



Like many of the mentoring relationships in the Bible, the one between the prophet Elijah and his protégé Elisha affords one of the finest examples in Scripture of the biblical model of discipleship and the prerequisites needed to prepare this generation for the challenges of the next. In a day when the organized church is selling out to the world and importing much of its popular business practices, it is reassuring to know that the Word of God remains unchanged in response to the need of the day. That need – to effectively groom and transition a new generation of leaders is not only a current challenge to all assembly elders and leaders, but an imperative in order to check the rising tide of secularism and latitudinarianism in the Church and to proceed with the work of maturing the saints. It is a task that requires both time and patience and carefully passing the baton of spiritual responsibility and is beautifully displayed in the ministry of Elijah the prophet.

Elijah was raised up by God during a time in Israel's history when there was wholesale departure from the Word of God. His job was to call back God's people to Himself. In many ways, the conditions that existed during his day parallel those of our day. Though not a "writing" prophet, the power and extent of Elijah's ministry earned him an undeniable place of prominence and respect in the hearts of all those who know and love the Lord. Yet despite being a great spokesman for God, Elijah was subject to the same passions that we have and not immune to his own personal bouts with discouragement and disappointment. After an outstanding victory against the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18), Elijah plunged quickly into despair, exhausted by the demands of ministry—a warning to all those engaged in ministry leadership. God used the occasion in the wilderness to inculcate an important lesson in the mind of His servant, namely that He was working privately and providentially in the lives of seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). What Elijah needed was an "attitude check" since he had allowed his worst thoughts to get the best

of him! As result, the Lord reminded Elijah that he still had a vital ministry to complete. He was far from being "shelved" by the Lord for this temporary "glitch" in the wilderness, attested to by further deeds done in the name of the Lord (2 Kings 1). He was instructed to anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat in his stead. Elijah's ministry was drawing to a close and the Lord was making preparations for the replacement of His choice servant. But before that could happen, there had to be a time of preparation for Elisha, as there is for anyone assuming a place of spiritual responsibility and leadership among the Lord's people. The account of Elijah casting his mantle upon Elisha (recorded in 1 Kings 19:19-21) and his conferment of responsibilities to him just prior to his translation (recorded in 2 Kings 2) carry many valuable lessons to all those who serve in a leadership capacity and desire to entrust the sacred duties that they inherited into the hands of those who would share the same convictions and faithfully carry on the work.

NOT ALWAYS OBVIOUS AT FIRST

Identifying qualified leaders among God's people is not always apparent. True, Elijah had been divinely instructed to cast his mantle upon Elisha, but from outward observation Elisha would probably not won any votes in a popularity contest, at least not initially. (see 2 Kings 2:23!) Plowing in the field with twelve yoke of oxen (1 Kings 19:19), Elisha would have hardly turned the heads of any leadership committee. The fact that he was "with the twelfth", the last in line further underscored that Elisha would have commanded any attention. But in the work of the Lord and especially in leadership this is exactly what is needed: a humble, self-effacing, and hard-working attitude—crucial characteristics in a line of work which involves long hours, high expectations, excessive scrutiny and at times, harsh personal criticism. As with many of God's honored servants such as Moses, Gideon, David, and the disciples, Elisha was not idle when he was called, but rather busily engaged in his work. The current day axiom still holds true: *"God does not steer parked cars"* but thrusts into service those who have learned the lesson of personal diligence. Further, Elisha's response to Elijah's actions also deserves notice. After having the mantle

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cast on him, Elisha immediately leaves the oxen and runs after Elijah. Requesting to bid his parents farewell, he then slays the oxen, burns them and his instruments and then gives the sacrificed oxen to the people to eat before leaving with Elijah. Herein are contained some of the subtle evidences of a promising candidate for use in the service of the Lord. First, his actions demonstrated a willingness to detach himself from material things for a higher cause. He was willing to "burn his bridges" behind him so that he would not be tempted to revert to his past livelihood should some difficulty arise. It also showed that unlike the man that the Lord spoke about who wanted to wait until his father died before becoming a disciple (Luke 9:60); Elisha simply requested to go home briefly to say goodbye to those he loved before launching into ministry as Elijah's servant. And giving the boiled oxen clearly exhibited his concern for the practical needs of people around him—a further indication of the core values needed for leadership and responsibility among the Lord's people. Indeed, that same servant attitude would later be cited when the king of Israel commented that Elisha was the one who poured water on Elijah's hands—verifying the low position that Elisha's occupied before his rise as a person of influence. (2 Kings 3:11)

DEVELOPMENT IN STAGES

Elisha's development as a leader of God's people and Elijah's successor came in three distinct phases: the initial phase in which he was called; a second phase in which he served as a spiritual apprentice to Elijah, and the third phase in which the reins of leadership were turned over to him (2 Kings 2). Having had it revealed to him that he was going to be taken up to heaven, Elijah made his plans to visit the schools of the prophets. As a test perhaps to his devoted student, Elijah makes the request for Elisha to tarry while he travels on to Bethel, another location for the school of the prophets. Elisha's reluctance to do so indicates his own heartfelt attachment to the work and to following in the steps of his mentor. who

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personal time with his mentor. Like many leaders, they are keenly aware that time is of the essence, that the days of discipleship and the conditions surrounding those days with those who have been instrumental in our spiritual development are limited, as painful as that reality might be. This episode reflects a two-sided perspective: one on the part of the mentor to ascertain if the commitment still exists in the one he has identified as a future leader and the other on the part of the learner to make full use of the limited time to capitalize on every discipleship opportunity.

PERSONAL TIME – A MUST

When Elijah came to the Jordan, he took his mantle and smote the waters with it so he and Elisha could pass over to the other side. It was a special time alone for teacher and learner. From this incident came a request from Elisha for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah – a definite petition to follow in the spiritual steps of his teacher. Citing that it was not for him but for God to grant, Elijah nevertheless gave encouragement to Elisha that it could possibly happen. What occurs next in the narrative is telling: “as they still went on, and talked” (2 Kings 2:11). Here is a poignant scene if there ever was one: mentor and learner, sharing final moments together talking about the things that no doubt they held dear. From the first time they met, until now and everything between -- all met a dramatic and sudden conclusion as this venerable servant of the Lord was ushered into to heaven in a chariot of fire – his departure as abrupt as his introduction onto the pages of Scripture.

And so it is with many of God’s prized servants – here for a time (however long that may be) and gone in a moment. They leave behind the legacy of their ministry and the mantle of their faithful service for the next generation to follow. That pattern of ministry and the power behind it was exactly what Elisha entered into when he picked up the mantle that Elijah left behind and retraced his steps crossing over the Jordan to resume the ministry that his teacher and guide had left for him.

The account of Elisha’s call and his training and transition into leadership is extremely relevant to the Church today. It is a stark reminder to the older generation that they need to be on the look-out for those from the younger generation who are exhibiting the hard-to-find

qualities that befit a faithful servant of the Lord, all the time being sensitive to the Lord’s leading as to whom their successors might be. They need to realize that there is always a venue for ministry right up to the time of their departure, if for no other reason that to help prepare the next generation of leaders, aware that the mantle will eventually come down upon someone soon, preferably on those exhibiting the qualities of true leadership who will maintain biblical convictions, even under a time of testing. And finally, it should serve notice to young and old alike to spend quality, personal time with each other in preparation for the transference of spiritual responsibilities in the local assembly in God’s good time. May each of us whether teacher or learner be diligent in heeding the lessons on biblical leadership and discipleship from these revered servants of the Lord. 📖

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Heb. 13:7



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Church Leadership

MENTORING THE NEXT GENERATION

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