

Lead Like Jesus – Heart

1/4/26

John 13

Sunday AM

On New Year's Day 1939, the Tournament of Roses Parade ran into a problem when one of the floats ran out of gas bringing the entire parade to a halt. Of course, spectators chuckled as someone had to run to fill a gas to get the float back up and running. What made it unforgettable was that the stranded float was sponsored by the Standard Oil Company. W/ all its vast resources, it still ran empty—b/c it failed to tap into what was available. Also ironic was the theme for the parade that year was – Be Prepared. I fear the same issue occurs to too many Christians. We run out of power b/c we refuse to tap into God's power. This year, let's commit to abiding in Christ and his power.

Well... Happy belated New Year! I hope you've all enjoyed the holidays, got your fill of turkey, eggnog, black-eyed peas, and extended family. As for my family, it was nice to have everyone home for a few days – and even to have my mom/sister visit. Nonetheless, I'm ready for life to get back to normal.

NOW – I'm sure you're aware but every January, something miraculous happens across our nation. People who haven't exercised since the Clinton admin. suddenly feel an *inner calling* to get into shape. For at least a week, local gyms will be full, treadmills will be humming, and nearly everyone will be wearing brand-new workout clothes—still creased from the package.

DYK that Jan. 2nd is the busiest day in U.S. gyms, but by Jan. 15th, attendance will drop by nearly half. By February, the gym will be quietly returned to the same (6) people who've been there since 1997 – but rest assured, they'll be judging the rest of us.

Here's the real genius behind the gym – since they already have your money, they don't care if you ever show up b/c a gym isn't built on the hope of your *transformation* – it's built on your *good intentions*.

If we're honest, this isn't just about gyms – but most of our lives – including our spiritual lives.

Every New Year we say things like – ¹This will be the year I read my Bible consistently. ²This will be the year I get my priorities straight. ³This will be the year I finally break free of such and such habit.

But then life happens. Our schedules fill and our motivations fade as our priorities change. Which raises an uncomfortable question – what if the problem isn't our intentions... but our direction?

We all can sincerely want to change, but if we keep walking the same road in the same direction, we'll continue to arrive at the same destination yet again.

Which brings me to our Jan. series. For the next (4) weeks, I want us to learn how to **lead like Jesus**.

Now, before anyone checks out thinking, "*I'm not a leader*," let's be clear – this isn't a series for people w/ titles, platforms, or corner offices, but for anyone w/ influence – and **that's all of us**. If you have a family, a job, a circle of friends, or a social media account—you're already leading someone somewhere. If you have kids, you're definitely leading someone – you're just not always sure where they're going—or why they're so sticky.

But here's where Jesus redefines leadership for us.

Leading like Jesus doesn't start w/ trying to change the world; it starts w/ learning to **lead yourself**.

Jesus modeled this before He ever called the disciples. ¹He reliably withdrew to pray. ²He resisted temptation. ³He lived under the authority of the Father. ⁴He showed us that if we can't lead our own hearts, habits, heads, and hands, then we'll eventually misuse any influence we're given. Direction always begins w/in.

From there, leadership moves outward to other people beginning w/ those closest to us—our spouse, children, extended family, friends, and colleagues. Leading like Jesus in these spaces isn't about control or perfection; it's about consistency, presence, and love anchored in truth. And for most of us, this is where our leadership is most tested – and where it matters most.

Only then does leadership extend beyond our inner circle to influence others toward what is good, right, and life-giving. Consider that Jesus never chased crowds or leveraged His authority for personal gain. He influenced people by serving them, speaking truth, and pointing them to the Father. His leadership wasn't built on charisma or popularity – it was built on character and clarity of purpose.

Today – I want to talk w/ you about leading w/ heart. But first, we need to define leadership.

I What is LEADERSHIP

To start – leadership is NOT about titles, power, personality, or telling people what to do; it's not about the leader themselves, but about serving, inspiring, and empowering, others to achieve a common goal.

A leader is someone who uses their influence to move themselves and other people toward a shared purpose, not by position alone but by earning trust thru clarity, character, and consistent action.

So, while John Maxwell says leadership is influence, I think Ken Blanchard is correct when he says that leadership is choosing to put other people first thru serving them to a greater purpose.

Certainly, this is what Jesus modeled for us on more than one occasion. Jesus taught us to lead w/ **heart**!

II The HEART of Leadership

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of the heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Proverbs 4:23

Over and again – the bible makes a simple point – ***the heart of the issue is always an issue of the heart.***

Good leadership doesn't flow from a book, a business plan, or an inspiring speech. Good leadership flows from the heart, b/c everything flows from the heart.

The heart of leadership is ***serving people toward God's purposes***—using whatever influence you've been entrusted w/ for their good, not your ego. It's ***character-driven influence***: love that acts, courage that decides, and humility that puts others first.

This means that leading w/ heart means choosing people over position, presence over power, and responsibility over recognition.

III 5 Keys to LEADING with Heart

In John 13, Jesus showed us how to lead from the heart—when He washed the feet of His disciples.

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew the hour had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; so, He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them w/ the towel that was wrapped around Him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus said, "You don't realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus said, "Unless I wash you, you have no part w/ me." Peter replied, "Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus said, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For He knew who was going to betray Him, and that was why He said not everyone was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He asked. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 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. 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. 1-18

H – HUMBLE Submission

John 13 opens w/ a reminder of Jesus' authority – Jesus knew the Father had put all things under His power, and He had come from God and was returning to God.

Yet in spite of His position, Jesus grabbed a towel and started washing the nasty feet of His disciples.

It would've been customary for an event like the Passover meal for a servant to have been posted at the door to wash the feet of those who came for the meal – but oops, someone forgot! And **no one volunteered**.

What we see is that the One who deserved to be served chose to serve. This is a leader's heart. Leaders lead thru humility. Jesus didn't forget who He was – He was submitting to the Father and modeling truth.

So, it was out of His security, not insecurity, that Jesus got up from the table, laid aside His outer garment, and knelt w/ a towel to begin washing their feet.

This is why humility in leadership is never weakness; it's strength under control – meekness. B/c the issue of the heart is always about **authority** and **motive**.

Authority is about **who** you belong to and living to please. Motive is about **why** you're leading and what's driving your influence. Authority answers *who is on the throne* while motive reveals *why you're leading*.

Authority exercised w/ humility builds trust; authority exercised for self builds fear. Bonhoeffer

Humble leaders realize their influence is stewardship, not ownership; it's responsibility, not entitlement.

E – EXALTING God Only

The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One. A.W. Tozer

Why do we take the responsibility to use our influence on our spouse, kids, friends, and colleagues? It's either to exact a personal preference or to exalt God?

In *Lead Like Jesus*, Blanchard says this is the battle b/w EGOS – either we’re wanting to **edge God out** or we’re seeking to **exalt God only**.

This is huge! If you’re a Jesus-follower, God expects you to use your influence to honor Him first – even when your boss or coach wants something different.

In everything you do, in word and in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father through Him. Colossians 3:17

This truth explains the towel in Jesus’ hands. When God is our highest aim, using our influence becomes an act of worship rather than self-promotion.

A – AUTHENTIC Service

Jesus redefined greatness when He knelt on the floor.

In John 13, the task of foot washing wasn’t symbolic or ceremonial—it was dirty, menial work reserved for the lowest servant in the house. Yet Jesus, fully aware that He was Lord, deliberately chose the lowest role.

What makes this moment even more striking was that Jesus washed *every* pair of feet – including Judas’s. He served knowing betrayal was imminent, denial was coming, and abandonment was just hours away. This is authentic service – doing good for others w/out expecting recognition or anything in return.

Servant leadership isn’t about doing soft things – it’s about doing hard things in a human way. Blanchard

Authentic service creates environments where people are free to grow, take risks, and tell the truth. Like Jesus w/ the towel, heart-led leaders convey – *I’m here to help you become who God intends you to be.*

R – RELATIONAL Trust

Leadership always travels at the speed of trust

John 13 shows us how Jesus built it. When He knelt to wash the disciples’ feet, He wasn’t merely performing an act of service, He was strengthening relationships.

Do you realize how deeply personal this moment was? As Jesus touched their tired, dirty feet, He was looking each of them in their eyes – offering dignity and seeking commitment. Even when Peter objected, Jesus patiently explained rather than dismissing him b/c trust grows when leaders take time to listen, clarify, and engage hearts – not just manage outcomes.

Leadership isn’t about being in charge. It’s about taking care of those in your charge. Simon Sinek

Relational trust for Jesus’ wasn’t transactional or conditional; it was rooted in love and consistency. Jesus valued the (12) over immediate results. This is why Jesus could later speak hard truth, give direction, and even rebuke – b/c His followers knew His heart.

People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. Theodore Roosevelt

T – TRANSFORMATIONAL Intent

The towel in John 13 was never the point – it was the object lesson behind it. After washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus said, “*I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you*” (John 13:15).

Jesus' influence was intended to be transformational – not – *I serve you, you serve Me* – but – *I serve you and you serve others in my name*. Jesus wasn't trying to get something from the (12) that night; He was shaping something w/in them. He was forming leaders who'd carry His heart long after the basin was put away.

The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers. Ralph Nader

This is where Jesus' leadership differs from much of what we see today. **Transactional** leadership focuses on compliance, output, and short-term results, while **transformational** leadership focuses on character, calling, and long-term fruit.

SEE – Jesus knew the disciples would fail w/in hours – yet He still invested in them b/c He saw who they'd become by the power of the H.S.

Leaders who lead w/ transformational play the long game—planting seeds, modeling truth, and believing that over time God will produce fruit that lasts.

Years ago, a Fortune 500 CEO was asked where he first learned about leadership. People expected him to mention a mentor, a professor, or a boss. Instead, he talked about a janitor at his elementary school. He shared that every day, the janitor greeted students by name, picked up trash that wasn't his, and fixed small things no one noticed. One day, when asked why he cared so much, he said, *"This is my school. These are my students and faculty. If I don't care, why should anyone else?"*

The CEO said that he grew up believing leadership wasn't about rank but about responsibility. Nor was it about position – it was about presence. Not about being impressive, but about being a faithful servant.

This is exactly what Jesus showed us in the upper room. No spotlight. No speeches. Just a towel, a basin, and a heart fully surrendered to the Father. Jesus led w/ heart, and in doing so, He changed the direction of His followers—and the world.

As we begin a new year, may we stop settling for good intentions and start choosing godly direction. May we lead ourselves well, love people deeply, and use our influence faithfully – b/c when we lead w/ heart – homes change, cultures shift, and God is honored. And it all begins w/ a heart abandoned/submitted to God.