

**Melody Redman** finds that almost inevitably, even young doctors are thrust into leadership



# BEING A DRIVER FOR CHANGE

## key points

- It helps to be intentional and reflect on what kind of leadership qualities we want to foster.
- The Bible is replete with examples of how God shaped unpromising people to be movers and shakers.
- Jesus was a leader par excellence and we have no better role model.
- It's not important to measure success by this world's standards.

**M**edics are often placed in a position of leadership. Depending on what paths we take and what responsibility we take on, the extent of this may vary. As Christian doctors and medical students, it is sensible then to take some time to be intentional and reflect on what kind of leadership qualities we want to foster. Here I want to explore some examples of biblical leadership.

To begin, let me tell you a little about myself. I hated speaking at school. The idea of standing at the front of class and delivering a talk was terrifying. I was not of noble birth. I was not a natural communicator. However, as Paul tells the Corinthians, God often chooses to use our backgrounds and our weaknesses for his glory. I have seen that through the opportunities I have had so far. I have been in positions of leadership where God has used me, phenotypically of a weaker nature, to bring influence. 'God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.'<sup>1</sup>

There are many examples of God using the unusual suspects to do remarkable things. One of

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the great movers and shakers, David, did not look prepared for his first big public gig – tackling the giant Goliath. King Saul doubted him. The king tried to talk him out of it or at least dress him in armour to make him look a bit more stereotypically fit for purpose. But David declares that the battle is down to more than just appearances. He knows where his strength is from. So he tells Saul, 'All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's.'<sup>2</sup>

If we're going to think about leadership, however, who better to focus on than Jesus? Whilst whole books have been written on this, I want to look at a few overarching principles. First, however, it is worth noting that Jesus prepared. Jesus waited.

It was around 30 years before he performed his first miracle. That is a long wait, and a lot of preparing.

Now let's look at some highlights:

■ **Jesus treated individuals as special.**

He valued people. Servanthood underpinned many of his actions. He washed his disciples' feet then explained, 'Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me "Teacher" and "Lord". You are right. That is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet. So you also should wash one another's feet. I have given you an example.'<sup>3</sup>

■ **Jesus was a master communicator.**

He tailored his conversation to his audience. He communicated profound principles through parables so that ordinary people could understand his message even though at times even the disciples struggled.

■ **Jesus took time to focus and recalibrate.**

He often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. His ministry was powered by prayer and he understood the benefits of retreat.<sup>4</sup>

■ **Jesus built a team around him.**

He spent a whole night praying and being close to God before he chose his disciples, and was intentional about the team he built around him. 'One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night. At daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles.'<sup>5</sup>

■ **Jesus was resilient.**

He was able to face utter humiliation and mockery. He knew elation, when the crowds put out their cloaks for him to pass over, and utter degradation: 'They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him.'<sup>6</sup> He was not only resilient; he actively and willingly sacrificed himself and willingly gave up earthly ambitions. 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.'<sup>7</sup>

■ **Jesus empowered others.**

'After this the Lord appointed 72 others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves."<sup>8</sup>

■ **Jesus focused every opportunity towards the glory of God.**

He considerably re-directed discussions towards one of his goals – to bring glory to God's name. 'No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.'<sup>9</sup>

There are so many more qualities and examples which we could consider. We could talk about how Jesus dealt with betrayal, resisted temptation, managed conflict within his team, dealt with those who viewed him as an enemy, defended others and acted with passion which included overturning the tables of the temple traders. There are many more examples of godly leaders from whom we can learn:

■ **William Wilberforce** exhibited great dedication, perseverance and commitment as he fought for the abolition of the slave trade and worked for what he called 'reform of manners' – working to create a just and compassionate Britain.<sup>10</sup>

■ **Dame Cicely Saunders**, founder of the hospice movement and pioneer in palliative care, was creative, collaborative and deeply compassionate.<sup>11</sup>

■ **Daniel** displayed an unswerving focus, humility and absolute integrity.<sup>12</sup>

■ **Esther** demonstrated patience, bravery and gently won the favour of those around her.<sup>13</sup>

Ultimately, we each have different strengths and weaknesses. It is important to be insightful and thoughtfully challenge our areas of weakness, through prayer, reflection, and action. We will each have, and can each seek, multiple opportunities to drive change: quality improvement projects, research, your workplace environment, engagement with the media and medical politics.

There may be seasons of waiting (perhaps whilst studying for membership exams, or in a certain year of study), and seasons of preparing. Most importantly though, we should remember that all of this is to serve God and to bring glory to his name.

If we lose our 'position' of leadership, or if seasons change – that's okay. Our salvation is a gift through Christ and we don't have to 'succeed' by the world's standards.

What are your strengths and what do you need to work on? What are your passions, and what next step do you want to take?

Whatever your answers are, be purposeful about your character, reflect on your strengths and weaknesses, and be empowered to drive change. Always take a moment to think of your circumstances and opportunities for influence.

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references

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