

HOW DID JESUS LEAD?

Jesus was a leader. There is no question. Numerous people willingly chose to follow him. Some heard rumors about his ministry. Some were personally touched by his ministry. Some were specifically chosen and called by him.

What kind of a leader was he? What did the crowds think about him? How did they respond to his teaching and ministry? At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, after teaching on topics such as prayer and fasting, Matthew 7:28–29 says:

[28] And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, [29] for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

There was something different about Jesus. The crowds hadn't seen anything like this before. What did his ministry look like that made it so astonishing? Later, Matthew 9:35–38 summarized the ministry of Jesus:

[35] And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. [36] When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [37] Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; [38] therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Jesus taught with authority, calling for a response. He proclaimed the gospel. He served, healing the afflicted. He shepherded harassed and helpless sheep. And he knew that laborers were needed to be sent out into the harvest.

As Jesus went about his ministry, his disciples were the ones closest to him. He led them by example. He shared life with them. He called them to do as he did. How did Jesus model leadership for the disciples?

Wash one another's feet

SERVANT

JOHN 13:12-20

[12] When [Jesus] had washed [the disciples] feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? [13] You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. [14] If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. [15] For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. [16] Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. [17] If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. [18] I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' [19] I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. [20] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

The disciples most likely wouldn't fully understand what Jesus was teaching them until after the cross. This humble service would have been utterly shocking. The leadership they were used to looked far different. Matthew 23:1–12 says:

[1] Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, [2] "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, [3] so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. [4] They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. [5] They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, [6] and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues [7] and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. [8] But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. [9] And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. [10] Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. [11] The greatest among you shall be your servant. [12] Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

I AM SENDING YOU

SENT

JOHN 20:19-23

[19] On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." [20] When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. [21] Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." [22] And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. [23] If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Jesus commissioned the disciples, sending them with authority just as the Father had sent him. And he didn't send them to go alone. He gave them the Holy Spirit. What was he sending them to do? Going into more detail, Matthew 28:16–20 says:

[16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus was sending them to do as he did. They would teach with authority, calling for a response. They would proclaim the gospel. There was a plentiful harvest, and he was sending them as the laborers, like he mentioned in Matthew 9.

FEED MY SHEEP

SHEPHERD

JOHN 21:15-17

[15] When [Jesus and the disciples] had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." [16] He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." [17] He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Peter had denied Jesus three times, but Jesus didn't abandon him. Jesus restored Peter, recommissioning him. As Jesus shepherded harassed and helpless sheep, so would the disciples.

OUR HOPE

JESUS

All of this is well and good, but a lingering question might be whether all of this is just my interpretation. Did the disciples believe that Jesus was calling them to lead as Servants Sent as Shepherds? What about Peter specifically? 1 Peter 5:1–5 says:

[1] So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: [2] shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; [3] not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. [5] Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Our experiences show us that often leadership doesn’t end up looking like this. We have imperfect churches led by imperfect pastors. Even Peter, who wrote divinely inspired scripture speaking of godly leadership, fell short. Galatians 2:11–14 says:

[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. [12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. [13] And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. [14] But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

Where is our hope, as imperfect leaders and churches full of broken people? How do we respond to an inability to live up to the ideals modeled by Jesus? We respond as Jesus did, with grace and forgiveness and restoration, relying on the Holy Spirit.