

PASSION . . .

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SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT

*The **passion** of servant leadership is grounded
in a theology of ministry.*

Let's take a closer look at this.

Think of it as responding, working, and behaving like Jesus—incarnating His healing, guiding, sustaining, and reconciling work in the lives of others.

But what does this mean to the go-to person? How does this fit when the organizational pack you run in is full of bottom-line, results-driven, deadline-drawing carnivores? Does Jesus fit into this world? The natural question that arises is, “How does our relationship with Christ convert or transform our leadership lifestyle?” Or rather, how is *servant leadership* expressed in a community of faith? And what does it look like in those who reside in a community of faith but work *outside* it?

Servant Leadership and the Spiritual Life

Christian leadership begins with the leader's spiritual relationship with Christ. It is impossible for a person to be a *Christian* leader unless Christ genuinely exercises dominance in his or her heart. There are many organiza-

tions and institutions that a person can join, but the Spirit of Christ doesn't reside in them. Christianity is not a "sign on the dotted line, pay your dues, attaboy" club. The Christian faith is a deeply personal and spiritually intimate *relationship* with the God who inhabits His children. Spiritual persons are those who increasingly open themselves to the actions of God's Holy Spirit. As Christ takes control of you, your leadership style and techniques will instinctively reflect *Him*.

This means you will begin to ask new questions—questions altogether different in scope and intent than those you may have been trained to ask. You will first wonder, "How and where can I make the greatest impact for the Kingdom?" This will lead to a second question: "What changes do I need to make inwardly and in my relationship with others so that I can become a more faithful witness for Christ?" If you truly desire to be a *Christian* leader, you must first assimilate what it means to be a leader who is a *Christian*. Christlikeness presupposes spiritual maturity and development. Living the spiritual life means

- Identifying the presence of the Holy Spirit
- Listening with care to the Spirit's guidance
- Responding to what the Spirit says

The aim of Christian spirituality is to foster a life of holiness. "Holiness" is a word that terrifies some. It conjures up images of judgmental, religious bondage. The reality is far different. True, *scriptural* holiness is freedom. Paul explains in Rom. 6 that it is freedom from a self-serving nature bent on possessions, power, lust, and self-preservation. Holiness can never be manufactured from your good intentions. It is always delivered from above. You must begin by recognizing that such a gift is ultimately only God's to give. But it is a gift. And He insists that you take it! Foreshadowed in Leviticus, it is echoed twice under the new covenant (Eph. 1:4 and 1 Pet. 1:15-16).

Don't kid yourself. If a "positional" holiness were sufficient, the Cross would mark the end of the canon. But it doesn't. In John's Gospel, Jesus explains that His going away is a good thing, because it means that the

“helper” will come. In Acts 2, we see that the Spirit is the gift that was promised. Why? Why would such a gift be necessary if God’s people are hidden behind the righteousness of Christ? The New Testament writers, under inspiration, remind us that a holy God expects us to be holy. In the same way that Jesus commanded the man with the withered hand to stretch it out, our Lord is doing *in you* and *through you* what is impossible for you to do alone. Both Peter’s and Paul’s Epistles throw down the gauntlet: *You* be obedient . . . *you* be blameless . . . *you* be *holy*. It is God’s will that you receive this gift of heart-purifying, Christ-modeling empowerment.

In the book *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life*, Drs. Morris Weigelt, Dee Freeborn, and Janine Tartaglia identified spiritual formation as “the whole person in relationship with God, within the community of believers, growing in Christlikeness, reflected in a Spirit-directed, disciplined lifestyle, and demonstrated in redemptive action in our world.”¹

Again and again, God, through His sacred Word, pleads with us to embrace a “holy consciousness”:

Matt. 6:33: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

1 Cor. 2:13: “[We teach] spiritual [things] . . . spiritual[ly].”

1 Cor. 2:16: “But we have the mind of Christ.”

2 Cor. 5:16: “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.”

2 Cor. 4:7: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

The leader’s focus must be on God. It is the first step to successful internal personal change and to outward relational impact. All that to say, you cannot, with any enduring success, be trained to do the things a Christian leader will do. You must become a Christlike individual who *leads in a Christian manner*.

With all of this in view, your understanding of what God anticipates from your relationship with Him may need a spiritual tweaking. And your *passion* for Christ may need to be recharged!

Servant Leadership and Ministry

If you are a Christian, *you are called to Christian ministry.*

In its briefest and most general understanding, ministry is *diakonia*, or service. At its very best, then, ministry (including servant leadership) is passionate service to others in Jesus' name. Certain words help us understand the dimensions of Christian ministry—words like “caring,” “sharing,” “growing,” “relating,” “teaching,” and even “confronting.”

Ministry—New Testament style—comes alive as someone holds the hand of a person engulfed in fear, listens intently to a person in trouble, cries with a person who is hurt, or embraces the individual who is grieving. Those broad strokes paint the picture. And that moves ministry from an ancient church in an ancient land into your hometown. Now let's park it in your driveway. Why not take an isolated, mobility-challenged senior to the store for groceries? Or why not reach deep down and find the courage to confront—in love—someone's lack of discipline or careless habits?

Serving encompasses the sharing of the Christian faith—sharing the gospel message by example or by personal witnessing, and by ministering God's Word to someone in time of need. There are two distinct temptations for the Christian who is in leadership. The first is to hide his or her faith—to compartmentalize it—as if it has no place in the marketplace. The second is to feel a deep sense of guilt if he or she cannot seem to bring those under his or her influence to a place of spiritual decision.

Brian McLaren, in his book *A New Kind of Christian*, suggests we break the chains of bondage that bind us to a bottom-line philosophy of conversions. In the emergent church movement there is a principle at work that fits very nicely into the framework of our discussion. It is not an abandonment of the Christian witness, simply a shift in expectation. McLaren encourages us to stop talking in terms of “conversions” and start logging “conversations.” Sharing the gospel is less complicated than many leaders realize. Accept the fact that you do have a sphere of influence. Within that sphere, *serving* is defined by the word *relational*. When you are able to stop thinking in terms of conversions, then the chains fall away. You are free to share the gospel—specifically *your gospel*.

This is your story of what God is doing in your heart and life and relationships. This isn't Matthew's or Luke's story of Jesus. This is *your story* of how and when Christ interrupted your life and intercepted your heart. As you work to develop relationships, those who work with you will cease to be your "constituents" and will become persons—precious, sacred, God-loved souls. Your passion for their wholeness will be nothing short of Christ's. His earthly ministry embodied all of this and more, with a passion beyond our understanding.

Ministry understood in this broader sense is the setting for our specific ministry. We may be specifically called and gifted for pastoral ministry, teaching ministry, evangelism ministry, music ministry, or leadership ministry. But it is futile and self-defeating to seek to function within our specific calling while ignoring the broader calling to serve others in Jesus' name.

*Jesus Defined Success in Christian Ministry
as Service or Self-Giving to Others*

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Matt. 20:25-28*).

Your responsibility as a leader is to passionately care for God's people, as a shepherd does for his sheep, coaxing, caring, coaching, guiding, and teaching. Your leadership mandate, then, is to motivate, equip, and enable the people of God to develop their gifts and to give their lives in meaningful service to others. *Your* ministry is to prepare others for *their* ministry.

*Being Christlike in Our Passionate Service, or Christian Ministry,
Is a Constant in Major Theological Writings*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*,² lists seven expressions of ministry by which a Christian community must be judged and characterized.

1. THE MINISTRY OF HOLDING ONE'S TONGUE

Here Bonhoeffer paraphrases James 3:2, “He who holds his tongue in check controls both mind and body,” and references the admonishment from Eph. 4:29: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths.” This expresses what we’ve been talking about. Through God’s Word we are challenged to improve. Then we call on the Holy Spirit to enable those radical changes within us. Most leaders, by definition, have trouble “holding their tongue.”

Leaders usually direct very *directly*. Curt, sharp, demeaning, condescending, sarcastic, caustic—these words often characterize the language and tone of leaders under the gun. But when this passage becomes absorbed by your consciousness, and the Holy Spirit changes you, then God’s Word *characterizes* you. Constantly criticizing your superiors, peers, and constituents—or other unproductive, spiritually unhealthy habits, such as judging, condemning, or putting others in their place—is replaced by wholesome, healthy language that is embellished by mercy and dripping with grace.

2. THE MINISTRY OF MEEKNESS

We care more for others than for ourselves. “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,” Paul tells us in Rom. 12:3. John tells us to make no effort to obtain the praise that comes only from God. He who serves must learn to think of others first.

3. THE MINISTRY OF LISTENING

Listening is a high-interest debt that you owe others! No wonder so many file bankruptcy under this spiritual service of leadership. A pastor who seemed to have a nearly supernatural magnetism was asked what he considered to be the secret to his ever-increasing worship attendance and outstanding percentage for staff retention. His answer: “One day a week, I do most of the talking. The other six, I make it a habit to listen.”

4. THE MINISTRY OF ACTIVE HELPFULNESS

James makes it very clear. Faith without good works is a faith with dead batteries. A thriving, personal faith is active and at work in the lives of oth-

ers. This is a matter of simply assisting others within the Christian community in external matters, big and small.

5. THE MINISTRY OF BEARING (SUPPORTING)

“Carry each other’s burdens” is the challenge of Gal. 6:2. “Bearing” means forbearing and sustaining one another in love. Ephesians 4:2 commands us to “be . . . humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

6. THE MINISTRY OF PROCLAIMING

This is the ministry of the Word of God. Bonhoeffer does not mean the message of Scripture proclaimed in a formal setting, such as in the worship service. He is referring to the free communication of the Word of God from person to person—to that unique situation in which one person becomes a witness in human words to another, with Christian compassion and consolation.

7. THE MINISTRY OF AUTHORITY (LEADERSHIP)

Jesus states in Mark 10:43-44, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” This is the paradox of ministry. Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service.

For Bonhoeffer, these practical expressions of Christian ministry provide the setting in which our specific ministries must function. This is particularly true as it relates to the ministry of leadership.

A study of the ministry of Christ reveals three salient features:

- *Christ the Servant.* His ministry was a servant ministry (see Matt. 20:25-28). He demonstrated His service to His Father by doing His will and to the people by accepting them as they were and meeting their needs—healing the sick, feeding the hungry, or simply taking time to be with them. Among the people, He listened to the sinner, the outcast, or the disrespectable member of society.
- *Christ the Teacher.* His ministry was mainly teaching. He taught with authority. He was known as Rabbi, “Teacher.” The proclama-

tion of the gospel, the announcement of the Kingdom to all who had ears to hear, was given in word *and* deed. It was clear teaching, adapted to the needs of the listeners and delivered in easy-to-understand illustrations and examples.

- *Christ the Sacrifice.* He was the “Lamb of God, who [took] away the sin of the world” by His sacrifice on the Cross (John 1:29). By His own free will, and in obedience to His Father, He laid down His life. His ministry was essentially sacrificial and priestly.

If we are called to be extensions of Christ, then our ministry will be characterized by *service*, *teaching*, and *sacrifice* to the people with whom we come in contact. It will include—to echo the words of the introduction—humble service to the community of faith, whose Head is Christ, for the purpose of enabling them, through modeling and teaching, to live their lives under the Lordship of Christ and to fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission in the world.

Servant Leadership for a Servant Community

Servant leadership mobilizes other Christians for ministry. The Christian leader models a radical commitment to building a servant community. Remember that biblically your leadership “success” will be judged in proportion to your passion toward this commitment. Will your leadership enable *others* to fulfill *their* ministry to each other and *their* mission in the world? As you consider this, ask yourself these two crucial questions:

Are the people you lead growing as Christians?

Are the people you lead becoming servants?

Robert Greenleaf, in his outstanding book *Servant Leadership*, suggests that those who are leaders must serve those whom they lead. Only those who serve, he believes, are fit for leadership. Though written for a secular audience, the book contains many thoughts on servant leadership similar to the words of Jesus.

The late Dr. Harold Reed, former president of Olivet Nazarene University and the Reed Institute for the Advanced Study of Leadership, re-

minds us in his book *The Dynamics of Leadership* that the quality of our leadership is largely based on our philosophy of life. If it includes a biblical theology of church and ministry, then *how* we lead—our style of leadership—will focus on the *qualitative growth* of the led as ministers of Jesus Christ, answering the call to serve others in His name.

Understood in this way, Christian ministry is a *shared ministry*, with every believer serving and supporting one another, using Holy Spirit-given gifts to stimulate personal and corporate growth and reconciliation in both the Church and the world. Ministry is a function and expression of the whole Church. It is not something that only a few persons are called, trained, and ordained to do. Rather, it is a basic function of the people of God.

Perhaps the model of ministry on the following page will help summarize this discussion and conceptualize the relationship of the leader's ministry to the ministry of the people of God whom he or she serves.

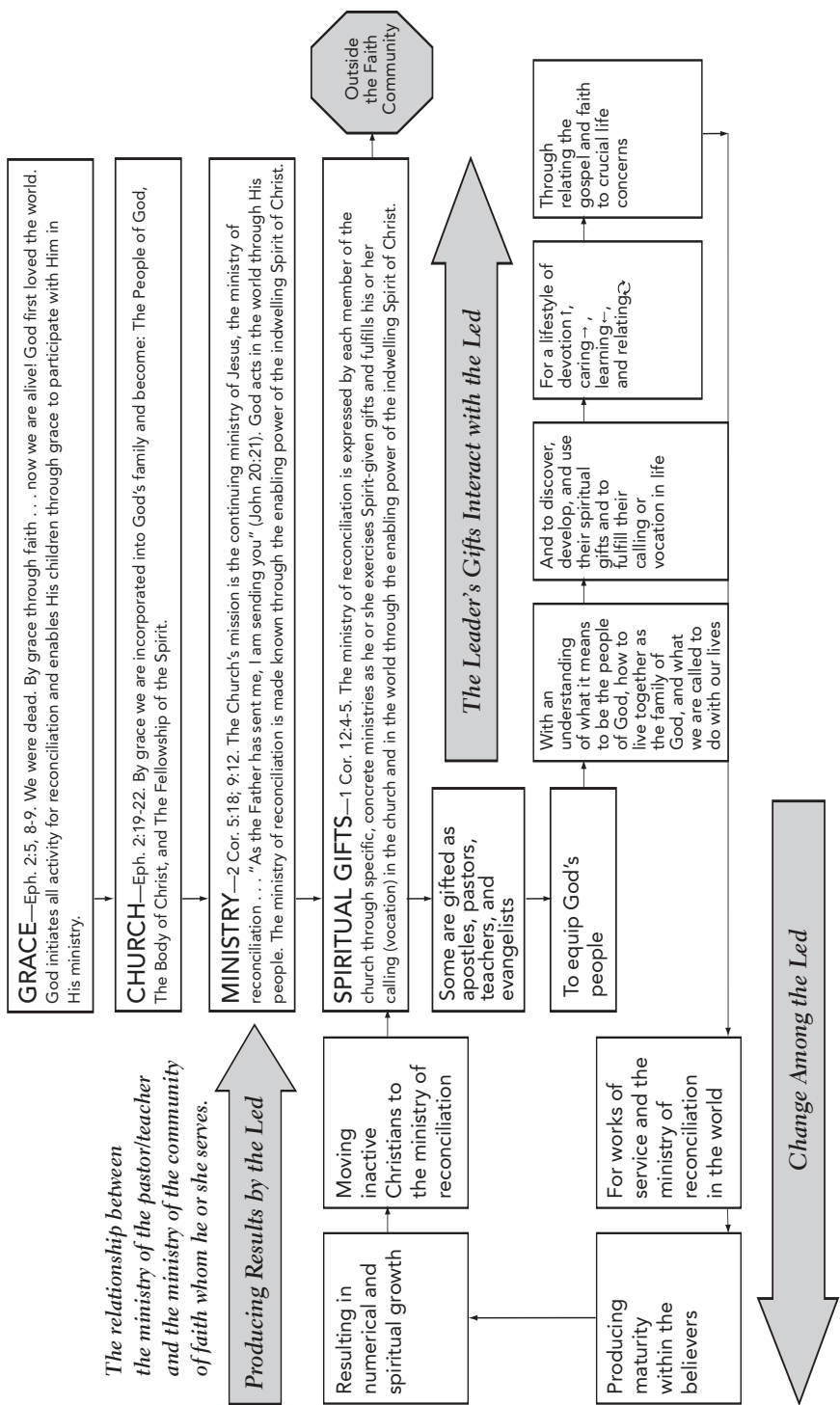
Following the diagram (fig. 1.1) full circle—from grace through the *leader* interacting with the *led*, through change among the led, and finally through producing results by the led—it becomes clear that our ministry of leadership is to prepare others for their ministries. Do you notice how the led then begin to become integrated into ministry?

Servant Leadership Vision

Vision has to do with seeing things clearly and at a great distance. In organizational and institutional thinking, it is seeing what others do not see. Vision, for the person who has it, is a consuming, passionate, and compelling inner picture. All Christian leaders are expected to have a vision for ministry. But effective Christian leaders have a shared vision. The *leader* shares the ministry vision with the *led*. Fundamental for the Christian leader is not so much *organizational vision* but rather *theological vision*.

What do we see—through the eyes of the Father—in the people with whom we work? Do we see problems or possibilities? The present or the potential? Some leaders focus only on the past. Our challenge is to see be-

Fig. 1.1



yond the past, or even the present with its up-front problems—to see redeemed individuals who are called to live as an extension of Jesus in their world, incarnating His healing, sustaining, and reconciling work in the lives of others.

Again as leaders, we must have a consuming, passionate, compelling inner picture of

- *Who* we are as the people of God
- *How* we may live together as the family of God
- *What* we are called to do with our lives in the work of God

And servant leadership is the *transference* of this vision. We must transfer our vision of ministry to those for whom we have Christian care and responsibility; they will in turn transfer their vision to others! More and more we need to see ourselves as *equippers* of ministers. Unfortunately, most of us have been educated to be ministers, not to be *enablers* of ministers.

Shared ministry demands “deep seeing” and “deep visioning.” Only the person who can see the *invisible* can do the *impossible*. Questions such as “What if?” or “Why not?” ought to permeate our Christian leadership mind-set.

Elton Trueblood states it most clearly:

Unless the layman is given solid teaching, his ministry, after an initial burst of freshness, will tend to degenerate into little more than a string of trite phrases linked to commonplace ideas and buttressed by a few sloppily quoted biblical passages. We must take the education of the laity with utter seriousness. Lay persons are not assistants to the pastor, to help him do his work. Rather, the pastor is to be their assistant; he is to help equip them for the ministry to which God has called them. The difference is as revolutionary as it is total. Half measures are worse than nothing. Our hope lies in making big plans, in undertaking to produce a radical change, in aiming high. Adult education is the big thing in the church. It is not a decoration, it is the centerpiece.³

Only from this perspective will ministry be mutually understood and shared. And without this shared vision, vibrant ministry in and through a

Christian organization, is as probable as a two-sided triangle. Ministry happens when the *leader* and the *led* have a common vision and pursue it together. The more consuming the vision, the greater the commitment to ministry.

You must be captured by a vision that transcends ministry to the people and for the people, to ministry with the people and by the people. Our leadership ministry is in helping others understand and develop *their* ministry.