots in New York City when he instituted the draft. Newspapers attacked him and called him a well-meaning baboon. Friends told him to make peace with the South. His top General openly criticized him. Lincoln struggled internally with what today would certainly be diagnosed as clinical depression; back then it was called melancholy. What made him great?

One of the things that made him so great was simply his perseverance in the face of all these challenges. He just kept going with courage and determination – left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot.

The Apostle Paul faced incredible challenges. Listen to this list in 2 Corinthians 11.

2 Corinthians 11:22–29 (NIV)

22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false

believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

What made Paul so great? Not just his credentials, not just his opportunities, but when he was knocked down, he got back up with courage and determination left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot, he kept doing what God had called him to do.

Friends, what are the challenges that you face? Where have you been knocked down? Where have you faced opposition? Where do you need to pick yourself up and brush yourself off and in the name of the Lord, do what God has called you to do? Where do you need to push through the opposition to not quit; to keep fighting to get back in the game? God wants to use everyone of you who is a follower of Christ to make a difference for the world for his sake during this challenging moment in history. Let's pray.

The Making of A Leader

Rich Nathan

May 3-4, 2014

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Leadership Lessons from the Life of Paul Series

Philippians 3:1-11

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