



THE WANDER BOX

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Introduction:

RECCESS WAS ALL THE RAGE WHEN I WAS IN THE THIRD GRADE. It was scheduled for the class period right after lunch. This was a glorious idea because it meant that once lunchtime arrived, I wouldn't have to sit at my desk taking notes and doing boring stuff for over an hour! This also meant that around 10 a.m., a daily onset of anticipation began to settle into my mind.

In our classroom we had one of those big, round, non-digital, black and white clocks. The kind where if you listened close enough you could hear the seconds and minutes tick as the hands moved. A chalkboard stretched across the front of the classroom consuming most of the real estate with its panoramic greenness. But positioned just above the big green wall, to the left, was the clock. And though it was small in comparison, it certainly became my focal point each mid-morning with the onset of my condition.

Now you need to realize that I grew up in a bygone era called “the 80s”. It was a magical time where people had big hair, there were singing raisins, and Nike was telling everyone to *Just do it* for the first time. By the mid-80s people were bringing video games into their homes with a gaming console created by Nintendo. Even though the arcade had moved into our homes, the outside still called to us. We loved playing outside, exploring, and using our imaginations, and realizing it was only time to come home because the sun was setting. If playing outside after school was the main attraction, then recess was like a preview you enjoyed before the movie began.

Each day after lunch, as we transitioned into recess, the possibilities and potential of leisurely time became a realized reality. And though it felt like we could do any number of things, at my school, we always ended up playing the same game: kickball. For some reason this was never a disappointment to our third-grade minds. After all, kickball was a game filled with ups and downs, the thrill of victory, and the sting of defeat. It was an easy enough game to understand. Basically, it was a baseball diamond with four bases and a big red, rubbery ball. One person would roll the ball toward home plate, and another would kick it. If the ball was caught before it touched the ground, or if it touched a person running in between bases, then an out was counted. After three outs, the teams switched from offense to defense.

Each day, the hands on the clock would release us from our classroom, and with lunch behind us, an exhilarating thirty minutes of recess awaited us. Captains stepped forward, teams were chosen, the game commenced, and someone usually got hurt. Dirty jeans and scrapped knees would be the reward of a recess well-played.

The only unenjoyable part that I recall, and this memory has stayed with me over the years, was the few minutes where the captains would select their teammates. Standing there, with their pre-puberty wisdom, they would determine our fates. I particularly hated these moments because I was never picked first, or second, and was usually among the last third-graders standing as teams were chosen. There were only a few of us. We were the leftovers, the awkward misfits who weren't athletic or popular enough to be chosen. Rather, we were the ones a captain eventually looked at and said, *well, I guess he's on my team* – because there was no one left to choose.

For most of my leadership journey I've felt like the leftover, awkward misfit who is always trying to prove himself. And I don't think I am the only one. Between all the social platforms and streaming services, the lines between reels and reality have become blurred. Let's be honest, it is easy to feel like the kid at recess who doesn't get chosen first, or at all. After all, the attentiveness of the world seems to lend itself to those who can posture, capture, and edit a moment to be served up in easy-to-consume soundbites. Leadership through attempts to grab attention is the mode of operation for the moment. If healthy leadership is akin to a nutritious meal, many are having fast-food delivered through an app. Real leadership, the healthy kind that changes things for the better, nourishes those it interacts with. It is something quite different than the quick service version that is often served. It takes time. It takes belief. And it requires the kind of obedience that will be creative and courageous.

So we turn our attention to understanding healthy leadership, meaning, from a biblical position. To accomplish this, we will ask questions like...

What does the Creation story teach us about leadership?

What does a leadership journey require?

What are the correlating characteristics of Christ-honoring leaders?

My hope is that, by the end, you will learn and believe that God can use the kid in the back of the crowd who no one else sees. That while talent may be important, it's not what matters most. That God created us and has shown us how to influence in His world for His purposes. That God can take our little bread-and-fish-talent and influence the multitudes. To understand this, we will first look at some of the original 'leftovers'— Matthias and Justus.

Team Justus and Matthias

VERY LITTLE IS KNOWN CONCERNING MATTHIAS AND JUSTUS. Real talk—for many years I wouldn't have been able to recall that their names were mentioned in the Bible. In any case, here is the scene. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the eleven apostles, along with Jesus' family and some of the women who had faithfully served went back to Jerusalem and gathered in the upper room. The purpose of this gathering was to replace Judas Iscariot who had placed a monetary value on his faithfulness to Jesus. He had betrayed our Lord for thirty pieces of silver. Overcome with grief and remorse, he committed suicide by hanging himself.

Peter and the other ten apostles believed the Scriptures required that the twelfth office of apostle, formerly held by Judas, be filled. Narrowing down the field was easy. There were two men who had been present throughout the entire ministry of Jesus from His baptism on. "Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias." (Acts 1:23)¹:

Justus: *Joseph is described as also having been called Barsabbas, "son of the Sabbath." Jews and proselytes often bore Gentile nicknames, among which "Justus" was common (cf. Acts 18:7; Col 4:11). Nothing more is known of Joseph except for a later tradition cited by Eusebius that as a result of his missionary work he was forced to drink poison and suffered no ill effects.*²

Matthias: *Whose name means gift of God, is merely mentioned with no further fanfare. Later tradition speculated that he became a missionary to the Ethiopians or that his bones were buried in Germany at Treves.*³

While both men were healthy candidates for the office of apostle, it was a decision that was ultimately up to God:

Then they prayed, "You, Lord, know everyone's hearts; show which of these two you have chosen to take the place in this apostolic ministry that Judas left to go where he belongs." Then they cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias and he was added to the eleven apostles. Acts 1:24-26

Scholars point out that in the book of Acts, "Joseph is given such prominence that one would expect *him* to have been chosen, perhaps a reminder that God's ways are not always man's ways."⁴ Now the praying part makes complete sense to me, after all "apostleship is not a humanly ordained office."⁵ Through praying, they were recognizing that in God's mind the leadership position was already filled, they were just waiting for it to be revealed.

The second part seems a bit odd to our western, twenty-first century ears. After praying, they casted lots, the modern-day equivalent of rolling dice. Sounds like a Star-Wars-mind-trick-esque way of choosing one of the most important offices in the early church. While this may seem like the disciples were leaving this most important office to chance, actually, it was an ancient and respected custom. Several stones would be marked with some representing Matthias and some Justus, then placed in a jar. The jar would then be shaken and the name on whose stone fell out first was chosen as the twelfth apostle.⁶ The Scottish New Testament scholar Ian Howard Marshall explains,

The most that might be said is that in the period before Pentecost the church had to seek other means of divine guidance than the aid of the Spirit, but the method which it adopted (prayer and the casting of lots) was entirely proper. In fact the church was asking the Lord to make his choice of the right man, who was then enrolled as an apostle; the church cannot be said to have 'elected' him.⁷

It is an amazing thought to think: *before Judas ever betrayed Jesus with thirty pieces of silver ... before the silver ever fashioned into coins ... before it was even discovered as a precious metal ... God had already chosen Matthias to be a leader in a movement that would forever change the world.* God had chosen a leftover, a kid in the crowd on the playground hoping to be chosen, to be an apostle. Keep in mind an apostle was someone who had personally seen and been commissioned by the resurrected Christ. Jesus had stood on the playground of Matthias's life and said, *over here kid, yeah you in the back, you are on my team.*

I think a lot of Christians may read the Bible and have a hard time relating to Noah and a flood that destroyed the entire world, Moses leading two-million people across the Red Sea, or Daniel standing for his faith and spending the night in a pit of lions. Likewise, we have a hard time relating to rock-star Christians who are famous athletes, or pastors with brands and perfectly-postured podcasts, or the testimonies where someone was a big-time drug addict until a Damascus-Road-type experience. Most of us will never lead two million people, manage our brand, or be blinded by a flashing light. Most of us came to Jesus not because He has a booming loud voice, but because He whispered through the chaos of our existence, "Come and follow me".

Many have a difficult time with 'Christian-fame' as the ideal future destination of our leadership journeys. And we should. After all, we are just trying to graduate and get into a good college or maybe earn enough money to send our kids to college. We love Jesus and want to follow Him with the entirety of our lives. We understand the obscurity of Matthias and Justus. They were faithful, followed Jesus, but their names never appeared in lights like Peter or John. This book is for all the Matthiases and Justuses of the world, not the Peters and Johns – they're busy recording a podcast.

This is for those of us in the back of the crowd who typically get picked last – who only get a shot because of a roll of the dice and being supernaturally tapped on the shoulder. I know that’s my story, which is probably why I am Team Justus and Matthias. On the other hand, there is something very liberating about not being chosen first, second, or last and still having the doors of opportunity swing open to us. We don’t want Christian fame, whatever that is, but we do want to serve well, effect change, and accomplish something significant for the glory of God. We believe there is a big difference between wanting people to think we are significant and wanting to do something significant for God.

So, this is leadership for those who play in the sandlot but are pointing to the stands like Babe Ruth on a clear day ... for those who look into the face of disparaging odds and simply wink. Not because we think we are like Noah, Daniel, Mary, Paul, Peter, or the likes, but because we know God has called us to it.

If you are the one who wants to live a life well to the audience of God, then the following pages were written with you in mind. But before we proceed, let me offer a brief word of caution. I cannot motivate you. If you lack motivation, then this book is not for you. You need another book (maybe read the Bible), and if that does not work, then read it again. I am writing for those, no matter their age, who want to fan the flame of motivation. Who want their leadership to matter and simply need a plan.



Part One:

INFLUENCE AND THE WORLD OF THE LOST BEGINNING:

reasons for believing in leadership

THERE IS AN AGE-OLD QUESTION THAT HAS BEEN KICKED AROUND THE BLOCK FOR AS LONG AS people have been writing about leadership: are leaders born or are leaders made? Most answers to this question have been largely based on one's context and culture, or rather some philosophy of leadership espoused and believed. I think it would very much depend on when and where you were born as to your take on this seemingly overcomplicated and somewhat ambiguous query. For example, at certain times in history, one's bloodline would determine their place in society; at other times, being female or of a certain ethnicity would automatically disqualify one from leadership.

But therein lies the rub and evolving tension about who can actually be a leader. Most of us would take serious offense to the notion that one is disqualified from leading due to bloodlines, sex, or ethnicity. We have the benefit of living in a time when influence has not been segregated for a select few. And why? Because we have been born in a modern world and Western context. This means that there are a few safe broad-stroke assumptions that can be made. These assumptions are generalities to be sure, but nonetheless have accurately characterized the mindset of a large swath of people.

First, Westerners seem to be born equipped with what some have described as a rugged individualism. There is an initiative or inclination toward decision and action. Second, the Western mindset is one that likes to challenge age-old traditions or beliefs. Think of the Civil Rights Movement or the Women's Liberation Movement. Additionally embedded into the Western mindset is a desire to work toward and serve a greater good, and thus accomplish something that can be measured. In other words, there is a bit of an entrepreneurial spirit in all of us (sometimes for better and sometimes for worse).

I simply point this out because the Western mindset is much more apt to believe something of themselves, such as the following statement: *I am a leader or I can become a leader*. Our way of thinking is positively inclined to the notion of influence. In fact, I believe that our independent mindset coupled with our initiative and desire to accomplish something measurable conditions us toward the whole idea. In short, we are wired to think we matter and can make a difference.

This predisposed mindset can be healthy. But I wonder if we could suspend it in hopes to discover reasons beyond culture and context, when and where you were born, and to believe that a measure of leadership potential exists in every human. I wonder if we could suspend a mindset to see something about the mind of God. You see, the grand narrative of Scripture, expressing God's desires for humanity, far outweighs any other factors in determining why we are created to influence. God's story is the great beacon of light, shining meaning and clarity on every story told through the human condition and experience. To accomplish this we will need a Monday-kind-of-mindset.

I like Mondays because it is a great day for beginnings. For me it is a day that I recommit to exercise and eat right for the following week. It's like my own mini-New Year's Day in which I can make resolutions and hope for the best. Maybe I like Mondays because the do-over I get reminds me of the grace I do not deserve. In any case, no matter the calendar day or the chronology of your years, I want you to read the following five small chapters with a sacred do-over mindset. Give yourself permission to start anew. If you don't, the following information will be just . . . information. However, if you permit yourself to start again, what you read will not be informative, but rather transformative. So, it's a good day to start something, or for our purposes, to start believing something about ourselves.

Armed with a Monday mindset, let us turn to first book of the Bible. In Genesis, we discover an influence granted humans in the world of the lost beginning. Genesis, after all, means *beginning or in the beginning* in both Greek and Hebrew, and the main theme of the book has to do with origins. While the focus of Genesis is the origin of the created world, humans, the numerous nations of the earth, and the covenant family through which the redeemer would be born⁸; it is also the origin of something else: influence.

In Genesis, all of God's creation was pregnant with potential and possibility. My hope is that as you read the

following chapters, you will awaken to the leadership potential that exists in you. I try to write and teach on the subject of leadership with a sanctified optimism: *once we awaken to how we were created and gifted, we will begin to see our own lives afresh and filled with possibility to accomplish the desires of God.*

Why begin with the creation story? Because Genesis is the beginning that is the beginning of every story. And in order to fully grasp the purpose of our influence, we must see ourselves in the origin of it all. Then we will become convinced that, though disfigured by sin, the residue of God's purpose still exists, is still discernable, and still applicable. The creation narrative will help us understand five reasons why each of us have leadership potential and capacity.

So, here we are – with a Monday mindset, no matter when you are reading this. Last week is ancient history. You are now on the precipice of tomorrow and the vantage point allows you to see and shape your own future. I encourage you to capture these moments with a sacred sense of intentionality. Get ready because we are jumping into the deep end of the pool of applied theology, and we left the floaties in the closet at home.