



The things you have heard me say in the presence of many

entrust to reliable people who will also be

qualified to teach others
2 Timothy 2:2

witnesses

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WEAK ENOUGH TO LEAD: WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES US ABOUT POWERFUL LEADERSHIP

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The author opens his masterwork with a statement “If we are hoping to glean a laundry list of ‘leadership principles’ from the Bible, we will be sorely disappointed.” We have known for quite a long while that not everyone can lead. However, those chosen by God have unique qualifications in that they have all showed their weaknesses. James C. Howell’s book, *Weak Enough to Lead: What the Bible Tells Us About Powerful Leadership*, gives us a unique perspective on Christian leadership. He posits that God uses those who are weak to display the most powerful leadership lessons of all time. It is at our weakest point that we are challenged by God to lead his people. We need to look no further than the examples displayed in the tales of Saul, David, Hannah, Moses, Elijah, Esther, Paul, and Jeremiah but also Jacob. More importantly, the greatest leader ever, Jesus the Christ, becomes weak and powerless in the world by giving up his power while on the cross, so that he may come back with authority. This display leads the author to challenge his readers with critical thinking questions arguing that “leadership is about authority far more than power.” Therefore, sometimes, a leader has to give up power and wait, recognizing the slow process of God’s work.

The secular world of leadership and its hopes for positioning a leader for success when it comes to productivity or profit is very different from the “Bible’s vision for life.” Think about it; the author puts forth a convincing argument that if Jesus served as the CEO “He’d run your company into the ground in a week.” Moreover, “old testament characters...would do no better.” God thrust people into leadership positions to serve and govern his people. The author points to an argument that in Israel you have servants, not leaders, and “placing some people in authority over others is nothing but a condescension to human sinfulness...Leadership exists only because of sin.” In other words, the author fully understands that leadership is about servanthood to others. Nevertheless, it is the leaders of “Israel whom seem to sin more than regular people because they have the opportunity to sin in more spectacular ways.”

The author claims that Biblical Hebrew has no words we can translate as a leader or leadership. However, he alludes to the fact that leadership in the Bible is associated with leaders, based on their position, have the opportunity to sin more than a regular person during that time. However, there is a distinction between those placed in leadership during biblical times versus the corporate world of today. We can ascertain from the author’s writings that the display of leadership in the Bible is more about life stories, not principles. By conducting a compare and contrast analysis,

we find that Biblical leadership would never work “in today’s corporate world and might even seem strange and even contradictory in today’s church and the world.” The author qualifies his statement about stories stating that the main reason why, after more than 1000 studies, we cannot “produce a profile of an ideal leader is that leadership emerged from their life stories.” Therefore, the author’s premise is simple. There are “no simple, painless answers in scripture to questions of leadership.” However, one will find a host of real-life stories of what we can call applied acts of leadership as illustrated by these historical figures in the Bible. The author adds to the body of Christian leadership knowledge associating the significant stories of some 20th Century leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Mother Teresa, John Lewis, and Nelson Mandela and connecting them to powerful scriptures that propel them forward to meet the ills of society.

Are we weak enough to lead? If we become weak, we need to look no further than God’s strength and examples:

- **Jesus** – The author illustrates very effectively that Jesus sets the stage as a child “by being weak enough to be puzzled and ask lots of questions. The art of all leadership begins and ends with the asking of good questions.” It is his weakness; he will lead us to the cross.
- **Children** – Jesus makes it clear that we must become in the likeness of a child which will demonstrate our weakness. The scripture tells us to let the little children come unto Jesus for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Can we humble ourselves to be in the likeness of a child?
- **Hannah** – Sometimes you must do what Hannah did and get up and present yourself to the Lord, recognizing how weak and vulnerable you are in the eyes of Christ. Doing what you promise to do by letting go is the secret to leadership. “Leadership is letting go” as when Hannah gave back the child that God had placed in her womb. The lesson is to know your weaknesses and remembers that “faithful leadership begins and ends in growing, not the bottom line, or my reputation, but our ability to be absorbed in God’s mind and ways.”
- **Saul** – “The complex realism of Biblical leadership.” Believe that when you insist on your will instead of God’s, be prepared for God to give you up and let you have your way. Although there will be frustration and grief, a leader should not stiffen his or her resolve. Recognizing that not all things are technical problems, leaders must adapt to facilitate social change, using the dynamics of innovation and learning to be used at the right time. Nevertheless, “there are so many moments in time when leadership quite simply will fail, no matter whose leading or how.” The book demonstrates Saul’s weaknesses.
- **Moses** – In another example, we find the depiction of strong Hebrew women in Moses biblical tale and how they defied even the Pharaoh’s wishes. Thereby, supporting the claim that even “Rosa Parks and so many other women without official titles through history...” stepped up to display strong leadership. The overall argument from the author here is that “Biblical leadership so often takes just this form: defiance by seemingly insignificant people with no power at all against the world’s influential leaders and their laws.” The clear message that sometimes a leader has to wait on God.

These are just some of the many stories articulated in this great work showing the weaknesses of those who became influential leaders in their own right. “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10). Can you imagine the secular leadership world embracing that notion? John Lewis became a congressman, and Nelson Mandela walked out of prison to become the President of South Africa. Sometimes you do have to wait on God to move those who refused to move. As the author states in a roundabout way, at times you do have to let go and let God have his way. At some point, a leader must ask the question “Are you weak enough to lead?” Overall, the book demonstrates that it’s okay to reveal your weaknesses at various times to reserve your authority. One must recognize that it is the church, work, and home that need wise leadership the most and we must be careful

with those who seem impressive, placing them in leadership positions. To lead by example, it is Jesus who asks us to be vulnerable and weak like those of a child for which theirs are the kingdom of heaven. As the book proclaims, the remarkable example of Job gives us a piece of mind that God will reward the righteous person.

This vivid book gives us great examples of Biblical leadership and how God empowers individuals who are weak to lead the way. The result is to recognize that God sets a sense of purpose for those chosen to lead his people and the book shows this drive. The book illustrates that God sometimes lets us have our way to show his authority over his children. The keys to successful Christian leadership is centered on the result of authority rather than power and by revealing one's weaknesses. The target audience is a CEO, Pastor of a church, School Administrator (Principal, Superintendent, and Chancellor) or any strategic leader sitting at the helm of a business charged with serving an organization or a large group of people.