

Lessons on Life and Leadership

Lesson 7... Every Leader Will Disappoint You, and You Will Disappoint Yourself.

After being corrected, my children used to say to me, "But, Dad, nobody's perfect!" That is so true—as my own example has proven to them many times.

Nobody's perfect; we know this instinctively. (If you doubt it, just read your Bible!) But somehow—when it comes to leaders—we expect them to be nearly perfect. We want them to be shepherds, visionaries, pioneers, innovators, and positive role models in every area. We expect them to have razor-sharp judgment, unlimited energy and patience, exemplary families, faultless morals, and to be available to us 24/7. OK, that may be a bit overstated. Yet at the first hint of weakness or failure in a leader, many of us too easily begin to criticize.

Under scrutiny like this, no wonder some of us don't want to lead. We shouldn't be surprised that many leaders who do take the risk and are "found wanting" end up leaving discouraged and disheartened.

The reality is that each one of us—including you and me—has weaknesses: areas where we are not and never will be gifted, vulnerability to sin (yes, current unresolved sin), situations that expose our insecurities and pride—and many more. It's true: nobody's perfect.

I have wondered why some leaders' weaknesses begin to emerge and hinder their effectiveness. Perhaps it is the result of how they came to be in leadership roles in the first place. Perhaps they were the only ones available, or "earned it" by seniority or age. Maybe they were successful in one task or stage of ministry but not another. Or perhaps they were thrust into their roles with little preparation for leadership, and even less development afterwards.

We're discovering that sometimes leaders have the competencies to lead, but lack the character that followers long for. We fall into the world's practice of developing skill and competence while neglecting the leader's character.

Whatever the cause, when a leader's weaknesses begin to show, we can become disappointed and start criticizing. But there are constructive ways to counter our critical impulses. We can purpose to make our leaders successful by being tolerant and understanding of natural weaknesses, and by helping them in their areas of weakness (that's biblical protection). We should guard our tongues by raising issues with the leader before talking to others. And of course, pray for them often.

But what about our disappointment with **ourselves** as leaders? We can disappoint ourselves when we see subtle or glaring flaws in our character, or realize our lack of giftedness in a needed area. Sometimes we expect more of ourselves than we can hope to deliver. And then there are the times when we make mistakes of judgment or wrong decisions, and people get hurt or marginalized. Some of us find it so difficult to admit our weaknesses and mistakes. Others of us see our own frailties all too well, and are harshly self-critical.

When the "disappointing" leader in question is you, it will help to know your limits and work as a team. Don't cling to a leadership role—you may have more lasting influence without it! And admit when your job as a leader is done. Always be empowering the next generation with an attitude that "He must increase, I must decrease."

Above all, we need to extend grace—to others and to ourselves. After all, "Nobody's perfect."