



# RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP

*Leading as Jesus Led*

# **RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP**



## **Leading as Jesus Led**

**David Ferguson**  
in cooperation with  
**The Center for Biblical Leadership**

Relationship Press

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## Acknowledgements

It might seem, at first thought, unnecessary to address the subject of leadership from a “relational” perspective. As you embark on this study, however, you will find that leadership is fundamentally about intimate relationships: first with the One who has called us, and secondly with those we serve. With this background, it should not be surprising that the development of this Relational Leadership resource involved a diverse team that needs to be gratefully acknowledged for their significant contributions.

Several individuals contributed to my own leadership journey over the decades, including my father, Roy, whose military background contributed to my understanding of the need to focus on objectives so that my life would not inevitably wander, and my grandfather, Jerry, who modeled quiet, gentle servanthood. In my professional and ministry undertakings, Gordon Carlson trusted me with leadership at a young age, and Pastor Roger Barrier of Casas Adobes Church in Tucson, Arizona has for the past decade shaped my appreciation for a leader’s humility and teachable heart, lived out in interdependent fellowship. Dr. Thomas Parker at Trinity Bible College and Theological Seminary shared lectures on management and leadership which years ago served to challenge my initial academic work on leadership principles from the life of Christ. Emmett McCoy modeled essential leadership traits for me in the corporate world, including integrity, loyalty, and dependability—traits that provide an ethical foundation from which to lead.

The “laboratory” for these relational leadership principles has been the gifted Intimate Life Ministries team with whom God allows me to serve. Without the calling, passion, energy, and support of each of them, these principles would remain untested, lacking credibility and relevance. Of particular support in this “laboratory” have been Dr. Lewis Alexander and the team he leads through the Center for Relational Leadership (CRL). In both ministry and corporate settings the CRL team routinely sees the reality of these principles lived out in the lives of those they serve. Critical to this relational leadership “laboratory” has been the CRL work in the corporate sector with McCoy’s Building Supply. Without the continued vision, encouragement, and support of Brian McCoy, Chuck Churchwell, and the entire McCoy’s Executive Team, the continued refinement and development of this work would not have been possible.

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May each of us "decrease that He might increase" as we experience together the blessings of leading as Jesus led.

David

## Foreword

There is an ancient legend concerning Jesus' return to heaven following His earthly ministry. It is said that the angels asked Him to whom He had entrusted the completion of His work on Earth. Stunned at the reply that He had left it in the frail human hands of the disciples, the angels asked, "What plan do You have if they fail?" With a knowing smile, Jesus answered, "I have no other plan."

It still amazes us to think that the Sovereign Lord of creation dared to entrust His church to us, temporal creatures He formed from the dust of the earth, then inspired by the breath of His own eternal existence. Yet it is true—you and I are chosen to carry out His work. Because it is His work, we must ensure that we carry it out according to His wishes.

This book passionately argues that central to His wishes for His church is a pattern of leadership that differs dramatically from that found in the culture around us. Rather than allowing the world to squeeze us into its mold, we are to lead from a center of passionate love for God and one another. This kind of Great Commandment leadership we have chosen to call **relational leadership**. Our challenge is to honor Jesus' example of leadership in His Body, an example centered in the words which have been the motto of the Center for Biblical Leadership since its inception—"I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27).

Author Dr. David Ferguson has done a marvelous job of framing this challenge in contemporary language while calling us to rediscover the ancient foundations for leading the people of God. May all who study this course live out its principles as they lovingly serve Christ's purposes.

Larry Duncan  
Director, Leadership Development and Discipleship Ministries  
Church of God of Prophecy International Offices



## **Welcome to *Relational Leadership!***

*Relational Leadership* is a course of study designed to equip you and your ministry team to meet the enormous challenges of leadership in the 21st century.

This *Relational Leadership* workbook is intended to serve as the participants' guide for the course. It includes everything participants need to thoroughly experience the *Relational Leadership* resource.

This workbook includes the following features:

- **Key Relational Leadership Principles**—These are introduced through the text of the workbook. They appear as text boxes in each chapter. Leadership principles are then discussed in the text of the workbook.
- **Personal Exercises**—These exercises are designed for individuals working through this resource with a fellow leader or as a participant in a class setting. The goal is to provide the opportunity to process the content, come to interact with one or two others, and experience the appropriate relational principle.
- **Experiencing the Word Together**—Each chapter will include at least one opportunity to truly experience God's Word together. At these times, participants will have the opportunity to become “doers of the Word” (James 1:22).
- **My Team Journal**—Leaders are given the opportunity to take notes and keep journal entries as their team shares responses to workbook exercises. Small group participants may also want to use this section to record responses of fellow group members. These notes will serve as reminders of the unique needs of each individual.
- **Session Outline**—Each chapter contains a structured outline that summarizes the chapter contents, including the personal exercises. These may be used as participant worksheets or as a guide for the instructor.
- **Additional Resources**—Each chapter includes a list of works referenced in the text, along with additional materials which may prove helpful to the participants as they continue their growth in relational leadership.

Participants should note that the *Relational Leadership* course can be experienced . . .

- individually, as a self study.

- with a partner.
- with a class or small group.
- with your ministry team.

*Relational Leadership* sessions can also be formatted for use . . .

- as a weekly “stand-alone” course.
- as curriculum for a weekend retreat.
- as a “continuing education” component of regular leadership team meetings.
- as leadership training for prospective leaders.

## **HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS RESOURCE**

In order to get the most benefit and blessing from this resource, we urge you to do the following:

1. **Set aside time each week to read the chapter and work through the Personal Exercises.** This will prepare you for your interactions with a partner or small group and enrich your personal understanding of each chapter.
2. **If you are working through this resource with a friend or fellow leader, we urge you to make time each week to work through and discuss the exercises.** Make your meetings a priority in your schedule and come prepared to interact appropriately.
3. **If you are working through this resource with a small group, we urge you to make it a priority to attend each small group session.** Make your meetings a consistent part of your schedule and come prepared to interact appropriately. You may also want to make notes and then reflect on the responses of fellow group members from each meeting. We urge you to get to know each person in your group in a meaningful way, show interest in their lives, and demonstrate supportive care.
4. **The following “Participant Promise” page presents some ways in which you can make the most of your experience with this workbook.** We suggest that you read it over and carefully discuss it with your partner or group before making this commitment.

## **PARTICIPANT PROMISE**

We invite each participant to commit to the following in order to enhance their personal and communal experience of this resource:

1. I will spend time between sessions completing the chapters with honesty and sincerity.
2. I will refrain from criticizing other leaders; instead, I will be open and willing for God to show me how I can better lead those He has entrusted to my care.
3. I will participate in learning sessions fully, openly, and honestly.
4. I will seek to give care as others may need it and receive care as I may need it.
5. I will be willing to receive feedback from those who know me in my group, team, or family so that I might experience the growth God intends for me through this course.

---

Name

Date

# Chapter 1

## The Critical Need for Relational Leadership



**W**e are thrilled that you have decided to be a part of this journey toward relational leadership. Since Christ has called us all to make disciples—to go into Jerusalem, Judea, and the uttermost parts of the world as witnesses for Christ (Acts 1:8)—it stands to reason that in some way we are all leaders. As parents, we are called to lead in family relationships. As church members, we are called to help one another grow in relationship with the Lord. And as Christians, we are called to share our faith and encourage others in their personal relationship with Christ. Therefore, we are delighted that you have taken this call to lead seriously, and we welcome the opportunity to journey with you on the path toward becoming a relational leader.

Before we begin this journey, though, we want to recommend that you find another person or group to go through this course with you. As the name implies, this course is about relationships. Therefore, it will be essential that you have at least one other friend or partner in ministry to experience this course with you. This will enable you to discuss and experience these principles in a relationship. In other words, it will not serve you well to try to experience a “relational” course alone.

Ideally, we hope that you will choose to go through this course with a group—either with a group that you lead, a group of fellow leaders, or even a group of potential leaders. We have found that this provides the ideal environment for the Lord to do the most work in our lives. With that said, let’s get started!

First, take a moment to reflect on the topic of leadership as a whole. Use the following questions to help focus your attention and begin your study.

- As you think about the subject of leadership, what comes to your mind? What do you associate with leadership as it is typically portrayed or practiced?

- How would you describe your own concept of effective Christian leadership?
- What do you sense may be needed in Christian leadership today?

In this course, we will define an approach to leadership that we will call “Relational Leadership.” We will then see how that approach may provide the answers to some of the most significant crises the church faces today.

### **WHY DO WE NEED A DIFFERENT TYPE OF LEADERSHIP?**

Imagine a world where immorality is rampant and corruption is widespread. Imagine a society in which truth is mocked as if it does not exist. Imagine a culture in which materialism has become a god and the persecution of Christians has become commonplace. Can you picture a world in which these things are not only a reality, but the norm? If you responded, “That describes our world now. That description fits our culture today,” you would be correct.

Indeed, it’s true. Our 21st century world is filled with all of the negatives and unpleasantness that we’ve described. Yet an examination of history reveals that those same descriptors also applied to the world in which the 1st century church operated. The early Christians encountered the same challenges of immorality, materialism, corruption, persecution, and skepticism that confront us today.

The irony is that the 1st century church turned the world upside down for Jesus Christ in the face of these obstacles that have brought the 21st century church to its knees. How is it that they set the world on fire with the Gospel, and yet, at times, we seem to barely survive?

### **A Crisis of Identity in the 21st Century Church**

We must ask ourselves, “What did the 1st century Christians have that made such a difference?” After all, the 21st century church is much better equipped than its 1st century counterpart in many ways. We have capable and professional leaders, gifted communicators who are well-educated and armed with the latest ministry techniques and methodologies. We have a wealth of creative materials and tools to assist us in sharing the Gospel. We possess tremendous material blessings in the form of money and facilities. We have access to technologically advanced means of communication that allow us to beam the message of Christ around the globe. But despite all the resources we have at our disposal, the Western world is less open and receptive to Christianity than ever before.

[NOTE: It is important to recognize that the conditions we have been describing are chiefly symptomatic of Western societies. Churches in other parts of the world are facing their own unique challenges. In Africa, for instance, Christianity has experienced such phenomenal growth that there is a pressing need for an increase in the number of church leaders, as well as the establishment of effective processes by which to train them (Snook, 1992). As we tackle the issues affecting the church within our own societal context, we must remain aware of the varied challenges confronting Christians throughout the world.]

**The Identity of the Early Church** One key ingredient the early Christians possessed that the contemporary Western church seems to be missing is a clear sense of identity. The 1st century church had an identity as a people of love. You could not have looked into the early Christian community without finding people who were committed to a deep and profound Spirit-led intimacy with the God who is love. Furthermore, those early believers expressed that same love for one another as they gathered in fellowship. They took seriously the words of Jesus: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). The 1st century church embodied this imperative as they partnered together, freely shared their material goods, and actively lived out *agape* love.

This commitment to love was unmistakably the central aspect of the church’s identity. Had their contemporaries asked, “Who are those Christians?” the reply would most likely have been, “Oh, they are the people who have a deep, loving relationship with Jesus, who claimed to be the Messiah. They are the people who have a deep, loving relationship with one another. They are the people who know how to love.”

Indeed, several surviving works from the first few centuries of the Church’s existence convey these very themes in their descriptions of the early Christians. In his *Apologeticus* of AD 197, Tertullian exclaimed, “See how these Christians love one another.” The anonymous author of the 2nd century *Epistle to Diognetus* remarked of the early Christians, “They love all men . . . They are poor, yet make many rich . . . What the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world.” Such descriptions reflect the fact that the 1st century Christians placed great priority on those things that Jesus deemed most central to the faith. When the Pharisees asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment in the Scriptures, He responded by choosing one verse from Deuteronomy and one from Leviticus and explaining their importance to those who awaited His answer: “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and mind and with all your soul and with all your strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second commandment is like it:

Love your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 22:37–39). The 1st century church lived out the Great Commandment as they demonstrated their love for God and for one another.

In contrast, how do you think the average person of our day would answer the question, “Who are those Christians?” They would probably say, “Oh, those are the people who don’t believe in. . . . That’s the group who insists on believing in. . . . Oh, yes, Christians are the ones who protest against. . . .”

Are the things we as Christians believe in, insist on, or protest against unimportant? Certainly not—at least not all of them. But as significant as those things may be, they must not become our sole identity. The 1st century church had a clear identity—an identity of love. That is what is often missing in our churches today. We must be a people who know how to love God and love others. When we lack this identity of love, we present a distorted view of faith, worship, and God, and we hinder our world from coming to know Christ.

**Relational leadership is needed  
to help restore an identity of  
love to the 21st century church.**



## Personal Exercise #1

We have described the early church as those who “turned the world upside down for Christ.” Take special note of the following characteristics of the 1st century church, as it is described in the Book of Acts:

- They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42).
- They had a reputation of unity (v. 44).
- They generously shared personal goods with those in need (v. 45).
- Others took note that they had been with Jesus (4:13).
- They spoke the Word of the Lord with boldness (v. 31).
- They were of one heart and mind (v. 32).
- With great power, they gave witness, and abundant grace was upon them (v. 33).
- The people held them in high esteem (5:13).
- Multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number (v. 14).
- They rejoiced that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame in His name (v. 41).

Take a moment and look over this list of characteristics again. Then finish the following sentence:

*I would like to see more of the 1st century church expressed in the 21st century church. I would most like to see more . . . because . . .*

(For example: *I would most like to see more unity because disagreements in the church can be so harmful.*)

As directed by your facilitator, share your responses with one or two other participants, or with the entire group. You may want to record these responses in the Team Journal at the end of the chapter.



**The Need for Restored Identity** After examining the life of the early Christian community, it quickly becomes apparent that what the 21st century church needs most is not a *new* identity, but a *restoration* of our identity as a people of love. Could we not benefit greatly from more fully knowing how to love God and love others?

Imagine God looking down on our world where love has grown cold. Imagine Him saying, “Church, I have revealed Myself to you in My Word. I have given you the 66 books of the Bible that tell you what I want you to know. These books contain thousands of verses that give you wisdom and guidance for your life. Out of all these 66 books, do you think that you could live just four or five verses?” If God said that, which verses do you think He might want us to live out?

Undoubtedly, He would remind us of Christ’s answer to the Pharisees and His charge to the disciples: “I want you to be a people who experience and express the Great Commandment heart of love, and then go forward to fulfill the Great Commission—making disciples of all the nations” (see Matthew 22:37–40; 28:19, 20).

Consider Christ’s words to the disciples in the Upper Room. Jesus was about to die and depart from His friends, the leaders of His church. His final instructions included a very simple commandment. John 13:34, 35 tells us what was on Christ’s heart as He prepared His leaders: “A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

In Christ’s charge to the disciples, we find three things. First, He gave them a purpose: “Love one another.” Second, He affirmed the basis of their identity, thus sustaining their life purpose: “You are ones who have been loved.” Finally, Christ offered up His vision for them: “The world will know you are My disciples because of your love for one another.” Jesus’ strategy was clear and revolutionary—as we come to experience Christ’s love for us, we will be challenged with the call to love one another, and that testimony of love will draw others to Him.

The principle seems so simple, so obvious. “Love one another, as I have loved you.” Yet this brief commandment is the key to relevance and effectiveness for the 21st century church. We believe that the Western church has experienced the residual blessings that go along with centuries of strong Christian beliefs and influences. However, many who became believers in recent years have had no one to teach them how to live out the relational aspects of the Gospel.

Effective discipleship that equips believers to truly love God and love others has been scarce. Therefore, the Western church has spent decades focusing on believing the “right” doctrines and behaving in the “right” ways. It is this narrow focus on belief and behavior, apart from authentic relationship, that has contributed to the irrelevance, dysfunction, and decline of the church in the Western world. Reversing these trends will require the 21st church to rediscover its relational roots. Similarly, the challenge for the rest of the world will be to avoid the mistakes of Western Christianity and, instead, fully embrace the identity that Christ declared in the Upper Room. All of us are people who are loved. Western and non-Western churches alike must embark on the journey of loving one another and expressing that love to a world without Christ so that they may be led to relationship with Him.

It is certainly not difficult to see that we are living in a world that needs to hear our testimony of a Savior who loves them. Neighbors are doing heartless things to neighbors. Nations are inflicting horrific destruction on other nations. Parents are cruel to children. Children are hurtful to parents and to one another. Doesn't it make sense that our God would want to send into this broken world a group of people, His church, which truly knows how to love?

The hard truth we must face is that the Western church has lost its identity; and as a result, our ministry lacks relevance and significance. Despite our best efforts and tireless exertion, we have little meaningful impact on the world around us. In order to change the church of today and increase the degree to which it can influence society in positive ways, we must have changed leaders.

### **Crises Among Those Who Lead**

Just as the church is experiencing a crisis in its identity, church leaders also frequently face crises. We see evidence of this when we look at the “leadership vacuum”—the lack of qualified leaders to fill the God-anointed role of leading His people to become what He wants them to be. In some developing countries, people are coming to Christ at such a rapid pace that churches cannot keep up with the need for leaders to shepherd and disciple these new flocks.

We also see signs of a leadership crisis as we witness the moral and ethical failures that seem to grip so many leaders today. These failures are destroying our witness to a dying world and undermining the faith of the people of God. The growing divorce rate of leadership marriages and

the failure of many leaders to pass faith on to their children provide evidence of the devastating toll that ministry can take on the family. There is also an alarmingly high rate of burnout among Christian leaders, many of whom report being ill-prepared to fulfill their call to ministry. Finally, and perhaps most tragically, many ministers admit that they have few close friends with whom they can safely share their struggles (Fuller Institute, 1991). Largely as a result of these varied crises in the lives of Christian leaders, the average tenure of pastors in Protestant churches has declined to just four years (Barna, 1998).



## **Personal Exercise #2**

Think about a time when your own Christian growth was painfully impacted by ill-prepared, morally or ethically compromised, or burned-out leaders. When might you have been hurt, disappointed, or saddened by someone in Christian leadership?

Share your responses with your partner or small group. Make this an opportunity to express care for one another, not an opportunity for complaint or criticism. Leave out names or details that would identify a specific leader. Expressions of care might sound like:

*I really regret that happened.*

*It makes me sad to hear about. . . .*

*I am very sorry. I know it must have hurt when. . . .*

As directed by your facilitator, either share your responses with one or two participants or with the whole group. Be certain to give care to one another as each person shares. Your caring words might sound like the examples above. You may want to record these responses in the Team Journal at the end of the chapter.

## **Crises in Our Approaches to Leadership**

Not only are there signs of crisis in the lives of church leaders, there is also evidence of crisis in our fundamental approaches to leadership. Even when our leaders manage to avoid the pitfalls of moral failure, family dysfunction, and burnout, there is often a great chasm between the leadership principles that they implement and what God desires. There are a variety of secular approaches to leadership that have found their way into the 21st century church. Here are a few examples you may recognize:

**Chief Executive Officer.** In this approach, one person, or a group of persons, tells everyone else what to do. There is no doubt that the church can sometimes benefit from a decisive leader who can take charge in critical moments. However, we must be careful not to endorse a domineering leadership style that can obscure the passion that God has for His people and become a hindrance to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

**Classic Management.** This leadership style endorses using people and resources in order to accomplish tasks. Its motto is, “Get things done through people.” Dr. John Kotter of the Harvard School of Business has made reference to the fact that most businesses in the Western world are over-managed and under-led (Kotter, 1996), and, unfortunately, this is true of many churches as well. One of the painful things about this approach is that people end up feeling used. People will respond to a great vision, but they will typically resist being used.

**Management by Committee.** In this approach, leaders seek to gain the approval of a majority of the people and equate that approval with the will of God.

**Do What Everyone Else Is Doing.** In this approach, leaders clearly identify a problem within their group, find someone else who has solved a similar problem, and then work hard to sell the people on someone else’s solution. Often the leaders must expend enormous energy to overcome the people’s resistance.

If we are not careful, we will introduce these worldly principles into the body of Christ and quench the moving of the Holy Spirit among His people.



### **Personal Exercise #3**

Have you been painfully impacted by one of these approaches to leadership?

Share your responses with your partner or small group. Again, make this an opportunity to express care for one another, not an opportunity for complaint or criticism. Expressions of care might sound like:

*I really regret that happened.*

*It makes me sad to hear about. . . .*

*I am very sorry. I know it must have hurt when. . . .*

As directed by your facilitator, either share your responses with one or two participants or with the whole group. Be certain to express care as each member shares. Your caring words might sound like the examples given above. You may want to record these responses in the Team Journal at the end of the chapter.

## **Crises in the Results**

Finally, the 21st century church is facing crises in its results. Consider the following:

- Almost 90 percent of churches in the Western world are stagnant, declining, or plateaued (Fuller, 1991).
- Of the ten percent of churches in the United States that are actually growing, less than one-third are growing by the conversion of unbelievers (Fuller, 1991).
- It is estimated that between 3,500 and 4,000 churches close each year in the United States. One of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. real estate market consists of churches that are being abandoned.

These statistics point to a disturbing reality in contemporary Western society, one that Dr. George Barna addresses concisely and convincingly: “Americans today are more devoted to seeking spiritual enlightenment than at any previous time during the twentieth century. Yet, at this moment of opportunity, Christianity is having less impact on people’s perspectives and behaviors than ever. Why is that? Because a growing majority of people have dismissed the Christian faith as weak, outdated, and irrelevant” (Barna, 1998).

If we keep doing what we have been doing, we are going to keep getting the results we have been getting. The fact is that our churches are perfectly designed to achieve the results they are currently producing. Therefore, if we sense that God is satisfied with these results, we should continue with business as usual. But if we sense His displeasure, we must insist on change.

## **WHAT TYPE OF LEADERSHIP DO WE NEED?**

If the church is to truly become an agent for effectively drawing the world to Christ, its leaders will have to embrace the life-changing impact that comes from intimately knowing Christ and fully experiencing what it means to be loved by Him. In other words, we must be relational leaders. A relational leader will know his or her own identity with certainty: “I am a person who is loved by God.” Out of that identity, you can boldly declare what the Christian life is all about. We will not only be leaders who believe right doctrine and display right behavior, but leaders who also know how to love. The Spirit will sustain our ministry to others as we make a sacrificial commitment to tell the world, “We’ve been loved by the One who is love!”

Creating a church with a restored identity and restored relevance will require leaders of a different kind. It will require leaders who think beyond programmed events or competitive advantage. The 21st century church needs leaders whose focus is not solely on planning the next activity or offering the best opportunities for people. The church needs leaders who are not preoccupied with what other churches are doing and who do not strive to stay on the cutting edge of ministry merely to avoid falling behind in attendance or status. Finally, the church must have leaders who are personally prepared for the ministry ahead of them, fully equipped to minister first to their spouse and children and then to the congregation as a whole. Relational leadership is needed to help restore an identity of love to the 21st century church. But what is relational leadership?

### **Relational Leadership Defined**

We define *relational leadership* as follows: “serving others to build a caring and connected team, which identifies and accomplishes significant and lasting objectives, as all are sacrificially committed to growth in love.”

***Relational leadership is “serving others to build a caring and connected team, which identifies and accomplishes significant and lasting objectives, as all are sacrificially committed to growth in love.”***

This course will thoroughly explore what this definition actually means in the lives of leaders and those they lead. For the present, we will briefly expand each part of the above definition.

**A Person: Called by God to Become a Servant.** A relational leader is called by God to minister to

others. This calling is more than a vocational choice or a preferred way of spending our time. Rather, it is a sense that God offers each of us the opportunity to utilize our gifts, talents, and life for His glory. Because relational leaders take this opportunity seriously, they will closely examine their preparedness to lead and serve others. They must possess certain spiritual and relational gifts and most certainly must discover their proper placement within the church. Some are called to minister the Word, and some are called to serve tables. Either way, all leaders serve, and all believers lead (see Acts 6:2-4; Gangel, 1981).



**A Team: Caring and Connected.** A relational leader works to build fellowship among a group of people “fitly joined together” through their experience of what the Bible calls fellowship or *koinonia*. Interestingly, there are two connotations of the word *koinonia*, each of which reveals a fundamental aspect of a caring and connected team. First, groups that experience *koinonia* learn to share their hearts and lives with one another vulnerably. Second, these people become committed partners in pursuit of a purpose centered on the divine and the eternal. True *koinonia* includes both the blessing of edifying relationships and the partnering together in God’s Great Commission purpose (Hendriksen, 1962).

**A Vision: For Eternal Priorities and Objectives.** Out of the servant’s heart comes a desire to build a connected and caring team. From the fellowship within this team comes the discernment, empowerment, and implementation of common vision for significant and lasting impact for the cause of Christ.

**A Commitment to and Plan for Growth.** The relational leader must first build a caring team and cast a vision for lasting, eternal objectives. But the relational leader must also commit to growth, including personal growth, the growth of other individuals, and ministry growth. We must realize, however, that growth is not primarily dependent upon what is said or how much is done. A plan for growth must not stop with developing better methods for communicating to people. It must not center on ways to conceive and present enticing events. It must not be concerned with erecting more attractive buildings. An effective growth plan must focus on spiritual and relational growth.



## **Personal Exercise #4**

Review the four parts of the Relational Leadership definition and then ask yourself, “Which part of the definition might need to be strengthened in my own life?” Complete the following sentences:

*As I look at my own leadership, the relational leadership concept that I need to strengthen is . . .*

- *having a heart to serve others.*
- *building a caring and connected team.*
- *discerning and casting vision relationally.*
- *planning for growing myself, others, and our ministry in His love.*

*I think God would want this change in me because . . .*

Share your responses with one or two others, then pray together, asking God to strengthen you or change you in at least one area of leadership. You may want to record these responses in the Team Journal at the end of the chapter.

## **THE MOTIVATION FOR CHANGE: CHRIST'S STARTLING LOVE**

In order for leaders to infuse this identity of love into the 21st century church, they will have to startle people with God's love. For leaders to even understand what that means, they will first have to experience the startling love of Jesus for themselves. Let us take a look at how Jesus startled the people He encountered.

First, Jesus said many startling things. As a young lad, He got lost in the intrigue of the synagogue and said to Mary and Joseph, "I must be about my Father's business." In His first sermon, Christ took a scroll of Isaiah and said, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me and is compelling me to preach the gospel." That certainly shocked those in attendance because He went on to explain, "Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus startled the lame man when He told him, "Rise and walk." Christ startled the blind men when He announced, "Your faith has made you well." The Savior filled His conversations with words that startled those around Him (see Luke 2:49; 4:16–21; 5:24; Matthew 9:29).

Jesus also did a lot of startling things. He surprised others when He broke social norms by talking to a Samaritan woman (John 4:7–26) and eating with tax collectors (Luke 19:5–7). He gave thoughtful recognition to widows (21:2–4) and children (Mark 10:14–16), and publicly criticized the arrogance of the well-placed, the well-educated, and the well-to-do. Christ's miracles were also undoubtedly startling to those around Him. He walked on water (Matthew 14:25) and turned water into wine (John 2:1–11). He healed people of disease (Luke 4:40), cured birth defects (Matthew 12:10–13), and even raised people from the dead (John 11:1–44). He calmed furious winds with the spoken word and commanded the billowing waves of the sea to cease (Mark 4:37–41).

Christ's words were startling and His miracles amazing, but what He said and what He did was primarily meant to call attention to how He loved. Take a moment and reflect on how Jesus loved people and how He startled them with His love.

Jesus startled the lepers by bringing healing to their bodies and dignity to their lives (Luke 17:12). As outcasts, they must have ached for the accepting touch of a family member, the warm embrace of a friend. Christ's healing touch brought restoration of both body and soul. Jesus startled a Samaritan woman when He broke all cultural conventions and asked for a drink of water (John 4:7). In the midst of her shame and her sense of having been rejected by her

community, the Savior entrusted her with a conversation about things eternal. With His grace-filled eyes, Christ saw past her life choices and offered her His love. Jesus startled the woman caught in adultery when He knelt down beside her, joining her at the point of her hurt and providing protection for her life. Jesus' words dispersed her accusers and then offered restoration as He lovingly said, "Where are your accusers? Neither do I accuse you. Go and sin no more" (see John 8:3–11).

All the way to Calvary, Christ startled people with His love. Imagine Him hanging on the cross between heaven and earth, this One who knew no sin, absorbing all of the world's sin into Himself. Imagine how He must have startled those Roman soldiers—the ones who had driven nails into His hands, pierced His side, and tortured His body—as He looked at them and said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34)." Think about the thief who was crucified next to Christ. After a lifetime of deception, he must have been startled to hear the words, "Today you will be with Me in paradise" (v.43). Finally, Jesus looked down from the cross and saw His mother Mary standing with His beloved disciple John. Once again, He displayed His startling love. Looking ahead to His approaching death, He made provision for His mother by saying, "Mary, behold your son; John, behold your mother" (see John 19:26, 27). The Bible says that from that day forward, Mary lived in the house of John.

In your mind, picture Jesus in agony on the cross. He is prepared to take upon Himself the sins of the world. He will soon sense His own Father turn His back on Him, and will cry out, in a voice that conveys a feeling of utter abandonment: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Yet there He hangs, still startling people with His love. He is the One dying, and yet He is thinking of everyone else. He is giving up His life, yet He is still giving of Himself so that others might know His love. That is the startling love of Christ. It is this startling love that we must first experience and then embody if we are to become relational leaders, leaders who will embrace the identity of the 1st century church while striving to revive and renew its 21st century descendant.



## Experiencing the Word Together

“He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:32)?

Imagine Christ hanging on the cross. He is preparing to die. He’s taking on the sins of the world, about to do battle with the forces of evil, yet He is thinking of someone else. That someone else is you. Christ has been beaten and tortured, but He’s thinking of your hurts and your pain. Jesus is about to provide redemption for all of mankind, yet He’s mindful of you and your concerns. He’s interested in your life, your circumstances, and your salvation. Christ is about to die because He wants a relationship with you. What does it do to your heart to consider all that Jesus endured, and to recognize that He did it for you?

*As I reflect on God’s gift for me in the death of His Son, and consider that He did it because He wants a relationship with me, I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because . . .*

Share your feelings with your partner or small group, then take turns giving thanks to God in prayer. Pray a prayer of gratitude that Jesus died just for you!

Now, take a moment and consider how you might have experienced the love of Jesus in addition to Calvary. When have you sensed the startling, surprising love of Christ for you? What other things has God graciously given to you? Take a moment to pray and ask God to bring to your mind an example that brings gratefulness to your heart. Did He startle you with His healing? With His acceptance? Did Jesus surprise you with His forgiveness or amaze you with His restoration? Did He startle you with His provision or a reassurance of His presence?

Consider how you might complete the following sentence:

*I recall a time when I \_\_\_\_\_, and Jesus startled me with His love.*

Share your response with your partner or small group. Celebrate the gracious gifts of Jesus’ love for you.



## **My Team Journal**

■ What insights did you gain as a result of this session? What did you come to know about the individuals in your team?

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■ What did each person share about their desires for more expressions of the identity of the 1st century church? These responses will give you insight into how to express the “startling love of Christ” to each team member.

Name:

Responses:

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■ What did each team member share about the painful impact of church leaders? How have they been negatively affected by secular approaches to leadership?

Name:

Responses:

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■ What leadership concept did each person want to strengthen? What does each person want to do differently?

Name:

Responses:

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■ Given all you have come to know about your team, how might you better love each one?

Name:

Ways I can love them:


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## Chapter 1 Outline

### **I. Why Do We Need a Different Type of Leadership?**

#### **A. The Crisis of Identity in the Church**

1. What did the 1st century church have that appears to be missing in the 21st century church?
2. How do you think non-Christians today would answer the question, “Who are Christians?”

#### **Personal Exercise #1**

#### **B. Crises Among Church Leaders**

1. What kinds of problems do we see today among Christian leaders?
2. Have you or someone you know been hurt by a leader’s moral/ethical failure? By a divorce or other breakdown in a leader’s family? By a leader who was suffering from burnout?

#### **Personal Exercise #2**

#### **C. Crises in Our Approaches to Leadership**

1. Secular approaches to leadership brought into Christian leadership:
  - a. Chief executive officer
  - b. Classic management: “Get things done through people.”
  - c. Management by committee
  - d. “Do what everyone else is doing.”
2. Have you ever been negatively affected by leaders who used one of these approaches within a church or ministry?

#### **Personal Exercise #3**



D. Crises in the Results

1. Almost 90 percent of churches in the Western world are declining or “plateaued.”
2. Of the ten percent of churches that are growing, only a very small percentage of them actually increase by “conversion growth.”
3. An estimated 3,500–4,000 churches will close in America this year.
4. People are increasingly open to spiritual things, but are increasingly less interested in Christianity.

**II. What Type of Leadership Do We Need?**

A. A Person: Called by God to Become a Servant

1. Example of servant leadership in Acts 6
2. All leaders serve (some serve tables, some serve the Word).

B. A Team: Caring and Connected

1. Fellowship/*koinonia*: sharing our lives with each other
2. Sharing as partners with purpose

C. A Vision: For Eternal Priorities and Objectives

1. Vision for what matters: the cause of Christ
2. Vision developed within the team (not by just one leader)

D. A Commitment to and Plan for Growth

1. Both individually and collectively as a team
2. Not simply by what we say or do, but by startling people with His love

**Personal Exercise #4**

**III. The Motivation for Change: Christ’s Startling Love**

**Experiencing the Word Together**

**My Team Journal**



## **Additional Resources**

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