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A Servant's Heart : The Key to Spiritual Leadership

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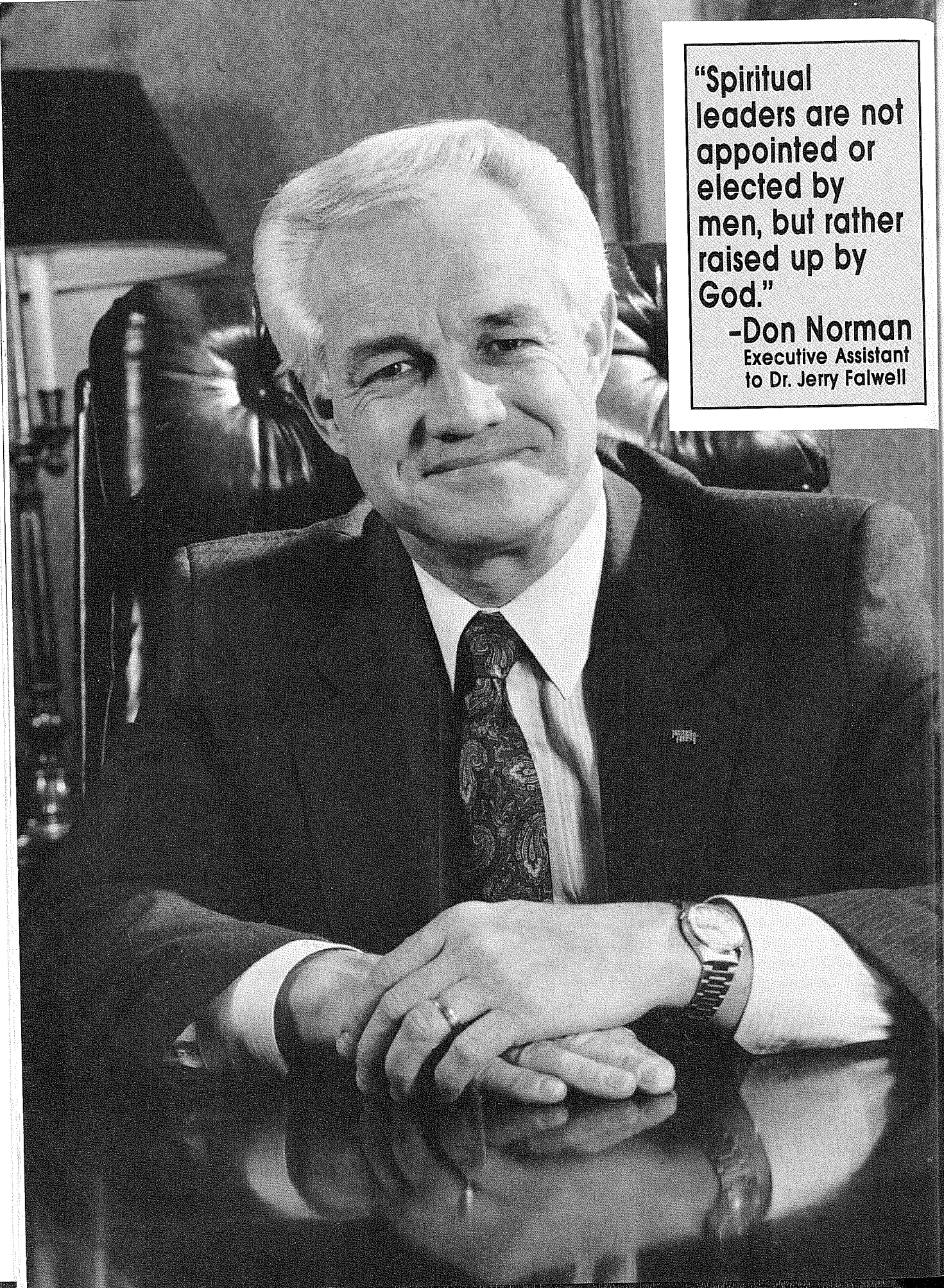
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A black and white photograph of Don Norman, an older man with white hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is seated in a leather office chair, leaning forward with his hands clasped on a reflective surface. He is wearing a watch on his left wrist and a ring on his right hand. The background is slightly blurred, showing an office setting.

**"Spiritual
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appointed or
elected by
men, but rather
raised up by
God."**

-Don Norman
Executive Assistant
to Dr. Jerry Falwell

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A Servant's Heart

The Key to Spiritual Leadership

by Ronald E. Hawkins

In the ninth chapter of Luke's gospel, we are privileged to be with the disciples as they travel with Jesus in the "School of Discipleship." The Lord teaches them timeless principles designed to make them able leaders.

Soon He will journey with them to Jerusalem. After His death, burial, and Resurrection, He will establish His church, and they will provide the leadership for this new dynamic and divine instrument. Through that instrument, God will carry on world evangelization. Jesus takes time to zero in on attitudes these future leaders must carefully nourish and develop if they are to be effective.

Appreciation for Their Commission. Jesus "called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority" (Luke 9:1). We too are commissioned and dependent. Nothing inside us naturally prepares us for the ministry God entrusts to us. Destitute of power and authority, we need to perform our ministry through Christ. When we view the authority and power God gives us in their proper context, they always humble us. They should never cause pride. God commissions today's leaders as He did Abraham's servant in Genesis 24. Speaking of the Master and doing His bidding without alteration or reservation is our finest service.

Appreciation for the Importance of Compassion. Some look at compassion as a quality of temperament—some have it; others do not. That is not so. We can develop compassion if we allow ourselves to become aware of the needs of hurting people. As we draw close to them

and sense their hopelessness, compassion moves us to meet their needs. When Mark recounts the feeding of the 5,000 he tells us that Jesus "was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd." The development of compassion demands that we move outside of our comfortable church walls and walk in the tragic places.

When I was a young pastor in Worcester, Massachusetts, I walked the sidewalks of that city, through row after row of three-story tenements, talking with the people. God's compassion and concern caught fire in my life as I drew close to the poor of that American city. Traveling to some of the mission fields of the world, I have sensed this same overwhelming desire to meet needs. Christian leaders should periodically visit mission fields like Africa and the Orient, and our own inner cities and Appalachia. The spiritual and physical needs of the people in these and other areas of our world are overwhelming. Christian leaders must work to meet the needs of people through Christ and the resources of His church. This generates compassion and makes us leaders worthy of Christ.

Character Development. Recent and past events in the church of Jesus Christ illustrate that God's people do not always evidence an abundance of character. Without character we lack the ability to make decisions in the best interest of others, whether or not our personal interests are served by those decisions. Character manifests itself in a selflessness that sacrifices personal gain for the enrichment of the church, family, friends, and others.

The bondservant of the Old Testament is one of the best biblical models for

A leader's greatest attribute is to possess the heart of Christ, and to minister out of that servant's heart.

character. In Exodus 21:5 a unique bond-servant states, "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free." Offered the opportunity for freedom from all responsibilities and burdens related to employment and family, the bondservant chooses to honor his commitment to meeting the needs of others. His motivation is clearly the love of others above love for self and personal comfort.

Beginning at Luke 9:16 Jesus is teaching the importance of character to the future leaders of the church. The Master Teacher frequently taught with parables, but here Jesus exposes His disciples to another teaching method. He teaches through paradox, a statement or an event seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense, yet it is true.

Jesus sets forth three paradoxes. The first involves the feeding of the 5,000. The disciples reasoned that since they were a great distance from a supermarket and without great financial income, the best answer was to send the crowd away. That makes sense. But it does not factor in the compassion and concern of God for the needs of the multitudes. Jesus takes the insignificant loaves and fishes in His hands, blesses them, breaks them, and uses them to feed thousands. The event defies human explanation. It doesn't make sense. How can the insignificant be multiplied and become the source of blessing for so many? There were even 12 baskets of food left over. In the hands of God, blessed and broken, the paradoxical makes sense. God takes the small and insignificant and through His power causes it to bring great blessing to those He loves.

The second paradox involves the Son of God. God takes the Man Jesus in His hands. He blesses Him, breaks Him, and buries Him. From the human side He is rejected by men. However, Jesus is always in the hand of God and enjoys the blessings of God. This makes the paradoxical possible. Jesus is crucified! They have finished Him. But wait! He is alive! How can it be? He has always been in the hand of God. God transforms death to life in His hand. He, through the power of the Holy Spirit, brings Jesus Christ back from the grave. He is the God of the Resurrection. Christ triumphed over death because He never left the hand of the Father. "He being dead, yet liveth." This is the greatest paradox conceivable to the human mind. Death is transformed into life in the hand of the omnipotent God.

In the third paradox the disciples

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Christ.**

are invited to apply the crucifixion teaching to their own lives. Jesus advises them that they must come to their own crosses. They must come willingly to these instruments of death on a daily basis. They must put their concerns and interests in the hands of a sovereign God. They must be willing to seek His blessing and undergo His breaking. Then and only then will they meet the requirement for divine service.

As leaders in the church of Jesus Christ, we too must develop a disciplined relationship to our own crosses. We must develop a keen awareness of the importance of character and the relationship of Christ's Cross to its development. We must see that in Christ's service, leadership is surrounded by the aura of the paradoxical. He that is the greatest must be like the little child. Concern for personal success will surely result in failure to accomplish God's purposes. We may have great numbers. We may build great churches. However, if character is absent, if we do not believe in the essential necessity of the Cross at the center of our lives, then in the long view all we do will be undone. The communities we seek to serve will witness the demise of our influence and our ministries. Only those things built on the paradox of the Cross will truly last, because they rest on the foundation of God's blessing and power.

Only when we lose our lives for His sake do we find it. Character is best demonstrated in the life of the servant. He that would be the greatest in the kingdom of God must be the servant of all. He must model a submissive spirit centered on compassionately meeting needs. His leadership will result in a work that will last long after he, as the servant of God, passes into the presence of his Lord.

Without the experience of the Cross, we wander impotently through the duties of our ministries. The disciples were well-acquainted with such impotency. They had met the demon-possessed lad in Luke 9:37-43. Hear the tragic cry of the father for his son. "I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and they could not." Why could they, with the power and authority of Christ at their control, not help this poor soul? Jesus tells us why. They had become perverse (9:41). What was their perversity? They had replaced concern for the Cross with concern for self-exaltation. In that exchange they lost their character and they lost their power.

However, that loss is not the greatest tragedy. The greatest tragedy is that

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those who so desperately needed God's
work in their lives were hindered from
receiving it. God's instruments for procla-
mation neutralized God's ability to reach
the lost by the self-centered games they
played. They argued over who would be
the greatest in the kingdom of God, and
their spiritual power eroded (9:46-48).
They were suspicious of the intentions of
those from another camp, forbidding them
to do the works of God, and their spir-
itual power eroded (9:49-50). They even
wanted to call fire down from heaven on
those who were nonreceptive to the
things of God, and their power was
further eroded (9:51-56). Jesus openly
rebuked such attitudes and labeled them
perverse. Today's spiritual leaders must
beware of developing such perversity, for
it compromises God's ability to use us
powerfully and it leaves the captives bound.

Jesus suggests three activities that will
keep us close to the Cross and ensure
character development. These activities
will also ensure that the world sees God's
power working through God's leaders.

**Attention to Hearing the Word of
the Lord.** Jesus informs the disciples that
they ought to let His words "sink down
into your ears" (9:44). The greatest sin-
gle force for the development of good
leadership is our willingness to hear the
word of the Lord and uncompromisingly
obey it. Paul warned of the danger of
"itching ears." We must make certain
that we let "all" of God's instruction sink
deep into our minds. Thus embraced, it is

Concern for personal success will surely result in failure to accomplish God's purposes.

free to do its gracious work of transformation.

A Willingness to Serve. Arrogance
and pride should never characterize our
dealings with those we are privileged to
serve. Leaders must continually look for
better and more effective ways to meet
the needs of people. For example, they
should take advantage of opportunities to
attend workshops and enhance their
abilities to serve their constituency more
efficiently. Ultimately, a leader's greatest
attribute is to possess the heart of
Christ, and to minister out of that
servant's heart.

**A Tolerance Toward Those Who
Differ.** The disciples had trouble dealing
with those who rejected Jesus. Their
solution was to call fire down on them.
Leaders have followed that approach for
generations. Leaders who mishandle those
who disagree with them cause irreparable
damage to their effectiveness. Jesus re-
buked the disciples for turning with
vengeful attitudes toward those who op-
posed them (9:55). Those who aspire to
leadership must always strive to speak the
truth in love.

Christ commissions the leaders of His
church. We have no inherent authority. We
depend on God's gracious gift of power. Our
fervent desire should be to adorn that
gift with compassion and character. Such
a desire will ensure a ministry of power, and
will result in people leaving our presence
praising God that they have been helped,
rather than lamenting that we had nothing
to offer them in their hour of need. ■

Drafted for Leadership

A.W. Tozer wrote, "A true and safe leader is likely to be
one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of
leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the
press of the external situation. Such were Moses and David
and the Old Testament prophets . . . I believe it might be
accepted as a fairly reliable rule of thumb that the man who
is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader." Tozer's words
sum up what Christian leadership is all about.

Spiritual leaders are not appointed or elected by men,
but rather raised up by God. The most important quality
of a spiritual leader is a life committed to the Lord Jesus
Christ and directed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Self-ambition disqualifies one as a good leader. Jesus, our
example as the greatest leader of all, became a servant. His
teaching in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:21) confirms
that a servant's heart in being faithful over a few things leads
to a position of being ruler over many things. Paul's admoni-

tion to the church at Philippi was: "Let this mind be in you,
which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of
God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made
himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a
servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:5-7).

Human ability and talent are often detrimental in Christian
leadership. Why? Because the flesh contends against the
Spirit, and when, in the power of the flesh, there are special
talents, there is a tendency to rely on self rather than on
the power of God, and the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:8).

A true Christian leader is determined, through the power
of God, to carry out God's will in his life. A leader leads
by his own lifestyle and his devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.
That godly leader will always be seeking first the kingdom
of God and His righteousness.

■ Don Norman