



Christian Leaders as Motivators: Prophetic Vision in Leaders

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A role that every Christian leader should play is that of motivator. A motivator *moves people to action*. As a believer, Christian leaders should serve as motivating agents. Moving people to grow closer to Christ, to achieve everything God has for them, and to embody Christian ideals. Throughout Scripture and Church history, there are many examples of motivational leaders. However, in order to be a motivational leader, one must first be transformed. We cannot embody Christian ideals if we have not become Christian. Along with transformation, Christian leaders must be authentic and genuine if they are to motivate.

INTRODUCING THE LEADER AND MOTIVATOR

Every Christian leader should act as a motivator. Before looking at motivation, an accurate definition of leadership is necessary. Winston and Patterson (2006) define leadership as

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one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives. (p. 7)

Winston and Patterson (2006) go on to say that leaders accomplish this by casting a “prophetic vision in clear terms” (p. 7). One of the ways that this is accomplished is by constantly keeping the vision and purpose in front of followers (Bennis, 1999). Using this definition, a leader will motivate. Part of the definition of leadership is to cause leaders to willingly do something with enthusiasm. This requires motivation.

McInerney (2019) defined motivation as “the psychological construct ‘invented’ to describe the mechanism by which individuals and groups choose particular behavior and persist with it” (p. 427). Therefore, a motivator is someone who moves someone toward action or causes a person to act or to continue to act. In defining motivation, this movement is not an impulse reaction, but a driving movement that causes an individual to persevere and achieve. In essence, it is a reason to act (Wright, 2016). There are two different types of motivation. *Intrinsic motivation* takes place when an individual enjoys an activity or finds satisfaction from it on their own. *Extrinsic motivation* is an outside source—be it verbal praise or material blessing—that causes an individual to do something. As theorists and corporations try to devise ways to increase morale, motivation, and productivity, they have desired to devise a way to use both extrinsic motivators to increase satisfaction. Studies concluded that in doing so, the most effective extrinsic motivators were verbal rewards (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Throughout Scripture and Church history, we see several examples of people who serve as motivational leaders. For the scope of this paper, we will look at two in the Scriptures, and two in Church history. The first such character is Nehemiah.

NEHEMIAH AS MOTIVATOR

Nehemiah served in the court of the king of Persia eighty years after the Israelites were released from Babylonian captivity (Neh. 2:1). He heard about the poor condition of Jerusalem from his brother and decided to act (MacArthur, 2004). Nehemiah fit the bill of a transformational leader.

He prayed and once he knew the direction he should go, provided a vision for the people. That vision consisted of rebuilding the walls around the city of Jerusalem. He had a great vision for a city he himself had never seen. This was also something that had never been done. Following this, he leveraged power in a way that was beneficial to others (Neh. 2:4). Having served in the court of the king, he would have the king's ear in order to arrange a way for him to go to Jerusalem. The fact that a man in the court of the king would have such favor with the king that he could ask a favor and it be granted spoke of the character of Nehemiah even before he went to Jerusalem. He anticipated trouble from those around Jerusalem and took letters approving his actions (Neh. 2:7–8). He took great care of those who worked under him to complete the wall around Jerusalem, adapted to issues, and persevered (Patton, 2017). All these actions served to motivate a defeated people to rise up in the face of opposition and complete a miraculous task (Neh. 6:15). Nehemiah and his workers were able to complete the wall around Jerusalem in 52 days (MacArthur, 2004). Nehemiah motivated the people by leading by example, having been transformed by a broken heart for his hometown. He displayed great leadership in the sense that he led with patience and understanding.

As a motivator, rewards for those on the team will be different than traditional means. When trying to get people motivated, simple compensation or a pat on the back may not work. There must be room for failure and mistakes as others grab a hold of the vision and seek to help fulfill the goals of the organization (Manso, 2011). Nehemiah's intrinsic motivation caused him to be an extrinsic motivator for others. He gave them a vision that they did not possess to complete a task that was seemingly impossible. In turn, he transformed a defeated people into a great workforce.

Principle One: Christian leaders as motivators are intrinsically led by a burden or to complete a vision and will provide extrinsic motivation to those who follow through effective goal setting.

CHRIST AS MOTIVATOR

There is arguably no greater motivator in history than Jesus Christ. There are many instances of Christ serving as motivator, however, given that we are limited in scope, there are two for consideration here. The first is

when Jesus called the disciples: “And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him” (Matt. 4:19–22, ESV). In this instance, Christ is both the definitive leader and motivator. He spoke to them, and they followed. They followed Him because He painted a different picture of their lives using a fishing analogy they understood. It changed their lives forever. In Winston and Patterson’s (2006) definition of leadership, the leader has “prophetic vision” (p. 7). Jesus clearly articulated this vision to James and John in a way they could understand, and it motivated to follow. This motivation was intrinsic in the life of James and John. Jesus came by, and with verbal recognition and praise, they were motivated to leave their nets and follow Him. He painted a different picture that intrinsically changed their perceptions and their lives. Then, Mark 2:14 describes the calling of Matthew: “And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him” (ESV). Jesus was able to motivate fishermen and a tax collector to leave their current occupations to follow and live for Him. He motivated them with the promise of a cause greater than their own. It caused them to act, and it would change their lives forever. Early philosophers believed that most motivation for accomplishing a task was for seeking pleasure or avoiding pain (Steers, Mowday, & Shapiro, 2004). Yet, this isn’t the case with Christ. Jesus told the disciples that they “will be hated by all for *His* name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22, ESV). He was clear about the potential suffering they would accomplish. Yet, the vision painted was greater than the potential pain to be endured. He gave them a fixed goal: salvation for themselves and the world, and, a fixed goal is essential to motivation (Gannon, 2007).

The second example of Christ’s motivation is similar to the first. In Acts 1:1–11, Jesus reminded the disciples that they have a mission to do. He instructed them to wait in Jerusalem until they received power to carry out that mission. The Holy Spirit is poured out on the believers in Acts 2. They hold onto the promise, faithfully follow Christ, and many died as a result. What caused these people to be so motivated by Christ? It was Jesus’ authenticity that leads to transformation which then resulted in

motivation. From the first call until His last words on earth, Jesus demonstrated authenticity, trust, and transparency. Authentic leadership is genuine and real (Northouse, 2013). While Jesus can be used as a case study of many different types of leadership: transformational, servant, and path-goal theory, to name a few, Jesus was definitely an authentic leader. He was sincere. He spoke with conviction and compassion, and His message benefited all those who listened. He wasn't seeking to build a kingdom for Himself on the earth. Yet, His message was honest about the difficulties of following Him and He granted those who wanted to leave Him a peaceful way out (Huizing, 2011). These two elements were unique to that time, and while effective, are contrary to human nature. Motivational studies suggest that individuals repeat actions that lead to positive outcomes (Steers et al., 2004); however, Jesus was able to motivate people to stand with Him knowing that the outcome maybe death. In first-century Judaism, there was much division. The Pharisees and Sadducees each had their unique way of interpreting the Scriptures. Nevertheless, strict adherence to the Law and respect for the Temple were required (Harris, 2002). Throughout the New Testament, there are references to corruption among Jewish leaders. In this climate, Jesus stood out as He delivered a sincere message that offered life and hope. He does not force Himself on anyone, but freely receives those who come to Him. This motivates many to come to Him, and after His ascension, to stand for Him. It is as if His character is an intrinsic motivator to those who come in contact with Him; inspiring them to fulfill their calling.

Principle Two: Christian leaders as motivators can inspire intrinsic motivation in followers by exhibiting consistent character and authentic leadership.

MOTIVATION AND CHRISTIANITY

It is no surprise that one of the most popular forms of public speaking is called *motivational speaking*. However, from a Christian perspective, there is more to motivation than simply *motivating*. There are many people who have motivated others and were not Christian. There are also those who have motivated people to do heinous things. Hitler, in his work *Mein Kampf*, penned his belief that he was sent by God to defend the world against the Jew (Hitler, 1925/2014). Through this doctrine,

he was able to motivate a large portion of the German people to participate in the Holocaust. Through the writing of the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx was able to influence the intellectuals and teachers in Russia, who provided the basis for the Russian Revolution (Evtuhov & Stites, 2004). Lenin motivated the people of Russia and the Bolsheviks that led to the overthrow of Imperial Russia and bring Communism as a form of government to the world stage (Evtuhov & Stites, 2004). Even the Apostle Paul was motivated to do negative things before his conversion (Acts 7). His belief in the falsehood of Christ motivated him to round up believers to be put to death (Acts 9:1).

Motivation moves people toward accomplishing a task. Motivation without Christian ethics, or a guiding set of moral values that controls a leader's actions, leads to immorality and evil ends (McQuilkin, 1995). That is not to say that all non-Christians have evil motivators. In the instance of Paul, he believed he was doing the right thing as he rounded up believers. Hitler, Marx, and Lenin stood by their principles as they implemented their belief systems. These, however, ended with disastrous consequences. Proverbs 14:12 offers guidance here: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (ESV). On the other hand, as a believer who subscribes to a life of faith and searches the Scriptures, motives and actions are put to the test. They are challenged and shaped by the Word of God as it is a discerner of thoughts and intents (Heb. 4:12). It reveals not just the motivators, but whether the motivator is proper, just, and holy. This is a byproduct of a surrendered life. From the early church fathers, there was no division between good morals and faith (O'Keefe & Reno, 2005). The surrendered Christian life keeps motivators in check and vision holy.

Principle Three: Christian leaders as motivators move people to accomplish a task as the Christian faith helps leaders maintain proper motivation and ethics.

THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN MOTIVATION

Christian leaders who act as motivators not only have the opportunity to change the world, but to change it for the better. Regardless of the industry, a Christian leader's goal must be to bring people into the Kingdom of Christ and to live out the principles of His Kingdom in the workplace and the marketplace. This runs counter to much of secular thought.

Much of the actions that we are motivated to do are influenced by the norms of secular society and the meaning that history places on certain actions and behaviors (Nolen, Horn, & Ward, 2015). In everything that Christ did, He sought to bring people into the Kingdom. In John 4, while Jesus sought water, He changed a woman's life. In Luke 8:43–48, as He was walking down the street, He healed a woman with an issue of blood. No matter what Jesus was doing, He was always ready to change a life. Christian leaders need to seek to connect their worship with their work. There is the realization that we are formed in worship on Sunday for mission on Monday (Smith, 2013). When put into practice, whether secular or ministerial, the Christian embraces their occupation as a way to extend the Kingdom of God. In other words, our faith becomes inseparable from our life and purpose. However, to have the right motives requires transformation. Indeed, a motivational leader must be a transformational leader. A transformational leader changes and transforms people (Northouse, 2013). It can be argued that one cannot transform others without being transformed themselves. This is seen in the life of Nehemiah. While serving in the court of the king of Babylon, Nehemiah hears of the condition of Jerusalem (Neh. 1:1–4). The news transforms Nehemiah, shaking him to his core. In verses 4–11, he talks with God. What follows is a vision of a rebuilt wall and a restored Jerusalem. Nehemiah could have never transformed those who rebuilt the walls and given them the courage and direction if he himself had not been first transformed. Lewis (1980) argued that repentance is a hard thing, because it requires us to unlearn all of the evil we have learned, and to operate by a different set of principles. In Nehemiah 1:4–11, Nehemiah prays a prayer of repentance. In order for the future to be right, the past needs to be mended. Also, according to Lewis (1982), everything is working to keep us from this transformation. The church, our human nature, and pride all seek to work against this transformation. That is why Romans 12:2 says: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (ESV).

Once transformed, Christian leaders become representatives of Christ and His Kingdom on the earth. Paul wrote, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20, ESV). Keene (2013) wrote that ambassadors are all those who know Christ and are in Christ, and they are going to a world in need of reconciliation. An ambassador, by

nature, represents its mother country on foreign soil. That analogy works for believers because we represent Christ and all He stands for as we live as pilgrims on the earth. Following the command of Christ, we should motivate all to enter into that same relationship. If believers embrace the truth of Scripture, it should motivate them to motivate others. One of the critical components of motivational theory is time (Steel & König, 2006). There is a certain immediacy for things to be accomplished. With the brevity of life and the swiftness of changes in circumstance, Christian leaders should seek to make as much of a difference as quickly as possible. Thus, “making the best of the time” that God has given us (Eph. 5:16, ESV).

This difference doesn’t mean that the believer holds crusades on the job in order to make converts. Embracing godly principles of business and being faithful regardless of the situation serves as a witness. Being steadfast and honest can motivate others.

Another crucial component of Christian leaders motivating others is that they must be motivated themselves. Before leaders can move others, they must be moved themselves. Christians will not embody Christian principles without being Christian. In other words, change has to take place in us that is genuine. That genuine transformation will motivate us to help others: “and without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6, ESV).

Principle Four: Christian leaders as motivators are transformed leaders who are motivated by biblical principles that translate into the workplace and relationships.

ST. BENEDICT AS MOTIVATOR

In the sixth century, St. Benedict would serve as a reformer of the monastic system. He was completely appalled at the behavior of Rome and spent his early years as a hermit. Eventually, he would establish a monastery at Monte Cassino. He established a protocol that all monks were expected to use. It outlined schedules of prayer, study, and work. In the end, it would be the Benedictine order that preserved scholastic works through the Dark Ages (Lowney, 2005). As a whole, monastics rejected material possessions, but were also very isolated and independent. It was also during Benedict’s time that the Roman Empire was collapsing. Despite

all this, he was able to motivate monks and nuns to come together and abide under a set of rules that would preserve monastic life (Ponzetti, 2014). Through his leadership, monasteries would become self-sufficient communities that would serve to preserve the Western way of life. This system would be in effect for 1500 years until the rise of Loyola and the Jesuits (Lowney, 2005).

Benedict's great achievement occurred despite the time of upheaval in which he lived. He was motivated by his faith and motivated others to not abandon faith, the church, or a lifestyle that they believed was important and necessary. Motivated by a desire for the system to be effective and true, Benedict left an indelible print on the church and Western civilization. Within motivational theory, there is the debate between which motives act as drivers or goals. In other words, intrinsic motives drive someone to complete a task versus the potential of a goal motivating or driving an individual to pursue the desired end (Covington, 2000). In Benedict, you see both. He knew that the monastic system had to encounter change if it was going to endure and be effective. While he developed a system by which this was to be done, it all started with an intrinsic desire to see something different. From there, goals were set that helped motivate him to achieve them. In other words, Benedict knew that there were things that needed to change. He was intrinsically motivated to fix the system. It was something that completely wrecked him. In the midst of reforming, he formed a system that he believed was the most effective. He started with a vision that was intrinsically derived, yet his goals and that vision motivated him to achieve them. In looking at motivational theory and how it applies to Christian leadership, it seems that this can be a natural flow.

Principle Five: Christian leaders as motivators are simultaneously intrinsically and extrinsically motivated.

TRAIT THEORY AND MOTIVATION

Trait theory looks at the traits that are necessary for someone to be a great leader. These traits are intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability (Northouse, 2013). It could be argued that to be a good member of a leadership team, one should possess humility, drive, and social skills (Lencioni, 2016). The exemplars discussed so far all possessed these traits, motivated people, and changed the world. While

there are many different leadership theories and approaches, the ability to motivate people toward positive behavior requires the right character. As trait theory and leadership studies have evolved, it is important to note that ability is no longer present (Northouse, 2013). Much of what is done in any sector can be learned. While the ability to accomplish a task is secondary, characteristics that make for a team player and a dependable team member are important. It isn't as much about the task but the motive and reasoning behind the accomplishing of it and the character of the individual accomplishing it. Improper and selfish motives lay the groundwork for destruction within organizations. The Christian leader as motivator must be one that serves and has the best interest of those he or she leads at heart.

The only way a Christian leader can motivate others to achieve and accomplish in a way that exemplifies Christ is for their motives to be pure. This requires the leader to be aware of their own weaknesses and shortcomings. Temporal Motivational Theory suggests that personality traits are an expression of needs within an individual (Steel & König, 2006). While this maybe true, a complicating dimension for Christian leaders is that Christ commands us to act from a motive of concern for others' needs above our own.

Principle Six: Christian leaders as motivators prioritize traits such as integrity, humility, determination, and right motives over ability and talent.

HOLY SPIRIT AND MOTIVATION

None of this is possible without a constant element that is needed in the life of the believer: the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Church is empowered for its mission on earth. This power has to be at work within us (Pinnock, 1996). Paul emphasizes this in Romans 8:14: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (ESV). While Northouse gave an exhaustive list of traits that are desirable for leadership, there is a list that enhances it: Galatians 5:22–23. Paul lists the Fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22–23, ESV). While Christian leaders can have various extrinsic motivators, ultimately their purpose and drive will be driven by the leading of the Holy Spirit, the ultimate Motivator. From this motivation, the leader instills this into others, and this, in turn, brings discontentment

with the status quo and creates space for a fresh vision and alternative hope (Engstrom, 1976). Jeremiah wrote: “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name, there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot’” (Jer. 20:9, ESV). What was his motivation to prophesy? Extrinsically, he was persecuted and disregarded. Why would Nehemiah be the one motivated to rebuild the wall? He had no knowledge of carpentry or engineering. Why would the Apostles willingly give their lives for the Gospel? What sets all Christian leaders apart is that they are motivated by the transformation and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. There is no escaping the call of God: “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29, ESV). So, as Christian leaders lead, they are simultaneously being led by the Holy Spirit who is intrinsically driving them to accomplish real goals.

Principle Seven: Christian leaders as motivators rely upon the Holy Spirit as they are transformed by the Holy Spirit. He will compel them to complete the plan He has for their lives.

SUMMARY

Throughout the Bible and Church history, there have been Christian leaders that have served as motivators for the Church and the world. From Nehemiah in the Old Testament, Jesus in the New Testament, to church fathers such as St. Benedict, God used them in their capacities to motivate people to make impacts that would change the world. As current leaders rely upon the leading of the Holy Spirit, they too can become motivators who lead others to make a maximum impact in the arenas in which they lead. By examining their lives and various theories of leadership, below is a summary of the integrative principles that leaders can take away and seek to apply to their spheres of leadership (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Leadership principles of “motivator”

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Christian leaders as motivators</i>
1	Are intrinsically led by a burden or to complete a vision and will provide extrinsic motivation to those who follow through effective goal-setting
2	Can inspire intrinsic motivation in followers by exhibiting consistent character and authentic leadership
3	Move people to accomplish a task as the Christian faith helps leaders maintain proper motivation and ethics
4	Are transformed leaders who are motivated by biblical principles that translate into the workplace and relationships
5	Are simultaneously intrinsically and extrinsically motivated
6	Prioritize traits such as integrity, humility, determination, and right motives over ability and talent
7	Rely upon the Holy Spirit as they are transformed by the Holy Spirit. He will compel them to complete the plan He has for their lives

Source Editor’s creation based on principles within the chapter

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