

## Growing Leaders

From a longer article by Viv Thomas

*'A leader who cannot develop and sustain friendship of loving communion with others will ultimately be a destructive leader.'*

Leadership is about relating to God. Without this understanding a Christian leader is the SS Titanic steaming towards an iceberg in the dead of night. You can relate to God in joy, anger, frustration, humour, praise and silence but you need to relate to him. Yet to do well in this area the first thing you find is that you cannot rush. There is no fast track to relating to God. There is no efficient way to a life of relating to God. Many have learned all the right Bible verses and principles but have developed little in their understanding of God or personal maturity. Secondly, you have to learn that God is in control. This is difficult for leaders as leader types like to control, build and envision. The first thing to learn in Christian leadership is inadequacy not adequacy. It is this which marks us out from our contemporary secular brothers and sisters. They begin with human potential and we begin with human inadequacy. We move to being adequate leaders by first visiting our inadequacy and seeing what God will do with it. Thirdly, you can put yourself in the way of God through the basic disciplines of the Christian life. You cannot control God but you can be ready for his initiatives. Fourthly, developing a knowledge of self. John Calvin told us that the two crucial issues for us were a knowledge of God and a knowledge of ourselves. Although the two are closely related we have often lived with the fantasy that we can know God without knowing ourselves. This is dream world and particularly dangerous for the followers of leaders who have no knowledge of themselves. Leadership is not just about knowing God but about knowing who we are. They are two sides of the same coin.

I was eating lunch with a few Christian leaders and one of them asked me, 'What would you pick as the one main characteristic of people who are leaders?' After grumbling about the limitations and unfairness of the question I answered, 'The ability to make friends, the ability to sustain loving relationships'. The answer did not impress my lunch partners and while I was speaking the answer it did not impress me. For leaders are to stride the globe, create dynamic organizations and cultures, are they not? Making friends and sustained loving relationship sounds weak in the presence of contemporary ideas of leadership. Yet, I am convinced that making adequate friendships goes right to the heart of leadership. And the reason why it is true is because of the nature of God. God is community, he is three in one and one in three. His power and authority in producing creation and

*'Great leaders are great listeners, they know that they live their lives in response to the articulation of God through the Word and Spirit.'*

redemption all come from a God who is not the isolated 'one' distant from any relationships. He is the Father, Son and Spirit who are in eternal and mutual love towards each other. His power comes out of this eternal community of love with himself. So, if leaders are to reflect the image of God in all they are and do they have to reflect this in their relationships. A leader who cannot develop and sustain friendship of loving communion with others will ultimately be a destructive leader.

**Formation**

**Mobile: +44 (0)7767 777 891**

**Work: +44 (0) 207 384 5954**

**[www.formation.org.uk](http://www.formation.org.uk)**

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