

## LEADING IN A TIME OF CRISIS

*This study guide is designed to provide questions that incite discussion, invite reflection, and inspire action. It was written to accompany The Moderator's Town Hall conversation with President Emeritus of Bridgewater College, Phillip C. Stone.*

*Timestamps linked to the Town Hall recording are included in this guide, should a discussion leader choose a "pause and talk" approach rather than asking participants to watch the Town Hall in its entirety prior to meeting. This guide can also be utilized across multiple meetings, given that some questions might spark heartier conversation than one meeting will allow.*

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*The video of this Town Hall can be accessed by using the following link: <https://vimeo.com/471154337>*

As Paul mentioned in his introduction, each of us hold leadership roles - often in a variety of settings, not just in our churches. So, to begin...

**Where in your life are you considered a leader by others or by your role / title?**

**@10:23** In talking about "the women of Sweet Briar" and the lead they took in keeping the college open, Phil said, "*Leadership does not usually, or primarily, come in the form of titles and formal authority. There are all kinds of ways that people simply take responsibility for something that matters to them.*"

**When do you find you are most moved to action on behalf of another: when it's your responsibility because of a title or role that you hold or when it's something or someone you are passionate about – and you can't not step up and do something?**

**@14:03** Phil started as President of Sweet Briar College with all students having transferred, all faculty and staff having been fired, prominent programs having been moved to other schools, and the school's accreditation having been suspended. When he went to rehire hundreds of people, "*sight unseen*", he ended his invitation back with "*Please remember this: at Sweet Briar College, the impossible is just another problem to solve.*"

**Read Matthew 19:16-26**

**In this unexpected time, what currently feels impossible to you?**

**When in your life have you been a part of solving a seemingly unsolvable problem?**

**What was the nature of your solution; what were its components? What lessons from your experience might be transferrable to other impossible situations?**

**@18:50** When asked what other top leadership principles made a difference in turning Sweet Briar around, Phil answered with the following: *"First of all: the women."* (**passionate self-sacrifice**) *"Number two, they had to put aside all the distractions."* (**a shared mission**) *"And making sure people were being acknowledged along the way so that they remained strong members of the team."* (**expressed gratitude for others**)

Of the three leadership principles Phil shared. . .

**Where do you see each of these principles exemplified by Jesus and the apostles?**

**In the spaces where you are the leader...**

- **Which principle would your people say is the one they experience most frequently? Which principle is experienced less frequently?**
- **Which principle do you ask your people to encourage or exhibit the most with the people *they're* leading?**

Considering the principle of **passionate self-sacrifice**...

**Who in your life is someone who lives sacrificially for something – or someone – beyond themselves?**

**Name a time when you saw – firsthand – passion in action.**

Considering the principle of **a shared mission**... the two great commandments and the great commission are expectations followers of Jesus have been called to carry out (along with other mission mandates.)

**Read Matthew 22:34-40 and Matthew 28:16-20**

**In our world today, what do you believe to be some of the most distracting forces at work against this mission?**

**Think about those who love you most. What would they say are the biggest distractions for you, personally, to prioritizing this mission above all else?**

Considering the principle of **expressed gratitude for others**...

**Have you ever experienced an environment that was noticeably void of appreciation? What was that like?**

**What's one action step you can take this week to express gratitude to another?**

**@21:51** Another key principle of leadership that Phil encouraged was for his staff to approach their work with a particular attitude: *"It's got to be done with joy. Doing this with handwringing and anguish is no fun. Let's have fun. ...Secondly, don't exclude anybody."* Phil was adamant his people release their anger and embrace reunion with those who may have sided with the closing of the college.

**Nehemiah said "The joy of the Lord is your strength".**

**Name a time in your life when claiming joy felt unrealistic.**

**Name a time when you stopped ringing your hands, deciding to 'flow', in spite of the anguish.**

**Read Luke 15:11-32**

**When things don't go our way – whether that be in crisis or simply an undertaking that requires extra work – why do the responses of frustration, anger, and bitterness surface so much more quickly than those of joy, patience, or hopefulness?**

**When was a time in your life when someone you trusted helped you reset your attitude and embrace a more Christlike approach to a person or situation?**

**@25:05** Answering a question regarding the growing division within the Church of the Brethren, Phil shared, *"I pray that we will live in unity and that unity will be risked or forfeited only to be obedient to God's will and fundamental issues which the Holy Spirit leads us to conclude can no longer be consistent with unity. I think those are rare events. I think that forbearance and humility and patience can help us get past a lot of things that might, at a moment, seem to be divorce material. And we can, with the benefit of some time, look back on it and say, that was not something that was pleasant. I still do not believe the other side was right on this, but I'm glad the family is still together."*

**Read John 17:20-23**

**As you read Jesus' prayer, what does He hope the world will know as a result of His followers living in unity?**

**How's your heart around the tensions that currently exist in our denomination?**

**What do you believe the message to the world will be if the Church of the Brethren stays together, amidst it's disagreements? What will be the message if we divide?**

**@34:54** In a conversation with a friend who is a Mennonite, Phil challenged him on a church-based practice. To which, the friend replied, *“Why should I be so stiff-necked that I insist on my way when the community of faith has decided a different way?”*

**What name would you give this principle of leadership Phil's friend espouses?**

**In an age of such individualism and independence, do you think the idea of honoring one's faith community – or living into the ethos of something larger than oneself – still holds value in today's culture? Why or why not?**

**@42:05** After Paul shared a story about Phil checking in with the dishwashing staff, Phil said, *“I think we should be especially attentive to those who do not normally get attention.”* He then went on to say, *“It's important for us to acknowledge people who do some of the hardest, dirtiest work in this society, who get so little acknowledgment.”*

**Where in scripture do we see Jesus embrace this same principle of leadership?**

**As you consider the places in your life where you lead others – how do you decide who gets more or less of your attention?**

**@45:54** When asked about how he went about deciding to leave Sweet Briar, Phil shared how his call as a husband led him to know when it was time to step away.

**Who or what guides your priorities?**

**When your personal and professional life are at odds, how do you decide which one wins?**

Of the many leadership principles Phil shared during the Town Hall...

**Which is the one that comes most easily to you?**

**Which is the one you need to practice more proactively?**

**Which one(s) do you believe a healthy organization cannot live without?**

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*“We need to remember that this great struggle (the Civil War) was fought to keep them (the rebels) in the family. Now that we have defeated them on the battlefield, why would we treat them like conquered peoples?”* | **Phillip C. Stone**, highlighting President Abraham Lincoln's embrace of **empathy** as a leadership principle, as he went about the work to “bind up the nation's wounds”. **@1:06:18**