

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor  
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## Luke 22:24-28 “Vibrant Servant Leadership”

Intro. I would hope that we all want to be a part of a church that transforms lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ, and has a transformational impact upon the community and beyond. One key to becoming such a church is godly, vibrant leadership, both from our pastors and lay leaders. The authors of *Transformational Church* list this as one of the seven characteristics of transformational churches. So I want to call upon all of our present leaders to listen carefully, and apply God’s truth to your leadership within this church. Some of the rest of you are future leaders of this church. Learn what you can so you will be equipped. The rest of the congregation needs to encourage and pray for the kind of leadership I will be talking about today.

Now what kind of leaders do we need? Do we just need a strong, no-compromise, CEO who is not afraid of anybody? Must we have a leader with game show-host public charisma and a personality that makes even casual contact inspirational? Well, remember that our topic here is not just leadership but *transformational* leadership. We’re talking about the kind of leadership that *God* will use to lead transformational churches.

I have selected as my text one of the best Scriptures regarding the kind of leadership that Christ prescribed for His church. As we begin, the first thing Jesus tells us is to:

### I. REJECT WORLDLY LEADERSHIP

I shared in my first message Romans 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed....” As we talk about leadership within the church, we are not to follow the leadership example of worldly rulers. Jesus said to His disciples in v.25, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.” Like many people today, the disciples were making the mistake of following the wrong examples. They were talking about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God, of taking the highest positions of authority. Instead of modeling themselves after Jesus, they were admiring the glory and authority of the Roman rulers. What power and authority they had! They had servants and wealth and fame and honor! So Jesus showed these men that their desire to rule and be the greatest was a worldly, pagan trait. It reminded one of the self-centeredness of “the kings of the Gentiles.”

Now Jesus mentions two characteristics of worldly leadership that we are to avoid:

A. Authoritarian Rule - Note that they “exercise lordship over them.” Leaders traditionally measure leadership by how much power they exert. The world’s notion is that the true sign of superiority is to lord it over others. The ancient monarchs practiced arrogant superiority, who governed with a capricious, unchecked will, with no thought of responsibility to the governed. Our American founding fathers saw to it that our President was to govern with checks and balances, and not rule as a king or tyrant!

Regarding authoritarian rule, Jesus says in v.26, “But not so among you....” You shall not be like Gentile rulers and “exercise lordship over them.” The church does not need bosses but leaders. This verse clearly speaks against Christian denominations that have ecclesiastical

hierarchies and rulers. In fact, one calls their supreme leader, “Pontifex Maximus,” a title that was borrowed from the ancient Romans. The apostle Peter learned this lesson from Jesus. In 1 Peter 5:3, he told pastors that they were not to be lords over those entrusted to them. In 2 Cor. 1:24 Paul said that he was not seeking to have dominion over their faith. Baptists have held to this Scriptural principle better than most denominations. We have no rulers at the Association office, or the state office, or at the SBC offices in Nashville! But you can be sure that there have been those within the local churches who have violated this principle, and have sought to rule the church with a heavy hand! I saw an example of that in my previous church. No one person or small group in the church is given authority to dictate or rule. The apostle John rebuked Diotrephes, for he “loves to have the pre-eminence...” (3 John 9). Instead, Paul wrote in Eph. 5:21 that we should submit to one another. We are not to rule over each other.

Christian leadership is not giving out dictates merely because one holds an office, but Christian leaders lead by biblical persuasion, by strength of character and by example.

General Eisenhower would demonstrate the art of leadership with a piece of string. He’d put it on a table and say: “Pull it and it will follow wherever you wish. Push it and it will go nowhere at all. It’s just that way when it comes to leading people. They need to follow a person who is leading by example.”<sup>1</sup>

Another characteristic of worldly leadership is:

B. False Praise – Jesus said in the last of v.25, “those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’” These men, while exercising their authority ruthlessly, nevertheless took delight in being called “Benefactors!” They demanded honorable titles which credited them with virtues that they never tried to possess. A king in Egypt, very near our Lord’s time, had borne the title “benefactor.” The Romans in particular vied for honors and did all they could, legally and illegally, to win promotion, recognition and titles.

This reminds me of some politicians today. They talk as if they are the benefactors of the people. And yet, perhaps in most cases, they are there to promote themselves, and fatten their own bank accounts, etc. It must be nice to have the power to tax, print money, and then turn around and give it to people, and then claim to be their benefactors! Congressmen pride themselves in how much bacon they bring home to their districts. Where do they get that “bacon?” It doesn’t come from their own pocket or bank account, you can be sure. Yet they are viewed as “benefactors”!

So instead of following the worldly pattern of leadership:

## II. FOLLOW CHRIST’S LEADERSHIP

If you are going to profess Jesus as your Savior, you need to settle in your mind that you are going to follow Him, and not the world. So what should characterize Christian leaders?

A. We Are to Practice Humility – Instead of insisting on titles of honor, Jesus says in the last of v.26, “he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.” Jesus tells them that the greatest among them—the one who so regards himself or is so regarded by others—should become like the youngest; that is, like the one least in honor. This mention of “the youngest” is in line with the fact that under normal conditions men have regarded old age as honorable and to be held in respect, while the young receive the least honor

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<sup>1</sup> Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* [Illus.#C-1442].

and respect. Also, it may be significant that back in Matt. 18, when Jesus answered the question, “Who is the greatest?”, He called to Himself a little child, and said that we must become as a little child. So we are to practice childlike humility. The kingdom of God is the only kingdom ever known to man where the greatest are those who take the humblest place.

I know about this matter of being the youngest, and how the young receive less respect and honor. I was the youngest child in my family. For the first 20 years of my ministry I had trouble being respected because I looked so young as a pastor. I had to earn people’s respect over time (1Tim. 4:12). You know, it’s been a while since anyone commented that I look so young!

So I believe we should follow the teaching of the apostle Paul in Php. 2:3, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” Christian leaders are to lead with humility. Instead of promoting self, they promote the mission of the church.

B. We Are to Serve One Another - Jesus says in the last of v.26, “and he who governs as he who serves.” He wants even the leaders among God’s people to have a servant spirit. Instead of reckoning greatness by how many servants you have, Christ reckons greatness by how many you serve. On this night Jesus Himself served the disciples, washing their feet. In His kingdom, authority is to be used to help others, not to glorify oneself. Since all Christians are to be servants, there is no reason for us to compete with one another for honors and recognition.

Leighton Ford of the Billy Graham Association once said, “True leadership means to receive power from God and to use it under God’s rule to serve people in God’s way.”

Yet I am afraid that all too often the saints today are not much of an improvement over the apostles. It is too bad that this competitive spirit is so strong in the church today as people promote themselves and their ministries as “the greatest.” An ancient prophet lamented over the shepherds of Israel “that do feed themselves,” and indignantly asked, “should not the shepherds feed the sheep?”

This teaching of Jesus is in response to the question, “Who is the greatest in God’s kingdom?” God’s pattern in Scripture is that a person must first be a servant before God promotes him or her to be a ruler. This was true of Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Timothy, and even our Lord Himself (Phil. 2:1-11). What is it that makes a godly mother the queen of her children? Simply that all her life she has been their servant, and never thought about herself, but always about them.

This is perhaps the most important basis of allocating spiritual leadership in the church. The Nominating Committee should nominate leaders who manifest a servant spirit. As you nominate deacons, you should nominate and elect those who manifest a servant spirit. After all, the word “deacon” means “servant.” If you are a deacon, your role is not to rule the church, but to serve your families, and the church body. If you are a S.S. teacher you are in that position to serve your class, to study hard and teach them the Word of God, and to minister to them. The same is true of me and our other pastors. All of our leaders should be humble, servant leaders.

Transformational churches understand this principle. 81% of the members of transformational churches agreed with this statement, “Our church leadership makes sacrifices for the direction God has given our church” (p.71). They are here to serve.

C. We Are to Follow the Example of Christ – Whenever the Bible wishes to give the supreme example, it points to Jesus. Jesus says in the last of v.27, “Yet I am among you as the

One who serves.” As in all things, Jesus is our example, and He has completely reversed the measure of true greatness. True greatness means to be like Jesus in humble service.

Appealing to something these men knew very well, He asks His disciples in v.27, “For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table?” Of course he is generally regarded as the greater. Yet, does true greatness really consist in having someone wait on you? Jesus answers this question by stating, “But I am among you as one who serves.” They all acknowledged that He was Lord, even the Son of God. Yet He was their servant that very night! He not only served the food, but He even washed their feet! Read the story in John 13:1-11. In fact His entire earthly sojourn was a life of rendering service to others in so many ways. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, taught the Word of God to hungry souls, and did other good works. In a very similar context, Jesus said in Matthew 20:28, “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” When Jesus Christ came to earth, all mankind should have been His servant! Instead, He served mankind. When Jesus washed their feet, He took the form of a slave. But when He went to the cross for you and for me, He was willing to go even lower. He assumed the form of a criminal, condemned to die! What humility! (cf. Php. 2:5-8).

The only power that will cast out self from the throne of our lives is the power of Christ, who exemplified selfless, humble service. The more you imitate Him, the more selfish ambition will be dethroned, and the conflict that goes with it.

Do you realize that Western civilization, at least in the past, has been impacted for the better by this Christian concept of leadership? People would talk of government in terms of “public service.” Yet I warn you that the more our society turns from our Christian heritage, the more our leaders will exercise selfish, authoritarian leadership over us, all the while claiming to be our benefactors!

I trust that I model servant leadership in my own life. The bulk of my life is lived in service to others: feeding God’s flock the Word of God, interceding for others in prayer, visiting the sick, bereaved, and homebound, ministering to other needs, and so forth. I serve wife and my family. If Jesus came to serve, then certainly my mission is to serve.

I call upon all of our leaders to be servant-leaders, whether you are a pastor, deacon, S.S. teacher, ministry directory, or committee chair.

D. We Are to Be Loyal and Faithful - Though they had their faults, Jesus commends them in v.28 saying, “But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials.” It was true that while others, perhaps even by the hundreds, had left the Savior (John 6:66), these men, except for Judas, had remained loyal to Him. They persevered through both the good and bad. Christian leaders are not those who quit at the first sign of trouble. They are loyal to Christ, and loyal to their brothers and sisters in Christ. We need leaders who persevere.

Now I have presented the foundation of the biblical model of leadership. Now I want to move on to bring out some of the leadership principles that are brought out in the *Transformational Church* book. So my last main point is to call upon our present and future leaders to:

### III. BE A TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER!<sup>2</sup>

I want to share six of the characteristics of transformational leaders that I gleaned from the book. First:

A. Transformational Leaders Call upon the Church to Fulfill God's Mission - Transformational Churches have leaders who understand the church's purpose.<sup>3</sup> Transformational leadership understands that the church exists for the mission of God, and God gives leaders to help churches fulfill the mission. The agenda of a TC leader is based on a core belief that God has sent us on mission. Jesus said to His disciples in John 20:21, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." Based on the mission of Jesus, I would say that He has sent us out to serve the hurting (Luke 4:18) and save the lost (Luke 19:10). We are to transform the world through His gospel, one person and one nation at a time.

We have adopted a mission statement, and here it is: We exist "To develop fully devoted disciples of Jesus, equipping them for a life of worship, love, service and gospel proclamation."

I think it is so wonderful that our church has been a strong supporter of mission causes. We have consistently been in the top 2% of Southern Baptist Churches in per capita support of the Lottie Moon mission offering. However, we need to be more than just a "missions supporting" church. I and other leaders need to move us to being more of a church on mission, both locally and beyond.

We have all heard the illustration of the difference between the chicken and the pig. The chicken makes a contribution to your breakfast while the pig makes a sacrifice! [Illus.#C-2095]

Our purpose for being a church, our mission, must include reaching those outside of our own church. Granted, we are to minister to one another within our own congregation. In fact, Paul said in Gal. 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." However, our mission does include ministry and outreach beyond our church fellowship. Transformational leaders are kingdom focused, not focused on building our own kingdom. We have built very adequate buildings to carry on the teaching and worship ministries of our church, but if we are not careful, we will make what goes on inside these building the focus of our mission. Jesus never commanded us to build buildings. He commanded us to make disciples. Buildings and programs tend to create spectators and consumers, while Christ wants us to be on mission for Him. A missional leader is constantly challenging people to move outward versus trying to gather them inward.

B. Transformational Leaders Cast a Vision – People are attracted to a compelling, God-sized vision. Leaders are tenacious about their vision and are people focused.

69% of members of transformational churches strongly or moderately agreed that they knew the vision of their leaders and the church (p.75). Clearly, the leaders of these churches did a good job of casting vision.

How well do you know our vision statement? Well here it is, "We strive to be a Biblically grounded, unified, multi-generational church family committed to exalting Jesus as Lord and Savior in our homes, our community, and around the world." Only God can accomplish that vision working through godly leaders.

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<sup>2</sup> The rest of this message is mainly based on the book, *Transformational Church* (see sources for more information).

<sup>3</sup> A mission statement explains the church's reason for existence.

C. Transformational Leaders Move People to Action - TC leadership is action oriented. We know that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). Paul said in Php. 1:6, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it ....”

Yet most churches suffer from a failure to launch and stay the course. With no clear sense of purpose, vision, and mission, they never set a clear strategy.

They are like college students who have trouble finding out what their career path should be. So they keep changing majors, and as a result some students take 5-6 years to finish a college degree.

I alone cannot lead the implementation of our mission, vision, and goals. I need other leaders who will take ownership of one or more action plans and help get it done!

D. Transformational Leaders Share Leadership – The CEO “Superman” model of leadership is replaced in transformational churches. The gifted “Superman” pastor can lead a church to grow, but cannot on his own lead a movement for God that is truly transformational. And churches should not expect a single pastor to be a superman who prepares well for 3 sermons and Bible studies a week, visits all the sick and bereaved, and is the chief administrator of the staff and programs of the church. Transformational churches develop and empower multiple leaders. Only 26% of the members of transformational churches agreed with this statement: “Our leaders seem afraid to step aside and hand off ministry to others.” TC leaders look for ways to hand off ministry to other people.

Moses was enabled by God to be a transformational leader. By following God’s leadership, God enabled him to lead the Israelite nation out of bondage into freedom. Yet Moses did not lead alone. God gave him Aaron. Later, God used Moses’ father-in-law to get him to appoint 70 leaders from the tribes. He had to learn to share leadership, lest he wear down.

Jesus did not call only 12 apostles as leaders, but Luke 10:1 says He “appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two....” He sent them to touch the hurting and work for the harvest.

Someone says, “What if I can pick an apple for God?” What would happen if instead someone said, “What if I can influence leaders in multiple orchards to pick apples for God?” These multiple orchards will produce and harvest fruit for many people everywhere.

Our authors wrote, “Leadership is the stewardship to help others exercise their gifts, not just an opportunity for me to exercise my gifts.” Eph. 4:12 says that God gave pastors and teachers “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ....” Peter told the entire church that they were a “royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). Ministry for God is not just for a few pastors, but for all of God’s people. And one ministry that some lay people are to take is leadership within the body of Christ.

The transformational leader leads a team. Everybody has a purpose on the team. No one person’s personal purpose is more important than the biblical purpose of the team. The pastor may be the coach of the team. Coaches recognize the need for people to get into the game. A football team cannot win or even survive with just a quarterback. Nor can a football team win with a hall of fame coaching staff but no players. All the members of the team are important.

Now if all the saints are to do the work of ministry, they need to be trained and equipped by the leadership, and they need help in discovering their giftedness. 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, 1 Peter 4 include some of the Scripture passages that teach that all of God’s people are gifted for service. We all also are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who empowers us for service.

E. Transformational Leaders Are Entrusted to Lead but Are Accountable – Only people of character should be elected or appointed as leaders in God’s church (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3). If these leaders are indeed men and women of character, they should be trusted to lead and not micromanaged, especially by individual members of the church! However, 1 Cor. 10:12 says, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” We all need to be accountable to someone or some group to minimize temptation and abuses of authority.

F. Transformational Leaders Pray - We have no ability to transform anything without God’s power. Therefore, we pray. Jesus bathed His ministry in prayer. The apostles were clearly the leaders of the Jerusalem church. They said in Acts 6:4, “we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” Leaders pray for the lost, they pray for the sick and hurting, they pray for guidance and power. Leaders need help in the work, and so we pray. Jesus said in Mt. 9:37, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

Conclusion: I want to acknowledge that I feel like Moses when God called him to the big task of leading His people out of Egypt. Moses said in Ex. 3:11, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He felt so inadequate. God has given us a big mission. Yet I feel inadequate. I’m sure other leaders do as well. But Paul said in 2 Cor. 3:5, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves . . . , but our sufficiency is from God.” Church, pray for our leaders. And may our leaders join me in looking unto God to help us implement the leadership principles that we have looked at today! May God help us to become more of a transformational church!

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978); H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of Luke* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2010); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Courageous: Luke 14-24* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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