

Lead like Jesus

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Day One

Did you know the widely-used workplace term servant leader doesn't have roots in the Bible? Sometimes, when something seems to fit what we believe as followers of Jesus, we easily ascribe it to what we know from the Bible. You and I know there is no better wisdom for living than God's Word! Whether in our personal or business life, we find truth and goodness for any situation we face in His Word. And, although the author and scholar who coined this term didn't find this truth from the Bible, we clearly see the Word calls us to lead lives as servant leaders.

What is it mean to be a servant leader? Coined by Robert Greenleaf in 1970 in an essay "The Servant as a Leader", Greenleaf seeks to understand a character from a fictional story—not the Bible. This story talks about a band of men on a mythical journey who have a servant who cares for their every need. "Once he disappears, their band falls apart, and everything is in disarray." One of the members finds the servant later, and discovers he is a "guiding spirit, and noble leader."¹

To my listeners today, this is why abiding in the Word and in community with other believers is critical! We might say Greenleaf was reading biblical allegory, but he was not! Greenleaf goes on to describe who a servant leader is. Some of a servant's characteristics include someone who desires to serve and then become a leader rather than having a leader-first attitude seeking unusual power or material possessions. A servant leader makes sure the needs of other people are his highest priority, and they are receiving benefits from the servant leader. Further descriptors of servant leadership include empowering others, standing back to let others shine, humility, authenticity, courage, accountability, acceptance of other perspectives, and stewardship.

Let's replace this fictional character and the worldly descriptors and think of Jesus in God's word, which is where we need to seek our wisdom about being a servant leader!

Day Two

Even though the phrase servant leadership isn't a biblical term, the Bible does tell us as leaders to serve! I am so thankful for God's Word and how it truly can inform how we work! Jesus tells us to serve in this passage.

Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves (Luke 22:25-26).

This verse follows a dispute among the disciples about who would be regarded as the greatest.

Although we don't read as much detail about the last supper in Luke's account, we need to consider how Jesus modeled servant leadership to the disciples that night.

¹ Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). The servant as leader. The Greenleaf Center For Servant Leadership, Cop.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him (John 13:3-5).

Jesus knew he was all powerful. God had *put all things under his power* yet he took the posture of a lowly servant and washed his disciples' feet, going as far as to use the towel on his body to dry them.

He did not exercise lordship over them and demand they wash his feet, rather as the leader, he was the one who served.

Do you exercise lordship, or, as a leader, do you serve? Maybe you are not yet thinking of yourself as a leader. Let's remove the notions of worldly appointments and titles. Jesus was not considered a leader by the people of his time, at least not in the sense of the synagogue or even in politics. It was through his service of speaking the Word of God, healing the sick, and performing miracles that Jesus came to be seen as a leader. And for some, his leadership blessed them, and others, it threatened. He didn't demand lordship as the Son of God, demanding to be followed. He was followed because he served!

If you find yourself in a position where you do hold a title, are you using this for the betterment of those who see you in this position? What do they see? Are you demanding respect or giving it? Are you watching your team struggle to complete work or are you seeking to help?

Day Three

Even though he was Lord of all, Jesus was serving the disciples in a very humble way! He did this for a very specific reason—to be a model of the behavior he was calling his disciples to. He knew they would ultimately argue about who was greatest.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him (John 13:12-16).

Clearly Jesus modeled how he served, even as their teacher and Lord. They were to serve one another just as Jesus had just served them. Jesus was also a servant and messenger of God. He was not greater than the one who sent him.

Yesterday, I asked you consider if you are displaying lordship in your leadership or service. Obviously, you aren't going to work washing people's feet, unless you are a nail technician by profession! But what are ways you can model servant leadership to people around you at work? Again, it doesn't matter if you hold a leadership title or not. You are a servant leader!

Some of descriptors of servant leadership we discussed include empowering others, letting others shine, acting with humility and authenticity, being held accountable, practicing stewardship and accepting the perspectives of others.

Jesus clearly saw the perspectives of others! He served them and didn't care what other people said when he dined with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus was a model of seeing people where they were. How are you seeing others around you who may feel outcast? Are there people at work battling a hidden illness or disability? How can you help?

Are you humble? Colossians 3:12 tells us *as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, we are to clothe ourselves in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*. Humility is a modest or low view of your own importance. If you are a leader, do you feel more important than people around you? Extending kindness in good measure, along with patience to others is one way to show you know they are important!

How do you steward your time? Are you wasting it in gossip or viewing memes online when you should be coaching someone along?

Ask yourself how you are modeling servant leadership!

Day Four

The worldview of a servant leader is someone who empowers others. Basically, giving someone the power to do something. Jesus empowered his disciples, and he empowers us today!

Jesus was all powerful. We see it time and time again in the miracles he performed in the gospels—water to wine, healing the sick and raising the dead! Jesus rebuked demonic spirits. In Matthew 10, Jesus sends out the twelve disciples.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give" (Matthew 10:5-8).

Can you imagine how these twelve men felt? The things they had seen Jesus do, they were being empowered to do! Personally, I would be invigorated and terrified all at the same time!

How can you empower others? Sometimes this can be as simple as being a good encourager when you see someone trying something new or struggling when they are stuck. Your words give them power to do something! Your words of encouragement may be the extra fuel they need to not feel scared of the next step they need to take. Think about someone who has been looking for work. They apply and apply, maybe even interview and are discouraged and tired. Your encouragement can empower them to keep applying and not lose hope!

Perhaps the empowerment is more literal. You are empowering a subordinate or colleague to try something new—something they have seen you do time and time again, just like Jesus did with his disciples! Is it preparing and presenting materials to a board of directors? Perhaps it is taking ownership of opening or closing during a shift. Either way, you are serving them by releasing your power and allowing them to do something they would not otherwise have an opportunity to do!

Think of when this has happened for you. Is there a specific time you can recount? This isn't only for those just starting out in a career. It is a lifelong journey! I think of how Mary Lowman and Julie Busted have empowered me through both giving me the power to do something new at The Christian Working Woman and their ongoing encouragement to me! I have been working for a long time.

Don't lose sight. There are opportunities for you to be a servant leader through empowering someone around you today!

Day Five

When I think of a servant leader, I think of someone who always places others before themselves—giving to others perhaps when they may not even seem like they can give anything more. Giving

without any expectation of something in return. This self-sacrificing giving was embodied by our Lord and Savior Jesus.

I think all of us have likely been on the other end of this—someone has done something for us and now they are seeking a favor in return. It's what you would call a quid pro quo or a tit for tat style of giving. I give, and then I want something in return. It feels like a transaction, because it is.

This is not servant leadership. This is a transaction.

Jesus gave his life for us!

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).

He sacrificed himself for our sins once and for all! It is a one-way selfless gift that gives us the joy of eternity with our Lord in heaven!

What are ways you can give to others? How are you a good steward of your time, treasure, and talent to the benefit of others?

Time. More than anything, women at all stages of their career need mentorship. Statistically, women are less likely to receive mentoring, and it is also a fact that those who receive mentoring are five times more likely to progress in their career in the form of a promotion!

Perhaps someone needs encouragement. Can you take time to pray with them or have a cup of coffee? Perhaps even taking time to send an encouraging text or a Bible verse would be just what they need.

Treasure. This isn't just money; it is the spiritual and eternal riches you have from your salvation. The greatest gift.

Giving of your tangible treasure could look like taking a colleague to lunch or buying them a small token of appreciation for a job well done. Perhaps it is preparing a meal for someone in need, which is a combination of using your time, treasure, and hopefully talent!

What about your spiritual treasure? How are you giving of this selflessly? Are you telling people about Jesus? Maybe praying for people? Simply being hopeful and being able to give an answer for what your hope is in can be one way to share your spiritual treasure with a colleague.

Talent. Are you amazing at something? Maybe you are super organized or love planning a meeting. Offer to help someone else when they need it most!