

## THE INDISPENSABLE MARK OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FROM CHRIST'S METHODS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN MARK'S GOSPEL

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**ABSTRACT.** What is successful Christian leadership? How should leadership be developed within a Christian context? This article encourages Christian leaders to seek to identify with Jesus' mission and paradigm in developing leaders by examining the Scriptural passage in Mark 3:13-19. Jesus' example in leadership development was based on succession of leadership primarily accomplished through personally shaping his disciples in close, mentoring relationships. This article, in particular, examines Jesus' practice of having his disciples near him in order that they might best accomplish the task he had purposed for them. Currently, this pattern of leadership development has been given diverse definitions from servant-based leadership to transformational leadership, but to Jesus, developing leaders was best accomplished through simple mentoring. Jesus' desired goals for his disciples were realized through an intentional nearness to the lives of the twelve. For Christian leadership to be healthy, its success depends on close relationships being developed between the mentor and the mentee. The indispensable mark of Christian leadership is the combined effort of action and agenda while purposing to influence others.

**KEYWORDS:** biblical mentorship/mentoring, mentoring, Christian leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership development

### **Introduction**

There is no shortage of literature written about leadership and its role in the life of any one desiring to make an impact in this world. When attempting to narrow the literature to clarify a single area that is responsible for success in leadership, the quantity of information can be overwhelming. Because of the surplus of information, defining success in leadership can be difficult to narrow to a singular definition or theme. Further, how can one identify the indispensable mark in successful leadership when so many models exist? The answer is to search for a model of leadership that has

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endured time, overcome criticism, affected multiple generations, transcended culture, and is still relevant in today's changing world. As difficult as this may appear, this article argues that there is a leadership model that exceeds the aforementioned criteria. In less than four years, Jesus' leadership and message immediately impacted thousands, within five generations the impact reached into the millions. And today, Jesus has impacted more than one billion people (Briner 2008: 21).

This article will set out to identify the indispensable mark of Jesus' leadership found within a pericope in the Gospel of Mark. Additionally, this article will argue that leadership is distinctively Christian when this indispensable mark is applied. Finally, this article sets out to show that for Christian leadership to be successful, it must be *successive*; in fact, its success depends on the personal shaping of others found in close mentoring relationships.

### **What is Christian Leadership?**

What makes Christian leadership distinct from secular leadership? Ted Engstrom acknowledges the answer can be elusive saying, 'leadership is hard to define but the one characteristic common to all leaders is the ability to make things happen' (Engstrom 1976: 25). Although a commonality between Christian and secular leadership exists, leadership to be uniquely identified as Christian, it must be further narrowed. While secular leadership may utilize moral and biblical principles in their models, Christian leadership possesses a quality beyond the implementation of principles, and distinctively emphasizes the heart and actions of the leader. For example, 'the action of [Jesus] in the Gospel of Mark is all-important to the meaning of the Gospel, for we learn who Jesus is not so much from what he says as from what he does. Christian leadership, as modeled by Jesus, is a reflection of who he was and what he does' (Edwards 2002: 13). But are the actions of the leader sufficient to set Christian and secular leadership apart? Howell argues, 'Biblical leadership is taking the initiative to influence people to grow in holiness and to passionately promote the extension of God's kingdom in the world' (Howell Jr 2003: 13). Blending Edwards and Howell Jr. we may conclude that a leader's actions combined with an agenda to promote God's kingdom by influencing others marks successful and successive Christian leadership. The indispensable mark of Christian leadership is the combined effort of action and agenda purposing to intentionally influence others. This is the model that Jesus initiated in Mark 3:13-19.

As noted above, Mark's gospel uniquely emphasizes the activity of Jesus more than the content in which he taught (Edwards 2002: 13). Mark's Gospel though, is not without a concern for Jesus' teaching, but his teaching is directly related to his activity—specifically the activity of developing of lead-

ers. Tidball further identifies a strategic connection between Jesus' teaching and his actions by noting that the teaching of Jesus was never unrelated or abstract and was always concerned with instruction that was related to discipleship. Tidball's insight further demonstrates the indispensable mark of leadership being an intentional influence on others for the promotion of God's kingdom.

### *Similarities in Secular Models*

Interestingly, there is ample evidence within leadership literature that secular leaders have adopted this model. Scandura and Schriesheim first observed a unique shift within a transactional leadership model at the Leader-Member Exchange while working to incorporate transformational leadership concepts for highly beneficial outcomes (Scandura and Schriesheim 1994: 1558). The authors defined transformational leadership as 'getting followers to act as you desire by transforming or changing the followers'. This study, along with additional research on the leader-member exchange, established clear links between the developmental activities of mentors and the career outcomes of subordinates or protégés. Their conclusion was that the success of this distinct leadership model is best accomplished when the mentor uses her own personal resources, specifically, time, knowledge, and experience to impact and influence her mentoree. Bawany further states that 'having a mentor will help boost your career progression in a number of ways. Mentors can advise you in making decisions to progress your career, expose you to opportunities you may not previously have considered, or had access to' (Bawany 2014: 52). Russell and Nelson agree and even indicate that the intent of leadership development through mentoring should consist of three specific stages of influencing others: training, educating, and giving experience, all of which can be identified in Jesus' pattern of leadership development. They conclude that mentoring is about developing people with the objective of helping them achieve their full potential (Russell and Nelson 2009: 40). Regardless of the field, contemporary leadership models are emulating a leadership style utilized by Jesus two thousand years ago.

### *Jesus' Model of Leadership Development*

The model of leadership that Jesus utilized is best demonstrated in Mark's Gospel account known as the selection and commission of the twelve disciples (Mark 3:13-19). It is in this passage that Jesus demonstrates a counter-intuitive method focused on the few rather than the masses. Mark's gospel highlights this (2:15) by revealing that there were many individuals who followed Jesus, but further adds that these 'followers' would be narrowed through the personal selection process of Jesus himself (3:13). Roskam highlights that although there was a growing opposition to Jesus among

Jewish leaders, the crowd that followed him steadily grew and became more open to his influence (Roskam 2004: 28). Historically, disciples made the decision as to which master they would follow, but in Jesus' case, it is the Master who chooses his disciples (Tibdall 2008: 44). The selection of the few further marks the uniqueness of Jesus' plan for successive ministry through these twelve men. Lane adds that the plan of Jesus was structured for the specific purpose that they might be with him and that he might extend his mission through them (Lane 1974: 132-33). Jesus' plan involved a pattern of transforming the individual in order to transform the world. Although counter-intuitive, this plan would yield compounded results throughout millennia while reinforcing the unique nature of leadership development that Jesus modeled in his ministry.

### *Jesus' Leadership Paradigm Described*

When examining Jesus' pattern of leadership development, it is apparent that a devotion to having his disciples near him was critical to helping them accomplish the task he set before them. Currently this form of leadership has many definitions, descriptions, and names, but for the purpose of this article I will use 'biblical mentorship' to describe the model of Jesus' leadership development practices.

To Jesus, developing leaders was best accomplished through mentoring. Jesus' desired goals for his disciples were realized through an intimate nearness to the lives of the twelve. Tidball rightly points out that the disciples were in fact called to pass on the teaching of Jesus and to make it widely known, but those whom would be sent, first would need to be near him (Tidball 2008:46). This is what Howell, Scandura, and Schiesheim earlier identified as the investment of personal resources required for mentorship to be successful. Jesus ultimately gave of his own personal resources by giving his life, which culminated in his death on the cross. Jesus knew that the only way to perpetuate truth was to pass it on, so he set out to personally train his disciples (Engstrom 1976: 37). It was Jesus' concentrated focus on the individual and the twelve that uniquely marked his leadership.

To fully appreciate biblical mentorship, it is helpful to explain the unique process applied by Jesus in his selection of the twelve. First, the word *ἐποίησεν* (translated 'appointed' in Mark 3:14 ESV) denotes the creation of something new (Lane 1974: 132). Edwards argues that the translation of this word means that Jesus 'made' the twelve; he was literally creating or fabricating his disciples. This serves as a helpful reminder that discipleship is not found in what the disciple can do for Christ, but in what Christ can make of his disciples (Edwards 2002: 112). The making of the twelve also indicates specific intent in the formation of this band of brothers. It is the emergence of this messianic fellowship that marks the anticipation

of Jesus' mission being accomplished through them (Lane 1974: 132). Plainly stated, the pattern of biblical mentorship Jesus was initiating was an intentional, directed, and spiritually-focused initiative benefitting the one being mentored in order that the disciple might accomplish the mission given to him.

Second, examining those whom Jesus selected further reveals an inverted pattern of leadership. For example, in selecting the twelve, common traits like youth, inexperience, and flawed character, reveal that the priority in being qualified for leadership would begin by being with Jesus rather than the individual's credentials (Hooker 1991: 112). Credentials emphasize the skill or personality of the person being selected while developing character emphasizes that mentoring is about Christ (Stowell 1994: 151). Jesus sets before us a model that determines a mentee's trajectory based on the mentor's commitment to invest in personal development more than charisma or giftedness that may naturally be possessed. Biblical mentorship is grounded in the principle that there is a responsibility assumed by the leader that development will be a priority in the relationship.

It was Jesus' aim to create leaders from these men. This raises an important question: can leaders be manufactured? According to research, many HR professionals make the mistake of measuring long term success based on identifying qualities or traits in individuals rather than drawing their conclusions about one's leadership potential based on the individual's ability to be developed (Locke 2014). According to Jesus' pattern, Christian leaders ought to build up other Christian leaders. Jesus developed leaders through an intentional focus on the individual and building into them the traits necessary to accomplish the mission he had set for them. The Gospels are replete with examples of Jesus ministering to individual disciples within the twelve and the twelve collectively in order to build specific leadership traits; and the trajectory that Jesus set for his disciples can be seen throughout the recorded history of the first century New Testament church and beyond.

Third, it is important to observe Jesus' intent in the biblical mentorship pattern. Since the projected course of the mentee is linked to the leader's relational commitment to develop, we may conclude that Jesus selected these men with the intention of developing a relationship that would foster the aforementioned mentioned leadership qualities. This is the primary distinction between mentors and managers. As a mentor, the relationship with a protégé is characterized by depth and personal commitment, focusing on broader objectives and encouraging mentees to ask relevant questions and think in new and creative ways. Alternatively, managers manage for profitability, productivity, and business outcomes (Russell and Nelson 2009: 42). The depth and personal commitment Jesus made to his disciples

was an influential trait that shaped these men as future leaders and continued to model the pattern of leadership by intentionally creating—through deep, committed relationships—other Christian leaders.

### *Jesus' Leadership Paradigm Demonstrated*

Jesus not only defined his purposes of mentoring within his earthly ministry but also demonstrated this model with his actions. Examining the paradigm of Jesus' leadership development reveals that he initiated this paradigm (Mark 3:13-19), he prayed for the success of this paradigm (an elaboration found only in Luke 6:12), he applied this paradigm (Mark 6:7-13), and he commended this paradigm to his disciples through his instruction to maintain the biblical mentoring of other disciples (John 13:16-17). Although Christian leaders should observe this specific paradigm, there is an order that is critical to discern in Jesus' actions before making application in one's personal leadership. As noted above, Jesus' actions reveal personal preparatory work by the mentor before effective mentorship takes place.

### ***Demonstration One—The 'Presence' Aspect of Mentoring: They Would Be with Jesus***

Mark notes that the foremost purpose of the disciples being selected was first to be with Jesus (3:14). Prior to the assignment of a task, there was a movement by Jesus to bring his disciples close to him. Jesus desired learners before he desired servants (Laniak 2006: 175). Being with Jesus was the bedrock of a biblical mentoring ministry (Tidball 2008:45). This critical aspect of mentoring was a primary focus of Mark in the preparation of the disciples for the mission (Lane 1974: 133). In fact, the significance of this important stage of mentoring cannot be overlooked for it was being with Jesus that ultimately qualified the twelve to do the task set before them. Within this context, Jesus employed three actions.

The first action by Jesus involved his own personal preparation to mentor others. We see this by noting the place of Jesus' selection. Mark introduced a mountain location that Jesus went to prior to summoning the twelve (3:13). Although the exact place is not identified, the mountain was generally a setting in biblical narratives that indicated divine or spiritual activity (Hooker 1991: 111). Additionally, the Old Testament frequently associated mountains with God's presence and revelation (Sinai/Horeb: Exodus 19:2ff; 1 Kings 19:8-18; Gerizim and Ebal: Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12-13; Joshua 8:3) (Edwards 2002: 111). Luke's gospel account helpfully reconstructs what takes place on this mountain prior to the selection of the twelve (Luke 6:12). Therefore, given the significance of both the mountain locations and also the activity that took place on the mountain, it is highly likely that Jesus was seeking God's participation and revelation regarding the selection of these men. Although we do not know what Jesus prayed in

this instance, other prayers for his disciples, like the one seen in John 17, indicate that Jesus prayed for them and the success of their mission. This commitment to prayer reveals a spiritual depth to Jesus' mentoring and a desire to build that depth into the lives of his followers. It is critical to the success of Jesus' paradigm that his followers be committed first to being with Jesus themselves and especially to praying for those they will be mentoring. Thus, for Christian leaders today, mentoring's first action must begin with an understanding the mentor's prayer life, which leads to spiritual maturity, is not merely to be preserved, but multiplied in future generations.

The second action in Christ's paradigm is characterized by the responsiveness of those being mentored. The creation and calling of the twelve was a purposeful decision by Jesus, further evidencing that the one who is in relationship with him, will act in accordance with that relationship (Edwards 2002: 113). For Christian leadership to impact other leaders, there must be an established relationship that compels the mentee to respond positively to instruction and commissioning. For Jesus, discipleship was a relationship before it was a task, it was a who before a what. Therefore, in order to ensure a succession in Christian leadership, Christian mentors must be concerned with developing Christ-likeness before developing leaders.

A third action within this paradigm can be seen through Jesus' intentional efforts to spend time developing and instructing the twelve through private moments (4:10-20, 33; 6:30; 7:17-23). These personal moments, separated from the masses, would prove to be the catalyst to the succession of the disciple's mission. These moments were essential to Jesus as he trained, taught, and communicated his mission to the twelve. The paradigm Jesus initiated was not a principle-based leadership model, but rather a relational model that consisted of reproducing himself in the souls of the twelve. His mentoring of leaders involved his person, and the impact of his sayings, passions, values, and even his habits would have rubbed off on them. To be with Jesus was the most profound mystery of discipleship (biblical mentorship) and his person and his work would determine the existence of the twelve (Tidball 2008: 45). It is difficult to arrive at any other conclusion than that personal relationship Jesus developed with the twelve indelibly marked the success and succession of their future ministry.

### ***Demonstration Two—The Present and Future Aspect of Mentoring: They Would Be Sent Out***

It is important to note that intimacy with Jesus is not the only desired outcome in the mentoring process. To Jesus, intimacy in the relationship ideally sparked action. Being with Jesus was the qualifying stage in leadership development, but the intent of the relationship was to mature spiritually, to

learn, and to accomplish the mission. Jesus summoned his twelve disciples for the purpose of sending them. Just as secular research links positive career outcomes to career mentoring, Jesus' pattern of leadership development evidences a positive impact when mentoring includes a preparation for actual leadership (Scandura and Schriesheim 1994: 1600).

Mentors often experience difficulties when attempting to strike a balance between the present and future aspects of mentoring. The mentor achieves a desired balance when he or she knows how to share the task while still preserving the relationship. Jesus demonstrates this balance later in Mark's gospel when he commissions the twelve for ministry while still maintaining a significant mentor role in their lives (6:6-13). The pattern Jesus modeled showed him involving the disciples in activity that represented their future ministry while maintaining an influence in their current activity. For example, soon after the mission of Mark 6 was completed, additional mentoring and reflection took place to prepare the disciples for an even greater mission (Mark 16; Matthew 28). This explicitly represents the present and future aspects of mentoring. The adoption of the present-future pattern of mentoring leads to a greater potential for success in the mentee's future. Jesus' mentoring of the disciples exhibited two top-down mentoring principles that help Christian leaders strike this necessary balance.

The first principle is that being prepared to engage a task is directly connected to the amount of time and resources invested by the mentor. This is supported by research that states leadership models are best accomplished when a mentor uses personal resources, including time, knowledge, and experience. Davis notes that the mentor is a slave, a servant to the learner; he or she sacrifices time, comfort, privacy and—in Jesus' case—even washes the feet of the learner (Scandura and Schriesheim 1994: 1599).

But the balance must be struck: there must be opportunities provided by the mentor to apply what has been learned by the mentee. The second principle is that Christian leaders who mentor should not lose sight of the learner's mission while the development stage is underway. The disciples were not only summoned to be with Jesus, they were also to be out sent by Jesus to preach and have authority to cast out demons (3:14-15). Tidball identifies this as a principle of shared purpose (Tidball 1986: 66). He goes on to say, those who have learned from him will want to exercise the same sense of purpose in their own ministry. The balance that Jesus modeled in his mentoring of the disciples can be seen through his encouragement for them to share in his mission while under his care. The disciples often lacked faith, evidenced pride, were deficient in wisdom, and were marked by impatience; therefore, Jesus understood that maturing the twelve would involve private instruction as well as public example for the task to be accomplished.



### **Applications for Twenty-first Century Christian Leadership**

The model Jesus initiated has multiple applications for mentoring ministry in twenty-first Christian leadership context. The following applications serve as guidelines for Christian leadership in creating future leaders in the church and culture.

First, Christian leadership must be concerned with the mentor's personal and spiritual qualification. As Jesus demonstrated in his prayer before the selection of the twelve, intimacy with the Father precedes the development of other Christian leaders. It is critical that a life characterized by integrity be the qualifying factor in a Christian leader's mentoring ministry. Jesus modeled a life of prayer, humility, and dependence on His Father indicating that his qualifications to develop other leaders rested in the life he lived.

Second, Christian leadership must be concerned with succession, or replication, as the measurement of success. The goal of Jesus' training was that future generations would be impacted by the message of the gospel. His High Priestly prayer indicates his desire for the message to be heard from the twelve to future generations (John 17:20).

Third, Christian leadership must be concerned with reproducing Christ in other leaders, not reproducing themselves. As noted in Mark's gospel, Luke's gospel, and the research examined, a Christian leader mentoring from a God-oriented life will more likely reproduce that same quality in others. Jesus' desire for his disciples to be with him so that they might be like him, demonstrates a priority in the model.

Fourth, Christian leadership must be concerned with developing the few so that the many can be impacted. Jesus transformed the world because he poured his life into the twelve (Davis 1991: 21). Dealing with issues of maturity and integrity are far more impactful in an intimate relationship rather than in a group setting.

Fifth, Christian leadership must be concerned with investing appropriate time and other personal resources in order for mentoring to be successive. Engstrom aptly notes, 'of all the things we have to work with, the most important is the time God has given to us' (Engstrom 1976: 101). Time taken to invest in the mentee must be a priority of a Christian leader if impact is to be lasting.

In light of the abundant research concerning leadership development, the Scriptural passage examined in Mark 3:13-19, and the model initiated by Jesus, Christian leaders are encouraged to seek to identify with Jesus' mission in developing others. This is the indispensable mark of Christian leadership.

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