

JEFF IORG

Learning, Leading, and
Leaving Your Legacy

SEASONS
OF A
LEADER'S
LIFE



NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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With appreciation to mentors who were patient with me as a learner, helped me become a leader, and inspired me by their leadership legacy.

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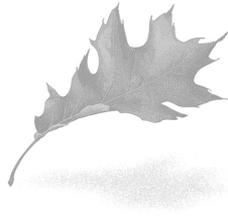
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Part One



LESSONS FOR EMERGING
LEADERS

INTRODUCTION



My mentors are dying, and my students are younger than my children. I'm at an awkward age—I'm too old to appreciate today's music and too young to get the senior discount.

From my mid-life vantage point, I see leaders living through various leadership seasons: all the way from teenagers just awakening to their destiny to statesmen wisely concluding years of effective service. I'm somewhere in the middle, a leader actively engaged in the prime challenge of making things happen, working with people all along the leadership continuum. I'm young enough to remember my formative years and old enough to be thinking about my legacy. Living through and observing others move through these seasons has motivated me to write this book. Hopefully it will help you make sense of the process, discover where you are in the leadership life cycle, and maximize the potential of your current leadership stage.

Life has seasons. For leaders, those seasons could also be called phases or stages of leadership. Younger leaders start out full of passion, idealistic, and excited about the future. Most of them are aware of how little they know about leadership and are zealous to learn all they can. They work hard to earn degrees, seek out mentors, attend conferences, read books, and so on. These emerging leaders recognize that their early years are primarily learning years—a time to gain information, solidify convictions, test theories, and practice skills. They discover the possibilities of their abilities and gain key insights about their future usefulness. This can be both an exciting and a trying time. While learning is the primary goal, many are also already leading (some with very significant responsibilities).

While good leaders are always learning, at some point the primacy of the learning phase gives way to the reality of the leading phase. Leading replaces learning as the main goal. This new season of life finds leaders engaged in their role, using their training to make a difference while still learning on the job. Leaders lead. They employ key practices to advance the mission of their organization. For Christian leaders, that means advancing the mission of God's kingdom as expressed uniquely through the commission of their church or ministry. Leaders who paid attention during the learning phase now have resources to draw from to know what to do. This longer season—sometimes decades long—is the prime of a leader's life when their most significant contributions are made.

But time marches on. Eventually, leaders recognize their time to lead is passing. Some make the mistake of holding on too long, dismantling what they have built by clinging to their leadership role long after their effectiveness has waned. Most leaders, however, are fully aware that the person in the mirror keeps getting older. For most of us, the loss of stamina alone forces us to face the reality that the final stage—the time to leave our legacy—is dawning. The final phase of a leader's life, the final contribution, is formalizing a leadership legacy. Some think of this in terms of a building, statue, or other tangible reminder of their contribution. Those can be meaningful. But a legacy is more than a thing or a place. Your legacy is the wisdom you have gained, the people you have influenced, and the convictions you modeled which inspire subsequent generations. Leaving a living legacy is more important than leaving a monument.

While the Bible contains many stories about great men, one leader in particular gives us a unique model of all three seasons. Peter lived through all three phases—learner, leader, and legacy-leaver—and stories from all three stages of his life are recorded in Scripture. In the Gospels, he was a learner; in the book of Acts, he was a leader; and in 1 and 2 Peter, he wrote his legacy.

This book looks at the stories of Peter's life through the lenses of these key questions:

- What was Peter learning about leadership?
- What do Peter's actions reveal about leadership?
- What did Peter write as his leadership legacy?

This book surveys the overarching story of Peter's ministry in Scripture, and examines leadership principles underlying the biblical narrative of Peter's life. We will be flying high, looking at the broadest perspective, and considering the big picture of what Peter's life teaches about learning, leading, and leaving a legacy.

This book is not a full commentary on Peter's life or the biblical texts describing it. While it takes the Bible seriously, its purpose isn't to exegete texts or critically analyze stories about Peter. Instead, it focuses on the previous three questions—considering one for each season of Peter's life—and isolates and applies the leadership principles that naturally emerge. This book doesn't cover every story involving Peter. Instead it focuses on the stories in which Peter is singled out by name, thus indicating his centrality to the narrative.

The first section of the book highlights every story in which Jesus singled out and interacted directly with Peter.

The second section examines every story in which Peter is portrayed or referenced as a leader, either in Acts or in the Epistles. Peter may have been present and providing leadership at other key points when the apostles are mentioned as a group, but for our purposes, the focus is on the stories in which Peter is a named character. The priority of his being named indicates the centrality of his participation and, thus, the potential to learn specifically from his leadership example.

The final section is different. It isn't based on stories about Peter. Instead, it summarizes what Peter wrote as his lasting legacy-gift to the church. The emphasis is on his legacy, not his activities or actions. His legacy is the wisdom he gained, the people he influenced, and the convictions he modeled for subsequent generations. Peter's legacy is so important, it became part of inspired Scripture. Your legacy won't achieve those lofty heights, but it's still an important capstone for your life.

While the book is divided into three neat sections, life isn't so regimented. The principles and insights in this book overlap from section to section. While there is a progression to a leader's experience, don't feel you must master every learning principle before you move on to leading. Some legacy decisions are made very early in life, even during the learning phase. This book is organized to help you think through leadership issues; it is not intended to be a step-by-step formula for your life. The book is also organized to stimulate further consideration of each topic. The chapters

are short and to the point, more like essays on a theme than part of a longer treatise. Scripture passages are listed for each topic, and discussion questions are included. Take time to read the biblical material before reading each chapter. They are foundational to the leadership insights in the book. Some of the stories may be familiar, but setting the scriptural context is essential. As you read the passages, ask yourself the three questions previously mentioned. Each chapter summarizes at least one key insight from each text. Perhaps you will discover other principles that are instructive for your leadership journey.

Hopefully, this book will be an ideal resource for mentoring groups, reading groups, self-directed leadership development groups, staff improvement exercises, classroom readings, and organizational development for emerging leaders.

Learning, leading, and leaving your legacy. These are the phases of a leader's life. Which season are you in right now? What should you be learning? How can you improve what you are doing? What will you leave for future generations? Let's get started.

Lesson 1

ACCEPT YOUR IDENTITY

*Matthew 10:1–4; Mark 6:7–13;
Luke 6:12–16; John 1:40–42*



Becoming comfortable with being called a leader is an intimidating adjustment for many younger Christians. Even some seminary students tell me, “I don’t really think of myself as a leader.” They aren’t yet comfortable with the mantle God has placed upon them. God-called, ministry-committed graduate students sometimes have a hard time accepting that they are supposed to be leaders.

These students readily identify themselves as being ministers, servants, missionaries, counselors, pastors, or active in various other ministry roles. But what they have a harder time accepting is that they are leaders. Part of God’s call to leadership is to accept your new identity—a new definition of who you are and how you will live. Learning to lead begins with accepting your identity as a leader, even though you may not yet know all it will entail from the beginning.

Modern readers often view the lives of biblical characters backwards—from the end of the story instead of the beginning. We assume too much about their understanding of God’s initial work in their lives because we have the benefit of spiritual hindsight. Because we know “the rest of the

story” when we approach the biblical text, it’s easy to assume that Peter knew from the start that he would be a great spiritual leader because of the remarkable leader he proved to be. That assumption isn’t necessarily accurate. Until Peter met Jesus, he’d been more concerned with catching fish than kingdom leadership.

Andrew and Simon were brothers who operated an extensive commercial fishing operation with multiple boats and partners. Andrew wanted his brother to meet Jesus. He wanted Simon to experience the life-change that such a meeting could produce. He may have also wanted his brother, a business owner, to use his talents for different purposes. “We have found the Messiah,” Andrew told Simon. Soon after that declaration, Andrew introduced Simon to Jesus.

Jesus met Simon (imagine the life-panorama Jesus might have visualized—knowing who Peter would become) and named him Cephas (Aramaic), which is translated Peter (Greek). Cephas, or Peter, means “the Rock.” Jesus is identified as the Messiah, Simon as the Rock. Those are powerful titles describing unique roles for both men. While Jesus fully understood them, Peter didn’t yet grasp all that Jesus meant by either title. Both titles reveal identity. Peter would come to fully understand Jesus’ role as Messiah during the next three years. He would also begin a lifelong journey of understanding what it meant to be the rock of the early church.

Jesus inaugurated his relationship with Peter by giving him a new identity. Jesus changed Simon’s name—a dramatic beginning to their relationship and a clear indication that Jesus intended to relate to Peter on new terms. Names have the power to shape character. I have a Native American friend who has both an Anglo name (to function in American culture) and a tribal name (related to the expectations his people have for him). Calling him by his tribal name evokes his heritage and motivates him to be a man of character and initiative. Calling him by that name is a call to action.

Names also have the power to reveal character. This is one of the reasons God is known by so many names in the Bible. God’s nature is too complex to be described with only one name, so he has dozens of names, both descriptive and proactive. When Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter, he created a goal for Peter to mature toward and an expectation of progress for his disciple.

While the full impact of his new name wouldn’t become evident to Peter for many years, it must have struck him as powerfully significant

that Jesus would change his name at their first meeting. What did this mean? Why such a dramatic declaration? He hadn't assumed his leadership identity or any specific leadership role; that would come much later. Nevertheless, when Peter met Jesus, his identity as a leader was both revealed and shaped by the new name he was given.

Beyond this initial encounter in which Peter was called as a leader, it's also evident Jesus intended him to be *the* leader of the original twelve disciples. Whenever the Twelve are mentioned in the Bible, Peter is always listed first. Similarly, when small groups of three or four disciples are mentioned, Peter is usually mentioned first or portrayed as the leader. Peter was a leader of leaders.

Many younger leaders have a more difficult time accepting this assignment—leading leaders—than even answering the simple call to lead. Yet God expects some to be leaders of leaders. This is the only way any organization, including the church and other ministries, can grow. Whether it is a church-planting movement, an inner-city recovery ministry, or a suburban mega church—all large organizations require layers of leaders to enlarge their impact. God calls some to lead, some to lead leaders, and some to lead many leaders.

Why is a leadership identity so hard to accept? There are four common reasons young leaders struggle to accept their new identity.

First, some struggle to accept their identity as leaders because of false humility. They believe that “I am a leader” is a prideful statement. It isn't. Agreeing with God that you are a leader is simply accepting and affirming his assignment for you. In a sense, denying your role as a leader is prideful, since you make yourself the final authority and reject God's plan for you. Accepting your assignment demonstrates humility, not pride.

Related to this are the struggles that some younger believers have with formal expressions of authority or organizational structure. Both are sometimes (wrongly) considered impediments to true spiritual community. I have noticed recently that some younger ministry leaders seem determined to do everything by collaboration, conversation, and coffee. That's an overreaction—a leadership cop-out—that limits kingdom growth. Have you noticed leading technology companies, who employ so many post-moderns, have no trouble creating structure and expressing authority through making decisions that result in worldwide impact? So why do we? Why is this post-modern aversion to leading through structure mostly

evident among younger *ministry* leaders? Don't buy into the myth that true community lacks structure or is inhibited by formally recognizing some people as the leaders.

Younger leaders may also struggle to accept their new identity because they feel inadequate to lead. Inadequacy isn't a disqualifying characteristic. If it were, God wouldn't have any leaders. Younger leaders often idealize the character and skills required to lead. They measure themselves by the more mature leadership qualities of their mentors. What younger leaders fail to realize is that their mentors were much like them when they were the same age. They had limited skills and were still working through character formation issues. God calls and uses imperfect people in leadership. Don't be intimidated by comparing yourself to those far more experienced than you are.

Lastly, younger leaders may resist accepting their new identity because they fear the responsibility it brings. While learning to lead, new leaders observe their mentors and the responsibility they bear. The load can seem overwhelming. God is gracious, however, in doling out leadership responsibility. He has a wonderful way of matching leadership responsibility with leadership development. As you grow in your capacity to lead, God will increase your leadership responsibility proportionately. Don't fear the burden of leadership. God will give you responsibility in proportion to your readiness to shoulder the burden of leadership.

God also works through the burden of leading to increase your capacity for leadership. For example, as a young pastor, I had to pray and trust God for several hundred thousand dollars for a church building program. Later, in another ministry, I grew to trust God for a few million dollars. Now I am responsible for a multimillion-dollar budget and am attempting to develop new projects that require millions more. God equipped me for this present challenge by growing me through those earlier leadership experiences.

Simon became Peter, the kingdom leader. The fisherman became the rock. Meeting Jesus and accepting his new identity changed everything for Peter. It's the same for you. You have sensed Jesus directing you to lead his people, to take new responsibility. Accept your new identity. Get comfortable wearing the leadership mantle. Commit to the journey of discovering the full meaning of your new identity.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you fully accepted your identity as a leader, or are you still in the process of doing so?
2. What barriers do you need to overcome to accept your identity as a leader?
3. How is your leadership identity developing or changing at this point in your life?