

CHAPTER 1



PRINCIPLES

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things,

Philippians 4:8

What standards are we going to live by? The answer to that question is one of the most important things that we will learn in life. What are your principles? What are the principles of your business or organization? Whether religious or not, we all live by certain ethics or principles.

We all have a line that we will or will not cross. Whether in the church, in business or in life, there are standards we have set or standards someone else has set for us that we follow. Personally, I believe that my standards should be just as high as or higher than the ones that any business or organization has set for me. Striving to reach this goal is a life challenge.

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Stephen R. Covey, in his book *“Principle Centered Leadership,”* states:

“Principles are not invented by us or by society; they are the laws of the universe that pertain to human relationships or human organizations.”

The moral laws of the universe for a Christian are governed by God. Aristotle and Plato are credited with teaching the first four: wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage, yet I believe it went back further than that. In the New Testament three more are evident: faith, hope and charity. These virtues are internalized by men and how they are manifested is a question we will answer later on in this book. All other virtuous actions can be categorized under these main seven. It goes without saying that justice, equality, trust, and tranquility are sub-categories of these basic tenants.

To live out these virtues we must first realize we need to change. In the case of anyone with a vice, the need to change is paramount in their recovery. To live in peace and harmony an inherent seeking of the truth must be in place. In Scripture they are referred to as the virtues. Therefore, abiding by the virtues brings the happiness and stability we need to survive in a life that is uncertain. Only in death is there certainty. In life we live each day the best that we can.

The Bible helps us to further set our foundational principles through the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus. The Ten Commandments state: Thou shalt have no other Gods before me; Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images; Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy; Honor thy father and mother; Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not covet; Thou shalt not bear

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false witness against thy neighbor. These commandments are standards set by God or guidelines by which we are to live.

Consider Moses. In the Scriptures he flew in the face of adversity and the law of the day. When he spoke to the Pharaoh in essence he said, "Only God and His law can govern us." Moses knew what this meant. Death and banishment from Egypt. From this statement we can ascertain that the higher law, belonging to God for people of faith, is the law that governs. And we will not be governed by anyone who does not abide by the law. Especially in the case of Moses. In the free world, the law is bound to the higher governing power. In the case of the United States, it is the Constitution. While those in power have done their best to destroy these principles, they remain foundational for all citizens and none are above it.

Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves and gives us parables as examples such as the Good Samaritan. In the book of Matthew, Jesus further tells us to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. In other words, treat all others in all walks of life, whether you like them or not, the way you desire to be treated.

History teaches us that when peace reigned the society flourished. Every time there has been a decline of a civilization the downhill slide can be attributed to the failure of the basic principles by those in authority as well as the subjects under the fallen leader's rule. We can see the evidence of this decline in worldwide politics. How many lives and governments would be spared if there had been a regard to right principles.

Our principles should always be guiding us in the proper direction. Wherever you go, your principles go with you. We are more than one-dimensional beings. God made us wonderfully; he allowed us to embrace teachings that can

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cause us to live lives that are full of practices that can empower us to be all that *He* wants us to be.

Stephen R. Covey writes in his book, *“Principle Centered Leadership”*:

“Principles apply at all times in all places. They surface in the form of values, ideas, norms, and teachings that uplift, ennoble, fulfill, empower, and inspire people.”

Therefore, principles can be defined as a manifestation or action, rules or conduct centered around what we believe. An understanding of this concept is pivotal to the teachings in this book. Ideally, spend some time pondering this question in your mind as you define your guiding principles.

Principle Centered

The principles that we are guided by must be the correct principles. If our principles are not solid they will throw us off balance and we will not be effective in our leadership.

“...and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. “

Isaiah 58: 10-11

We are to center our lives on the Scriptures and in this way our lives and actions will be righteous before God, with

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the bonus that lives centered on His principles are approved. As our foundation, we will have a sense of blessing others in what we do in everything from our relationships with our families, friends, and co-workers by sharing our possessions, talents and resources. Moreover, our bodies will indeed be used for the purpose of the Lord, in thought, word and deed. We will be held accountable in this life and in the next.

It has been said that if you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything. If a person has not centered himself in certain principles, he will find himself tossed back and forth, battered by the wind of every new doctrine and every new philosophy. He will also find that he is not consistent in his behavior because he does not have a base or standard by which to guide or evaluate his behavioral patterns. It then becomes when in Rome do as the Romans do.

Blending into every situation like a chameleon is not desirable. You don't want to display one behavioral pattern at church, a different one at work or home, and another behavioral pattern on your vacation. If this is the case, you will soon realize you don't know yourself and, furthermore, you do not have a set standard by which to live. Eventually, you will find yourself mixing your behavior in church, at work, at home or on vacation. This will trigger an unfavorable reaction and family, friends and acquaintances will begin to realize you are not who they thought you were.

If you are grounded in sound, Biblical principles you will be secure in yourself and not care what others think. You will not be tempted to change because of a desire to fit into a mold or due to negative criticism. While we need to learn from our errors and strive to improve, we can only do this with the grace of God. In Christ we can discover our life mission, our

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role with our families and our work. We can work toward a goal of finding the right principles to live by and in this way overcome our daily struggles.

When a leader is principle centered he will have the wisdom of Solomon, the power of the mightiest kings, the guidance and security that comes from a clear awareness of the providence of God.

Wisdom is the power to understand right from wrong and knowing how to balance this with our daily trials. It is the ability to judge truth and to see God's hands in our lives. Even the breathtaking vista of a mountain view takes on a deeper meaning.

A clear awareness is the security of realizing our sense of identity is not tied to any one person or thing. It is anchored in the strength that comes from within. This self esteem flows out of our confidence and knowledge that truth is what matters, and this knowledge gives us strength. The leader must be secure enough in his decision that he is not going to waiver every time he comes across opposition. The leader must know that his decision is based on a solid premise.

To succeed we must take the first step. With the correct guidance and direction, we can make the correct decisions based upon clear and righteous principles.

Leaders must be comfortable in knowing that their life experience has led them to this knowledge and realize their guiding principles are effective. They know that their principles are well grounded and dependable.

In some cases, the leader must realize that based upon the correct principles, he has engaged wisdom well beyond his

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years. Understanding how to put all of the pieces together and make them work is the key.

On the other hand, the power that men seek can corrupt if not used widely. Power has the ability to crush and be abused. It also gives us the courage and strength to accomplish any given task. Knowing this allows us to make the correct choices and wise decisions that ensure strong leaders.

Leaders must be strong and secure enough to make the decisions necessary to execute their plan. They must realize that the decision is theirs to make and not waver because appearing uncertain will affect the quality of their decisions.

Principle Centered Leadership vs. Person Centered Leadership

One of the conflicts that we often run into is principle centered leadership versus person centered leadership. In my experience we often get caught up in person centered leadership.

In person centered leadership we find ourselves following the person and not necessarily the principles. The focus is mistakenly on the person and not the teaching. Perhaps we are caught up in the person's charisma, or oratory skills. Unfortunately, we forget to concentrate on the topic.

African Americans have traditionally been drawn to great orators. Since the Africans brought to America were forbidden to learn to read or write in many states, it is my opinion they became fascinated with *nommo*, the word. They became intrigued by what is called orature and oratory. Moefi Kete Asante defines orature and oratory in his book, *"The*

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Afrocentric Idea.” He explains orature is communication using the entire body:

“It includes sermons, lectures, raps, the dozen, poetry and humor.”

He goes on to define oratory as communication that includes public speaking and the study of speeches.

“One studies oratory by studying speeches—that is, the critique of strengths and weaknesses in a public presentation.”

African Americans have been true to the African Heritage. It is quite evident that our greatest leaders have been great orators. The greatest asset is using oration to move people into action. Leaders such as Marcus Garvey, Nat Turner, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and Barack Obama, are but a few examples.

Unfortunately on many occasions, the oratory skills have become a two-edged sword. As previously mentioned, we are caught up in the person and not the message. In such cases, if the person is out of the picture, the movement fizzles.

With principle centered leadership, the primary focus becomes the person’s message, his cause, and the motivating principles, not the person himself. Therefore if you remove the person, the principles are still in place and the movement continues based upon these principles. Principle centered leadership addresses one of the major deterrents to effective leadership, which is the belief that the total function of leadership falls on one person. Great leadership should be viewed as the responsibility of all and the charge of some.

Principles Differ From Values

There are many occasions where people mistake values for principles. In essence, principles are your actions or your character. They are focused on the outward behavior. A principle is a general and fundamental truth. Values, on the other hand, are as different as individual people. They are subjective and within all of us. Values are our ideals, our self-worth, the ideas we consider important, and the outcomes we hold in high esteem. For many it is a desirable quality of life. The more our values and our principles are aligned, the better we can live our life in harmony and righteousness. Then, and only then, can our principles be useful to us and those we lead.

This reminds me of a story entitled, "Two Traveling Angels," (Author Unknown).

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansion's guest room. Instead the angels were given a small space in the cold basement. As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied, "Things aren't always what they seem."

The next night the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor, but very hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had, the couple let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good night's rest. When the sun came up the next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field. The younger angel was

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infuriated and asked the older angel, "How could you have let this happen?"

The first man had everything, yet you helped him, she accused. The second family had little but was willing to share everything and you let the cow die. "Things aren't always what they seem," the older angel replied. "When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it."

"Then last night as we slept in the farmer's bed, the angel of death came for his wife. I gave him the cow instead. Things aren't always what they seem."

Sometimes that is exactly what happens when things don't turn out the way you believe they should. Those with faith should stand on principles and believe that every outcome is to your advantage. In many cases you might not realize it until some time later.

Even in this story we see the older angel's principles take control as he does not allow the greedy to prosper. In addition, he saves the farmer's wife from death, as a direct result of the couple's hospitality.

When evaluating your life's principles remember the following:

The most destructive Habit Worry
The greatest Joy Giving
The greatest Loss Loss of self-respect
The most satisfying Work Helping others

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The ugliest personality Trait	Selfishness
The most endangered Species.....	Dedicated leaders
Our greatest natural Resource	Our youth
The greatest Shot in the Arm	Encouragement
The greatest Problem to Overcome	Fear
The most Effective Sleeping Pill	Peace of mind
The most Crippling Failure Disease.....	Excuses
The most Powerful Force in Life.....	Love
The most Dangerous Pariah.....	A gossip
The world's most Incredible Computer.....	The brain
The worst thing To be Without	Hope
The deadliest Weapon.....	The tongue
The two most Power Filled Words	I Can
The greatest Asset.....	Faith
The most Worthless Emotion.....	Self-pity
The most Beautiful Attire	A Smile
The most Prized Possession	Integrity
The most powerful Channel of Communication.....	Prayer
The most Contagious Spirit.....	Enthusiasm
The most Important Thing in Life	God

Author John Wooden recounts, “Material possessions, winning scores and great reputations are meaningless in the eyes of the Lord, because He knows what we really are and that is all that matters.”