

Nov 2---Choose this day whom you will serve
Column—Counsel from a Commander
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We have reached another crossroad in America and our elected and appointed leaders are arm-wrestling over the steering wheel as we approach the November 2 elections. America’s uniqueness from other nations has been that its elected officials serve the people rather than the other way around. Now, it is becoming clearer, that the people are being given less representation and more direction than at any other time in our history. If this is true, then how you choose your leaders will determine the kind of leader and policies you will serve. How will you choose?

I get a kick out of George Patton’s simple advice on how he used to choose leaders to command beneath him. “Never pick a man because he slobbers all of you with kind words. Pick the man that can get the job done.” But what if everyone is slobbering all over you to get your vote? What if everyone promises you the moon and you know that none can deliver everything? How do you choose then?

In my latest book, The Centurion Principles, I’ve identified the key traits of what great leadership, what Centurion Leadership, is and how to rise up to become a Centurion leader yourself. In the coming days as you consider who your leaders will be, locally and nationally, let me offer you 4 qualities you should evaluate and the best way of measuring those seeking your vote.

First—A Centurion Leader has both the competence to lead and a vision to take you where you need to go. For you to follow them, they must be able to communicate that vision and exude that competence. So then, how do you judge? Jesus made this statement about judging those in spiritual leadership that is equally appropriate now: “By their fruits you will know them.” (Matt 7:16) An interview, a debate, a speech is only a brief reflection of a person’s ability to communicate their vision. It has nothing to do with their leadership. If you want to know about that, go back into their record for the past decade or more and examine the decisions they made, the offices they held and their successes and failures. From that you will know where their minds and hearts lie on various issues and the kind of leaders they are likely to be.

Second, a Centurion Leader has the heart to persist and endure setbacks on their way to achieving the vision or mission. Everyone fails at some point or another. The real question before you is, ‘what did that person do after failure?’ Failure is just a comma in the middle of a sentence. How a leader finishes that sentence defines who they really are. In the election of 1824, Andrew Jackson won the popular vote and had the most electoral votes. Because he didn’t get 50% of the electoral votes, however, the election was thrown into the House of Representatives. After much back-room antics, John Adams was selected as President, much to the dismay of most Americans. Jackson was obviously disappointed by the outcome, yet he spent the next 4 years out of power working on accomplishing some of the goals he had set out in his run for Presidency. Four years later, Jackson ran again and was overwhelmingly elected in both the Electoral College and popular vote. To quote Patton once more, “It’s not how far a man falls that defines a leader, but how high he bounces.”

Third, a Centurion Leader is willing to sacrifice himself for the mission by leading from the front. A lot of leaders aren’t willing to breathe the same air as those that work for them. Leadership by e-mail has become common. When George Washington’s Continental Army was suffering through the winter of 1777, the conditions in the camp were almost indescribable. Men, for want of clothing, walked about the camp in blankets. Many had legs amputated after suffering severe frostbite. For the first two months that winter, all lived in tents while log barracks were being constructed. Washington had at his disposal a warm house with heating inside yet he refused to take advantage of it. Instead, he lived in a tent until the last of his men were safely housed in their wooden barracks. He often spent time alone away from the camp that winter on his knees in the snow, as He prayed to the Almighty for help. When the battle begins, the Centurion is visible, because he leads from the front sharing in his men’s trials as well as triumphs.

Fourth, a Centurion has an immovable moral compass. There are no questions about the meanings of words, of agreements—no parsing of words, no splitting of hairs. A Centurion does what is right rather than what is popular, what is honorable rather than what is merely legal; what is self-sacrificial rather than what is self-serving. When General Ulysses S. Grant commanded the union armies, he was known for going the

extra mile when it came to taking care of his men. What many people don't know is that he applied that principle equally to his enemy whenever possible. When Vicksburg fell after a 40 day siege, the first command Grant gave was that his quartermaster should provide rations not only to the citizens of Vicksburg but to every confederate soldier as well. When Lee surrendered at Appomattox, Lee mentioned that he needed to return some Union prisoners at once since he had no provisions to feed them, much less his own men. Grant thought about this for a moment, and then said, "Suppose I send over 25,000 rations, would that be sufficient?" These actions seem a far cry from the parade of indicted and convicted CEO's in America today who have shown they never even possessed a moral compass.

We live in an age where image is everything. In leadership, this has produced empty shells, from Presidents to parents, senators to school teachers, and politicians to pastors. Now more than ever, America is in need of leadership that is guided by a firm and unyielding compass that points to true north, based upon the One who is truth.

No man is perfect and no leader as well. But it is clear that we are desperately in need of leaders who will rise above their peers, who will go beyond the call of duty and inspire us to do likewise. Find the Centurions who are seeking to lead. They are not easily forgotten for they leave a legacy without trying to do so. Their footprints remain for the generations to follow.

I invite you to choose your leaders with the strength and honor of a Centurion. That's today's counsel from a commander!