

*Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. <sup>2</sup> We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. – James 3:1-2*

In September 1980 I was 22 years old. I was just beginning my 5<sup>th</sup> year at Ohio University and my second year in a two-year associate degree program called Mental Health Technology. I had been following Jesus for about 5 years at that time. That fall, we started using the name Good Works to describe our efforts to love people without homes, children experiencing poverty and widows. January 1<sup>st</sup> will mark the start of my 40th year both with Good Works and with the broader issue of leadership, discipleship and spiritual growth.

Here are a few thoughts on leaderships that have come to me over the years. Keep in mind that I believe in a theology of failure and that I believe I have learned more through failure than through success. Indeed, if we can truly make friends with failure, we can learn things previously thought impossible.

- Leadership first requires the ability to lead yourself; to discipline yourself and to follow your own teaching with practices. Ultimately, the credibility for leadership is found in our character. Leaders lead best by example.
- Leaders understand that “deceit” is the bomb that will blow up their hopes for the thing God has wired them to do. They practice honesty first with themselves and then with others.
- Leaders in the body of Christ SEEK to grow in a deeper intimacy with God every day and establish daily disciplines which put Christ first! They know themselves well enough to know when something between them and God requires action and must be addressed. Leaders pray for the grace of obedience.
- Leaders live a life of availability. They manage their time wisely but also communicate in their significant relationships that they are not too busy when needed. They are approachable.
- Leaders understand power. They understand their own need for power and the dangers of power. Because they choose to be anchored in the fear of God, leaders pledge privately and publicly to use their power for good.
- Leaders focus on building trust with people because they know trust is the conduit for developing people into mature followers of Jesus.
- Leaders are not hung up on titles. They have a larger perspective of themselves and the ministry God has trusted them with. They know that the ministry God has trusted them with is not about buildings or techniques or methods. It is about people, and helping people grow into their potential from God!
- Leaders, because of their humility, admit their need for others, their emotional weaknesses and give permission to others – in the right context –to help them grow in their weaknesses. They are seeking to become honest enough to admit their weaknesses to trusted friends, ask for help and even laugh at themselves at times. They seek out others to help fill the gaps of their own weaknesses. They pay attention to their weaknesses so that they do not lead others astray.
- Leaders believe in followers so that (1) they can believe in themselves and (2) they can identify their gifts and God-given abilities. Leaders give permission to others through their authority to take acts of faith that bring them to maturity.
- Leaders seek to grow in love in their close friendships and understand that this is the well from which they have credibility to speak.

- Leaders have the courage to speak the truth in love without regard to personal gain. In doing this, they seek to act like God.
- Leaders cultivate and model gratitude for all of life's blessings and trials.
- Leaders model a godly life primarily through humility, bearing with others, and mature love towards (without favoritism).
- Christian leaders keep big picture and work (as far as it depends on them) towards the unity of the body of Christ for the glory of God!
- Leadership can be lonely and thus leaders must address this unique problem or it could be their downfall.
- Leaders are people who have been 'tested' by God and who, like Abraham have discovered in themselves through these tests that they do indeed fear God.
- Leaders understand that sacrifice is a way of life, not an occasional activity.
- Leaders understand that personal disciplines are the reservoir from which life flows out of them in day-to-day ministry.
- Leaders understand that integrity is their most important asset and they learn to guard it. This means they must sometimes 'remove themselves' from things others can do. Leaders wrestle regularly with the challenge Jesus poses to be in the world but not of the world.
- Leaders initiate accountable relationships with others. They don't wait for others to call them to accountability. They understand the 'myth' of accountability – that they are only as accountable as they choose to be. They know that accountability is a means to the end and that the end is holiness.
- Leaders pray every day for wisdom, discernment and the grace of humility so that they might walk in the spirit, have the mind of Christ and see life in view of the resurrection.
- Leaders understand appropriate transparency both in when, what and to whom.
- Leaders understand theologically that God redeems everything in God's time. Thus, our woundedness, still carried over many years is something God is still going to use regardless of when God fully heals us. This fragile state IS the tension between holiness and sin.
- Leaders are always learners. They cultivate in themselves a teachable spirit.
- Regardless of their specific job description, a Christian leader's focus is to seek to find ways for the body of Christ to experience the fullness of its expression in a local community and beyond.
- A mature leader will have a practiced theology of forgiveness. They will be approachable and know how to live in the holy tension of delicate relationship with people who are at various levels of maturity.
- Christian leaders have not-yet-Christian friends.
- Leaders leave a legacy. They finish well. They think about the long-term impact of their actions and decisions. They know about the "dash" (-) between the dates.
- Keith's four Leadership motifs: (1) Environmentalists (2) Conductor (3) Captain (4) Archeologist.
- Three things I have learned from the past 39 years with the ministry God has trusted me with: (1) Leadership is lonely (2) Ministry is fragile (3) Fruit, the kind that 'will remain' takes years to produce.