The Sacrifice of Leadership

I hate to admit it, but there was a time when I aspired to lead because I thought, naively, that leading meant I wouldn’t have anyone telling me what to do.

As Bob Dylan sang during his “Christian phase,” no one ever really serves themselves. After listing a wide assortment of powerful people, from politicians to media moguls to “a preacher with your spiritual pride,” he says that in reality there are only two choices:

“Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”

The difference between leaders and others is the number of people for whom leaders (even non-believers) are answerable to God. As Jesus pointed out, when you serve Christ, you as a leader become the slave of all.

So why agree to lead? Some may be motivated by a mix of self-serving and altruistic motives. Others may have deep-down desires to be in charge or to prove detractors wrong. Whatever the reason, being in a leadership position has a way of bringing us to our knees – sometimes blaming God for getting us into this mess!

One of the greatest rewards of leadership is living out the Savior’s paradox of sacrifice. Becoming a slave to Christ and all who belong to Him is actually extremely liberating. On the other hand, a leader who chooses to serve himself unwittingly makes himself a slave to the adversary, the devil. Dylan was right – you will be serving somebody even as you lead.

Leadership isn’t all sacrifice, though. Next month: the rewards of leadership.

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1 Matthew 20:25-28