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Jesus leadership: A model for ministry

Numerous experts throughout the years have claimed to have the secrets to successful leadership. Whether in religion, business, or politics, leadership is a pertinent topic, with opinions (all claiming statistical data to prove their arguments) varying from essential characteristics to new breakthrough techniques. Famous leaders are cited as models; but is there a better example of leadership than we can find in Jesus?

Many have searched His parables and sayings for insight on leadership; rarely, however, are His actions examined for His actual leadership style. By focusing on Jesus as a Person (through reading the black rather than red print), we can learn the essential principles of our Lord's leadership style.

Jesus as Leader

Chronologically, the first key aspect to Christ's leadership was His *calling*. Centuries of prophecies were fulfilled in a small Babe,[1] who grew in "wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:52, KJV), and had His calling supernaturally confirmed at His baptism.[2] This teaches us that upbringing and affirmation are vital to the formation of leaders. Their talents and characteristics are nurtured and encouraged by others.[3]

Next, leaders require followers, and Jesus had plenty, which leads to the second aspect of Jesus' leadership—His disciples. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He not only gathered a crowd of followers, He called specific individuals in order to mentor them in a smaller setting. This discipling apprenticeship involved private instruction and question-and-answer sessions as well as on the job observation and delegation. He *empowered* His followers through this instruction and leadership, both encouraging and disciplining them.

Empowering others is a part of Jesus' servant-leadership model. Through His miracles, Jesus freed people from their infirmities and empowered them to start a new life, physically and spiritually.

Jesus also led with *integrity* by His example. Respected leaders live what they preach, relying on *principles,* not popularity. Jesus could have won the nation through popularity. He did not. Effective spiritual leaders should do the same.

Texts on leadership speak of leaders requiring a *vision* they can "sell" to their followers.[4] Jesus passionately believed His message, and, with integrity, He taught with authority. He was so committed to His vision that He died for it. Vision with commitment is a winning combination,[5] which inspires others to action.

Love and action

Action is the key; a true leader wants to draw others to act upon the vision and see it to fruition.[6] Jesus set the vision, preached the message, and demonstrated the vision through miraculous healings. Once people caught the passion, they were inspired to sacrifice everything for it. If leaders today could inspire such passion for service, the miraculous church growth of the Day of Pentecost would be repeated.

Jesus had charisma[7] and a perfect character[8] that resisted all forms of temptation[9] and weakness. He faced the hard issues of inequality, power, and suffering head on, and rebuked His followers when they did not do the same. Jesus' character was revealed through His consistency: He refused to advance Himself and publicly maintained often unpopular teachings.

Personally upholding the highest principles, He commanded His followers to do likewise. What higher principles exist than those outlined in the Sermon on the Mount, which embodies true love? (How interesting, too, that love is absent from even Christian lists of leadership qualities.) Love was behind every aspect of Christ's life. It was central to His vision and His mission. Love drove His service and led Him to His death.

Jesus' compassion flowed from this love. In humility, He met people where they were. He met their immediate needs. When crowds followed Him, though tired, He was moved to heal them, feed them, and teach them. Christian leaders must have compassion[10]; yet some prestigious voices in leadership training omit it from their lists of "indispensable qualities."[11]

There can be misconceptions that compassion and humility are signs of weakness.[12] Christ, however, personified love and encouraged

everyone to embrace compassion and humble servant leadership as the only Christian leadership style.[13] Modesty is both admired[14] and negatively viewed as a self-effacing weakness.[15] The key to Christ's humility was the source of His confidence. It was based in God, not ego, thus He remained competent, powerful, yet approachable (approachability is a prerequisite for pastoral leadership).

LEADERSHIP IS LONELY, BUT THIS DOES NOT MEAN THE LEADER MUST WORK ALONE. SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES BENEFIT BOTH LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS.

Balance

Jesus not only taught, demonstrated, and delegated,[16] but also took time out for Himself and His disciples. Leaders need time to recharge, particularly if their personality types become drained by interaction.[17] Rest time is not only healthy, but also allows time for planning, dreaming, and reflecting on problems. Jesus took time out of His ministry to stop, rest, recharge, and pray, particularly during times of stress or anticipated difficulties. Examples include Jesus' withdrawal following the death of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:13, 23; 15:21), times of prayer before important decisions (Luke 6:12), and before His death (Luke 22:39–41).[18]

Leading with confidence

Jesus was called by God to be a Leader. His only purpose was to obey God's will and glorify His Father. Continual time spent with God enabled Him to maintain His focus on His ultimate purpose and prevented Him from being distracted or tempted. Jesus led with authority in that He believed, not so much in Himself, as in God's power to work through Him.

Jesus taught His followers to have faith and confidence in God's power to work through them. Only through faith and prayer could they receive the power to heal and receive healing. Peter provided a tangible example of a faith slowly growing, then faltering, only to grow stronger than before. When faith was exercised and a job was well done, Christ did not hesitate to offer praise.

Independent learning, which has a risk of failure, is a necessary requirement to attaining leadership skills. When this occurred, Jesus did not hesitate to offer feedback on essential aspects of leadership.[19] Leadership is lonely, but this does not mean the leader must work alone. Shared responsibilities benefit both leaders and followers. A true leader is not afraid to ask for help; it is a sign of humility. Leaders also benefit from feedback on their leadership, even as Jesus, the perfect Leader, asked those He trusted for personal feedback.

From His actions to His words, every aspect of His life was marked with incredible wisdom. Jesus not only lived His life for His personal calling, He lead others to fulfill theirs. Jesus gave purpose to the lives of His followers. He gave them a message, a task, and a hope. Jesus was people-focused. He lived for others and yet His esteem was based in God, and not in pleasing humans.

Conclusion

Christ came, transformed, and expanded leadership beyond the humanistic figure often depicted in textbooks. He was the Model of perfection in every area, including Christian leadership. Any leadership author will tell you to model yourself on the best.

Hence, who else should be that Model but, of course, Jesus? M

1 J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), 44.
2 Ibid., 66–72.
3 Michael Jones, "Servant-Leadership and the Imaginative Life," in *Focus on Leadership: Servant- Leadership for the 21st Century,* eds. Larry C. Spears and Michele Lawrence (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 37–40.
4 John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 86, 87; Andrew J. DuBrin and Carol Dalglish, *Leadership: An Australasian Focus* (Milton: John Wiley, 2003), 5.
5 See Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2005).
6 Warren Bennis, "Become a Tomorrow Leader," in *Focus on Leadership* (see note 3), 101, 105.
7 Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities,* 10, 11; DuBrin and Dalglish, *Leadership: An Australasian Focus,* 73–75.
8 Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities,* 4, 5.
9 Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 19.
10 Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership,* 230.
11 Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities,* 1–3.
12 Amanda Sinclair, *Doing Leadership Differently* (Carlton South, Victoria, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 94, 95.
13 Charles C. Manz, *The Leadership Wisdom of Jesus: Practical Lessons for Today* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), 70.
14 Bill George, *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 20.
15 Sinclair, *Doing Leadership Differently,* 94, 95.
16 John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 99–101.
17 Marti Olsen Laney, *The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2002), 252–260.
18 Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership,* 207.
19 Ibid.,, 145.

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