

with answers

The Art of the Basin and the Towel

(Developing the Qualities of a Servant Leader)

“But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over people, and the great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant.’” (Matthew 20:25)

BIBLICAL
BASIS

The issue of servant-leadership is the single greatest contrast between spiritual and secular leadership. During His three and a half year ministry, Jesus consistently taught His disciples that leadership meant servanthood – as opposed to the “top down” attitude the Gentiles demonstrated during that day (Matthew 20:25).

In his book, *In the Name of Jesus*, Henri Nouwen mentions three very real, yet subtle, temptations that any servant of Christ faces. They correspond with the three temptations our Lord faced before He began His earthly ministry (Matthew 4).

First Temptation: to be self-sufficient (self-reliant)

Satan told Jesus that if He was the Son of God, He should turn the stones into bread. He should take charge. He should be self-reliant. This attitude stands in opposition to everything we know about the Kingdom. As leaders, we must foster our dependence on the Lord. Instead of being self-assured, we need to be open and vulnerable.

Second Temptation: to be spectacular (celebrity mentality)

Satan next tempted Jesus to throw Himself down and let God protect Him with His angels. He should put on a show. Paul says this is to be deliberately renounced, as Jesus renounced it. In Nouwen's words, “Jesus refused to be a stunt man... He did not come to impress anyone.” The goal of leadership is not to become a celebrity or to maintain an image, but to obey God.

Third Temptation: to be powerful (in charge)

Satan's final temptation was for Jesus to bow down and worship him. If He would, Satan said he'd give Him all the kingdoms of this world. The temptation was to gain power now. After all, Jesus would eventually inherit all the kingdoms from His Father in heaven. Paul said: “*We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus' sake*” (2 Corinthians 4:5). Paul came to the Corinthians in weakness, not in strength, that their faith should not rest in the power of men, but in the power of God. To lead is appropriate and necessary. But to push, manipulate, and control is never right. Put simply, one God is sufficient!

Horizontal Thinking versus Vertical Thinking

On a regular basis, Jesus guided His disciples away from “horizontal thinking” and steered them toward “vertical thinking.” Too often, they started looking at each other, comparing what they had done with what others had done. Often they worried if they were receiving enough credit or getting enough prestige. Even at the Last Supper...

“Within minutes they were bickering over who of them would end up the greatest. But Jesus intervened: ‘Kings like to throw their weight around and people in authority like to give themselves fancy titles. It's not going to be that way with you. Let the senior among you become like the junior; let the leader act the part of the servant.’” (Luke 22:24-26)

Practicing the Art of the Basin and Towel: John 13:1-20

In John 13, Jesus demonstrated servant leadership in a most vivid fashion: He washed the disciples' feet. Let's examine the text and see Christ's model as a servant leader.

Christ-like Servant Leaders

1. Are motivated by love to serve others (John 13:1-2)

“Just before the Passover Feast, Jesus knew that the time had come to leave this world to go to the Father. Having loved His dear companions, He continued to love them right to the end.”

Jesus' Love Was:

- Possessive (He loved His own)
- Continuous (He continued to love them to the end)
- Unconditional (He even washed Judas' feet)
- Unselfish (He was serving in His most difficult hour)

CHECK YOUR
HEART

“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.” (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Question: Does love for people motivate you to lead? What is your primary motivation?

2. Possess a security that allows them to minister to others (John 13:3)

“Jesus knew that the Father had put Him in charge of everything; that He came from God and was on His way back to God...”

Jesus knew:

- His position and was willing not to flaunt it.
- His calling and was willing to be faithful to it.
- His future and was willing to submit to it.

Jesus demonstrated He could serve others because He was secure and confident about who He was, apart from titles. He was conscious of people, not positions. He was there to give, not gain.

- Security is the prerequisite to great undertakings. Only the secure will stretch.
- Security is the prerequisite to small undertakings. Only the secure will stoop.

Servanthood begins with *security!*

Question: Are you secure enough to serve people without regard to your position?

3. initiate servant ministry to others (John 13:4-5)

“So He got up from the table, set aside His robe, and put on an apron. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with His apron.”

Someone forgot to schedule the servant that night, and no one but Jesus volunteered for the job! Jesus initiated servant-leadership, because no one else would. The following day, Pontius Pilot would pick up a basin of water and avoid responsibility. On this night, Jesus picked up a basin of water and assumed responsibility. He didn't wait for a "foot washing" rally to begin.

Question: Do you initiate acts of service to those under you?

Note Jesus' Attitude:

- a. He had nothing to prove.
(Jesus didn't have to play games, project His self worth or prove Himself to anyone.)
- b. He had nothing to lose.
(Jesus didn't have to guard His reputation or fear He'd lose popularity. He took risks.)
- c. He had nothing to hide.
(Jesus didn't keep up a façade or image for anyone. He was vulnerable, transparent.)

KEY POINTS

4. receive servant ministry from others (John 13:6-7)

"When He got to Simon Peter, Peter said, 'Master, You wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You don't understand now what I'm doing, but it will be clear enough to you later.' Peter then persisted, 'You're not going to wash my feet - ever!'"

Peter was still position-conscious at this point. This is why he couldn't receive from Jesus. True servants can receive ministry as well as give it because they understand God's grace is what improves all service. They never want to stand in the way of grace giving.

Question: Do you have too much pride to receive servant ministry from others?

5. Want nothing to interfere with their relationship with Jesus (John 13:8-9)

"Jesus said, 'If I don't wash you, you can't be a part of what I'm doing.' 'Master!' said Peter. 'Not only my feet, then. Wash my hands! Wash my head!'"

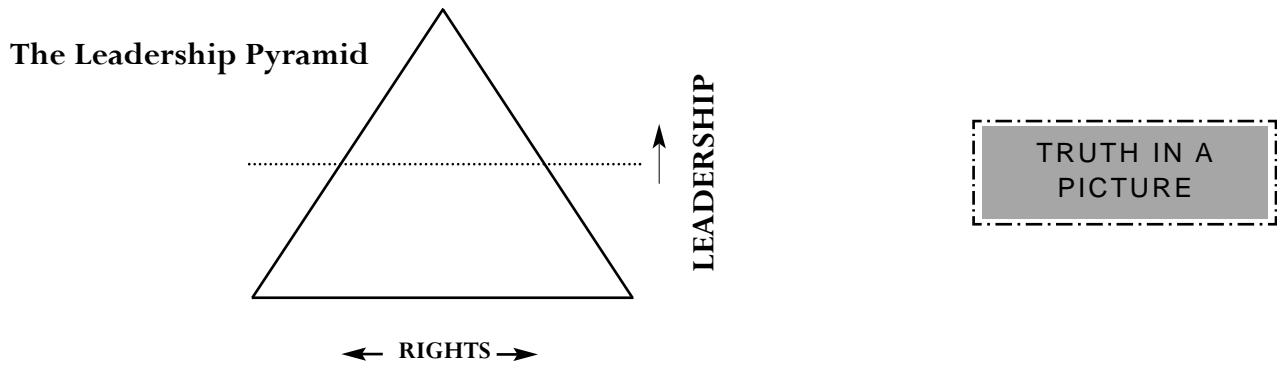
Peter moves from one extreme to the other. Why? He hungered to connect with Jesus. Once he realized it was OK for Jesus to wash him, he wanted an entire bath! He did everything with reckless abandon. It is love for God, and for people, that is behind a servant leader's behavior. They respond quickly to God's connection in their lives.

Question: Do you hunger for intimacy with God so much that you'll do anything to get it?

6. Teach servanthood by their example (John 13:12-15)

"After He had finished washing their feet, He took His robe, put it back on and went back to His place at the table. Then He said, 'Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as Teacher and Master, and rightly so. This is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, then you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid a pattern for you.'"

#1 MOTIVATIONAL PRINCIPLE: people do what people see.



Observations

- Servant leaders don't gain rights as they reach the top – they surrender them.
- Everyone wants to be thought of as a servant, but no one wants to be treated like one.
- We would all love to wash Jesus' feet, but we are commanded to wash each other's feet.
- As Christians we are free in Christ; as leaders we must surrender freedoms for the sake of others (I Corinthians 9:19-22).

Question: Are you modeling what it means to surrender your rights as a leader?

7. Live a blessed life (John 13:16-17)

“What I've done, you do. I'm only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn't give orders to the employer. If you understand what I'm telling you, act like it – and live a blessed life.”

“I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found out how to serve.”
(Dr. Albert Schweitzer)

How Do We Live a Blessed Life?

When Jesus saw His ministry drawing huge crowds, He climbed the hillside. Those who were apprenticed to Him, the committed, climbed with Him. Arriving at a quiet place, He sat down and taught His climbing companions. This is what He said:

- You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and His rule.
- You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourself proud owners of everything that can't be bought.
- You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.
- You're blessed when you care. The moment you care, you find yourself cared for.
- You're blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart – put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.
- You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are and your place in God's family.
- You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's Kingdom. (Matthew 5:1-10).

The Beatitudes in the Form of Personal Disciplines:

- a. Intentionally admit your need for God (Matthew 5:3).
- b. Be a person of brokenness before the Lord (Matthew 5:4).
- c. Give up your quest for personal rights (Matthew 5:5).
- d. Maintain a hunger and thirst for God (Matthew 5:6).
- e. Practice an identity with people in need (Matthew 5:7).
- f. Maintain a pure heart (Matthew 5:8).
- g. Cultivate peace in all relationships (Matthew 5:9).
- h. Take a positive view of criticism (Matthew 5:10).

Question: What blessing do you enjoy because of your decision to be a servant leader?

8. Live their lives opposite the philosophy of the world (John 13:18-19)

“I’m not including all of you in this. I know precisely whom I’ve selected, so as not to interfere with the fulfillment of this Scripture. ‘The one who ate bread at My table, turned his heel against Me.’”

“Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.” (Philippians 2:3-4)

Bible Paradoxes

If I Want to...

I Must...

Save my life.....	Lose my life.....	Luke 9:24-26
Be lifted up.....	Humble myself.....	James 4:7
Be the greatest.....	Be a servant.....	Matthew 20:20-22
Be first	Be last.....	Matthew 19:30
Rule.....	Serve.....	Luke 22:26-27
Live.....	Put to death the flesh.....	Romans 8:23
Be strong.....	Be weak.....	2 Cor. 11:30
Inherit the Kingdom.....	Be poor in spirit.....	Matthew 5:3
Reproduce.....	Die.....	John 12:24



There are Seven Paths to Power:

- a. Force (People have no choice.)
- b. Intimidation (People are pushed.)
- c. Manipulation (People are coerced.)
- d. Exchange (People trade for something.)
- e. Persuasion (People are convinced.)
- f. Motivation (People act willingly.)
- g. Honor (People are honored by their leader and they respond accordingly.)

Question: How is Jesus' leadership style different from Christian leaders' styles today?

ASSESSMENT: On a scale of one to ten (1-10), how would you rate yourself as a leader who serves others? How do you believe others would rate you as a servant-leader?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

ACTION PLAN

APPLICATION: Who is someone you find difficult to serve? List two ways you can serve them this week.