

# Servant Leadership

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Once while I was reading the story in John 13 about Jesus washing his disciple's feet, I asked God a question. I was warmed by Jesus' example as a leader laying down his life for his followers. Here was the Son of God, the Creator of the universe, the Lord of Glory, humbling Himself as a mere servant. As I read the story, I told the Lord that I didn't have a problem with the doctrine of foot washing, but that I really had a hard time identifying with it in our culture and modern society. So I asked the Lord, "Jesus, if you would have come during 20th century America, and I was one of the original twelve apostles, what would you have done?" Immediately, he replied to my heart, "I would have shined your shoes." I must say I was rather shocked as I retorted, "A shoe-shine boy? Oh, Lord, I could never let you shine my shoes. I ought to shine yours!" Then there was silence as I suddenly realized that my response was much like Peter's. I realized that, in my heart, I had not allowed Jesus my Lord to also be my Servant. I began to realize that I was only qualified to serve as I allowed Him to serve me. Then the Lord spoke to me and said, "As a leader in the Body of Christ you are to follow my example and be a "shoe-shine boy" to my people. That's what a true spiritual leader is: a shoeshine boy! And I've got God's polish to shine His people's shoes with, Hallelujah! Let's look at some character traits of a SERVANT LEADER.

## GENTLENESS

King David, one of the greatest leaders of the Bible said, "Thy gentleness has made me great."<sup>1</sup> Greatness comes from gentleness. If you want to be a great leader, you must let God develop the fruit of gentleness in you. "Illusions of grandeur" should not be confused with "visions of greatness." I once heard a proverb: "Nothing is so strong as real gentleness and nothing is so gentle as real strength." The Heavenly Father is a gentleman. Jesus was and is a gentleman. The Holy Spirit is also a perfect gentleman. Paul said: "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."<sup>2</sup> Leaders who think they can get away with treating God's people brutishly are in for a big surprise. God won't tolerate leaders who treat HIS SHEEP wrong. Judgement will swiftly come! "FOR PASTORS ARE BECOME BRUTISH AND HAVE NOT SOUGHT THE LORD; THEREFORE THEY SHALL NOT PROSPER, AND ALL THEIR FLOCKS SHALL BE SCATTERED."<sup>3</sup> I heard of a great pastor who let success go to his head. He developed a hot temper and angry spirit. So he began to strike out at people in the church from the pulpit. Today he is destitute and backslidden.

## EXAMPLE

Wise leaders lead by example. Jesus never requires of us something that He doesn't require of Himself. Paul commanded pastors in I Peter 5 not to "be lords (dictators) over God's heritage, but examples to the flock."<sup>4</sup> The servant leader should always see himself ON THE BOTTOM LIFTING GOD'S PEOPLE UP rather than ON TOP BARKING OUT ORDERS TO PEOPLE. "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servant for Jesus' sake."<sup>5</sup> A godly leader will lead by example in tithes, offerings, character, commitment, love, and forgiveness. IF YOU WANT PEOPLE TO FOLLOW YOU IN SOMETHING, SIMPLY SET THE EXAMPLE. "Be an example to the believers..."<sup>6</sup>

## DAZZLING DIRECTOR versus DEDICATED DISCIPLER

Some leaders try to ramrod God's people into doing certain things. They try to be a General Patton giving out battle plans. They try to conform everybody to their desires and ambitious programs. But there is a wiser approach. It is wiser to be a DEDICATED DISCIPLER rather than a DAZZLING DIRECTOR. As the leader shines the people's shoes and endeavors to help them mature and discover their gifts, he can guide them through doors of ministry and service.

## LONGSUFFERING

Longsuffering is the ability to love people when they act adversely or don't meet up to our expectations. In every group of people there are some that are chronically "ever learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth."<sup>6</sup> A longsuffering leader will be patient with these people. In every group of people there are some who are "weak and feeble-minded" who must be "comforted and supported."<sup>7</sup> In every group of people there are some who will insult, criticize, or misunderstand the leader. A wise leader must practice the proverb; "A soft answer turneth away wrath."<sup>8</sup> He must learn never to strike back, but to fight evil with good. A "longsuffering" leader is one who is dedicated to people's growth over the "long-term". Of Jesus it is said, "A bruised reed shall he not break and the smoking flax shall he not quench."<sup>9</sup> Cheatham paraphrase: "A wounded person he shall not hurt, and a struggling believer he shall not take advantage of." A longsuffering leader will not give up believing in God's people!

## SCRIPTURES

1. Psalm 18:3, 2. I Thess 2: 7,8, 3. Jer 10:21, 4 I Peter 5:1-4, 5. II Cor 4:5, 6. I Tim 4: 11-16, 7. I Thess 5:14, 8. Prov 15:1, 9. Isaiah 42:3