

## **PASSIONATE LIVING 4**

### **“Defining the Priorities of Life”**

Let me begin with a little review. Four weeks ago we began to explore the principles for living a Passionate Life as discovered in a book by that same name. The basic premise of the series is that when these principles are applied and practiced; our lives can be more than just ordinary, they can be extraordinary! The secondary premise is that a unique ‘shape’ can be helpful in reminding us of the meaning of the principle.

In week one we discussed how a disciple uses memorable moments in life – ‘kairos’ events to enter a circle of repentance and faith. In week two we discovered that God created us to be fruitful, but that fruit only comes if we live in a gentle swing between rest and work, with seasons of abiding, pruning, and fruit bearing. We noted that God prefers we work from our rest instead of resting from our work.

Last week we determined that life consists of balancing the three primary relationships of life; Up (our relationship with God); In (relationships with fellow followers of Jesus), and Out (relationships with those yet to be Christians).

This morning we are going to define the priorities of life. We might subtitle this message: “Leaders and Learners; discovering Jesus’ priorities for moving disciples to apostles. The shape we’ll use today is a square, a four-sided box; with 4 principles, or stages of development on the learner to leader continuum.

Much has and is being written on leadership in the last 10 years. I’ve read a fair number of books on the subject, I even taught a course on Servant Leadership at DWU. It is a fascinating study. But one thing I want you to know; there is only one person’s theory of leadership that matters ultimately to me, and should to you. What Jesus taught about leadership is the subject of my message today.

He was the original Servant leader, and contrary to how many define that role today, he was anything but wimpy, soft or subservient. He was often harsh with his followers, reminding them they didn't know what was best for themselves, so they better just shut up and follow. He was always on the front line, taking the assault from their detractors, even when undeserved. He washed the disciples feet, and at the same time set before them a clear and visionary mandate to do likewise. He called one of his best friends "Satan", because Peter was speaking from his flesh and not his spirit. And there was nothing wimpy about grabbing the cat of 9 tails and clearing the moneychangers out His father's house.

There is nothing wimpy about being a servant leader in the mode of Jesus, and that is the process we'll discuss today. We're all leaders, whether we realize it or not. Parents lead children. Teachers lead students. Employers lead employees. Small group facilitators lead those who attend the group. Older people lead younger people. Friends lead friends. There is a simple 4 stage process of turning learners into leaders, we see it as Jesus works with his disciples, and we must apply it to all the leadership opportunities we encounter in our lives. If we do, we'll continue the transition toward a Passionate Life. Let's begin.

#### **1. STAGE ONE ON THE LEARNER TO LEADER CONTINUUM: ENTHUSIASM**

The leadership process begins with these simple words from Jesus: "*Come, follow me.*"

*"One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!' And they left their nets at once and followed him. A little further up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men." Mark 1: 16-20*

Most of us begin any new endeavor with some level of enthusiasm. The first day on our new bike began at least, with much enthusiasm.

The same might be said for first day of school, college, first date, even marriage. The same was true when Jesus called his first followers.

They enthusiastically left whatever had been occupying their minds and time, and began the adventure of following Jesus. But their enthusiasm was not built or based on any competence they evidenced, but for the sheer fact that they had been chosen, and especially because they have been chosen by Jesus.

I remember my first days in my first church. I had just graduated from Seminary. I proudly displayed my new diploma in my new office. I thought I knew everything there was to know about theology and ministry, and leading worship, and leading people, and administering a church. Man did I have a rude awakening. So did the disciples, so do most of us when after awhile we come to realize just how little we really know, and just how far our confidence and enthusiasm will not carry us!

Leaders on this first stage also must understand they play a distinct role. At this point in the process, Jesus didn't take much time seeking consensus from the disciples on how they thought the Kingdom of God ought to be built. NO, he began the process by giving specific directions and clearly laying out the vision for where they were all headed. He was excited to have the disciples along, but he was clearly the head.

When initiating any new project or learning cycle whether with your child, or employee, the leader needs to clearly set out the vision God has given. That's what Jesus did. And he did it humbly. This poses a problem for us as learners today. We are naturally suspicious of anyone claiming to be a leader, and giving specific directives. Our western independent mindset automatically questions directive authority. But the principle is still true.

As leaders, we must resist the urge to endlessly explain what we are doing or get feedback from those following. Do you really need your two-year-olds input on how to conduct potty training?

Lay out your plan and stick with it. But do it humbly. If you start out as a direct leader, but are not genuinely humble, you may soon find yourself walking alone. Let me summarize this first enthusiastic stage:

Stage One Learner Characteristics: **Confident** and **Incompetent**

Stage One Leader Characteristics: **Direct** and set humble **Examples**

## **2. STAGE TWO ON THE LEARNER TO LEADER CONTINUUM: REALITY**

This stage can also be summarized with a few poignant words from Jesus:

*“Take up your cross daily, and follow me.”*

*“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.” Luke 9: 23*

Remember teaching your son or daughter how to ride their first bike? You hang tightly on to the back of the seat as she wobbles and pedals all over the place. Then she starts going faster and straighter, and soon shouts: “Let go, I can do it.” You do, and soon after those big brown eyes well with tears as she untangles her skinned knees and elbows from the tumbled bicycle. She accuses through her tears...”Why did you let go?” This is not fun.

Eventually the enthusiasm wanes, and the disciples become aware they have really no idea what they are doing. Reality sets in. The fun fades for the disciples. The pressure mounts. Worse yet, they suddenly realize they are following a man who is totally opposed by everybody with any authority. The disciples quickly become overwhelmed and lose confidence in themselves and in Jesus.

I had plenty of people in my first church who took it upon them selves to correct my every mistake, to publicly point out my shortcomings and failures. But I also had many moms and dads, grandmothers and grandfathers, and a few real friends who encouraged me, and picked me up, and helped me through the reality part. In many ways whatever you enjoy and appreciate about my ministry, you are in debt to the good folks in Stickney SD.

Amid the reality fast becoming fear in the disciples, Jesus changed his directive style of leadership to more of a coaching style, appropriate to this new reality. Now he shares his vision and his grace with his disciples. Now he looks for more ways and opportunities to spend time alone with his disciples. Now he starts giving explanations. After he squeezes the sponge so that their false sense of enthusiasm is gone, he knows they are now ready to get down to business.

And here's where it's going to get interesting. Stage two is the most important in the development process for any disciple, or organization. What happens quite often at this uncomfortable 'reality' stage; is that people choose to return to the 'good feelings' of stage one; instead of pressing through the discomfort found in the reality of stage two.

I have seen it in this and other churches. Pastors and other leaders institute a certain change, it's all fine and dandy at first; the enthusiasm carries the day. But then the nitpickers and negative critics begin their cries, the change is seen for what it is; uncomfortable; and the "take us back to Egypt" committee goes full bore!

On stage two leaders need to be there to offer God's grace and encouragement on a personal, individual level. While the learner is bouncing around between stage 1 enthusiasm and stage 2 despair, the leader can offer a ladder to get out of the pit. The two rungs on this ladder are grace and vision. So let me summarize the characteristics of learners and leaders on stage two:

Stage Two Learner Characteristics: **Unenthusiastic** and **Incompetent**

Stage Two Leader Characteristic: Becoming a **Coach**

### **3. STAGE THREE ON THE LEARNER TO LEADER CONTINUUM: COMMITMENT**

Hear again these insightful words from Jesus: *"I have called you friends."*

*"This is my commandment: love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me." John 15: 12-15*

Stage three learners are starting to get the hang of things. Enthusiasm is back, but this time it is based on some real knowledge of what the task is.

Confidence in their ability to accomplish the task may wax and wane, but generally a sense of competence moves in the upward direction. The rider is back on the bicycle, this time admitting and knowing they have lots to learn. This time shouting; “Don’t let go”. But soon, they pedal fast and straight and even if you wanted to hang on you couldn’t. Soon he squeals: “I’m doing it, I’m doing it.” Sticking with the challenge through stage 2 has paid off.

A coming together and a going out mark this stage. Jesus sends them off in pairs, to practice; and then takes them away upon their return, to process and reinforce. They were practicing their work – rest pendulum. He is creating an intimacy with them they had not enjoyed before, and then he calls them: friends! This is the kingdom in action.

What leadership style meets the needs of the learner on this stage? Now is the time for consensus. The leader is less directive and more suggestive. He/she welcomes discussion as a way to enhance the learning curve. The leader is available and accessible to followers for a personal relationship. Jesus’ increased time with the disciples begins to produce growing confidence...and then, commitment. Had they not seen their enthusiasm tempered by the trial and tribulations of stage two, they would not likely have been able to achieve this growth, certainly not this quickly.

Many leaders make a mistake by starting at this consensus gathering stage. It is appropriate on stage 3, deadly on stage one. Most of the time, God gives visions to individuals, not committees. Learners must pass through stages 1 and 2 before they have the experience and vision to offer credible opinions and suggestions.

If decision-making ability is given to soon to learners, both learners and leaders will soon veer off course, spending time trying to fix something easily avoided by following this Godly and Biblical roadmap around the square!

There is also a danger for many Christians at this stage. They become committed to the cause; they begin to subject even their personal preferences for the good of the cause, and the greater majority. The danger is stopping on stage three! At this very comfortable, even efficient and effective stage of intimate relationship with his disciples, Jesus drops a bombshell.

Jesus tells the disciples he will be leaving them soon. The disciples start flirting with stage 2 despair all over again, but this time their experience, confidence and commitment allow them, maybe even compels them to press on, to stage 4. But before we do, let me summarize stage 3.

Stage Three Learner Characteristics: Growing **Confidence**

Stage Three Leader Characteristic: Open to **Discussion**

#### **4. STAGE FOUR ON THE LEARNER TO LEADER CONTINUUM: REALIZATION**

Jesus again: *"Go and make disciples."*

*"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Matthew 28: 18-20

We are almost around the Square. In this 'home stretch' the learner has caught the vision and has practiced living it out. Enthusiasm is high, confidence is high, commitment is high, because experience is high! All this adds up to a high level of competence to do the job without the leader. In other words, the learner is ready to be a leader and start the square all over again with others as the learners!

What kind of leadership does the learner need now? Leaders need to offer very little direction, instead asking the learners what they think, how they would solve the problem, how they would like to proceed.

It's kind of like when we first become a Christian God says you have two options; Obey or disobey, door number one, or door number two.

But as we mature and grow God says choose from any of these 5 doors, and I will bless your efforts because I trust you to choose my will, because of our experiences together. Does that make sense?

Leaders offer encouragement, and gratitude, praise and thanks. They get out of the way, and let the learner (slash) leader do their thing. Leaders who are followers of Jesus must always be looking to give away their jobs to people who can become leaders themselves. Leaders then move on to a new task, or new group, or new vision.

Stage four can be summarized like this:

Stage Four Learner Characteristics: **Confident** and **Competent**

Stage Four Leader Characteristics: Gives fewer **Directives** and **Examples**

In conclusion, the stages of learning to leading might be even more simply stated.

Stage 1 – “I do, you watch.”

Stage 2 – “I do, you help.”

Stage 3 – “You do, I help.”

Stage 4 – “You do, I watch.” (I'll move to another task.)

From “Come follow me, to Go make disciples” may have taken 3 years, but look at the return on that investment!

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Stage One Leader Characteristics: \_\_\_\_\_ and set humble \_\_\_\_\_

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Stage Four Leader Characteristics: Gives fewer \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_