

Serving with Authority

Accept it!

Respect it!

Use it!

Release it!

By Jon Byler

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Serving with Authority: Respect It

Serving leaders, like all leaders, have and use authority. Authority is the legitimate power that gives them the right to act in their role as a leader. But many serving leaders may find the subject of authority a bit awkward. Is authority good or bad? How does it fit with the concept of serving others? In this series we'll examine how serving leaders view and use authority. First, a glimpse at the life of David reveals that serving leaders respect the authority of those above them. David was anointed to be king, but Saul was still on the throne and was chasing David and his men. Twice, David had an easy opportunity to kill Saul and take the kingdom. On one of these occasions, David cut off the corner of Saul's robe.

⁵Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. ⁶He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord." ⁷With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way (1 Samuel 24: 5-7, NIV).

David's restraint shows remarkable respect for the authority of Saul even when Saul was seeking to kill him. David acknowledged that Saul was the king and respected his position even when he didn't agree with the actions of the king. David's response shows serving leaders the results of respect for those in authority over them.

Respect for authority builds character.

This period was a very difficult time in David's life as he was chased by king Saul. It was a time that his character was tested and shaped in powerful ways. Most significantly, David learned that before he should be *in* authority, he had to learn to be *under* authority. This is always a difficult lesson for leaders and much more difficult when the person in authority is not a good leader! But serving leaders respect the authority of those over them and allow God to shape their character as they show respect by their words and actions.

Respect for authority builds trust

David acted with respect for authority because it was the right thing to do. But his followers were also watching. As they saw David's respect for king Saul they grew in their trust of David. They observed that he was "conscience-stricken" after cutting Saul's robe. They heard him describe his enemy as "the anointed of the Lord." As they watched him closely, they recognized that David was a leader they could trust. Serving leaders build trust with those who follow as they respect the authority of those over them.

Respect for authority builds people.

David's actions challenged and shaped those who followed him. Although they initially disagreed with his position David's respect for king Saul helped them grow. David helped them grow them by rebuking them when their values did not align with his. As these men witnessed David's loyalty to Saul, they also became extremely loyal to David. These men would go on to do extraordinary exploits for David. They knew that because David had respect for authority, he would not misuse authority when he was in power. Serving leaders

serve those who follow by respecting the authority of those above them. As they do so they build the people around them.

For further reflection and discussion:

- What is my attitude towards those in authority over me? Am I able to respect them even when I don't agree with their decisions? How does my attitude impact the way I lead?
- How do I talk about those in authority over me? What impact does this have on my leadership as those who follow listen to my comments?
- How do I want those under my authority to view my leadership? Do I have this same view of those over me? How does this impact my ability to serve those under me?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll look at how serving leaders accept authority.

Serving with Authority: Accept It

Serving leaders respect the authority of those over them but they also accept the authority invested in them. They recognize and accept that every legitimate leadership role brings with it the authority to carry out the expectations of that role. Paul spoke clearly about his authority as an apostle.

So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it (2 Corinthians 10:8, NIV).

Paul had a clear understanding of his authority and accepted it as a gift given to him by God to carry out the mission God had given to him. He helps serving leaders do the same.

Accepting authority acknowledges accountability.

“the authority the Lord gave us...” Paul recognized that his authority came from God and therefore he was accountable to God for how he used this authority. What comes from God is good and should be used for His purposes. Many leaders, especially those who have been wounded in the past with abuse of authority or those who lead others who have been hurt in this way run away from authority and shrink back from exercising their authority. They are so concerned about misuse of authority that they miss using authority for its intended good.

Other leaders find it difficult to accept their authority because it seems like they are seeking power for themselves. But serving leaders recognize that all legitimate authority comes from God, and they are accountable to Him for how they use it. They also recognize that they are accountable to Him if they fail to use it! Serving leaders accept authority because they recognize that they are under authority.

Accepting authority allows focus.

“the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down...” Paul was clear about the focus of his authority, it was to build others up, not to destroy them. The focus of authority is to benefit those who are being served by the one in authority. Many leaders have used authority to tear people down or to build their own kingdoms.

But Paul makes it clear that our authority is focused on others. Authority is intended by God to be a blessing to others. Serving leaders accept that and use authority as it was intended. They refuse to accept prevailing distrust of authority as an excuse to fail to use their authority. They are committed to do all within their power and authority to build others up. That is serving leadership.

Accepting authority activates confidence.

Paul accepted his authority, and it gave him confidence in his role. His confidence could be seen as pride to the extent that he boasted about it and said boldly, “I will not be ashamed of it.” He begins and ends this verse declaring his confidence in his authority. But the rest of his statements make it clear that he is not simply drawing attention to his significant role in the church. Paul’s confidence is based on his understanding of where

authority comes from and the purpose for which it is given. When these issues are settled confidence is not pride or arrogance, it is simply an appropriate acceptance of what is. All leaders need confidence to lead. Their confidence inspires others to follow. Serving leaders accept their authority and have confidence as they use it for its intended purposes. They inspire others to follow as they accept that their role gives them authority to serve.

For further reflection and discussion:

- How have past experiences with authority shaped my own view of my role? In what ways does the example of Paul encourage me to recognize and accept Godly authority?
- Do I see my authority as operating under God's ultimate authority? How is this expressed in my leadership?
- Does my leadership most often build others up or tear them down? What examples can I give of how this has been demonstrated in the past week?
- How confident am I as a leader? In what ways is this related to how I see my own authority? What do I need to change to have the confidence that Paul expressed?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll examine how serving leaders use authority.

Serving with Authority: Use It

Serving leaders don't avoid authority, they use it to serve! They welcome authority as a way to build others up, move the organization in the direction it needs to go, etc. Paul, as we saw in the last issue, used authority to build others up. Now, let's reflect on a short statement he made which is packed with leadership insights about authority.

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1, NIV).

Paul boldly and unapologetically calls the believers at Corinth to follow his example! He is using his authority to spur them on in the direction they need to go. He is serving by using authority and his statement provides several insights into how serving leaders use authority.

Using authority involves modeling.

"Follow my example, as I follow..." Paul makes it very clear that he is not asking others to do something that he is now willing to do. He is calling them to do what they have seen him doing. He models to his followers what he asks them to do. He models being under authority before exercising authority. He was a follower before he became a leader. Some leaders give directions but don't model what they ask others to do. Serving leaders first show the way and then call others to follow. This compels serving leaders to first examine their own lives before they call others to follow. They recognize that they need to model the values, mission, and purpose of the organization they lead before they can boldly ask others to follow. Where they fall short, they acknowledge their failure and seek to improve. Then, they are not ashamed to tell others, "Live and work like I do!" Serving leaders model the way before using their authority to ask others to follow. They serve others by modeling the way.

Using authority implies direction.

Paul, in these few words, was clearly using his authority to provide direction to those who followed him. "Follow my example..." He is not ashamed to set the standards of what he expects from his followers. As he does this, he brings focus and clarity to the direction he is calling people to go. Some leaders are reluctant to point others in a clear direction. They feel that serving others means moving only when everyone agrees. Leaders who seek consensus from everyone often cannot move forward. Serving leaders understand that their authority is given to them for the purpose of setting direction. They gladly seek input and counsel from their team, but they do not hesitate to clearly articulate the direction needed. They serve the mission of the organization by clearly pointing out the direction which is needed.

Using authority inspires action.

Leadership involves getting things done, using authority to help people move in the desired direction. Paul's instruction here is a clear call to action for the believers in Corinth. He sets the example with his own life. He points out the direction that movement is needed. As he serves with these leadership actions, he inspires action from the followers.

Paul's instruction here can be lost in the context of his showing an example, but he says "Follow" as a command, an instruction. It is a call to action, to movement in a direction.

Some leaders use their position to call people to action. They use the power of a paycheck or other incentives to help people act. But serving leaders use their authority to inspire others to act. As serving leaders model the way and clarify direction, they inspire action! Those who follow understand what is expected of them and they are motivated to move forward. A serving leader is in charge to charge others up! They serve by inspiring action from others.

For further reflection and discussion:

- How well do I model the purpose, values, and mission of the organization I lead? How does this impact my ability to serve my team? Can I say with confidence, “Follow my example”?
- How effectively do I use my authority to provide direction to those that I serve? Am I more inclined to lead only when there is consensus or to lead without consulting others? What can I do to strengthen the clarity of direction needed in my organization?
- How well does my leadership inspire others to act? Are there ways that I use my leadership authority to force others to act rather than inspire them to act?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll look at how serving leaders release authority.

Serving with Authority: Release It

Serving leaders don't keep authority, they release it! They follow the example of Jesus whose final words were about authority.

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV).

Jesus was able to say truthfully, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." But as soon as He said these words, He released His authority to the disciples. As He released authority, He provided a powerful example for all serving leaders.

Releasing authority implies trust.

For Jesus to release His authority to this small group of people implied a deep trust in them and in His own investment in their lives. We are certainly aware of the weaknesses and failures of this team. Jesus did not overlook their faults. Yet, He trusted them to carry out His mission in the world. Some leaders see their authority as something to be leveraged but not released. They insist on doing all the work themselves. They don't invest in the growth and maturity of their team. They expect perfection in their followers before releasing authority. But serving leaders begin with the desire to release authority as quickly and fully as appropriate. They look for opportunities to help their team grow up and assume more and more responsibility. They expect some mistakes along the way and address failures. But they serve by trusting those they lead. They see potential and desire to see that potential developed and released. Serving leaders serve by trusting those they lead.

Releasing authority involves includes accountability.

Although Jesus spoke these words as He was leaving the earth, He also reminded the disciples "I am with you always..." This was both a comforting presence as well as a reminder that while His authority was released, there was also accountability built into that release. They were expected to go and "make disciples...baptizing...teaching." Jesus did not release authority for them to do whatever they wished. He provided clear instructions and would hold them accountable. Some leaders release authority with no accountability and see this as the highest level of trust. But serving leaders include accountability as they release authority. They make clear the expectations of what authority is being given and what accountability is expected. They serve by releasing authority but including accountability.

Releasing authority insures multiplication.

The way Jesus released authority made it possible for His followers to "go and make disciples of all nations." He built multiplication into his delegation. Some leaders work harder to grow their organization. But serving leaders ensure growth and multiplication by releasing authority to those they lead. They recognize that if they insist on doing all the work, all the work will never be done. Serving leaders ensure multiplication by releasing authority.

For further reflection and discussion:

- What level of trust do I have in the key leaders on my team? What do I do to demonstrate my belief in them? Am I able to delegate authority as quickly as possible to those I lead?
- When I delegate authority do I clarify what level of accountability is also expected? Do I appropriately adjust the levels of accountability as my team members grow and mature?
- Does my leadership provide maximum multiplication potential for my organization? In what ways am I leading to encourage growth and multiplication of leadership roles
- Reflect on this series on authority (issues 336-339). In what way can I share these principles with those I lead?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler