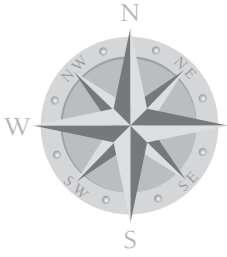


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A BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY OF LEADERSHIP

GOD HAS ALWAYS PLACED A HIGH PREMIUM on leadership. The Scriptures chronicle the impact on the people of God of a continuous line of human leaders—Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Nehemiah, Peter, John, and Paul, just to name a few. Most of the leaders highlighted in the Scriptures were part of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament or the church of the New Testament era. But secular leaders also receive attention because they were part of the historical context in which the spiritual leaders lived and led. The whole of biblical history can be viewed as a record of God's raising up and developing human leaders to lead His people in accomplishing His will.

Some of God's leaders led well; some led poorly. But the one constant is that God has almost always used human leaders to accomplish His purposes on the earth. In Old Testament history, the leaders of God's people tended to be singular personalities, unique men and women who stood out as individual heroes. They were kings, prophets, priests, or judges. The leaders included lower-level citizens, such as those appointed by Moses to act as judges (see Exodus 18:25–26); but, for the most part, Old Testament leaders were highly individualistic, heroic leaders.

*Just about everything we have
been taught about traditional
management prevents us from
being effective leaders. And
just about every popular notion
about leadership is a myth.*

*James M. Kouzes
and Barry Z. Posner
The Leadership Challenge*



With the establishment of the church, a major shift in leadership took place. The church has neither kings nor judges, but all believers are priests. Furthermore, all believers are given spiritual gifts with which they are enabled to render significant service for the kingdom of God. Some are specially gifted in the area of leadership; but leadership has become much less of a solitary, heroic occupation. Leadership during the church age is much less individual, much more collegial; it is much less directing or ruling, much more serving and enabling. Church leadership is marked by a plurality of elders and deacons and no singular human head of the church.

This shift in leadership style from Old Testament to New anticipates by almost two thousand years the shift that is today taking place in modern secular leadership thinking. As James Kouzes and Barry Posner suggest, some major changes are taking place in our understanding and practice of leadership. Not everyone readily understands the magnitude of the changes. Old approaches and methods die slowly. Perhaps we can better understand why the apostles had such a difficult time understanding Jesus' approach to leadership in His church. It was so different from what they were used to.

LEADERSHIP THAT IS UNLIKE SECULAR LEADERSHIP

Christian leadership is not like the world's leadership. Jesus Christ made this point clearly and emphatically. The key New Testament text on leadership is Luke 22:24–27. Study this passage in its context, and then answer the questions below:

1. *How would you describe the “Gentile” way of leadership? What are some of the characteristics of people who lead this way?*

2. *What current examples of this kind of leadership can you think of? Which government, political, business, or church leaders today lead like “the kings of the Gentiles”? What specific actions, attitudes, or approaches put them in this category?*

LEADERSHIP THAT IS MARKED BY SERVANTHOOD

Even though this was not the first time the disciples heard Jesus connect ser-



vanthood with leadership (see Mark 9:35 for example), it was still a hard concept for them to grasp.

3. *Why do you think they had such a difficult time?*

4. *Do the two terms “servanthood” and “leader” seem antithetical? Why or why not?*

5. *How would you describe “servanthood” on the part of a leader?*

Most of us are uncomfortable with the idea of being a servant, and we often have wrong ideas of what Jesus means when He says that a leader must be a servant. We think of servants as passive; therefore servant leadership is considered by some to be a passive style of leadership in which the leader simply does what others want him to do. But is that what Jesus meant? We should be able to look at Jesus’ own leadership, since He calls our attention to it (Luke 22:27), to help clarify our understanding of servant leadership.

6. *How would you summarize Jesus’ example as described in Philippians 2:5–11?*

7. *Does this mean that Jesus was a passive leader? What do the following passages reveal about Jesus’ leadership style?*

Matthew 6:33 _____

Matthew 16:24–28 _____

Matthew 28:19 _____

Mark 8:14–21 _____



John 2:13–22 _____
 John 13:13–17 _____
 John 15:12–17 _____

One could hardly read the above passages and think that Jesus was a passive leader. Quite the contrary, He gave clear direction and exercised great authority in the lives of His followers. He also directly and powerfully challenged those who were against Him. When He gave commands, He expected to be obeyed. But, in many ways, the kings of the Gentiles acted similarly.

8. *So what is the difference between Jesus and the rulers of the Gentiles?*

One major difference is that Jesus never exercised authority for His own personal benefit. His motivation was always to fulfill His Father's plan and serve His followers. Therefore, even when He exercised authority or required compliance, His leadership was always described by service. Servanthood is not defined by the actions themselves but by the motive and goal that generate the actions.

9. *Contrast Jesus' leadership with that of Diotrephes, described in 3 John 9. What was the characteristic attitude of Diotrephes as a leader? What were his motives and goals?*

PAUL AS A SERVANT LEADER

A difficult concept is always clarified by a good example. To better understand servant leadership, consider Paul's example of his leadership in the lives of the believers in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:1–12).

10. *What parallels do you notice between Luke 22:24–27 and 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12? Mark up the two Bible passages on the next page to note the parallels.*

**Luke 22:24–27**

- 24 And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest.
- 25 And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’
- 26 “But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.
- 27 “For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”

1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

- 1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,
- 2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.
- 3 For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit;
- 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.
- 5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness—
- 6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.
- 7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.
- 8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.
- 9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
- 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;
- 11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,
- 12 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.



11. In the 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 passage Paul uses three images to describe his leadership. What are the three images, and what does each contribute to our understanding of servant leadership? Are you surprised at the images Paul uses? Complete the chart below to determine the emphasis of each image.

Text	Image (What is the image used?)	Emphasis of the Image (What point was Paul trying to make?)
2:7–8		
2:9–10		
2:11–12		



LEADERSHIP THAT IS FOCUSED ON EQUIPPING OTHERS

Any philosophy of Christian leadership must consider carefully the passage in Ephesians 4:7–16. The importance of this “gifts” passage comes from the fact that it describes the function of gifted leaders in the church. God gave these gifted leaders to the church primarily to equip others for service.

12. *Read Ephesians 4:7–16 carefully. The following three statements are conclusions drawn from the passage:*

- ✦ Both leaders and followers are equal members (parts) of the body of Christ. Only Christ is the Head.

What are some leadership implications of this statement?

- ✦ Individual believers fulfill different functions in the body. Some are leaders; some are followers, but no one individual has all the gifts. Therefore there is an interdependence of all in the body of Christ; the growth of the body requires the contribution of all.

What are some leadership implications of this statement?

- ✦ All believers, both leaders and followers, are gifted by God for service. There is a healthy diversity of gifts.

What are some leadership implications of this statement?



A DEFINITION AND SUMMARY

Look back over the preceding pages, giving particular attention to the key passages you studied. Now try to summarize your discoveries in a definition of servant leadership and a set of corresponding leadership principles. (Once you finish preparing your summary, compare it with the listing on the final page of this chapter.)

My Definition of Servant Leadership:

Summary Principles of Servant Leadership:



REFLECT

1. Can you think of people who exemplify the characteristics of servant leadership as you have defined and summarized them? Who would they be? What specific characteristics identify them as servant leaders?

*If you wish to be a leader
you will be frustrated, for
very few people wish to be
led. If you aim to be a
servant you will never be
frustrated.*

Frank F. Warren

2. To what extent do these summary principles fit your life? In what areas do you see a need to develop?

3. In what two areas or characteristics of your life do you need to grow in order to be more of a servant leader?

4. What specific action(s) can you take during the next week to grow in these areas?



SUMMARY PRINCIPLES OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

From the study of key passages in Luke 22, Ephesians 4, and 1 Thessalonians 2, the Center for Christian Leadership has spotted the following principles for effective servant leadership and leaders:

- ✦ Servant leaders are self-sacrificing rather than self-seeking (Luke 22:24–27).
- ✦ Servant leaders lead by relationship and example rather than from position and pressure (1 Thessalonians 2:7–12).
- ✦ Servant leadership is active rather than passive (1 Thessalonians 2:11–12; Ephesians 4:11–12).
- ✦ Servant leadership gives direction rather than allowing drifting (1 Thessalonians 2:11–12).
- ✦ Servant leaders exercise appropriate authority, always for the fulfillment of their mission rather than for personal gain or advantage (1 Thessalonians 2:11–12).
- ✦ Servant leadership functions best by equipping and empowering others to work together rather than by functioning solo (Ephesians 4:11–16).
- ✦ Servant leaders lead by personal involvement in caring for people and their needs rather than demanding their own needs be met (1 Thessalonians 2:7–8).
- ✦ Servant leadership is a matter of character and gift rather than position and connections (Luke 22:24–27; Ephesians 4:7, 11–12).