

Skills for Leadership

We're continuing to learn about leading like Jesus. One of the myths about leadership is leaders are born leaders. They're not. Leaders are made - made by two things: by choices and by circumstances. Making the right choices in the right circumstances makes for a great leader. This is a skill that you need to learn. Some people have natural relational talents, but real leadership is more than that, and it has to be learned. Leadership is a skill to develop, not just a gift.

Remember what I said when we started this series: leadership is influence. Every time you have interaction with anyone, even if it's just a conversation, you're influencing them. So you **are** a leader. The question is are you a good leader or a not so good one; an intentional one or an unintentional one; an effective one or an ineffective one? The issue isn't whether you lead, it's what kind of leader are you?

Today we're looking at leadership skills that Jesus modeled. Jesus was the only perfect leader. For the rest of us there's no expectation of perfection. God uses us in spite of ourselves. You don't have to be perfect or highly talented, but to be a good leader you have to study the model: Jesus.

In Luke 22:26 TLB, Jesus told them, "...among you, the one who serves you best will be your leader." Notice serving is the basis for leadership - not being demanding or requiring more of people. So, did was he saying that by serving that meant leaders should be kowtowing to people? Did that mean they should be doing whatever people want? No! Jesus said he, himself came to serve, and he certainly didn't kowtow to anyone or tell people what they wanted to hear or do things the way people wanted him to.

But there are a number of skills Jesus modeled in his time serving here on earth. Today I want to look at those and at getting and keeping them in our lives. Let's get right to it.

The first thing he did that we need to do is, **1. We Must Be an Example** - It begins with living what you want to communicate. If you're going to be a leader you've got to look at your own life and say, what does my life model? What kind of example am I? If I want to be a leader, I've got to work on my growth. You can only take others as far as you've gone yourself. You can't take them past where you are. So you've got to grow to have something to give other people.

In John 13:15 Jesus says, "*I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.*" He said, I did it, now you do it. In this particular case he had just washed the feet of the disciples, modeling servanthood.

The problem in our culture is we confuse being a leader with being a boss or a political official. They are not the same. Bosses demand. Leaders model. They lead by example. 1 Peter 5:3 says "*Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care but lead them by your good example.*" Lead by example.

So, what do we need to model? What do we need to be an example of? 1 Timothy 4:12 gives us five specific things: "*Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, in faith, and your purity.*" These are five areas to work on in your life: In what you say - How do I speak? In the way you live - How do I live my life? In your love - How do I show love to other people? In faith - Do I really trust God and does it show? In your purity - Do I live with integrity? These are things to model and Jesus is your example in all five areas.

You have to settle this in your heart and mind: Ask yourself, "Will I choose to follow Christ? Will Jesus be my model?" and, "Will I choose to be a model?" You can't be at all like Jesus until you know him and then have the integrity and transparency to be an example. Leadership is a choice - not whether you are but the kind you are. You have to be willing to make difficult choices other people choose not to make.

Another thing he did that we need to do is, **2. We Must Challenge Perspectives**. Real leaders challenge people to see a greater purpose; to see beyond ourselves. They work to get our thinking off ourselves; help us think in bigger ways. They challenge us to accept a greater cause, a greater purpose, a vision of a objective greater than ourselves.

Why is that important? Because we need people that force us to think beyond ourselves. By nature we're pretty self-centered. If you don't think that's true, you don't know what the Bible says about human nature or what modern psychology has discovered about human nature. We spend most of our time worrying about what we're going to eat and what we're going to do and how life is going. The farthest out from ourselves many of us go is to worry about our family and friends - the people that impact our own lives. It's quite easy and it's human nature to mostly live a self centered life.

We only grow and develop when we're challenged. You always need challenges in your life. If you don't have them you're coasting and there's only one way you can coast: downhill. Good leaders challenge people to a greater

purpose. A life without challenge is a life with no purpose. And because everyone's unique, good leaders realize that what works for one person won't work for another. You have to challenge people differently because we're all different.

Jesus constantly challenged people. He stretched them. He was always challenging them to do something with their life. Do something great with your life. Don't waste it.

Jesus will challenge your priorities by asking you to give up something good, something you may love, for something better or greater; for the good of other people. One day a wealthy young man who had everything met Jesus. He had success and wealth. But apparently he had some sense that there was something more, so he asked Jesus, "What more do I need to do? How do I inherit eternal life? Jesus gave him the challenge of priorities. He said in Mark 10:21, *"Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me."*

Now, in all of the four Gospels, Jesus never says this to anyone else. Jesus didn't tell everyone to go sell everything and give it to the poor. He only said it to this guy because it was a unique challenge for him. Jesus hit him right in his priorities. He challenged his priorities and God will do that to you as well. It may not be go give your money to the poor. But it will be in some area where it pushes YOUR buttons.

Jesus also challenges your faith. He does that by asking you to do something that seems impossible: "I want you to go and ask forgiveness of that person." I can't do that God. "I want you to start tithing." I can't, God. "I want you to lead this group." I can't. "I want you to go and talk to that person about me." I can't do that. He's going to challenge your faith by stretching you.

Jesus challenges us by giving a greater vision. He says, I want you to think bigger than your little, self-centered world. *"...go and make disciples of all the nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you."* That's certainly a pretty big vision.

When Jesus told his followers to go to all nations it was physically impossible. When he gave this command there was no way they could do it. He's giving them an impossible task. He does that because he wants to expand your vision, to break down your prejudices. He wants you to think globally.

That includes you. Why? Because that's why you're here. You're not here to watch history. You're here to make history. That's why God chose you to be a part of this church. Maybe you say, "But I can't!" Of course you can't. Not on your own power. But you don't know what God can do through you.

Every single person you'll ever meet hungers for a higher purpose. Some of us, after we've been pushed down long enough, lose track of that – it gets suppressed - but deep down it's still there. A great vision makes for great people. It turns ordinary people into great people.

I've said before, there's nothing more significant than the kingdom of God - God's reign. It's going to outlast everything else. That's why I don't make any apology saying to you that the most important thing you'll ever do with your life is be a part of this church, get involved in ministry, do your mission in the world and help with what God is doing. Because what we're doing here has global and eternal implications - it's going to outlast your job, family, hobby, house... It's going to outlast everything.

Another thing he did that we need to do is, **3. We Must Affirm People's Capabilities** - You affirm them and their potential. When someone believes in you, it inspires you to do more than you thought you could. It gives you courage and brings out the best in you.

In the 40s and 50s the Green Bay Packers lost seventy percent of their games. In 1958 they had only one win, ten losses and one tie - the worst record in Packer history. But the next year they got a new coach - Vince Lombardi. Over the next nine years they had nine winning seasons, winning seventy-five percent of their games and five national championships, including the first two Superbowls. What turned a losing team with years of failure into the most winning team? How in the world did it happen?

They had a leader who believed in their potential. He challenged them and believed in their potential. He affirmed them. He said, "You can do this. You're not losers, you're winners." He had confidence in their abilities and very high expectations for their level of dedication - that's part of affirmation, you expect more from people. And the team started winning.

Everyone in your life, every single person you come in contact with, has enormous potential - far more potential than they or you realize. When you're interacting with someone, pray, "God, what do you want to do? How could you use me to affirm them and help them go to the next level?"

Leaders work to bring out the best in other people. You want to know the key for bringing out the best in your kids; your spouse, your friend? Treat them as if they already were what they have the potential to become.

One day Jesus said to Peter - Impulsive, Foot-in-the-Mouth Peter. The guy who said "Let me walk on water," then sank. Who said, "I'll never deny you," then denied Jesus three times. Jesus said to him, "You're going to be Petros - the rock. Steady, unmovable. Peter was anything but. Yet Jesus looked at him and saw the person he would be.

Jesus looks the same way at you.

Some people say things like, "I just believe in telling it like it is." Don't say that to me - that's a cruddy way to live. Don't tell it like it is. Don't just reinforce the negative. Tell it like it could be. That's faith. "According to your faith it will be done unto you." Jesus said in John 14 *"Anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.* He said, you guys can do what I did. In fact, you're going to do greater things than I did.

How is it possible for Christians to do greater things than Jesus? I'll tell you: First, we do it through prayer which has no limit. I can pray right now and affect someone in New York, New Guinea or New Zealand, South Africa, South Korea or South Dakota, Darfur, Denmark or Detroit. When Jesus was on earth in human flesh, he was limited by location - he was only in one place at a time. But when he went back to heaven and put God's Spirit in you, me and other believers, he could do things all over the world at the same time through the believers - the Body of Christ.

Catch people doing something right and affirm it. Every time you encourage other people, you are leading. Everyone needs to be encouraged. An encouraging word makes a person feel a bit better, even in difficult times. Proverbs 12:25 says, *"Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers a person up."*

Now, don't give phony encouragement. It has to be from the heart, not manipulative. Give real encouragement and give it regularly. Don't be stingy. Give it all the time. Encourage your family, your friends, your small group people you lead, people who lead you, people who seem strong, people who seem weak, people who seem happy, people who seem sad. You don't know how much someone may need encouragement at that moment. Give it in real ways and don't be vague - be specific. Don't just say, "I like you." Tell them why.

Paul was great at encouragement. The encouragement notes he wrote are now most of what we call the "New Testament." In every letter Paul wrote things like, "I believe in you guys. I know that you can do this. I have confidence in you. What God began in you God's going to keep on doing."

Another thing Jesus did that we need to do is, **4. We Must Entrust People with Responsibility.** Nothing develops you faster than having someone trust you with responsibility. People respond to responsibility. Our expectations have an incredible influence on others. More than you realize. Research shows that people tend to live out what's expected of them. What are you expecting of people around you?

In Matthew 16:19 Jesus said to his disciples, *"And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."* Talk about responsibility! Jesus has given you awesome responsibility as well. He gives you the good news. You share it with people and it unlocks their hearts and gives them a future.

Jesus gives us incredible responsibility. Did Jesus know we'll sometimes fail? Of course. But part of bringing out the best in people is realizing they're going to fail, even, allowing them to fail. Our tendency is to fear making mistakes. We want zero mistakes. When any do happen we want to rush in and bail people out. That prevents us from learning valuable lessons. The fact is failure is a part of life. We need to give ourselves the opportunity to fail.

Shouldn't we prepare people as much as possible? Of course! That's why we have Crosstraining 101, 201, 301 and 401. That's why we do mentoring. But you learn best by doing. Luke 16:10 says *"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones."* We have to start somewhere. One of the most important life skills anyone can learn is to accept responsibility and the only way is by being given opportunities. All of us need to be trusted. We need someone who lets us prove ourselves and develop confidence.

Another thing Jesus did that **we need to do is, 5. We Must Treat People as Friends and Family.** Real leaders don't try to pretend like they're better than anyone else or separated from others. In **John 15:15, Jesus** said, *"I no*

longer call you slaves, because a master does not confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends..." That's got to be one of the most amazing things he ever said. Then in Matthew 12:48-49 it says, *"Jesus asked, 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' Then he pointed to his disciples and said, 'Look, these are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'"* That God would call me friend and family. That God would call you friend and family. That God would want to be our friend and make us family. God says I'm not calling you servants, I'm calling you friends.

If God is willing to be our friend and family, how in the world could you ever think that you're too far above anyone to be their friend or family member. So what if they annoy you or disagree with you? Do you imagine that you never annoy God or disagree with what God wants? God is perfect and all powerful and always right, so God has every right to stand off, aloof from us and be critical of us, but instead, God came to us and called us friend and family.

A final thing Jesus did that we need to do is, **6. We Must Hold People in Prayer.** You pray for your co-workers. You pray for your friends. You pray for those in your small group. You pray for your church family. You pray for your neighbors and relatives. You pray for your neighbors and community. All through the Gospels we have examples of Jesus praying for those he was leading; those he was influencing.

And did you know that Jesus has prayed for you? He said *"I'm praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message."* That includes you. Jesus Christ prayed for you.

It's your choice. Do you want to be a Godly leader, an effective leader, a good leader, a positive leader. Do these things we've talked about today with people. Be a people builder; influence people for good.

My question to you is, what are you going to do with your life from here on? You can focus on finances, on your reputation, on your body, on your comfort, on your home, on your interests... or you can focus on people and building them up. And that is the greatest use of your life. Of all the work you do; all the efforts you make here on earth, that's the only part that will last into eternity. The earth will be gone. Every company, every country, every institution here on earth will fade, fall, fracture, fail or be finished. People are going to last forever in heaven or hell. Everything else you see is eventually going to be gone. So don't waste your life on things that aren't going to last. Don't waste your life on things that are temporary. Don't waste your life because you're not taking any of it with you. Finances won't last. Pleasure won't last. Fame and popularity don't last. Status isn't going to last.

A few weeks ago I was at the annual meeting of our Conference - the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church. On the third day we had our memorial service where we celebrate the lives of the leaders in our conference - both lay and clergy - who have passed away since the last time we met together. After each name we ring a bell in recognition of how their lives have sounded a clear note of love in the world. It's always a very moving time, but the thing that always gets to me, is that as each name is read and the bell tolls, those whose lives were affected by that person, stand to acknowledge the gift of their life and the influence they had on your life.

As I stood at several of the names, I marveled at the difference that those people had made in my life, and the lives of many others who stood at the same time.

I'm always aware that the day will come when they ring that bell for my life. A bell rings for each of us in our time as our life on earth closes. What will matter at that moment is what kind of difference did you make in the lives of people in this world; in this community; in this church.

What if everyone here decided today to be a real, good, godly, positive, affirming leader - every one of us a real influencer? What if each and every one here went out this week to be people builders? What if each of us helped someone to grow - if only a little? Let's set an example for everyone we come in contact with; challenge them to be bigger than themselves, to believe in their potential. Let's affirm them, expect the best, trust them with responsibility, pray for them, help them when they need it. What kind of impact would this church have? We could begin to change the world and we could do it with just this many people; just this many influencers; just this many leaders.

And, guess what? God is calling you to do just that.

Let's pray.