

RAISING UP CHRISTIAN LEADERS WHO WILL TRANSFORM SOCIETY

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The powerful movement of God is always associated with godly leadership. In this article, John looks at how we can intentionally raise up a new generation of Christian leaders.

I fully believe that God can bring transformation to a people and culture. But whenever God-inspired transformation has occurred, he has chosen to use leaders as an important part of the process. Sometimes these are prominent leaders like Wesley or Wilberforce and sometimes they are grassroots leaders as in the present revival in China.

I don't think that the raising up of new Christian leaders has been high enough up our agenda. Paul's advice to Timothy was, "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul was calling Timothy to intentionally raise up and invest in a generation of people who could influence others in God's ways and truth.

I would like to share a model by which we can raise up a new generation of Christians leaders who God may use to transform our nation and culture

1. We need to value leadership.

Australian culture in general, and many church cultures, devalue leadership. Leaders are seen as egotistical or manipulative with hidden personal agendas. Many people feel that they need to be cautious about leaders, critiquing them and bringing them back to earth.

The Bible recognises the danger of ungodly, egocentric leadership, but it calls for respect for leadership (e.g. Heb. 13:7, 17). Until we value our leaders, there is little chance of new generations aspiring to be Christian leaders.

I know there are many churches where leadership is respected, trusted, and valued. These churches usually have younger people aspiring to lead, and you can see why.

2. We need to think leadership.

Many people still equate leadership with a role or position, or with the organisation of a program. Leadership is about influencing people. It's about saying and doing things that have a positive impact on the lives of others and that cause them to change.

Church leaders must think influence. Who am I investing in? Who am I impacting? Who am I helping to grow in faith?

One early church leader who did this well was Barnabas. He was always looking for people to invest in (e.g. Saul, John Mark). So did Jesus of course. They thought leadership. They thought influence.

3. We need to call new leaders.

Most new leaders will not grow their influence without someone encouraging and challenging them to do so. It's just too tough for most people to step up by themselves. So leaders need to intentionally and specifically call those with potential/gifting to broaden their influence.

There are many things to look for in potential leaders. Heart for God is crucial. Character is important although this will continue to grow. Some evidence of the ability to influence others is a strong sign that leadership can grow.

Leaders need to be constantly on the lookout for those God is raising up to lead us into the future. Some will eventually have a wide sphere of influence and others will mainly influence small groups of people. We need to call them to pursue God's gifting to influence.

4. We need to network new leaders.

I don't think that it's a coincidence that Jesus developed a network rather than a personal mentoring or teaching program. Maybe that's what all rabbis did in those days, but it really is the most effective way to nurture leaders. They need a group of friends with the same passion to pursue God and his kingdom. It really helps to have a network of people who are facing similar challenges and opportunities. Leadership is just too hard by yourself.

These networks need experienced leaders to facilitate and guide, but the energy and drive comes from the new leaders who are encouraging each other to grow and influence, and who learn from each other.

5. We need to equip new leaders.

A leader's role is to "prepare God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:12). The equipping of new leaders is vital. There is much to learn about God and the way he works. There is much to learn about Christian leadership and influence.

This equipping happens most naturally in the networks. It requires some teaching, but also involves lots of modelling, processing and reflection. (Malyon Leadership is writing resources for leadership development networks to assist in the learning element of these networks.)

6. We need to let new leaders loose.

Again we look to the model that Jesus used - building a network, modelling and equipping, then sending them out to have a go themselves (Matt. 10:1-42). We know that in those early days, the disciples (and the wider group who were also sent out) didn't understand all that Jesus was teaching, but he let them loose anyway. And they had a great time and saw God at work through them (Luke 10:17-20).

I know that it's risky, but new leaders need to be given a go. They won't grow as leaders cocooned in the safety of a training program or small group. Oh the responsibility needs to match their maturity, but they must seek to influence while they have the security of the network to process their efforts.

7. We need to mentor and coach new leaders.

While I think that networks of new leaders are absolutely vital, there is still some development that has to be done one-on-one in a personal mentoring or coaching relationship. These are the opportunities to share personally - confronting barriers to leadership and encouraging growth. Each new leader needs a mentor.

This may sound like a pipe dream to many, but I am already seeing it happening. God is raising up a new generation of leaders, but he needs every church to play their part.

I'm convinced that it's not all that difficult. It just requires intentional effort.

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