

# **The Model for Biblical Servant Leadership**

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## **Abstract**

The image of God is the mirror biblical foundation of Christian leadership. Jesus is still the ultimate leader, and a true example of how a leader should lead and behave. A biblical leader uses the Bible as a blueprint for leadership. He or she always seeks God's heart, pursuing His approval and satisfaction before attempting anything. The Bible portrays leadership as a shepherd carefully tending to sheep through caring, protecting, and providing. The Bible uses the shepherd and the sheep as metaphors for leaders. God is the shepherd, while leaders are the under-shepherds guiding the flocks while accomplishing God's mission.

Keywords: Bible, Christian, Biblical leadership, Christian leadership, Image of God

## **Introduction Overview**

Today's leaders must deal with numerous obstacles. Challenges that did not exist in the Biblical World. However, leadership is one of the Bible's most profound concepts. The Bible has numerous instances of leadership and what good leadership entails, beginning with Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses in the Old Testament and concluding with Jesus, the ultimate leader. Leaders in the New Testament who demonstrate outstanding leadership include Paul, Peter, and Titus. The books of Titus and Timothy demonstrate the prerequisites for church leadership. However, leadership continues to be problematic.

There are countless books, papers, and journals about leadership; however, none can compare to the ultimate model for leadership, which is the Bible. The Bible's Scriptures serve as the foundation for Christian leadership. It is the base and ground of biblical leadership, and it is God's intended plan for His leaders. Throughout the Scriptures, it appears that God always chose leaders who were true to His heart. A great example of this is found in (1 Samuel 13:14 KJV) after God rejected Saul, God said to the prophet Samuel to tell Saul this, "But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee." Additionally, another great example of God selecting leaders after His own heart is found in Jeremiah 3:15 KJV, which reads, "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." These two verses, from my perspective, are great examples of what the image of God looks like: seeking God's own heart.

Conversely, John 14:15 KJV states, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." A leader must be a person after God's own heart to obey and apply this scripture in daily life. That, I believe, cannot be accomplished without understanding God's nature and image. The study of God's image forms the foundation of the shepherd's biblical theology and serves as a model for exceptional leadership.

### **Explanation of Doctrine**

The best explanation of doctrine or principles of leadership is found in the book of Titus and Timothy. It is in these two books of the Bible that the role and the qualifications of biblical leadership are explained. 1 Titus 6-9 states,

if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must

be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict (KJV).

The doctrine explains what kind of leadership effectively “promotes the kingdom of God in the world and meets God’s approval” (Howell, 2003, P.1). In 1 Timothy 3:1-6, Timothy gives an extensive version of what leaders should look like and gives the qualifications of a leader. 1 Timothy 3:16 says,

This is a true saying: if a man desires the office of a bishop, he desireth good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he falls into the condemnation of the devil (KJV).

Leaders are accountable to God and must obey God’s word and apply principles that are found in the Word of God into their lives so that the Word can manifest, grow, and produce good fruit (change) in their lives. Leaders must know how to repent when they have done wrong. David was great at that. David was always quick to repent when he fell into sin. A leader must know and exercise the commandment of God, after all, Jesus said in His Word, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15, KJV). A leader must live by the Word of God and walk in His light. A leader must spend time with God by praying

and reading His Word, so they can get to know God better. Since we were created in his image, our goal is to be like Him every day. The ultimate goal at the end is to be like Christ. Leaders must strive to be like Christ and must always know that they are not leading alone but that God is with them. Leaders must always operate in love (Cincala, 2006).

The biblical foundation of a leader is found throughout the Bible from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Starting with the book of Genesis and ending with the book of Revelation. The “image of God in humans describes their nature as relational beings whose wholeness depends on right relationships with God” (W.S.T., 2005, p. 341).

The shepherd/shepherding metaphor is rooted in the Old Testament. There are three primary usages of YHWH when translated by the verbs shepherding, tending, herding, or by the nouns shepherd, shepherdess, or herdsman: 1) herders of livestock; 2) YHWH as Shepherd of Israel; 3) a person or group as leaders/rulers” (Kinnison,2010, p.66). The shepherd doctrine is found through the image of Christ based on Genesis 1:26-27, 31; Gen 5:1; Genesis 9:6, in the idea that God created man and woman in his image and likeness to have dominion over things in the earth. Likeness and image are in two parts, distinctively bodily nature and spiritual nature.

Even after the fall, mankind retained God’s image (Peng, 2003). Rom 1:23 and “its context deals with the impact of the fall on God’s image in humanity. Similar to 2 Cor 4:4, in Rom 3:21-31, though not explicitly using the motif of the image of God, Christ is seen as the solution to the plague of the dysfunction of God’s image in humanity alluded to in Rom 1:18-23, no matter that the solution is provided through “the faith in Jesus Christ” or through “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” In Rom 5:12-21, it is likely that the motif of the image of God also underlies the comparison between Adam and Christ” (Peng, 2003, p.27).

Christ is the true image of God. Christ was sent to earth to restore humanity due to Adam's failure. Christ was able to restore humanity, being perfect and made perfectly in the image of God. Therefore, Christ is the true example of the image of God and a true example of a shepherd. "By the New Testament, shepherd imagery is widely accepted as part of the continuing heritage of the Jewish people. Particularly, Ezekiel and Zechariah's eschatological vision of the one Promised shepherd in the line of David has formed messianic expectations. New Testament, the shepherd is the general translation of the noun ποιμήν and the act of shepherding or tending... Matthew and Mark recognize Jesus as Zechariah's stricken shepherd and the disciples as a scattered flock (Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27; cf. Zech. 13:7).<sup>65</sup>" (Kinnison, 2010, p.75).

### **Application of the Doctrine and Role of a Leader**

Biblical "leadership is taking the initiative to influence people to grow in holiness and to passionately promote the extension of God's kingdom in the world" (Howell, 2003, p. 3). The life of a leader is to lead, protect, provide, and influence God's people using the gospel of Jesus Christ for their edification. According to Wayne (2013), "A shepherd's responsibility is to care for and guide sheep in such a way that they (sheep) can effectively and proficiently perform the duties that are natural and necessary to sheep." The leader follows Christ as the congregation follows the leader. The leader uses and applies biblical application to his or her life and, as a result, change is manifested (p.110).

The role of the leader involves taking the initiative to influence others using God's Word and since it has impacts on the kingdom that is at the core of the definition of biblical leadership, the godly leader looks for, pursues, and follows up opportunities to positively move others toward holiness of character and obedience to the divine agenda (Howell, 2003). One of the roles of a leader is to make disciples, after all, that is the great commission of Jesus: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV). There are nine elements that leaders can use in making disciples according to Troxel (2001), and these nine elements are: “a defined purpose, an Intentional strategy, a Simple structure, a Climate for change, an Inspiring worship service, a Prayer foundation, a Lay ministry, an Evangelistic focus, and Small groups” (p. 125). The true image of God is love. 1 Corinthians 13 is considered to be the love chapter in the Bible. It is in the following chapter that Paul talks about spiritual gifts such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, and the gift of interpretation, but Paul says the greatest of all is love. At the end of the chapter. Paul warns the Believers to be considerate and courteous to everyone (Mouton, 2011). In 1 Cor. 13:39-40, “Three things, then, to sum this up: When you speak forth God’s truth, speak your heart out. Don’t tell people how they should or shouldn’t pray when they’re praying in tongues that you don’t understand. Be courteous and considerate in everything” (MSG).

Another role of a leader is to aspire to decisively influence the character and life direction of others... A leader must focus on helping people individually, both members and nonmembers, and help grow the church into godliness in obeying God’s agenda (Howell, 2003). Therefore, leaders must have a relationship with God and must know God’s voice so that he/she will be able to obey. John 10:27 says, “My sheep hears my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (KJV). For example, Howell (2003) describes the role of biblical leadership as “people-oriented rather than program-driven in that it focuses on the spiritual maturation of individuals and communities of faith (Col 1:28-29). It is kingdom-oriented rather than organization-driven in that it seeks to help people find their niche where they can make their most significant and satisfying contribution to the extension of God’s saving rule in the world (Rom 12:4-8). Leaders bring God’s people in line with God’s mission” (p.3).

Another role of leadership is music. The music ministry is very important in the church. The music ministry/ praise team is responsible for carrying God's people into the presence of God. The Bible says that God inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). Therefore, the pastoral leadership ministry is a very important part of leadership. Jesus, who is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, deserves the best worship, and He only accepts worship that is in spirit and truth. The music ministry leads people into the presence of God; it is in the presence of God that yokes are destroyed, and burdens are removed (Isaiah 10:27). The "psalms, so fundamental to our sung worship, regard sovereignty and royalty as belonging to God alone" (McMahon, 2004, p.27).

The image of God governs with the Triune God to be a more effective leader. Leadership can be more effective if the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is used to govern. Understanding the Trinity of God is very important as a leader. Trinitarian leadership helps leaders contribute to health based on biblical standards. The Trinitarian Compass helps leaders to radiate God's power, wisdom, and love better than before. "Rather than trying to pursue church growth in our human strength, we focus on reducing human-made obstacles that hinder God from doing what He has promised to do. If we wanted to use precise theological language, we shouldn't "actually speak about 'all by itself' growth, but about 'all by Himself' or 'all by Godself' growth. This God has revealed Himself to us in a threefold way. If we get connected to Him in each of the areas addressed by His threefold revelation, we will experience God Himself working in us. What else should be the chief task of a Christian leader, if not that?" (Schwarz, 2016, p.21).

The methodology of leadership is to lead as Jesus leads His disciples. Jesus is the ultimate blueprint of how a leader should lead, and His methods were excellent and effective. Jesus set forth a model that was not only effective but long-lasting. First, Jesus was a servant. Jesus says, "The Son of Man did not come

to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:47; John 13:1-7 NIV). The best leaders are servants. They know how to lead and serve. Throughout the Bible, some of the best leaders, such as Moses, David, and Paul, were great servant leaders. According to Howell (2003), Jesus' ministry methodology “focuses on three motifs that governed his training of the twelve apostles for kingdom ministry. These motifs harvest through sacrifice, righteousness through freedom, and greatness through servanthood those dimensions of his theology of the kingdom of God that he sought with great intentionality and repetitiveness to impart to his disciples as future kingdom leaders. He equipped them to be equippers of others” (p.4).

The purpose of a leader is to lead God’s people, and “many of the biblical leaders by today's standards would be unqualified to lead a church, teach in a seminary, be a corporate president, or lead a nation. The Bible is filled with stories that show God choosing the unqualified, weak, powerless, and poor to carry out a mission... the people we identify and read about as leaders in the Bible were imperfect human beings in the hands of a loving God. Men and women envisioned by God to be more capable and stronger than they thought of themselves” (Diaz, 2013, p. 21). God “chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are” (1 Cor. 1:27-28 ESV).

Moses was one of the greatest leaders in the Old Testament. However, when God calls Moses to lead. He refused, and he gave God many excuses for why he could not do it. He was not a great speaker. He was a murderer who fled from Egypt. He had a temper, and he was filled with self-doubt and confidence. Finally, Moses said yes to God to lead the Children of Israel from slavery to freedom. Moses was known to have a strong relationship with God (Exodus 33:11), and he was a humble man (Numbers 12:3). His brother Aaron and sister Miriam

played key roles, especially in leading the people out of Egypt. Moses is a fully human leader with strengths, weaknesses, personality flaws, and a servant's heart. We can learn from his leadership for it has many lessons both good and bad' (Diaz, 2013, p.20).

God chooses people to lead because of their character and integrity, but most importantly because they are pliable and are willing to learn and obey God's word. They have a humble spirit. They love God, and they have a relationship with him. God sees them as the clay and He is the potter, and in His hands, He can shape and make them into anything He wants them to be. They are obedient. God is not looking for someone profound, wise, and wonderful. On the contrary, He is looking for someone willing to do whatever task He has for them to do. He just wants someone who will accept the role, and as a result, He works through them to accomplish His will. The purpose of a leader is to do God's will, to lead God's people from bondage to freedom through His Word.

In addition, God did not say it would be easy, but He did promise that HE would be with us. Sauer (1971, p.491-92) says, "For You are with me!" That is the essence of trust. Those words are an echo of Yahweh's assurance to Isaac and Jacob, "I will be with you" (Gen.26:3; 31:3), and of Moses' promise to Joshua, "Yahweh will be with you" (Deut.31:8). That is the kind of faith that is exemplified in Isaiah's prophecy about Immanuel, "God is with us" (Is. 7:14), and in the refrains of Psalm 46, "Yahweh of hosts is with us." (46:7, 11). The purpose of a leader is to love, protect, nurture, provide hope, and shelter God's people. The role of a leader is not just to grow the membership of the church or to write books, attend seminars, crusades, conferences, and various activities. It is not just reading books on how to lead or filling up the church library with the books they have written. It is more than that. The role of a church leader is very important. It may be the most important role in the world. They are entrusted with people's souls and livelihoods. They can make or break a person. They can edify or

degrade a person. Martin (2002) explains the expected role of a leader this way: he says,

Church leaders hear from every corner how they are supposed to be all things to all people. They are exhorted to be visionary, charismatic, extroverted, and persuasive communicators. They must also be servant-leaders: listeners, encouragers, and nurturing facilitators. But, still again, pastoral leaders are expected to be expert managers and administrators, organizing whole communities while efficiently and effectively working harder and longer than anyone else to inspire others to go and do likewise: to burn out for Jesus. Not only are leaders supposed to keep on running like the Energizer bunny, but we also require our church leaders to be spiritually attuned, empathetically sensitive, and even, shall we say...mystical. Pastoral leaders, ordained under denominational auspices, face inordinate expectations: they are to be prophets, priests, queen/king, as well as CEO and sacrificial lamb all at the same time (p.84). In the face of the enormous challenges “the Christian leader faces in the different circumstances around the world, typical leadership appears strangely impotent.” (Baumgartner, 2016, p.3).

Leaders are expected to do all the above; however, the pressure and the expectation can be so overwhelming that it places the leader into bondage, performing for the congregation and board members instead of leading the congregation to spiritual development. Martin (2002) further explained, “The underlying but barely hidden implication is, of course, that if these practices are not performed and if the roles remain unfulfilled and the tasks unachieved, then the minister is in some sense guilty of being limited, fallible, in short, of being human. Must our understanding of leadership revolve primarily around the practices, roles, or tasks to perform? Must we try to sew even more merit badges on the already weighty stole of pastoral leaders? Is it not true of the Christian life that in some sense the yoke is supposed to be easy, the burden light? (p.84).

The role of the followers is to help the pastor in any way they can. The followers are to pray for the pastor and support the pastor. In other words, the followers are the ladder holders. They are holding the ladder as the pastor climbs the ladder, and the pastor is leading the congregation. The congregation is holding the ladder. The leader has a vision, and it is up to the congregation to see that the vision flourishes and comes to pass. If a pastor is leading and no one is following, then that pastor is not a leader. The followers are the key ingredients to the church's flourishing and the success of the pastor at large.

The role of the followers is very important. If church membership is declining, most likely the church doors will close, and the pastor will be out of work. The success of the pastor depends on the success of the congregation and how that pastor leads. The followers must believe in the pastor's vision, and they must fall in love with it and treat that vision as their own. The followers must trust their pastor, or the vision will not flourish or work. Trust must be developed. Trust "parallels man's relationship with God. Trust is defined as "a firm belief in the honesty, truthfulness, justice, or power of a person or thing." The Greek word for faith is similar. Pistis is a "firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing." Why can we trust God? Because he is honest. Because history has proven the reliability of His Word.

There are two bases for this confidence. One is the holiness of God's character. The other is his faithfulness (Price, 1980, p.2). The leader must be faithful and trustworthy, just as Christ is faithful and trustworthy. Moral "wholeness means keeping our promises, being honest in all personal and business transactions, and maintaining moral purity. Why can't our word be as good as God's? Isn't that what Jesus meant when he said our yes should be yes and our no, no? We need not swear by heaven or earth. To promise to remember someone in prayer just to acquiesce to a request is not honest. We must be faithful to our commitments: in ministry, finances, conversation, and with our family" (Price, 1980, p.4). If the

followers can see these qualities in their leader, then “skies the limit” if the pastor says, “jump they will say how high.” Because they trust and believe their pastor. The pastor has proven himself, repeatedly to be trustworthy, full of integrity and possess great character. Personal “integrity in a minister is an indispensable quality, yet it comes only with great struggle. ... Dulling the cutting edge of honesty is very easy. Masks get comfortable very soon. Roles are learned terribly fast. Ministerial cosmetics go on quickly.” A pastor who keeps to the basics will earn respect and trust over the long haul, while the magnetic smooth talker fumbles his way to another parish” (Price, 1980, p.8). Followers will respond positively to their role if the pastor displays integrity, transparency, and trust.

Leadership settings in the church can be very complicated and confusing without the proper training and education. I believe the image of God can be used in leadership settings. For example, Tooley (1964), “Jesus used the shepherd/flock image in three major categories: to describe his mission, to speak of his death, and to symbolize the eschatological judgment. The same assumption that this image is firmly embedded in the teaching of Jesus is seen in a comment on Mark 14: 27-28 ESV” (P.15). Mark 14:27-28 says, “And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that, I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee, by Jesus of imagery connected with sheep and shepherds” KJV). It is in this verse that we see the Jesus imagery, and it is connected between the shepherd and the sheep.

Christians are accountable to God for their spiritual obedience, faithfulness, and progress. But this growth process is to be nurtured and exercised in the local church. In many instances, new or immature believers make decisions and choices out of harmony with God’s Word and are thereby sidetracked in their progress. Some of these Christians need firm help and guidance, while others need assistance only in certain crises. Perhaps if each believer were properly accountable to another,

many problems could be prevented” (Troxel, 1982, p.39). In other words, Christians are supposed to obey God and apply His word to their lives so that they can grow and mature in Christ.

Church leaders are to bring the local flocks into accountability into obedience to God’s word without bondage and condemnation, but with conviction, with the help of the Holy Spirit. The elders must follow these principles of accountability without bondage, shame, and guilt. The author stated that qualified elders are to watch over the new convert and new member's souls and behavior and make sure that they are making choices that are aligned with God’s word, not emotions. This is all part of the church setting. The setting is very important. New members or new converts must understand the vision of the pastor, the mission statement of the church, and what is expected of them. It is important to have membership or new member classes, spiritual development, or discipleship classes for members to attend. Accountability is very important in a leadership church setting.

## **Conclusion**

The “metaphor of the shepherd is only possible because mentally people can visualize God as a shepherd or a leader” (Nel, 2005, p.81). Likewise, pastors or leaders of the church are the under-shepherds. God is a shepherd. Pfitzner (1977) noted that “Jesus in the Good Shepherd discourse: 'The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Thus, to the end, both at his arrest and during his actual crucifixion, he loves and looks after his own (John 18:9 and 19:25-27). The story of the Good Shepherd is a love story of a God who loves his creation and that He was willing to die for them.

In contrast, A good leader must be able to exemplify Jesus and display the Jesus Image and be able to fight for his congregation” (p.10). The Gospel of John describes Jesus’ love for humanity and how this agape love was able to break barrier

and saved humanity. This “passion for human soul drove Jesus to leave His heavenly home and transformed into human formed in order to fully understand how to be human. Yet, He operated in his divine being. He was fully human and fully God.

The Gospel of John reveals the glory of God by starting with “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... in Him all things were made by Him...” (John 1:3). The true image of God is revealed in His glory (Pfitzner, 1971). The biblical image of God as the shepherd and the sheep started in the Old Testament, and it is one of the most important images. Porter (2001) articulated best by saying, “Sheep and shepherd are not only one of the most important images of the church in the history of theology, but it has had a significant role in recent times. For example, it is demonstrable that it played an important role in the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution. Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, where it was used to temper and balance the new prominence given in modern times to the image of the church as the people of God” (p.53). The followers or congregation need to know the importance of using their gifts in the church, regardless of what discipline or career they find themselves in. After all, both natural and spiritual gifts are given by God to be used for the glory of God and to serve others. According to Cawley (2015), Christian leaders and managers can create organizational practices that promote employee engagement and human flourishing in light of and in response to God’s common grace. Grace (Christ’s rescuing force) is always available to each leader in order for them to do their tasks and thrive at all levels. As “each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10 ESV). Moses, in the Book of Numbers, lost focus. He went from God being his source to depending on himself, due to his dealing with a group of disobedient people. These people prevented him from seeing the promised land. I believe that Moses experienced an emotional and physical breakdown. Moses’ attitude glorified himself instead of God when he stopped listening to God and started doing his own thing.

The role of leadership can be so heavy that leaders start focusing on themselves and their needs instead of the needs of the people. Failure is the human side of leadership (Livesay, 2011). It shows that leaders are not perfect, and they make mistakes too. Leaders are often controlled by others or push others around them. Leaders need to stay focused. “For them to always look to Jesus the author and the finisher of their faith” (Heb 12:2).

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