

Christian Servant Leadership in the Twenty-First Century

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Chapter I. Introduction

Who is Jesus, and how has His leadership transformed civilization between the first and twenty-first centuries? This paper examines how Jesus Christ is very possibly the world's most outstanding leader – from whom a ministry of Servant Leadership developed, which has an immense influence on the lives of billions of people across the globe. This Christian Servant Leadership (CSL) influenced not just Christian organizations, but also U.S. policymaking and corporate strategies.

This study examines the influence of Jesus Christ as a Christian Servant Leader who created a transformative effect on civilization globally over the past two thousand years. Additionally, this study acknowledges how Christian theology and ethics were foundational in establishing American governance and recognizing its importance in policymaking by creating the United States Constitution and its impact on policymaking in the United States and globally. Most importantly, this study examines Christian Servant Leadership and its relationship to Robert Greenleaf's (secularized) Servant Leadership principles and its application to Prison Ministry work.

Chapter II. Literature Review

The study examines a variety of literature sources used in this study, including peer-reviewed journals, textbooks, statistics, and websites related to Christian and secular Servant Leadership, and the foundational principles of our U.S. government in Huckabee's book. Of particular interest are New Testament Scripture (NRSV), demonstrating Christian Servant Leadership and Northouse's book *Leadership: Theory and Practice* on Servant Leadership, Litwa's interpretations of Paul's soteriology as it applies to this subject, dealing with

(secularized) Servant Leadership, and Van der Merwe's journal article *The Concept and Activity of 'Obedience' in the Gospel of John*.

Christ as Servant Leader

This study examines Christ's ministry in the New Testament, wherein we uncover parallel ideologies in today's leadership development curriculums, precisely that of Robert Greenleaf's Servant Leadership. Principles of Greenleaf's Servant Leadership emerged consecutively in various other leadership books, including by Kouzes and Posner, which identify similar qualities in their book *The Leadership Challenge* to those employed by Greenleaf. However, it is in Greenleaf's work, as analyzed in Northouse's book *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, that we can fully observe the direct relationships between Christ, the originator of Christian Servant Leadership, and Greenleaf's secularized Servant Leadership. CSL begins with the reciprocal relationship between the leader and the led, which flips the traditional leadership model, resulting in transformation for both parties.

"...whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matt: 20:25-28, NRSV)

This study reveals how Christ, as the originator of all Christian Servant Leaders, created a path forward that allowed Christian Servant Leadership to flourish in transformative outcomes in contemporary times. Christ calls his followers to be "little Christs," providing exemplary leadership in the manner of Christ's mission. (Matt. 28:19-20, NRSV)

Jesus informs his disciples that '[f]or I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you' ([John] 13:15). Jesus encourages the disciples to imitate him, for he is their master who is par excellence the example of obedience. Jesus verifies this in his

appeal in the following verse: 'no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him' ([John] 13:16). (van der Merwe, 2022, p. 27)

The results of CSL are the transformative aspects emerging from both the leader and the led. These transformations can occur in office environments, a government and its people, or ministers and the justice- involved. This transformative process is reciprocal and acts on both parties simultaneously to better both. Christians are "being transformed into the likeness of Christ, who is the embodiment of God. Believers are 'conformed to' and 'transformed into' the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3.21), even having the 'mind of Christ' (Phil. 2.5; 1 Cor. 2.16)" (Litwa, 2012, p. 24). Greenleaf's "best-test" process evaluates the 'good fruit' reaped from CSL, and personal testimonials buttress those results.

Christian Ethics and Principles in Constitutional law.

This study acknowledges the relationship between Christianity and ethics and principles as the foundational principles of U.S. Constitutional law. In the book, *The Three C's that Made America Great: Christianity, Capitalism and the Constitution* by Mike Huckabee, David Limbaugh states that "Our Judeo-Christian worldview is the bedrock of our Constitution, which does not ensure personal liberties merely by formally affirming them, but by imposing concrete restraints on government. These limitations ensure our political and economic liberty" (2020, p. 3). Additionally, "The Father of the constitution had no doubt the Father in heaven was actively involved in drafting this historical document" (pg. 24).

The influence of Christianity both in the United States as a governing power and on the world stage is unquestionable. Thus the United States is witness to the unique transformation process between a government and its people. The influence of Christianity within the corporate world is equally observable. The business models of large corporations, including FedEx,

Starbucks, Nordstrom, and The Container Store, were influenced by Greenleaf's idea of Servant Leadership.

Christian Servant Leadership and the Justice-Involved

Christian Servant Leadership is well suited for ministry work within incarcerated systems and re-entry programs. The incarcerated have generally suffered from challenging childhoods and have accumulated a historical identity of defeats. The justice-involved are responsive to the 'commitment' shown by CSLs who demonstrate a commitment previously lacking in their lives. Remarkably, transformation occurs within the incarceration system (often called Satan's House), which is mystifying, but the spiritual transformation is full of mystery. "We can be open to it, but we cannot accomplish it for ourselves" (Barton, 2006, p. 11).

Chapter III. Analysis

This section will compare Greenleaf's principles and Jesus Christ's as written in the New Testament.

Servant Leadership

Robert Greenleaf first introduced Servant leadership over 50 years ago.

Greenleaf credits his formulation of Servant leadership to Hermann Hesse's (1956) novel *The Journey to the East*. It tells the story of a group of travelers on a mythical journey who are accompanied by a servant who does menial chores for the travelers but also sustains them with his spirits and song ... [but] Without the Servant, they can't carry on. It was the Servant who was ultimately leading the group, emerging as a leader through his selfless care of the travelers. (Northouse, 2021, p. 454)

A comparative analysis of Greenleaf's Ten Principles of Servant Leadership and their relationship to Christianity are clarified below:

1. Listening – Strong communication between leaders and staff is critical to Servant Leadership. The definition of communication is talking and listening, and servant leaders prioritize listening first. However, it also requires being receptive to what others are saying. Christ shows us that two different worlds are operating simultaneously. One is the material world, and the other is the world of the Spirit.

They are from the world and therefore speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of falsehood. (John 4:5-6, NIV)

Servant Leaders must be able to listen to the sounds from both worlds in order to provide balanced decisions.

2. Empathy – Empathetic leadership works to place the leader into the speaker's circumstances. It requires that leaders look at things from the speaker's perspective, even if they appear insignificant. Empathy is essential in prison ministry in order to validate the perspectives of the justice-involved. Christ informs us that whatever we do for the least of his children, we have also done the same for him. "And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'" (Matt: 25:40, NRSV). Serving the lowest also serves the highest.

3. Healing – Healing is a necessary trait of Servant leadership, and it has a reciprocal effect on those seeking healing, and those providing nurturing healing. As a result, servant leaders are healed in a reciprocal relationship with those to whom they serve. The suffering of

the justice-involved, their jobs, their family lives, or their health, are also healed in ways that include spiritual fulfillment. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" (1 Cor. 12:4-6, NRSV). Organizations are similar to the corporate body of Christ, and all members of the body are of equal importance.

4. Awareness – is the process of keeping in tune and touch with the social and political issues swirling around their environments. Vigilance is required in order to have both an outside-in relationship with their staff and a broader perspective. Similarly, Christ shows us to be aware of our surroundings and know that ultimately cultural frenzies come and go. "If the world hates you, be **aware** that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18, NRSV). Servant Leaders know what to focus on and what is just the cultural white noise that distracts most people from their goals.

"Before I was **aware**, my fancy set me in a chariot beside my prince" (Song of Solomon 6:12, NRSV). Servant leaders are not status seekers looking for power, but instead keenly aware that any power given to them must be returned to those they lead in their daily work.

5. Persuasion – is the process of helping others change their behavior positively, rather than using coercion or negative consequences. By successfully motivating each individual, CSLs can achieve positive transformations. This personal transformation results from their deep desire to want to change, inspired by their mentors. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2, NRSV).

6. Conceptualization – requires being a visionary and seeing what things could be like in the future. Servant leaders need to be able to effectively communicate their vision to their staff in

order to gain their support. Similarly, "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: **prophecy**, in proportion to faith" (Rom. 12:6, NRSV). Christian Servant Leaders, when using their gifts correctly, enhance their ability to conceptualize the future and to communicate their visions to their staff "because no **prophecy** ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21, NRSV).

7. Foresight – is a necessary trait for Servant Leaders as it allows them to predict what lies ahead. Greenleaf believes that leaders should be "held accountable for any failures to anticipate what could be foreseen and act on that understanding" (Larocci, 2022, p. 456).

"Your Excellency, because of you we have long enjoyed peace, and reforms have been made for this people because of your foresight" (Acts 24:2, NRSV). Christian Servant Leaders accept the weight of the responsibility to serve, remain vigilant, and protect their staff from the slings and arrows of cultural chaos.

8. Stewardship - Christian Servant Leaders must take responsibility for their entire group, its finances and assets (both capital assets and human resources), and maintain a relationship in line with the company's relationship with its social environment. "Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and **stewards** of God's mysteries" (1 Cor. 4:1, NRSV). Additionally, Christian Servant Leaders must be trustworthy to handle these responsibilities. "Moreover, it is required of **stewards** that they be found trustworthy" (1Cor. 4:2, NRSV). CSLs must be above reproach as their role and responsibilities are parallel to church leadership.

9. Commitment to the growth of people – Christian Servant Leaders understand the unique value of each individual and their contributions within their organization and beyond to their identities outside of their work domain.

CSLs allow each individual to grow personally and professionally by offering classes and opportunities for self-improvement and even involving them in critical decision-making. "So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the **growth**" (1 Cor. 3:7, NRSV). The commitment of CSLs has no boundaries.

"When Jesus told His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, they would not have seen this as a casual assignment to squeeze between other interests. This would need to become their primary focus" (Bradley, n.d.).

10. Building community – The Christian Servant Leader helps to develop a relationship with the community at large and understands the importance of taking the health and desires of the community to heart in their endeavors. "Community allows followers to identify with something greater than themselves that they value" (Northouse, 2021, p. 457). "Peace be to the whole **community**, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 6:23, NRSV). "Servant leaders build community to provide a place where people can feel safe and connected with others, but are still allowed to express their own individuality" (Northouse, 2021, p. 458).

Christian Leadership in Prison Ministry

How can Christian Servant Leadership best serve the justice-involved? Greenleaf emphasized '**listening**' to others. "Servant leaders communicate by listening first" (Northouse, 2021, p. 455), or as Mudge states in his paper *The Way of Subtraction and Subversion: Four Metrics for Teacher Spiritual Formation* (2022, p. 65):

It is all about paying attention, paying attention to God, paying attention to ourselves, paying attention to others, paying attention to what is—to reality—seeing what is in front

of us, and the Bible promises that if we can do that properly, it will bring us the true rest we really need.

Incarceration systems "hold almost 2 million people in 1,566 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 2,850 local jails, 1,510 juvenile correctional facilities, 186 immigration detention facilities, and 82 Indian country jails, as well as in military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories" (Sawyer, 2022).

CSLs are accustomed to obedience, not only to Christian values, but to respecting different perspectives and ideologies. Consequentially, their devotion to the lives of the justice-involved is palpable and held firm by those beliefs and themes, which include: "(1) obedience to God as Father, (2) the essence of obedience – to love, (3) various expressions of obedience, (4) the ability to obey, (5) Christian obedience is to become like Jesus and (6) the rewards of being obedient" (van der Merwe, 2022).

CSLs working in prison ministry are the outward manifestation of God's loving commitment to humanity. This **commitment** to the ongoing development of the justice-involved is observed in their assistance with education, re-entry services, pen-pal programs, prayer ministries, health concerns, and developing work skills. CSLs measure success using Greenleaf's 'best-test' approach.

The best test [of a servant-leader], and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (Larocci, 2022)

The 'good fruit' is the result of this successful relationship. CSLs are uniquely positioned to make disciples of the justice-involved, thus fulfilling Christ's Great Commission.

Chapter IV. Summary

This study demonstrates how Jesus Christ was the founder of Christian Servant Leadership through his ministry. It further demonstrates a direct relationship between Christ's principles and Robert Greenleaf's principles of Servant Leadership, along with the broader application in today's leadership literature.

The study advocates the efficacy and benefits of Servant Leadership as initially established by Jesus Christ and its influence on the development of the United States and its political system, corporate structures, and application to the justice-involved.

CSLs can maintain their leadership approach while benefiting from integrating other leadership concepts on an as-needed basis, without compromising the integrity of their approach, provided they stay within the original precepts.

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