

Letting Go of Others

By Bobby Schuller

Today we're on a series on serenity, and today I want to talk specifically about how we find serenity in the leadership. So many of us, we don't view ourselves as leaders, but we are because a leader is anyone who has influence. So any time you influence someone with your ideas, anytime you try to motivate somebody to go in a particular direction, anytime you give somebody advice, if they take that advice, you're leading them. So leading is influence.

And very often we find ourselves in these leadership roles, whether it's at your church or place of business, leading your kids, leading your spouse, husband or wife, sometimes we lead our parents, sometimes we lead our enemies. And very often as we're leading, influencing our kids, your boyfriend or girlfriend, or whatever, your near dweller, we can become worried that hey, they're making the wrong decisions, or hey they're going to go down the wrong path, and our anxiety goes way up, and instead of turning to God or praying about it, or doing the best we can to influence them, we tighten our control. We have this need to control others.

And today we're going to address that, that I believe the most effective way to influence people is not to control them, but to obviously lead by example, and to pray for them and believe that by faith the Holy

Spirit will fill in the gaps. I don't know about you, but I believe the Holy Spirit is better at leading than I am. What do you think? Amen.

So I will never forget years ago when we were pastoring a church in Old Towne Orange at an American Legion hall, we'd turned a dance hall into a church by bringing in chairs. Just below us was a bar. Sometimes those guys would start celebrating even on a Sunday morning, and you could hear them below drinking and clinking and playing music, but it actually made it a great environment.

And I remember the time when that church really started to grow. It really culminated.. it really started at one point when a guy named Dallas Willard, he was a friend of mine and mentor, and I think one of the most important authors in the last maybe of the 20th century for Christianity, he came and he spoke at our church. And I think one reason why he had such an impact on so many people, it's not just his writing, but he had like just a way of carrying himself that was so alluring.

For example, on a day when he was preaching and we were actually interviewing him, in our church on the wooden floors, there were these signs that we had made out of plywood, and some gust of wind came or something, and you can actually see on the video the sign falls down and it smacks the wood so hard that it actually sounds like a gunshot, and the whole church, like everybody was (WHOA) like this, jumps up. There's several people standing up looking around to see what

it was, and on the video, you can see we three pastors who were interviewing Dallas, we all shot up out of our chairs and got scared. And he was just Yoda, man, he was like.. just not even, just so relaxed and chill. And that was, not because he had a hearing problem, he didn't. It's because he had this in-dwelling of the spirit, this daily walk and trust with God. In other words, for Dallas, the proof was in the pudding. People who knew him wanted to read his books because of the kind of person he was. And that is the best way we can influence people.

Speaking of Dallas, it was that day when he was speaking effectively on leadership, and when so many people tell us what to do as leaders or as Christians, he was telling leaders what not to do. And he said here are the three things you should not do when you're leading. He said don't presume, don't pretend, and don't push. Don't presume, don't pretend, and don't push. Remember those three things. If you want to influence your kids, your grandkids, your neighbor, your spouse, your enemy, don't presume, don't pretend, and don't push.

It was interesting because years later, I was reading the Sermon on the Mount, studying it, and I found that in Matthew chapter 7, that actually these three things appeared in Matthew chapter 7. If you want to open your Bibles with me, Matthew chapter 7, verse 1, this is the passage on do not judge or you too will be judged. But I actually believe that this is actually a passage about influence of leadership, not as much about sin and shame and all that stuff.

So the first part, Jesus says “do not judge or you too will be judged for in the same way you judge others, you will be judged. And with the same measure you use, it will be measured against you.” I think traditionally many of us, when we read this passage, we think if I judge my neighbor, God is going to judge me, right? If I’m really harsh on my neighbor, God’s really going to be harsh with me.

That might be the case, but I actually think what this passage is saying, it’s actually wisdom. Don’t you find that in the body of Jewish knowledge, when Jesus is preaching, many rabbis would say this type of thing, and the intent was not to say that if you judge other people, God will judge you, it’s that if you judge your neighbor, your neighbors going to judge you back. If you let loose on your neighbor, you’re neighbors going to let loose on you.

And we see that happening today in politics and religion and every other place where debates are happening. When people lash out at one another, when they judge, what happens? Does the person go you know what, you’re right. You’re right – I am a bad person. Sorry. How can I be better? No, people, they go no you’re a bad person, right? And this is almost every, I think, spousal fight sounds like this: you did this. Well you did that. Well you did this. Well you did that! And it goes up and up and up. Apparently nobody’s ever fought with their spouse here. I guess Hannah, it’s just us. Oh well. Anyway.

And I think this is essentially presumption. This is the first “p” do not presume. Because judging someone is effectively making an assessment about them without caring about their story where they came from, why they did what they did, how they hope to rectify it. Judgment is essentially just casting a label on someone, presuming you know why they did it, you know how they did it, you know all the details.

And so judgment comes from a place of ego and a place of pride, and when you're the one being judged, it's incredibly frustrating when you feel like this person casting this verdict doesn't care about your story, doesn't care about you personally, doesn't care about where you've been, and doesn't care about how hard you've been trying. All they care is you messed up. And so Jesus just tells us plainly don't do this because what will happen is if you see the faults in other people, people are going to do their best to see the faults in you, and buddy, let me tell you, they're going to find them.

So this is why this is an issue on leadership is when we get frustrated with people we're trying to lead, very often we presume things about why they did what they did and we judge them. And if you want to lead people well, you need to stop judging, stop presuming.

He carries on and he says “why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye. How can you say to your brother ‘let me take the speck out of your eye when all the time there is a plank in your own eye.’” So this is

Jesus being funny. If you were hearing this in Aramaic in His day, He's painting this hilarious image of a guy having just a giant log jutting out of his eye socket, going like let me fix your speck here. Let me see.. and so it was hilarious. It's probably not as funny now because it's in the Bible, but that's just how things are.

And Jesus is saying you have this giant thing, you need to take it out of your eye before you can go around telling people about the specks in their own eye. What is that? That's pretending, right? That's the second "p". Don't pretend. Don't pretend. Don't pretend like you're perfect, don't pretend like you've got it all together. Rather, when you remove the speck from your own eye, you can say stuff like I've had stuff in my eyes before. I know what it's like. You think your speck is bad I used to have this log jutting out of my eye socket. Nearly killed me.

Anyway, so don't pretend. Right? Don't be a hypocrite. And why do we do that? Why do we do that? So that we can see clearly to help our neighbor. So the point of all of this is actually so you can lead, actually so you can speak, actually so you can influence people. That's why. It's not just don't be a hypocrite, it's don't be a hypocrite so that your message is coming from a humble place; so that your message is believable.

So for me, I don't think I struggle with judging people that much, honestly. I don't think I'm too much of a hypocrite. I'm looking at Hannah; I'm not sure. Am I good? We're good there. So we're good with

presume, we're good with pretend, it's this third one – it's push. Don't push. This is the one that I struggle with a lot.

When I think I am right about something, especially if I love the person. The more I love you, the more I'm going to push. This is my personality. I'm like you don't understand! This is going to help you. Why aren't you hearing me? Why won't you listen! No! And maybe you're not that way. This is how I am a lot. And Jesus continues, He says, "do you not give to dogs what is sacred. Do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet and turn and tear you to pieces." If you have teenagers that sometimes act like swine, you know what Jesus is talking about here. I don't have teenagers, but I've been a teenager. I have been the pig. It's like no mom, you know. And this is the thing.

First of all the pearl, when Jesus is talking about it, the pearl is a symbol for the kingdom of God. It's throughout the Old Testament and the New. You probably think instantly of the pearly gates. That's from a reference from Revelation 21:21. Usually people think Revelation 21:21 is about heaven. It's actually not. It's about the kingdom of God, the bride of Christ, and that the way we become a part of this new city or this new bride is by entering through these gates of pearls. So the pearl is a symbol of the kingdom of God, which means the reign of God. It's a short way of saying the way you become a part of this thing is by becoming a student of Jesus; by obeying God.

So there you see it's a symbol for the kingdom of God. Another place that's very famous is Matthew chapter 13. When Jesus says there was this guy and he saw this pearl of incredible value and he went and sold everything he had, every bit of land, all of his belongings so we can get a hold of this one pearl. So there it is. And he said this is the kingdom of God. This is what it's like attaining the kingdom of God. And so when Jesus is talking about throwing your pearls before swine, he's talking about your faith, your wisdom, your walk with God.

By the way, this would have made so much sense to Jesus' audience. We don't have a legendary treasure today the way the pearl was in Jesus' day. The most exciting thing about the history of the pearl is that the Latin/Roman word for pearl, and yes this is true, was margarita. So a margarita was a pearl, and the person who sold those margaritas was not called a bartender, he was called the.. margaritari. Margaritari! And the reason any jeweler actually was called a margaritari. You almost have to say it once you do. You can't go back. The reason he's called the margaritari is because if he sells pearls, he's going to sell gold and diamonds and all that other stuff. A pearl was vastly more valuable than even diamonds or gold or anything else. And most people wouldn't even see a pearl in their whole life.

To give you an example of how valuable a pearl was in the first century Roman Empire, there was a famous Roman general, I think he was briefly even Caesar for like a day or something, but he was a Roman

general and he paid for his entire Roman conquest with one of his mother's pearl earrings. That's pretty valuable. It's hard to measure these things, but would that be hundreds of millions of dollars? Maybe billions?

Another very famous story is about Cleopatra when she was hosting Mark Antony, and she wanted to express to him how wealthy and illustrious Egypt was that she said I will throw you the most expensive banquet that has ever been known. And what she did was she took a pearl, dissolved it in vinegar and drank it. And actually for centuries, this possessed people. This truly did happen that Cleopatra had so much wealth, she could drink a pearl. Like people couldn't fathom how amazing that was. In fact this is a famous painting from Tiepolo. There are so many paintings of this story because it's so romantic, but here's a famous one. If you zoom in and you look at Cleopatra's hand, I know Cleopatra looks like a white English woman there, not an Egyptian. Actually Cleopatra was Greek, not Egyptian, but I digress. Here she is, you can see in her hand there holding a pearl. The whole painting is about that pearl. The whole thing is about a very amazing way of just saying this is how incredibly wealthy she was. She could just eat a pearl.

Okay, so you get it, right? Pearls are very valuable. They're incredibly valuable, and that the kingdom of God, that having the gospel, knowing the Lord, that it's like holding this great pearl in your hand. So

it's an incredibly value thing to you. Right? It's the most precious thing. It's something you would die for.

Now another interesting thing about pearls is that pearls are actually made through struggle and suffering. So even though there's all this myth, they believe that maybe lightening would strike an oyster and then it would do this, and some believe it had something to do with Poseidon. They just didn't know. But we know now that the way a pearl is made is actually through an irritant or splinter or an infection. If a grain of sand or some other piece of carbon gets inside an oysters shell, it's always trying to get it out, and it can't get this thing out of its mouth. And it's painful for the oyster. It hurts. It's like having a splinter and you can't get it out with your tweezers. And then finally what the oyster does, in order to protect itself from the irritant, it creates this resin around it over time. So over time, through suffering, this incredible treasure is formed.

And I think that's how many of us are with our wisdom, with our knowledge and with our walk with God. We can say to our kids and our neighbors – you haven't been what I've been through. You haven't seen what I've seen. You don't know what I know. And we have this treasure in our hands that we gained through suffering; that we gained through struggle. That we adapted to. We allowed it to change us for the better. That out of the suffering came this incredible treasure, and we're like take this. Take this. I don't want you to go through what I've gone

through. I want you to know the Lord. I want you to change. I don't want you to struggle. And so in our desire to influence people, we truly have the right answer; we truly have the knowledge, and yet what happens? Those teenagers, man, I tell you. Or whoever. Very often if they feel that we are taking our pearls and trying to shove it down their throat, they will not want them. They will turn and tear us to pieces.

If you hand a pearl to a pig, it's going to think it's food. And when it tries to eat it, it's not going to taste very good, and he'll be very upset with you. And I think this is how so many people are receiving our well intentioned advice, our well intentioned leadership, they turn and they tear us to pieces and yet, it's like not only did we lose our pearl, we made things worse. I see this so often with leaders who do have the right answer, who do have the right path, who do know the right way, that in their communicating of those ideas, they end up entrenching their opponent even deeper into the wrong ideas, even deeper into the path.

And this is because this is just human nature. People freak out if they fear you are controlling them. Your spouse will freak out if she or he thinks you're controlling him or her, your kids will freak out, especially if they're teenagers or adults. There have been so many families I have been friends with that have amazing parents and amazing kids, and the parents and the kids cannot resolve the fact that the kids are not kids anymore, they're adults. And the parents have the right answer and the best advice, and yet the kids can't take it because now they're in their

20's or 30's or 40's and they're feeling controlled. They're feeling smothered. You can't spell smother without mother. Right? When you're a parent, it's hard to hold your kids loosely; to trust that you've said your peace, and to allow your kids to mess up.

And that's the irony is that the best way to influence people is through inspiration, not through manipulating, and this is the hardest thing for people like me who are always wanting to push people in the right direction. You can't push people, you have to show them, and you have to hold it loosely and allow the Holy Spirit to do what the Holy Spirit is going to do.

But we're called to lead, right? I mean Jesus does tell us see clearly so you can help the speck in your brother's eye, right? I mean Jesus wants us to influence people, He wants us to help people. And so I just want to finish my brief sermon today by just giving you some things that I think are very useful in influencing the people you love and the people you don't love, right, or struggle to love, and here are some things.

First of all, I really like the way that Simon Sinek views leadership. He says that every form of leadership takes one of two forms. You're either manipulating people or you're inspiring people. Now before you just say well always inspire and never manipulate, he would actually say that sometimes, even though the term manipulate sounds very negative, pejorative, the term manipulate sometimes that's exactly what you have to do, right? If you hire a guy to mow your lawn, and you pay him \$50,

that's a type of manipulation. It's a deal. I'll pay you \$50, you mow my lawn. You're not going to go out there and make a YouTube video about how great it is to mow lawns and hope that someone hears your.. right? Coaches do this. Coaches discipline their team. Parents discipline their kids. These are forms of manipulative leadership. If your two-year-old is running into the street, they're not going to listen to your inspiring speech about how cars kill children. You just have to grab them, right? That's manipulating.

And so there are times in which.. especially maybe in a workplace, there are times when you have to do this. But that's the worst thing to do. The ideal would be to inspire people to do the right thing.

So for your friends or for dating, if you're dating someone or whatever, or a spouse maybe that you want to come to faith, the first thing I would say is just make sure that you live it. Do your best to live it and don't pretend. Like be honest about your shortcomings and your feelings in which you're struggling with, but also be honest about how important your walk with God or whatever it is you're trying to communicate to your neighbor, how big of an impact its taking in your life. So make sure that all people know this. The proof is in the pudding. Doesn't mean you have to be perfect, but it does mean that people need to notice some kind of visible change in your life. Then the change you're trying to enact will be alluring. As a leader, you're going to create other leaders like you.

As a parent, we have to remember that for our kids, our first task is to keep our children safe, but the second task we have is to make them strong. And sometimes those things are working against each other. It's one of the hardest things to be a parent is to allow your kids to go in environments that are not as safe as they used to be in order that they can become stronger. And every day as a parent as your kids get older, we have to do the discipline of allowing our kids to do things that are not quite as safe as they used to be in order that they can be stronger. In other words, we have to stop hovering over them as they get older. We have to allow them to make mistakes and inspire them the best way we can.

If you have kids that are under you know 15, 14, I think one of the most important things you can do is make sure they have good friends. I think too many parents don't pay attention to the kind of friends that their kids keep, and I think this is one of the best ways that you can help; to help your kids grow is to have them surrounded by friends who are encouraging and nice and to make sure that they're around that kind of good kid.

So there are lots of things we can do to inspire and help our neighbor, but what about our enemies? What about people that really hate us. What about people that really dislike you. How do we have an impact on their lives?

Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount that we're called to love our enemies. Actually it's really interesting. Allow me to cite a leftist/atheist in church. Bill Maher, was interviewing.. I found this real interesting.. a few days was interviewing a panel of his guests, and they were talking about this guy on a bus, I forget which city it was in, who had a swastika on his arm. He was a neo-Nazi and he was sitting on a bus reading or he was on his phone, and somebody filmed themselves punching this guy, right? Like sucker punching this Nazi, right? Because he's a Nazi so you punch him.

And Bill asks the question 'can we punch Nazi's?' And Bill's answer is no. We can't punch Nazi's just because they're Nazi's. The first amendment protects the freedom of speech. Yes, everybody in America universally hates Nazi's and Nazi's are evil and their ideology is evil but you can't just punch them. And every single person on that panel disagreed. One person said we need to change the first amendment to not include Nazi's. One guy said absolutely you punch that guy in the face. My grandfather didn't go and fight Nazi's in WWII to allow them to show their swastikas on a bus. And he's like I see a Nazi, I'm punching him. You know what my immediate thought was? American soldiers who took Nazi's captive, they kept them clean, they fed them, they cared for them, they gave them all the rights that were due an enemy, even though they're horrible and evil. They didn't sucker punch their captors when they were sitting.

And this is what I'm getting at is that the world is becoming so, so entrenched in judgment, entrenched in presuming, pretending and pushing. If you get on Twitter, you're going to see a lot of people presuming, a lot of people pretending, and a lot of people pushing. And it's not Jesus' way to lead or to influence.

I'll just finish with this last story. On that note of Nazi's and clan members and all this stuff, there's this amazing movie that was put out by PBS not super long ago, about a man named Daryl Davis, an African American man who was a blues piano player and rhythm and blues guy, very involved in the civil rights in the 60's, grew up in the 60's, tells this heartbreaking story about being the only black kid in a Boy Scouts troop, and he's carrying an American flag and people are throwing things at him, and he's like nine-years-old. And just trying to sort of find his place.

And he tells this story about how one day as an adult playing in a rhythm and blues band he was asked by a friend to play in a country band, and so he went to this country bar and they played all this music. And afterwards, there was this gentleman who came up to him and he said 'I've never heard a black man play like Jerry Lee Lewis.' And he said where do you think Jerry Lee Lewis learned to play piano, this kind of thing. And so they had this conversation. And he ends up sitting down and talking with this guy for a long time, and eventually his friends tell this guy, tell Daryl. And he's like what do you mean tell Daryl. Tell him!

He's like well I'm a member of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. This was back in the 70's or 80's or something.

Eventually Daryl, and I think this is why they call it Accidental Courtesy, Daryl becomes friends with this guy, and ends up leading him out of the Ku Klux Klan. And in fact, over the years, he continues to be a professional musician, but like his hobby is walking into Klan meetings and neo-Nazi meetings, and talking to people. He will actually befriend these people, hang out with them, talk with them, listen to them, challenge them, and over the last so many years, he's been a part of seeing 200 people leave either the Ku Klux Klan or neo-Nazi's and apologize for their racism and violence and all this stuff.

And to me it's just an incredible story. It's like just incredible, first how brave he is. I'd be terrified if I was a black man to walk into a Klan meeting and to keep doing it. But it also shows the effectiveness. You see a lot of the back stories of these men, how many of them are abused, hurt and so they take it out on their neighbor. And this is a very brave and very good man, Daryl Davis. I actually hope he can come and speak sometime at this church.

But this is a great lesson to us because if Daryl Davis can walk into a Klan meeting and befriend Klan members, and forgive them, and lead them out of the Ku Klux Klan, you can forgive your coworker Jan for stealing your stapler. Okay? You can forgive your next door neighbor who keeps leaving his trash cans out. You can forgive whoever it is in this

church that rubs you the wrong way. You can forgive your competitors and pray for them. And you can trust that the best way to lead is to understand and to know people. To not pretend, to not presume, and not push, but to listen and to love people, even people that are evil. And though there always are going to be times where we do have to push and we do have to act and we do have to take action, the first response of a Christian is mercy, forgiveness, listening. That's what makes us so obviously believers is to act like Jesus.

So if you want serenity, we have to hold the people we're leading and influencing loosely, pray for them, and trust that if we do our best, the Holy Spirit will do the rest.

Let's pray: Father, we love you, we thank you, and we ask in Jesus' name for the people that we love; that we want to change, that we want to take a new path, that we want to be different in some way. I pray, Father, that your Holy Spirit would work the only way that you can into the best way, and pray, Father, that you would help us with our kids, our spouse, our grandkids, our neighbors, our enemies. Help us to influence them for your kingdom. Lord, we love, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.