

MISSION, MOTIVATION & METHOD

(Written in 2012 and Election Year)

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away (I Peter 5:1-4 NKJV).

Peter's letter to elders in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia Minor and Bithynia contains essential elements for leadership success. Though he writes to leaders of a church group, the leadership nuggets he shares are usable in the institutions of the home and government. The home, church and government have all been instituted by God, and have a symbiotic relationship with each other. As such, leadership burdens, approaches and functions are shared among each other.

Peter's words to these spiritual leaders contain a mission, a motivation and a method. Knowledge of these essentials and commitment to them by leaders has a huge impact on the quality of life of those who follow them.

The mission for these elders was to tend the sheep. It is a mission not only to those sheep that are well and safe, but to all the sheep. It includes strengthening the weak, healing the sick, binding up the broken, rounding up the strays and bringing back the lost. This is no work for part-timers or those concerned with their image.

True shepherds know they will get dirty and injured while tending the sheep. They also know that in their unselfish service to sheep, they will sometimes smell like sheep.

The passage also contains the motivation for the service that is to be rendered. Peter says that the elders should not serve from a sense of compulsion, but eagerly and willingly. These adverbs speak to the heart of love that shepherd leaders are to have for those committed to their care. Neither money nor desire for prominence can provide the staying power and sacrificial service that sheep require. Sooner or later, the true colours of imposters and mere hired hands will be shown.

The method of leadership enjoined by Peter is not dictatorial, but that of example. This approach models the traits, skills and attitudes that are encouraged among those being led. The followers are not only told what to do, but are also shown how to do it by their leaders. This is a powerful method of leadership because it goes farther and deeper than others. Commands barked out in domineering fashion reach the ears, but humble service reaches the heart of those who are led.

These principles must also be known by leaders in our homes and communities. Parents must know their mission to instill Christian values in their children and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians. 6:4). This mission includes those children whom they may find challenging. Like the good shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine and pursues the one lost sheep, parents must know the value of each child. Parents must render these duties from hearts of love that manifests themselves in eager and willing attitudes. Financial remuneration and the glory of recognition are unworthy incentives for the ministry of parenting. Example should also be held by them as the premier method for raising their

children. Sadly, the profanity, violence and irresponsibility that are seen in children have first been seen in their parents.

In this election year political leaders would also do well to embrace this tripod approach to the service they render. Clearly, God has a mission for government. Paul includes the punishment of evil, and consequently the promotion of law and order in society in his letter to Christians in Rome (Romans. 13:1-8). An unselfish love for their country and fellowman should also be their motivation in running for office. This will cause them to give more time and effort in passing legislation that incorporates the Judaeo-Christian values on which the United States has been founded. Political leaders should feel more of a burden in modelling the principles of citizenship to the people who elect them. Honesty in paying taxes, driving within the speed limit and accepting responsibility for one's actions are more easily accepted in society when leaders demonstrate them.

Though oceans of time separate us from Peter, his words to First Century elders find application to leaders in the Twenty-first Century. Preachers, parents and politicians influence our communities either for good or for evil. If they know their God-given mission, serve from pure motives and practice the virtues they enjoin as the method of leadership, their impact in the home, church and government will be positive.

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