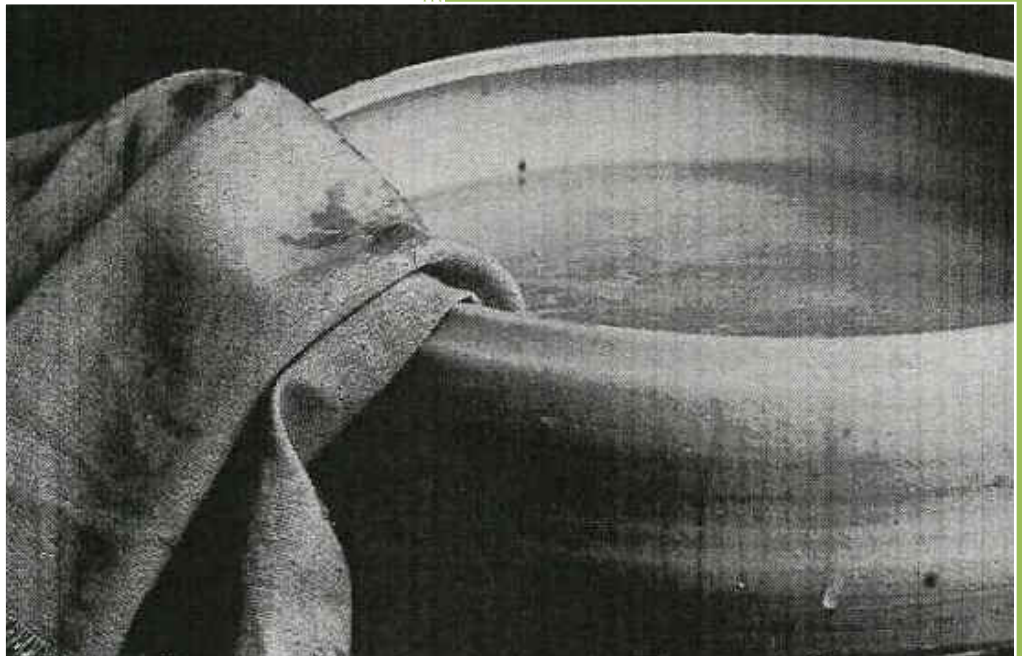


CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP



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January 2010

THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

1. There has been a lot written and said about leadership and our task is to discover and re-discover the unique features that make Christian leadership unique.
2. Leadership insight from the Bible is modelled everywhere but taught very vaguely. We need to derive the essences rather than mimicking the methods.
3. Christian leadership can only ever be representative, never final. Jesus is the only primary leader
4. Jesus sows some seeds for us to plant and allow to germinate: e.g. Matthew 20
5. Christian leadership is about power under, not power over
6. Christian leadership is about servanthood, sacrifice and redemption.

THE SERVANT LEADERSHIP PATTERNS OF JESUS

1. Emanating from relationship with the Father without being mystical.
2. Freely offered not coerced or co-dependent
3. Humility without any hint of seeking status
4. Always inclusive and never exclusive
5. Ministry capacity not position
6. All about equipping saints for ministry not making decisions
7. It is about revelation transfer rather than spiritual franchising
8. It takes responsibility for completing the task, not just participating in the process

SUMMARY AND QUESTIONS

THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a huge subject. Conventional wisdom as to what makes for good leadership is constantly changing reflecting cultural and philosophical shifts within the community. Universities, business colleges and all kinds of consultancies around the world produce endless courses and resources. Bookshops teem with contemporary theory on effective leadership and the testimonies of successful leaders attract high paying clients on the promise of disclosing the secrets of their success. As always the church has been caught up in the pursuit of appropriate leadership models, especially during the last few decades. Figuring out what is Biblical and what is cultural is not always easy, but it is important.

What is it that defines good Christian leadership? That is our question. We know from reading Scripture that the biblical narrative is replete with leaders but largely vague on specific timeless principles. Biblical principles of leadership need to be derived rather than simply adopted. We need to look through the Biblical snapshots and discover what it was that made good leaders good. Even so it will continue to seem funny to our Western minds that Jesus didn't devote a semester to the matter when he was training the twelve. We would rather he was less specific about subjects like "forgiveness" and "loving enemies" and more specific about leadership structure.

One foundational fact is that for leadership to be Christian it can never claim to be the final reference point in a chain of command. Christian leadership can only and always be thought of as delegated. The fact is that there is only one Shepherd, one Head of the church and one Lord. His name is Jesus Christ. The moment leadership detaches from Him, fails to reference Him, reflect him and connect people to him it is doomed. The powerful first principle of Christian leadership must be to saturate our hearts with the leadership modelling that Jesus provided. We need to read all the Biblical texts on leadership through the window we have of his Person and Ministry. It must be our guiding interpretive principle.

Jesus uses a very profound method of transferring revelation. The process begins as he plants a seed or truth in the soil of our hearts and let it grow through exposure to the power of the Holy Spirit and our fellowship with Him.¹ Here in the Gospel of Matthew is one such "seed" looking for some good soil:

*²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ 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."*²

¹ We who want to produce a manual for everything keep on forgetting that nothing in the kingdom of God is designed to work apart from Holy Spirit power and intimate fellowship. We would rather the book, the CD's or the program. We would rather just go and sit in a conference room and be "entertained" for a few days.

²*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Mt 20:25-28). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Jesus is talking about “greatness.” Greatness or prominence is not related exclusively to the exercise of leadership. It only qualifies as such in this case because of what Jesus goes on to say as he chastens the disciples for their unseemly arrogance. He actually talked about this subject on more than one occasion.³ This time the mother of James and John had come to Jesus looking to book the two prime seats either side of Jesus in the palace from which he would be ruling the world. Understandably, the other ten disciples were upset to think that deals might be being done without them having opportunity to press their claims. How unfortunately universal and familiar this is. Jesus first of all cites the leadership philosophy common in the Gentile world:

- *rulers lord it over them*
- *high officials exercise authority over them*

Those of us who are familiar with the Greg Boyd teaching on the comparison between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God are familiar with the words, “power over.” One of the key issues with leadership is “power” or “authority.” A short and superficial sweep across Christian history will convince us that Christians in general and Christian institutions in particular have tended to see a pendulum swing going on through the centuries. In the first centuries Christian leadership was functional, relatively status free and spiritual. As the centuries progressed it became more institutional, status oriented, abusive and controlling. The Reformation saw a series of reactionary shifts away from institutional authority. The most thoroughgoing of these was among the German and Swiss Anabaptists who put forward the view that there should be no identified leaders but that everyone should participate in leadership. This reaction to the abuse of power created a structure that may well nominate people as leaders but where they are expected to operate as leaders without exercising any power, authority or influence.⁴

God has used but has not endorsed any of the models of leadership developed by the members of the kingdom of this world. Even as we look at the way Jesus exercised leadership we need to be careful about superimposing our cultural values over his words and actions rather than seeing for what it is. Most important of all these features is the fact that Jesus never exercised leadership or authority OVER any human person. He ruled over demons, sickness, storms and bits of food, but not over the freedom of the will of any person. He always offered them something but never coerced them. On this occasion he provides the disciples with a summary of his own leadership model and how it contrasted to that operated by the “Gentiles.”

- *Power was used to **serve** people rather than creating an entourage of people to serve him*
- *Power was used to **bear** the consequences and **neutralize** the power of people’s sin*
- *Power was used to **provide** opportunity for redemption for everyone.*

³ Another occasion was during the Last Supper as recorded in Luke 22

⁴ Democracy is, indeed, an example of such a leadership system. Its intrinsic virtue is in its capacity to curb the power of bad leaders. In other words, if leaders do a bad job they can be thrown out of office. It has another virtue in the eyes of western culture, in that it purports to transfer power to the individual, based on the right of an individual to vote. The fact is that it actually gives power to collectives of people – parties.

For Jesus, leadership is about other people getting things they don't deserve at cost to the servant. The disciples are enjoined to exercise their own ministries on this basis.⁵ The classic reference for this is from 2 Corinthians 8:9, *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."* Secondly, the work of Christian leadership is by nature sacrificial. It is about laying down your life for someone else's well being. The third thing has to do with purpose. Christian leadership is about redemptive purpose. It is defined by its capacity to bring about a redemptive result in the life of the person. This is not pleasing people, nor is it running to fulfill their every wish. As with good parenting the leadership responses are designed to produce more wholeness and equip the person to serve Jesus in the work of the kingdom.

THE SERVANT LEADERSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST

Some of those who have contributed to the discussion about Christian leadership and specifically about the "servant" motive seem to have confused the idea of servanthood. What is often presumed so easily morphs into weak, insipid attempts to try and please everyone. Such a view presumes that if the leader is a servant then the people and/or their perceived needs are the masters. To see this distinction more clearly we simply need to look at the way Jesus exegetes this gospel text in his three year ministry. Here are some comments on the way Jesus "served" as a leader:

1. LEADERSHIP THAT FLOWS FROM THE RELATIONSHIP ENVIRONMENT BETWEEN HIMSELF AND HIS FATHER *not* GENERATED FROM HUMAN DISCUSSION

His priorities, words and actions were drawn from his awareness of what his Father was doing. In other words, his "community of more" was from intimate counsel with the Father and the Spirit: the other two persons of what we refer to as the Godhead. He did nothing from personally derived motive and did nothing from self serving ambition. Out of his acquaintance with the Father and the empowering presence of the Spirit he took singular initiative and the full responsibility of it. They never voted on an issue and they didn't qualify or modify issues through endless discussion. He maintained this fellowship with the Father through consistent times of prayer and because of a thorough understanding of the Scriptures and being always open to do kingdom business.

2. *FREELY OFFERED not COERSIVE or CO-DEPENDENT*

His leadership was always offered freely and on not one occasion did he coerce or cajole his followers into some kind of manipulated allegiance. They were free to follow and they were free to walk away at any time. What he offered was the opportunity to follow him. Apart from the core group of disciples, the followers defined themselves by the fact that they were either there or not. No list of names and no glossy marketing strategy to "close the back door." Like Paul Scanlon says, ministry leadership is like travelling on a bus to a destination. The bus stops and people get off and others get on. It is a reality of life when the issue is about heading for a destination rather than keeping a crowd contented.

⁵ Serving others does not make them master (as some church congregations think about their pastors and leaders, e.g. These are the people who do it for us) but it refers to the fact that when servanthood happens someone ends up with more (of what God thinks they need) and the servant ends up with less.

3. **HUMILITY not STATUS**

Accessible to all

His leadership style was not offered from a perspective of arrogance, but always from humility and love. The fact that Peter had the freedom to “rebuke” the suggestion that Jesus might be facing suffering and death (Matt. 16) says a lot about the relationship culture that had developed between the disciples and Jesus. If Jesus had operated like some leaders I have known Peter would not have dared to question, let alone fire off a sharp rebuke. Just think of the leaders that you know and ask yourself how many of them could you freely rebuke. Jesus’ leadership style was not this aloof, “I am always right” kind of arrogance. His humility and lack of need for human status made him available and welcomed in all of the most ordinary places of the society, even the despised and detested places. This humility saw him walk with people, visit with them, enjoy their company, eat with them, sleep along the roadside with them. Humility commended him as accessible to all not the property of a few.

4. **INCLUSIVE not EXCLUSIVE**

Leadership in the open

Jesus’ leadership culture meant that he related to his disciples as friends but he never allowed that friendship to pollute his ministry as a leader. His loyalty was to God and to the revealed purposes of God for all people. This is why he could have twelve disciples without allowing that set of relationships to become like an exclusive club. Jesus was constantly modelling the availability and inclusiveness of the kingdom of God to his disciples. When a Phoenician woman invaded their privacy in Sidon Jesus drew the disciples to her rather than sending her away. When they were going on a retreat and five thousand people showed up, Jesus gave himself to the five thousand people rather than excluding them and drawing a social/status line around the twelve.

5. **MINISTRYCAPACITY not POSITION**

People who know how to do the work

Jesus’ was a leader because of what was inside of him and his leadership was exemplified through the ministry that he did and the responsibility that he carried rather than the position he had or the decisions he made. This was no company board room operation. This was exclusively a field exercise from beginning to end. So often, leadership becomes identified with a position and a room with a table and chairs. When that happens, it so easily adopts the posture of an opinion-fest. . Jesus carried revelation and Holy Spirit anointing that qualified him to BE and DO. Because of this he was qualified to speak and offer the wisdom of heaven that we have become familiar with in the gospels. We who major on talking, decision making processes and positions of authority need to keep remembering that the gospels were about kingdom work, not cerebral discussions.

6. **EQUIPPING CAPACITY not DECISION MAKING**

I think Jesus leadership was measured by his capacity to equip and was therefore qualified much more by what happened in and through the lives of those people who are the legacy of his ministry.⁶ In our own decayed culture we look for the superstar leader. We have endless examples of so called great leaders who are known and desired for their personal capacities. We fly them around the world forever and they end up telling stories that are twenty years old. We want Elijahs and God wants Elishas. We want heroes and God wants sons and daughters. Heaven is going to bear testimony to the people who have sown their lives into others in such a way that they are equipped,

⁶ Not just those who were physically with him, but all who receive leadership from him in every generation.

released, encouraged and supported. Even though we don't know their names, we know the names of the great people they have equipped. These are the real heroes. Christian ministry today is far too dependent on the reputation and the giftedness of individuals. It is easy for the devil to stop a movement based on this leadership culture. This is the reason why the revival in China has been so powerful. It has been built on leaders who saw their function in raising up leaders and supporting them. China is full of house church movements and the leaders of those movements do not need to become famous for them to be effective. While there is no doubt about the fame of Jesus Christ, it is still true that Jesus measured his own success through what happened when he was NOT there over what happened when he was. The record of the discussion he had with his disciples on this matter is recorded in the Gospel of John,

⁵ "Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'" ⁶ Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. ⁷ But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.⁷

7. REVELATION TRANSFER not SPIRITUAL FRANCHISING

Jesus' leadership was about the transfer of revelation. Jesus embodied this revelation before he practiced it and taught it. Very often we are guilty of living off the revelation of other people. There is nothing wrong with getting revelation through other people. It is both classic and integral to Christian enterprise. The problem is that what we are often doing is parroting it or mimicking it rather than allowing the word from heaven to become incarnate in our own lives and experiences. It is definitive of Christian leadership that a leader will only be qualified to the extent that he or she carries in their being the revelation that will equip and encourage others to serve Jesus effectively. We are currently experiencing the impoverishment of generations of leaders in the west who have carried a compromised revelation. Too many Bible verses have been sacrificed on the altar of humanism and rationalism. Our culture has been given sovereignty over faith in the Word of God and the power of the Spirit. When Jesus prayed the prayer recorded in John 17 he referred to this aspect of his leadership responsibility:

⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.⁸

The issue here is that genuine leadership will first of all arise from the fact that the leader has revelation from heaven inside of them that needs to become incarnate in the lives of those for whom they have responsibility. It is probably true to say that people will gather to leaders because of the fact that they seek the revelation that is represented by the life and ministry of the leader.

⁷*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Jn 16:5-7). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

⁸*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Jn 17:7-8). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

8. RESPONSIBLE FOR FULFILLMENT, not just PARTICIPATION

It is clear from the way Jesus talked about himself that he was taking personal and primary responsibility for completing his own work and for getting his disciples across the line. We have a crisis of commitment in the western world today. It plays out wherever the need for personal commitment is required. Fathers have abdicated their responsibility to their wives and children; parents have chosen to be committed to making money rather than nurturing their children. In the legal system individuals have been acquitted of most of their personal responsibility and it has been transferred to one or other institutions or groups. One of the often referred to “games” that is played out in many public service departments for an individual to think more of covering his own backside than serving the best interests of people and the community. It is also true in Christian leadership. It seems there are thousands of people who are prepared to pay good money to hear all kinds of famous preachers and teachers but not to take responsibility for implementing the revelation they have listened to. If Christian leaders are to follow the example of Jesus then it means taking responsibility for completing the work intended by God and for making sure that the people for whom we have responsibility are challenged, released and supported to become sharers in the same. Here are samples of the words of Jesus that impose responsibility on his disciples in contrast to seeing their role as observers or participators:

“Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men”⁹

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”¹⁰

SUMMARY

I think it is possible for us to work at developing a leadership culture in Grace Canberra that will represent a contemporary application of the leadership principles of Jesus that have been outlined above. Here is a set of principles by which this might become possible:

1. LEADERSHIP DERIVED FROM HOLY SPIRIT REVELATION If we determine to seek the Lord in the Word and by the Spirit, in prayer and worship and by going after anything we have conviction about as being from God and if we determine to encourage one another in these ways we will learn how to do it better.

Question: am I willing to develop and maintain a leadership method that flows out of my relationship with Jesus Christ

2. FREELY OFFERED If we determine to live what we have seen (revelation) and allow our hearts and lives to be our most valued qualification people will feel much more confident to receive leadership from us not just friendship. If we allow people to opt in or out according to their decision rather than our coercion we may have less people but we will see more of God’s power.

⁹ Mark 1:17

¹⁰ Mark 16:15

Question: am I confident to offer people the fruit of my own commitment to following God rather than base my "leadership" on their approval or disapproval?

3. HUMILITY We must guard our hearts and seek to deal with our pride. It is such a subtle thing and so accepted in our culture. We must deal with all attitudes of superiority, insecurity and self righteousness and help one another through loving relationships to identify and deal with self based motives. We need to actively work against status that is always offered by sincere people to loving leaders because of the blindfolds of our culture.

Question: am I aware enough of my own personality and motivations to see pride when and where it exists; and when I see it am I prepared to deal with it?

4. INCLUSIVE I think we could operate all aspects of leadership in an open forum and welcome anyone who wants to participate and then sort out their motives along the way. We would be better to deal with wrong motives as they become apparent than restrict the opportunity to provide an environment where leadership can be raised up through a generous inclusiveness.

Question: Am I willing to keep on reaching out to the perimeters and create acceptance what will include people rather than creating a club around those people I know best?

5. MINISTRY CAPACITY Leaders should be recognized for the capacity they have to DO ministry rather than how old they are, or what nice people they are or the host of other reasons people end up as part of leadership groups. We must keep on qualifying or disqualifying ourselves and each other on that same basis. If we are not doing anything in ministry we should go and learn how to do something that is useful rather than become part of the influence that justifies mediocrity and lack of responsibility.

Question: Am I willing to keep on learning to DO ministry better so that what I offer people through leadership is based upon my own ministry experience?

6. EQUIPPING I would like to set a goal for us to see what leadership would look like if one of the criteria for recognizing leaders was their capacity to equip others rather than their capacity to do the ministry themselves. When you have people who are willing to do ministry but not equip others you invariably end up with co-dependence.

Question: Am I willing to take responsibility to provide relationship mentoring that will see other people learn to serve God rather than just offering friendship and encouragement?

7. REVELATION TRANSFER I think it would be important for us to ask questions about each other in terms of what revelation from heaven we carry. The revelation carried inside of someone is not always easy to see. If we seek to raise up leaders because we have spent time with people and have seen the revelation inside of them, we will be much more able to help them take a step of faith and offer that revelation to others (and therefore become a leader to them). We need to stir one another to continually seek, interpret and implement fresh revelation.

Question: Do I have an awareness of those things God has revealed to me and which have become incarnate in my life and experience and do I have the confidence to enable others to see what I have seen in order to be able to implement the same things in their lives?

8. **RESPONSIBILITY** All leaders must be people who know what God wants to do and take responsibility to see that they commit to doing it until it is done and encourage others to share the same responsibility. We need to find ways of keeping each other accountable to the outcomes and destinations rather than simple sit out our days at some rest spot on the road.

Question: Am I willing to commit to a faith journey where I take responsibility for getting myself to the destination as well as helping other people reach the same destination?

