

foreword by Calvin Miller

JESUS ON LEADERSHIP

Timeless Wisdom on Servant Leadership

C. GENE WILKES



Jesus on Leadership—a must read for those who value their family!
This book is most inspiring and practical. I'm pleased to recommend it.

WILLIAM MITCHELL, author of *Building Strong Families*,
founder of Power of Positive Students

It was my opportunity to be led by God to enlist Gene Wilkes to write the curriculum edition of *Jesus on Leadership: Becoming a Servant Leader* for LifeWay Press. Gene's message communicates the biblical servant leadership demonstrated by Jesus and has helped equip church leaders to be more effective. In the same way, I believe this tailored Tyndale House edition will have incredible impact on leaders in business, industry, government, and schools, as well as churches. This edition of *Jesus on Leadership* is simply proof of how God's energizing presence has brought together spiritual gifts, experiences, relating style, and vocational skills in Gene Wilkes's life to serve all leaders who desire their lives to please and serve God. The quality of what Gene has done is an example of how God can and does develop a person's capacity to understand and apply God's servant leadership principles in the daily walk of life. For God's touch on Gene's mind and heart in the writing of *Jesus on Leadership*, I say, "Thank you, God!"

HENRY WEBB, director, Discipleship and Family Leadership
Department, publisher of LifeWay Edition of *Jesus on Leadership:
Becoming a Servant Leader*

Read at your own risk. Gene Wilkes may change your whole view of leadership. While *Jesus on Leadership* is a practical tool kit, Wilkes's unusual writing gifts make it stirring devotional reading as well. And it is no book of theory. This material flows from the heart and hands of an authentic servant leader. Besides living these principles himself, Gene Wilkes has trained and mentored scores of leaders, Jesus-style. I am delighted that he has now spelled out his heart in print for the benefit of thousands. This refreshing book deserves top priority on the reading list of every Christian. I predict it will be around for a long time.

LYNN ANDERSON, president, Hope Network Ministries, author of
They Smell Like Sheep: Biblical Leadership for the Twenty-First Century

Spiritual formation is the biggest issue for leaders in the church. The need is obvious, most notably demonstrated by the lack of genuine spiritual vibrancy in so many who occupy positions of influence among Christian congregations and institutions. Help has now arrived! What Gene Wilkes says is right on target at delivering a corrective for so much of what we see masquerading as Christian leadership. Don't read this book if you are unwilling to be challenged—or even changed!

REGGIE MCNEAL, director of leadership development,
South Carolina Baptist Convention

Gene Wilkes's description of leadership according to Jesus—"I am a mission and I serve those who are on that mission"—has captured the heart and passion of the mission-driven leader.

BILL EASUM, author of *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* and director of 21st Century Strategies

I have known Gene Wilkes since he was eighteen. He has lived his life as a servant leader. This has been his passion. The insights I have received from reading this book will forever change the way I do my job and live my life.

GARY COOK, president, Dallas Baptist University

Gene Wilkes, my friend and fellow pastor, serves us lessons on leadership that have been simmering for a lifetime. Centered around the meat of Christ's ministry, they are complemented by wise counsel for others and flavored with experience. Although the truth is often hard to swallow, Gene's recipe for servant leadership is both delicious and nutritious. It's a feast fit for a King, coach, pastor, or parent. Enjoy!

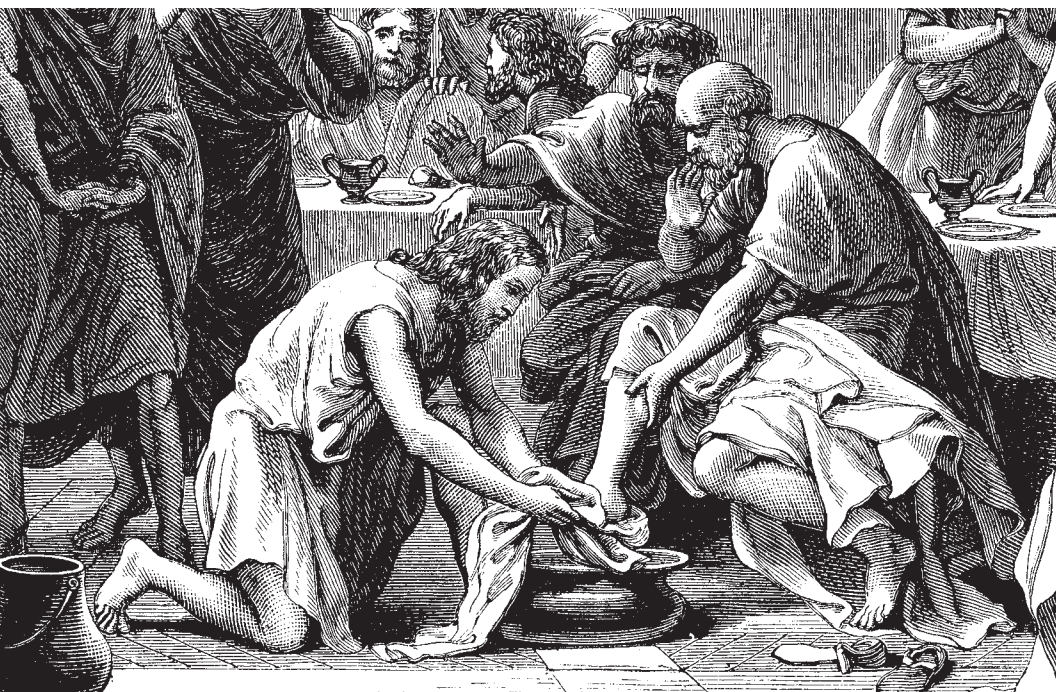
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Timeless Wisdom on Servant Leadership

C. GENE WILKES



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FOREWORD

THERE are some books the world waits for without ever knowing it is waiting. *Jesus on Leadership* is such a book. When such books are written, they inevitably can have no more than one source. There is not a guild of authors for the books that must be written and must be read.

For some time now I have known that Gene Wilkes was working on this book. I have prayed for him throughout this long season of his dedication. I have seen him emerge from his cocoon of creativity before. Behind him, through the doorway of his study, can be seen the titles of hundreds of different books that have been his companions and future for his mental sojourn. But the fact that Gene Wilkes knows the literature of leadership is not why this book is the finest of its kind in the marketplace.

There are four major contributors to Gene Wilkes's greatness as a scholar and teacher. These same four forces permeate this book and make it a must for all of those who want to become informed and capable leaders.

First, Gene Wilkes loves Jesus. Please don't think this a

mere saccharine appraisal between friends. This simplicity provides Gene his passion to serve both God and his congregation. Further, this love for Christ carries a subtle and pervasive authenticity that makes Gene Wilkes believable. Whether you read him or hear him lecture, you walk away from the experience knowing that what you've heard is the truth—the life-changing truth from a man who lives the truth and loves getting to the bottom of things. All this I believe derives from his love of Christ.

Second, Gene is a practitioner of servant leadership. When he encourages you to pick up the basin and towel and wash feet, you may be sure it is not empty theory. He teaches others what he has learned in the laboratory of his own experience. Gene is a servant leader, and even as he wrote this book, he directed his very large church through a massive building program. His church leadership ability, which he exhibited during this writing project, does not surface in this volume, but it undergirds and authenticates it.

Third, Gene Wilkes knows better than anyone else the literature of leadership. As you read this book, you will quickly feel his command of his subject. Footnotes will come and go, and behind the thin lines of numbers, ibids, and the like you will feel the force of his understanding. No one knows the field of both secular and Christian leadership like this man. So *Jesus on Leadership* is a mature essay. It has come from the only man I know with this vast comprehension of the subject.

Finally, Gene Wilkes is a born writer. It is not often that good oral communicators are good with the pen. But throughout this book, you will find the paragraphs coming and going so smoothly that you will be hard pressed to remember you are reading a definitive and scholarly work. Books that are this critically important should not be so much fun. Gene Wilkes is to leadership what Barbara Tuchman is to history. You

know it's good for you and are surprised to be so delighted at taking the strong medicine that makes the world better.

All in all, there is joy throughout the realm of leadership. The waiting is over. Let the reading begin.

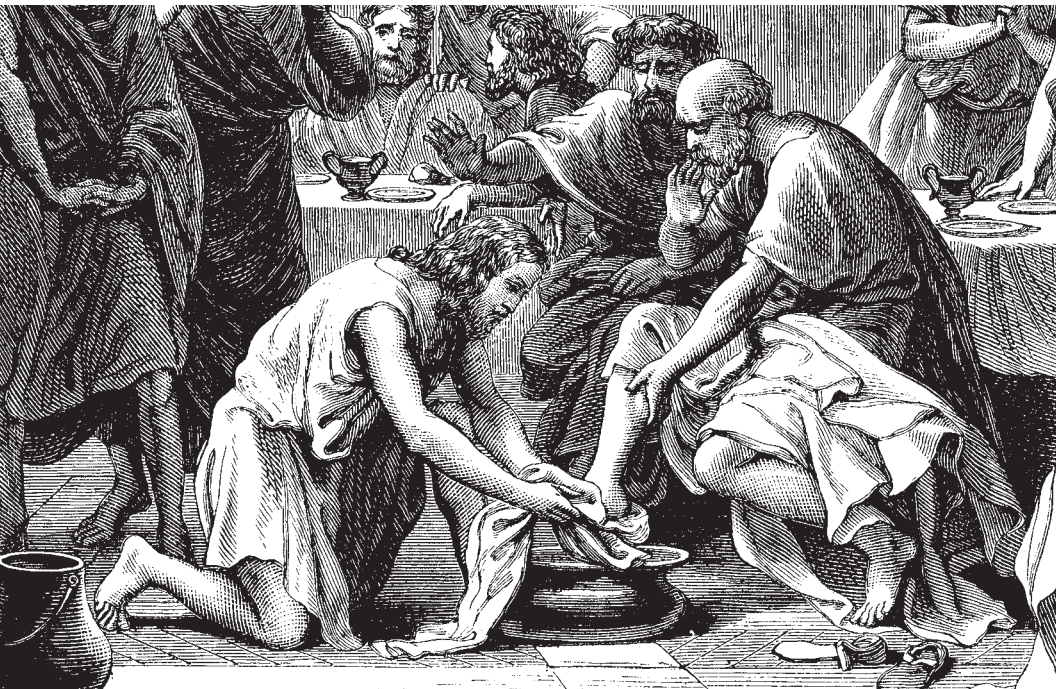
Calvin Miller

Fort Worth, Texas

April 1998

DOWN FROM THE HEAD TABLE

A CALL TO SERVANT LEADERSHIP



ALL true work combines [the] two elements of serving and ruling. Ruling is what we do; serving is how we do it. There's true sovereignty in all good work. There's no way to exercise it rightly other than by serving.

EUGENE PETERSON *Leap over a Wall*

ABOVE all, leadership is a position of servanthood.

MAX DEPREE *Leadership Jazz*

THE principle of service is what separates true leaders from glory seekers.

LAURIE BETH JONES *Jesus, CEO*

PEOPLE are supposed to serve.

Life is a mission, not a career.

STEPHEN R. COVEY *The Leader of the Future*

ULTIMATELY the choice we make is between service and self-interest.

PETER BLOCK *Stewardship,
Choosing Service over Self-Interest*

EVERYONE who exalts himself will be humbled,
and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

JESUS *Luke 14:11*

I WILL never forget the second Tuesday evening of February 1996. We at Legacy Drive Baptist Church had struggled to retool ourselves to carry out the mission God had placed on our church: to make disciples who know Christ, share Christ, and multiply Christ in the life of another. During the transition, several core members left, attendance and giving went down, and the current church leadership—and I—began to question my ability to lead.

That evening, five men who loved God, our church, and me told me they had lost confidence in me as a leader. After meeting several times without my knowledge, these deacon officers had concluded that I was not the person for the next level of growth in the life of our church. They said it was not in their power or purpose to fire me, and they did not want to bring the issue to a vote because they knew it would split the church. Their job was to oversee the church and maintain its unity, not tear it apart. They asked me to take two weeks to pray and consider their position. They wanted to know my answer at the end of those two weeks.

As I walked from the house that evening, a strange sense of exhilaration came over me. These guys had done me a favor. They had put on the table what we all knew. I had stopped leading, and the church was floundering because of my lack of leadership. It was not long, however, before the elation turned to fear. I asked selfishly, “Why would God allow such a thing to happen to me?” Interestingly, just one month before, God had confirmed my call to and his vision for Legacy Drive. Ronnie and Tina Young, members of our church, had given me a trip to Robert Schuller’s Institute of Successful Church Leadership as a Christmas gift. I went alone to recuperate and write. God began to confirm his vision in my heart as I heard Dr. Schuller say that prayers he had been praying for forty years were just then being answered. I listened as this misunderstood servant leader told how he had followed God to a unique mission field and had labored for forty years to see the call of God on his life completed.

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I felt silly with my troubles, having been in my mission field for only nine years!

On the third day of the conference, Dr. Schuller said, “I don’t know who you are, but a dozen, maybe thirty [out of about 1,500]; but God just planted a seed of a dream in your heart. I want to pray for you.” As Dr. Schuller prayed, I wept. I prayed, *God, help me*. It was not a prayer of desperation but a prayer for God to help me complete the task he had assigned for me to do at Legacy Drive and with my life. I wrote in my journal that day, “I prayed not out of fear but out of a great sense that God does want to do something with my life that I truly cannot do on my own. It was a prayer of release to let God work however he would choose. It was a prayer of confidence that God is love and answers prayer. I will be obedient to his call—that’s what that prayer was about.”

God had confirmed his call on my life in January. In February, God turned up the heat to test and change my heart.

The Sunday following the meeting with the deacon officers, I flew to Nashville to tape the training video to support the *Jesus on Leadership* workbook. When I landed, I asked Sam House, one of the project leaders, if they would still publish the work even if I were not a pastor. He didn’t laugh. It was ironic that my denomination’s publishing house was about to print a piece that I had written to help churches develop servant leaders—when I had just been told I wasn’t leading!

As I was preparing to shoot the training videos Monday morning, I read through John 13 again. As clearly as I hear any voice, I heard God say, “Gene, I want you to wash their feet.” I thought, *You’ve got to be kidding*. I read the story again. I sensed a moving of God’s Spirit in my heart: *Wash the feet of those who have called you to this time of decision*. As we drove out to the shoot, I told Sam what God had said. He laughed this time and said, “Doesn’t God have a sense of humor!”

After a day of shooting and an evening of recording the audio version of the workbook, I rode with Henry Webb and Ralph Hodge to Atlanta for the first Promise Keepers Clergy Conference. While there, God changed my heart. One evening we heard Wellington Boone speak on reconciliation. He commented that while reconciliation between blacks and whites was important, God could not bring revival until blacks were reconciled among themselves. Wellington began to honor Tony Evans, a black pastor in Dallas. I did not know that Dr. Evans had been catching flack from the black community because he had reached out to whites.

Rev. Boone said in front of forty-two-thousand-plus clergy, “If I had a cup of water, I would wash Tony Evans’s feet.” The men of integrity would have nothing of idle words. Suddenly, a man jumped up and approached the stage with a glass of water. Almost immediately, another man came running down the aisle waving a towel. Men began to cheer and stand to their feet.

Another black clergyman on the platform, Bishop Porter, went to Tony Evans, stood him up, and led him to a chair on center stage. Wellington Boone took the towel and water, unlaced Evans’s shoes, and washed his feet. The place erupted with emotion. Men began to cry at this display of humility and honor. I began to cry because I knew God really wanted me to wash the feet of those who had called me to decide how deep the mission of God was in my life. That was it. I knew. My responsibility was to wash their feet. God would take care of the rest.

I caught a plane back home before the conference was over. Jeff Koenigsberg, a twelve-year-old boy in our church family, had died of cancer while I was away. Jeff and my oldest daughter were the same age. I could not imagine the pain of his parents, Tom and Kris. The ordeal I faced was insignificant compared to what they had to endure. Washing feet is nothing compared to burying your son. Jeff’s memorial service was Saturday. God

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used that event to calm my heart and remind me of the important things in life. On the flight home to Dallas, God had also graced my life by placing me beside Bob Dean, a friend from college, who listened to my story and encouraged me to do what God had told me to do. He had his own stories of servant leadership.

That Sunday I preached three morning services, attended team meetings in the afternoon, and preached a service that evening. The officers and I met in the church offices after the evening service. No one had approached me all day about our meeting two weeks earlier. They had done what they said they would do and waited to hear what I had to say.

When we all got into the room, I thanked them for drawing a line in the sand concerning my leadership and my commitment to the mission of God on our church. I told them there was one thing God had told me to do before I gave them my answer. I took a towel that I use to wipe the feet of those we set aside for service in our church, and I walked over to Ted, the chairman of deacons. I knelt before him and began to wipe the dust from his shoes. I began to weep. God had humbled my heart. I asked his forgiveness for not supporting him and allowing us to be drawn apart. I prayed for him as I did what God told me to do.

When I finished praying, I stood up. Ted stood, too. Talk about a pregnant pause. I had talked to none of the officers since my return. I didn't know if they had already put my termination package together or if they were really waiting to see what God had led me to do. Ted put his hands on my shoulders and turned me around to where he had been sitting. He took the towel from my hands and knelt before me. He, too, wiped my shoes and prayed for me. I could not hold back my emotions. I did not know what was next, but I now knew what reconciliation felt like.

After he finished, I returned to my chair. I told the group that God had confirmed my call to this church and its mission.

I sensed I was the one to lead in the days ahead. I was convinced God was not finished with me and the church. I then turned to each man with whom I had been entrusted to carry out this mission and asked if he would continue to lead with me. Two said yes. Two said they would serve out their terms as officers but could not say what they would do after that. One said he didn't think he could continue. We talked into the night, agreeing upon what needed to be done to address the needs of the congregation and what I would do to serve them and the church to meet those needs.

Within the next two weeks, two more families left the church. We told the other deacons of our conversations. Since that time, God has blessed our church. He had changed the leader's heart through testing; God could now transform the church. By the way, Ted was the chairman of deacons the next year! The other officer who took a wait-and-see position is a deacon officer again even now.

Why do I tell you this story? I tell it because it is the crucible in which I learned the heart of Jesus and the power of servant leadership. I began to understand what Jesus did when he washed the feet of his disciples. I learned that the power of leading as a servant comes from God's using a person who humbles himself (on his own or through the actions of others) to God's call on his life and who serves those who were entrusted to him in order to carry out that call. I learned that my greatest test of servant leadership may be to wash the feet of those who have the ability to ask for my resignation. That event has become a watershed in my relationship with God and with Christ's church.

This book grows out of my personal journey of learning to lead. The information on these pages comes from a personal crisis of choosing how I should lead among God's people. This book also grows out of the need to find and develop leaders who can carry out God's mission with me. This is not a complete

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picture of what I am learning, but it serves as a primer for those who want to learn to lead like Jesus.

Converse with the ideas on these pages. Let them challenge your presuppositions about leadership. Above all else, let them test your faith about who Jesus really is. That will make the difference not only in how you lead but in how you live your life.

JESUS' MODEL OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

WHAT did I learn when I laid aside every model of leadership I had read or heard about? Who was this Jesus I became reacquainted with when I took off my shoes and walked with him through the pages of the Bible? Let me tell you.

The essential lesson I learned from Jesus on leadership was that *he taught and embodied leadership as service*. Jesus was a Servant Leader in every sense of the concept. I would describe him as one who served his mission (in biblical language, “the will of [his] Father”) and led by serving those he recruited to carry out that mission.

FOR JESUS, THE MISSION WAS TO BE THE MESSIAH. He was sent to bring salvation to the world as God’s Sent One. He served that mission by living as the Suffering Servant Messiah. This mission was everything for Jesus. It was his purpose and direction for all he did while on earth—including his death.

.....
IF WE TAKE A HIGH-LEVEL LOOK AT JESUS'
LIFE, WE SEE THAT EVERYTHING HE DID
WAS IN SERVICE TO HIS MISSION.
.....

FOR JESUS, THE MODEL OF LEADERSHIP WAS SERVANTHOOD.
He was never self-serving. He led first as servant to his Father in heaven, who gave him his mission. If we take a high-level look at Jesus' life, we see that everything he did was in service to this mission. His personal mission was to serve not his own will but the will of his Father. He said, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38).

THE MISSION—AND THE VISION

And what was the will of his Father? How did that translate into Jesus' life mission? At least three times Jesus provided what we would call a mission statement:

- ❖ When Jesus stood in his hometown synagogue, he read his mission statement from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." *Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19*
- ❖ When Jesus stood among his disciples and defined greatness and being a leader in the kingdom of God, he couched his mission statement this way: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." *Mark 10:45*
- ❖ When Jesus stood in tax collector Zacchaeus's home, he stated it another way: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." *Luke 19:10*

Jesus articulated his mission in order to define what he was as Messiah. Where and how he led flowed from a clear sense of why he had come in the first place.

If Jesus was a servant to his mission, he led with a vision of what things would look like when he completed that mission. “What things would look like” was his vision of the Father’s call on his life. Jesus cast a vision of how things would look for his followers—if they allowed him to be the Messiah God sent him to be. Jesus often described that vision of things to come as “The kingdom of God/heaven.” Jesus painted word pictures in the form of stories to show people the vision of God for their lives. These stories, or parables, let people see the implications of Jesus’ being the Sent One of God in their lives. Chapters 13 and 25 in Matthew’s Gospel are collections of vision stories. Luke 15 is also filled with stories about why Jesus came and what lives looked like when God’s love ruled in people’s hearts. Jesus led others by casting a vision of how things would look when he completed his mission.

SEVEN PRINCIPLES TO LEAD AS JESUS LED

After seeking to understand the elements of Jesus’ leadership style, I sought out timeless principles that described how Jesus led and that could be applied to my needs as a leader among God’s people. Here are seven observations I discovered that describe how Jesus led as a servant.

1. Jesus humbled himself and allowed God to exalt him.
2. Jesus followed his Father’s will rather than sought a position.
3. Jesus defined greatness as being a servant and being first as becoming a slave.

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4. Jesus risked serving others because he trusted that he was God's Son.
5. Jesus left his place at the head table to serve the needs of others.
6. Jesus shared responsibility and authority with those he called to lead.
7. Jesus built a team to carry out a worldwide vision.

These seven observations about how Jesus led are the foundation for our seven principles of servant leadership. Each principle is based upon a teaching or an example of Jesus as he lived out his mission and led those he recruited to join him. Before you can lead as Jesus led, you and I must move beyond what I call a “head-table mentality.”

HEAD-TABLE MENTALITY

One day, I found myself at a head table. My job was to introduce the speaker after the musician sang. As the speaker began his talk, everyone at the head table stood and moved to sit among those attending the conference. Everyone but me! The speaker, who picked up on those leaving the head table, said, “If you are at the head table and would like to move, you can at this time.” Alone, I stood and said, “I’d love to!” We all laughed, and I walked red faced to sit at a table with those who served in the kitchen. From head table to kitchen-worker status—in front of my peer group! What a demotion!

As the blood returned to the rest of my body, Jesus’ story about where to sit at big meals came to mind. He taught:

When someone invites you to a wedding feast [or conference], do not take the place of honor [at the head table], for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the

host who invited both of you will come and say to you, "Give this man your seat." Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, "Friend, move up to a better place." Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

LUKE 14:8-11

As I reflected on my social blunder and the speaker's words about leadership, I realized that I had done what was typical of many who sit at head tables. When given a position, we happily accept the status that goes with it and somehow believe we no longer need to go near the kitchen. I was suffering from head-table mentality. I had accepted the myth that those who sit at the head table are somehow more important than those who serve in the kitchen. I even had perpetuated that myth by nonverbally resisting a place among the servers. I wondered if the people in my church suffered from this mentality.

.....
WE WHO LEAD OFTEN OVERLOOK
THAT THE TRUE PLACE OF CHRISTLIKE
LEADERSHIP IS OUT IN THE CROWD
RATHER THAN UP AT THE HEAD TABLE.
.....

I realized that we who lead often overlook the fact that the true place of Christlike leadership is out in the crowd rather than up at the head table. People who follow Christ's model of leadership would never be embarrassed to find themselves among the kitchen help. Such a leader is comfortable working with those who serve in the background and gladly works alongside them until they complete the job. Head tables are

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optional for leaders who follow Jesus. Service, not status, is the goal of this kind of leader.

BRING BACK THE TOWEL AND WASHBASIN

Too many organizations, homes, businesses, and schools struggle because they lack men and women who lead as Jesus did. Head tables have replaced the towel and washbasin as symbols of leadership among God's people. Often those recognized as leaders in the church, for example, hold positions elected by friends and family. Some of these leaders love sitting at head tables but never go near the kitchen (or nursery). Leaders in civic groups may seek to push their personal agendas rather than work with those in their care to meet the goals of the group.

Churches, organizations, and the communities they serve, however, need leaders who know how God has made and gifted them for service and who willingly serve Christ and those placed in their care. These groups need leaders who have skills to equip others and to "team with them" in ministry. We need leaders who will step down from the head table and serve in the kitchen. Ministries and organizations will survive in the twenty-first century when men and women stop following self-conceived concepts of leadership and adopt Jesus' teachings and examples.

.....
HEAD TABLES HAVE REPLACED THE
TOWEL AND WASHBASIN AS SYMBOLS OF
LEADERSHIP AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE.
.....

Service-centered leadership has found its way into current discussions about leadership. The writings of businesspeople

like Robert Greenleaf, Peter Block, Stephen Covey, and Max DePree have called leaders to a service-oriented model of leadership. In the marketplace, the pendulum has swung from personality-centered leadership to character-based leadership. I believe interest in principles of servant leadership has grown out of a desire for organizations to be led by those who will serve not themselves but those they lead. Our culture has wearied of the leadership models of Attila the Hun and rogue warriors. We are seeking leaders who consider us more than a means to an end.

The time is ripe to bring Jesus' principles of leadership into the discussion of leadership. This should happen in the church especially, because leaders in the church—who should have been paving the way to service-oriented leadership—have actually gravitated toward the self-serving forms of leadership that are now being discarded by secular thinking.

HOW DO WE LEAD BY SERVING?

SERVANT and leader stand together as a model for those entrusted with the well-being of a group. Leaders who follow the example and teachings of Jesus will lead first as servants. If that is the case, how does a leader serve and still lead?

I realize that for people today who are well versed in leadership studies, the concept of servant leader causes a significant mental block. I once addressed a group of innovative church leaders. As I described the seven principles of servant leadership, I could see from their faces that they were comparing the principles against concepts of leadership they had learned from conventional wisdom. I struggled to explain how a servant could lead and how leaders could still lead while serving others. At the end of the session, I knew that I had not completed the connection between leadership and service.

The link between the two concepts came to me two weeks later when a friend asked me, “What is your passion?” The answer to that question helped me realize that my passion was

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the mission! Mission (and the vision of that mission) was the connection between service and leadership. I rushed back to Jesus' model of servant leadership and saw how his mission connected his service and leadership. I found that I could lead through both conflict and synergy because I had become servant to God's mission to make disciples in my life and through the church. My leadership style had become that of servant to those on mission with me so we could carry out God's mission in our lives as a unified body of believers. In the short weeks that followed, I was able to move from a description of servant leadership to a working definition:

A servant leader—
serves the mission and
leads by serving those on mission with him.

The mission is everything.

Mission is everything for the servant leader. The mission that God or someone in authority entrusts to the leader is the focus of every decision and action. True servant leadership begins when the leader humbles himself to carry out the mission entrusted to him rather than his personal agenda.

This service to the mission creates the passion that is essential for a leader's effectiveness. Lyle Schaller told a group of church leaders, "I think passion is the critical variable. It has taken me a long time to come around to that, but if a pastor does not have a passion for the mission, you can forget the rest. I would insist the number one quality of a leader be passion."¹ Bill Easum concurred with Schaller when he said, "It all goes back to why we are doing this. . . . It's the mission . . . and the pastor and key leaders simply must have a passion for the mission. It is more than just maintaining or even growing a church, but believing your church can reach an

entire city or a region; believing they can make a difference.”² Servant leaders have passion for the mission because the mission is so paramount in their lives that they have literally become servants to it. This passion for the mission drives the leader to recruit and empower others to join him on that mission.

A servant leader is also servant to those on mission with him. While serving the mission, servant leaders actively recruit and build up others to join them. The leader becomes servant to those who have joined him when he provides adequate vision, direction, correction, and resources to carry out the mission entrusted to the group. The leader serves when he equips others and “teams” with them to reach the goal of mission together.

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LEADERSHIP BEGINS WHEN A
GOD-REVEALED MISSION CAPTURES
A PERSON.
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Leadership begins when a God-revealed mission captures a person. This person turns leader as he becomes servant to the mission. Before mission, there is no need or motivation to lead. The leader then sees a picture of what the mission looks like in the future and casts his vision of that mission to others. Vision is a leader’s unique rendering of the mission. Leadership turns to service when the leader equips those recruited to carry out the now-shared mission. Leadership is complete when the equipper empowers those he has equipped into teams to maximize resources in order to execute the mission. Simply put: Servant leadership is passionate service to the mission and to those who join the leader on that mission.

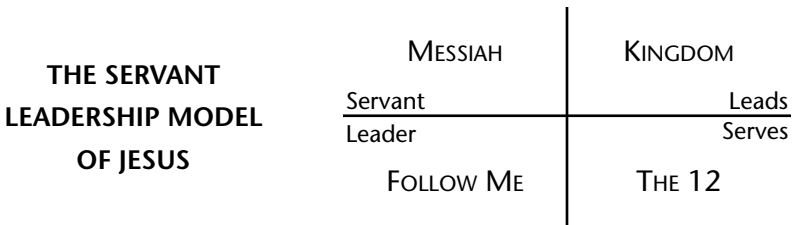
FOUR KEY CONCEPTS

The four operative concepts of servant leadership are: Mission, Vision, Equip, and Team. *Mission* is God’s call on your life. You know what your mission is when you can complete the statement, “God called me to _____.”

Vision is your unique take on that mission. You can state your vision by completing the statement, “When the mission is complete it will look like this: _____.”

Equip is how you train others to join you on mission to complete the vision. *Team* is how you mobilize those you have equipped to carry out the mission beyond your departure.

If you look at the model below, you will see that *mission* and *vision* are above the horizontal line. When a person becomes servant to the mission and vision, he also becomes a leader. This corresponds with Jesus’ mission as Messiah and vision of the kingdom of God.



Below the horizontal line are the elements of *equip* and *team*. When a servant to the mission recruits a group of people to carry out that mission with him, he becomes a leader who serves. He serves by equipping those on mission with him and mobilizing them into teams to reach the vision cast for them. These elements correspond to Jesus’ serving his disciples by calling them to follow him and by building the Twelve into a ministry team.

This model is not just for people in assigned or elected leadership positions in a church or corporation. A mother can be a servant leader. Kim, my wife and the mother of our two daughters, has become a servant to God's mission in her life. That mission as a mother is to raise godly children. Living out that mission has meant setting aside her personal desires for career and sometimes even friendships. Her vision of God's call on her life as a mother is that she will teach our daughters to be witnesses or ministers of God's love wherever they find themselves: at home, with friends, at school, at church, or on their competitive teams. Kim leads our daughters by equipping them to be witnesses and ministers and serves them as she provides direction, correction, and resources to carry out God's mission in their lives. She is seeking to build them into a team of two who will carry out the mission after she is no longer around them. The servant leadership model applies at home, in church, and in the marketplace.

Heart makes it happen.

A servant's heart is essential for this kind of leadership. This state of heart allows God to reveal and define the life-driving mission in a person's life. This condition also brings the leader into the lives of those she leads. Without that spirit, the leader remains aloof and distant from those carrying out the mission with her. A servant's heart allows the leader to put aside her own agenda in order to carry out that mission. I am convinced that only a relationship with the Servant Leader, Jesus Christ, can produce such a heart condition.

WHY DO WE LEAD DIFFERENTLY FROM JESUS?

Jesus' priorities in leadership are different from how we tend to lead today. This is because our priorities come from our natural

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tendencies rather than our spiritual resources. J. Oswald Sanders, author of *Spiritual Leadership*,³ has rightly compared natural and spiritual leadership tendencies:

Natural

Self-confident
Knows men
Makes own decisions
Ambitious
Originates own methods
Enjoys commanding others
Motivated by personal considerations
Independent

Spiritual

Confident in God
Knows God
Seeks to find God's will
Self-effacing
Finds and follows God's methods
Delights to obey God
Motivated by love for God and man
God-dependent

The differences between those who lead out of their natural motives and those who lead from a spiritual base are clear. Jesus modeled the power of authentic, spiritual leadership.

How can everyday men and women adopt the leadership of Jesus? He was, after all, God! How do those of us who know our true selves lead as Jesus did? We can lead Jesus' way only when we obey his teachings and examples. It begins by becoming servant to the Servant Leader. That relationship will yield both mission and vision for our lives.

THE S WORD

Submission to God and to the divine mission for your life is the first step to servant leadership. You will never become a servant leader until you first become servant *to* the Leader. Your mission and purpose in life spring from the relationship you have with God. While many people invite you to determine your own destiny, God calls you to live out a divine plan through your life. Knowing and living that life mission begin in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

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YOU WILL NEVER BECOME A SERVANT
LEADER UNTIL YOU FIRST BECOME
SERVANT TO THE LEADER.
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The issue of submission to Jesus as Master is central to our discussion. You and I do not naturally submit to anyone or anything. Insist that I be your slave, and you have a civil-rights case on your hands! American history illustrates what happens when one human enslaves another. We resist submission to another person with every fiber of our cholesterol-free lifestyles. In a culture where the individual has reached godlike status, submitting to anyone or anything outside ourselves is beyond reason. Self-interest soars high above service in our hierarchy of interests. These attitudes are part of our cultural thinking. They are also the very feelings that prevent us from knowing the freedom that comes from giving ourselves to Christ.

Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Denying—not embracing—self is the first step to becoming a servant leader. We will cover this fact more fully in our discussion of the first principle of servant leadership in the next chapter.

If you desire to lead as Jesus led, you must desire first to follow Jesus; this is how leadership training among God’s people begins.

A LOOK AHEAD

Each chapter of this book will focus on one of Jesus’ principles of leadership. These principles will serve as guidelines for developing a personal model of servant leadership in whatever context God has placed you. I suggest that you take off your shoes,

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put on the sandals of a disciple, and follow Jesus through the pages of the Gospels. By following Jesus, you will see how Jesus wants us to lead among his people.

Let me remind you that this book is secondary to the good news of Jesus Christ. My prayer is that reading this book will lead you to read the Bible—again or for the first time. I want you to see that following Jesus has practical implications for how you live your life, not just more information from which to form an opinion. I want you to know the power of being a servant leader like Jesus. My desire is for you to know more about yourself and God's plan for your life after walking through these pages. Don't look for human insights. Look for the purposes of God for your life.

You can read this book as a study guide to the leadership style of Jesus. You will find contemporary applications and references to works on leadership and how they pertain to a servant model of leadership. I will introduce you to familiar and not-so-well-known writers on leadership. If you are a leader, this book will give you insights into how you can become more effective as a leader. If you don't consider yourself a leader, this material will help you understand how leaders lead and how you can be a better follower. This book can serve as a manual for leadership in the home, church, or marketplace.

You can use this material as a devotional guide to discover the love of God as revealed in God's Son/Servant, Jesus. Following Jesus is ultimately about knowing God. If you walk away from this book and only know more about God, I have not accomplished my goal for this book. My prayer is that you will encounter the God of all ages by seeking the one sent to bring you salvation and an eternal relationship with the God who created you. My hope is that if you do not know God as revealed in the person of Jesus, you will meet him in these pages.

The principles in this book build upon one another somewhat because they tend to follow Jesus' teachings and examples

of leadership chronologically. They also reflect a deepening relationship between Jesus and his followers. You, however, can study each principle independently of the others. Each principle stands alone as part of the entire servant-leadership model.

Here's a look at what you will be reading:

Principle #1: Humble your heart

“Servant leaders humble themselves and wait for God to exalt them” (based on Luke 14:7-11). This principle comes from Jesus’ story about choosing places of honor at a banquet. Servant leaders humble themselves to the mission entrusted to them. They also wait expectantly for God to exalt them—in God’s timing. Servant leaders trust that the host will choose those he wants at the head table of leadership.

Principle #2: First be a follower

“Servant leaders follow Jesus rather than seek a position” (based on Mark 10:32-40). This tenet comes from James and John’s request of Jesus that they sit on his right and left when he came into his glory. I will describe this biblical event and draw applications from our natural tendency to equate leadership with position. Jesus, on the other hand, taught that suffering for him comes before reigning with him.

Principle #3: Find greatness in service

“Servant leaders give up personal rights to find greatness in service to others” (based on Mark 10:45). The other ten disciples did not appreciate James and John’s boldness with Jesus. When the Master saw that they had become indignant with their peers, he defined greatness and being first among the followers of Christ. Greatness begins with those who become servants to the mission of the group and those teamed with them to carry out that mission. The best example of this principle is Jesus’ own life.

Principle #4: Take risks

“Servant leaders can risk serving others because they trust that God is in control of their lives” (based on John 13:3). Only when you trust God with absolute control of your life can you risk losing yourself in service to others. Trusting God includes believing that God is working with at least five “raw materials” to form you into a unique servant leader. Those raw materials are your spiritual gifts, experiences, relational style, vocational skills, and enthusiasm. These elements make up your S.E.R.V.E. profile.

Principle #5: Take up the towel

“Servant leaders take up Jesus’ towel of servanthood to meet the needs of others” (based on John 13:4-11). Jesus stepped down from his place at the Passover meal to set an example for his disciples. He took up the towel and washbasin of a slave to model his mission and show his love for those he recruited to carry out that mission after his ascension. We will discover the power of servant leadership as modeled by the Suffering Servant of God.

Principle #6: Share responsibility and authority

“Servant leaders share their responsibility and authority with others to meet a greater need” (based on Acts 6:1-6). Jesus equipped his disciples to carry out a worldwide vision. He shared both responsibility and authority with them to make disciples of all people. Those same disciples shared their responsibility and authority with their peers in order to meet a need greater than their resources could handle alone. We will review five steps to EQUIP someone. Servant leaders encourage others to serve, qualify others for service, understand the needs of those they equip, instruct others in their specific tasks, and pray for those they invite into ministry.

Principle #7: Build a team

“Servant leaders multiply their leadership by empowering others to lead” (based on Mark 6:7). Leadership of a team is the highest expression of servant leadership. This is true because team leadership embodies each of the principles of servant leadership. Servant leaders serve best when they team with others to accomplish the mission. We will review four steps to building a ministry team.

Throughout the discussion of the seven principles, I will make application of Jesus’ model of leadership into marriage, parenthood, and the marketplace. I believe you will find these applications surprising to the extent that you will discover you really are a leader if you are living out God’s call on your life.

The world wants to know what a servant leader after the model and teaching of Jesus looks like. People want to see how Jesus’ model of service to God and others lives out in a person’s life.

LEADERSHIP IS NOT SOMETHING YOU PURSUE. LEADERSHIP IS SOMETHING OTHERS GIVE TO YOU

No matter how smart, talented, and persuasive you are naturally or by training, you are not the leader until the group you are leading says so. The mantle of leadership is bestowed on you by those who grasp your mission and choose to follow you. You cannot wrest that mantle from those who do not share your mission or who refuse to follow you. You earn the place of leader through authentic relationships and character. Whether you hold a position of leadership or not, to lead, you must gain the trust of those you have recruited or who have been entrusted to you. The follower holds the final power to determine the leader.

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YOU ARE NOT THE LEADER UNTIL THE
GROUP YOU ARE LEADING SAYS SO.
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I have learned this truth as a husband, a father, and a pastor. A husband cannot lead his wife until he first serves her through acts of love and kindness. A father will never be the leader of a family unless his children acknowledge his place of authority over them. How do they learn that? Children learn that a father is a leader through his loving service to them through training and discipline. A pastor may be given the title and biblical position of leader, but he will never lead a group of people until that group gives him the freedom and trust to lead them. *How does any assigned leader actually become the accepted leader of the group?* The answer to that question is found in this book. If you will apply these seven principles of servant leadership as taught and modeled by Jesus, I am convinced you will become more effective as a leader, and those who have been entrusted to you will be more likely to place on you the mantle of leadership.

EVERY GREAT LEADER IS A SERVANT LEADER

A great leader is great because he lives—without compromise—the call to mission on his life. He is also great because he inspires others to carry out that mission with him. I believe Jesus was (and is) a great servant leader because he served his Father’s mission without compromise and has inspired many people over many centuries to carry it out. I can also say that I believe Jesus was the greatest leader because his mission was for all people for all time. Even great leaders in history only affect their space on the timeline and beyond. Jesus affected all creation for all time. His life, death, and resurrection served the greatest need of people for all time: to have a personal relationship with the God who created us.

FOR STUDY AND REFLECTION

- When you read the term *servant leadership* for the first time, what did you think/feel?
- Read through the seven statements describing how Jesus led. Put a check mark by the ones that are new to you or that you may have questions about.
- What leadership issues are you facing in your life at this time? You may be a parent, CEO, manager, or church leader. Make a list of those issues you hope this book will address.
- Have you ever thought of Jesus as a leader? If so, what characteristics describe him best for you? Have you ever viewed Jesus as a servant? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Can you articulate the four elements of servant leadership for your life? What is God's mission for your life? Can you paint a picture of what your life will look like when that mission is complete? How are you leading by equipping those who are on mission with you? Write the names of those you are building into a ministry team.
- Would you describe yourself as one who has submitted your life to Jesus and as one who is actively seeking to model your leadership style after him? If not, how would you describe your relationship to Jesus at this time?

Endnotes

1. Quoted by Carol Childress in *NetFax*, a publication of Leadership Network (Number 84, 10 November 1997). For information about this service, contact Leadership Network at 1-800-765-5323 or www.leadnet.org, which contains this and back issues of *NetFax*.
2. *Ibid.*
3. J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 38.