

The Servant Leader

I once saw a cartoon of a boy scout leader who took his troop of boys hiking, got lost and said to them, “anyone bring a compass?” The very first quality of a leader is that he has the ability to lead! When the Apostle Paul gave his various lists of Spiritual Gifts, one of those gifts of the Spirit is “leadership.” **Romans 12:8** says, let “*he who leads, lead with diligence*”

We can learn much about how to lead by watching Jesus lead his disciples. In fact, the gift of leadership is nothing less than Christ the leader living out his leadership in and through the life of a gifted child of God.

It has been said that leaders are born, not made. For the Christian leader this is really true. He is born again and gifted with the spiritual gift of leading. He was reborn to lead.

Leading through Character

He who would lead others in Christian service can learn from Christ. He led by principles, not by His strong will, or by dictating or by intimidating. Jesus showed the Twelve how to lead by Godly virtues and Biblical principles. Jesus’ character was his greatest mentoring tool. Out of His character, he taught eternal principles to live by.

How Jesus Led Men

Christ’s true genius as a leader of men is that he was a servant-leader. His style was to lead by serving others. His humility, love, and servant heart won the affections of those he mentored. Jesus did not measure the greatness of a man by how many servants he has, but rather the greatness of the man is how many men he serves.

Indeed, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy that the messiah would be “*meeek and lowly at heart.*” (**Isaiah 53**) The Messiah is to be a king, but he is a servant-king! Paul tells us that Christ came “*in the form of a servant,*” (**Phil. 2:6, 7**) this then is the “mind” of Christ, it is his set attitude and lifestyle. He leads others by being a servant leader.

Washing Feet

John 13:4ff records the great life-message Jesus gave his men in the last hours of his earthly existence. He washed the disciple’s feet. He is training them by his example. They will never forget this example of the King of Glory down on His knees, humbly washing the feet of those men He loved. Let’s learn some eternal principles from Christ’s example of washing dirty feet:

1. Humility is the Key to Servant-Leadership

Seeing King Jesus washing their stinking feet was an object lesson in humility. Jesus, dressed only in a towel, like a common slave washes their feet to show them that the way up is down! The path to great leadership is humility. The leader is willing to do the most menial task to inspire others to service. A leader must not ask others to do what he himself is not willing to do. The Christ-spirit in you will give you His humility to fulfill the words “*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.*” (**1st Peter 5:6**)

2. The Servant-leader doesn’t wait to be asked to serve

The image of Jesus wrapped in a towel, washing feet is that of a volunteer spirit. No one asked Him to do this humble task, but He chose to do it. He sees a need and meets it. The disciples would never have dreamed of asking Jesus to wash their feet. That is why great leaders are volunteers. They inspire others to volunteer by their example. The fact that Christ was a volunteer (even on the Cross!) inspires us to be like Him.

3. The servant-leader does not pick and choose whom he will serve

Remarkably, Jesus washed the feet of Judas, knowing full well that Judas was a traitor! There is great love and mercy in that act. Like Jesus, great leaders are willing to serve whomever needs it, regardless. Servant love is unconditional. We can learn from Christ's example.

4. Servant-leaders wear Khakis

Wearing a towel, Jesus is ready for the dirty work that needs to be done. This is love in action. It reminds us that *doing* is always a stronger lesson than just *telling*. Leadership is more about what we *do* than what we *tell* others to do. Jesus was "among" His men, being a part of their daily lives. He mentored them by serving them every day. A leader is willing to do whatever is needed to make others around him better. Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart stores, became famous in Bentonville Arkansas the Headquarters of Wal-Mart, because after he had become one of the richest men in the world; he still drove to work in a ten year old pickup truck. He said he drove the old pickup because it reminded him to stay humble and remember where he came from. Leaders wear khakis.

5. Servant-leaders give with no thought of return

Jesus did not ask the disciples to wash His feet. There is a lesson to be learned here. The Servant does not demand to be served in return. This is not about getting from others by giving to them. Great leaders have the greater good in mind, not personal gain. They see the "big picture" not just their own little world.

6. Servant-leaders must learn to receive as well as give

Peter comes forward and says, "*Lord you shall never wash my feet!*" This sounds noble, but it is also prideful. That is why Jesus corrected Peter. Christ wants us to know that leaders must accept service from others. We need the humility to let others be in control, and let them do for us as we do for them.

7. Servant-leaders are most like Christ.

After washing their feet Jesus said to the twelve, "*Do you know what I have done to you? I have given you an example (life-message) that if I your Lord and Teacher has washed your feet, then you ought to wash one another's feet.*" (**John 13: 14, 15**) The lesson is clear to all who will apply it. We are most effective as leaders when we behave toward others as Christ did. He is the model of Christian leadership; He led men by His example. He didn't just tell them to love their enemies; He actually loved His enemies. He made a disciple out of a Roman tax collector! He ate dinner with despised Zaccaeus. He forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery. His example was as strong a teacher as his teaching.

Servant-leaders are Pace-setters

The Greek word for leader literally means, "He who stands before others." A dictator tells others to do what he himself is not willing to do. Not so with a true leader. He is a pacesetter. He says, "Follow me, and my example, and do as I'm doing. I'll show you how. That is Christ's way of leading others. He tells you to take up a cross daily, and then He goes and dies on the Cross for you! No wonder men loved him and still follow Him. We must also be Pace-setters by our example of servant leading.

Leaders are Visionary

Jesus saw the Kingdom of God and He willfully asked His followers to join in on the vision to bring it to reality here on earth. In fact Christ saw the potential in the twelve men He called. He had our salvation in mind when He called them. (See **John 17:18-20**) By leading them he planned to win the world unto Himself. Robert Coleman in *The Master's Plan of Evangelism* sees this vision as part of Christ's leadership style. Every good leader must also have an end in mind.. Leaders see what others cannot see. He doesn't get lost in the details. This is the difference between leaders and managers or administrators. Managers are into the daily routine; they are not leaders of men. They are managers of personnel! There is a huge difference.

Wrong jungle

A great illustration of managers and leaders is the group who go on safari. The group is in the jungle in thick underbrush taller than an Elephant. The manager is organizing the group to cut a path through the jungle. He is handing out machetes, he offers water to the exhausted workers, and is very much in charge as they try to cut their way out. The manager of men is consumed with the details. Then the leader shows up. He climbs a tall tree looks out over the landscape and tells the manager, "Stop chopping! You are going the wrong direction." That's a leader, he sees the big picture, and leads accordingly.

Servant-leaders are Committed

Jesus was totally committed to His vision. He gave the Father all He had for all His days. It is a characteristic of a good leader that he is not easily distracted from his calling and vision. He plans his work, and he works his plan.

He is a man possessed, because there are many who would distract him and discourage him. A leader believes in what he's doing when no one else does. The leader must ask his followers to be as committed as he is. Jesus will say to His men, "If you love me, keep my commandments."

We are talking about accountability. Leaders expect those around them to be accountable to the vision, program or calling. He is accountable and wants the same from you.

Servant-leaders are committed to Excellence

A leader is focused. Jesus our example was a focused man. He was forever about two things: 1.) His Father's business (see **Luke 2**). 2.) Pleasing His Father. (See **John 8:29**) We too must be captured by this concept of doing the will of God and doing it well. Excellence is the byproduct of a heart's desire to please our Heavenly Father. Excellence is about giving your very best effort to the things God calls you to. This is why we must train young men & women early in life to be people of excellence.

By beginning early to train servant leaders we can develop a generation of leaders to shape the world.

Here is a pattern of growth we find in leaders:

- Emerging leaders= Tend to be 18-25 years of age
- Energized leaders= Tend to be 25-40 years of age
- Established leaders= Tend to be 40 years old or older.

Your Life Message

Finally, Jesus modeled the profile of a leader. His life was the message. Long after the crowds forgot His words and deeds, they still remember the Man. His disciples wanted to be like Him. That is the ultimate compliment. We must be “Christ” to others as they see Him in us.

You cannot lead one way and live another way. You must walk your talk. What you are speaks louder than what you teach. The true leader says, “Follow me, I’ve been there.” He has lived what he asks others to do.