

The Nature of Loving Leadership: How Leaders Should Show the Love of God

By Dr. Juli Slattery for Today's Christian Woman



There is a lot of talk today about God's love and what it looks like. The nature of God's love is important for every one of us to grasp, but it's particularly critical for leaders. By leaders, I'm not just referring to teachers and pastors but also to parents, husbands, and mentors. One of our greatest tasks is to show the love of God to the world with whom we interact.

In Exodus, God has given us a picture of two different leaders: Moses and Aaron. They had drastically different approaches to teaching the Israelites about God and modeling his love.

Aaron represents what many Christians define as *loving leadership* today. He essentially catered to the Israelite's desire. Let's set the scene: Moses was meeting with the Lord on Mount Sinai. He had been up there for 40 days and the people were getting restless. They started to wonder if he would ever come back. In their doubt, the Israelites grasped for the assurance of the gods they had known and worshiped in Egypt.

Come, make gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him. (Exodus 32:1, NIV)

To appease the people's anxiety, Aaron told them to melt their gold jewelry and create an idol to worship. In one sense, Aaron was probably trying to avoid a riot, but he also led the Israelites into great sin. The whole purpose of their time in the desert was to learn to worship. The Lord, through Moses, told Pharaoh time and time again, "Let my people go, so they can worship me" (Exodus 8:1). Instead of guiding the Israelites through their fear, Aaron encouraged them to worship with the pagan rituals they had learned in Egypt.

As Moses was meeting with the omniscient Lord, he learned of the great apostasy that was taking place. God was so angry at the Israelite's idolatry that he told Moses he would destroy them and start over again building a new people with Moses as the patriarch. Instead of selfishly agreeing to this, Moses reminded the Lord of his covenant and interceded for the Israelites. Moses went so far as to offer his own soul in exchange for the Israelites. He told God, if you won't forgive the people, then blot me out of your book and redeem them ().

When Moses came down from the mountain, he was furious at the people for which he had just interceded. His righteous anger at their sin called for swift discipline. When Moses confronted Aaron in his failed leadership, Aaron came up with excuses, blaming the people and even claiming that the golden calf magically appeared. "When they brought [the gold] to me, I simply threw it into the fire—and out came this calf!" (verse 24).

What happened next is hard for us to swallow. Moses charged the Levites to kill those who were in open rebellion and idolatry. Three thousand people were killed based on Moses' command. We must remember that while divine discipline takes a different form today, God still confronts and punishes idolatry and rebellion. Spiritual leaders are called not just to lay down their lives for their "sheep," but also to teach the majesty and righteousness of a holy God.

So let me ask you, which leader showed his love for the Israelites? Was it Aaron who compromised to appease the people and then blamed them? Or was it Moses who offered himself as a sacrifice for their rebellion and implemented God's discipline? Moses was a human leader who demonstrated that we can hold to deep love and concern for people while also having righteous anger at assaults to the holiness of God.

How did Moses become such a great leader? He spent time with God. In fact, we are told that Moses had intimate fellowship with God. While you and I can't climb a mountain and meet face to face with God as Moses did, we still have the opportunity to have intimate fellowship with him every day, asking him to show us the nature of his love.

We will never learn about loving leadership simply through reading books but by spending time pursuing the heart of God and learning from his guidance. God never displayed permissive leadership, calling it love. He has always led his people by providing what they need rather than by giving them what they demand.