

THE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES OF JESUS CHRIST

Priesthood Leadership Session

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Alan Matheson

As leaders, we often feel the weight of the responsibility given us. The yoke doesn't fit comfortably. We see clearly our inadequacies, perhaps those others can't. While well intentioned, we often miss the mark. Leaders often walk alone.

But, done right, leadership can also be tremendously rewarding. Leaders experience accelerated personal growth. They feel deep satisfaction in watching their team reach new heights. And they experience the exhilaration of marshaling people and resources to accomplish the unexpected.

We are all leaders, and we all can be better leaders. The best way to improve is by learning from great leaders. We've heard wonderful descriptions of the leadership qualities of President Nelson and Joseph Smith. I want to share some lessons from my favorite leadership mentor.

He was born in humble circumstances, a laborer whose childhood attracted only modest attention. But he dedicated himself to his studies, associated with great teachers, and "grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." He launched a startup with a few inexperienced friends and no capital, in a sector with intense competition and a dominant market player that spared no effort in seeking his demise. His product didn't give customers the immediate satisfaction promised in most advertising. His marketing was counterintuitive: he touted self-sacrifice and promised delayed gratification. Against all odds, the enterprise grew rapidly. He became the CEO of the most significant organization in history, which bears his name, and is located in the ultimate "C" Suite (Celestial) to the right of the Chairman. His enterprise has expanded in influence and is thriving even after 2000 years. He even has an excellent best-selling book!

He once asked, "What manner of men ought ye to be?" and then answered, "Even as I am." I would paraphrase: What manner of leader ought ye to be? Even as he is.

I'll share some of the leadership lessons taught by this great exemplar.

Be a Good Follower

He set the perfect example of obedience and submission to his Father's will. He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." [John 5:19] "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" [Heb. 5:8]

- Great leaders are first good followers.

Create a Compelling Vision

He spoke of building the Kingdom of God on earth, a place where the sick would be healed, the hungry fed, and the naked clothed; where all are loved, all progress, and the pure in heart would see God. He broke through old thinking, and painted a picture of a new world. He replaced the centuries-old belief system of an eye for an eye, with a new paradigm: turn the other cheek; give him your cloak also. Where before “thou shalt not kill” was the standard, he raised the bar to “love your enemies” and do them good.

He laid out the path to success clearly and succinctly: faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost.

- Great leaders create a compelling vision and establish a clear path to achieve that vision.

Build a Team to Carry out the Vision

One of his great leadership skills was the ability to build not just organizations, but also people. He saw in a simple fisherman the potential to be a courageous, powerful leader who could affect the course of mankind. Trusting that potential, he called the fisherman and others to leave their nets and follow him – not after the fishing season or when it became convenient, but now! He gave them specific tasks and important responsibility to encourage their development. He provided direction, but didn’t micromanage. When one of his followers asked how he could get light in a closed ship, he encouraged the follower to find a solution, and then helped him implement the proffered solution.

He gave his managers the authority to accomplish what he directed them to do. “Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.” [Luke 9:1-2] He wasn’t afraid to stretch them with challenging duties. He asked one of his followers to build a ship, and another to build a House Unto the Lord, skills they hadn’t previously exercised. He could have accomplished those things more quickly himself, but he recognized his followers needed to grow and be prepared to advance his vision when he was no longer there.

- Great leaders identify talent, build on that talent to carry out their vision, and give their team the authority, resources and confidence to succeed. They listen with love. They have a succession plan, preparing those they lead to carry on after they are gone.

Operate from a Base of Enduring Principles

He said, “I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.” [john12:49] In other words, he did not shoot from the hip, but operated from a base of fixed principles and truths. He was constant, not tossed about by every wind of doctrine.

- Great leaders lead from the strength of enduring principles. They don’t change based on prevailing trends, creating uncertainty and confusion in their followers. Those who seek power at the expense of principle, quickly lose their way.

Set the Example

My mentor often said, “Come, follow me.” His actions were the most influential sermon. He worked with those he served, never from a secluded corner office. He wasn’t afraid of close relationships or that his followers would be disillusioned as they came to know him. He, the greatest of all, was comfortable among all. He had both great virtue and a common touch. His detractors once asked why he ate with publicans and sinners. Hearing them, he responded, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” He called on us to be perfect, and could because *he* was perfect. He was not mocking, but stating directly and powerfully our potential. This man, who could not lie, beckoned us to be more like him, to achieve beyond our reasonable expectations.

- Great leaders model the behavior and performance they seek.

Serve Whom You Lead

My favorite leader put himself and his own needs behind those of others. Once, he took his leadership team to dinner. “He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.” [John 13: 4-5] At another time he taught: “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” [Matt 20:27]

- Great leaders serve those in their stewardship. Leadership is not about sitting on the stand or being the last to speak. It’s about being in the homes of members providing succor when they are most hurt and vulnerable, bringing light into darkness, lifting others without any expectation of reward other than their renewed hope.

Recognize the Value of Everyone

One of his protégés wrote: “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. . . . If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. . . . But now are they many members, yet but one body..” [1 Cor 12:12-23]

- Great leaders recognize that every member has value. They take time to recognize the talents of those they lead. We have different skills. No one has all abilities. We collectively are stronger when everyone contributes.

Hold Your Followers Accountable

He corrected his closest associate at times to help him grow. And that associate accepted the reproof in the spirit in which it was given. In love, he was forthright with his followers. When his associate drew a sword and smote the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear, the master responded with control, “Put up thy sword into the sheath.” [John 18:11] Without anger, he quietly healed the servant’s ear. His reproof was kind, yet firm.

- Great leaders hold their followers accountable, with understanding and love. They also are accountable to God, to those they lead, and to themselves.

Use Your Time Wisely

“He entered into a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at [his] feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone: bid her therefore that she help me. And [he] answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her. [Luke 10:38-42]

- Great leaders use time wisely. President Spencer W. Kimball taught:

“Jesus also taught us how important it is to use our time wisely. This does not mean there can never be any leisure, for there must be time for contemplation and for renewal, but there must be no waste of time. How we manage time matters so very much, and we can be good managers of time without being frantic or officious. Time cannot be recycled. When a moment has gone, it is really gone. The tyranny of trivia consists of its driving out the people and moments that really matter. Minutia holds momentous things hostage, and we let the tyranny continue all too often. Wise time management is really the wise management of ourselves.”

Lead With Courage

As a large and surly mob, armed to the teeth, came to take him prisoner on false charges, he did not cower or run. He stood steadfast and resolutely asked, “Whom seek ye?” The startled mob mumbled his name. “I am he,” he answered, with such courage and nobility that the soldiers “went backward, and fell to the ground.”

Another time, also before hostile accusers, he asked, “Whom seek ye?” and when they named him he announced, “I have told you that I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these [my disciples] go their way.” [John 18:4-8]

In Gethsemane and on the cruel cross, he gave everything for everyone.

- Great leaders act with courage. They make the tough, unpopular decisions when it is the right thing to do. They put themselves in peril to protect their followers.

Conclusion

I conclude with the words of President Kimball:

“Those individuals whom we most love, admire, and respect as leaders of the human family are so regarded by us precisely because they embody, in many ways, the qualities that Jesus had in his life and in his leadership.”

“Conversely, those leaders in history who have been most tragic in their impact on mankind were tragic precisely because they lacked to almost any degree the qualities of the Man of Galilee. Where Jesus was selfless, they were selfish. Where Jesus was concerned with freedom, they were concerned with control. Where Jesus was concerned with service, they were concerned with status. Where Jesus met the genuine needs of others, they were concerned only with their own needs and wants. Where Jesus was concerned with the development of his disciples, they sought to manipulate mortals. Where Jesus was filled with compassion balanced by justice, they have so often been filled with harshness and injustice.

“Perhaps all of us would not be the perfect example of leadership, but all of us can make a serious effort toward approaching that great ideal.”

Jesus Christ, the greatest leader, leads the Church and us today.