

The **ENTRUSTED Leader's Workbook**
***“Barnabas”* Edition**

Seven Core Values that Impact Every Leader-to-Follower Relationship:
HEART-MISSION-APPROACH-STABILITY-LIFESTYLE-FORTITUDE-WORLDVIEW

Lesson Fifteen: Living a Lifestyle That Is Beyond Reproach

By
Dr. L. Hollis Jones

The ENTRUSTED Leader's Workbook: "*Barnabas*" Edition

Seven Core Values that Impact Every Leader-to-Follower Relationship:
HEART-MISSION-APPROACH-STABILITY-LIFESTYLE-FORTITUDE-WORLDVIEW

Lesson Fifteen: Living a Lifestyle That Is Beyond Reproach

CORE VALUE: A LIFESTYLE that is Beyond Reproach and publicly demonstrates faith, hope, and love in the marketplace.

BIBLE VERSE(S): 1 Timothy 3:1-7

ONE SIMPLE TRUTH: God expects a leader to publicly display a LIFESTYLE that leaves no opportunity for followers to suspect a lack of self-discipline or control.

APPLICATION: Learn and apply God's Biblical standards to your lifestyle!

Introduction:

A leader's LIFESTYLE stands on public display. The higher one ascends on the leadership ladder the greater the public visibility. How others view a one's personal life directly impacts his or her credibility as a leader. God does not require perfection; however, he does insist that a leader maintain a LIFESTYLE free from the appearance of attitudes and actions inconsistent with his Word. Suspicions of illicit behavior should never swirl around the life of a leader who claims to follow Jesus.

The ENTRUSTED Leadership concept requires a healthy relationship between the leader and the follower. Respect and credibility characterize healthy relationships. Leading as a servant depends on others who follow voluntarily. A leader's LIFESTYLE either enhances his or her respect and credibility with followers or, it erodes them.

Some suggest a leader's personal life does not impact his or her ability to lead others. I emphatically reject this notion. A leader's personal lifestyle directly impacts one's ability to lead others. Poor choices can damage a person's admiration for his or her exceptional professional skill and diminish one's respect and credibility.

God expects a leader to publicly display a LIFESTYLE that leaves no opportunity for followers to suspect a lack of self-discipline or control. Followers do not respect or trust a leader who they suspect cannot manage his or her personal affairs. Suspicion that a leader's personal life is in disarray creates insecurity among followers. Why should followers believe a leader can oversee the complexity surrounding others if the leader cannot control one's own life?

God's standard for a personal lifestyle exceeds that of the world. We live in a culture which sets the moral bar based on what the majority deems socially acceptable. Over the past fifty plus years, the world has lowered the moral bar. God's Biblical standard, however, has not changed. God holds a leader to a higher standard because God understands the impact a leader's personal life has on the lives of others. Read 1st Timothy 3:1-7 and answer the following questions.

Questions of the Biblical Text¹ (1 Timothy 3:1-2a)

“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, ...” (NIV)

What does it mean to “be above reproach”?

How does God's standard of living “above reproach” impact your personal lifestyle?

¹ Unless otherwise noted the questions listed in *The ENTRUSTED Leader's Workbook* are based on: *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984)

In your own words, compare and contrast a leader’s living a personal lifestyle that is “above reproach” to a leader who does not. Include in your comments thoughts on the different levels of credibility and respect these leaders might have in the eyes of their followers.

Commentary

According to the Apostle Paul, one who chooses the role of a leader desires a noble task. The desire to serve as a leader becomes a good and honorable intention. To remain noble, however, a leader must live above reproach. A leader must not only live a life free of wrongdoing, but also a leader must avoid any behavior that might even raise a question or suspicion of wrongdoing. Paul illustrates what this means in 1st Timothy 3:1-7. Paul starts with a challenge to live “above reproach.” What follows this exhortation is a long list of attitudes and actions that characterize how “living above reproach” might apply to one’s life. His description of being “above reproach” equates to what I call a “socially blameless lifestyle.”

Paul said: “...the overseer must be above reproach...” (NIV) The context of Paul’s instruction concerns church leaders. The application of a lifestyle above reproach, however, extends to every arena in which a follower of Christ leads, including the marketplace. To fully appreciate why a leader must live above reproach, one must understand the role of an overseer.

The Greek term used by Paul in 1st Timothy 3:2 that the New International Version of the Bible translates overseer as is *episkopos*. Strong defines this word as follows: "...a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, ..." ² The basic idea is that a leader watches over, cares for, protects, and insures the integrity, accuracy, and purity of an activity. A leader charged with this public responsibility must also live this prescribed way privately or forfeit his or her credibility with others.

A leader "must" live beyond reproach. This characteristic is not optional for a leader. In order to be the type of leader God desires, one must live a socially blameless lifestyle. Given the noble nature of the task of leading, God requires an honorable lifestyle. Paul's suggests for a follower of Christ, that leading and living above reproach go hand-in-hand and remain inseparable. Paul rejected the idea that a person might appear excellent as a leader and less than excellent morally. Leaders bear the responsibility for setting the moral bar for those he or she leads. Followers will respond in kind to a leader's lifestyle based on the attitudes and actions observed, not just the words spoken.

Living "above reproach" means to adopt a personal lifestyle which provides no opportunity for blame or criticism. Such a person guards against behavior that others might question, misunderstand, or misconstrue. Living a socially blameless life involves avoiding life choices that discredit or disgrace a person.

²James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996), G1985.

One must realize that in some situations, simply abstaining from a behavior may not suffice to appear “above reproach”. For example, the Bible states clearly that drunkenness remains a sin. The abuse of alcohol will discredit and disgrace a leader. Simply abstaining from drunkenness may not be enough for a leader. A Christ follower may find that total abstinence from the consumption of alcohol provides the only alternative to avoid the appearance of drunkenness. The purpose of Paul’s charge to appear “above reproach” involves protecting the respect and credibility of leader’s who portray following Christ.

The *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines the noun “reproach” as: “**1**: an expression of rebuke or disapproval...**3**: a cause or occasion of blame, discredit, or disgrace.” And as a verb: “**1**: to express disappointment in or displeasure with (a person) for conduct that is blameworthy or in need of amendment”.³ Reproach characterizes the person who has chosen conduct deemed as disgraceful and blameworthy. Such behavior brings discredit and needs amending. Conduct which provokes “reproach” destroys a person’s credibility and respect with others.

Paul instructs leaders to live above reproach. Leaders must behave carefully so as to avoid the appearance of conduct deemed by others to be unacceptable. To do this, one must display behavior that cannot be misconstrued by others. For example, simply visiting a bar may lead to the appearance of drunkenness. Leaders must avoid any appearance that damages one’s credibility with followers, even if the conduct stands totally innocent in nature.

³Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*., Includes Index., 10th ed. (Springfield, Mass., U.S.A.: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1993).

Living “above” compromising situations and choices means to be so far removed that no association can be made. For a leader, this means avoiding any and all situations or relationships that could possibly give the appearance of wrongdoing. For example: a leader should NEVER allow himself or herself to be alone for an extended period of time with a member of the opposite sex. Even if the relationship is 100% innocent, the appearance alone raises questions and diminishes credibility. Living “above reproach” requires one to exceed innocence and to avoid situations that might be misconstrued.

What follows Paul’s charge to leaders to “be above reproach” is a long list of attitudes and actions that directly impact a leader’s credibility and respectability with others. Reread 1st Timothy 3:1-7 and answer the following questions.

Questions of the Biblical Text (1 Timothy 3:2b-7)

What is the first relationship Paul says a leader must keep free of suspicion or reproach? Explain why you think Paul started with this relationship.

Write a simple definition of “temperate.” Explain how a lack of moderation might damage a leader’s credibility and respectability with others, especially in regard to the consumption of any controlled substances like drugs and alcohol.

“Self-control” requires self-initiative that curbs one’s illicit desires. How is credibility impacted when others observe a leader whose lifestyle maintains “self-control”?

Define “hospitable” and explain why such an attitude might be important to a leader?

How might a lifestyle of drunkenness negatively impact a leader’s relationship with his or her followers?

How would you like to follow a violent and quarrelsome leader? What emotions might reside inside the hearts of the followers of such a leader?

Later in this letter to Timothy, Paul says: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1st Timothy 6:10 NIV) Describe how being “a lover of money” might negatively impact a leader’s relationship with followers?

Commentary

The moral excellence of a leader’s private life directly impacts the health of the leader-to-follower relationship. Questionable attitudes and behaviors damage the

respectability of a leader. After encouraging leaders to adopt a lifestyle that is “above reproach,” Paul lists specific areas of a person’s life that a leader must publicly display noble and honorable behavior. A deterioration of anyone of these areas opens a leader to reproach.

The first area Paul discusses concerns the marriage relationship. Paul says a leader must be “the husband of but one wife.” By God’s design, the man functions as the leader of this union. This passage provides a principle of leadership that applies to male and female leaders alike. The marital relationship generates the most intimate and sacred of all human relationships. A couple enters this union with covenantal promises intended to endure a life time. Male and female leader’s can apply the following principle based on this passage: A leader who does not respect his or her commitment to the marriage relationship cannot be counted on to respect the leader-follower relationship. Followers who observe a leader who will casually ignore or disregard his or her intimate marriage relationship have no choice but to wonder if this leader will also disregard a less intimate professional relationship. Such unfaithfulness inspires suspicion and insecurity on the part of followers and damages a leader’s credibility and respect.

Paul next turns to the moral quality of temperance. The *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines the term “temperate” as follows: “marked by moderation,...keeping or held within limits: not extreme or excessive,...moderate in indulgence of appetite or desire, moderate in the use of intoxicating liquors,...marked by an absence or avoidance of extravagance, violence, or extreme partisanship.”⁴ Moderation signifies a lifestyle under control. Excessive behavior of any kind suggests a lack of

⁴Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*., Includes Index., 10th ed. (Springfield, Mass., U.S.A.: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1993).

discipline and restraint. A temperate leader builds credibility with followers when he or she imposes personal limits of behavior on himself or herself that appear consistent with God's standards.

Initiating control of one's self-centered desires is a mark of maturity. Unfortunately, most people rely on limits set by others, such as governmental laws or organizational policies. The leader that demonstrates the maturity of self-control builds respect and admiration among his or her follows. The person who cannot control his or her personal selfish desires, however, leaves no reason for his or her followers to trust that he or she can lead.

Hospitable people extend comfort and kindness to guests and strangers alike. The person who displays hospitality to others gives generously of his or her time, energy, and worldly goods. Typically, a hospitable person focuses selflessly on serving the needs of others with no expectation of reward. Hospitable acts performed by a leader communicate an attitude of kindness and generosity to his or her followers. Followers view the leader as open and approachable. This type of behavior promotes a healthy leader to follower relationship.

A drunkard loses all respect in the eyes of others. Everyone knows that the faculties of a drunk are seriously impaired. A leader who allows drugs or alcohol to control his or her judgment has no right to expect others to voluntarily follow. Drunkenness destroys credibility. The appearance of drunkenness raises questions of respect in the minds of others.

A violent and quarrelsome leader strikes fear into the hearts of those that follow. Most followers will seek to avoid contact and conflict with such an individual. No real

relationship can exist with his or her followers when a leader resorts to physical, verbal, or emotional abuse. Scared and downtrodden followers resist following abusive leaders.

Paul starts his list reputation builders and busters with the marriage commitment. Faithfully loving one's spouse enhances one's reputation in the eyes of others. Paul ends this list of reputation builders and busters with a condemnation of the love of money.

Please note that Paul does not condemn the possession of money. Being wealthy is not a sin; loving money is. Lovers of money often behave in a greedy and covetous manner.

No amount of money satisfies one who craves prosperity. The pursuit of wealth consumes his or her every action, thought, and motive. The gain of money often drives leaders to use their followers to this end. This one sided existence forges an unhealthy leader-to follower relationship. Followers do not respect leaders consumed with acquiring personal fortune.

Application

Living "Above Reproach," beyond the slightest suspicion of moral compromise, remains essential for today's marketplace leader. God's absolute Biblical standards shine in stark contrast to the world's standards of moral relativism. To function as the leader God desires, you must learn and apply God's Biblical standards to your lifestyle! To make these standards a regular part of your LIFESTYLE, two practical steps will start the process.

The first step one must take concerns a choice of the will. A leader must decide which moral bar will shape one's lifestyle. The world's relative standards appeal to man's sinful heart because this lifestyle embraces the false idea that each individual gets to decide for himself or herself what is right and wrong. In the world's system, living above

reproach becomes an irrelevant concept because if one's behavior raises suspicion by another then that person is considered to be judgmental or intolerant. Sadly, much of this thinking has infiltrated the evangelical community as well.

God's Biblical standards allow no room for relative moral behavior. God's moral bar remains absolute and fixed and does not fluctuate according to the tides of what society deems to be acceptable behavior. As a follower of Jesus Christ who leads in the marketplace you have a choice. You must decide which moral bar will shape your LIFESTYLE. The decision you make on this question will determine if you live above reproach or not.

The second step assumes that a leader chooses to allow God's Biblical standards to shape one's lifestyle. If one makes such a choice then he or she bears the responsibility of learning and obeying God's Word. The Bible makes God's moral bar clear. Living above this bar will result in a lifestyle that can be said to be "above reproach."

Conclusion

God expects a leader to publicly display a LIFESTYLE that leaves no opportunity for followers to suspect a lack of self discipline or control. In 1st Timothy 3:1-7, the Apostle Paul challenges leaders to live "above reproach." He exhorts leaders to adopt certain social attitudes and actions that will enhance credibility and respect with one's followers. To be the leader God desires in the marketplace, you too must accept the challenge to live above reproach. You can go a long way toward building credibility and respect with those you lead by publicly displaying: faithfulness to your most intimate relationships, temperance, self-control, hospitality, sobriety, gentleness, peace, and a satisfaction with God's provisions.