

# ABF Teachers and Leaders Training Topic:

## *The Spirit of the Leader*

Before I was a pastor, I spent some time living in Southern Florida. I worked a sales and management position for a large retail chain down there. It was a job I really enjoyed because you got to be with people all the time and meet people from all over the world with different backgrounds, different interests, and different personalities. It was fun. But as a Christian working in sales, with my salary and livelihood directly tied to how much I sold, I immediately felt the challenge of keeping my integrity by being truthful in my sales presentations when I often saw people “bend” the truth in their presentations usually leading to good sales numbers.

One of the guys I worked with, who was actually a former pastor and a self-professed Christian, taught me a lot in our time together...but probably not in the way you might think. He was a young guy, in his early 30's, with a wife and two young kids. He was a really charismatic person. He let us listen to a couple of his sermons he had tapes of and they were really good. He was very well spoken and was the kind of guy you just liked when you met him. As a salesman, his numbers were always good and at first meeting him he seemed to really have things together.

But as I began to get to know him more, I began to see some disturbing things. He and his family had recently moved to Florida to try to get a fresh start. He had been let go from his church because he had committed adultery on his wife and kids. As I remember, he moved away and they followed. They lived in separate places in Florida. She wanted to try to work things out, but he was more interested in “having fun” with Florida girls. He lied about everything; from details about his college years to his age to the details about the products he was selling, the truth was a seemingly unimportant detail to him that he could manipulate at his discretion. Never once in our time together did I hear him talk about his relationship with the Lord or how much he loved Him or what God was doing in his life. I suspected he didn't spend much time with God.

So as the weeks and months that we worked together went by and I got to see his life close up, I thought, “How does this happen? How does this happen? I've heard him preach. I know that he knows what's right and wrong. I know he knows about Christ and even apparently has placed his trust in Him, but he doesn't seem to be in love with Him. How can he live this way and do the things he's doing? I never want to be like him. I never want to be like him.”

The call that God offers to teachers and leaders in His church is wonderful. What a privilege to be able to help shepherd and grow God's children. Think about that. And if you're listening to this then you know exactly what I'm talking about because

God has called you to leadership in your community group. The fact that he trusts us to shape our people is incredible. And what a responsibility!

As teachers and leaders we're always giving to our people, right? Maybe it's in the form of lesson on Sunday morning. Maybe it's by organizing our care groups. Maybe it's by giving advice to a couple that's struggling in their marriage. Maybe it's by encouraging the one who's lonely and frustrated by their singleness. As leaders in the church we're always giving. And rightly so. We should be giving to our people. We should be encouraging them, and challenging them, and motivating them, and holding them accountable. That's what leaders do. That's what we're called to do. But as busy people, focused on helping and serving others, it's easy to fall prey to the sin of placing our focus on ministry instead of on God.

As leaders who are always giving to others in the church—on top of our responsibilities at work, and home, and with our families—are we also being filled, and centering our lives on Christ, and learning, and growing for the good of our own spirits and so that we don't make compromises on what we know to be right and wrong, like my co-worker did? I suspect that at some point he really loved God and loved spending time with Him and felt called by Him into vocational ministry. But somewhere along the way he lost his first love. Are we spending time with God, our first love, to allow Him to grow us? Are we spending time with God so that we continuously have something to give to others? Are we seeking to live balanced lives that don't focus on some things too much and other things too little?

Howard Hendricks, the master teacher and leader in the church, talks about the Christian's balance in his life. In his book *Teaching to Change Lives*, he asks the reader four questions that have helped him balance his own busy life: 1) How much of my time do I spend with people? 2) How much of my time do I spend alone? 3) How much of my time do I spend at work? 4) How much time do I spend at play (p. 30)? How do you answer those questions? How would your family answer those questions about you? How's the balance in your life?

How many of us have had times in our lives when we felt we just didn't have anything more to give? I've had moments in my lesson preparation time, for example, when I've thought, "I just don't have anything all that significant to say to my students. The passage is wonderful, but I don't really have anything insightful to say!" Forgive me if you've sat through any of those lessons. But those times are always wake-up calls for me that I'm not being filled enough, that my spirit is not being fed enough, to give anything substantial to my people.

Part of our time alone, away from other people, that Hendricks challenges us to have has got to be spent one on One with our God. You know that, and I'm certain you do it. If we want to be able to follow God well and give to others, we have to be receiving from God. We spend time learning and studying His Word because that's the primary way He speaks to us today. We spend time with Him to allow His Spirit to transform our spirits and energize us to be able to live with integrity and

obedience to Him, and to give to others. How's your time with the Lord? Is the number one priority in your day, the most significant non-negotiable, spending time with your Father? Is it something you look forward to or something you do because you're supposed to?

John Piper, in the book *Desiring God*, speaks to what I believe is key in this very issue. He challenges the reader to *delight* in the Lord. He writes, "When delighting in God is the work of our lives...there will be an inner strength for ministries of love to the very end (p. 11)." Do you delight in God? Do you enjoy being with Him? Are you excited to spend time with your Father? If not, perhaps there's a need to rebalance your life. Perhaps God is calling you to repentance and to remember your first love...Him.

Do you do your "ministries of love," as Piper calls them, because somewhere along the way you were asked to do it and have been doing it for fifteen years, or because you delight in the Lord and desire to help others delight in Him as well? Do you serve the church because of the loving, growing relationship you have with your Heavenly Father? Have you ordered and balanced your life in a way that it's continually being filled by Him, so that you in turn can give to and fill others and live your life with integrity and purity and obedience?

I'll bet you, like me, want to be used by God in people's lives for His glory. I'll bet you, like me, want more than anything to be growing spiritually, knowing God in a deeper way every day. And I'll bet you, like me, never want to find yourselves in a situation like my co-worker in Florida. Are you willing to order your life in such a way as to accomplish this? Are you willing to do your "ministries of love", your service and leadership in the church and in the kingdom, because of your first love? Will you commit to filling your spiritual tank by spending regular and consistent time with your Father? We trust you will. Consider yourself challenged, and may God bless and multiply our efforts in leading His people, all to His glory and the glory of His Son. Amen.