

# Why Servant Leadership Is Not Enough!

## The Multi-Dimensional Aspects of Leadership as Taught in Scripture

By Eugene B. Habecker

In Christian ministry (and elsewhere), the term “servant leadership” is often cited as the model to which all leaders and managers should aspire. However, the biblical model for leadership is significantly more inclusive and only by understanding the various models and metaphors for leadership used in Scripture can we come closer to understanding how God wants us to carry out leadership.

### Leading by Following

Models of the leader who serves tend to focus on what the leader does for the people, without recognizing the tremendous contribution people can make to the life of a leader. It doesn't allow for the “one anothers” frequently referred to in Scripture: love one another, serve one another, prefer one another, forgive one another, exhort one another, comfort one another, etc.

A second model—one that I and others have championed—is the idea of the leader as follower *and* the follower as leader. Often in an organization, leaders follow while followers lead. Even basic definitions of leadership note the link between leading and following. In fact, the most basic definition of a leader is one who has followers. Without them, no matter how well servant leadership is pursued, there's no leadership.

In both models, the basic focus is on the role carried out by the leader and the people being led. I believe both help us understand the roles carried out by leaders. Leaders both serve and at times follow.

I'm convinced we'll understand leadership best if we think of it, not only

along one or two dimensions, but along a multitude of dimensions. By doing so, I believe we come closer to understanding leadership and *how* leaders actually do the work of leadership.

Several teaching sections from Jesus and Paul further illustrate these points.

### Jesus and Leadership

It's true that Jesus calls us to be servants. So we could argue that Jesus would support the idea of servant leadership. He was always concerned with the servant and with those being served. So, too, we could make a similar point with the leader needing to be a follower, particularly of the Lord. Jesus not only modeled servanthood, but also followership. Indeed, he was sensitive to and obedient to his heavenly Father, as he calls us to be his followers. Jesus served and followed, was served by others and he led.

But Jesus never states these ideas of servanthood and followership to be the *only* dimensions of leadership. Even these two ideas were never presented by our Lord to be the first, let alone the only “chairs” in the orchestra of organizational leadership. Indeed, he placed an emphasis on these and other leadership dimensions and models, using several other metaphors: the leader as manager, shepherd and mentor.

### The Leader as Manager

Much of what Jesus dealt with in the gospels had to do with the leader as manager: the story of a king who sent his servants, and ultimately his son, to collect rent; a financial manager who

was shrewd in handling the accounts of his boss so he would have friends after he was fired; a commendation for those who had adopted the right investment strategies; the story of a CEO who paid the *same* wage for people working differing hours—and there are many more stories.

My sense is that the servant-leader model is inadequate to fully understand these and other stories in the Gospels that often required difficult management decisions. Jesus' instruction to “take from the one who buried his gift, and give it to the one who had the most aggressive investment policy, the one who has the most” hardly sounds like servant leadership.

### The Leader as Shepherd

One of my favorite descriptors about leadership is as shepherd leaders—presuming a knowledge of the true Shepherd. There are numerous examples from Scripture that point to this as an appropriate leadership metaphor.

Many of us have memorized the 23rd Psalm about the Lord being “my shepherd.” Jesus used the shepherd image throughout much of his teaching, lamenting that the people were like sheep with no shepherd.

The shepherd leader is a protector, restorer and healer of those within his or her leadership charge. Protecting those under your care and being concerned for those who have lost their way is an apt description of what leaders ought to be doing. It includes serving, but it's more than serving.

## The Leader as Teacher/Mentor

There's no doubt the teaching and mentoring roles, which are related but different, were important to Jesus during his ministry. I'd argue that the leader as teacher and mentor are important dimensions of leadership effectiveness.

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, he seemingly had a driving concern for these important elements of leadership. He rarely worked alone. In fact, more often than not, he was with his colleagues as future leaders-in-training. He practiced what we call "just-in-time learning."

He taught the principles during the

which was usually interspersed with just-in-time learning experiences, that his group of leaders and followers were mentored by the living Son of God. And this mentoring was also carried on during the days of the early church, such as Paul with Timothy and Barnabas with John Mark.

There are countless other elements of leadership which our Lord modeled, and that's the point. Ask yourself this question: In organizational leadership, which of the following five elements is most important: to be a leader who serves, who follows, who manages, who shepherds, or who teaches and men-

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course of normal living, and then followed up with an experience or a question: "Did you understand what I just said, or what I just did? Are you really seeing and hearing with all the faculties I've given you? Do you get it?"

Then he would explain the parable or the miracle, and they would move on, only to do it all over again. There were times when his followers understood it, so he'd send them on an assignment or field trip. Then he'd debrief them and perhaps make a correction or two, and then move on again. Often he'd take the time to confront his students, like when he asked Peter, "Do you really love me?"

It was in the process of his teaching,

tors? Obviously, all are necessary for effective organizational leadership. Accordingly, a leadership model that emphasizes multiple dimensions, not simply one or two, best serves our understanding of how transformed leaders lead.

As I understand leadership, the leader is constantly moving from one role to another, making various trade-offs and exchanges, constantly adjusting focus and emphasis as contexts change. Just as we constantly shift roles in our personal lives, be it as parent, spouse, neighbor, employee, citizen, or child, we're constantly using multiple skills, roles and tactics to do leadership.

## Transforming Leadership

I'm persuaded leadership truly is an art, not a science. You can't become an effective leader by following textbooks. Leadership has to be learned and practiced in the trenches. Knowing what to do and when to do it is terribly important in leadership. Ultimately, the only way I learn to do it is by depending on the powerful leadership of the Holy Spirit. As it says in Psalms: "You lead me, Lord, as I follow closely" (Psalm 119:59, CEV).

Henri Nouwen said it best. "It's not enough for the [leaders and managers] of the future to be moral people, well-trained, eager to help their fellow humans, and able to respond creatively to the burning issues of their time... The central question is this: Are [they] truly men and women of God, people with an ardent desire to dwell in God's presence, listen to God's voice, look at God's beauty, touch God's incarnate Word and taste fully God's infinite goodness?"

That's the heart of Christian leadership!

This article was condensed from an address given by the author at a previous CMA conference. The full address can be accessed by going to CMA's Management Resource Center ([www.CMAonline.org/mrc](http://www.CMAonline.org/mrc)).

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