

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is that capacity of the leader to lovingly care for those over whom he/she is given leadership. This care is both verbal and physical. Certainly servant-leadership is a model that every pastor (and Christian) should learn to display in all of their actions. It is my opinion that if this is not learned on the behalf of the pastor, something far from God's intention will surface.

The Model of Jesus

Perhaps the best illustration for servant-leadership is found in that of Jesus Himself. Jesus presented a captivating portrayal of this practice as He washed the feet of His disciples in John 13:5-14. In this narrative, Jesus simply undertook the menial task of a house-servant, and washed the dirty feet of His disciples. Nowhere in this action could one construe anything but pure devotion for His people and true servanthood. It is my belief that Jesus further showed servant-leadership in His willingness to associate with those of society who were considered by many to be "less-thans." These individuals were referred to as "*sinners and tax-collectors*" by the religious people of that day (Mark 2:16 NASB); yet, Jesus was willing to associate with these groups knowing that His reputation was blemished in the eyes of the scribes of the Pharisees (Mark 2:16). True servanthood does not consider what the act of service causes the servant to look like to others; instead, it considers only the one(s) to whom service is rendered. Jesus further modeled servant-leadership as He allowed Himself to be touched by those who were considered ceremonially unclean (Luke 8:43-44). In doing this, He showed that His purpose was to bring Good News and deliverance to those who were in need, not to promote Himself as some religious leader or as some political figure-head. Jesus was (and is) the epitome of

the model of servant-leadership and presented illustrations for all of His followers to mimic. Regarding this very issue, Greenleaf made a comment that bears repeating: “Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wise, free, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (Solomon MM630 Handouts). Paul, in his writing to the Philippians, shows the reader the motivating reason behind Christ’s willingness to take upon Himself this role and further admonished the reader to be willing to take this role upon him/herself: *“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men”* (Philippians 2:5-7 NASB). If the rising leader sincerely desires to be more like Christ, how can he/she get beyond this concept?

The Model of Nehemiah

Another vivid example of servant-leadership was presented by Nehemiah. An initial indication of his servant-leadership was found in his love and desire for the walls of Jerusalem and their representation of the people and land of Judah (Nehemiah 1:2-4). His expression upon hearing of the disrepair of the walls was that of deep sadness and weeping which was soon followed by a period of prayer and fasting before God as he sought God’s desire for using him in this drastic situation. Another glimpse at Nehemiah’s servant-leadership was found in his honor of and obedience to the one who was given leadership over him, King Artaxerxes. The narrative of Nehemiah records that Nehemiah was Artaxerxes’ cup bearer and because the king saw Nehemiah daily, Artaxerxes became aware of the deep sadness of Nehemiah and sought the reasoning for

such. It is at this point that Nehemiah stated the cause for his sadness and sought Artaxerxes' permission to journey to Jerusalem in order to repair the walls. Obviously, obedience to those in leadership above an individual is a necessary part of being a leader: a good leader must be willing to present himself as a good follower.

Another aspect of Nehemiah's leadership was that he did not request anything of any individual that he was not willing to do himself. Nehemiah inspected the walls of Jerusalem himself at nighttime. He conducted this task in privacy without even the priests and other leaders knowing what he was doing. He did not delegate this task to those who were working with him; he took the responsibility upon himself. The lesson to be learned from this is that servant-leaders should never expect something of others that are not expected of themselves. A second facet of this lesson is that there are some tasks which should only be performed by the servant-leader him/herself. Paralleling that thought, it should be noted that Nehemiah was careful to arm himself and his fellow workers for the possible fight in which they might have to engage with the enemies and discouragers. The Bible makes an unusual note regarding this concept: *"From that day on, half of my (Nehemiah's) servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah. Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon"* (Nehemiah 4:16-17 NASB). Nehemiah, too, was laboring with one hand while holding his weapon with the other. The desire to protect oneself and one's fellow workers is another prevailing mark of a servant-leader.

The final note that I choose to grasp in this essay concerning Nehemiah as a servant-leader is the concept that he stood strong in the midst of great discouragement. Nehemiah faced threats, lies, and persecutions, but he remained steadfast to the task-at-hand; he did not allow discouragement to dissuade him. As a growing leader examines the task that he/she faces, the realization soon dawns upon him/her that not everyone wants him/her to succeed. The reasons for this are myriad, yet the method to victory over these various reasons is singular: a determination to see the project to completion, a trust in God to bring it to completion, and a corresponding series of actions are the overcoming factors. Nehemiah displayed these characteristics well and in doing so, presented a marvelous portrait of the character of a servant-leader.

The Model of Gideon

Another biblical model for servant-leadership is found in the Old Testament character, Gideon. Gideon was an individual who was self-effacing and could not see himself as a conquering hero. Instead, he designated himself as follows: “*O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house*” (Judges 6:15 NASB). In observing this, Gideon demonstrated that he possessed a true humility that is a necessary ingredient in the chemistry of a servant-leader. Because he could not fathom himself as capable, he had no alternative but to trust in God and to obey Him. This factor is of primary importance. It is often in seminary that we hear of becoming competent. While it is certainly necessary to develop skills and techniques, it is more important that the servant-leader come to an understanding that true competence is only found in one’s reliance upon Christ. This is the primary, motivating factor in servant-leadership.

There are many models of servant-leadership displayed throughout the scriptures. While each illustration is unique, certain similarities remain. There is an ability to walk in humility. There is an ability to value others. There is an ability to honor the work of others. There is an ability to exhibit absolute trust in God. While this list is in no-wise exhaustive, it is illustrative of some of the characteristics that we as Christian leaders should be seeking to develop within ourselves.

Personal Leadership Survey

My personal leadership style is a mixture of many different facets. I tend to have a great love for the people whom I am given leadership over and seek to know their needs and find some way to meet those needs. I am aware that there is a danger in this style of leadership because it can quickly find itself transposing into a system of people-pleasing. (It must be noted, my ultimate goal is NOT to please others, but instead, is to lead them in a manner that is pleasing to Christ.) I am continually aware of this difficulty and seek to avoid it.

I also strongly desire to follow those who have been given leadership over me through obedience and respect. My ability to follow their lead is transferred as an image to my people that they, too, are to respect the judgment and leadership I present before them, even if it is difficult. As I stated previously in this essay, a good leader is also a good follower. This must be modeled as an aspect of servant-leadership.

My leadership abilities have received great amounts of training. However, the disciplinary aspect of my administration and leadership is sometimes lacking. I am really not sure why this is. It is not because of a lack of desire or knowledge; it is perhaps simply a lack of focus and a simultaneous broadness of focus within my scope of

leadership. I suppose I get so involved in so many areas that I have a difficult time focusing on a single, particular area, thus rendering much of my effort scattered at best and futile at worst.

The care for people is a large element of my ministry. I am highly aware of the need for strong families within the church and have the intention of creating these strong families as a priority within the scope of ministries of the local church. This currently takes place through planned “Fan the Flames” seminars, annually scheduled advances, and intentionally-scripted “fellowship moments.” “A church is only as strong as the families within that church” is the guiding philosophy behind these plans. I intentionally work at building families, and I understand that in doing this, I am also accomplishing two other things: one, I am strengthening the church and two, I am receiving a benefit of strengthening my own family. This is perhaps a strange take on servant-leadership but to receive something is not an ulterior motive; it is simply a by-product. And thus I end this essay. I have succeeded in bringing it back around to the place where Paul told us Christ wanted us to be: *“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men”* (Philippians 2:5-7 NASB).