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Leading According to the Times and not According to Tradition

By Dr. David Robinson, Founder

"And the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do..." I Chronicles 12. All the men listed in this chapter came in full battle array to Hebron with the single purpose of making David the king of Israel, but it seems only the men of Issachar really knew what to do.

Currently America is caught up in a hotly contested debate about the challenges facing our Nation. The media is obsessed with spinning the best story about which party and ideology understands the most about the times in which we live and how to make the critical decisions facing our great nation.

As Christians, and especially leaders, we should earnestly be seeking God about our personal testimony and the influence we have wherever the plan of God has led us. Our nation is facing many challenges for which, without Divine intervention, there seems to be no answers. Issachar and his 200 men were facing a challenging moment in the life of Israel and God gave them a Divine revelation of what to do. May He do the same with the leaders of our nation. May the Lord raise up some leaders in the church with a "Joseph" anointing who, in spite of the prevailing non-Christian culture, will have favor with government and marketplace leaders to share their God-given wisdom.

More important than what party is leading America, is how effective will Christian leaders be in leading and serving where God has assigned them?

What is the single biggest factor in the ability of a ministry to have long-term influence, impact and success in fulfilling its mission? It is not an outstanding mission, vision, and value statement...important as these are. It's not the latest information and communication technologies, as vital as these are to ministry in the 21st Century. It's not even access to unlimited ministry tools, time and money, as helpful as these would be.

What I believe is most important is the ability to hear the voice of the Spirit and follow His strategy. We must develop a passion to innovate and adapt as He leads us during these very tempestuous times. Could it be that while most in the Church have maintained a strong allegiance to following the inerrant Word of God (the map), some have lost their sensitivity to read the compass (the Holy Spirit)?

In addition to hearing the voice of the Spirit, if we are going to maximize the opportunities the Church has today, we must develop and mobilize **leaders** at all levels of ability, talent, and gifting. They must not only "understand the times and know what to do," they must be functioning effectively at every level of leadership opportunity and challenge.



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If we are going to lead according to the times and not traditions, we must have the courage to invest all available resources: money, good will, energy, facilities, and ministry tools in new and innovative ways. But we also need to do this without abandoning the **best** of yesterday and today. It is naive to believe we can carry all the baggage of yesterday and today in the tomorrow God has planned for us. Wise and courageous leaders will know the difference, as did the men of Issachar.

Three things are vital if today's "men of Issachar" will have understanding of the times and know what to do. One, they know the difference between leading and managing their ministry. Second, they must set goals for making the quality changes needed to keep their ministry relevant to the 21st Century without compromising their core values. Third, they must understand today and tomorrow's leadership and management realities.

Managers are *doers* and leaders are *visionaries*. Both are vital and necessary for success. Managers are about efficiency, procedures, and coordinating the bureaucracy. They keep us on the right path today but provide little, if any, direction for the future. They tend to limit imagination and creativity and they slow progress or change. But **today** wouldn't happen without them.

Leaders are visionaries. They dream about how the future can be. "...behold the dreamer commeth...let us kill him...and we shall see what will become of his dreams." Genesis 37:19-20. Be careful who you share your dream for the future with, but by all means, have one. If you don't, you should be managing and allow someone else to take the leadership role.

The vision leaders have should be based on at least two things: innovation and inspiration. **Innovation** is based on wisdom, knowledge, and understanding given by the Holy Spirit. It's letting and causing resources and influence to flow to those who add value and away from those who don't. *Inspiration* is based on a sense of mission, vision and a passion for living for a cause greater than yourself.... one that will out last your lifetime. Innovation and inspiration will always increase stakeholder value. Just as today's success won't happen without great managers, tomorrow's success won't happen without great leaders.

Second, when establishing goals for ministry innovation, we should consider at least three.

First, strong leaders will always be fostering ministry renewal. Too many ministries wait until conditions demand that something must be done. Smart ministries are always considering how we do what we do...better. Great leaders make significant changes before they have to. Good leaders make changes when they have to, and poor leaders resist change and try to make changes when they are no longer necessary or will not have any significant impact on the ministry's future.

Second, great leaders are constantly trying to inspire their team to make innovation everyone's passion. They are in a constant state of war against the status quo. Challenging the process is not an occasional event, but a way of life. Innovation is not resisted but valued and embraced by every leader at every level.



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Third, great leaders are cultivating and developing a creative ministry environment all the time.

"So it is with effective leadership. The leader whose thinking is constrained within well-worn ruts; who is completely governed by his established passions and prejudices; who is incapable of thinking either grey or free; and who can't even appropriate the creative imagination and fresh ideas of those around him is as anachronistic and ineffective as the dinosaur. He may by dint of circumstances, remain in power but his followers would almost certainly be better off without him."

Dr. Steven Sample, President USC

The two biggest traditional threats to this kind of creative and innovative environment is the *W.N.D.I.T.W.B.* tradition, "We've never done it that way before." A close second tradition is the *W.I.I.F.M.* tradition. "What's in it for me?" Great leaders constantly and firmly resist these traditions and insist their team members do the same.

Leaders who lead according to the "times and know what to do" understand today and tomorrow's leadership and management realities. They understand that information and communication technologies are a lot like the internet. They are available to just about anyone in the world; they are transparent (few, if any secrets); they are reliant on personal integrity; a lot of personal financial gain is at stake, which could be lost if they were "disconnected." Leaders who don't understand these realities will find their ability to lead effectively, greatly challenged.

Understanding our times and helping those we lead know what to do should be at the top of every leader's prayer list and active agenda. We must not only get them ready for eternity, we must get them ready for tomorrow. The world is trying to help people cope with today's challenges. Dr. Phil, Oprah, and many others seem to have some answers, but we know better. God help us as leaders in the Body of Christ to not just help our people cope, but lead them on a mission to be "more than conquerors through Jesus Christ our Lord," in the home, in the church and in the marketplace.

The greatest challenge for those who choose to lead according to the times and not tradition is constantly enlarging the gene pool of ideas while being led of the Spirit to respond with courage and conviction to the best ideas. The Sons of Issachar did, Jesus did...Why not you?

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