

Leading Like Jesus

By Richard J. Higgins

Leadership in our Lord's service can be extremely demanding and at times overwhelming. Perhaps our experience as a leader is not what we had expected or what we were accustomed to in the past. Jesus calls us to a radically different style of leadership than what we encounter in the world.

The disciples learned this lesson as James and John came to Jesus asking a request that would not be atypical from the world's perspective¹. They were lobbying for a special place in the kingdom to come. Jesus graciously replies, "You do not know what you are asking for." Jesus' path involves suffering and he says the final decision "is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Now how do you think the others disciples felt? That's right - they were indignant² with James and John. Most likely the reason for their anger was because they wanted the positions of honor that James and John had requested.

Jesus, realizing the dissension among His disciples, proactively deals with the situation. He calls the disciples to Himself and presents several principle's of spiritual leadership...

YOU ARE IN THE WORLD

We live and minister in a world that has been affected by the fall. Jesus says, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord³ it over them; and their great men exercise authority⁴ over them." This is how the world operates. Leadership entitles one to perks and privileges. Therefore, people are ambitious to achieve fame and the benefits that accrue to one in power. As Lord Acton wisely observed, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Jesus however, completely changes the paradigm...

Glenn Wagner laments the fact that leaders of the Church are abandoning the shepherding model for the CEO model. He points out the inherent dangers of this mind set, "When we consciously remember that we are shepherds, we remain humble. But when we start thinking of ourselves as leaders, humility tends to evaporate - sometimes along with our ministry."

YOU ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE WORLD

Jesus declares, "But it is not⁵ so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave⁶ of all." Notice that Jesus does not condemn being great or being first - rather He tells one how to be a leader! We may react to the world's style of leadership in such a way that we can become biblically unbalanced. Servant leadership does not mean abdicating your leadership responsibilities; if God has called you to lead, then do it with diligence⁷!

God wants His people to serve Him by exercising leadership. We are not to be ambitious

for ourselves, but rather ambitious⁸ for God and His purposes. Oswald Chambers writes, “Don’t make the ambition of your life in accordance with your old human nature, but be the children of the Highest - put your concentration on the things of God.” As we lead, we are to always seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

Admittedly this type of leadership can be difficult because it is so different from the world’s leadership. Our motives must be pure; we must realize we are serving a purpose that is beyond ourselves. As we lead, others should be aware of our attitude:

1. Am I doing this for the Lord or out of selfishness and a “what’s in it for me” attitude?
2. Do I exhibit true humility of mind or do I regard myself as more important than others?
3. Am I looking out for the interests of others or am I merely looking out for my own personal interests?⁹

Not only are you to be different, but . . .

YOU ARE TO BE LIKE JESUS

Jesus is our supreme example, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.” If Jesus, the Son of Man, was called to serve, then how much more should we take up the basin and the towel. After Jesus washed the disciples’ feet he said to them, “For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

We are called to follow His example; that includes leading like Jesus. Leading means serving and serving implies suffering at times. You may be in the trenches and you’re feeling tired and frustrated. Jesus knows how you feel and what you’re going through¹⁰.

The temptation is to feel unappreciated. You may be thinking, “If only people recognized my position as a leader.” Watch out - you’re thinking like the world. We are to act like a slave - a person with no rights. When I can own that concept at the core of my identity it can be quite freeing! I no longer have anything to protect; I am completely free to serve Jesus!

The church needs men and women with a holy abandon who are willing to be radically different from the world. God is looking for men and women who are willing to lead like Jesus. By God’s grace, may you be that type of individual!

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Notes

¹ This event is recorded in Matt. 20:20-28 and Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-27 also provides helpful insight.

² This Greek word (*aganakteo*) occurs seven times in the New Testament; it literally means to grieve much. It was used to describe the synagogue official who was indignant because Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:14).

³ Peter admonishes his fellow elders by not “lording it (same Greek word - *katakurieo*) over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3). The context reveals that an attitude of humility is essential for this type of leadership (1 Pet. 5:5-6).

⁴ This is a strong word which conveys the idea of exercising power implying compulsion. Tyranny could be a suitable synonym.

⁵ The order of the words in Greek denotes their significance. Literally, this sentence reads, “Not so among you...” placing the negative first.

⁶ The word slave (*doulos*) is not merely one who serves (*diakonos*), but one who has surrendered all personal rights in an attitude of total submission.

⁷ Paul’s declaration in Romans 12:8.

⁸ There is a holy ambition that should characterize Christians. Paul presents this idea in 2 Cor. 5:9, “Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.” This concept is especially significant for church leaders, “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do” (1 Tim. 3:1). The word aspires to (*epithumia*) denotes a strong desire or longing and is translated in other places as lust or coveting.

⁹ Jesus of course is our example; see Phil. 2:3-11. We are commanded to “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

¹⁰ See Hebrews 4:14-16; Jesus is ready to provide mercy and grace in our time of need if we come to the throne of grace.