

Leadership Should Start with Apprenticeship

Someone asked me the other day what my advice would be to young leaders. Then they followed it up with this: "and if it could be just *one* piece of advice."

Wow....

My mind was instantly flooded with a thousand replies, like:

- stay in close community with Christ
- pray like a mad-man (or a mad-woman)
- don't give in to a worldly understanding of success
- prioritize marriage and family
- as you preach and dispense, drink freely from the cup yourself
- never waver from Scripture

But then I realized what would probably be the best, most all-encompassing, advice I could give. The most practical. The most "from the trenches."

"Apprentice yourself to an older, proven and seasoned leader through an existing local church."

How's that for a lost word.

"Apprentice."

(Maybe I'll deal with older, proven and seasoned in a later blog.)

But I wish it would get found.

We make knowing about something equivalent to its reality in our life. But that's not what knowledge means. We confuse information with knowledge. They are, of course, not the same. **In the Bible, to know was to do.** It was intimate, experiential, something within you. If it didn't impact your life, you didn't know it – even if you had the information.

In colonial America, one would be apprenticed for six years to a particular tradesperson in order to learn the craft. The apprentice would live, eat and breathe with the person they wanted to emulate in terms of the skill they were trying to master.

This was the dynamic behind the idea of an apprentice. You would seek to learn a craft under a master not simply to acquire information, but skill. You didn't learn *about* making a gun, or forging iron, or weaving a basket. You learned to *do* it. And to do it well. Only when you *could* do it were you turned loose as one who had the knowledge (real knowledge) to do it.

Today, we've made "knowing" all about information – seminars, videos, podcasts, TV,

classrooms, conferences – which allow the head to be stuffed, but the life to remain untouched.

Going even further, unless you spend time with someone long traveled along the road you wish to take, you don't have any idea what it is you have no idea about. That's the real problem of thinking you know everything. You think you know everything there is to know – but you don't know what it is you don't know.

No one does.

That's why being an apprentice matters.

So I would advise young leaders to go against ego and instant gratification, opportunity and eagerness, yes, even church planting (at first) and consider serving in an existing church for a season in order to be mentored. Serve your time. Learn all you can. Humbly submit and be schooled.

And who knows?

You may just end up filling one of the most important and growing needs of our day, which is succeeding the previous generation of leaders by assuming the leadership mantle of...

...where you apprenticed.

> [Read more from James.](#)