

Leadership in Proverbs

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[0 : 00] Please take your Bibles and turn to Proverbs chapter 20 and verse 28. Today we want to talk about this morning or this afternoon we want to talk about leadership.

Leadership from the book of Proverbs. I think a lot of us have some sort of leadership role that we end up fulfilling in our lives if we're husbands or parents, fathers, mothers, pastors at work. We all have, or a lot of us do have leadership positions that we fulfill. Maybe that's not true, but for you in particular.

And if that's not true for you, then maybe you should ask, what kind of leaders are we looking for? What kind of leadership should I put myself under? That's what we want to look at.

Proverbs chapter 20, verse 28. Love and faithfulness keep a king safe. Through love his throne is made secure. Love and faithfulness.

[1 : 09] That's a pair of words that you see very often in the book of Proverbs paired up. Proverbs 3.3. That chapter in Proverbs that's just so foundational for the rest of the book.

It says, Let love and faithfulness never leave you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Love and faithfulness are right at the heart of what Proverbs is calling wisdom.

So bind them on your heart. Love and faithfulness is how God rules. Psalm 89.14.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Love and faithfulness go before you. The picture is the Lord is a king and he has heralds.

He has messengers that he sends out into the world to go and do his will. That go before him. And these messengers, these servants of God, this all-wise God, never does anything without love and faithfulness.

[2 : 20] That's how he exercises his kingship. Those are his methods. And so here in Proverbs 20.28, it's not love and faithfulness being your messengers or going before you.

The picture is a little bit different. It's love and faithfulness being your bodyguard. Being a king's bodyguard. Giving him security. Giving him safety.

These are two soldiers protecting this king. But what Proverbs applies to a king applies to all kinds of authority.

All kinds of anyone who exercises authority. So do you have employees that work for you? Maybe you're the owner of the company or maybe you're just a boss in the company.

Do you have employees working for you? Are you in charge of a team? Are you a parent? Well, then you have authority. You have authority over your children. Husbands. Husbands.

[3 : 23] Husbands. You are called to leadership. For the head of the wife. The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.

And so Proverbs 20.28, men, if you're married, this is for you. This is about leadership. This is how you should be exercising your leadership.

And how do you lead? What's your method, men? What's your attitude? I'll be quite frank.

One of the few things that make my blood boil, and that's a Christian husband who dominates, who selfishly leads and selfishly rules his wife, who thinks that is authority, to be some sort of dictator.

And he calls that leadership. He calls that headship. The Christian man who thinks that is headship doesn't know the first thing about leadership.

[4 : 26] The same goes for pastors. Right after authoritarian husbands is authoritarian dictatorial pastors. Christ laid down his life for his sheep.

The shepherd laid down his life for his sheep. And some men will push those sheep around and think that those sheep live and exist for him.

He'll ask the sheep to lay down their lives for him. Again, they don't know the first thing about true biblical leadership and headship. You see here, love and faithfulness are at the very heart of wise leadership.

It's what gives the king security and safety. Just to be practical, as we've been looking through the book of Proverbs, I've told you, and the book of Proverbs encourages us again and again to go out and look at the world and learn what wisdom looks like and think about the things that are going on. Well, this summer, the number one podcast in the Christian genre was the rise and fall of Mars Hill, which was a mega church in Seattle. The main preaching pastor and the founder was Mark Driscoll. [5 : 43] He's a Calvinist. He was an expositional preacher. He was direct, a very gifted speaker, not afraid to take unpopular stands.

At the height, Mars Hill had 15 campuses, over 6,000 members, over 12,000 attendees, but all was not well. It wasn't so much a doctrinal problem.

It wasn't a philosophy, a ministry problem, just apparently, and I'm talking about from far away. There was a leadership problem. Everything seemed secure and safe, but in a few months, the whole thing completely unraveled.

And it was very much, it appears to be, that there was just this dissent and disharmony about how Mark Driscoll was leading.

And so what happens then? If there's harshness or pride? Well, in a few weeks, in a few months, the whole thing unraveled, and they decided to disperse the whole congregation.

[6 : 54] I don't know all the details. I didn't read all that podcast, or listen to all that podcast. But from everything I've read or heard, the problem was a Proverbs 20, 28 problem.

So, I'm not really, really not trying to get into other churches' issues or another pastor's problems. I'm no interest in digging around in someone else's bones.

But wisdom is always on the lookout for lessons. And wisdom always has its eyes open for something to learn. And so, in that spirit, I would ask, well, what does that teach me?

What can I just learn from that? Maybe, what can I think about? Well, I think one very apparent lesson is, love and faithfulness don't seem like powerful bodyguards, but they are.

Servant leadership doesn't seem like it should work. It doesn't seem like it should be all that effective. But in God's world, that's what actually works best.

[7 : 59] pushing people or cowering people into silence, into submission, in just whatever context, at work or in family or at a church.

In that moment, it seems like it would work better. And it's so tempting to use our authority as husbands, as parents, as bosses at work, as pastors to, as Jesus said, to lord it over people. It seems like that's the best way to keep safety and security. But every dictator ends up fearing, most of all, his own people.

That's the way it works in the world. You know, about 10 years ago, with the Arab Spring, Muammar Gaddafi, he died. He was shot and bludgeoned and basically torn to pieces by his own people. Mussolini, who ruled Italy with an iron fist during the 30s, the 20s, 30s, and into World War II, he was shot by his own people.

[9 : 11] And they hung him up for people to stone because the people just had enough. He had ruled. He had such control that eventually it always backfires.

And so pushing, forcing, dominating, using cruelty seems to work, but it always backfires in the end. It backfires in a church. It backfires in a home. It backfires at work. And so what works? What works?

Whatever organization we're talking about, what gives it stability? What gives that leader safety? Well, it's self-giving, self-denying, loving service.

You don't see yourself as over them. So as a pastor, you say, I'm a sheep first. As a boss at your work, you don't say I'm in charge and that's your primary identity.

[10 : 18] You say, okay, well, we're all in this together in some way. You don't see yourself as over them. They don't exist for you. Leaders are there to serve them.

And so it's actually putting yourself under someone. Leadership always entails putting yourself under someone for their good. So you put their welfare above yours.

You put their well-being over yours. So the husband lays down his life for his wife. The boss asks, how can I help them?

How can I help them to do their job well? How can I give them what they need to do it well? How can I serve them? Not the other way around. Jesus shows us.

He takes the towel and he washes the feet. Now, does that mean you're not in charge? That you don't have authority? Well, not at all.

[11:15] Jesus says, you call me Lord, teacher and Lord. And he said, and rightly so. But that's what I am. The Roman centurion knew Jesus had authority.

You remember what the Roman centurion said to Jesus? You know, I'm a man with authority and under other people. And I say to one man, do this. And he doesn't. And I say to another man, go here or go there.

And they do. And the Roman centurion said, and Jesus, so are you. You're that kind of person. You have authority. And Jesus didn't say, oh, no, no, no.

I'm just a servant. He said, not even in Israel I have seen such faith. That man saw something that most people didn't see about Jesus.

That he was really in charge. That he had authority. And Jesus didn't deny it. And so without denying, without giving up your authority, you use that authority for good.

[12:14] For the person that you're called to lead. That's what love and faithfulness looks like. So moms, you have authority.

Husbands, you have authority. Bosses at work, you have authority. But do you use that authority to serve? Do you use that authority to love?

Do you use that authority to do your duty? Faithfulness here is about being faithful to what you're called to. But I think most of all, it ends up being faithful to doing what God has called you to do.

Being faithful to him. So he gave you that place. He gave you that authority. And so you put yourself under him. And you say, okay, I need to do what he has told me to do.

And so parents, your children don't rule over you. You have a God-given job to do. And so you do it. And you do it with love. The children are not to rule over the family.

[13:19] The parents are. And husbands, your wives don't rule over you. But God has given you the final authority in a house. And so you use it. But you use it with love. You use it as a steward of God who put you there.

So at work, men or whoever is leading, you have authority. God put you there. And so you don't neglect your calling. You do the job that God has called you to do.

And as pastors, God has given us authority. And so we must use it. And we must use it faithfully. And do it in love. So what do you do when you come to work or you come into a situation with that kind of attitude?

Where you say, I want to love them. I want to serve them. I want to be faithful to God in them. I'm going to put myself at their service as I lead.

And what happens? Will your children respect you? Generally, that's what happens. Your wives will respect you. Your employees will respect you.

[14:25] The flock will respect you. And things won't fly apart. And they won't turn on you. The stability and the safety that you want as a leader, you'll have.

You'll have as you exercise love and faithfulness. That's what Proverbs is saying. This is what works. This is what works in the push and pull of real life.

Now, there seems to be two dangers in any kind of leadership. Being too soft or being too hard. Neglecting your authority and not using it or using it too harshly.

But love and faithfulness will keep us from both of those things. Do you see that? Love and faithfulness will keep you from both of those dangers. Love says, I will do this with kindness and gentleness.

So when I am talking to someone who's underneath me, maybe that's my child. Maybe that's someone at work. I'm going to use kindness. I'm going to use gentleness.

[15:23] But faithfulness says, I will do that even when it's hard. When it's uncomfortable. When it's difficult. I'm going to love them. And I'm going to be faithful to God.

And so does it work? Does that work in real life? Yeah, it works. It works. Proverbs is true. And if you go looking for books on leadership on Amazon.

If you go looking for books on leadership out in the world. You want to read some books. You're going to find something very fascinating that's starting to happen. Even in our culture.

At last, the world is coming around. And everyone is talking about servant leadership. Not in the church. But in the corporate world. In the factory world.

They're talking about servant leadership. And I think in a way, at long last, they've discovered what's in Proverbs. And really what Christianity has said about authority and leadership.

[16:27] And they're all saying this works. This works. Cheryl Beckhelder is a Christian businesswoman. She went to Indiana University for years and years.

She had a family and other things. I'm not going to give you all the background here. But for years, she tried to lead like the world was telling her to lead.

She said, I want to act like a man. Or I want to do my work like a man. I want to act like a lady.

Is what she was trying to do. She was trying to do what everyone told her is what good leadership will look like. And the results, they weren't that great in her life.

The results weren't good. In 2007, she came on board at Popeye's Chicken with this new idea.

[17:25] We don't have those, or at least very many of those around here. But down south, she came on board with Popeye's Chicken with this new idea. One that actually grew out of her Christian faith. And just thinking about what does it look like to be a Christian leader?

A Christian executive? And at this point in 2007, Popeye's Chicken had gone through four CEOs in the last seven years. Sales were just altogether declining right across the board.

Guest traffic was down. New restaurant returns were terrible. Everywhere you looked, things were falling apart. The franchise owners, they didn't like the company. They didn't like the executive staff. They really hated the company. They were angry. And a coup was in the works. And then Beck Helder made the new CEO.

And she brought just this new idea with her. And it's Proverbs 20, 28. It's a Proverbs 20, 28 idea. The motto she taught everyone. And the motto that she was going to do this job with was dare to serve.

[18:28] Dare to serve. And instead of saying, how can I get all of these people in line to do what I want them to do? She turned to them and said, this is who we have to love.

She used that kind of language. The problem with leadership at that point was they didn't even know if they liked the people, the franchise people, the franchise owners.

They were causing all sorts of problems. And so the executive team, they made a decision. And they said, we're not only going to like them, we're going to love them. And so how's that for a business philosophy?

To turn to the people that are not liking you, that are so upset with you, and say, instead of giving you what you have coming, I'm going to love you. It was a game-changing notion to love the people you lead.

We would love the franchisees for making huge investments in our people and our restaurants. We would love them for their passion. We would love them enough to listen to their point of view and their business experience.

[19:35] If you love the people you lead, you know them well, their strengths, their values, their life experiences. You celebrate them. You thank them. You occasionally hug them in an HR-appropriate way.

And what happened? So this mindset of, I'm going to bring basically Proverbs 20, 28 into a real-life situation that is falling apart.

Well, what happened? This Proverbs 20, 28 work where you go in and say, I'm going to love these people. I'm going to be faithful to them, and I'm going to be faithful to God and what he's called me to do.

Well, what happened was the stock price quadrupled in a few years. Popeye's chicken now leads the whole restaurant industry and franchisee happiness with 95% satisfaction level.

The bottom line profit doubled. Chick-fil-A saw all that, and now she works on their board of directors. Proverbs 20, 28 works.

[20:35] It works.

And they're going to be servant-hearted. And they're going to be, and they're going to be thinking, how can I help you? How can I help them?

What does it look like to be Christ-like in a position of authority? Because that's how Jesus leads the church. Because this pair of love and faithfulness, this proverb, finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

Isaiah 16, it's a messianic prophecy. It says, in love, a throne will be established. There's not a lot of thrones that are established in love in this world.

It's been a dog-eat-dog world. But in love, a throne will be established. In faithfulness, a man will sit on it. One from the house of David. So, the Lord sits on this throne.

[22 : 03] The Lord Jesus sits on his throne. And how does he rule his church with love and faithfulness? And it says his throne will endure forever. Ultimate safety, ultimate security is found in his kingdom.

And so, Jesus is this wise king. He's wiser and greater than Solomon. And he laid down his life for his kingdom. And now his throne is a throne of grace. And so, when we come to him, we come to a king that is asking those kinds of questions of, How can I help?

What can I do? What do you need? How can I support you? And you pray to him. And he gives you the grace you need to fulfill your calling.

How does he rule you? Harshly? Oh, we heard about it this morning. You come to him weary and heavy laden.

And he gives you rest. Harshly? No, never. We sing that beautiful refrain. With him is that true and perfect gentleness.

[23 : 07] Harshness. No harshness hast thou and no bitterness. To be ruled by him is to be ruled in love and faithfulness.

And that's our king. And that's our savior. And he shows us how to use the authority that God's entrusted us with wisely. So, brothers and sisters, Proverbs works.

Jesus shows us that. And so, what we want to do is we want to go and be wise. We want to go and be wise to his glory. And so, if you're called to some sort of position of leadership, you should be going away and saying, Okay, how's my leadership measuring up to this proverb?

Am I doing it in love? Am I known for my love? Am I known for my faithfulness? Am I like Jesus? That ultimate and great servant leader?

That's what we want to do. And that's what he helps us to do. Let's pray and close our time.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this word. I do pray that you would give us real practical and particular insight into how we can exercise our authority with love and faithfulness.

[24 : 26] If that's using more gentleness. If that's taking more time to listen. If that's being just more faithful and more diligent in our work.

Lord Jesus, thank you that you do sit on a throne of grace.

And so, we can come to you in our weakness and our need. And you help us. You help us to be the kind of husbands or wives. The kind of parents.

The kind of bosses. The kind of team leaders. The kind of pastors. The kind of teachers. Whatever position of authority you have given to us. You've called us to do it in a way that is counter-cultural. And God-glorifying. And in a way that brings blessing to others. And even a blessing to ourselves.

Help us to be these kind of leaders, I pray.

[25 : 25] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.