

## **THREE LEADERSHIP GEMS FROM GENESIS**

@ BTS 31<sup>st</sup> COMMENCEMENT SERVICE

by Rev Peter Lin

Today is a joyous celebration. We have 28 students graduating from our degree and diploma programs. You represent the future of BTS in God's kingdom. We are so proud of you.

Today's commencement is also the first of its kind. Not only do we have students graduating from our degrees and diploma programs. This is the first time that we have leaders graduating from our 1-year training in AIM – Advanced Institute of Ministry. AIM was founded 2 years ago to meet the laity and emerging leaders' needs of our Baptist churches. It aims to build lay leadership that is team-based, collaboration-oriented, kingdom-minded, and spiritually formed. They represent the leadership of 11 of our 37 Baptist churches. We are so proud of you.

Whether you are a graduate of our degree programs or AIM, one thing will happen whether you want it or not. Once you get the paper in your hand, your friends at church will expect you to lead. You will be thrust into leadership positions – willingly or not.

And so as you change status from students to being our alumni, I want to give you three key leadership tips from Genesis. They are in the form of three Ss. Good leadership needs strength. Great leadership comes from the soul. Outstanding leadership needs speed.

### **1. First, strength. The Strength of a good leader is dreaming.**

Genesis spends twenty percent of the book focusing on Joseph as a leader. Joseph is a dreamer. You know his dreams. Even in his youthful days, he dreamt of leading his clan. He dreamt that his parents and his brothers would bow down to him. Even his brothers who hated him recognized him as a dreamer.

All good leaders have a dream of where he is heading and that dream fuels their imagination and captures their followers' hearts. In the 21st century, we call this visioning.

Dear students, the difference between leaders and followers is vision. And the difference between good leaders and better leaders is the clarity of the vision. If you are going to lead, you will need a clear dream/vision of where you are going. Only then will people follow you.

But most dreamers are just daydreamers. Nothing gets done. But Joseph is special.

Joseph is a dreamer who finishes. He focuses on the finish line. When he was helping Pharaoh with his vision, he implemented a plan that led to the flourishing of Egypt in the midst of a global famine. When it comes to his own personal dream of leading the clan, Genesis showed that he engineered the circumstances to help his brothers, step by step, to confess, to repent and sincerely humbly accept his leadership wholeheartedly.

Students, learn to start your ministry with a vision. And never let your sight drift away from the finish line. This will give you the strength to navigate the journey.

## **2. Second, soul. The soul of a great leader is compassion.**

Genesis 5 – 23 focuses on two leaders - Noah and Abraham. Noah was the leader of a new world order. Abraham was the leader of God's chosen people.

God thinks highly of Noah. Genesis describes him as "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God." God commanded Noah 7 times and the Bible recorded that Noah obeyed God all 7 times. Noah was faithful. But Noah did not finish well. He was the 1st drunkard recorded in the bible and waking up from the stupor of alcohol, he called a curse on his youngest son Ham and his grandson Canaan.

Dear student, you are graduating today but that only means you are enjoying a good beginning. Please learn from Noah that a leader who started well faithfully could be sidetracked carelessly and ended up losing his way easily.

On the other hand, Abraham, also heeded God's call faithfully to leave his country, clan, and family. He left all his security blankets behind. There were two blemishes on his resume – dealing with his wife and his concubine. But other than that, he had a clean record.

The New Testament gave Abraham the highest accolade as our father of faith but not to Noah. Why not? Both were obedient, but only Abraham was compassionate.

When there was a global Crisis and the whole world was threatened. The Bible never recorded Noah ever speaking up for his neighbors. Abraham was different. When his nephew Lot was kidnapped, Abraham saved him. When the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were threatened with destruction, Abraham wrestled with God for their safety.

Remember the negotiations? Abraham pleaded, "If there are only 10 righteous men in the cities, can you please spare the cities." Abraham obeyed God but his love for his fellow men took him a step beyond obedience – he wrestled with God for them. That is compassion. That is the soul of a great leader.

Students, after leading for a while, following a vision, you will likely get stuck in a rut of just "doing" the right things. Like the church of Ephesus, you look good on the outside but the compassion for God's people has burned dry and the love for God has grown cold. Keep a check on your soul every three months. Ask the questions of the soul: 'Am I just "doing" things? am I still passionate for His people?'. Without passion that comes from compassion, the leadership soul will wither and die.

## **3. Third, speed. The speed of an outstanding leader is in his recovery.**

One of the things that all leaders have to face is making mistakes. Even great leaders like Abraham/Noah made some major mistakes. I recently asked a cardiologist why he made patients run on a treadmill. Is it to see how high the heartbeat goes up to? He said 'Yes' but there is a more important element. It is to see how fast the heartbeat goes back to normal.

Making mistakes is human. An outstanding leader makes a speedy recovery from mistakes.

When I was interviewed for my first pastorate, I was asked a strange question. 'When was the last time you say sorry?'

As I gain more experience, I see the wisdom of the question. Saying Sorry is an admission that I made a mistake, or owning up to committing a sin against someone. Leaders are public figures and it can be shameful to admit to making mistakes.

But without owning up and admitting our own mistakes fast, we will be stuck for a long time, and many leaders never recover. We will be tempted to think that our mistakes are another person's fault. Saying sorry, admitting, and confessing is a shortcut to recovery.

Judah's life in Genesis helps us to understand this. Judah had a bad start in life. He was the mastermind behind selling Joseph to slavery. Genesis spent very little time on Judah. But the amazing thing is that his name has remained prominent among the Jews until now. The Jews are not called "Abrahamites", "Josephites", or "Noahites". The Jews ceased to be called Israelites when the Northern Kingdom disappeared. But even when the S Kingdom of Judah was exiled to Babylon ... even today, the Jews are still called the Jews which is named after Judah. Why?

Jewish Scholars said that Judah was the 1st person in the OT to show a repentant spirit. Judah confesses to Joseph (before realizing that this is his brother) that he has once sold his own brother to slavery and he can never let another brother Benjamin come to harm. In fact, he did the most courageous thing; he said to Joseph – 'take me as a prisoner instead'. And in his courage to confess and repent from his sin, he became an outstanding leader in both the OT and the NT. In fact, God made him the forefather of King David and our Lord Jesus.

In my years of ministry and parenting, my biggest shaping moments are always about owning up and admitting my mistakes. And it always starts with three words "I am sorry".

In your ministry, you will make mistakes and you will be tempted to push the blame to others and behave like a victim. "Don't, don't, don't" because that is the sure way to destroy your leadership.

When things go wrong – ask yourself/your spouse the honest question "Am I responsible? What is my part?". If you are, go on the super highway to recover – confess, repent, and start by saying – "I am sorry".

Remember the three tips: Start your ministry with a clear vision that will give you the strength to finish well. Check your compassion index for the people God gave you. That will keep your soul healthy. Finally, look into the mirror to own up to your mistakes and say "I am sorry". That will speed up your recovery of intimacy with God.

Three hard lessons, but if you do them well, you will not just be celebrating today but at an alumnus meeting 20 years from now as you joyously witness each other becoming channels of His blessing.