

**THE
LEADERSHIP
LESSONS OF
JESUS**

A TIMELESS MODEL FOR TODAY'S LEADERS

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INTRODUCTION

Who is the greatest leader in history? Of all the names that might be given in response to that question, one name stands out above the rest: Jesus Christ.

From his birth in a Bethlehem stable to his death on a cross, he lived on this earth for less than forty years, leaving behind only a few hundred followers upon his return to heaven. He never wrote a book, taught a seminar, or created a detailed outline for his disciples to follow. After his departure, he sent the Holy Spirit to aid them in recalling what he did and said.

A few years later, his movement had swelled to include thousands of new believers. Soon his followers fanned out across the Roman Empire, spreading the good news he had taught them. Within five generations, the number of Christians reached into the millions.

Two thousand years have passed since he was here, yet his followers today number more than one billion, with millions more people joining every year. The organization he founded—the church—has branches in every country on earth.

Yet, ironically, his public ministry lasted less than four years. With no formal training and in the face of murderous opposition, he inspired such loyalty that his followers were willing to die for him.

How did he do it? What principles did he follow? And do those same principles still work today?

We believe the Bible answers these questions. That's why we're using the Gospel of Mark as the basis for study, both because it is the shortest of the Gospels and because it is preeminently the "Gospel of action." As you read these chapters, you'll be journeying through the earthly life of Jesus Christ as witnessed by his friends and enemies.

If you have dismissed Jesus as irrelevant to modern life, brace yourself. Most of us know that Jesus was a great teacher and the Redeemer of the human race, but many people have never considered him to be the ultimate leader. Who else has ever had his enduring impact? Human leaders come and go, but the legacy of Jesus has grown greater with the passing of each century.

Our goal in writing this book is threefold: First, we want to lay bare those leadership principles that made Jesus so incredibly effective. Second, we hope you will discover Jesus in a new and more personal way. Third, we want you to see how relevant the Bible is to the challenges you face every day.

The Jesus you will meet in these pages is not some dim, distant icon. He is the Son of God and the greatest leader that history has ever known. After twenty centuries his message still speaks to modern men and women. We believe the principles Jesus embodied are applicable in any area, whether an office, a school, a small business, a multi-national corporation, or a volunteer organization.

We have intentionally kept each chapter short because we know how busy life is for most people. But if you have a Bible handy, please take time to read the corresponding passages from Mark. By doing that, you will gain much more from our comments and application. (Although the book is written from Bob's perspective, to make the reading easier, both of us have contributed to the project.)

Take what we have written and apply it to your situation. We won't mind if you underline the sentences you like or make notes in the margin. Jot down any questions that come to mind. Add your comments. May this book inspire you to become a leader like Jesus.



1. A CALL TO LEADERSHIP

*A voice came from heaven: "You are My beloved Son;
I take delight in You!"*
Mark 1:11

The idea of a "calling," particularly for those not employed in some sort of professional ministry, is often seen as archaic, impractical, or quaint, even by Christians.

This view is damaging, however, both to God's kingdom and to individual lives and careers. As Christians, we must understand that God has a call on our entire lives, including our careers. To see this any differently denies both allegiance to God as our Creator and an understanding of the unbelievable price Jesus paid for us on the cross. It keeps us from living fully integrated lives in which all things work in synergy for our good and for the building of God's kingdom. (For more on this, see *The Road Best Traveled: Knowing God's Will for Your Life* by Ray Pritchard).

Evidently, Jesus' leadership status needed reaffirmation by God the Father as Jesus began his earthly ministry. The

voice from heaven saying, “You are My beloved Son; I take delight in You” (Mark 1:11) was this affirmation.

God has specific plans for each one of us, and we must do our best to determine what they are and submit to them. When we fail to do this, less than God’s best often transpires. For example, a very gifted teacher at a Christian college—one *called* to teach—was railroaded into the college presidency by well-meaning colleagues, resulting in trauma, hard feelings, and disappointment on all sides. Gifts in one area, such as leadership abilities, are not necessarily transferable.

While it is certainly worthwhile to seek advice from others, ultimately a calling is between you and God. In an incident famous among our circle of friends, one friend told another, “I have put out a fleece for you,” referring to the familiar incident with Gideon as recorded in Judges 6:36–38, “and here is what you need to do.” Wisely, our other friend responded, “Hey, thanks, but I will put out my own fleece.”

Never let someone else determine God’s will for your life. No one else can understand God’s unique call on your life as clearly as you can. Many have wasted years trying in vain to please others when they would be far more productive living as God designed them to live. This doesn’t mean we go off half-cocked or without advice, but in the

end, as Romans 14 says, each one of us must face God individually.

When we consider taking positions of leadership, we need to put out our fleece and seek God's affirmation. We may not hear an audible voice from heaven, but we can know that we are acting within God's will for our lives.



2. LEADERS CALL FOLLOWERS

Follow Me,” Jesus told them, “and I will make you fish for people!”

Mark 1:17

The difference between management and leadership is chiefly in the way those being managed or led are motivated.

Most relationships involve elements of both management and leadership. But in a pure sense, those who are being managed are usually compensated in some way for their services, and systems and techniques play a large role. Pure leadership, on the other hand, is characterized primarily by the way followers are motivated to please their leader voluntarily, and the leader typically possesses a more spontaneous personal style.

Jesus was both the greatest manager and the greatest leader of all time, and both his management skills and leadership abilities should be prized and emulated.

In some ways his earthly leadership began when he called his first followers—Peter (Simon), Andrew, James,

and John—from which the most important lesson to learn is that he *called*. He asked. He didn't just walk by, expecting some sort of supernatural attraction to occur. He called. He asked those four, who were to become some of his most devoted and productive followers, to “follow Me”—a must-learn lesson for today's leaders.

When you feel called to lead, and when you discover someone you really want and need to be involved in your endeavor, don't be coy. Follow the example of Jesus and ask them to join you. People want to be asked and feel needed. Even when they say no—and some will—they will feel good about themselves and about you, simply because you asked.

Sure, there will be times when others take the initiative to ask if they can join you in your enterprises. This is fine, but don't wait for it to happen, particularly where key people are concerned. If you feel called to lead, whether in a church ministry, a civic undertaking, or a business effort, and you see your own Peter, Andrew, James, or John that you want alongside you, step up and ask them to join you, to “follow” you.

Jesus called his disciples personally. So when inviting a key person to join you, resist the strong temptation to extend your invitation through a third party or some other impersonal means—a letter, email, or phone call. Perhaps fearing rejection or embarrassment, some leaders are re-

luctant to contact potential followers face-to-face, a true leadership mistake. Real leaders rise to the challenge of personally inviting to the team those persons necessary for the greatest success. No other invitations have the power and appeal of the one-on-one method. Jesus *asked* people to follow him, and so should you.

Notice also: Jesus called his disciples to a person before he called them to the enterprise. I once received that kind of personal call and have never forgotten it. When the National Football League was just beginning to come into its own as a major professional sports attraction and new franchises were being added yearly, I received my call. Dave Dixon, one of America's greatest sports entrepreneurs and conceptualizers, called me from athletic administration at a small college.

These many years later, I still remember the important part of that call verbatim. Dave said, "Bob, one of these days I am going to get a pro football franchise, and when I do, I want you with me." Wow! *That* is a leadership call. Some years later, Dave had his franchise, and I joined him in it, later joining him again in two other daring and innovative sports undertakings; his personal call was that strong. Even after being retired from professional sports, I am not sure I could resist a Dave Dixon call declaring, "Bob, I want you with me." There is power in a personal call.

The current conventional wisdom says that to recruit new business and professional personnel, we should focus narrowly on graduates of the most prestigious universities. An MBA from Harvard, for example, is thought to be the ultimate credential for positioning oneself on the fast track to a successful business career. This same way of thinking also dominates the church. Depending on the denomination, only those from a few select seminaries are seriously considered for prime ministry opportunities.

This was not the way of Jesus, however, although he surely would have *considered* the Harvard MBA of his day or the top seminary graduate. After all, he chose Paul—one of the best-educated men of his time—and Matthew—skilled in the business of his day. Jesus' example in recruiting effective followers suggests that we cast the widest possible net. Consider everyone on his or her merit. Accept talent, character, and commitment wherever you find it. Do your best to look beyond the surface of family background, social status, degrees, and the patina of appearance. Real leaders look hard for real people with real virtues. Jesus showed how spectacularly successful a leader can be with carefully chosen followers from all walks of life.

As you lead and call followers, don't fall into the trap of observing the conventional wisdom. Be sure you don't miss the most capable potential followers because you're

afraid to go against the narrow focus of the world. Anyone can hire the best-dressed person with the highest class rank from the most prestigious college, even “bean counters.”

Whether your vision for leadership involves leading a godly family, developing a new product, directing a Sunday school class, revitalizing a lackluster ministry, or starting a new business, be sure you speak about it with fervor, frankness, and faith. Those you personally call to follow must be infected with your enthusiasm for the vision.

Go back to the Gospels. You will see that Jesus laid the foundation for his vision when he promised, “I will make you fishers of men.” But that was only the beginning. Jesus carried this same vision through his death and resurrection. Remember from John 21 that Jesus’ final discussion with his disciples took place during a *fishing* trip on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus never strayed from his initial vision, using the same motif he employed in his original call to challenge his men one last time.