



A Visit to the Young Leaders Conference

By Auburn Mann

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.
Proverbs 27:17



The 2018 Young Leaders Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, far exceeded my expectations. The Conference was designed to address leadership within the contexts of ministry, media, and the marketplace. Workshops catered to those aspiring to be leaders in the clergy, in business, in the arts, and even in one's own home.

Members of TPCBC's IMPACT Young Adult Ministry traveled to Atlanta to participate in the Conference. From the moment we arrived that Thursday morning last month, my senses were overstimulated with sights of people from all over. I appreciated the diversity that was thematic throughout: the many food options available and items for purchase, and, of course, the diversity of the attendees, with their varied geographic, denominational, ethnic and professional origins. This was reflected in the way the topic of "leadership" was discussed. The Conference easily conveyed the reality that leadership can take as many forms as there are people.

Although the workshops really drove home the multifaceted nature of leadership, even more pronounced was the articulation of the one simple ingredient necessary in all genuine leadership: service. From a church keeping their members focused on God, to those soothing the souls of their audience through sermonic melodies – supplying a sorely missed market for the community, to parents rearing successful children, the emphasis should always be on the population one is called to lead (serve).

This can only be fully actualized when we approach positions of leadership with a servant's attitude (or heart). I remember during the Thursday night worship service, Pastor Sheryl Brady preached on the 2 Samuel story. Pastor Brady juxtaposed King David with one of his men, Uriah, who was married to Bathsheba, outlining the perils of leadership without a servant's attitude. Although David is described as "a man after God's own heart," in this period of lustful weakness, he traveled a path of adultery and then manipulative murder to cover up his transgressions. David forgot his true place in God and ultimately abused his authority, betraying his loyal soldier and friend, Uriah, to death. This spiritual amnesia was simply a symptom of David losing track of his greatest purpose, which was to reflect God's love and grace through his station as Israel's king. Instead, he used his anointed platform to serve himself. With his credibility and reputation tarnished, his peace of mind and household stripped, and his newborn son with Bathsheba dead, David had fallen far out of favor with God.

In contrast, Uriah demonstrated true leadership through his faithfulness to his mission, foiling David's initial machinations to conceal David's adultery and the resulting pregnancy by honorably declining an opportunity to return home to his wife, Bathsheba. Uriah viewed such a conjugal visit as improper and

a disservice to his soldiers, who were still fighting on the battlefield. Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!” (2 Samuel 11:11) This essentially sealed his earthly demise, because when Uriah returned to the battlefield, David set him up to be killed. True leadership – leadership in service – is sacrificial leadership. Uriah’s leadership was not unlike that of Jesus Christ, who is the quintessential leader, for Christ served all of humanity all the way through death. Of course, these are extreme examples, but the gist of the message centered on the principle of leadership as selfless service and dedication to the God’s Kingdom.

Throughout the Conference, the phrase “Next Level” was uttered time and time again. It was a reminder that God is promoting us and our ministries to new levels and higher heights. But as Pastor Brady queried, if we are not satisfactorily serving people in our current positions, how do we expect to survive in situations with more responsibility? Our focus should always be on God’s Kingdom and serving in ways that help others actualize their God-given potential, pushing them to their next plateau in Christ.