

Follow the Leader

Gleanings from Jesus' Leadership

The Bible makes a great deal out of light. Almost always it denotes a kind of spiritual or moral awakening that illuminates our human condition so we can see things as they really are, or as we say, "see life in a new light." Jesus said "I have come into the world as light so that whoever believes in me will not remain in darkness" (Jn. 12:46). *That's what leaders do...they shed light on areas that are hidden so that they can be seen as they really are.* Thanks Jesus for showing us the way of serving others by exposing what is concealed! Naturally we don't have Jesus' perfect perspective, so God has provided ample light from two other sources: his Word to us (Ps. 119:105) and the presence of his Spirit in us. The more we understand God's Word and listen to God's Spirit, the brighter our light becomes as we serve others in Jesus' name.

Of course Jesus doesn't just identify areas that need repair but also provides tender, and sometimes tough, plans for restoring brokenness. When reading through the Gospels and reflecting on the kind of person Jesus was, I'm struck by the winsome ways he endeared himself to others without compromising truth. Take Nicodemus for example. He and Jesus were up late (perhaps all night) and had a rather intense theological discussion on the mystery of being born-again (Jn. 3). Though Nicodemus was no stranger to theology, he sought out Jesus and went away enlightened by the truth of new life in Christ.

One chapter later Jesus had a surprisingly practical exchange over a drink of water with a rather risqué lady from Samaria (Jn. 4). Yet, he carefully but boldly moved the discussion toward her personal life. *That's what leaders do...they listen intently for the wordless cries of a broken heart and address one's deepest longings with compassion and with truth.* Thanks Jesus, for your commitment to truth and to human hearts!

On another occasion Jesus said "I lay down my life for the sheep," then insisted "I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn. 10:15-18). As if it's not enough to die for another, Jesus did so willingly! *That's what leaders do...they willingly serve others, even at their own expense.* Thanks Jesus for not only showing us the way but setting the example.

Now, Jesus also had incisive and penetrating moments when engaging others. With cutting logic he answered those who tried to position him against the religious and political ethos of the day. Many times he was placed between two horns of a (supposed) dilemma, yet he masterfully escaped by shedding light on the real problem, without evading the apparent one. Consider Matthew 22:15-22 on whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar.

Or the next instance when Jesus was challenged to choose between a commonly held view of the afterlife and Moses' authority (Matthew 22:23-33). Again, Jesus escapes the trap by challenging his interlocutors' presuppositions, thus dissolving the apparent dilemma. *That's what leaders do...they offer alternative views and challenge erroneous thinking in an effort to point people to the truth.* Thank you Jesus for providing keen insights and carefully argued positions, showing us what it means to love God with all our minds (Matthew 22:37).

Not only did Jesus display a lucid intellectual acuity but he always modeled heavenly humility. Every good leader knows what it is to follow others by aligning their will under the will of another. Jesus followed his Father's will by submitting to the cross (Matthew 26:42). In part, this included the necessary act of submitting to the frailties of being human. Although enjoying full, uninterrupted fellowship with God the Father, Jesus "made himself nothing" (Philippians 2:5-8). Indeed, in an unmistakable act of willing submission and service Jesus washed the feet of his disciples; those who followed him! *That's what leaders do...they set the example of leadership by putting themselves in the place of those they lead.* Thank you Jesus for taking the lead in being a follower and for your matchless humility in becoming one of us.

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Of course there are many more instances that could be noted about Jesus' supreme leadership, but one thing is for sure: Jesus leaves us a legacy in leadership from his illuminating insights, compassionate heart, engaging logic, and humble service to others. *So, let's do what leaders do...follow our leader!* "Lord Jesus, enable us to follow you, learn from you, and truly be like you in all that we do, so we might lead with love, respond with uncompromising truth and listen to others with divine compassion. May we do this by the illuminating power of your Holy Spirit and the brilliant light of your Word. Amen."