

## Tools for Wise Leadership

*A programme of TWR-Africa, produced by TWR-Zimbabwe, presented by Rev Dr Roy Musasiwa*

**Series 12: Self-Leadership**

**Talk 08: The Leader's Roles**

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Welcome to the programme **Tools for Wise Leadership** as we focus our attention on the important issue of self-leadership. Indeed in order to lead others well you have to lead yourself well first. We have seen how this can be done by attending to the heart and the head issues. We now go on to the hands or skills of a leader. Our focus today on the roles we play in society.

The Zulus and Ndebeles have the saying “*Umuntungumuntu ngabantu*”, meaning that it is our relationships with other people that make us who we are. Human relationships are at the heart of the leadership task, but not all relationships are effective in transforming others. So as leaders how do we relate to other people?

In our social networks we are sometimes spectators, but very often we are participants. When we are spectators we see and observe what occurs around us in the social group. Our concern here, however, is us as participants, in which case we fill roles within the social group. The concept of role describes the pattern of responsibility assigned to an individual within a social group. A given individual may have many different roles within the groups of which he is a part. At home you may be a husband and a father. At work you are perhaps a manager. Then at church you are a deacon while you are a student at an after-hours college. The list goes on. But remember as you carry all these roles, you are just one individual bringing your personality, uniqueness, and weaknesses to the roles. At the same time society has already prescribed the extent of responsibility expected within the role.

This means the first tension you will have is that of being true to yourself versus fulfilling the expectations society has already prescribed for your different roles. How do you resolve this tension? Some try to throw away any idea of social expectations in favour of being themselves. This was indeed the case with certain twin brothers in Zimbabwe who caused a stir a few years ago by moving around practically naked in an effort to define themselves the way they felt like, while resisting the tyranny of expectations. The result is that society rejected them. They were arrested, locked up in remand prison and released on condition they put on clothes. They had tried to define themselves in ways that were not in tandem with societal values. But having faced rejection they were forced to conform to socially defined expectations in order to make it in life.

The opposite solution is never to be yourself but just to let the world define who you should be and how you should behave. This is the phenomenon of peer pressure, making people do even what they would not naturally want to do because of a craving for acceptance. If you adopt this solution you actually become a walking lie, someone who puts on a mask in order to please the world.

How does this tension apply to leadership? How do you act out the most transforming role in society? Jesus and Paul have the answer for us. They both defined themselves according to the will of the Father in heaven. That meant that in some situations they played roles that rejected social norms and expectations. Jesus refused to conform to the world's picture of what a rabbi and a Messiah should be. However, when it came to issues that would not conflict with God's will Jesus lived the way any other Jew lived.

Paul gives us similar lessons. When it came to obeying God he refused to be conformed to the world's standards. He demonstrated in his own life what he taught when he said we must not be

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conformed to the world, but we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds. So, for example, he refused to play the role of turning Gentiles into Jews through circumcision as a precondition for being accepted in the church as Christians.

But while in many respects Paul was a non-conformist, when it came to cultural practices that did not conflict with God's norms and standards he deliberately became a conformist. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 he says,

*“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.”*

Now talking about our roles in society, there is another tension to contend with. It is called role conflict. Our roles can conflict, e.g. your role as pastor can conflict with your role as husband and father. We experience role conflict when we find ourselves pulled in various directions as we try to respond to the many positions we hold. Ok let's suppose you are a pastor and you are also a father. Your child really needs your support with his school work and you are in the middle of helping your child with his homework when the phone rings to say that a husband and wife belonging to your church are in the middle of a fight and you are being requested to immediately go and help them restore peace in their relationship. Do you remain home and fulfil the role of being a good father or do you excuse yourself from helping your child and rush to play the role of being a good pastor?

One response to role conflict is deciding that something has to go. In this particular case the role as a father is so important that the quarrelling couple will have to be contended with a delegated person coming to help them resolve their quarrel – or at least they will have to wait until your child's homework is done. You see conflict among the roles begins because of the human desire to reach success, and because of the pressure put on an individual by two opposing and incompatible demands competing against each other. But success in the eyes of God is of far greater value than success in the eyes of human beings who impose expectations that may at times conflict with God's will.

Jesus refused to conform to the tyranny of expectations. In Mark 1:35-38 we read,

*“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’”*

When people had seen Jesus' healing miracles they demanded more and more of Jesus. His popularity had suddenly surged. Many evangelists would not have resisted the pressure of demands which conflicted with the need for prayer and seeking God's direction. For Jesus prayer was so important that he preferred to disappoint people who were demanding more and more of the services he had to offer. And as a result of seeking the Father's guidance Jesus left a place of revival to go to other villages to preach there also.

The lesson Jesus gives us is that when roles conflict we need to seek God's priorities. Something may have to go and some people may have to be temporarily disappointed

In this programme we have touched on the need of adequately fulfilling our roles in society. Dealing with people is one of the most important skills a leader can develop. It is God's will that must help us in our role definitions so that we do not fall to the extreme of self-definition which discards social expectations, or the extreme of being moulded by the expectations of the world to the denial of one's sense of true identity. Similarly when it comes to dealing with role conflict we

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must seek God's priorities even when it means some people's expectations will go unmet. We should not fall into a Messiah complex of thinking we can solve all the world's problems, especially when so often our roles start to conflict.

Next time we meet again on this programme we will be discussing the important difference between status and functioning. Meanwhile you need to practice these skills of wise leadership.

### **Discussion Questions for: Series 12 - Talk 08 - The Leader's Roles**

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For this series of *Self-Leadership* you can use the following study questions to guide you in deepening the impact of this series:

**Study Question 1: for Personal reflection**

What does this episode mean to you personally as a leader?

**Study Question 2: for Group Discussion**

What does this topic mean you as a group of leaders?

**Study Question 3: for applying the topic**

What can you apply from this topic in your role as a leader?

### **Summary:**

A leader often has to balance his role between being spectator being and participant. In every position the leader needs to be active. Even as a spectator the leader needs actively guide.

### **Discussion Questions:**

**Study Question 1: Personal reflection**

Do I adequately balance my role as leader in doing God's will by being a good parent or role model in my community?

**Study Question 2: Group Discussion**

Do we allow the world to define who we are and where our responsibility lie?

Do we allow people who oppose us to dictate our roles as leaders?

**Study Question 3: Applying the topic**

Do we desire acceptance to the point that we allow the world to mould us at the expense of our Christian values?

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