



The Practice – Lesson 4

Lead Like Jesus

Connie Parker

Introduction

On the night when He was betrayed, Jesus gave His disciples a crucial key to effective leadership. *“Let the leader act the part of the servant.”* (Luke 22:26 The Message)

How can you as a leader act the part of the servant? Consider these lessons from the life of Jesus, a leader who chose to serve.

- 1. Jesus humbly listened to those He led.** Many leaders are known for what they say and how powerfully they say it, frequently directing attention to themselves and their own importance, but Jesus was humble. He spent a great deal of His time listening to the ideas, concerns, and hearts of those He led. For Jesus it was never about who He was, the miracles He could perform, or the grandeur of the home He had left behind. When the crowds were great, He often very intentionally walked away (Matthew 8:18; John 6:15). Instead of talking about Himself and who He was, He talked about His Father – His love, His goodness, His mercy, and His coming Kingdom. He listened to His disciples and answered their questions, and He also listened to all He met: wealthy, influential Nicodemus, complaining Martha, outspoken Peter, the immoral, the lepers, the blind, and even the lunatics. Lead like Jesus. Do not isolate yourself from the thoughts and issues in the hearts of those you lead, and keep the focus on others, not yourself.
- 2. Jesus was compassionate.** Many leaders become so focused on their vision and the tasks that need to be done to accomplish it that they ignore the suffering of their people. Jesus had three years to complete His mission of changing the world, but He always took time to address the needs of those who were hurting – the woman with the issue of blood, the widow whose son had died, the 5000 hungry people who had spent the day listening to Him teach. In the end, it was His heart of compassion that communicated most

powerfully the love of God for His people. It was also when Jesus was moved with compassion that miracles occurred. (Luke 7:13; Mark 9:22, Matthew 15:32). When we have a heart of compassion for the suffering people around us, we will lead like Jesus.

3. Jesus helped people become physically, spiritually, and emotionally healthy. It didn't matter to Jesus what the need was. If the person's need was physical, He spoke the word and they were healed. If the need was spiritual, if they came to Him and sought His help, He brought spiritual wholeness to their lives. If they were emotionally distraught or grieving, He brought hope and peace.

Jesus demonstrated two additional leadership principles in this regard as well.

- When Jesus was physically weary and grieving, when He was hot and thirsty, even when He was facing death, He was able to set aside His own needs in order to serve others who sought His help (Matthew 14:13; John 4:6; John 13:5). If we want to lead like Jesus, we must be willing to set aside our personal needs and desires in order to bring wholeness and health to others. Galatians 2:20 says it best, *"I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not "mine," but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (The Message)
- The second principle is equally important. Jesus said, *"The Son can't independently do a thing, only what he sees the Father doing. What the Father does, the Son does. The Father loves the Son and includes him in everything he is doing."* (John 5:19, The Message) The principle here is not to respond just to the need, but to the direction of the Holy Spirit. God's direction will always lead to the physical, spiritual, and emotional health of others.

4. Jesus chose to do what was right, not what was easy. Leaders will generally be given the opportunity to take the easy way out in decision-making. It would have been easy for Jesus to turn stones into bread after He had spent forty days and nights in the wilderness, or to ask God to send twelve legions of angels to rescue Him from His Gethsemane agony. Instead He chose God's path, the narrow way. If the decision seems easy and straightforward, pause long enough to pray for God's perspective and His plan, and don't be surprised if it seems more difficult and challenging than your initial idea. Daniel and

Joseph are also great examples of men who chose to do what was right, not what was easy.

- 5. Jesus persuaded people instead of giving orders.** Jesus never forced people to follow Him. He invited them and engaged them in conversation but never made them feel guilty for the choices they made. He left the final decision in their hands, just as God does with us. The disciples and many others chose to follow Jesus, not because He compelled them to do so, but as Peter said in John 6:68-69, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.*" (ESV) When the rich young ruler made his sad decision, Jesus did not try to convince him otherwise (Luke 18:24). Jesus had all power, but He never used it to make people do what He wanted them to do. While it is definitely more "time-efficient" to give orders (and usually necessary in emergency situations), persuasion and love inspire more loyalty than force for leaders who choose to lead like Jesus.
- 6. Jesus balanced His current circumstances and His vision.** Many leaders either limit their focus to the present issues and challenges without a long-term vision, or they ignore the current problems and paint a rosy picture of life in the future under their leadership. Jesus realistically acknowledged the present difficulties, but saw the path through those challenges to a hope and a future that would not disappoint. He did not minimize the trouble to come (Matthew 16:21), but was resolute in moving through that time to His final goal (Hebrews 12:2). Rather than minimizing current challenges or ignoring them, a leader who chooses to lead like Jesus will face them with truth and openness while looking to the future with hope and joy. Deborah was another amazing leader who was both a judge, wisely giving counsel under a palm tree in Israel, and a prophetess who spoke God's Word to a warrior. Her courage in going to the battlefield brought transformation to her nation (Judges 4 & 5). Leading like Jesus will require that kind of balanced thinking.
- 7. Jesus applied lessons from the past to present situations.** Leading like Jesus requires a willingness to reflect on past experiences, both successes and failures of yourself and others, and apply what you've learned to the present situation. This takes humility! Jesus had a clear understanding of the lessons of Jewish history and theology, the symbolism and the prophecies and how they applied to His own life. "*Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.*" (Luke 24:27, The Message) As we prayerfully reflect on Scripture and our own life experiences, God will speak truth to our hearts, truth that we in turn can use to bring transformation to the lives of

others. It was not just Jesus that used this leadership principle. David used his experiences as a shepherd boy not only to kill a giant, but also to lead the nation of Israel as king (1 Samuel 17:1-54).

- 8. Jesus sought to help people grow personally, professionally, and spiritually.** Jesus did not just seek to bring health to people who were physically, spiritually and emotionally sick, but He helped the healthy to grow and fulfill all that God had called them to do. Many leaders are afraid to encourage the personal, professional and spiritual growth of those they lead. Often they are concerned that doing so will compromise their position of power. To lead like Jesus, you must always promote the development and growth of those you lead and rejoice in (rather than fear) their success. Jesus was totally committed to teaching and growing others. He recognized that that crowds could not grasp His deeper teaching, so He tailored His message to the throngs who followed Him to the hills, to the shorelines, into homes and synagogues and the temple courts, teaching them with stories and illustrations they could understand. But to His disciples who were with Him 24/7 for three years, He frequently gave greater revelation. Then He released them to minister in the towns and villages and debriefed them when they returned, rejoicing with them in what God had accomplished through them. Our time on earth is short. We must use it wisely to develop skills and gifts in others.

- 9. Jesus united people.** Those who are insecure in their abilities as leaders often seek to increase their power by encouraging competition and division among those they lead. That was never Jesus' heart. When He detected rivalry within his team, He exposed it and corrected it (Mark 10:35 – 45). Unity of heart and purpose is essential to your success as a leader. Do everything you can to promote your team pulling together as one to accomplish the task God has called you to do.

Conclusion:

As women, many of us have been taught from childhood to serve with joy around the house, in the church, and in our communities. We love to build relationships with one another. We are compassionate nurturers who have learned through motherhood to be good listeners and persuasive negotiators. We love to build and live in community with others and usually know how to unite our family when the circumstances require it. Do not treat these skills and gifts lightly. They are tools and experiences that God can use in us to transform our homes, our churches, our communities, and our nations.

Reflect:

In his classic business book "Servant Leadership," Robert Greenleaf wrote that a servant leader is one who first serves, but then chooses to become a leader. If you love to serve, I encourage you to prayerfully consider if God is calling you to choose to become a leader, and then lead like Jesus!

"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28, ESV