

# **Spiritual Leadership by J. Oswald Sanders**

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## **1. Authoritative Leadership Under Leadership of Christ**

One rapidly developing trend is a style of authoritative leadership that is neither biblical nor beneficial. It was in awareness of this trend that I wrote: "True spiritual leadership is authoritative, but not authoritarian." Authoritative because it commands the sanction of Scripture and secures the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, but not authoritarian in the sense of exercising an undue influence on the decisions and life-style of other believers. The leader must be careful not to usurp the responsibilities that are rightly theirs, to be exercised under the lordship of Christ. (Preface Page ix-x)

## **2. We Need More Great Encouragers**

Great leaders have always been great encouragers. In these days when world and social conditions are throwing up such vast numbers of discouraged and disillusioned people, more than ever the Christian leader should purposefully embark on an encouragement-slanted ministry. Never was the exhortation of Hebrews 10:25 more appropriate—"Let us encourage one another, and all the more, as you see the day dawning near." (Preface Page x)

## **3. We Need Comfort and Encouragement Ministries**

The spiritual leaders of today would profit greatly by taking note of the mature wisdom of that great pastor-preacher Frederick B. Meyer: "If I had my life over again, I would devote much more time to the ministry of comfort and encouragement." (Preface Page xi)

## **4. True Leadership Selfless Service**

At the beginning of any study of spiritual leadership, it is essential that the divinely-enunciated master principle be clearly understood and firmly embraced. True greatness, true leadership, is achieved not by reducing men to one's service but in giving oneself in selfless service to them. And that is never done without cost. It involves drinking the bitter cup and experiencing a painful baptism of suffering. The true spiritual leader is concerned infinitely more with the service he can render God and his fellowmen than with the benefits and pleasures he can extract from life. He aims to put more into life than he takes out of it.

"One of the outstanding ironies of history is utter disregard of ranks and titles in the final judgment men pass on each other," said Samuel Brengle. "The final estimate of men shows that history cares not an iota for the rank or the title a man has borne, or the office he has held, but only the quality of his deeds and the character of his mind and heart." (Page 20)

## **5. I Have One Passion "He Alone"**

Although Count Zinzendorf was strongly drawn to classical pursuits and tempted by rank and riches, his attitude and ambition was summed up in one sentence: "I have one passion; it is He, He alone." He renounced selfish ambition and became the renowned founder and leader of the Moravian church. His followers drank deeply of the spirit of their leader and circled the world with the gospel. Their missionary activity had the unique distinction, in days when missionary work was on a very limited scale, of bringing into being an overseas church with three times as many communicants as in their home churches. One member out of ninety-two became a foreign missionary. (Page 20-21)

## **6. To Be Used to the Limit**

Both scripture and the history of Israel and the church attest that when God does discover a man who conforms to His spiritual requirements, who is willing to pay the full price of discipleship, He used him to the limit, despite his patent shortcomings. Such men were Moses, Gideon and David, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Adoniram Judson, William Carey, and a host of others. (Page 24)

## **7. Authoritative and Spiritual Leadership**

The overriding need of the church, if it is to discharge its obligation to the rising generation, is for a leadership that is authoritative, spiritual, and sacrificial. *Authoritative*, because people love to be led by one who knows where he is going and who inspires confidence. They follow almost without question the man who shows himself wise and strong, who adheres to what he believes. *Spiritual* because a leadership that is unspiritual, that can be fully explained in terms of the natural, although ever so attractive and competent, will result only in sterility and normal spiritual bankruptcy. *Sacrificial* because modeled on the life of the One who gave Himself a sacrifice for the whole world, who left us an example that we should follow His steps. (Page 24-25)

## **8. Great Leadership Demands Wholehearted Obedience**

Leadership is often viewed as the product of natural endowments and traits of personality—intellectual capacity, force of will, enthusiasm. That such talents and scholastic attainments do greatly enhance leadership is beyond question, but those are not the factors of paramount importance in the spiritual leader. “The real qualities of leadership are to be found in those who are willing to suffer for the sake of objectives great enough to demand their wholehearted obedience.” (Page 25)

## **9. Only God Makes Spiritual Leaders**

Spiritual leaders are not made by election or appointment, by men or any combination of men, nor by conferences or synods. Only God can make them. Simply holding a position of importance does not constitute one a leader, nor do taking courses in leadership or resolving to become a leader. The only method is that of *qualifying* to be a leader. Religious position can be conferred by bishops and boards, but not spiritual authority, which is the prime essential of Christian leadership. That comes—often unsought—to those who in earlier life have proved themselves worthy of it by spirituality, discipline, ability, and diligence, men who have heeded the command: “Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them,” and instead have sought first the kingdom of God. Spiritual leadership is a thing of the Spirit and is conferred by God alone. When His searching eye alights on a man who has qualified, He anoints him with His Spirit and separates him to his distinctive ministry (Acts 9:17, 22:21). (Page 25-26)

## **10. Spiritual Authority Outlined**

Samuel Logan Brengle was one of the truly great leaders of the Salvation Army. A man of scholarship as well as of singular spiritual power, he outlined the road to spiritual authority and leadership in challenging words:

It is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confession of sin, and much heartsearching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold, deathless, uncompromising and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but rather, like Paul, by counting those things that are gain to us as loss for Christ. That is a great price, but it must be unflinchingly paid by him who would be not merely a nominal but real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is recognized and felt in heaven, on earth and in hell. *Samuel Logan Brengle* (Page 26)

## **11. God Assigns Spiritual Leaders**

Places of spiritual ministry and leadership are sovereignly assigned by God. (Page 31)

## 12. Spiritual Leadership is Not Learned

No theological training or leadership course will automatically confer spiritual leadership or qualify one for an effective ministry. (Page 31)

## 13. Suffering and Servanthood Linked

It is noteworthy that only once did Jesus say that He was leaving His disciples an example, and that was when He washed their feet (John 13:15)—an example of *servanthood*. And only once did any other writer say that He left an example—and that was an example of suffering (1 Peter 2:21). Thus the thoughts of suffering and servanthood are linked, even as they were in the life of the Lord. And is the servant greater than his Lord? (Page 32)

## 14. God's Servant is Undiscourageable

“He will not be disheartened or crushed, until He has established justice in the earth” (Isaiah 45:4). God's Servant would be undiscourageable. A pessimist never makes an inspiring leader. Hope and optimism are essential qualities for the servant of God as he battles with the powers of darkness for the souls of men. God's Servant would be optimistic until His full objective is attained. (Page 34)

## 15. Three Kinds of People

General Charles Gordon once asked Li Hung Chang, an old Chinese leader, a double question: “What is leadership? And how is humanity divided?” He received this cryptic answer: “There are only three kinds of people in the world—those that are immovable, those that are movable, and those that move them!” (Page 36)

## 16. Qualified Leaders Have Followers

At a large gathering of Protestant missions leaders in China, the question of qualifications for leadership was being discussed. There was vigorous debate on the subject. D. E. Hoste, general director of the China Inland Mission, sat quietly listening until the chairman asked if he had anything to say on the subject. From all over the auditorium came murmurs of approval at the invitation, for his contributions to a discussion were always listened to with more than ordinary interest.

With a twinkle in his eye, he said in his curiously high-pitched voice: “It occurs to me that perhaps the best test of whether one is a qualified leader, is to find out whether anyone is following him.” *J. Oswald Sanders*. (Page 37)

## 17. Natural vs. Spiritual Leadership

National leadership and spiritual leadership have many points of similarity, but there are some respects in which they may be antithetical. That is seen when some of their dominate characteristics are set over against one another,

### Natural

Self-confident

Knows men

Makes own decisions

### Spiritual

Confident in God

Also knows God

Seeks to find God's will

Ambitious	Self-effacing
Originates own methods	Finds and follows God's methods
Enjoys commanding others	Delights to obey God
Motivated by personal considerations	Motivated by love for God and man
Independent	God-dependant

(Page 38)

### **18. True and Safe Leaders Have No Desire to Lead**

A true and safe leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the press of external situation. Such were Moses and David and the Old Testament prophets. I think there was hardly a great leader from Paul to the present day but was drafted by the Holy Spirit for the task, and commissioned by the Lord of the Church to fill a position he had little heart for. I believe it might be accepted as a fairly reliable rule of thumb that the man who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader. The true leader will have no desire to lord it over God's heritage, but will be humble, gentle, self-sacrificing and altogether as ready to follow as to lead, when the Spirit makes it clear that a wiser and more gifted man than himself has appeared. *A. W. Tozer.* (Page 39)

### **19. Seven Ingredients Necessary in a Leader**

Lord Montgomery enunciated seven ingredients necessary in a leader in war, each of which is appropriate to the spiritual warfare: (1) he should be able to sit back and avoid getting immersed in detail; (2) he must not be petty; (3) he must not be pompous; (4) he must be a good picker of men; (5) he should trust those under him and let them get on with their job without interference; (6) he must have the power of clear decision; (7) he should inspire confidence.

Dr. John R. Mott moved in student circles, and his tests covered different territory: (1) Does he do little things well? (2) Has he learned the meaning of priorities? (3) How does he use his leisure? (4) Has he intensity? (5) Has he learned to take advantage of momentum? (6) Has he the power of growth? (7) What is his attitude toward discouragements? (8) How does he face impossible situations? (9) What are his weakest points? (Page 41)

### **20. Great Leaders Are Servants to All**

The essential ideas of true spiritual leadership are gathered up in these words of John R. Mott:

I have in mind the use of the word leadership which our Lord doubtless had in mind when He said, "He who would be greatest among you shall be the servant of all"—leadership in the sense of rendering the maximum of service, leadership in the sense of the largest unselfishness; in the sense of unwearying and unceasing absorption in the greatest work of the world, the building up of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Page 42)

### **21. Suggested Standards of Self-Measurement**

Because qualities of natural leadership are by no means unimportant in spiritual leadership, there is value in seeking to discover leadership potential both in oneself and in others. Most people have latent and undeveloped traits that, through lack of self-analysis and consequent lack of self-knowledge, may long remain undiscovered. An objective study of the

following suggested standards of self-measurement could result in the discovery of such qualities where they exist, as well as the detection of incipient weaknesses that would make one unfit for leadership.

- Have you ever broken yourself of a bad habit? To lead others, one must be master of oneself.
- Do you retain control of yourself when things go wrong? The leader who loses self-control in testing circumstanced forfeits respect and loses influence. He must be calm in crisis and resilient in adversity and disappointment.
- Do you think independently? While using to the full the thought of others, the leader cannot afford to let others do his thinking or make his decisions for him.
- Can you handle criticism objectively and remain unmoved under it? Do you turn it to good account? The humble man can derive benefit from petty and even malicious criticism.
- Can you use disappointments creatively?
- Do you readily secure the cooperation and win the respect and confidence of others?
- Do you possess the ability to secure discipline without having to resort to a show of authority? True leadership is an internal quality of the spirit and requires no external show of force.
- Have you qualified for the beatitude pronounced on the peacemaker? It is much easier to *keep* the peace than to *make* peace where it has been shattered. An important function in leadership is conciliation—the ability to discover common ground between opposing viewpoints and then induce both parties to accept it.
- Are you entrusted with the handling of difficult and delicate situations?
- Can you induce people to do happily some legitimate things that they would not normally wish to do?
- Can you accept opposition to your viewpoint or decision without considering it a personal affront and reacting accordingly? Leaders must expect opposition and should not be offended by it.
- Do you find it easy to make and keep friends? Your circle of loyal friends is an index of the quality and extent of your leadership.
- Are you unduly dependent on the praise or approval of others? Can you hold a steady course in the face of disapproval and even temporary loss of confidence?
- Are you at ease in the presence of your superiors or strangers?
- Do your subordinates appear at ease in your presence? A leader should give an impression of sympathetic understanding and friendliness that will put others at ease.
- Are you really interested in people? In people of all types and all races? Or do you entertain respect of persons? Is there hidden racial prejudice? An antisocial person is unlikely to make a good leader.
- Do you possess tact? Can you anticipate the likely effect of a statement before you make it?
- Do you possess a strong and steady will? A leader will not long retain his position if he is vacillating.
- Do you nurse resentments, or do you readily forgive injuries done to you?
- Are you reasonably optimistic? Pessimism is no asset to a leader.
- Are you in the grip of a master passion such as that of Paul, who said, “This *one thing* I do?” Such a singleness of motive will focus all one’s energies and powers on the desired objective.
- Do you welcome responsibility?

R. E. Thompson suggests these tests of our attitudes to people as an indication of our capacity for leadership:

- Do other people’s failures annoy us or challenge us?
- Do we use people or cultivate people?
- Do we direct people or develop people?
- Do we criticize or encourage?
- Do we shun the problem person or seek him out?

It will not be sufficient merely to engage in this exercise in self-analysis superficially and pay no further heed to the discoveries made. Something must be done about it. Why not take some of the points of conscious weakness and failure and, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of discipline, concentrate on strengthening or correcting them?

Those desirable qualities were all present in their fullness in the symmetrical character of our Lord, and each Christian should make it his constant prayer that they might more rapidly be incorporated into his own personality.

There are other qualities that detract from leadership ability, for example, an oversensitive and defensive attitude when checked or corrected. There is always some element of truth in such criticism, and self-vindication is an unproductive quality.

An unwillingness to accept responsibility for failure or the tendency to lay the blame at someone else's door will forfeit confidence.

Inflexibility and intolerance in attitude is likely to alienate the worker who is creative and ambitious.

While always aiming at excellence, one should avoid the snare of perfectionism. The perfectionist usually sets goals quite beyond his ability to attain and then entertains a false sense of guilt because of failure to achieve. We live in an imperfect world, and we must come to terms with the possible. Setting more modest and realistic goals would bring great release to many an idealistic perfectionist.

Inability to keep a confidence has cost many a leader his influence with his people. Similarly the inability to yield a point, and thus shatter the image of infallibility, will achieve the same result. (Pages 44-47)

## **22. Elders and Bishop can be the Same Person**

It is generally held that the two words used of leaders in the church—*bishop* and *elder*—were applicable to the same person. *Elder* had reference to his dignity and status, whereas *bishop* related to his function or duty. In other words, one word has reference to his person, the other to his work. That is borne out in such passages as Acts 20:17 and 28, where Paul addresses the same people first as elders and then as bishops. The present connotation of *bishop* was a considerably later development. (Page 51)

## **23. Church Leaders Should Also be Able to Teach**

Mentally and spiritually he should also *be able to teach*. The word implies not only ability but readiness to teach; a desire and constraint to impart to others the truth that the Holy Spirit has taught him from the Scriptures. If he is to teach, he himself must be a student of the Scriptures.

“Any man who shows himself incapable of successfully teaching others is not qualified for the eldership,” said H. A. Kent. The spiritual leader is responsible for teaching those under him to a greater or lesser degree, and his instruction must have the support of a blameless life.

Samuel Brengle lamented:

Oh, for more teachers among us; leaders who know how to read hearts and apply truth to the needs of the people, as a good physician reads his patients and applies remedies to their ills. There are soul-sicknesses open and obscure, acute and chronic, superficial and deep-seated which the truth as it is in Jesus will heal. But it is not the same truth for each need, any more than the same medicine for every disease. This is why we should most diligently study the Bible and pray for the constant and powerful illumination of the Spirit. (Page 53)

## **24. A Grown Man Must Find His Center of Gravity at Any Moment**

“It is the mark of a grown-up man, as compared with a callow youth, that he find his centre of gravity wherever he happens to be at the moment, and however much he longs for the object of his desire, it cannot prevent him from staying at his post and doing his duty,” wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer. (Page 58)

## **25. Martin Luther’s Attributes**

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, was described as a man easy of approach; totally without personal vanity; so simple in his tastes that men wondered how he could sustain life on so little; abounding in solid sense, playful humor and mirthfulness; honest as the day, transparently sincere. Added to that was his undaunted courage, inflexible conviction, and passion for Christ. It is small wonder that he bound men to him with bonds of steel. (Page 66)

## **26. Hudson Taylor Described**

Professor G. Warneck described Hudson Taylor in terms that indicated how appropriately God had endowed him for his work of pioneering in China: “A man full of faith and the Holy Ghost, of entire surrender to God and His call, of great self-denial, heartfelt compassion, rare power in prayer, marvelous organizing faculty, indefatigable perseverance, and of astounding influence with men, and withal of childlike simplicity himself.” (Page 66-67)

## **27. Leadership Caliber Work While Others Waste Time**

The young man of leadership caliber will work while others waste time, study while others sleep, pray while others play. There will be no place for loose or slovenly habits in word or thought, deed or dress. He will observe a soldiery discipline in diet and deportment, so that he might wage a good warfare. He will without reluctance undertake the unpleasant task that others avoid or the hidden duty that others evade because it evokes no applause or wins no appreciation. A Spirit-filled leader will not shrink from facing up to difficult situations or persons, or from grasping the nettle when that is necessary. He will kindly and courageously administer rebuke when that is called for, or he will exercise necessary discipline when the interests of the Lord’s work demand it. He will not procrastinate in writing the difficult letter. His letter-basket will not conceal the evidences of his failure to grapple with urgent problems. His prayer will be as Amy Carmichael wrote:

God, harden me against myself,

The coward with pathetic voice

Who craves for ease and rest and joy.

Myself, arch-traitor to myself,

My hollowest friend,

My deadliest foe,

My clog, whatever road I go.

*J. Oswald Sanders.* (Page 68)

## **28. Christians Should Lead Disciplined Lives**

Barclay Buxton of Japan used to urge Christians to lead disciplined lives whether they were in business or evangelistic work. This included discipline in Bible study and prayer, in tithing their money, in use of their time, in keeping healthy by proper food and sleep and exercise. It included the rigor of disciplined fellowship among Christians who differed from each other in many ways. This disciplines of his life, and his urgings for others came because of experience. *World Vision* (Page 70)

### **29. Responsible Leadership Always Looks Ahead**

Responsible leadership always looks ahead to see how policies proposed will affect not only present but succeeding generations. (Page 72)

### **30. Great Missionaries Are Men of Vision**

The great missionary pioneers were without exception men of vision. Carey was seeing the whole world on the map while his fellow preachers were preoccupied with their own little parishes. Henry Martyn saw India, Persia, and Arabia—a vision of the Muslim world—while the church at home was engrossed in its petty theological squabbles. Of A. B. Simpson his contemporaries said, “His life-work seemed to be to push on alone, where his fellows had seen nothing to explore.”

Speaking to Douglas Thornton of Egypt, Mr. Baylis, his senior missionary, remarked: “Thornton, you are different to anyone else I know. You are always looking to the end of things. Most people, myself included, find it better to do the next thing.” Thornton’s answer was: “I find that the constant inspiration gained by looking at the goal is the chief thing that helps me to persevere. (Page 72-73)

### **31. Tyranny vs. Tact and Sympathy**

When a man, in virtue of an official position demands obedience of another, irrespective of the latter’s reason and conscience, this is the spirit of tyranny. When on the other hand, by the exercise of tact and sympathy; by prayer, spiritual power and sound wisdom one is able to influence and enlighten another, so that he through the medium of his own reason and conscience is led to alter one course and adopt another, that is true spiritual leadership. (Page 76)