

INTRODUCTION

I'll be speaking about the spiritual dimension of leadership throughout this teaching, but please don't imagine that I'm writing only to pastors, career missionaries, or church leaders. Every leader who is also a Christian—including the manager of the widget factory, the football coach, and the public-school kindergarten teacher—needs to remember that the leadership role is a spiritual responsibility, and the people we lead are a stewardship from God, for which we will one day be called to give an account (cf. [Matthew 25:14–30](#)).

[Matthew 25:14-30 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴“For *it is* just like a man *about* to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them.”

¹⁵“To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.”

¹⁶“Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents.”

¹⁷“In the same manner the one who *had received* the two talents gained two more.”

¹⁸“But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.”

¹⁹“Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.”

²⁰“The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’”

²¹“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

²²“Also the one who *had received* the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.’

²³“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

²⁴“And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no *seed*.’

²⁵‘And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’

²⁶“But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no *seed*.’

²⁷‘Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my *money* back with interest.’



²⁸ ‘Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’

²⁹ ‘For to everyone who has, *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.’

³⁰ ‘Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

If you truly understand your accountability before God as a leader, you can begin to see why Christ portrayed the leader as a servant. He was *not* suggesting, as many have supposed, that lowliness alone is the essence of leadership. There are plenty of humble, meek, tenderhearted, servant-minded people **who are not leaders**. A true leader inspires followers. Someone who has no followers can hardly be called a leader.

So while it is certainly true that leadership demands a servant’s heart; it is by no means the case that everyone with a servant’s heart is thereby a leader. There’s far more to leadership than that.

To put it simply, leadership is *influence*. The ideal leader is someone whose life and character motivate people to follow. The best kind of leadership derives its authority first from the force of a righteous example, and not merely from the power of prestige, personality, or position. By contrast, much of the world’s “**leadership**” is nothing but manipulation of people by threats and rewards. That is not true leadership; it’s exploitation. Real leadership seeks to motivate people from the inside, by an appeal to the heart, not by external pressure and coercion.

For all those reasons, leadership is not about style or technique as much as it is about character.

Want proof that effective leadership is not just about *style*? Notice that a number of divergent leadership styles are modeled in Scripture. Elijah was a loner and a prophet; Moses delegated duties to trusted people whom he kept close to him. Peter was brash; John was tenderhearted. Paul was a dynamic leader, even when being carried about in chains. He influenced people primarily through the force of his words. Evidently, his physical appearance was anything but powerful ([2 Corinthians 10:1](#)).

2 Corinthians 10:1 (NASB)

¹ ‘Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!’

All were men of action, and all used their diverse gifts in markedly different ways. Their leadership styles were varied and diverse. But all were true leaders.

Again, I think it’s a serious mistake for Christians in leadership to pass over these biblical examples of leadership and turn instead to secular models of leadership in pursuit of style-obsessed formulae they think will make them better leaders. Yet entire organizations now exist to train church leaders with leadership techniques and management styles gleaned from worldly



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“experts.” I recently read a Christian book that analyzes the entrepreneurial and administrative techniques used at Google.com, Amazon.com, Starbucks, Ben & Jerry’s, Dell Computers, General Foods, and several other prestigious secular corporations. The authors of that book occasionally try to insert a biblical proof-text or two to buttress some of the principles they teach, but for the most part, they uncritically accept whatever seems to produce “success” as a good model for church leaders to imitate.

Then someone gave me an article from *Forbes* magazine. The publisher of that magazine says a best-selling book on church leadership and ministry philosophy by an evangelical pastor is “the best book on entrepreneurship, business and investment that I’ve read in some time.” The *Forbes* publisher says, “Whatever you think about [this pastor] or his religious beliefs, he has discerned a consumer need out there.”

Then he gives a brief summary of the book, substituting the word *business* for *church*, to demonstrate that the same management principles currently producing megachurches will work in the corporate world. Ironically, he is quoting a pastor who has borrowed *his* philosophy from successful secular entrepreneurs. The assumption is being made on both sides that whatever “works” in the corporate realm is automatically transferable to the church and vice versa. For example, the *Forbes* editor quotes the pastor: “**Faith and dedication won’t overcome a lack of skill and technology. Funny words from a preacher, but how true.**”

But is that really true? Are faith and dedication lacking something vital that must be supplied by skill and technology?

Have modern management theory suddenly unlocked principles of leadership that were hidden until now?

Does the financial success and corporate growth of McDonald’s automatically make their approach to McManagement a good model for Christian leaders to follow?

Does the clout of Wal-Mart translate into proof that their corporate leadership style is right?

Is authentic leadership merely a matter of technique?

Can this approach of mimicking whatever is currently fashionable in secular management theory possibly be reconciled with Jesus’ statement that His kingdom operates by a markedly different style of leadership from “the rulers of the Gentiles”?

Of course it can’t. It is a serious mistake for Christians in positions of leadership to be more concerned with what is currently popular in the corporate world than with what our Lord taught about leadership. I’m convinced that the leadership principles He taught are essential to authentic success in both spiritual and secular realms. And just because a leadership technique seems to “work” effectively in a corporate or political environment doesn’t mean it ought to be embraced uncritically by Christians.



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In other words, you don't become a *spiritual* leader by studying the techniques of corporate CEOs. You can't exemplify *biblical* leadership and follow the trends of Madison Avenue at the same time. There's much more to Christlike leadership than *modus operandi*. Again, **true spiritual leadership is all about character, not style.**

That is my theme in this teaching. I'm convinced there **are better models** for Christian leaders to follow than Ben and Jerry. Surely our mentors in spiritual leadership ought to be spiritual people. Doesn't it seem obvious that the apostle Paul would have more to teach Christians about how to lead than we could ever learn from Donald Trump? For that very reason, this book is based largely on biographical material from the life of the apostle Paul from the New Testament.