

Chapter One ***Purpose at the Front***



People want leaders.

People want someone in whom to believe. They both desire and need a person to respect—a champion of the faith—someone who stands for what they themselves believe. If they have an individual to whom they can point as an example of success, a person who has gone through the trials of life, yet has overcome using the very principles to which they hold, then they can continue believing and hoping that they, too, will succeed. A perfect example is when David defeated Goliath, inspiring his Jewish brethren to rise and conquer their enemies (I Sam. 17:41-54). In this manner a leader catalyzes faith in the hearts of the people he leads. Without a leader, it is difficult for most people to believe in themselves.

A leader also provides and releases love. People can sense whether or not a certain leader cares about them. It is one thing to have a peer or a spouse or a child love you. It fulfills an entirely different need, however, to have a person you respect give his life for your well-being. It creates self-worth. It dissolves guilt. It stimulates love among all involved.

In addition, leaders provide a standard by which men and women measure themselves. When a

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trustworthy leader speaks, listeners judge their own beliefs according to what the person whom they respect is saying. If they agree, their own beliefs are strengthened. If they disagree, they either reevaluate and change their views, or they reevaluate and become stronger in their opposing views. Either way, a leader is an instrument by which men and women clarify their own thoughts. To listen to, read the books by, or spend time with a leader is to commit to a process whereby one's mind and emotions become established. A leader, then, is a catalyst toward personal stability and security in one's own beliefs.

Even more important, a leader provides purpose and energy for life. Without a vision and direction, people wander. They go through life discouraged and disillusioned. The plain truth is that the vast majority of people were created to be followers—and every one of us are followers in most areas of our lives. No individual has enough energy to discipline himself and work every day while staying at the forefront in every area of life. A leader pushes through difficulties in some specific area to make a way for others to follow. In doing so, they provide direction and energy for others. Only by following such leaders can people be productive, happy, and blessed.

Further, leaders unite people. We were created with a need to belong and work together. Without leadership, this is impossible. Anything significant that has been accomplished in society has been done through the cooperative effort of many. Leaders are needed to focus the labors of people and simply to help them live together in peace and harmony.

Finally, people want a leader to tell them what to do. This may sound domineering, but I do not mean it in that way. Every person—including leaders themselves—needs direction. They need others to encourage them, point the way, and reaffirm their own decisions. The apostle Paul wrote:

How will they go unless they are sent?
(Rom. 10:15a)

Paul made this statement to Christians who should know God's will for their individual lives. Concerning them, he stated that even they will not step out in faith unless someone encourages them to do so. It is true: A leader's job is to tell people what to do. I am not advocating control nor manipulation. A leader simply is the one who has the authority and ability to send others. Therefore, he helps them fulfill what God has placed them on this earth to do.

I have found in my own life that being aware of "these purposes for leadership" is essential. When I first accepted the leadership position over a church, I did not have much visible fruit to show for my labors, and it was difficult to support my family financially. Well-meaning friends, whether or not they stated it verbally, would sometimes look at me with a question in their minds: "When are you going to get a *real* job?" That was a question I had to answer for myself again and again, for my own well-being. Of course, I am not for people loafing around or using ministry as an excuse for inactivity. But I found that I had to define my purpose as a leader before I could focus my

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energies and actually accomplish what God was calling me to do.

Just as a businessperson offers a product or service to the public, so also every leader has something to offer the people. The grocery store owner makes food available to the local residents. A secretary provides her skills and time. A doctor provides his or her education, training, and wisdom. With no less clarity of purpose, a leader has something to give. You cannot load it into a truck and ship it to the store across town. It cannot be quantified nor marked with a price tag. A leader gives that which cannot be seen. Yet, what leadership produces is the visible fruit of changed lives, fulfillment, healthy relationships among people, faith in people's hearts, and the very structure of the society in which we live. The leadership business is the most important business in the world.