Spiritual Leadership: An Exegetical Examination of Daniel's Spiritual Leadership Style

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Abstract

Spiritual leadership often centers on an intrinsic motivation to make a difference in life beyond simply achieving organizational goals. Spiritual leadership is associated with positive traits like integrity, honesty, caring and justice. Those who exercise spiritual leadership are known for strong connectedness through dyadic relationships which leads to the ability to positively influence peers and followers alike. This work sets forth an exegetical analysis of Daniel's spiritual leadership and its positive influence on those in his life.

Keywords: spiritual leadership, integrity, honesty, caring, justice, influence.

Introduction

The prophet Daniel is among the most fascinating figures in all of Judeo-Christian scripture. Daniel lived in the late 7th century B.C. and was blessed by God with a long life that reached the late 6th century B.C. He lived in a tumultuous time for the nation of Israel. For some 200 years God had been warning Israel of impending judgment for their disobedience to His law. In 605 B.C. the warning became reality for Judah with the arrival of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian army had recently crushed the Egyptians at Carchemish and the Hebrew army was no match for them. Jerusalem surrendered and Judah became a vassal state of the

ever-expanding Babylonian empire. It was Nebuchadnezzar's practice to take the brightest and most skilled men from conquered nations back to Babylon and train them to serve in his government. Daniel was selected from among the royal house of Israel to be trained in the ways of the Chaldees and thus serve the King of Babylon.

The biblical account of Daniel's life describes how he was elevated to the position of prime minister over all of Babylon. The story revolves around a dream God had given Nebuchadnezzar. The king had a dream that disturbed him and none of his wise men could satisfy him with an interpretation. To be sure his wise men were telling him the truth, Nebuchadnezzar demanded they tell him the dream and the interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar became angry when none of his wise men could tell him the dream, so he ordered the execution of all the wise men in Babylon. Daniel asked the king for a reprieve so he could pray and seek the answer from God. The reprieve was granted, and God revealed the dream and interpretation to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar was so impressed with Daniel's ability to reveal the dream and interpretation that he made Daniel the prime minister of Babylon.

The record of Daniel's leadership in the Babylonian kingdom affords a unique opportunity to examine spiritual leadership from a biblical perspective. Daniel exercised influential and effective leadership in a challenging and often dangerous environment. This paper will present an exegetical analysis of Daniel's spiritual leadership style and show how it relates to spiritual leadership in a contemporary setting.

Literature Review

Over the last twenty years interest in spirituality and spiritual leadership in the workplace has been on the rise (Johnson, 2015; Daft & Lane, 2018). According to Reave (2005), spirituality and spiritual leadership are linked to intrinsic motivation, reliable autonomy, integrity, honesty, humility, and

compassion for others. Fry (2003) connected spirituality and spiritual leadership with a learning organization. Fry went on to show that spiritual leadership is connected to three primary elements which enhance leader influence, the elements of vision, altruism, and hope. Roof (2015) connected spiritual leadership to higher employee engagement, greater employee job satisfaction, organizational connectedness, and organizational loyalty. Phipps (2012) said the natural human desire for connectedness and self-achievement are what makes spiritual leadership so effective. The literature shows spiritual leadership as effective for enhancing employee commitment and thus productivity and organizational performance.

Resent research has expanded on these thoughts and shown that spiritual leadership is effective in increasing employee quality of work life, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior (Johnly and Johnly, 2018). Yang et al., (2017) more specifically examined the importance of perceived leader integrity with regard to relational energy. Increased leader to employee relational energy was found to have a strong positive effect on employee job performance. Reddy (2019) identified spirituality in the workplace as an enhancement to effective servant leadership. Roof et al., (2017) identified spiritual engagement as beneficial in restoring "personal resources" which enhance one's ability as a leader to engage in servant, transformational, and ethical leadership (p. 216). They define spiritual engagement as, "an evolutionary, spiritually transforming set of beliefs, behaviors, expectations and emotions that have the potential to affect ethics, values, identity, and organizational dynamics" (p. 230). According to these authors, the factors that have a positive influence on spiritual engagement are worship, meditation, fasting, and rest. Finally, Hester (2020) pointed out that spirituality is directly connected to "learning to see others with empathy and compassion" (p. 2). This cursory review of the literature demonstrates how spiritual leadership can be discussed in terms of leadership behaviors and in terms of personal

"motivating beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and expectations" (Roof, et al., 2017, p. 216).

Oh & Wang (2020) synthesized the various definitions of spiritual leadership into three groups or categories. First, spiritual leaders are known for demonstrating higher ethical values such as integrity, honesty, caring, and justice. Secondly, spiritual leaders are often seen as valuing interconnectedness. Spiritual leaders tend to engage with, guide, and encourage followers. Spiritual leaders see the inestimable value in every human being. Finally, spiritual leaders motivate and influence followers to achieve organizational goals, mission, and vision. Oh & Wang (2020) summed it up nicely by saying, "In essence, spiritual leaders are those who inspire and motivate followers/coworkers based on organizational and ethical values to build a meaningful and connected work environment" (p. 232). It is this summary by which the leadership of Daniel will be evaluated.

Integrity, Honesty, Caring, and Justice

Daniel's spiritual leadership is seen in his exercising of integrity, honesty, caring, and justice. In 539 B.C. king Cyrus of the Persian empire conquered the city of Babylon and in doing so conquered the Babylonian empire. In Daniel 6 we find a description of events that followed shortly thereafter. Darius was placed in charge of Babylon and the surrounding new territory of the Persian empire. One of the first things Darius did was establish a hierarchical governmental system whereby the king's interest would be protected. Darius appointed 120 satraps or governors to rule over 120 regions. Over the 120 satraps Darius appointed three rulers, presumably each having 40 satraps for which they were responsible. The three rulers then reported directly to Darius. One of the three rulers Darius appointed over the satraps was Daniel.

One might reasonably wonder why Daniel, a survivor of the last regime, was appointed to such a prominent position of

leadership. The answer seems to be twofold. First, Daniel had prophesied the fall of Babylon to the Persian empire. That prophesy certainly reached the ears of both Cyrus and Darius. Daniel's reputation as a prophet preceded him and Darius wanted this man to serve in his administration. Secondly, Daniel was a skilled leader and manager. Daniel had served as the prime minister of Babylon for years which qualified him to continue serving under the new regime. Daniel had what one might call "corporate knowledge" and was therefore valuable for a smooth transition to the new administration.

Daniel's performance as a leader was so effective Darius considered making him vice regent of the whole kingdom. "Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm" (Daniel 6:3). The "excellent spirit" in Daniel can certainly be attributed to his spiritual relationship with God. Daniel was committed to honoring God with his life. Honoring God included integrity, honesty, caring, and compassion in all his interactions and functions as a leader.

Daniel's favor with Darius caused some of his peers to be jealous. They wanted the prime minster position for themselves and could not suffer the thought of a Hebrew being in charge. This group of men set about finding fault with Daniel so they might bring accusation against him to Darius. They searched for any failure or weakness in Daniel's professional life whereby they might make accusation against Daniel. "So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him" (Daniel 6:4). The integrity and honesty of Daniel could not be impugned. His relationship with those under his charge was impeccable. His justice in dealing with the affairs of the king was beyond reproach or even the appearance of evil. This group of wicked men did their best to find some fault in Daniel's

leadership and administration of the king's affairs and could not.

By the testimony of his enemies, Daniel exhibited the traits of a spiritual leader. Daniel's integrity was impeccable. Integrity has been defined as a wholeness or completeness in a leader's life (Johnson, 2015). A leader demonstrates integrity by being the same person in public and in private. A leader with integrity will be transparent in all they do. Daniel was honest in all his dealings with the king and those under his charge. Daniel demonstrated his care and compassion by being a good steward of all that had been placed under his control. Daniel was a spiritual leader in a hostile and difficult work environment.

Interconnectedness

Interconnectedness is a natural trait of the spiritual leader. To be interconnected means to build dyadic relationships with acquaintances, professional peers, and those over whom the leader has responsibility. An example of Daniel's interconnectedness is found in the historical events of Daniel 2. In chapter 2 Daniel recounts how King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that disturbed him. The dream was a direct revelation from God concerning the kingdom of Babylon and the kingdoms to follow. Nebuchadnezzar called on the wise men of his court to give him the interpretation of the dream. To be sure his wise men were giving him the correct interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar commanded them to tell him the dream and its interpretation. He reasoned that if they could tell him the dream then their interpretation could be trusted. The wise men pleaded with the king to tell them the dream and promised to give him the correct interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar refused to share the dream and threatened to have all the wise men in Babylon executed if they did not reveal both the dream and its interpretation.

The wise men were unable to meet the king's demands concerning the dream and the execution order was given. All

the wise men in Babylon were to be executed immediately. According to Daniel 2:14, Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, began to carry out the command. Daniel was among the wise men of Babylon and thus was included in the execution order. When Arioch approached, Daniel inquired concerning the circumstances of the execution order. Daniel's interconnectedness with Arioch is evident immediately in that Arioch took the time to answer Daniel's question. Arioch explained the dilemma of the dream and the failure of the wise men to meet the king's demands. As a spiritual leader, Daniel had built a relationship with Arioch where there was mutual respect.

Daniel's interconnectedness is further demonstrated by a request and the granting of that request. Daniel asked Arioch for an audience with the king to make a request. The request was for the king to delay the execution so Daniel would have time to search out the dream and its interpretation. Daniel wanted time to pray and seek God's wisdom in the matter. Daniel was sure God had sent the dream and God would give him the answers he needed. "So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation" (Daniel 2:16). Daniel's interconnectedness as a spiritual leader was part of the reason the king granted a stay of execution.   God used Daniel's spiritual leadership interconnectedness to move the heart of Nebuchadnezzar to grant the request.

Daniel quickly gathered his friends, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abed-Nego), and asked them to pray with him for God's mercy in revealing the dream. Daniel's interconnectedness is further demonstrated here as he included his friends in the accomplishment of this task. God heard their prayers and that very evening revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel. Daniel went into the king's presence the next day and revealed all the king wanted to know about the dream. Daniel was careful to give God all the credit. King Nebuchadnezzar was so impressed with Daniel that he

promoted him to the position of Prime Minister over Babylon. Daniel's interconnectedness is further seen in the inclusion of his friends. "Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king" (Daniel 2:49). Daniel requested his friends be promoted with him and the request was granted. This historical account clearly demonstrates Daniel's spiritual leadership trait of interconnectedness.

Influencing Followers

One of the core elements of any leadership model is influence (Northouse, 2019). Daniel's influence as a spiritual leader is clearly seen in his involvement in the lives of his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshack, and Abed-Nego were their Babylonian names). Daniel and his friends were taken captive by the Babylonians at the same time. All four of these young men attended training in Babylon together and as seen above, they served as administrators in the Babylonian government. Daniel's influence as a spiritual leader is best observed when his three friends faced an ethical dilemma and made the right choice.

Daniel 3 opens with Nebuchadnezzar ordering the construction of a large statue on the plain of Dura. The statue was covered in gold and would have been a most impressive sight for all who saw it. The idea for this statue came from the dream Daniel had interpreted, as recorded in Daniel 2. In the dream God had shown Nebuchadnezzar a large statue composed of various metals. The head of gold on the statue in the dream represented Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar decided to build a complete statue out of gold and place it on the flat plain so everyone could see it.

The problem came when Nebuchadnezzar commanded all his administrators and government officials to fall down and worship the image. Apparently, the king decided to unify his

government under one religious symbol. To worship the image was synonymous with patriotism and support of the government. To reject worshipping the image was synonymous with treason and rebellion against the king. When it was time to worship the image, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah politely declined. Daniel is not mentioned in the narrative, so it is often presumed he was away on government business.

When Nebuchadnezzar learned of the three Hebrew young men declining to participate in the wordship of the image, he was angry. He called them before his throne and threatened to burn them alive in a furnace if they did not change their mind and worship the image. The response of these three young men to the king is classic, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16b-18). These young men respectfully stood their ground concerning the law of God. They were forbidden by the law of God from worshipping anyone or anything other than Jehovah God. These young men would not be persuaded to break God's law, even on pain of death.

The conviction of these three young men was their own, however, it was greatly influenced by their friend and leader, Daniel. Daniel had set the example for all to follow shortly after arriving in Babylon. In Daniel 1 the king prescribed food for the captives that included meat Hebrews were not allowed to eat. Daniel's response looks very similar to the one found in this story. Daniel 1:8a says, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank." Daniel's conviction and example from the beginning had influenced those around him and was later seen in the choice of his three friends. As a spiritual leader Daniel was incredibly influential

in the lives of all who came into contact with him, including the king and other government officials.

Conclusion

Spiritual leadership is influential, inspiring, and serves as a prototype for others to follow. Fry (2003) asserts spiritual leaders are motivated intrinsically, regardless of circumstances or outside pressures. This intrinsic motivation comes from one's personal relationship with God. A spiritual leader operates as a steward of human resources for which one must give an account. This kind of intrinsic motivation helps a spiritual leader influence others with empathy and compassion (Hester, 2020). Spiritual leaders exude integrity and honesty which builds trust and allows influence to take place (Oh & Wang, 2020).

Contemporary leaders would do well to learn from the spiritual leadership example found in the life of Daniel. The most important element in any leader's life is integrity (Samul, 2020). This is particularly true in the life of a spiritual leader. For the spiritual leader integrity is connected to one's relationship with God. Being the same outwardly and inwardly brings peace and can be a powerful tool to influence and lead others. Daniel demonstrated spiritual leadership. May contemporary leaders follow his example.

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