



Week 2 -God First, God Only Leadership

WE TRAIN PEOPLE TO LOVE GOD & THEIR BODIES.

Lead out of intimacy, not information.

What does it mean to be a God-first leader? To proceed, let's define leadership, and then the exploration of how you can lead God first can begin.

Leadership, by general definition, is INFLUENCE. A God-first leader's life represents a life influenced by the Spirit of God and is defined by Matthew 6:33: *"Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* Christ-like leadership is birthed out of intimacy, which comes from relationship, not information.

When Jesus began His ministry, He did not seek out "leaders." He sought out those who would follow Him. We start our journey toward becoming godly, Christ-like leaders with Jesus and His call to the disciples.

*"Jesus went up on a mountainside and **called to him those he wanted** and they came to him. He appointed twelve **that they might be with him** and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons."* ~ Mark 3:13-15

He calls the ones He wants. Above all else, let this truth settle deep within your soul: Jesus doesn't just want your service—He wants **you**. Christ Jesus has called you by name because He wants YOU to be with Him, to walk with Him, to follow Him. As leaders, we are often driven by what we believe we can produce, the effects we can bring, and the change we can manage. In the kingdom of God, however, leaders receive His choosing and grow in following. He has called you. *You matter.* Each of us has a place at His table. This good news lays the foundation where your leadership will THRIVE.

As a disciple of Christ, you have been created to influence others, as our heavenly Father has influenced you. When we lead from our identity as His sons and daughters, understanding how loved we are, we will lead others to that place as well – living as His beloved.

"We never grow closer to God when we just live life; it takes deliberate pursuit and attentiveness."

Francis Chan

Jesus led out of His identity as the Son of God and out of His intimacy with the Father. His vision and mission were established in authority because of His intimacy with the Father. If we are to be Christ-like leaders, programs, training, podcasts, and even the best books on becoming a leader are of secondary importance and value. Of primary importance is intimacy with Him. This is God-first leadership.



Leadership began with God. It is His idea. 🙏 The Holy Spirit develops the heart of a leader with humility, wisdom, and effectiveness out of intimacy.

Mark 3 continues: "He appointed" them that they might *BE WITH HIM*. The word *appointed* in Greek means– *to ordain, to make, to cause to stand, to set*. God calls those He wants, and He ordains and sets them in place. You are not a mistake! You are right where He wants you to be, and He has ordained you to lead and influence those around you for His glory and your joy.

What did Jesus choose the disciples for? ***To BE with Him.***

His first purpose in selecting and training His disciples was that they would be with Him. Jesus intentionally chose His disciples and knew that those He chose to walk this life with Him would be those who would take charge when He returned to heaven. He knew the *most important thing for them* would be the *time they spent WITH HIM* – learning, laughing, crying, winning, failing, and growing in His presence.

Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.
Col. 1:18 NLT

Stop a moment and meditate on that.

The same is true for us, who seek to develop in leadership today. A person's success as a God-first, God-only leader is found in intimacy. In being with Him. A desire to grow, to lead others, and to truly be all God created each of us to be – that is GOOD! **Kingdom leadership, however, is not about more skills but greater dependence upon and intimacy with Him.** God has created each person first to be influenced and then to be an influencer. God-first leadership is birthed

and grows in His presence.

Biblical Pattern of Leadership Development – God first

Throughout the Bible, many leaders God called into leadership – whether as judges or kings or prophets - spent significant amounts of time in growth and presence before they were elevated to leadership. These times were often hard, challenging, and required much sacrifice. It is no surprise that God uses the hard things and people in our lives to create character and trust that prepares us for where He appoints us to lead and serve.

Read the examples below:

- Moses – 40 years in the wilderness before his calling to be Israel's deliverer
- Joshua – faithfully served Moses for 40 years in the wilderness before he led the people into the Promised Land. *"Inside the Tent of Meeting, the LORD would speak to Moses face-to-face, as one speaks to a friend. Afterward, Moses would return to the camp, but*



the young man who assisted him, Joshua the son of Nun, would remain behind in the Tent of Meeting.” Ex. 33:11 Time and relationship.

- Joseph – served Potiphar as a slave and then, after being falsely accused, spent years in the prison of Egypt before becoming 2nd in command of Egypt
- David – served as a shepherd for years alone with God before being anointed King; he then spent years in the wilderness waiting and fighting for the throne God promised him.
- Nehemiah – served a foreign king faithfully before God moved him to lead the Israelites in rebuilding Jerusalem.
- Paul – 3 years in the wilderness before being sent to the Gentiles
- Jesus – lived as a carpenter serving his family and community before launching into ministry.

The world does not need more charisma, or talent, or naturally gifted leaders. It desperately needs leaders whose lives are dependent on and infused with the Holy Spirit.

The pattern throughout the Bible remains: *God is not in a hurry*. He desires that we become people of His presence, not just those who lead by natural abilities. Natural abilities open doors, create opportunities, and grant realms of influence.

However, nothing is more valuable than His presence and His anointing on our lives. To lead out of the intimacy of deep knowing– that is what

our broken and desperate world needs. The world does not need more of us and our abilities, but men and women who are vessels of grace and divine mercy poured out to serve and love and lead. More of Him, less of us. God-first. God-only.

There are no shortcuts to godly leadership. And also, there is no rush. God's timing in each person's life is precise and impeccable. He knows every future and will craft all past experiences for His glory and our good as we press into Him and develop an intimate relationship with Him.

How do we learn to live as people of His Presence and lead out of this? What does this look like practically?

Again, leadership is INFLUENCE. As those called to lead in our culture and the Church, our influence is vital. Those we lead will be shaped and changed by how we lead.

To influence BY the Spirit of God, we must first BE influenced by the Spirit of God.

Time daily with Him must become a priority; to study and read the bible, but also establish a pattern and a habit of intimacy with Him. Intentional time must be set aside to be spent just with Him – abiding, communing with Him- to create a



relationship. Relationships only grow when they are invested in. How we spend our time and attention shows what we value most. What are we MOST influenced by? What are we investing in daily?

Jesus set a pattern of intimacy with His life; every action, every word, and everything He did resulted from His communion with and obedience to the Father. He also said that by the indwelling Holy Spirit, His disciples will do GREATER works! (John 5:19, 14:12) This kind of intimacy is our inheritance. It is our right and our privilege. We get to learn to live it out, moment by precious moment.

Matthew 6:33 is the anthem of God first, God only leadership: ***“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*** How does this apply in the workplace? How does this apply in our homes and relationships? Because Jesus has chosen you to be with Him, He wants to be a part of every area of your life. He wants to bring heaven and life into your board meetings, into your PTA meetings, into your relationships, and into your entire realm of influence. Seek Him in every area – He will lead you; then, you can most effectively lead others.

Leading from Intimacy - God only

Knowing God, His ways, and His heart is of utmost importance. In the Old Testament, the bible uses the word “yada” over 940 times. This word means *to know* and defines knowing God and one another. *Yada* is an *active* form of knowing and *experiencing* God Himself. Ps. 46:10 says, “Be still and YADA that I am God.” Psalm 139 says, “You have searched me, Lord, and you YADA me. You yada when I sit and when I rise.” *Yada* means personal, intimate, experiential understanding and knowing. This word is used for mental and emotional knowledge, and also in the context of the beautiful and intimate knowledge that comes from sexual intimacy in marriage. God’s desire and design are for an intimate, experiential relationship with us. Each of us has been created to know Him and be known by Him. Jesus led out of this “yada” kind of intimacy and beckons us to intimacy.

Intimacy grows as God-first leaders seek Him first, daily, moment-by-moment. *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.* Jeremiah 29:13 God has not hidden Himself and does not tease us. As we seek Him, we will find Him.

Biblical Pattern of Leadership Development – God first, God only

One of the most potentially tragic elements of a leader’s story entails a leader who begins to think his or her successes and accolades result from their own strengths or efforts. One of the most heartbreaking leadership stories in the Bible is that of King Uzziah. He started very well; he loved God and was a great king. The complete account of his life is found in 2 Chronicles 26, but read the following verses (5, 15b-16):



*5 He (Uzziah) sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success.... His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped **until he became powerful.** (emphasis mine) 16 But after Uzziah became powerful, **his pride led to his downfall.** He was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense."*

Uzziah became strong and forgot who he was and who the true King was. His life ended tragically because he forgot who he was and who God is. God first, God only.

Seeking God requires an everyday, moment-by-moment lifestyle. Our hearts may lie to us; idolatry and pride will creep in when we are not set on seeking Him first. Intimacy keeps our hearts centered on Him. God first, God only.

Another application of God first, God only, is that we are not to idolize or elevate any ministry or person within a ministry or to seek a certain number of followers. Worship belongs to God alone. Glory is to Him. All success, all numbers, and all goodness come directly from Him

*Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory,
because of your love and faithfulness. Psalm 115:1*

When we see a charismatic leader or ministry making a significant impact in the world, it becomes easy to elevate that person or ministry above what is proper. Pastor and speaker Matt Chandler states, "When I make much of Jesus, people begin to make much of me." There is great danger here, both for the leader and those being led. Elevating anyone to where God alone can stand causes both parties to be set up for significant failure. Much heartache results from looking to a leader instead of to God. When the leader does not meet expectations, they are crucified by those who before had been idolizing them. Worship and elevation belong to God alone. This is the cry of a God-first, God-only leader.

God's design for leadership is based on His calling and not our ability– that we would BE with Him; it is built upon daily time spent in relationship knowing His heart and ways.

Leadership is being influenced by Him before we influence others; it is knowing and experiencing Him and leading from intimacy. Most of all, God first, God-only leadership recognizes that He alone is God and that as His chosen follower, He is primary. Eyes on Him, seeking Him first. God first, God only.



Training Exercise—Day #1 Seek Him first -- Be with Him

*"Be still and know (yada) that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth." Psalm 46:10*

Your get-to for growth today involves making time to just be with Him. 5-10 minutes is a good place to start. Find a quiet place where you will be away from distractions – maybe you go for a walk or sit in your prayer closet; the goal is to stop doing, stop studying, stop everything else. Just BE WITH HIM. Take a pen and journal.

If we do not make time to sit with Him, to be in His word, to receive His love and love Him in return, we will never lead like Jesus led.

This may very well be the hardest training exercise of this entire training. **Comfortable being uncomfortable!** Our world says, "GO GO GO!!!"....and our hearts need to learn to STOP and REST in His presence. **We are addicted to rush and starving for stillness.**

"Our only business is to love and delight ourselves in God." PPG

Purposing to set aside time JUST FOR HIM is precisely that – a set purpose and intention. If we do not make time to sit with Him, to be in His word, to receive His love, and return love to Him, we will never lead as Jesus led.

Setting time aside to be with Him might look like turning off your radio and phone as you drive and letting the silence be an offering.

It might look like a favorite worship song – sitting and worshipping, lifting your heart and hands and soul. It might look like getting on your face, on your knees, or dancing and spinning and reveling in His presence.

What it DOES look like is BEING with Him. Not doing for Him, not working for Him, but learning to enjoy His presence, to talk with Him, to develop intimacy with Him.

Turn your affections towards Him. He is the great Lover. The Holy Spirit always responds to our affections when they are turned toward Him. This journey into Godly leadership begins with BEING WITH HIM. **Kingdom influence grows by intimacy.**

Cultivate a still heart. So go. Sit with the Lover of your soul. Let Him talk to you. God first, God only.

Connect with your swim buddy. Share your experience.



Training Exercise—Day #2: *Seek Him first – His word*

"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Psalm 119:18

"Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:11

"Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts." Jer. 15:16

"No Spiritual discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of scripture."

Nothing compares to what God has to say about every area of life and relationship. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

That problem at work? He has your answer. The impossible parent or co-worker? Struggle with finances? His word contains wisdom for every circumstance and relationship.

Without God's word as a firm foundation, our lives and leadership will remain shallow. Some of us have been great at singing songs and being still while neglecting a solid study of His word. Others have only studied and not become intimate with the One whom they have studied.

Freedom resides where intimacy meets truth. God's word serves as our anchor; His Spirit will never contradict what His written word states. ***If we do not have a working knowledge of His word, we will be led astray in our world.*** It is vital that we as leaders know and press on to understand God's word.

How do you study God's word? There are many ways – yearly studies, daily devotions, courses on subjects or books, and the list goes on and on.

KEYNOTE: The study of God's word should never come ONLY through a devotional or study written by someone else. These serve us well in growing; however, God's word itself is to be primary in our study. Why study what someone says ABOUT God's word



without studying His word itself? Knowing God's word safeguards our hearts from sneaky theologies and false truths. (1 John 4:1)

Challenge yourself. Maybe you have been doing a "Reading through the Bible in a Year" plan but have not been lingering, savoring, or diving deeper into God's word. Perhaps it is time to SOAP in your study time (see below for an explanation of SOAPing). Perhaps you are a daily devotional person. Take the verse of that day and read its entire context; Study the Greek or Hebrew of the word and ask the Holy Spirit what He is saying to you beyond the devotional.

"If I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folks from digging into the Bible."

J.I. Packer

Most of all, ask the Holy Spirit what and how you will study. Study methods and types vary according to the different seasons we are in; He knows exactly what we need to delve into. Here again, we return to the need for intimacy, for being with Him.

Finally, end your study/worship time with an action step or an "I WILL_____" statement. If we do not act on what we learn, it is just knowledge. Action empowers change and cements learning. Not "I want to," but a committed action: "Because I read this because You showed me THIS, I WILL_____" Studying without practice is boring.

Here are some great tools to help with bible study:

How to use the SOAP method of Bible Study (Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer) <https://lovegodgreatly.com/how-to-soap/>

Excellent site for referencing, verse searches, Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) word definitions, commentaries, etc. www.blueletterbible.org

"How to study your Bible"

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/tips/3-simple-steps-for-studying-the-bible.html>

"We fail in our duty to study God's word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. *Our problem is that we are lazy.*"¹

"Everything we need or will need is hidden in His Word, and we search it out like buried treasure."

-Lisa Bevere

As we make God's word a HIGH priority, our intimate knowledge of His heart and ways will grow exponentially.

Connect with your swim buddy.

¹ R.C. Sproul, Knowing Scripture.



Training Exercise—Day #3: Seek Him First – Daily Delight & Discipline

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33

*For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being.
Romans 7:22*

*How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Psalm 119:103*

Our culture and our flesh elevate comfort and pleasure over the discipline of delight. **Delight is a discipline.** Choosing intimacy over ease requires an awakening in our hearts. Knowing Him and His word takes time, repetition, and INTENTION to set a new habit.

How will you, as a leader and child of God, go forward in setting a habit of daily abiding?

Begin when you wake up and interact with the Lord throughout your day. How can you build pauses and connection with the Lord into YOUR day?

Be practical. What does intentionally setting time aside every day for God look like in YOUR current schedule? How does it work in your time frame?

Are you a morning person or a night person?

What will you need to sacrifice?

What are 2-3 things you know are your time suckers (those things that suck you in and steal your time)?

ARE YOU IN THE WORD? God-first

ARE YOU IN WORSHIP? God-first, no other gods before Him

Write all this down. Share them with your swim buddy. Then ask the Father where to begin on this journey to intimacy. **Remember, Christ-like leadership originates in this place-time spent with Him and time spent in His word.** This is our foundation. God-first leadership requires lives that live out God-first daily.



Beloved, all of life must come from this place – intimacy with Him. You were created to BE WITH HIM; you are most yourself with Him. All else will flow out of this sweet place.

Enjoy Him. ENJOY Him. That is the chief end of human existence.

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

Westminster Confession of Faith

Connect with your swim buddy. Share your experience, what you learned, and what challenged you.