

## Healthy Leadership 3: Creative Leadership

### Genesis 1:1-5, 26-31

The Pathway to Healthy Leadership: Studies in Exodus on Moses as Leader

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Worship at 9:15 and 11 a.m.

Let us pray. We humbly bow in the presence of your majesty, Almighty God, recognizing that only you can create. And you have spoken your Word to us to create us to be your humanity—to do the things that you've called us to do—to lead the world that you've made. Help us to see and hear Jesus, the Creator, who guides us into new leadership, to be new creations. We pray this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

On the pathway of leadership—at the beginning of the path, and at the end—stands Almighty God: the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end. And any act of leadership we as human beings practice, is because God has established, from the beginning, patterns of leadership in God's own identity. And God will complete those patterns of leadership even though we may fail. God not only created all things that exist, but God created humanity to be leaders and managers in the midst of God's creation. God created us to be creative leaders—to have imagination and artistry in our leadership. While we cannot create that which God created, in the basic elements, and the earth, and human life, we can take all of those wonderful gifts and use them in a creative process to lead this world into the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And God gives us the responsibility to lead, not just a few, but every human being who is willing to listen to the voice of God, to take up that opportunity to have dominion. Only God can create. God is the original creative leader.

When I was in college we had the opportunity to sing a wonderful work by Randall Thompson, an American composer, that was entitled *Americana*. In the middle of that work, in the third section out of five, are words that are taken from a leaflet issued by the National Women's Christian Temperance Union in the 1930s, during Prohibition. The words go like this:

*Apples are God's bottles. Grapes are God's bottles. These purple and green bottles you will find hanging on a pretty vine. See so many little bottles are on a single stem. Put a grape in your mouth and you will open God's bottle. How nice the juice tastes. Some men take the juice of apples and grapes and make drinks that will harm our bodies. They put the drinks in glass bottles. But we will not drink from such bottles—we will drink only from God's bottles.*

Now, the message is pretty clear; but there's an underlying message here that we pay attention to in the nature of creation and leadership: while God can create the grape (and only God can create the grape) God has made it possible for human beings to take the grape and to use it for good or bad purposes. I'm not here to preach a sermon on the goodness or evil of wine; I'm sure we all have our opinions about that. But I am here to say that we have a responsibility to use God's grapes well. While we cannot create that which God created, in the vine and the grape, we can do what God has shown us to do in naming the grapes, dividing the grapes in terms of kinds, blessing of the increase and multiplication of them, and making the grapes into raisins, juices, and wines. We can set those grapes into bottles or oak barrels; and we can rest after a hard day of winemaking. We can provide leadership to God's creation; and that's what God wants us to do. We can use our God-given responsibility for creative leadership to use for good the good creation that God has made.

All actions are created in words, by God, in Genesis, chapters one and two. The word that is unique to God, and can only be used about God, and by God, in that passage, is the word: "create." You will never find, in Hebrew, that human beings 'create' anything. As God has made things, we human beings can make things, as well, but we cannot 'create.' As the pinnacle of creation, God makes us, as human beings—male and female—to become creative leaders of the creation that God has made. Those two words here: "in our image" and "in our likeness" are very important words for understanding our roles as leaders. "In our image" means that there is a shadow cast by God upon the earth and we human beings walk in God's shadow. We are not the primary being; God is. We are shadows of the primary being. "According to our likeness" means we are made in a model like God—fashioned like God. We are not the designer; we are not the architect; but we are made to be creative, in God's image. And we are given dominion—responsibility to lead the earth and lead everything God has made in the pattern that God has hoped we would follow in that leadership. While God makes humanity, he gives us the freedom to make things. While God speaks to humanity, he gives us the power to speak to one another. While God sees humanity and what it does, we have the ability to see each other and what we do—examine it. While God can divide things and set them apart from each other, God has given us the ability to sort things through and set them in their right place. While God can bless humanity by stooping down and helping us to take responsibility, we too can serve one another as God has served us. And God calls us, as we call out and name the things that are important in life. God's act of leadership is to make humanity artistic leaders. God created us with godlike powers, in some ways: to lead... to take initiative...to act...to think... to reason... to imagine... to envision... to dream... to make... but not to create. And we should use every fiber of our creativity to do that, with awareness of who God is and who God has called us to be.

God demonstrates the power of creative leadership in the midst of moving over the Earth when the Earth is "dark and formless and void;" there is chaos over it. God gives us the ability to look at things that are in chaos and to make sense out of it; to reorder them and re-organize them. God brings order out of chaos. God works in leadership with people who are in the midst, even in their own lives, of difficult places: tough walks... dark times... in the crucible of doubt, God gives people the ability to enter into a deeper sense of the creative presence of God and to do well, even though they struggle. God's leadership brings order out of the chaos.

Parents often are called to bring order out of chaos. Remember those moments where the baby is in the high chair and having one of their first meals—and the food is not going in the baby's mouth but going every which way, on the table... in the room... on your clothes. It is up to the parent to bring order out of that chaos, which is a good thing. Or, you remember the toddler who decides to

take out every toy and spread them out all over the floor and keep playing with various ones at various times—to the point that you walk into the house and it is chaos. The parent is called to bring order. Or, you remember the teenager who is rebelling and pushing back and does not want to do the things the way you want them to do. The parent remains calm, and clear, and persistent, and present—providing guidance and direction in the middle of those moments of chaos.

We had a little chaos at times in our family. I can remember those moments when our youngest daughter, who seemed to be the one that always pushed the edge a little bit more than the other, wanted to turn her blonde hair into red hair. Rather than reject that idea, my wife took her to the hairdresser to get her the best red hair possible. Then there was that time she wanted to have her body pierced. We groaned; but my wife took her to the tattoo parlor to be present with her, to make sure that, if she was going to be pierced, it would be pierced in a place that would do the least amount of harm—up here in the eyebrow. Then there was the mother of another daughter in the church in Bethlehem, who came up to me one day and said, “You need to tell your daughter to dress better for church. She’s wearing jeans and tennis shoes. I want my daughter to dress better but how can I possibly do that if the pastor’s daughter dresses this way.” I said, “She’s here, isn’t she?” It is the responsibility of the parent, in the midst of the chaos, to provide a sense of loving and present direction.

Time magazine talks this way about a time in Mother Teresa’s life—this woman whom Malcolm Muggeridge portrayed in a film as being something beautiful for God; this woman who fed the poorest of the poor, in the most difficult place on the face of the Earth. We see letters that tell the story that she felt that God was not present in her life for more than 50 years. In the darkness... and the absence... in the eclipse of God... God was making something beautiful in Mother Teresa. God specializes in the kind of leadership that takes that which is in chaos and darkness, and brings a wonderful new possibility to it. And God calls us, as leaders, to be creative like that. We’ve heard from Beethoven today; and we know the struggle that Beethoven went through in order to create music when he was deaf. Some of the greatest music of all history was created when he couldn’t hear a note. That’s the kind of leadership that God calls humanity to in the midst of the darkness and the chaos.

But God does not expect human beings to do this alone. One of the major points of this text, as Karl Barth noted, is that God, who exists community, creates humanity to be in community with each other. We are not to go it alone. Even God does not create by himself. God, as we came to know God, in the rest of Scripture in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the community of God creates a community of being. Creative leadership is always in community, and never by itself. This, in fact, is a very strong part of the current teaching on leadership if you read leadership books. Leadership Can Be Taught, by Sharon Daloz Parks, says we need a new paradigm of leadership—a new metaphor. We need to move from the historic view of leader as ‘hero’ to a new view of leader as ‘artist in community.’ Leadership as artistry is not so much about the heroic action of one person, but sometimes the quirky action of various people in the context of a team or group. We still, in America today, have a temptation to think that one person can come and make everything right. My sense is the presidential election coming up is an awful lot about that messianic expectation. But God does not give one human being that kind of power and authority; he gives it to community. We need a new image of leadership that’s creative in community—where, in synergy, we work together; where we bring the best out of one another. It’s like a jazz band: with tradition and discipline, and a sense of intuitiveness, working on technique, imagination, and innovation, playing in sensitivity to each other, listening carefully as one person takes the lead, and then another person takes the lead, as the team plays together. That’s the kind of creative leadership that is in the very being of God. And it is the kind of leadership that God expects us, as human beings, to develop.

Max DuPree has written several books on leadership: one called Leadership is an Art and the other one, Leadership Jazz. Again, his whole emphasis is on the importance of leaders in community paying attention to the humanity of one another, as well as to the productivity of the business or the organization. DuPree’s point is this: that creativity is ultimately about change. In order to bring about change, the whole community must be invested in the change process. And so it is that God calls us to the kind of creative and artistic pattern of leadership that can only be developed out of the nature of who God is in community.

Sometimes we can kill community. In that way of putting down community, criticism can crush inquiry; fear can flatten a sense of three dimensions and make it just too threatening, and thwart the thinking ability of people. Attack can confuse the imagination... boredom can bury the initiative... pessimism can impoverish the possibility... disdain can discount the discovery... condemnation can consume the creativity. In other words, if we focus on those things that are always wrong, we are killing the creative leadership possibility. Bad community kills creative leadership.

Now, in all of this, Scripture always points to that which is at the end of the Omega—to Jesus, who is the One whom God has sent as the Son; whom we know, from John chapter one, is also the Creator of light in the darkness. Jesus’ creative leadership is about participating with human beings to make them responsible disciples and leaders. Recently, I heard a woman talk about her husband. And her comment was in very strong language: he cannot change; he will not change; I have no expectation he can change; human beings don’t change. At the heart of creative leadership in the pattern of Jesus is: that’s a lie. That’s an untruth we must put away. Jesus has the ability and the power of God to change each of us, if we are willing to change. And God wants to make us new creations, new kinds of leaders. People who are using artistry and creativity in everything that we do, because the Spirit of God is moving over us like the Spirit did in the Old Testament creation.

God has not abandoned us. In Jesus Christ, God will help the old patterns of life to be let go, and the new patterns of life to be put on. As Henri Nouwen says, in his book, Making All Things New: “Underneath the chaos of worry is a growing sense of un-fulfillment in the world—of boredom, resentment, disconnectedness, and depression. And God can make that difference.” How? There are two ways: if we take time to be in God’s presence, in silence and solitude; and we take time to be in God’s presence together... as we reason together, think together, and find creative ways to work together in community. In Jesus Christ, all things are made new. We have the possibility of being a new creative leadership community in this city. If we are in God’s presence and we seek the way of Jesus Christ, we can open ourselves to be a new creation—to be a part of that development of a new heaven and a new earth, because God has called us to be partners with Jesus Christ. Let us take that call to creative leadership and do it freely, to the best of our abilities, in the power of God, in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. Oh, Lord Jesus, we ask that you would be with us now and help us to take up—by your grace and mercy, in your forgiveness from the past of our mistakes—the new mantle of creative leadership. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.