



LEAD LIKE JESUS

Leading Like Jesus in Uncertain Times

by

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Introduction

For the past ten years we have been proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth as the greatest leadership role model of all time. We believe that the servant leadership that Jesus modeled is right and works in all seasons including times of uncertainty and economic turmoil.

The question of the moment is what aspects of leading like Jesus are most crucial and relevant to leading in times of uncertainty? This is an important question because He never sends us into any situation alone. In fact, choosing to go alone is to deny His wishes.

It is our strong belief that there are three keys to leading like Jesus in uncertain times:

- Be a bearer of hope
- Make your people your business partners
- Be a servant leader

Be a Bearer of Hope

Leading in uncertain times can take on one of two patterns of behavior – that of a prophet of doom or a bearer of hope. The prophet of doom seeks to spur others on through fear with visions of want and despair. The bearer of hope encourages people to hang in and hang together to build a brighter future. For inspiring recommitment and creativity, being a bearer of hope is better. It is true that issuing a clear wakeup call in dangerous times may be needed to get people's attention, however, it needs to be followed quickly by an equally clear and authentic call to hope to counteract the fear and the panic it can create.

How many times did Jesus say, *Fear Not!* in the gospels? We've heard over 300 times. Why? Because *I am with You*. He is a bearer of hope - *Let not your heart be troubled*.

As you seek to be a bearer of hope, it is important to be clear and grounded as to where your own hope is found. "Genuine hope is not wishful thinking, but a firm assurance about things that are unseen and still in the future." The level of hope you will be able to bring to others will be in direct proportion to the level of your own trust in its source.

As a bearer of hope in uncertain times, you have to be a positive thinker like Jesus. Positive thinkers get good results because they think positively and seem to be able to make lemonade out of lemons. You have to be that kind of positive thinker for your people. If they see you into doom and gloom, it is hard for them to be hopeful. Don't deny what is happening – Jesus never did – but cheer people on - He always did!

At The Ken Blanchard Companies, Ken is the chief spiritual officer. Every day he leaves a morning voice mail message for his over 300 people. He does three things: First, he tells people who to pray for – family members, friends, folks who need encouragement. Secondly, he praises people. He constantly wants to catch people doing things right. Finally, he leaves a motivational message – something to uplift their spirits. He is a bearer of hope.

Make Your People Your Business Partners

Does being a bearer of hope mean that you should deny the truth of the present reality? As we've implied, absolutely not! Tell your people the truth about what is happening. Jesus always told His disciples the truth even when they didn't want to hear it. He wanted them to be His business partners so when He was gone physically from the earth they could carry on. They knew His vision and how He wanted it carried out.

In hard times, you need your people as your business partners. Too often in uncertain times, top managers meet behind closed doors, make decisions and then announce them. They act like their people don't know anything about their business. And yet they do. If they understand the facts, your people will know where to cut costs and also where you could increase revenues. This year at the 30th anniversary celebration of The Ken Blanchard Companies a large group facilitator was brought in to lead three hundred and fifty of the Blanchard folks through a six hour process doing just that – suggesting cost-cutting measures and new revenue streams. This session followed a very honest sharing with everybody about the impact the economic downturn was having on the organization's performance. The energy level and quality of ideas was exceptional. What followed that night was a wonderful

anniversary celebration highlighting all of the good times as well as the hard times. We feel it's hard to deal with the hard times if you forget to celebrate the good times.

If you respect your people and share information they go out of their way to help even when you are not there. An important thing about leadership is not what happens when you are there but what happens when you are not there. After Jesus was gone, did His disciples carry on with His vision? You'd better believe it! They risked their lives for it every day because he made them His business partners.

Be a Servant Leader

In Matthew 20:25-28, Jesus said to His disciples ... *You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- 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.*

In His words to His disciples about leadership, Jesus did not suggest a "Plan B." There are no exceptions to His call for us to view leadership as an act of service.

In our study of Jesus as the greatest leadership role model of all time, we have found there are four domains that are necessary to be the servant leader that Jesus wants us to be:

- Heart – our intentions and character
- Head – our beliefs about leading and motivating people
- Hands – our leadership behavior
- Habits – our daily strategies to keep us on purpose as we strive to lead like Jesus

Matters of the Heart

Servant leadership as Jesus modeled starts on the inside with a question: "Are you leading to serve or be served?" Few people would admit that they are self-serving leaders. Yet we see all kinds of examples of this kind of leadership in action. Why? Because we let our **E.G.O** get in the way. **E.G.O** stands for **Edging God Out** and putting ourselves at the center of the universe in terms of whom we worship, our source of security and self worth and the audience to whom we play.

The two biggest culprits that **Edge God Out** are false pride and toxic fear. As a result, the basic heart challenge of leading in times of uncertainty is how to defeat the twin adversaries

of false pride and toxic fear. When pride and fear reign in the heart of a leader the results are invariably self serving, "all-about-me" leadership and a self protecting "every-person-for-him/herself" response by those being led.

When people lose trust in the integrity and courage of their leaders they will start to pull back on their commitment and willingness to put themselves at risk. The mightiest word and most powerful antidote to these negative forces of pride and fear is love. To lead like Jesus is to love like Jesus. Applying this concept to leading during uncertain times may at first seem difficult until it is considered in terms of what love requires from leaders in dealing with those who look to them for guidance. Love is the essence of the heart attitude of leaders who care enough to give the best of who they are in service of their people and their vision.

In his classic work *The Greatest thing in the World - Walking in Love*, Henry Drummond provides a spectrum of nine aspects of love that create a useful framework for putting love into action as a touchstone for leading like Jesus. Drummond's nine ingredients of love are:

- Patience
- Kindness
- Generosity
- Humility
- Courtesy
- Unselfishness
- Good Temper
- Guilelessness
- Sincerity

In times when uncertainty reigns and reasons to lose heart are everywhere, a leader who seeks to put these expressions of love into action has a natural advantage in inspiring trust, loyalty commitment and creativity.

Love based-leadership will be the result of moment-to-moment choices you make between seeking to serve or be served, between Edging God Out and Exalting God Only, between pride and fear and humility and God-grounded confidence. Jesus would hope we would make the right choice. As He said in John 13: 34-35,

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Matters of the Head

When we talk about servant leadership, some people interpret that as trying to please everyone or the inmates running the prison. That's where too many of today's leaders miss the mark. They lack God's point of view because they don't take advantage of their opportunities to develop godly habits of the mind. Servant leadership isn't leadership without control; it's Jesus' way of doing things.

Jesus clearly demonstrated two parts of servant leadership:

- 1) A visionary role – doing the right things with a focus on results
- 2) An implementation role – doing things right with a focus on people.

Effective leadership begins with a clear vision. During times of uncertainty, it is of vital importance to maintain and be able to communicate a positive vision of where you are headed, how you intend to make the journey and what it will look like when you arrive. Leadership is about going somewhere, even in times of uncertainty and external turmoil. Like a ship of exploration caught mid journey in a storm, there will be temptations to go off course or start throwing the things overboard that will be needed later in the journey. People will be looking for hints from you whether you will model and sustain the values you've called them to follow or suspend the rules when times are tough. Jesus lived His values of love of God and love of His neighbor all the way to the Cross.

What values would you like your people to say you exhibited in times of crisis and uncertainty? What behaviors do you think would be the most meaningful expressions of these values in the eyes of your people?

As you can tell, the visionary role of leadership in tough times is more important than ever. It helps people see the vision with a big picture, eternal purpose in mind and paints a compelling picture of the future, which gives people hope. It requires that you, as a leader, define or redefine and model the operating values, structure, and behavioral norms of your organization.

This visionary role is the *leadership* aspect of servant leadership. Here the traditional pyramidal hierarchy is alive and well. People look to you as the leader for

vision and direction particularly in uncertain times. While you should involve experienced people in shaping the vision, the ultimate responsibility remains with you and cannot be delegated to others.

When it comes to the second role of leadership – the implementation of the vision – the emphasis moves to the *servant* aspect of servant leadership. Now the traditional pyramid must be turned upside down because your role is to serve your people and the vision, not yourself. When Jesus washed the feet of the disciples He was emphatically demonstrating how He wanted this role of leadership to be played out. He was calling us to serve. What follows this aspect of leadership is the hands. What do we do as leaders?

Matters of the Hands

How do you want your leadership to be remembered by the people at work, at home, in your church, and in your community? Leading like Jesus is not a course, it is a lifestyle! Making the development of people an equal partner with performance is a decision you make. It is following the example of Jesus as a servant leader and pouring your life into the lives of other people. It is about leaving a leadership legacy of service.

Leading like Jesus is more than a theory or a hopeful sentiment. It is a call to obedience in leadership as an expression of who you are following: Jesus. It means actually changing your behavior to be more like Jesus and starting to ask “What would Jesus do?” before every act.

Jesus didn't tell Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John that He would give them a self-study course, send them to a seminar, or provide them with an education at a prestigious university. He said, *I will make you ...*” This is an important distinction in the life of the servant leader. Servant leaders are shepherds, not herdsmen. Shepherds lead with love and nurture. Herdsmen lead with force and fear. Jesus redefined leadership in a way that rocked the world then and continues to rock the world now.

A key activity of an effective servant leader is to act as a performance coach. When Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, He pledged to them His full support and

guidance as they developed into *fishers of men*. This is the duty of the servant leader – the ongoing investment of the leader’s life into the lives of those who follow. By being a performance coach and changing His leadership style appropriately as His disciples developed individually and as a group, Jesus empowered His followers to carry on after He was gone. Through His *hands* (effective leadership behavior), He was able to transmit what was in His *heart* and *head* about servant leadership.

This is key for you as a leader during uncertain times. Your people need to know that it is not all about you but about helping everyone win. A major message that great leaders need to send in uncertain times is that, “none of us is as smart as all of us.” We’re in this together.

People want to know if you are concerned about image or integrity. Are you reaching out to them or retreating? Are you investing in them or hoarding resources for yourself? They look to you not only to serve but also to be a good shepherd to everyone God has placed in your care. They want to see if you are a good steward of the resources that God has placed in your hands. Remember everyone is watching you! People cannot see what is in your heart or head until it appears in your behavior.

Habits Matter

As Jesus moved through His season of earthly leadership, He was under constant pressure and temptation to get off course or respond to the failings of both His friends and His enemies. Jesus stayed on track with His mission by applying five key habits that countered the negative forces in His life. His habits included spending time in solitude and prayer, relying on the Word of God, having confidence in His unconditional love relationship with His Father, and benefiting from the comfort He found in fellowship with a small group of intimates. These are habits that are particularly important in tough times to combat the E.G.O’s twin adversaries – false pride and toxic fear.

Solitude

Jesus modeled solitude as an integral strategic component of His leadership. When preparing to lead, making important decisions, handling bad news, and dealing with praise and recognition Jesus modeled for us the value of spending time alone to seek recalibration of our spiritual instruments for finding the “true north” of God’s will and pleasure.

In times of success, the roar of the crowd can be intoxicating to a leader. In times of uncertainty, the pressure resulting from the hard choices to be made and managing the concerns and needs of others can be a draining and demoralizing.

Prayer

The one thing that is most instructive about how and where leaders might take their followers is found in their prayer life. Prayer is an essential act of the will that demonstrates whether we are really serious about living and leading like Jesus. Without it, we will never be able to open the way for connecting our plans and efforts with God’s plan for His kingdom or engaging the spiritual resources that Jesus promised in the work of the Holy Spirit.

In leading like Jesus, prayer should never be relegated to our last resort in times of deep distress. It is our most powerful, most immediately accessible, most useful resource for responding to the moment-to-moment challenges of both good and bad times.

Dwelling in the Word

The key to appropriating the spiritual resources needed to live and lead like Jesus is maintaining an abiding relationship with Him. Dwelling in His Holy Word, along with prayer, are irreplaceable elements of an abiding relationship. The Bible is so much more than a how-to manual for dealing with people; it is an intimate love letter written to you from your Father. We heard it once said that B.I.B.L.E stands for – basic instruction before leaving earth. Don’t get so busy in uncertain times that you forget that it holds the best daily advice you can get.

Trusting in God's Unconditional Love

We often ask parents if they love their children. They all smile and nod their heads. Then we inquire, "Do you love your kids only if they are successful – they are good students, athletes or business people?" They all shake their heads. Why? Because we unconditionally love our kids! What if we accepted that unconditional love from our Father? Good question, don't you think? That's why we have trusting in God's unconditional love as a habit. We have to work on it.

The implications of God's personal, unchanging, unrestrained love for you are enormous – so enormous that it might seem easier to consider His love as so far beyond comprehension that you don't even try to understand it. If you do, you leave the dearly purchased gift unopened and the joy of the Giver unrealized.

The power of unconditional love is lived out in your relationships. If God's love for you was based on your performance to the standards that His righteousness requires, you would never have another moment free from anxiety. But what if you accept God's unconditional love for you? What if you admit that you can't earn enough, achieve enough, or control enough to get any more love? You already have all the love there is through Jesus!

As Margie Blanchard says, "The antidote for fear and pride is faith in God's unconditional love for us." The true servant leader, particularly in uncertain times, understands unconditional love and puts it into practice every day. All individuals need to be heard; they need to be praised; they need to be encouraged; they need to be accepted. As a leader, you need to practice these expressions of love. Why? Because you express your love of Jesus by loving those He puts in your path.

Supportive Relationships

Henri Nouwen once noted a consistent pattern in the daily life of Jesus that proceeded from solitude to community to service. The time Jesus spent in fellowship with His disciples seems to have been for their benefit and His. The most poignant and instructive episode involving this inner circle of intimate friendships occurred on the night Jesus

would be arrested and start His final journey to the cross. In Matthew 26:37–38, we read, *He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'*

Leadership can be a lonely business filled with great amounts of soul-draining human interaction but little soul-filling intimacy. Without some safe-harbor relationships where we can lay down all the armor and weapons needed to face the world and relax in confidence and unguarded communion, we become vulnerable to two debilitating frames of mind and spirit—the victim and the martyr. Allowed to blossom into resentment or a self-justification for seeking EGO-soothing instant gratification, these twin demons have been the downfall of many a leader in every walk of life, particularly in tough times

Besides having supportive people gathered around us we all need trusted truth tellers. Preferably these are people not directly impacted by what we do, who can help us keep on course. If you can't name any active truth-tellers in your life, or if you have avoided or undervalued the ones you have, it's time to change. Having truth-tellers is probably the greatest resource for growth that you can have. *Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: if one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up. . . . Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken* (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10, 12). Who do you have to support you in tough times and who is there to keep you on course to be the servant leader that Jesus wants you to be?

Maintain an Abundance Mentality

When hard times come, we look to our reserves of material resources and wonder if we have enough to see us through. We may seek first to perform our way out of trouble by working harder using the same systems and strategies that kept us safe in the past.

It is a true saying that anything Jesus calls us to do can be done – including being a servant leader in times of turmoil and uncertainty. Considered within the limitations

we normally place on our own capabilities and efforts this may appear as unattainable. It is less heroic when expanded to include access to the power and resources of an abiding relationship with Jesus.

So in uncertain times, remember to be a bearer of hope, involve your people as your business partners and be ready to serve, not be served, as a leader. You might think this is a difficult assignment. Not if you believe God is good, He has a purpose for your life, He loves you unconditionally and you can trust Him. As A.W. Tozer said, "What you believe about God is the most important thing about you."

Blessings to you as you seek to lead like Jesus.