

PART 1

# THE ESSENTIALS





## CHAPTER 1

# GOOD AND BAD LEADERS

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**A**rmed with my newly earned B+ from a high school elective auto upholstery class, I marched down to the nearest auto upholstery shop and filled out a job application. I was hired on the spot! The extent of my experience was that I had spent about an hour a day during a sophomore semester learning the ins and outs of how to be a trimmer, otherwise known as one who restores the insides of automobiles.

What did I quickly learn? I was woefully unprepared for the work I was hired to do. I spent the next six months after school taking seats out of cars, cutting off the old seat covers, watching someone else make new seat covers, installing the new seat covers that someone else had sewn, and reinstalling the seats. It was clear that my high school class had not prepared me as a trimmer.

Fast-forward about seven years. I'm now the pastor of a church plant in Tucson, Arizona, that has experienced steady growth. We've

moved into our first rented building, which holds about 300 people, and we have two services on Sunday morning. All the basics are in place to run the church successfully. We have a good worship team, a plan to teach through the Bible, a great Sunday school director and teachers, and more.

What did I quickly learn? I was woefully unprepared for the work I was called to do. The problem was not in what we were doing as a church, but in the intricacies of leadership. I wasn't unfamiliar with leadership theory, but I had yet to discover the principles of biblical leadership. The chasm between secular and biblical leadership theory reminded me of the difference between a seasoned trimmer and a sophomore who completed an auto upholstery class. Many in the church have similar misunderstandings about leadership, not realizing that leadership among Christians is different.

Take, for example, the time James and John brought their mother to Jesus. She asked if her sons could sit at His right hand and left in His kingdom. Jesus asked James and John if they were able to drink the cup He was about to drink and be baptized with the baptism that He would be baptized with. They answered with great exuberance, "We are able," being entirely unaware that Jesus was referring to His future suffering. When the other disciples heard of this power move, they were angry. Jesus called them together, teaching them that greatness and leadership are different among Christians.

Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28).

Note a few key differences here for those who are in biblical leadership positions. They...

- do not lord over those they lead
- do not exercise authority over those they lead
- serve those they lead
- are even slaves to those they lead

This gives us insight into the kind of Christ-directed leadership we will explore in this book.

## **WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?**

The first and simplest definition of a leader is “one who leads the way” or “one who goes first.” In that sense, all of us are involved in leadership. You don’t need an office, a title, or a position to lead. For every observable action we take, it is possible that another person will take notice and adjust their actions accordingly. Whether we’re a corporate executive officer, manager, teacher, laborer, parent, or an older sibling, our attitudes and actions directly affect the future and success of the people we lead.

## **THE UNIQUE CALL FOR CHRISTIANS**

Even if you think you’re not a leader, the fact that you’re a Christian puts you in a leadership role. When we come to Christ, we receive a calling to set an example and lead others to the truth of Christ, being an ambassador or representative of God wherever we go. Read what the Bible says about those who are in Christ: “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Considering that other people's temporal and eternal outcomes depend, in part, on our leadership, it's wise to learn what we can about leading well and developing the qualities that will lead to success.

### **WHY BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP?**

There are all kinds of leadership theories in use today that remain in a constant state of flux. If we want to grow in our leadership abilities, there is a never-ending supply of resources—books, articles, podcasts, subscriptions, leadership coaches and groups, video classes, etc. For the most part, we can apply the lessons from these resources and become a better leader. However, there is one resource that has been around for 2,000-plus years and is unique in its teaching to leaders. The Scriptures have provided direction to millions of people on how we are to live and lead. Consider what we have in the gift of Scripture:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Biblical leadership is not limited solely to spiritual leadership, nor is it limited to the church. It is extremely useful to all Christians who are in a leadership capacity of any kind. If you're a Christian and you manage a business or lead in any other way, biblical leadership will contribute to your success—for several reasons. Here's why:

First, the Scriptures are inspired. I don't mean inspired like a magazine article is inspired; I mean God-breathed. In 2 Peter 1:21, we're told, "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit used men to write the Scriptures. He used their personalities, their

writing or speaking styles, and their vocabulary to convey the information God wanted to give to mankind. What we have here is worthy of our full attention. Through this message from God, we can find everything we need to fulfill the callings and positions He has given us. This means we are getting direction on leadership from God through Scripture. I don't think it's an overstatement to say this is the best source of instruction on leadership we have available.

Second, there is blessing for those who are obedient to the Word of God. One day, as Jesus was teaching, a woman cried out from the crowd, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" (Luke 11:27). Jesus' response was surprising: "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Consider how blessed Mary was, being able to raise the Messiah. She truly was blessed among women, yet Jesus said that you are more blessed if you hear God's Word and you do it—you are literally living under a blessing! James also referred to this blessing: "He who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). When you listen and yield to the Word of God, you place yourself and your leadership under the blessings of God.

Third, when we apply biblical leadership principles, we are operating in faith, which can bring God's power into our leadership. When we believe in God's Word and do what God says in the Scriptures, that is faith. Here is a definition of faith I have found useful: "Faith is believing what God has said—believing enough to do it." And when you do that, God works on your behalf. Jesus said in Matthew 17:20, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." Faith itself is not what is strong. If you put your faith in the wrong thing, you won't get the results you need.

In 1980, a book was published with the title *Having Faith in Your*

*Faith.* But the problem with putting faith in our faith should be obvious. Our faith is only as strong as what we put it in. When we put our faith in God, our faith becomes incredibly strong. We can move mountains, even if our faith in God is the size of a mustard seed. The issue isn't how much faith you have, but rather, putting your faith in the right place. When we talk about biblical leadership, we need to recognize that our power comes from the God who created the universe and everything in it and gave us the pages of Scripture.

### GOOD AND BAD LEADERS

Standing in the auto shop of another employer, I asked myself, *How did I get here?* While applying pinstriping to the side of a car, I made a mistake. This isn't as bad as it sounds because you can easily remove and properly install the striping at minimal cost. But I didn't know that the owner of the auto shop was watching me. He came out in full anger mode. This was not uncommon; throughout the shop, everyone focused hard on what they were doing lest they become the subject of the owner's outbursts. Loud enough for everyone to hear, he began cursing and berating my work.

I had been hired to expand the shop to include an auto upholstery department. While we were getting the upholstery part of the shop built out, I was to work with everyone else putting accessories on cars—radios, cruise controls, side molding, and, yes, pinstriping. I had committed to staying employed at the shop for a year and a half while the auto upholstery department became established. What a long year and a half that was as I learned how detrimental a bad business leader can be! The morale at the shop was horrible, the turnover rate of employees was out of control, and the efficiency and quality of the work suffered.

There are many places we could go in Scripture to look at both good and bad leaders. However, some leaders are both good and bad.

Such is the case of one of the early kings of Judah, a king by the name of Asa. He starts out as a great leader, and over time, his leadership deteriorates. We will look at King Asa to learn some biblical lessons on both good and bad leadership.

### **LESSONS FROM KING ASA**

The reign of King Asa was just a few generations after the reigns of King David and King Solomon. The kingdom of Israel had been divided into two regions—the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem was the capital of Judah, and Samaria was the capital of Israel. In this divided nation, Asa sat on the throne of David in Judah.

We see the life of Asa broken up into five different stages, with the most tragic and greatest lesson coming in the last stage of King Asa's life. Here are the five stages:

- the new king
- the first leadership test
- a warning and positive response
- the second leadership test
- a final visit from a prophet

The people of Judah and Israel were living in a dark time, when idolatry was commonly accepted and widespread. They were supposed to worship God from Mount Moriah, where the temple was built. Instead, they worshipped idols on every high place, which means they would go to the tops of the hills and worship their false gods—including the gods of the Canaanites who had previously lived in that land. This had been an ongoing problem—in fact, the people had turned to foreign gods shortly after being delivered from slavery in Egypt. The time of the judges (before the kings) was also

full of idolatry, with heroes like Gideon becoming involved. Idolatry was pervasive throughout Judah and Israel during the time Asa was king over Judah.

### THE NEW KING

Abijah rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the City of David. Then Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet for ten years. Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God (2 Chronicles 14:1-2).

We're told that because of Asa's good leadership, the land was at peace for ten years. Asa became one of the good kings—the first in a few generations.

Here we find our first leadership lesson:

#### *1. Good leadership not only points the way, but also leads the way by example.*

Asa led by example: He “did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God.”

When we lead, we're not just telling people what to do. We're setting an example and saying, “Follow me.” Like Paul said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1); he was leading the way in his relationship with God.

Back in 1985, when Skip Heitzig of Calvary Church in Albuquerque sent me to plant a church in Tucson, he shared two principles that were very important for me to know as a young pastor. First, he said, “Every time you get behind the pulpit, make sure things are right between you and God. Pause momentarily and make sure there's nothing you need to repent from so you can be a clean, pure vessel for God to use.”

The second principle was this: “You won't bring people closer to

Christ than you are. Some of them may surpass you, but the majority of people won't get any closer to Jesus than you get."

That's great advice. May each one of us take these principles to heart. May we lead the way in our walk with Christ—in knowing the Word of God and in living in a close relationship with God.

Paul said to Timothy, who was a young pastor, "Let no one despise your youth, but *be an example* to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).

Peter encourages us to be examples in our lives as well. "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" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Leading by example meant removing the false gods, according to 2 Chronicles 14:3-4. Asa commanded the people of Judah to serve the Lord God of their fathers and tore down the altars and high places where they worshipped these false gods.

Here we find another leadership lesson:

## ***2. Good leaders place a strong emphasis on doing what is right.***

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice (Proverbs 21:3).

Wherever you are leading, look at the culture in context to see what is harmful and ungodly, and be willing to confront it. Be strong enough to make corrections and remove what is wrong as you lead the people under you toward what is right. As a result of doing what was right, King Asa was given ten years of peace, and he used that time to build a large army and fortify the cities in Judah for protection from their enemies.

Then the first test arrived.

## THE FIRST LEADERSHIP TEST

A king by the name of Zerah came out of Ethiopia (Africa) with a large army to do battle against Asa and Judah. Asa went out and set his troops in battle array. As he compared the size of his troops with Zerah's massive army, he realized, "I'm in trouble!" At that point, from a human perspective, Asa had two options. He could have retreated, or he could have gathered his generals and said, "Let's work out a strategy—let's figure out how we're going to defeat this larger army."

But that's not what he did. Instead, he called out to the Lord and relied on Him.

Asa cried out to the LORD his God, and said, "LORD, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!" (2 Chronicles 14:11).

What a great prayer! Asa realized he was not alone, so he called out to God for help.

Here we find another leadership lesson:

### *3. Godly leaders lead by faith, placing their trust and hope in the Lord when there is a need.*

This is a powerful leadership principle. Paul said in Romans 1:16-17:

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

That's what King Asa did. He put his faith in God, and God actively intervened, allowing Asa to defeat a larger army. "The LORD struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled" (2 Chronicles 14:12).

Psalm 34:10 says, "The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing." This happened with Asa, and God gave him the victory.

### A WARNING AND POSITIVE RESPONSE

We now look at the next part of King Asa's life, during which God sends a prophet to encourage and warn him:

Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you... But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!" (2 Chronicles 15:1-2, 7).

We're told that when Asa heard these words, he grew in his courage and removed more idols and restored the altar of the Lord. You might think, *Didn't they already do that?* But that was ten years previous, and a lot had changed. During the ten years after the idols had been cleared out, people slowly began to erect and worship idols again in the high places.

So when Asa heard these words from Oded the prophet, he took courage and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and from the cities that he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim during his fight against Zerah. He then restored the

altar of the Lord because it had been broken down. Again, this was good on Asa's part. God had encouraged him, and he had stepped forward as a godly leader.

Second Chronicles 15:19 tells us, "There was no war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa." The first ten years were quiet. In the tenth year, he called upon God and fought a larger army, then there was peace for another 25 years. Asa had a good run up until this point!

Azariah's words in 2 Chronicles 15:2 remind me of James 4:8: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." If you feel far from God today, then draw near to Him. But do you know what the rest of the verse says? "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

Here we find another leadership lesson:

#### ***4. Maintain a right relationship with God.***

Our faithfulness ensures that God will fight for us when we are in need. If you're currently living away from God, you can call out to Him, and He will respond. God has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). If you are distant from Him, now is the time to make things right.

Make a decision to repent and live your life God's way. To repent means to change our mind about sin and turn away from it. What peace is found in a right relationship with God! It's always much better to have a right relationship with God and to stay close to Him. Then you can have confidence that when you call upon Him in the middle of a struggle, He will be on your side.

This brings us to the fourth part of Asa's life.

## **THE SECOND LEADERSHIP TEST**

After Asa's battle with the larger army from Ethiopia, there was peace in the land for 25 years. Then another conflict arose.

In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah (2 Chronicles 16:1).

Remember that Israel was a divided kingdom. King Asa ruled over the southern kingdom of Judah, and King Baasha ruled over the northern kingdom of Israel. The temple was in Jerusalem, which was in Judah. The law required the people to travel to Jerusalem for the feasts, but Baasha wanted them to stay in Israel. So Baasha built a fortified city, Ramah, between Israel and Judah, to prevent his people from going into Judah. This was a problem for Asa because God's people in Israel could not worship Him in Jerusalem, as God desired. What did Asa do?

Asa brought silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-Hadad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, "Let there be a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. See, I have sent you silver and gold; come, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me" (2 Chronicles 16:2-3).

King Asa followed his father's example in making a treaty with Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, to overcome this problem, and he took money from the house of the Lord to do it. Ben-Hadad agreed with Asa's request and sent armies against the cities of Israel, which caused the people of Israel to cease their building of Ramah.

Ben-Hadad heeded King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. They attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali.

Now it happened, when Baasha heard it, that he stopped building Ramah and ceased his work. Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones and timber of Ramah, which Baasha had used for building; and with them he built Geba and Mizpah (2 Chronicles 16:4-6).

It appears that Asa was successful. We could say again, “Good job, Asa!” However, a successful outcome does not determine the rightness of an act. There are many ways to be successful, but how many of them are God’s way? Asa was a seasoned king; he knew how things were done in the world. When he was a young king, he recognized his insufficiency and called out on God. The danger of gaining more experience is that we tend to lean more on our knowledge and less on God, which is what happened to Asa.

This leads to another leadership lesson:

*5. Success does not always mean you have done what is right and pleasing to God.*

This is a mistake we as leaders are prone to make. Things are going great; everything is fantastic. In time, we begin to do things the way the world does. We stop seeking God or following His ways. In using worldly methods, we fail to trust God. Instead, we trust in silver and gold and the strength of men.

It’s so easy for us to rely on our knowledge and what we’ve learned over the years instead of relying on God. In our prayer life, we need to bring everything before the Lord, even when we feel that we have what it takes to get the job done. Asa had access to the money in the treasury, and he had a relationship with Ben-Hadad to negotiate a treaty. He had what he needed to achieve a desired outcome, but he didn’t seek God.

This brings us to the final, sad part of Asa’s life.

## A FINAL VISIT FROM A PROPHET

Again, it certainly looks like Asa was successful. But as we read on, we see that there's a problem.

At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him: "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand" (2 Chronicles 16:7-8).

When Asa first became king, he was young and served God for ten years. At his first test, he called out to God and God delivered him, and the land had peace for 25 years. Then at his second test, 35 years into his career as king, Asa feels like a veteran king. He's no longer young, and he knows how things are done. So he hires a mercenary army, as he had seen his father do. His thinking seemed rational: *Why send your people out into battle when you can hire mercenaries to go out and do battle for you?* But the army of the king of Syria (who later became a bigger enemy) escaped from King Asa. The consequence of Asa not trusting God was having wars in the future. Hanani reminded Asa of how God had delivered him from a previous battle against the huge army of the Ethiopians and the Lubim.

Hanani then speaks one of the great promises we find in the Scriptures, which is an excellent leadership lesson: "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

That brings us to our next lesson:

***6. God will show Himself strong to those who are loyal to Him, trusting in Him rather than anything or anyone else.***

God is looking for people who are loyal to Him. Are we trusting and relying on God, or are we placing our trust in ourselves or someone or something else? Are we figuring out the solutions to problems on our own, and going to God only when a problem is beyond our ability to handle? Or will we always call upon the Lord, having a loyal heart toward Him?

The first time I heard someone talk about 2 Chronicles 16:9, it was quoted out of context, which is not uncommon. I was told that if I could get rid of sin, God would show Himself strong toward me. Yes, we need to battle against sin, walk in God's grace, and find victory over strongholds. However, that is not the point of the passage, based on the context. Asa was loyal to God in the first battle, when he faced a larger army and called out to God for help. But in the second battle, he lacked loyalty toward God. He did not trust the Lord in the middle of a crisis. Instead, he trusted his business sense and a foreign army to deliver him and his people.

Now the story turns sad for our hero. The seer goes on to say,

“In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars.” Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time (2 Chronicles 16:9-10).

Asa became enraged with the seer and put him in prison. Then he oppressed some of the people. Because of Asa's failures as a leader, people suffered under his leadership.

This brings us to another leadership principle:

***7. Good leaders remain vigilant.***

Just because you start well doesn't mean that you will end well. We must remain vigilant throughout our lives. How many people in

the Bible started out good and ended bad? There are so many, and they are examples and warnings for us. We want to be vigilant in our faith so that in the end, we can hear those words: “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23).

Read what Proverbs says about biblical leadership:

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice;  
but when a wicked man rules, the people groan (Proverbs  
29:2).

Because Asa was not being led by the Lord, he was oppressing the people, and they were groaning. Our decisions to rely on ourselves instead of God have long-term consequences and affect more people than we can imagine.

The end of Asa’s life came in the forty-first year of his reign:

In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians. So Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of his reign (2 Chronicles 16:12-13).

### **DON’T DOUBLE DOWN ON SIN**

What a tragedy that Asa doubled down on not seeking God. How sad that he made a mistake and then, when he was confronted with it, refused to repent. Asa could have responded another way. He could have said, “I have sinned against God,” returned his loyalty to the Lord, and made things right with Him.

Instead, he hardened his heart. He put the prophet in prison, oppressed some of the people, and would not seek God even with a severe malady. There is nothing wrong with seeking physicians when we are sick, for God often uses physicians to heal us. But Asa refused

to seek God at all. Though he had previously called upon God when he was young, 39 years later he would not even seek God for his healing, but instead he sought the knowledge of man.

When it comes to healing, James 5:14-15 says we're to "call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him." We can pray that God will do a miraculous work of healing. There are two books that document miracles in our day: *Miracles Today* by Craig Keener, and *The Case for Miracles* by Lee Strobel. Just because we don't hear a lot about miracles doesn't mean God isn't doing them. But we are to pray and seek God in every matter, including sickness, and wait to see how He responds. To do this is to trust God in a much greater way than we trust physicians. And ultimate healing is granted when a faithful believer is taken to heaven.

### THE BLESSING OF SEEKING GOD

Asa, who previously sought God and brought blessings to his people, died as a king who no longer trusted in God. His self-reliance resulted in defeat, misery, and the oppression of his people. It's so important for a leader to start well, but we must remain vigilant and continue seeking God in every area and season of our life so that we will finish well as leaders. This will bring huge blessings to us and to those we lead. Remember 2 Chronicles 15:7: "Be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!"

Among the many leadership lessons we gain from the life of King Asa, let's remember this:

Remain loyal to the living God; put Him first in everything in your life—the good, the bad, and the ugly. This is so important to God, as He is on a search to show Himself strong to those whose hearts are loyal to Him.