



Servant Leadership

Advent Study

Day 1

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Introduction

Several years ago Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges wrote a book entitled *Lead Like Jesus* that is the inspiration for this Advent series and is the source for quoted material. Blanchard was in the consulting business helping companies develop management and leadership skills when Jesus Christ gained control of his life. A logical progression from that event was that he would begin to see leadership from a new point of view: the will of God. What kind of leaders does God want? Those who lead like Jesus. Servant leaders.

Jesus made it clear what he had in mind concerning leadership when, in John 13, he washed the disciples' feet; and when he said, in Matthew 20:28, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve." That is the example that we are to follow if we are to be Christ's disciples...servant leaders...in our world today. Advent is a time for self-examination as we look toward, once again, to the coming of the Lord at Christmas. Hopefully, in the days ahead we will come to have a better picture of what servant leadership is all about and how we can become more effective servant leaders.

An immediate question is: Who is a leader? Blanchard and Hodges sum it up this way: "Leadership is a process of influence. Anytime you seek to influence the thinking, behavior, or development of people in their personal or professional lives, you are taking on the role of a leader." Perhaps we tend to think of ourselves as a follower rather than a leader, but that definition makes it clear that we are all leaders in one way or another and we should want to be the leaders that God wills us to be. As our brief reading for today tells us: "Encourage one another and build each other up." That's an act of servant leadership.

R&D *What are your leadership roles?*

Prayer: *Lord, help me to be the servant leader You call me to be.*

Day 2

Read: 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Life Role vs. Organizational Chart

Although our reading for today was written by the apostle Paul to his protégé Timothy to guide him in leading a church—and therefore is to the pastor of a congregation—the general idea applies to all Christian leaders: we are to be a good example to others. If we want to influence others in any way, we want them to respect us. To respect us as servant leaders a good reputation (v.7) as one who lives as a disciple of Christ is invaluable.

"Most of the leadership that shapes our lives does not come from leaders with titles on an organizational chart; it comes from leaders in our daily life role relationships." If we have a leadership role in a business, community, or church organization, for instance, we will have some

opportunity to influence others for good; but it is in life roles as parents, spouses, and friends that we have enduring life-long relationships. My wife and I have a picture gallery of loved ones who were influential in our Christian life—we call them our “treasures in heaven”—and not one of them was on an organizational chart.

Jesus’ mother is an example of what servant leadership can mean in the life of another. Mary poured into her son a legacy of submission to God, faith, and service. She modeled a person with a servant’s heart. In her life role as a mother she had the opportunity to influence the most important person who ever lived, and she did not fail. Our opportunities to be God’s person in the lives of others are not nearly as dramatic and challenging as what Mary faced, but we are here to show our submission to God, faith, and service to those around us each day of our lives.

R&D How are you doing in your life roles? Explain.

Prayer: Being a servant leader is indeed, Lord, a noble task. Equip us, sustain us, and guide us to be Christ to the world around us.

Day 3

Read: Matthew 20:20-27

Servant Leadership

The mother of John and James, in contrast to the mother of Jesus, had a selfish request. She wanted a special place for her sons next to Jesus in the kingdom. When the nature of this request became known to the disciples, they were upset that James and John might get preference over them. As servant leaders, everyone but Jesus seemed to be entirely on the wrong tract. It fell to him to set the record straight.

Jesus gives himself as the example of one who has come to serve rather than be served. “This call by Jesus to servant leadership is clear and unequivocal; his words leave no room for plan B.” For disciples of Christ, servant leadership is the only option. “Servant leadership is to be a living statement of who we are in Christ, how we treat one another, and how we demonstrate the love of Christ to the whole world. If this sounds like serious business with profound implications—it is!”

Blanchard and Hodges note that Jesus never sends us into any situation alone or without a valid plan. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). One way in which I have an opportunity to be a servant leader is as an online missionary with Global Media Outreach. As a result, I am daily in contact with people from all over the world who are making a commitment to Christ as Savior, or are seeking to grow in their faith relationship. I often use the Jeremiah quote with them because it speaks volumes about the kind of God we have and His desire for our good. God has a plan, but people need to be led to the truth.

R&D How does Scripture aid you in being a servant leader?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the opportunities You give us to lead others to You.

Day 4

Read: James 1:2-8

Yoked

When most people think of a yoke, it is probably the heavy piece of equipment that was placed on the necks of oxen as they pulled a wagon or farming equipment. It has an unpleasant feel about it. Yet, Jesus, in Matthew 11:28-30, tells us, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Why is our yoke easy and our burden light when yoked to the Lord? Because He carries the much greater weight of whatever burden is involved.

James is being realistic about the trials we Christians face when we are yoked with the Lord...that is, doing what He wants us to do. But, at the same time, he is giving us encouragement. There are things we are to learn from the challenges we face, and Christian maturity will result. But, most important of all, God is right there with us in the midst of our trials and temptations; whatever wisdom we lack, we simply need to ask God who gives generously to those who seek Him (v.5).

There is that ever-present temptation, even when we are trying to do good things, to take the matter into our own hands rather than looking to God, through the Holy Spirit within us, to guide our way. I don't know how it is with you, but this has never worked very well for me. I get into a project that seems just the right thing to do and disaster results. Then I start calling to God for help. Hopefully I'm learning to look to God first so that I can be yoked with Him.

R&D How do you go about seeking the Lord's guidance concerning the challenges you face in life?

Prayer: Lord, help me not to lean on my own understanding, knowing You are the source of all wisdom and guidance.

Day 5

Read: Luke 5:1-11

What Jesus Knows

Having dealt in our last session with the fact that God has plans for us, and we are better off when we follow His plans, today we see how impractical those plans might look to us. Peter, after all, was a fisherman. What did Jesus know about catching fish? Peter had already experienced a frustrating attempt at fishing that day, with no results. It seemed humiliating to be told by someone who had no knowledge of fishing to take the boat out and try again. But, either something Jesus had said or just the power of his presence, caused Peter to obey. He learned a great lesson that day: Jesus knows things we don't know!

“A common barrier to embracing Jesus as a leadership role model lies in skepticism about the relevance of his teaching to our specific leadership situations. We are, in many ways, faced with the same questions that Peter faced when Jesus asked him to do some highly unusual and unorthodox things regard his fishing business.” I'm a lot like Peter. I have had to learn the hard way that Jesus knows what he is doing and my role is to follow him.

On the other hand, things work well when we follow Jesus' instructions. Here's a simple example from a couple of days ago. When I walked into a spare room in our house I heard a little cardboard music box playing “You Are My Sunshine.” (It seems to have a mind of its own and

does that from time to time). It reminded me that my wife had been given that little box long ago by a dear friend who had been a wonderful Christian counselor to us over the years. It was as though the Holy Spirit was reminding me that it was due time for us to be sending a thank-filled greeting card to that friend, which we did. Three times within the next 24 hours we heard people sing “You Are My Sunshine”! God will not only guide us in being servant leaders to those with whom we have life connections, He will sometimes affirm us for doing it.

R&D Recall an instance in which God affirmed you for doing the right thing.

Prayer: You are all-knowing, Father God, and we need to be all-listening for Your inner guidance through the Holy Spirit.

Day 6

Read: John 15:1-8

Jesus Works through Us

Jesus not only showed that he knew at least something about fishing, his earthly life gave him the opportunity—and the frustration—of facing a work schedule and related chores like those we encounter in our lives. For the first thirty years of his life he was, after all, a carpenter. He knew sweat and toil. He knew what it was like to be part of a large family living in close quarters. He undoubtedly experienced the disappointments of “ill-mannered customers and clients who won’t pay their bills.” So, when he calls on us to do what he would have us do, he is not asking things he wasn’t willing to do while here on earth.

Now we can do those things under his guidance and encouragement. He is the vine and we are the branches. He is our life-support system. If we remain in him, we will bear fruit. As we looked at earlier, we have the opportunity to be yoked with him, and he will bear the brunt of the burden. When he ascended from earth, Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to be with us everywhere and all the time. What more could we ask?

We have a friend who says Christians are extension cords of God. I think it is a wonderful illustration because most of us are much more knowledgeable about extension cords than we are grapevines. Extension cords carry power. What the source of the power accomplishes is through those cords. So it is with God. He is the ultimate power source, who sent His Son to show us what true life is all about with the idea that we Christians will be Christ to the world around us, empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so.

R&D How well are you being used as an extension cord of God’s love?

Prayer: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

Day 7

Read: Acts 9:1-19

Transformation

I don’t think it is going too far to say that the apostle Paul has been the most influential Christian of all time. So, his transformation from an enemy of Christ to his primary disciple is certainly one of the most important things that ever happened. And, the enormity of that transformation and the way it happened is one of the greatest miracles. Our reading for today tells the story. But it only tells part of the transformation of Paul that needed to take place.

Paul had received the finest theological education of his day as a student under the famous Gamaliel. He knew God's word. He was also a man fully committed to God as he understood Him, to the extent of being an avid persecutor of the people of the way (as Christians were known at that time). The blinding encounter with Jesus changed all that, but there was still much that he needed to learn and experience in order to become the Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul initially was more feared than followed, and he had to go away to Arabia for three years for time alone with God (Galatians 1:16-18) that he might know what Christianity was all about and how to be Christ to his world. "During his time in Arabia, Paul's personal leadership transformation became complete—he fully surrendered to God and God's plan for him, he began to trust in God's presence and provision, he became confident in God's unconditional love, and he accepted and abided in Jesus. He returned to Damascus prepared to teach and equip."

God is looking for that sort of transformation in us. It won't be as dramatic and far-reaching as was necessary with Paul. But think of Ananias in this story; perhaps we can better identify with him. He had one simple act to perform, but what an essential act that was: to place hands on Paul to restore his sight. It also seemed a very dangerous assignment, considering who Paul was. But Ananias proved to be a servant leader and did as he was instructed. Are we willing to go and do likewise (Luke 10:37)?

R&D What has been the most transforming experience in your life?

Prayer: Lord, I want to be transformed to be the person You want me to be, but I do not want to be one who refuses Your call upon my life because I don't think I've been adequately transformed.

Day 8

Read: 1 Samuel 18:1-4

Building Trust

For any group or organization to function effectively, there must be trust. The servant leader who has, through self-examination, found himself or herself to have been transformed into the person God wants him to be, is ready to be trusted.

David was that kind of person, and a fully trusting relationship developed between him and Jonathan. A footnote in the *Life Application Bible* says that the foundation stones of the relationship between David and Jonathan were: (1) they based their relationship on commitment to God, not just to each other; (2) they let nothing come between them, not even career or family problems; (3) they grew closer together when their friendship was tested; and (4) they remained friends to the end.

If, on the other hand, the leader is motivated by self-interest, others will follow only as long as it suits *their* self-interest. Trust is the key, and trust can only exist if the leader and the followers are of one mind as to the essentials of the goal.

One of the hazards in most groups or organizations is that someone other than the leader wants to become the leader himself. This can be particularly tricky in industry, and often leads to people in leadership roles holding back those under them so as to maintain an advantage over the suspected usurpers. When I was in a leadership role in industry years ago I learned the benefit of taking the opposite approach. God had apparently gotten through to me at that point in my life because it made sense to me to keep those working with me fully informed of what we were trying to accomplish and how important they were in reaching that goal. As a result, there was a level of

trust, and—rather than trying to “leapfrog” over me—they simply pushed me up the corporate ladder. Later, they all became leaders in their chosen fields, including several in Christian ministry.

R&D *What lessons has life in Christ taught you about trust?*

Prayer: *Lord, help us to become trustworthy servant leaders.*

Day 9

Read: Psalm 128

Family Trust

Perhaps no role of the servant leader is as important as in family relationships. The family leader sets the example, and that example can affect generations to come. Blanchard and Hodges say, “The family leader’s example determines how family members treat people of all ages and conditions; how they view success, failure, and adversity; how they solve problems; and how they communicate love and self-worth. If a family leader believes that his self-worth is the result of his performance plus the opinions of others, he is likely to pass on those priorities and values to the next generation by how he treats them. On the other hand, if the family leader demonstrates humility, grace, and an open reliance on God, His Word, and His promises, these traits are likely to flow into the family members.”

As our psalm tells us, those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways will not only be blessed, but pass that blessing down the family line. The footnote for this psalm in the *Life Application Bible* says, “A good family life is a reward for following God. The values outlined in God’s Word include love, service, honesty, integrity, and prayer. These help all relationships, and they are especially vital to home life.”

The servant leader should be guided by the above quotes. They will serve us well. But, perhaps the most important goal for the family leader to pursue is quality time with the family. Not just a quantity of time—although that is important—but time well spent. Despite all our human failures, love covers all wrongs (Proverbs 10:12), and love is best shown by sacrificing our personal desires for the benefit of our family.

R&D *Can you see traits of your family leadership in the lives of your children, siblings, spouse?*

Prayer: *Lord, may those who come behind us find us faithful.*

Day 10

Read: Nehemiah 2:11-18

Community Trust

Nehemiah is one of the greatest leaders in the Bible. Unlike Moses and Gideon, he did not make excuses when asked by God to undertake a major effort. Unlike David, he did not stray along the way. Nehemiah was called by God and commissioned by the king, and he did what he was told to do: rebuild the walls of Jerusalem following the exile of the Jews and the deterioration of the city after those years in exile. As we see from our reading for today, when he arrived, he realistically assessed the situation and challenged the people, letting them know that the Lord was with them in the effort, and they trusted him to lead.

Community leadership involves willingly extending one’s service for the common good. To do that requires finding common ground and bringing reconciliation between people of varied

backgrounds and opinions. A classic example of this, from years ago, involved our living in a small community where half of the people were life-time residents and the other half were from all over the United States, having come with their own individual cultures, opinions, prejudices, and life experiences. It was quite a challenge!

Perhaps all of us have at one time or another faced the challenge of community leadership in some way. According to *Lead Like Jesus*, “The various how-tos of leadership in the community include informed, principle-based voting; standing up for what is right over what works; responding with honor when called upon to serve on juries; praying for all who stand in harm’s way on behalf of the community; lending a helping hand to those in need; and seeking to understand those who are different from you.” One way in which we can all be servant leaders in our community is to pray regularly for our neighbors and to be ready to “put feet on those prayers” when needed.

R&D *What role or roles have you had in community leadership?*

Prayer: *Lord, make me conscious of the needs of others.*

Day 11

Read: Philippians 2:1-4

Looking Out for Others

Our passage from Philippians makes clear what servant leadership is all about. We are to encourage, comfort, and love those around us. We have the Holy Spirit working within us to do those things. A good friend of ours rightly says, “Sin is just doing what I want to do because I want to do it.” At the same time, we are told to love our neighbors as *ourselves*, but that means that we are to love ourselves; so some self-interest is not, in itself, sin. But, as Paul says, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (v.4). How do we balance all of that?

Blanchard and Hodges say, “A heart motivated by self-interest looks at the world as a ‘give a little, take a lot’ proposition. People with hearts motivated by self-interest put their own agenda, safety, status, and gratification ahead of that of those affected by their thoughts and actions.” The authors of *Lead Like Jesus* then go on to show the difference between *driven* people and *called* people. Driven people tend to think that they own everything, including their relationships, possessions, and positions. The result is that most of them spend their time protecting what they have.

Called people, on the other hand, are led by the Lord. They look at everything as being on loan from God. Our relationships are on loan because there is no guarantee we will see our loved ones tomorrow. Our possessions are on loan and are held lightly because they are to be shared with others. Our positions are on loan from God and from those whom we are attempting to influence. Servant leaders act as good stewards of what has been loaned to us.

R&D *How does this concept of everything you have being on loan from God affect the way you live?*

Prayer: *Help me to realize, Dear Lord, that all of the funds I have are held in trust for You; and help me to be a good steward of Your funds.*

Day 12

Read: John 14:1-14

Equipping Successors

In our reading for today Jesus was preparing his disciples for the time when he would no longer be with them. He was giving them assurances about himself and about what would happen when he was no longer around. They did not yet understand about the Holy Spirit who would be coming to take his place...one who would be unlimited by time and space; but Jesus was laying the groundwork for what was to come.

Servant leaders also need to prepare the way for those who will succeed them in whatever leadership roles they have, and self-examination is an essential step in that direction. A first question might be whether there is anything holding us back from taking this step. Am I enjoying it too much to pass it on? Do I think those who would follow me will be competent to do it well? Am I willing to trust God to see that they do? These and other questions need to be resolved in our minds so that we will be “free and easy” in passing on what we have learned to those who would succeed us.

Jesus, of course, is our model. Jesus spent most of his ministry time training and equipping his disciples for leadership. As he neared the end of his time with them, he told them, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead I call you friends, for everything I learned from my Father, I have made known to you” (15:15). Likewise, we should be teaching those who follow us everything we have learned. And we can give them encouragement by recalling that, in our reading for today, Jesus also told them that those who have faith in him would be doing what he has been doing, and even greater things (v.12).

R&D What leadership role may you soon (or someday) be passing on to another (or others)? What preparations are you making?

Prayer: Lord, help us to know when and how to pass on any leadership role we have, and equip us to equip them for the task.

Day 13

Read: Exodus 3:1-14

God Is the Leader

There is a fascinating passage in 1 Samuel 9 in which the people of Israel are asking for a king to rule over them. Samuel is disappointed that they want to take that step, and so is God. God is displeased because the Israelites have rejected Him as their king and are willing to look to an earthly substitute. But God gives permission for it to happen only if Samuel warns the people what it will mean for them to have a king. The point is, God is looking for servants who will acknowledge and follow Him as leader.

Throughout his life Jesus affirmed this principle: God is not looking for leaders but for servants who will let Him be leader and whose focus is on His kingdom and not their own. God made that clear to Abraham; there was something very important God wanted him to do, but God would be in control. In our reading for today, God makes the same thing clear to Moses; He would provide leadership for this shy, retiring man who was conscious of his own limitations. Likewise, as we have seen earlier in this series, God had to turn the apostle Paul completely around to get him under God’s leadership in order to serve effectively.

Blanchard and Hodges like to use the term EGO (meaning Edge God Out) as the problem of the leader who sees himself rather than God at the center of his efforts. “If you want your life to be significant, then you have to recognize that it’s all about God, not about you. As the old Yiddish saying goes, ‘If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans.’” When we think about servant leadership, let us always keep in mind who the real Leader is.

R&D How conscious are you, when engaging in a leadership role, that it is all about Jesus?

Prayer: So fill me with Your Holy Spirit, Gracious God, that, in whatever I do, I do for Your glory.

Day 14

Read: Luke 12:1-7

The Right Kind of Fear

To emphasize the essentiality of God as our leader, Blanchard and Hodges say that another dynamic of EGO (Edging God Out) is fear. As our reading from Luke demonstrates, fear of others is unjustified, fear of God is what our lives should be based upon. Fear of God is wholesome fear; it is holding God in awe because of who He is. We can overcome our selfish fears if we put our trust in Him.

Some fear is not a bad thing; it can help us be cautious when we are in physical, emotional, or spiritual danger. In reflecting on this matter, I remembered a story from my childhood. Although an agnostic at the time and from a Protestant family, I attended a Roman Catholic high school where I heard many prayers repeated daily. One night I was walking home alone along a very dark and seemingly dangerous route. I found comfort in being able to repeat “Hail Marys” all the way home. This story is perhaps a parable about the right kind of fear. In my feeble way, I had my priorities right; even though not a Christian, I was looking to God in my hour of need.

The issue in today’s reading is ultimate fear. Psalm 111:10 tells us that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and Proverbs 14:26 says, “He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.” Because God is with them, servant leaders need not fear failure to accomplish what we believe God has called us to do, rejection by others who oppose that good work, or disappointment with others who fail to support our efforts. We answer to God alone; our only fear should be whether we are in relationship with Him.

R&D When have you let fear of others stand in the way of doing what God would have you do?

Prayer: Lord, You are an awesome God.

Day 15

Read: Romans 12:1-2

Worship

I sometimes jest that one of my “gifts” is rationalization, and I may be rationalizing in what I am about to tell you about myself. Although a layman, I have some responsibilities in our worship community that cause me distractions on Sunday mornings when my whole focus should be on worshipping God. I’m checking to see who is present and who isn’t; I’m concerned about whether the sermon is coming across effectively; I’m wondering if the music is appropriate for the occasion. I try to rationalize this behavior, but I am guilty. I am not trusting God.

But I take some comfort in what Blanchard and Hodges have to say to servant leaders about worship. They say we need to *altar* our focus...a word not misspelled because we need to put our EGO on the altar so that it can be transformed. “In the Bible, people worshiped when they saw God or some evidence of God’s presence, power, or worth. So worship starts and ends with God. We respond to His initiative.” And verse 1 tells us that offering our bodies as a living sacrifice is our spiritual act of worship. These are words I can readily identify with because I see God’s grace in my life all day long and am grateful (worshipful) about it.

On the other hand, our EGO shows up when we begin to think too much about ourselves; when we think and act as though everything depends on us. Doing this sets us up for failure as servant leaders. The fact is that matters beyond our control, and even beyond our awareness, determine our success or failure. Our efforts are important, but they need to be put in the perspective of God’s control.

R&D *What works against effective worship of God in your life? What will you do about it?*

Prayer: *Lord, may I worship You in spirit and in truth.*

Day 16

Read: Hebrews 12:1-3

Clearing the Way

If we are going to be transformed from our EGO centeredness so that we can be the servant leaders God calls us to be, some self-examination may be helpful. The passage from Hebrews tells us something about “setting aside the sins that so easily entangle us” so that we may clear the way to run the race before us with our eyes on Jesus. “Edging God Out separates us from God, from others, and from ourselves; compares us with others; and distorts the truth into a false sense of security.” When transformed into exalting God instead of ourselves, “we move toward community and transparent relationships rather than separation and isolation, from comparison to contentment with who we are and whose we are, and from distorting the truth to seeking the truth as a basis for decision making.”

Stepping from EGO into transformation involves admitting that we have an EGO problem that is beyond our control and needs fixing. What is standing in the way of our being an effective servant leader? By examining our inner thoughts under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will, hopefully, be able to discern those areas where correction is needed. In what ways are we too focused on ourselves? Why don’t we have more trust in God? Advent is a good time of the year to be looking within ourselves, confessing our short-comings, and seeking God’s forgiveness that they way may be cleared for greater service to Him.

It may be comforting at this point to think back on our brief reading for today. We have a great crowd of witnesses. We are not alone. Those who have gone before us have shown faith in the Lord and are now in His presence. They are like a huge cheering section, encouraging us onward. Many have endured terrible hardships and sufferings. They are our treasures in heaven, telling us that we can persevere because they have done so. They are model servant leaders; we can be also.

R&D *What issue do you need to resolve with God to clear the way for effective leadership?*

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for the faithful who have gone before as examples of what it means to be Your disciples.*

Day 17

Read: Matthew 6:14-15; Ephesians 4:32

Forgiveness and Grace

Blanchard and Hodges contend that servant leaders look at their daily leadership choices with eternity in mind. In other words, their perspective is on what God wants rather than their selfish desires. “Leading like Jesus calls for a radically different perspective and priority—seeking first the kingdom of God” (see Matthew 6:33). “What does seeking first the kingdom of God mean in terms of our leadership decisions? It means bringing an eternal perspective into the realm of practical, day-to-day leadership decisions that effects better results and better relationships. It means revising the way we see people, situations, and priorities to the way God sees them, and inviting the Holy Spirit into our relationships to infuse into our thoughts and actions two key elements—forgiveness and grace.”

Forgiveness is an essential aspect of leadership. It is how servant leaders respond to mistakes and errors. It is the way a heart centered in the unconditional love of God responds to disappointment in, and failures of, others. There is no room in that heart for resentment toward others. Jesus, in our reading for today and in many other places in Scripture, has made the priority of forgiveness clear. Paul, in the Ephesians verse, notes that forgiveness includes kindness and compassion to those who need forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the way of grace. “The key to a leader ministering to followers inflicted with false pride or fear, as well as followers witnessing to leaders inflicted with the same, is the power of grace.” We exhibit grace when we are present to one another, acknowledging our mutual limitations and encouraging each other to do better. It is sheer grace that allows us to be servant leaders and smoothes the pathway to success in those efforts to which the Lord calls us.

R&D *Whom do you need to forgive today?*

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, it is beyond comprehension that You forgive all our sins; by Your grace, may we be forgiving of others.*

Day 18

Read: Matthew 28:19-20

Purpose

On the issue of vision, the authors of *Lead Like Jesus* focus on organizational ministry. In other words, what is your church’s mission statement? They note that, when the mission statement is either vague, unchallenging, or unknown to the congregation, little happens. Without a vision, the people flounder. One growing church’s mission statement, they note, is to make Jesus smile.

Our focus in this series is on servant leaders and what our personal vision might be. We should all be guided by the mission Jesus gave us in our brief reading for today. We are all called to go into the world making disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded us to do. God will use each of us in different ways to accomplish that goal depending on our particular gifts and many other factors that are commensurate with our personality and the opportunities we have. But servant leadership does not stop there.

Toward our vision, we need to ask ourselves, “What is God’s purpose in my life?” That might be answered in at least two ways. One is what His overall purpose for me might be: to teach, to be an encourager, to meet the needs of others, etc. The other answer has to do with what God wants of me today, right now. Servant leaders should know the overall direction God wants them going, but be equally conscious of the immediate situation. God doesn’t want part-time disciples. What God called to my attention at this point was to remind our church leadership to make our vision more clearly known to our people.

R&D What do you believe to be God’s special purpose in your life?

Prayer: Use me, Lord, in the long run and in the short run as well.

Day 19

Read: Matthew 22:36-40

Values

Knowing our values, living our values, and not compromising our values would sum up how we should be looking at this subject in our study today. In our Bible passage Jesus makes it clear what our primary focus should be. What do we value most? Loving God and loving our neighbor. Blanchard and Hodges say, “Values are the nonnegotiable principles that define the character of the leader.”

If loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbor as ourselves are our values, how do we show that in our lives? “Values will not drive the accomplishment of a purpose or picture of the future unless they are translated into behavior.” Servant leaders, to be effective, must “walk the walk as well as talk the talk.” Those who follow us and those we serve need to see that our values are lived out in the crucible of everyday life.

We are, nonetheless, continually faced with factors that could cause us to compromise our values. “Leading like Jesus does not include letting the organization change or compromise your values.” I mentioned rationalization in an earlier study; if we’re not careful, it can be the source of relinquishing our values and justifying our doing so. Churches in our day, seeing a decreasing congregation, too easily compromise the gospel by trying to make it more palatable to the people. But, as John MacNaughton once said, “The world is filled with compromise in things big and small. In matters of business negotiations and politics (often called the art of the possible), thoughtful compromise has a real place. In matters of faith and morals, compromise is the enemy.” Servant leaders stand by their values.

R&D How effectively are you able to stand by your values in our day? What challenges them?

Prayer: Lord, help me to live a life of loving You and my neighbor.

Day 20

Read: Matthew 20:20-26

Clear Directions

Today we re-visit a passage of Scripture we looked at earlier in this series because it is at the heart of what servant leadership is all about. Whoever wants to be great is to be a servant. Something that would seem ridiculous in the world’s eyes is at the center of what Jesus means by servant leadership.

In business organizations there is the saying that the customer is always right. In practice, however, just the opposite is the case in many organizations. The employee, instead of being focused on pleasing the customer, is more interested in pleasing the one who pays his salary...the boss. Likewise, self-serving leaders tend to see their followers not as essential members of their team but as ones who are there to serve them. Jesus needed to make the point clear to his disciples: “Not so with you” (v.26).

From *Lead Like Jesus*: “While Jesus demonstrated the ultimate in servant leadership, he didn’t send his disciples out to serve without clear direction. He did not imply that they should go out and help people do anything they wanted. The vision was clear. He got it from the top of the hierarchy—his Father. As ‘fishers of men,’ the disciples were to ‘go and make disciples of all nations,’ focusing first on loving God and then on loving their neighbors (Matthew 4:19; 28:19; 22:37-40). And when it came to implementing this vision, Jesus wanted the disciples to be servant leaders who helped others understand and believe the good news.” These are clear directions indeed.

R&D How does your servant leadership role fit into Jesus’ vision for his Church?

Prayer: Lord, You equally love everyone You have created; help me never to take other people for granted.

Day 21

Read: Luke 10:25-37

Outreach

Over the last few days in this series we have been looking at some general principles that servant leaders need to keep in mind. Today our focus will be on a couple of specifics: leadership in the family and outreach to our neighbor.

Unfortunately, many of us who are parents have failed to provide a positive vision that the members of family could understand and follow. They should see in our lives the “love God” priority, but the specifics of that may be foreign to them. What may be vague as an overall vision can be dealt with in individual situations as we keep this principle foremost in our minds. It does little good to talk with our children about praying unless they see us doing it regularly and fervently. If God is really first in our lives, when we are faced with a family crisis, we deal with it in terms of seeking and doing God’s will in the situation. When we ask our children to do something or to behave in a particular way, we explain the godly principle behind what we are asking of them.

Furthermore, in our reading for today, we see that Jesus changes the “Who is my neighbor?” question into “To whom am I a neighbor?” Thus we get to the specifics of the “love neighbor” priority. “In the realm of one-on-one relationships, if you’re seeking to lead like Jesus, your vision should always be committed service to the best interests of the other person.” We can demonstrate the validity of this focus by how we work with those who minister with us; do we take them for granted, or are their needs at the front of our mind and actions? Likewise, in carrying out our servant leadership role, are we truly serving? A story that has always been a great example of this principle is about the seminary students who were to preach on the parable of the Good Samaritan. They were each released to go to where they were to preach the sermon with just enough time to get there; but, between the two locations they would pass someone who appeared to be injured and in great need. Would they stop?

R&D *Reflect on whether you would have stopped.*

Prayer: *General principles of following You, Lord, are essential; but let me not forget the specifics of carrying out those principles.*

Day 22

Read: John 17:6-19

Accountability

It takes only a moment's reflection on the Ananias and Sapphira story in Acts 5 to remind us of the high degree of accountability that existed in the infant church. In our reading for today Jesus spells out for us in detail his own accountability for those who would lead that infant church. Think of the responsibility he had to his Father to equip those who would follow him. There would be no Christianity today if those all-too-imperfect disciples had failed to pass on to us what Jesus had demonstrated to them.

Jesus first acknowledges that the Father had given him a handful of loyal followers. God has likewise given us those whom we lead. Jesus taught these disciples all that the Father had shown to him. We have been guided in our leadership role and have much that we can pass on to others. Jesus had compassion for those he would be leaving behind because he realized the trials and tribulations they would face. We have no idea what may face those who follow us, but we should be concerned that they will be able to stand up to whatever it may be. Jesus prayed a heartfelt prayer for his disciples, and those who will follow us need to be in our prayers as well.

According to Blanchard and Hodges, "The fruit of great servant leadership is realized when a leader seeks to send the next generation of leaders to meet the challenges of their season with all wisdom, knowledge and spiritual resources he or she can provide." Jesus held himself accountable for equipping his followers with as full an understanding as he was able to convey to them of what they needed to know to carry out the mission before them. As servant leaders in our day, we should likewise be accountable.

R&D *What are you doing to prepare those who will follow you? What more do you need to be doing?*

Prayer: *"Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name" (v.11b).*

Day 23

Read: Hebrews 5:12-14

Discipling Others I

The issue our reading for today puts on the line is the need for maturity in our spiritual lives; it is time to quit living on milk alone and move to solid food. That same principle is true in the role servant leaders have in developing other servant leaders. In *Lead Like Jesus*, the authors say that a key activity of an effective servant leader is to be a performance coach. A performance coach is one who undertakes three activities: performance planning, day-to-day coaching, and performance evaluation.

As we saw in our last study, Jesus looked to the Father for his performance planning; that is, he did what the Father told him to do. Planning the ministry in which God has called us as servant leaders is, for the most part, a "top down" function. We look for the Lord's guidance; trying to plan by committee doesn't usually work well. If Moses had taken a committee with him

to the top of the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, there is no telling what he might have come down with. Servant leaders have a plan: the one they believe the Lord has given them. However, it should be as flexible as circumstances require, and often the suggestions of members of the team are helpful in making adjustments.

As noted in an earlier study, it is essential for members of the team to know the plan and how to carry it out. Day-to-day coaching allows the servant leader to keep the team on track. But it is also a great teaching tool, as we prepare others to take up leadership when we are ready to pass it on. In this process it is also clear to us who is performing and who is not. That is our opportunity to focus attention in a couple of directions: encouraging those who are doing well to keep up the good work and lovingly confronting those who are not. These are not easy tasks for us; but Jesus never said that being a servant leader would be easy.

R&D How do you react to the idea of being a performance coach? Why?

Prayer: Lord, help us remember that, in whatever capacity You call us to lead, leaders lead.

Day 24

Read: Matthew 10:5-16

Discipling Others II

Jesus was dealing with novices, and often we are as well. In the Matthew passage, Jesus spells out in detail what they were to do and not do. Among these men were experienced fishermen, but Jesus called them to be fishers of men. “Their learning state was that of novices. At that stage of learning, they were dependent on Jesus to teach them about the new task. Therefore, to meet their learning needs, Jesus focused on telling them what to do and how to do it.” As servant leaders, we will sometimes find ourselves in the same situation. Failure often results from servant leaders “not responding effectively to this orientation learning stage.” As we have stressed previously, we need to lay out a clear plan for those who will follow.

Two other issues should be noted in the training of novices. Some just aren’t willing automatically to take direction. Our pastor illustrated this in his sermon this past Sunday. In Genesis 22:3, Abram obediently saddled his donkey although it was following God’s instructions that seemed to lead to the sacrifice of his only son, Isaac. Too often, those who would follow us won’t just “saddle the donkey.” When we tell our child to clean up her room, we don’t want to hear excuses about now not being the best time to do so or arguments that the room isn’t that messy. The effective servant leader sticks to his or her position: “Saddle the donkey.”

The other issue has to do with overconfidence. Some members of our organization, family, or ministry team may not think they need to be treated as novices. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones used to say, “The worst thing that can happen to a man is to succeed before he is ready.” Tact is needed, of course, in dealing with the one who doesn’t think he needs the orientation learning stage, but the effective servant leader will find a way to do so, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

R&D What issues have you faced in preparing others for the work God has for them to do? How did you deal with these issues?

Prayer: Lord, we need lots of guidance in telling people what they are supposed to do. Thank You for the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Day 25

Read: Matthew 17:14-21

Discipling Others III

In our reading for today Jesus faced the problem of his disciples having been unable to heal a demon-possessed boy. They were clearly frustrated by their failure (v.19), and Jesus undoubtedly was as well (v.20). He explained to them what the problem was, and encouraged them to “saddle their donkeys” (i.e. move out in faith).

Jesus clearly demonstrated how to provide loving confrontation and encouragement to his disciples. “When the disciples were new to the task of being ‘fishers of men,’ they experienced a setback to their confidence when they were not competent to handle every situation. . . . Your people or family members or volunteers may experience those same feelings when confronted with a task or a goal they cannot do or in which they experience a failure or problem.” Jesus was truthful with the disciples concerning why they could not cast out the demon. He instructs them that casting out demons comes only out of prayer and fasting (v.21). He didn’t lose control of his temper despite the frustration he must have faced. He loved his followers regardless of their ineptitude.

Just as we can face the problem of our followers being overconfident, the reverse can be true as well. Even those who have made real progress and have been doing well can go into a slump and become discouraged. Any number of factors can cause this, often ones that are totally unrelated to the goal at hand. There are also those who simply learn slowly and can become frustrated by their lack of progress. The ideal servant leader is encouraging to those who have become depressed or feel inept. He is loving and patient with them. He does what Jesus would have done in those situations.

R&D How patient and understanding are you with those who work with you? How can you be more patient?

Prayer: Lord, help us to remember that we are, after all, dealing with people.

Day 26

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

The Needs of the Servant Leader

What a wonderful charge for the apostle Paul to give to those who would follow him in servant leadership roles in the infant church, and what an appropriate way to end this Advent Study. Servant leaders, especially those in pastoral ministries, need all the help they can get. Blanchard and Hodges say, “Sending out someone to act on your behalf is the highest form of validation of your trust in that person’s competence and commitment.” It is also a calling upon us to be available to them and to be praying for them. We know the support we need in our ministry and we know what support those we send out will need.

In a ministry in which I was involved years ago I experienced great joy as a result of support from my predecessor, who is an ideal servant leader. The man I succeeded in that ministry became my closest confidant. Although my approach to the ministry was somewhat different from his own, he was always available to me and a source of great encouragement. That experience gave me a living illustration of what passing on servant leadership to another should look like, and I hope I have been guided accordingly in subsequent years.

So how do we most effectively pass on servant leadership to others? Paul gives us a rather complete outline. We respect their ministry, hold them in high regard, encourage them, and are

patient with them...things we have discussed over the course of this series. We are also concerned about their spiritual growth. “The spiritual health of the leader is the wellspring from which a follower’s trust and commitment flows.” This means we want them to be in regular and effective Bible study and prayer. We want them in fellowship with other Christian servant leaders. And we want them serving in the capacity to which God calls them. Anything we can do to lay that sort of groundwork for others will hold them in good stead.

R&D *What has been your “track record” in sending forth others to be servant leaders?*

Prayer: *Lord, I know of no greater privilege than serving You, and it is in serving others on Your behalf that is the greatest joy of all.*

by Harry C. Griffith

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