

LESSON ESSENTIALS

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 3: PUBLIC LIFE OF A SPIRITUAL LEADER

No one loves to be examined. No one loves to be watched and judged. However, if you are a spiritual leader with any number of people in your sphere of influence, you are being watched and likely judged. How do you cope with that? Is it fair for people to judge spiritual leaders? Should leaders be held to a higher standard of moral living?

In many places in the Bible, Christian men and women are instructed to live 'above reproach.' This means that we ought to live in such a way that no criticism could be made of our lives. This is a high standard for everyone, but even more so for the leaders among us who are very much on public display.

Having your life under scrutiny can be uncomfortable.

Depending on your personality, you may begin second-guessing your decisions and actions. You may be tempted to base your choices on what you think your congregation would like or approve of above what you feel the Lord calling you to do.

However, a third option is to see the scrutiny of the congregation as the Lord's protection and guidance in your life. Knowing that we are all 'on display' should be humbling, not terrifying; helpful, not paralyzing.

The scriptures are clear in their teachings to us about what a godly life looks like. We know from the reading of the Word that the Lord expects certain behaviours from us. We also know that our main concern should be pleasing the Lord, not man, and so our actions should be for Him alone.

However, we are surrounded by other people – other people who can see our actions, hear our words, and judge our lives. Is this fair? Is this right?

The short answer is yes. It is right that those around us would evaluate our lives. When Paul instructs believers to imitate him as He imitates Christ, he extends that and also says that the believers ought to imitate those who are imitating Paul! So we can, and should, look to the examples of those around us to see what a godly life lived out truly looks like. While you are looking to godly men and women for an example of Christlikeness, others are looking at you. If you are in a public ministry role, then they are watching you very closely.

Having your life under scrutiny can be uncomfortable. Depending on your personality, you may begin second-guessing your decisions and actions. You may be tempted to base your choices on what you think your congregation would like or approve of above what you feel the Lord calling you to do. Alternately, you may chafe under this close observation and resent the perceived intrusion and unwelcomed feedback.

However, a third option is to see the scrutiny of the congregation as the Lord's protection and guidance in your life. Knowing that we are all 'on display' should be humbling, not terrifying; helpful, not paralyzing. So many godly men and women wisely, actively seek out mentors for the sake of building accountability into our spiritual disciplines. Being a ministry leader visible to the public is an extra level of accountability. For example, if you knew that someone was recording every conversation you had, would it not cause you to speak more carefully? More wholesomely? More encouragingly? More scripturally? Similarly, knowing that the congregation is watching your life, even if from a bit of distance, should help us to stay on track with the scriptural, godly choices that we truly do desire to make.

Matthew 5:14-16 says, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." This is clear evidence that we are to live so as to be seen, but for His glory, not for our own. This is why we must live 'above reproach.' This is why we must pursue godliness in all of our actions and our speech so that, as our lives are on display, the watching world will have no opportunity to speak poorly of

us, or, more importantly, of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are His ambassadors. We are representing Him in His kingdom. This is a great privilege and a great responsibility. Let's not shrink back from it, hiding from the public gaze. But let's live with humility and with intentionality, so that when others see our lives, they truly see Christ in us!

Consider life as a "great parade." We are all following hard after our Lord Jesus – the "Parade Master." As He goes on before us, we watch His example. But we also watch those in front of us, those who are farther along in their faith journey. We need to remember that there are those following behind us watching our example. Praise the Lord for 'such a great cloud of witnesses' both in the Bible and in our personal lives that model for us godly living. And thank the Lord in humility that He is choosing you to be His witness in the lives of those around you. May He give each of us the strength to live well, both privately and publically, for His glory.

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IN REVIEW

- Every Christian needs to be mindful of the way they are living and the reputation they are building by their lives, but a public ministry leader even more so.
- When we pursue a godly life, knowing that we are being watched and imitated, we must remember that it is His glory we are seeking and not our own.
- The call to shine like a city on a hill really gives us no opportunity to hide ourselves away completely. While we may not lead very 'famous' lives, we are all in the public to some extent. We must not waste or dismiss the opportunity to shine with His light in His kingdom for His glory.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Some may read this exhortation and feel like a fraud. We all have shortcomings and know our own failings. Knowing that we are being watched and knowing that we ought to live above reproach may make us feel like we are faking our godliness for the sake of those watching. Take heart: the call is not to perfection in our own strength; the call is to live for Christ, by His strength. Remember: striving for holiness when you don't 'feel' holy is not hypocrisy; it is sanctification which is a gift from God. How do you feel the sanctification of God in your life today?

- Even if you live the 'perfect life,' which you will never actually be able to do, you will still have detractors and those who criticize you or make assumptions about you. You need to respond to them with grace and humility allowing the Lord to be your justifier and vindicator. His opinion of you is what truly counts in the face of false accusations or misplaced criticisms. If you have felt the sting of harsh criticisms or false accusations, write down some names to pray for. Pray now for a humble heart to respond to the criticisms with grace, and pray also for your critics, that they would find the saving grace of Jesus.

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