

# Leading the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

## *Part Two*

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(Number 3, August 13, 2001) In the last *Leadership Connection*, the question was, What is a leader and are you one? If we're to minister effectively and develop leaders in the 21st century, we must understand what a leader is. How can we develop leaders if we don't know what a leader is? In short, we need a definition. The following is the definition I've adopted: a Christian leader is a servant with the credibility and capability to influence people in a particular context to accomplish his or her God-given direction. In this article, the second in a series dedicated to the subject, we'll explore what it means to be a servant.

The Savior teaches that Christian leaders are to be servants, thus Christian leadership is servant leadership (Mt. 20:25-28; Mark 9:33-35,10:41-45; and Phil. 2:3-8). In Matthew 20:25-28, Jesus teaches us that servant leadership is twofold – it's humble service – essentially it's serving others with deep humility.

**First, we'll look at the service component.** Servant leaders are focused on service. But it's the service of others, not themselves. While they don't ignore their own needs (Phil. 2:4), they look to the needs of others. They willingly subordinate their self-interests for others. Jesus sets this in contrast to Gentile leadership in verses 25-27. In his day, the Gentile leaders' motives were their own self-interests and personal gain. This is service of self, not service of others. He says that our leadership isn't to be like that. It's to be others-focused, not self-focused.

In verse 28, Jesus completes the section by using himself as an example of the kind of leadership that he's talking about—one who came not to be served but the exact opposite, to serve. It's all about service. This concept deeply probes the leader's motives. It asks,

Why do you want to be a leader? Is this some ego thing or is it a God thing? Are you here for what you can get out of it personally, or are you here to bring out God's best in others and help them to accomplish his will for their lives?

**Second, we can now look at the humility component.** This relates to how leaders lead. Jesus uses Gentile leadership to instruct us how not to lead in order to instruct us how to lead. Gentile or pagan leadership is also flawed in the way they lead. Their method is to "lord it over" people. This is pride, egocentrism, arrogance, not humble leadership. (Peter must have been listening because he also warns us of this in 1 Pet. 5:3.) Jesus is calling for leaders that exude humility from core to crust. This "flies in the face" of what many believed in the first as well as the twenty-first century. D.A. Carson writes, "In the pagan world humility was regarded, not so much as a virtue, but a vice. Imagine a slave being given leadership! Jesus' ethics of leadership and power in his community of disciples are revolutionary." (D.A. Carson, "Matthew" in the Expositor's Bible Commentary, p. 432.)

Ultimately, the service of the leader gets at the heart of the leader. Leadership begins with clarifying one's own heart. Leaders must ask, In my heart am I a servant – a humble servant? Is my service sprinkled throughout with humility? Is this ministry all about me or is it about other people?

Jesus' teaching had a profound impact on Peter, who was present (verse 24). Peter builds on Jesus' teaching in his first epistle. Like the Savior, he uses a series of contrasts to teach that servant leaders lead or serve willingly and eagerly by their life-example (1 Pet. 5:2-3). Jesus' teaching is invasive, and Peter's approach illustrates how deeply the Savior affected his thinking on leadership.

While Jesus taught servant leadership in the gospels and Peter in his letters, the concept isn't new – it's found throughout the Old and New Testaments. The following leaders are called servants: Abraham (Gen. 26:24), Joseph (Gen. 39:17-19; 41:12), Moses (Ex. 4:10, Dt. 34:5, Num. 12:7, Josh. 1:2), Joshua (Josh. 24:29), David (1 Sam. 17:32, 34, 36; 2 Sam. 3:18, 7:5), Nehemiah (Neh. 1:6, 11, 2:5), Daniel (Dan. 6:20), Christ (Isa. 42:1, Mt.

20:28, Phil. 2:7), Paul (Rom. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, 1 Cor. 9:19, Gal. 1:10), Timothy (Phil. 1:1), Epaphras (Col. 4:12), James (Jms. 1:1), and Peter (2 Pet. 1:1).

*What do servant leaders do for their people? The following are some practical ways that leaders serve their people:*

1. They value and lift up the people they lead in ministry (Luke 15:19-10).
2. They assist people in discovering their divine design and direction for service (1 Cor. 12).
3. They see that their people are properly trained and equipped for ministry (Eph. 4:11-12).
4. They create the best possible environment for their people so that they can freely accomplish ministry without unnecessary encumbrance (Acts 15:24-29; 1 Cor. 16:15-16).
5. They let their people actually lead and do the ministry (Eph. 4:12).
6. They hold their people and themselves accountable for their ministries (Gal. 2:11-14; Phil. 4:2-3).

Finally, are you a servant leader? Find out by taking the Servant Audit that I've included. In the next issue of *Connection*, we'll examine the leader's credibility.

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