

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark Peters and I'm one of the pastors on staff here at North Shore Alliance; it's great to have you with us this morning.

For the last five Sundays, we've been teaching through a series entitled "*Vision Begins With God.*" Throughout this series, we've been looking at the vision and values of our church, but we've continued to suggest that a vision of God need to precede a vision from God. Seeing, knowing, and experiencing God always precedes joining Him in His work--doing always flows from being, not the other way around.

This morning marks our final Sunday in this series, and I want to wrap up by talking about something dear to God's heart and ours: *developing leaders*. I want to talk for a few minutes about what it takes to be a leader, and I want to begin by inviting you into a dialogue. There's a couple questions I'm going to ask and let's see if we can come up with some answers together.

Let's start with the first question: *when you hear the word "leader," what are some of the names that come to mind?*

- (write out list)

Here's the second question: *when you hear the word "leader," what are some of the qualities and characteristics that come to mind?*

- (write out list)

That's a pretty impressive list of names? I'm pretty sure my name doesn't belong there. And how about our list of characteristics? Creating lists like these are part of the problem in talking about leadership...we count ourselves out before we even begin. A further

problem is that we've all seen really good leaders and really bad leaders--the really good ones make us wonder if we could ever do the job, and the really bad ones make us fearful of ever stepping up.

If we make the all-star list we've compiled the standard for leadership, I'm not sure many of us would ever feel up to the task. And those who think of themselves as God's gift to leadership...those are the kind of people who end up being dangerous--to themselves and to others. *So how do we move forward?*

I want to take you on a very brief journey through the Bible, stopping to look at those God called into leadership. God accomplished His work through them, and they all had significant limitations:

- **Abraham**: was a backwoods nobody, someone who doubted God's promises, a liar, and a classic conflict avoider. God knew all of this and called Abraham anyway.
- **Jacob** was a conniving, two-faced, liar who played favourites in his family and caused all kinds of problems. God knew all of this and called Jacob anyway.
- **Moses** had an identity complex, an anger problem, and a speech impediment. God knew all of this and still called Moses to lead His people.
- **Deborah** was a reluctant leader in a patriarchal society...God knew all of this and called her anyway.
- **Gideon** was from an unimportant family, and by nature he was filled with fear and anxiety; he was most at home when he was hiding. God knew all of this and called him anyway. In fact, in His first conversation with Gideon, God said "*The LORD is with you mighty warrior;*" Gideon was hiding in a winepress at the time.
- **Elijah** suffered from depression, but God used him anyway.

- **David** had issues with power, anger, revenge, and lust. Add to that the fact that his family was a mess. God knew all of this and used David anyway.
- **Esther** was the Queen of Persia but she only got that gig because she had won a beauty contest. Esther was timid and fearful for good reason; one wrong misstep and she would end up in exile like the last Queen. God knew all of this and called Esther anyway.

When we get into the New Testament, it doesn't get any better:

- **Peter** was over-confident, impetuous, he was always sticking his foot in his mouth, and he was a hypocrite. God knew all of this and called Peter anyway.
- **Thomas** was filled with doubt, **Mark** was a quitter, **Onesimus** was a runaway slave. God knew all of this and called them anyways.
- And what about the Apostle **Paul**? Paul was a murderer, an uptight legalist, he wrote people off, and had a hard time with criticism. God knew all of this and called Paul anyway.

Is your resume a little lean? Is your character a little deficient? Do you feel inadequate? Great! You just might be leadership material! In fact, if God's past decision making is any indication, He's looking for people just like us. God has got more skill, more experience, more love, more wisdom, and more strength than we will ever need to lead--there is no lack in God. If we are willing and obedient, God can use us.

Our lack of expertise does not pose the least bit of a problem to God. God does not call those who are qualified, He qualifies those whom He calls. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, God says "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*"

I don't want to rush past the feelings of inadequacy that we may be feeling today; I don't want to brush aside the very real weaknesses we experience. In doing so, I might be suggesting that one day we grow out of weakness and have the competency God needs to get the job done; that's not the Biblical picture of spiritual leadership.

God says, "*My grace is sufficient for you.*" We never reach a place in life (or in leadership) where God's grace is unnecessary; we never stop needing God, we will always be dependent on Him. It's His power that shines through and sustains us in our weakness; God does not make us strong so we can stand on our own, He fills us with Himself, and we learn to rely on His strength.

The apostle Paul makes the same point earlier in 2 Corinthians 4:7-9. He says, Jesus lives within us, and in our weakness we are like jars of clay, but our weakness showcases Jesus and His all-surpassing power. Paul writes, "*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*"

Spiritual leadership is not for the faint of heart, and it's certainly not for the proud or confident of heart...it's for those who know how much they need God, for those who are willing to listen to Him, follow Him, and depend on Him for every step of the journey.

All of us have gaps, all of us have inadequacies, all of us need to depend. Often those leaders who are the most at ease, are those who learned long ago to depend on the Lord moment by moment. These are the leaders that rely on His strength, His love, His competency, not on their own.

I'm always surprised to hear what some people think goes on within me when I'm teaching, leading, or dealing with a difficult situation. Some people assume that I feel in control, confident, and competent; let me assure you that is almost never the case. Like each of you, I am learning the secret of abiding in Jesus Christ.

In John 15:4-5, Jesus said "*Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*"

Wesley Duewell writes, "If you rely on training, you accomplish what training can do. If you rely on skills and hard work, you obtain the results that skills and hard, faithful work can do. When you rely on committees, you get what committees can do. But when you rely on God, you get what God can do."<sup>1</sup> *Which would you rather experience?*

If you are a follower of Jesus, stop writing yourself off; don't banish yourself to a lifetime on the sidelines. And stop hoping that one day you will feel confident enough, that you will be competent enough to excel at every task that God invites you into...that day will never come. It's God who do abundantly more than we can ask, or even imagine. *God can use you...will you let Him?*

**Illus:** I want to switch gears and talk about what it takes to develop spiritual leaders, and to start things off I want to tell you a part of my my journey towards serving and leading in the church. But I can't tell

my story without telling another story in parallel: the story of an upstart, young pastor--short in stature but mighty in faith--you know him, you love him, he's one of our own...I'm talking about Dave Sattler.

When I first met Dave, I was only 19 and he was already ancient; he was 23. Dave was newly married, newly graduated from Bible schooled, and newly hired at the church I grew up in--Surrey Alliance Church.

Surrey Alliance Church was the only church I had ever known, and when I graduated from high school, my youth pastor asked if I would run the Jr. High Youth group. I didn't really know what I was doing, but I didn't say "no" and before long I had recruited a group of my friends to help me. I'm not sure that we did a great job, but none of students died and we didn't burn anything down--success!

But as we neared the end of the school year, our team got the news that a Jr. High Pastor has been hired. To be honest, part of me was relieved; I had a heart to serve but not much else. I felt inadequate, unprepared, and unsure of myself most of the time--maybe this ministry stuff was best left in the hands of the professionals. I was looking forward to handing in my resignation. Then I met Dave.

If you know Dave, you know that one of things he loves to do is to build people, and form teams; he's brilliant at it. If I had tried to hand in my resignation, I don't think Dave would have received it. I became one of Dave's first recruits, maybe his first ever recruit in

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<sup>1</sup> Wesley Duewell, *Ablaze For God*, 78, as quoted by Stephen Seamands, *Ministry In The Image of God*, 29.

pastoral ministry, and that next year I worked alongside Dave in youth ministry.

You know what drew me to Dave? His life. He and Joanne were fun and engaging, they were inspiring. They had me over for dinner, they talked with me about serving, Dave and I played soccer together, we did ministry together, we prayed together. I thought everything was going smashingly until one day Dave sat me down and gave me his famous line: *Buddy, I need you*. 20 years later, Dave is still using this line, and he's still sucking people in.

*Buddy, I need you...*Dave needed someone to join him in teaching the Bible with our Jr. High students. Dave had been doing most of the teaching by himself and he probably needed a break, but there was more to it than that. I can remember as clear as day what Dave said to me. He said, *Mark, I see Jesus at work in your life, and I think you have more to give...I think God might be giving you a gift to teach the Bible to others*.

It was the first time anyone had ever said anything like that to me before. Even though I was the only "Mark" in the room, a part of me wanted to look behind me to see if Dave was talking about someone else named "Mark". *I had a teaching gift? Are you kidding?* I didn't see it, I didn't want it, and I certainly didn't want to get up in front of others and fall flat on my face. I was scared spitless, I wanted to say "no," but I was more afraid of saying "no" to Dave than I was of falling flat on my face.

That was 20 years ago, and all these years later, I'm still teaching because I'm afraid of saying "no" to Dave Sattler...he's very scary. All kidding aside, Dave saw something in me that I couldn't see. The

reason I said "yes" to teaching was because Dave took the time to invest in me; he had the courage to call out from me what he saw Jesus doing in me. And that, church, is what it means to be a spiritual father or mother.

Some might ask, *are spiritual leaders born or made?* I'm not sure that is a helpful distinction; both are involved. Spiritual leaders are born, born of God: the Father calls, Jesus saves, and Spirit transforms and equips. But spiritual leaders are also made. Spiritual leaders don't grow on trees, they grow up in a church family where spiritual mothers and fathers come alongside, encouraging, teaching, and guiding. Developing leaders is both God's work and ours.

Every Joshua needs a Moses. Every Esther needs a Mordecai. Every Silas, Timothy, or Titus, needs a Paul. Even Paul needed someone to father him and teach him how to be a father to others--he had Barnabas. The Church is not primarily an organization, it's an organism, and when healthy, organisms multiply. God's vision for our church, a vision that includes transformation and mission, cannot exist apart from father and mothers who raise up leaders.

I want to invite you to take your Bibles and open them with me to Acts 11:20-26; I'll have it on the screen behind me. And as you're turning there, let me tell you a bit of the background story of Paul and Barnabas.

Before Paul encountered Jesus, he was going from town to town, hunting down followers of Jesus and throwing them in jail. And whenever possible, Paul would use his influence to seek the death penalty for these Christians. But after Paul encountered Jesus

personally, he did a 180; he began to preach about Jesus wherever he went.

Not long after Paul's 180, he went to Jerusalem to try and join the disciples but they were scared to death of Paul...he has been murdering their friends. No one would go near him until one man who vouched for Paul; his name was Barnabas...he saw something in Paul no one else could see.

The persecution that began in Jerusalem scattered Christians all over the Greek speaking world, and everywhere they went they told the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. Let's pick up the story in Acts 11, starting in verse 20.

*“Some of them...went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks...telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. 22 News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*

*24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”*

Every Paul needs a Barnabas; we all need someone to believe in us, to see Christ in us. When Barnabas saw what God was doing in

Antioch, he searched for Paul and brought him in under his wing...he was the spiritual father Paul needed.

**Illus:** Can I tell you another personal story? There's a guy I talk with regularly who plays a multi-faceted role in my life: he's my spiritual director, he's a mentor, he's spiritual father. When Morris and I talk, I do most of the talking and he does most of the listening. He mainly asks me questions that unpeel the layers of my soul. Whether I'm at rest, or in crisis, Morris holds up a mirror and helps me to see what God might be saying and doing in and through my circumstances. On my own, I struggle to see the forest from the trees, but Morris helps me navigate what I am seeing, thinking, and feeling.

I always look forward to talking with Morris, but as of late I have begun looking forward to the way he always concludes our conversation. Before he says “goodbye,” he always concludes with the following phrase: *Mark, I believe in you.* We can talk for an hour and a half, and yet our conversation isn't complete until I hear the words “*Mark, I believe in you.*” Some days these words feel like water in the desert because I don't believe in me, and I need someone who sees something I can't.

**Illus:** Last year in my small group, God prompted me to speak to one of the guys. I had begun to notice that whenever we opened the Bible, he had something insightful to say, something thoughtful, something that was true. I began to suspect that maybe the Spirit was giving him a gift to teach. So one night I pulled him aside and told him that I saw Christ at work in his life, and that he might have the spiritual gift of teaching.

He immediately dismissed it: *I don't have a teaching gift*. I asked him if he had ever tried teaching and he said he really hadn't. If I had been more on the ball I would have pulled out Sattler's line, *Buddy, I need you*. A few weeks later he led the teaching time in our group and it was one of the best small group nights we had all year. *I see Christ in you. I believe in you. And I will walk with you.*

Do you think you could do that for someone else? *I see Christ in you. I believe in you. And I will walk with you.* You don't need to be a leadership expert to be a spiritual mother or father. You do need to be connected to Jesus (He is the vine and we are the branch), and you do need to be willing to hold out your hand to someone. One author writes, "The reason it is so critical to allow God to shape your life is because your life is all you have to give away."

A few years ago I read an interview with Billy Graham. At the time of the interview he had been "retired" for a number of years from active involvement in large scale crusades. In the interview he was asked one primary question: *Billy, if you had it to do all over again, what would you do different?*

That's quite a question. There are few people in the history of Christianity who have had as big an impact as Billy Graham: he has seen millions of people give their life to Jesus because of his preaching, he has been a spiritual advisor to multiple presidents, he has conducted his ministry without scandal or moral failure.

Billy's response to the question is instructive. He said, I would do two things differently: (1) I would spend more time studying; and (2) I would take 12 people and pour my life into them. You can preach to millions, but you can only father or mother a handful. You don't mother or father someone by giving them a map and then sending them out on their own; mothering/fathering means going along with them.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, Paul writes to a church that he started; this is what he says: "*Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.*" Don't miss the metaphor...you're seldom going to hear one more poignant, more intimate. How does a nursing mother care for her child? Up close. Heart to heart.

God's goal is that we might "*become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*"<sup>2</sup> He will do His part, and He's looking for willing partners to join Him in this work. When God calls you to use your gifts, will you put your faith in His ability and step into the game? When God calls, will you play a mothering or fathering role in someone else's life? Will you make yourself available to be used in God's expanding kingdom?

I want to conclude with the words God gave to Joshua just before he was tasked with leading the nation of Israel. He had to step into the shoes of Moses...pretty big shoes...and God gave Joshua a promise to

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:13.

sustain him. He said, *“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous”*.<sup>3</sup> May these words burn upon our hearts as well.

**Pray**

**Communion:** This morning as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we do so remembering that our welcome into God’s family has nothing to do with our performance, skill, or competence; for we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **but**, we are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. Jesus died, His body broken, and His blood shed for us.

We more messed up than we realize, but more loved than we can imagine. *“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning.”*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joshua 1:5b-6.

<sup>4</sup> Lamentations 3:22-23.