Hi,

Today’s updates:

* My noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet today on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle). We will be in Genesis 16, the story of Hagar and Ishmael.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

Lots of leadership examples have been put before us in recent months. So, we are going to take the next few days to consider leadership in the model of Jesus. First, we are called to lead with a servant’s heart.

***Matthew 20:25-28 (NRSV)***

**But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”**

***Hebrews 12:1-3 (NRSV)***

**Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.**

***1 Corinthians 10:13 (NRSV)***

**No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.**

We are all asked to lead. Sometimes in a large organization. Sometimes in a small group. Among a group of friends. Or in our family. All of us are called upon to influence the behavior and thinking of other people with whom we are seeking a shared goal. Leadership is inescapable. We all lead and we all are led.

Jesus led. In leadership-speak, Jesus formed a team, showed them a vision of where they were headed, and taught them how to get there in everything he said and did. But even for Jesus, leading wasn’t easy. His disciples were often confused, blind to the larger picture, unable to understand or live out what Jesus was trying to teach them – at least until after Jesus was gone. For then, over the next decades, Jesus’ disciples, now apostles, spread across the Mediterranean world, building for the kingdom of God.

Ken Blanchard of *One-Minute Manager* fame, set out to learn more about Jesus’ leadership from the four gospel accounts. Blanchard writes, “I realized that Christians have more in Jesus than just a spiritual leader; we have a practical and effective leadership for all organizations, for all people, and all situations.” Perhaps so. It is certainly a provocative claim, but may neglect the distinctiveness of the Church and the work of the Holy Spirit in a world filled with people who are at best apathetic and, at worst, hostile to God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Still, we can learn a great deal about leadership from Jesus. We just have to be ready to be surprised . . . as surprised as the disciples.

*Wishing to serve*

Jesus’ leadership began with the heart, not the head, not even the hands. A humble heart. A giving heart. A serving heart. Today’s passage from Matthew is taken from the last days before Jesus’ crucifixion. Two disciples, the brothers James and John, the sons of Zebedee, get their mom to go to Jesus and ask that her sons get elevated among the group so that they can sit at Jesus’ right and left hands in the kingdom. When the other disciples hear what had happened, they are understandably upset and go to Jesus, who seizes the teaching moment. The Gentiles may lord it over one another, Jesus says, each seeking to rise higher than the next, but that is not to be the way of Jesus’ disciples. They are to emulate Jesus, remembering that they are to serve, not be served.

This isn’t about being nice or even helpful. It is about putting the interests of others ahead of our own (remember Phil. 2:1-11 from last week), even when that means substantial sacrifices from us. Blanchard writes, “A heart motivated by self-interest looks at the world as a ‘give a little, take a lot’ proposition. People with hearts motivated by self-interest put their agenda, safety, status, and gratification ahead of that of those affected by their thoughts and actions.” The question Blanchard asks is pretty much the same question Jesus asked the brothers James and John: “Are you a self-serving leader or a servant leader?”

Likewise, the writer of Hebrews, sometimes referred to as the Preacher, points us toward the example of Christ. Even when we tire or lose heart, we are to, as the late John West puts it, “keep on keepin’ on” for Christ, our model and our hope. Jesus endured, setting aside humiliation and shame, always keeping his eye and his heart on the goal (again, back to Philippians 2:1-11).

*Ego*

Ken Blanchard has a clever way of creating helpful acronyms and charts. For example, he asks whether our ego gets in the way of our faithful obedience. Does our ego “*E*dge *G*od *O*ut?” Do we allow ourselves to be driven by pride and fear? Pride pushes us toward the promotion of ourselves, at the expense of others. Fear pushes us toward the protection of ourselves, again at the expense of others. In their self-promotion before Jesus, the brothers James and John revealed their prideful desire for status and recognition.

Or . . . will we seek an ego that “*E*xalts *G*od *O*nly.” Will we embrace a life built on humility rather than pride and confidence rather than fear?

Blanchard suggests that trading one ego in for the other is a matter of (1) embracing an eternal perspective, (2) seeking to lead for a higher purpose, (3) carefully assessing our own faith and trust in God, and (4) seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All this is sound advice that has been taught and modeled by Christians for two thousand years. Blanchard and Hodges even suggest a twelve step program to move from *E*dge-*G*od-*O*ut to *E*xalt-*G*od-*O*nly patterned on Alcoholics Anonymous! That may seem a tad cute, but Blanchard and Hodges are right to see that many of us have nurtured egos that get in the way of our discipleship and joy. Perhaps, a twelve-step Ego Anonymous program actually would help.

*Community*

Paul’s aphorism from 1 Corinthians 10:13 can be puzzling. Really? . . . God won’t allow me to be tested in more than I can handle? I can certainly imagine events in my life that I’m not at all confident I could handle. Trading in one ego for another won’t insulate me from suffering and problems. I remember a sermon by a man whose long-time Christian friend had committed suicide. The preacher reflected on this text.

But it is important to know Paul isn’t really speaking to “me.” The “yous” here are plural. Paul is speaking to the community not to any one individual. It is in community that we learn to *E*xalt *G*od *O*nly. It is in fellowship that we learn the way of forgiveness and grace. Together, we learn how to lead with servants’ hearts. And in all this, God is forever faithful. Paul Sampley writes, “With every test, the faithful, dependable God will make sure it is something you can collectively handle, or God will provide an exodus as in olden times.” Amen.

*A bit more -- The letter to the Hebrews*

Other than Revelation, no book of the New Testament seems more foreign to most Christian readers than the Letter to the Hebrews. And the reason is clear. More than any other NT book, Hebrews is steeped in the Old Testament world of temples, priests, and sacrifice. Since most of us don’t know much about the Old Testament, we are puzzled by the writer’s theology, illustrations, and allusions. Our understanding is made all the more difficult because we can’t answer the simplest questions about the “letter.” Who wrote it? When? To whom? In his *Interpretation* series commentary on Hebrews, Thomas Long gives us a good and colorful sense of the problems:

“Among the books of the New Testament, the epistle to the Hebrews stands out as both strange and fascinating. Unique in style and content, as a piece of literature it is simply unlike any of the other epistles. Though some of its phrases are among the best-known and most often quoted passages in the New Testament, many contemporary Christians are largely unacquainted with the book as a whole, finding themselves lost in its serpentine passageways and elaborate theological arguments.

For those who take ropes and spikes and torches and descend into the murky cave of Hebrews, there is much about this document we wish we could discover, but our historical lanterns are too dim. For example, we wish we knew who wrote this curious epistle. Even though many names have been suggested—Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, Clement of Rome, Priscilla, and Silvanus, to mention a few—the arguments are not strong for any candidate. We actually have a firmer grasp of who did *not* write Hebrews than who did, since on stylistic grounds alone, it is a virtual certainty that the apostle Paul did not pen this letter. But who did? The best answer to that question is the comment of Origen in the third century: “But who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows.”

We also wish we knew more than we do about the recipients, the first readers. Were they in Rome? Jerusalem? Colossae? Were they Gentiles? Jews? A mixture? We can only guess at the answers to these questions. The one current geographical reference in the book, which mentions Italy, is ambiguous (see comment on 13:24). Early on, someone attached a title to this document— “To the Hebrews” —but whoever did that was probably just speculating about its original recipients and was as much in the dark as we are.

Moreover, we would like to be able to pinpoint the date of Hebrews, but we can only provide an approximate range. Clement of Rome appears to quote Hebrews in a letter written sometime near the end of the first century, so it had to be composed before then. Also, most scholars believe that the elaborate christology of Hebrews could not have developed overnight and would more likely reflect the theological activity of the second or third generation of Christians. Putting these thoughts and a few other bits and pieces of evidence together, most scholars make an educated guess of A.D. 60 to 100 as the possible span during which Hebrews was composed.

So we peer into the depths of the text unsure of who wrote it, to whom, from where, or when. Imagine being handed a book today with the comment, “Here, you may enjoy this. It was written in America or Russia or France, I’m not sure, by a Jew—or was it a Gentile?—anyway, it was written sometime between 1920 and 1970. Enjoy.”

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott