

Kenneth Wong, Paul Wadson & Jim Hacking
look out how we can follow Jesus' example in clinical leadership



JESUS' EXAMPLE OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

key points

- Servant leadership is characterised by humility, empowerment, giving credit where credit is due, accountability, willingness to forgive, courage, and stewardship.
- Jesus demonstrated servant leadership when he humbly washed his disciples' feet and empowered them to follow his example.
- The authors encourage us to follow Jesus, as we LOVE our teams: Love with compassion, being Other-centred, being Visionary and Empowering.

'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.' (John 13:14-17)

Following the Lord Jesus' example of servant leadership in this passage, let us consider the characteristics of servant leadership, which he revealed and demonstrated. The mnemonic-LOVE-may help us better remember these key features:

L for Love or compassion, which can be defined as seeing a need and lovingly doing something about it. What needs did Jesus see? The disciples' dirty feet that need washing? Their psychological need the evening when they were going to Gethsemane, so Jesus gave them a foot spa? The need for tender loving care? Might Jesus be concerned about pride which can endanger the body of Christ if the head and hands tell the heart

and feet that they are not needed? Did Jesus see all those needs and perform this humble act to meet the needs lovingly? 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that love is patient and kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud.

Practising compassionate leadership means listening with fascination to those we lead, arriving at a shared (rather than imposed) understanding of the challenges we face. It is about empathising with and caring for the team, taking action to help and support them.

How can we love and pray for our teams? Can we do more than making coffee for the team after a ward round?

O for Other-centred: Servant leadership is characterised by humility (a willingness to listen and learn from criticism). Did you notice how Jesus gave space and time to Peter? When Peter asked him those silly questions, he didn't say to Peter, 'Come on, let's just get on with it. We have to go to Gethsemane in a moment.' Should we encourage a less hierarchical team structure so everybody can voice their opinion and be valued? After checking the understanding of

the team, we also need the courage to correct any misunderstanding and do the necessary. Jesus is an authentic leader (showing his true feelings). Servant leaders are also willing to forgive.

We see the supreme example of servant leadership when Jesus washes his disciples' feet, an act of service only a slave was supposed to do. Jesus redefined leadership as serving each other in love, meaning there was no job that was low or demeaning to do.

As part of my (Paul's) GP training, six months were spent in a busy A&E department. The supervising consultant for the department was a Christian. In our induction, he stated that his aim was always to lead from the front. I discovered he was a man of his word when on the busy shifts he would regularly be working hard alongside the juniors. There was no role in the department that he felt was too low to him. This was in contrast with another consultant in the department who would only be seen for the big trauma cases. In our workplaces would we be willing to step up and help our colleagues? It can make a big difference if we are willing to humble ourselves. I have a GP colleague who once swept the floor in the waiting room, to the patients' surprise. In what ways can you help and serve your colleagues? Would you be willing to step down to do a task 'below your pay grade' as a demonstration of servant leadership?

V for Vision: Jesus always had a long-term, big picture vision. He knew what the Father had planned and walked the path towards the Cross every day of his earthly ministry. But his disciples could not grasp it. In all four gospels, Jesus explains what is going to happen to him time and time again, but none of his followers can get their heads around it. After his death and resurrection, it took him the whole walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus to explain to Cleopas and his companion how the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures pointed to the Cross and the resurrection as God's plan for salvation. It was then that the penny finally dropped, and they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the others.¹

A visionary leader does not just have a vision. They take the time to share it with their team, in different ways, at different times, until the whole team grasps the big picture and can articulate it to outsiders. But often, until they see it in practice, modelled by the leader, the team can find it hard to get the vision clear in their heads. The visionary leads from the front.

Always work for the good of the whole – making sure everything the team does serves the core vision.

Servant leaders also show good stewardship, ensuring that all the resources the team uses are deployed as effectively and efficiently as possible to achieve the vision.

Do you have a clear vision for what your team is there to do, a big picture of what it can achieve?

E for Empowerment: leading by example with clear instructions and appropriate delegation. Give your team responsibility and permission to exercise it. With permission to take on responsibility is

servant leadership...

Servant leadership is also demonstrated in hospitality: A friend once said to me – 'God is the great inviter'. In the Gospels we see Jesus extending radical hospitality to all, particularly the marginalised and the outcasts. Being a medical student in a large teaching hospital, I (Paul) was very aware of my low position in the food chain! I remember clearly an obstetric and gynaecology consultant taking us out for a pub lunch and how special it made us feel.

I (Ken) also remember how an Ophthalmology professor bought me dinner at a nice restaurant in Oxford when I was a medical student in the mid-1990s. Some acts of kindness are remembered for decades!

I (Paul) remember as a student once being stopped in a corridor by a consultant to introduce himself and ask about me. It has stuck with me to this day because there can sometimes be a tendency for those in authority to be aloof. There is an expression that love is spelt: T I M E. When we give our time to people, we value them.

permission to innovate and change, but also to fail safely. Failure must be seen as a chance to learn and develop confidence and skills. Are we committed to helping the team develop in this manner especially when we have to stretch our comfort zones? One of the things we need to persistently pray for is wisdom to manage uncertainty and for research efforts to improve understanding.

Finally, in verse 17, Jesus said, 'Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.' Are we able to hold our team accountable and give credit where credit is due?

What is the motivation that led Jesus to wash his disciples' feet? Verse three gave us an important clue- 'Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.' Jesus was motivated by this eternal hope and everlasting love (verse 1). Thanks to Jesus' death on the Cross, taking our punishment for sins which separated us from God, we also have an eternal hope. Does that motivate us to be servant leaders and love and persistently pray for our teams? May the risen Lord Jesus pour out his Holy Spirit on his followers and empower us to be servant leaders.

Let us take heed of Jesus' calling as he hold us accountable, 'Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them'. (John 13:17)

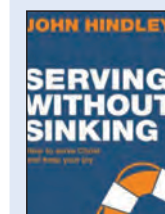
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references

1. Luke 24:13-35