

THE LEADER AS SERVANT

By John White

Leadership in the context of house church offers both a challenge and an opportunity.

The challenge is that many of us who are leading house churches have learned our leadership skills in the traditional church. We have developed a way of leading, a leadership style that is generally seen as necessary for work within organizations (like traditional churches). Endless decisions must be made...attendance must be maintained (or increased!)...programs must be run...budgets must be met. (Perhaps only those who have served on a church or para-church staff, on the “inside”, can fully appreciate the pressure that the organizational leader feels.)

Working within the organizational church seems to require “strong” leadership. There is a concern for being sensitive to people along the way, but the bottom line is that there is a bottom line! There are objectives to be accomplished, and time is of the essence! People must be motivated and “moved” from point A to point B. This is the required leadership style for “church as organization,” and the challenge is that we may bring it with us into “church as organism”, into the house church. The house church offers the opportunity to recapture the style of leadership modeled and taught by Jesus. There is no building to finance and no committee to which to report. We no longer have to “make it happen”. We are genuinely free to learn to lead like Jesus led.

However, we must be aware that even in Jesus' day there was the temptation to copy the leadership style of the world. (Isn't that the way to "get things done"?) Jesus sees his disciples leaning that way and He decisively puts an end to that leaning. "You know that those who are regarded as 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 slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

Gayle Erwin, in his excellent book, *The Jesus Style* (Yahshua Publishing), made the following comments: "It amazes me how many of our church and religious systems break apart when analyzed in terms of this command, and yet we continue claiming our structure to be Biblical and authorized by God."

Power Pyramid Reversed

"The principle of being servant of all is devastating to chains of command and to systems where submission is upward. Many religious structures are carbon copies of giant corporation flow-charts (i.e., pyramid shaped). In the kingdom of God, the power pyramid is reversed, upended, so that the authority is on the bottom, not the top."

Submitting Downward

“When Jesus alluded to submission, it is always directed toward leaders, or the ones who want to be great in the kingdom, and they are always ordered to submit downward, not upward... Jesus put no pressure on the masses to submit to the leader, but instead put the pressure on leaders to be slaves of all.”

“This downward submission of the greatest seems to be a natural outgrowth of the way Jesus viewed people. He served them because he knew their value. We lord it over others because we don't recognize their value and don't view them in the way Jesus does (We have often been trained to be more interested in reaching objectives than in loving people).”

What Is a Servant?

“The job of a servant is to do all he can to make life better for others - to free them to be everything they can be” (p. 50, The Jesus Style). Another way of saying this is that a servant is committed to making others successful.

Servant Leadership

“One who leads in the style of Jesus does not use forms of coercion, nor does he depend on institutional position for authority. Instead, by serving people, he leads as they recognize his ability and choose

voluntarily to follow. And those who follow, by whatever means, will become like their leader for better or worse” (p. 59, The Jesus Style).

Examples of Servant Leadership

- A servant leader understands that it's about the other person - making them successful. Here are some examples:

1. A servant leader blesses others. This is the principle of catching people in your house church doing something right. Many people are using spiritual gifts without realizing it. The servant leader is always affirming people and their gifts - both in private and in public.

“Grandma Helen, you are better at delighting in Jesus than anyone I know. I want to be like you when I grow up!”

“Nan, the meals you prepare for the church are such an important ministry. I think Jesus takes great pleasure in your work in the kitchen!”

“Lenny, your vulnerability and transparency sets the tone for our whole group. You are a vital part of this church!”

2. A servant leader imparts vision to others. This is vision for what they can be and how God can use them.

“Greg, I can see your house church out in Byers being a powerful force for the kingdom of God in that area.”

“Donna, not only are you gifted in prophecy, but I believe the Lord could also use you to equip others to prophesy.”

“Elaine, here are some articles on women planting churches in India. Servant See if you think that’s something you would be interested in learning how to do.”

3. A servant leader asks questions and listens well. Asking is often more important than telling. Thoughtful questions have the potential for powerfully impacting a person’s life (notice the many questions Jesus asked!). And attentive listening is one of the greatest expressions of love to another person.

“What is the Lord doing in your life? Have you had any ‘God sightings’ recently? What did you learn about leadership in our last house church meeting? What do you see God doing in our group? If you could change one thing about our group, what would it be? What are your personal goals for the next couple of months? Is there any way I can be of help to you with those goals? etc.”

John Eldredge, in his challenging new book, *Wild at Heart*, reminds us that to lead in this way requires that we recognize and put to death our natural tendency to derive a sense of value and power from positions of leadership.

”Jesus warns us against anything that gives a false sense of power. When you walk into a company dinner or a church function, He said, take a backseat. Choose the path of humility; don’t be a self-promoter, a glad-hander, a poser. Climb down the ladder; have the

mail clerk over for dinner; treat your secretary like she's more important than you. Look to be the servant of all. Where am I deriving my sense of strength and power? is a good question to ask yourself...often."

So, let's pray for our brothers and sisters who are in positions of leadership in the churches that are highly organizational, because the temptation to lead as the world leads is great in that context. But, at the same time, let's recognize that the same temptation exists in the house church. May there be a million house churches across North America and may they be led by people who have adopted the Jesus style of leadership.

The house church offers the opportunity to recapture the style of leadership modeled and taught by Jesus.