



Lead Like Jesus: Part 1

WEEK 2



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Sermon 2: Lead Like Jesus: The Attributes of a Leader – John 13:1-17

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Introduction

Grab your Bibles and turn with me to John 13. While you're turning, I heard a joke one time about a pastor and his song leader.¹ The pastor wasn't a particularly good leader, and they didn't get along very well. Eventually, the tension between the pastor and song leader started to spill over into the Sunday morning services. One Sunday, the pastor talked about the importance of being a giver. Afterward, the song leader got up and led the song "Jesus Paid It All". The next week, the pastor talked about not gossiping and watching your tongue. The song leader got up and led the song "I Love to Tell the Story". Another week, he talked about being willing to change. The song leader got up and led the song "I Shall not be Moved." The pastor was so frustrated that he resigned. He told the congregation, "Jesus brought me here, and Jesus is taking me away." The song leader then led, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

I think everyone in the room over the age of 16 can relate to that. Everyone in this room who has ever had a job has had a boss or someone in a leadership position over them who wasn't

1. Mary Mancee, "Some Random Thoughts," accessed August 12, 2024, <https://marymancee.com/2023/11/29/joel-osteens-jokes-part-2/>.

very good at their job. And the best day of your life in that job was when they left or when you left.

We looked at this last week. God designed us to be leaders. It's baked into his creation design. God created humanity to lead everything that he had created. God created a structure of operations where we are all created equal but not the same. He's given us different roles and leadership responsibilities. In the beginning, it was perfect, just like everything else.

But the first sin completely corrupted every aspect of God's design, including his design for leadership. You can see it as part of the curse in Genesis 3. From that moment forward, both men and women want to dominate people and push people down. We want power and control. And we don't want anyone else to have power and control over us. So, not only do we try to dominate, but we also rebel against the structure God has put in place. So, there's a constant tension between being created to function in a certain way while also fighting against that structure. That idea, all by itself, would create bad bosses and bad leaders.

But then, the problem is exacerbated by a complete lack of understanding about God's design for leadership, how it should operate, how it should function, and what it should look like. Jesus's redemptive work on the cross is a complete redemption of God's design. Through Jesus's atoning work, he made it possible to restore God's entire original design completely. The problem we have is that most people don't actually understand what leadership is and where it comes from.

I taught on this a while back, and I started by giving 5 things leadership is not. I think that's a helpful place to begin this morning. Today, we're going to begin to understand how to lead our homes, our churches, and our communities like Jesus. And I think the best place to start is to get rid of some notions about leadership that are not true. So, here are five things leadership is not.

5 Things Leadership is Not

Number 1, *leadership is not position*.² Leadership really has nothing to do with the position you occupy or a position someone occupies over you. Just because someone may have a higher title than you or because they may occupy a higher rank on the org chart than you, that doesn't make them the leader.

2. John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 5. Maxwell discusses this concept by writing, "A person may be 'in control' because he has been appointed to a position. In that position, he may have authority. But real leadership is more than having authority."

Smart pastors instinctively know this. You guys are just beginning the pastor search process. If all goes well, in a few months, you'll have your new pastor here. He will have the title of pastor, but he will not be the leader of the church.

Theoretically, he will be the leader. In principle, he will be the leader. I know you guys well enough to know your hearts and to know your love for the Word, and you know God's Word talks about pastoral leadership of the church. God calls men to be the undershepherds of Jesus and to lead the church. You know this. You will affirm that, but you will not follow that, not very far anyway. You will allow your pastor to lead within a very narrow band that doesn't require much and does not challenge much.

That, by the way, is not an indictment of this church. It's an acknowledgment that leadership has nothing to do with position. You won't know the new pastor. You won't trust him. And you won't follow him very far.

I understood this concept when I got to our church. There was a man there. His name was Cliff Sturdivant. And Cliff was, and still is, one of the godliest men I've ever known. I love him. My wife and children love him. And he loves us. He calls me the son he never had. He had three daughters.

But Cliff was the chairman of the deacon body when I first got there. He had been a deacon since 1991 or something. As the chair of the deacon body, he loved the church through some really difficult times. He served God's people extremely well. Long before I got there, they had a church split. Then, they had a pastor who wasn't a great fit. During these difficult seasons, Cliff was the one who held it all together. He loved the people well.

Now, when the church voted to call me as their pastor, who was the real leader of the church? I was in principle, but in practice, Cliff was the leader of the church. If I had put the church in a conflict position where they had to choose between me (who they really didn't know) and what I wanted to do and Cliff (who had loved and served them well) and what he wanted to do, they would have followed Cliff every single time. That's because leadership doesn't have anything to do with position.

Second, *leadership is not personality*. We tend to think that you have to have big, charismatic personality to be a great leader. Again, that's not true.

Did you know that Warren Buffet is an introvert? Bill Gates is intensely introverted. Elon Musk is introverted. These men built some of the largest and most profitable companies in the history of the world. They are great leaders. They do not have big personalities.

Abraham Lincoln, widely regarded as one of the greatest presidents in the history of our nation, was an introvert and viewed by his own party as lacking sufficient intellect to run the nation. I won't bore you with the history, but many of our nation's greatest leaders did not have

big, charismatic personalities. There is no correlation between personality type and leadership effectiveness.

But what happens is people tend to follow the loudest voice in the room, so we think that's what leadership looks like. The truth is that doesn't have anything to do with leadership and everything to do with conflict avoidance. Most people would rather go along to get along than to have a conflict with someone. But leadership doesn't have anything to do with personality.

Third, *leadership is not popularity*. The idea of leadership as a popularity contest is instilled in us as children. The most popular kids in school are seen as "the leaders of the school," so we think that the most popular people are the best leaders.

Leadership has nothing to do with popularity. In fact, good leadership can often be the most unpopular thing in the world. But, I think, the reason people tend to follow popular people is because of a very basic value proposition. People value popularity. They want to be popular. And they think they can have popularity by proxy if they follow a popular person or hang around with them or whatever. That doesn't have anything to do with being able to lead your home, family, or church well. Leadership is not popularity.

Fourth, *leadership is not power*. And this is where we really struggle. When we say we want to be leaders, what we really mean is that we want to have power. Specifically, we want the power to do what we want to do and the power to control other people. Right? When we desire a leadership role, most of the time, what we desire is the freedom from the control of others and the ability to control others. I hate to break it to you, that's not leadership.

There is a difference between forcing obedience and instilling loyalty. Dictators are able to force obedience, but they do not instill loyalty. People do not love the dictator. They are afraid of the dictator. They are not leaders. They are monsters. Leadership is not about power and control. If you want to be a leader because you want power and control, there's some heart work that God is going to have to do there to get you to where you need to be. Leadership is not power.

And number five, *leadership is not private*. This requires a paradigm shift in our minds. Leadership is not about me and my personal success. Most people want to be leaders because they want freedom from control and freedom to control so that they can be personally and privately successful. They attempt to use people and manipulate people to get what they want. That is not leadership.

Leadership is not about my success. If I am an effective pastor, my leadership isn't about me. My leadership is about you and how successful I can help you become. When the group is successful, then I'm successful.

It's the same way in my home. If I am a godly leader in my home, it has absolutely nothing to do with my wife and children being obedient and doing what I want them to do. The entire direction of my leadership is not inward. It's outward. I want to put them in a position to be emotionally healthy, physically successful, and spiritually sound. And if I am able to do that for them, then I'm a successful leader. It's not about me and what I want. It's not private. Leadership is public. Good leadership is for the benefit of others.

So, leadership is not position, personality, popularity, power, or private. So, what is leadership then? What is good leadership?

I'll give you the simplest and most concise definition of leadership that I've found. It comes from John Maxwell. *Leadership is influence*.³ Your capacity to influence the decisions and actions of others is your capacity to lead. So, when we're talking about leadership, what we're really asking is, "How can I influence the people around me?" In a specifically Christian context, we are asking, "How can I influence the people around me for the glory of God and their own good?"⁴

The primary purpose of leadership is to make the glory of God known.⁵ That's what's baked into God's design. He created both men and women to lead so that we can make His glory known, and in making His glory known, the human soul can be satisfied. So, what we really need to discover is how we can influence others so that they can see the glory of God.

How do we do that? How do we expand our influence for the glory of God? Well friends, that begins with you. If you want to lead well, the first person you have to lead is yourself. The main thing I want you to take away this morning is that biblical leadership is inside out. Leadership, the way God designed it, flows from your character. It is not necessarily something you do. It is something you are. So, if you want to be a good husband, father, wife, or mother, if you want to lead your home well, it begins with you and your development. That's because you teach what you know, but you reproduce who you are.⁶

3. Maxwell. *Developing the Leader Within*, 1.

4. Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 62. The definition of leadership I offer is inspired, in part, by Geiger and Peck's focus on the purpose of leadership. They write, "The primary purpose of our leadership mandate is to make known the glory of God by leading others to flourish in God's design."

5. Ibid.

6. This is a quote I've heard phrased in numerous ways. I am unable to locate the origins of the quote. John Maxwell used it in his work *Be A People Person: Effective Leadership Through Effective Relationships*. Brad Lomenick used it in *H3 Leadership*. Jack Frost used a version of it in *Experiencing Fathers Embrace*.

I'll never forget sitting in the hospital after Noah was born. You know, becoming a dad tends to change you. As I was sitting in the hospital room holding this newborn baby boy, I got lost in thought while I was looking at him. Alisha said to me, "What are you thinking about?" It, sort of, washed over me in that moment, and I said, "I can never expect him to be something I'm not."

Listen, that's where influence comes from. It flows from your character. Your character shapes your attitudes, how you perceive the people, situations, and ideas around you. And your attitudes drive your actions. So, if you want to be an effective leader in your home, church, and community, then you have to have the character to lead.

That's why we're in John 13. This week and next week, we're looking at how to lead like Jesus. Jesus is the most influential man in the history of the world. Because he is the most influential man in the history of the world, he's the greatest leader in the history of the world. Nobody in the history of the world, has influenced more people to help them see the glory of God more than Jesus. We don't often think of Jesus in terms of leadership, but he is absolutely the greatest leader to have ever lived.

So, this week and next week, we're going to see the attributes, attitudes, and actions of a leader. This morning, we're looking at some of the attributes that made Jesus the most influential leader of all time.

Attributes are character traits. They are foundational blocks that form who you are at the core of your being. Everything about you flows from your attributes. How you think and act in any given situation is directly tied to your character as a leader. And so, in John 13, we're going to see five attributes that great Christian leaders must possess.

The Five Attributes of a Leader

Let's read the first ten verses in John 13 to get us started.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share

with me.”⁹ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.”¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

Now, the first thing I want you to see here about Jesus is his integrity. *Great leaders have integrity.* Look at verse one again. “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

Alright, let’s get nerdy with this. Everyone loves it when I talk about math, but great leaders always have integrity. It’s an attribute of their character. It’s who they are.

The word “integrity” comes from the Latin word *integritas*.⁷ We also get the word “integer” from the root Latin word *integritas*. Now, I know this is a basic review for everyone in this room because we all remember our middle school math lessons, but just in case you don’t remember, there are nine types of numbers: whole, natural, rational, irrational, even, odd, prime, composite, and integers.

An integer is a whole number, meaning it’s not fractional. An integer is not divided in any way. And that idea really informs our understanding of integrity as a character attribute.

Someone who has integrity is not divided. They are complete. There are no double standards for a person with integrity. The person with integrity behaves consistently in all areas at all times.

Right out of the gate in verse one, you see Jesus’s integrity on display. His “hour” had come. What Jesus is talking about there is the realization of everything his entire life had been driving towards.

Remember, a couple of weeks ago, we looked at the theology of the atonement. We said that Jesus’s atoning work was more than just the cross. From conception to the resurrection, the entirety of his life was an atoning work. The cross satisfied the penalty of the law. His sinless life satisfied the component of the law that demands adherence. That was his active and passive obedience.

So, the totality of Jesus’s life and mission has been one undivided and unwavering pursuit of a single cause, the redemption of humanity. And he never failed. His integrity never

7. Jeff Iorg, *The Character of Leadership: Nine Qualities that Define Great Leaders*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 24.

waivered for a fleeting moment. He had to live a perfect life in order for him to accomplish his mission.

This is integrity to the max. This is integrity to the extreme. There was never a single moment in Jesus's entire life where he waivered in his righteous code of ethics and principles. And it says there in the last clause of verse one, "He loved them to the end."

Jesus started it. Jesus finished it. And he never faltered at any point in between. That's integrity to the extreme. We can pursue integrity, but we cannot possess integrity to that level. You can see glimpses of that in humanity, but you see it perfectly in Jesus. He bore the full wrath of God for my sin and for your sin because that was the singular purpose for which he came.

Great leaders must have integrity. Integrity establishes credibility.⁸ When you're thinking about leadership as influence, think about the people that influence you the most. You trust them and you're willing to follow them because you trust them.

I've had some bad bosses in the past. I've had bosses that had zero integrity. I had one boss who schemed, plotted, backstabbed, and slept her way to her position. I didn't trust her as far as I could throw her, and nobody else did either. She lacked integrity. She was a boss, but she was not a leader.

Integrity matters. Internal consistency matters. People who lack integrity have very little influence in your life. If you want to be a leader, you have to develop integrity.

Number two, *great leaders have humility*. Jesus, the Son of God, took on the role of a servant by washing His disciples' feet, a task typically performed by the lowest servant. This act of humility is evident in John 13:4-5: "So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him."

Jesus's action of washing the disciples' feet is outlandish. Peter, to his credit, recognizes the outlandish action. Peter wants no part of it. See verse eight. This is a stunning act of humility.

This was a job reserved for the lowest slave. Some Jews insisted that Jewish slaves shouldn't be required to do this job.⁹ In the Jewish mind, this was a job so low that only the lowest gentile scum should do it. Certainly, peers wouldn't wash one another's feet. It is absolutely unimaginable that Jesus would humble himself like this.

8. Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 80.

9. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 462.

But great leaders are humble. I told you that leadership isn't about position and power and control and personal prestige. This is the corrupted version of God's design for leadership. The type of leadership the world chases, where I have power, where I have control, is the desire of the carnal heart. That leadership says, "Acknowledge me."

Christian leadership is the opposite of that. Jesus taught this numerous times. He said, "The first shall be last" (Matt. 20:16). We prefer the Ricky Bobby version. "If you ain't first your last." We desperately need humble men and women in our homes, churches, and communities.

But I think, more than anything else, we fight this. We want to look humble, but we don't actually want to be humble, and I think that's because we think humility means we are weak or that we will turn into doormats for people to walk all over. Gene Wilkes talks about this in his book *Jesus on Leadership*. He heard a pastor say, "If we exalt ourselves, we will be humbled. If we humble ourselves, we will be exhausted."¹⁰

Humility doesn't mean being a doormat. It doesn't mean allowing someone to mistreat you are taking advantage of you. Humility doesn't mean having a low view of yourself, like your worm in the dirt.

Humility is simply thinking about yourself the way God does. God doesn't see you as lowly and pitiful. It's true we're sinners, but we're also saints. God sees you as infinitely valuable. In fact, we are so treasured by God that he gave his only son to redeem us. The humble leader simply accepts their God-given identity and mission.¹¹

Our identity is in Jesus. We didn't earn our position. It was freely given by the grace of God. And when we identify with him, we behave like him. Look at verse 16. "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him." If Jesus humbled himself, we probably should stop clamoring for our position and our glory. Great leaders have humility.

Number three, *great leaders have love*. In the context of the passage, love comes before humility, but I covered humility first because only humble people can love like Jesus. Look at verse 1 again, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

Every action that Jesus took was motivated by love. This is a character trait. This is an attribute of God. 1 John 4:8 says, "God is love." It also says in verse 7, "Love is from God." So, all we can know of actual love must be defined by looking at God because he is love.

10. C. Gene Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership: Timeless Wisdom on Servant Leadership*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998), 36.

11. Iorg, *The Character of Leadership*, 95.

Our view of love is rarely the same idea of love as God's love. We have such a corrupted, selfish view of love. In our view of love, love is about us. Love is about how we feel. And we will manipulate people and use people to satisfy that sense of longing for love. That's not biblical love.

The emotional love that movies are made about, the emotional love that so many people chase after, is not the purest definition of love. That type of love can be defined as infatuation. That type of love can be defined as lust. That type of love is no type of love at all by any measure of biblical standards. Genuine love, the type of love that can only be defined by God, is a sacrificial love.

You've already had a math lesson this morning, so here's an English lesson to go along with it. Emotions are abstract nouns. That's their syntactic function. They describe abstract ideas, traits, concepts, and qualities. That's what an abstract noun does.

In the Bible, love is not best understood as an abstract noun, but as a verb. In the Bible, love is always moving. It's always doing. It's always giving.

The Bible describes love with a series of adjectives to help us understand it. 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 says, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

You see, love is not a feeling. It carries with it the connotation of action. Love is always doing. How do we know that God loves us? John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave..." Love gives. How do we know that Jesus loves us? "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8-9).

In our text in John 13, Jesus demonstrates the sacrificial nature of love. It has no regard for its own wants, desires, prestige, or power. It is only interested in pouring itself out for the benefit of others.

You can't fake that. That is a character trait. To love like Jesus, love has to be cultivated inside of you so that when you are presented with challenges and opportunities, you instinctively respond like him.

Great leaders love people. It's instinctive. Their first reaction is always to serve the people around them so that they can be successful.

There are frighteningly few people who exhibit this character trait to the fullest. You can have levels of love. Take your friends for an example. You can genuinely want them to be

successful. You can try to help them be successful. You can be happy for their success. And that's reciprocal to a certain level.

There comes a point when a ceiling is reached, and your love turns to jealousy because we want the people we care about to be happy, fulfilled, and successful, but just not that much more than us. When people really begin to eclipse us, we start to pull back. And maybe it's easier to see in the people around you because you've had an experience where you eclipsed them, and they weren't that happy for you. They love you to a certain level. When we reach that level, we're not willing to sacrifice anymore.

I sat in my office for a long time this week and contemplated this idea. I'm in my forties. And over the course of my entire life, I could only think of five people who I could unequivocally say that they've loved me like Jesus, that they invested in me, that they served me, that they would sacrifice for me, and the more successful I become, the happier they are. Five people constitute the totality of that list. Three of them are my mom, my dad, and my wife. So, in my forty years of existence, I can only say with absolute certainty that two people outside of my immediate family have loved me like Jesus.

Do you know what's true about all five? They have massive influence on my life. They could call me anytime for anything, and I would go to the ends of the earth for them. That's great leadership. That's Jesus. Great leaders have love.

Number four, *great leaders have perseverance*. Look and verse 1 again. It says, "He loved them to the end." Jesus finished what he started. Jesus remained steadfast in His mission, teaching and serving His disciples even as His crucifixion approached. His perseverance is evident in His commitment to show them the full extent of His love and prepare them for their future roles.

I love a story I heard about Andrew Jackson.¹² The friends he grew up with couldn't understand how he became a famous general and then the President of the United States. They were sort of bewildered by his success. They knew men who had way more talent but never succeeded in life.

One of Jackson's friends said, "Jim Brown, who lived right down the pike from Jackson, was not only smarter, but he could throw Andy three times out of four in a wrestling match. But look where Andy is now."

Another friend responded, "How did there happen to be a fourth time? Didn't they usually say three times and out?" "Sure, they were supposed to, but not Andy. He would never admit he

12. Sermon Illustrations, "Perseverance," accessed August 12, 2024, <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/perseverance.htm>

was beat -- he would never stay 'threwed.' Jim Brown would get tired, and on the fourth try Andrew Jackson would throw him and be the winner."

Perseverance is a character trait. Perseverance is the quality of never giving up, of staying on mission to the very end, no matter what obstacles you may face.

You develop that through understanding your purpose. Persevering leaders have a purpose. They are on a mission. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He started it, and he finished it.

Persevering leaders have desire. When you have a God-given purpose, you have an unquenchable desire to achieve that purpose. You have to have that. You have to want it. Your life has to be driven by your desire to achieve something and help others around you achieve something.

This is one of the great problems I see. There aren't many people who have a defined purpose of what God has called them to do. Because there is no defined purpose, there is no evident desire to achieve anything. People just kind of float along through life. They may have a desire to do things from time to time, but because there's no sense of purpose, there is no lasting desire, and when things get difficult or tiresome, they quit.

I see this at the gym all the time. January and the beginning of February are full of people who are going to "Get healthy this year." By the end of February, it's the same people who are always there during the week throughout the whole year. It's the same little group grinding away, making incremental progress over the course of years.

The difference between the two groups is that the group that grinds every day, grinds for a greater purpose. Everybody's goals are different. I have my goals defined. In my office, I have what I labeled the fit 50 plan. There are six areas of fitness that I want to achieve goals in by the time I'm fifty.

The physical fitness component was born out the idea that I want to be as useful as possible for as long as possible. I want to be useful to my wife, useful to my children, useful to my grandchildren, and useful to my Lord until the day he calls me home. I don't want to get old and broke down and feeble. So, I have a purpose. The purpose fuels the desire. And because I want it, I persevere when others don't.

It's a pretty simple concept. But all great leaders have perseverance. They have a purpose that drives them to continue on when things get tough. Jesus persevered to the end.

Number five, *great leaders have courage*. It's verse 1 again, "To the end." Jesus knew what the end was. He knew what suffering awaited him and he chose to do it anyway.

The cross is an inconceivable terror to our minds. We can't begin to understand the fullness of the horror of the cross. Beyond the physical torture of it, and it was an excruciating way to die, but beyond that, Jesus became the primary object of God's wrath.

Isaiah 53:5-6 says, "He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned — every one — to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Verse 10 says, "It was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief." We can read those verses, and we can appreciate them, but we can't understand the fullness of them.

God's wrath rests on sinful men. We have transgressed a holy God. We're guilty, and we deserve every drop of wrath that we've got coming to us.

The most common command in the Bible is some form of "Don't be afraid." God repeats that over and over and over again. You don't have to be afraid. You don't have to be afraid.

Do you know what Paul says in Hebrews 10:31? "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid, except for that. You better be afraid of falling into the hands of the living God. The Lord says, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay" (Heb. 10:30). We ought to be terrified of God's wrath. It's the only thing God's word tells us to be afraid of.

Jesus had the courage to take God's wrath for you and for me. He understood the fullness of what that meant. I'm terrified of it because Paul says to be terrified. The whole Bible says not to be afraid. But Paul says, "You better be terrified of God's wrath." I'm afraid because of that. But I don't understand the fullness of what that means. Jesus did. And he took it anyway. This is majestic courage.

If you want to be a leader, you have to have courage. You're not going to have the answers. You're going to have to make difficult decisions that will be deeply unpopular. You will suffer. People will hate you.

Just before I get up to preach, just before every sermon that Alisha is with me, right before I walk up on stage, she looks at me and says, "Preach the word regardless of what it costs us." We know first-hand the hatred that can come from preaching the full counsel of God's word. The Israelites killed every prophet they ever had, up to and including Jesus.

God calls leaders to do things personally and professionally that have a tremendous cost. If you don't have courage, if you're weak-kneed, if you're a gutless, spineless coward, get out of

the way. We don't need any more people who are more concerned about self-preservation than the glory of God. If you want to be a leader, you have to have courage.

There are other attributes leaders can have, but those five are core, foundational principles. If you want to lead like Jesus, if you want to influence and impact those around you, you have to have integrity, humility, love, perseverance, and courage. If you develop only those five character traits, you'll do well.

Call to Action

So, how do we develop them? You've heard the what. So, what? What do we do with this? Well, I've got 10 things for you to develop these character traits. If you want to develop these character traits, you have to do these 10 things.

For integrity, you must have Scripture meditation and consistent accountability. The Word of God has its own work in your heart. It's alive. It's active. It transforms you. If you do not meditate on God's word regularly, you will not be a man or a woman with the integrity you need to lead.

So, you have to have Scripture mediation. And then, you have to have consistent accountability. Peter Drucker, the business guru, said, "What gets measured gets done." You have to have accountability to develop integrity.

Establish regular check-ins with a trusted mentor or peer group to maintain transparency in your actions and decisions. Nothing will produce integrity in your life like the Word, and nothing will reinforce integrity like accountability. When you know you're going to have to give an account for your thoughts and actions to someone else, you'll develop integrity very quickly.

For humility, seek feedback and find service opportunities. If you want to be humbled, actively request constructive criticism from others and embrace it as an opportunity for growth. You guys have sermon evaluations in your hands. It's humbling to receive constructive feedback. It's necessary if you want to be good at anything, but it's humbling.

And so are service opportunities. When you humble yourself, serve behind the scenes, prioritize the needs of others, and help the helpless, it's hard to be proud. Alisha and I love serving at the Nashville Rescue Mission. I can honestly say I have never served dinner to 500 homeless people and left the building thinking I'm the greatest thing in the world. I'm humbled by the grace and blessing that God has given me. Humbling yourself and serving produces more humility.

For love, invest in relationships and practice active listening. Set aside time each week to connect with someone in need of encouragement or support, modeling Christ's love. That's not complicated. Start thinking of someone every day that you can help. Pray for them. Send them a

text or give them a call just to encourage them. You'll start developing a heart for people when you start thinking of how to love people.

And when you talk to people, listen to people. Focus on understanding them rather than figuring out what you're going to say next. It's just a mindset to say, "I'm going to practice empathic listening in my conversations.

So, to develop love, be intentional to invest in a relationship every day, just for the other person's benefit. And be present in your interactions with people. Make them the most important thing in your life at that moment. You'll begin to develop a heart for people.

Fourth, *to develop perseverance, pray and set goals*. Nothing will provide you with more perseverance than prayer. Regularly pray and reflect on God's faithfulness in past difficulties to strengthen resolve for current trials. When you start looking at all the ways God has helped you in the past, you get a different vantage point on present struggles. Spend time in prayer. Ask God what he wants for you next.

Then, set goals. When you know what God has called you to do, break that down into smaller, more manageable tasks and commit to seeing them through, regardless of challenges. A lot of this isn't complicated. I'm giving you a list of things to do to become the leaders God designed you to be. It's a simple list, but it's hard to practice. But I want you to understand this. If you don't have a purpose given to you by God and if you don't have goals to achieve, you will not have perseverance. There's no way around that. If you're going to have perseverance, you have to have a God-given purpose to pursue and goals to meet.

And finally, *for courage, stand for truth and be bold in your obedience*. Be willing to speak out for biblical truths and justice, even if it means standing alone. But understand courage is not internal. Courage is external. We trust in the Lord, not ourselves. Stand up for the truth.

And be bold in your obedience. When you're meditating on God's word and when your spending time in prayer, the Holy Spirit will illuminate certain commands. Do it. Be obedient right then, regardless of the cost.

God told Joshua in Joshua 1:7-8, "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. ⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Those are the 10 things you have to do if you want to lead like Jesus. If you want to develop the character of a leader, take those home and put them into practice.

Now, let me finish with a story about one of the most influential people in my life. I mentioned him earlier. His name is Cliff Sturdivant. As long as it isn't immoral or illegal, there is nothing I wouldn't do for Cliff. He has a massive influence on my life. He has no power over my life. He has no authority over my life, and it doesn't matter. He can call me anytime, day or night, and ask me for anything, and I'll do it. That's a great leader.

And he's a great leader because of his character. We have to be careful about who we allow to influence our lives. Cliff has run his race well. He's in his late seventies now, and for almost eight decades, he's never had a moral failure. He's never had a moral lapse. He has integrity to the max.

Cliff is humble. I introduce him to everyone as "The Legend of Lake County." He's a legendary High School football coach who won state championships in Lake County. He's in the UT Martin Hall of Fame from when he played. I tell everyone only three people have walked on water. Jesus and Peter walked on the Sea of Galilee. Cliff walked across Reelfoot Lake. When I tell people that, it embarrasses him. He's humble.

He has a heart for people. He loves people. He loves me and my family. In fact, I don't think I've ever had another person more invested in my success than Cliff. And I don't think anyone is prouder of me and my family than Cliff is. He loves us. And it's not just us. He loves everyone like that.

He has courage. I've seen him make exceedingly difficult decisions. He has perseverance. Over the course of eighty years, there have been trials and tribulations in his life. He's been through a lot, and he's persevered through all of it. Cliff has the character of Christ.

Now, I want you to understand this. I was a young pastor when I was called to Cliff's church. He's a retired school teacher and football coach. I had the position of the leader, but Cliff was the leader.

He led me. He invested in me. He helped grow me. And because of Cliff's leadership in my life, everything I do, every success that I enjoy, is due, in part, to him. That's the mark of a great leader.

You have people like that in your life. You have people that have that type of influence in your life. The scenario is different but the character is the same. People have done that for you. And God has designed you to do that for others. That's the kind of leader God has designed you to be.

Are you willing to commit to becoming that? Are you willing to commit to developing the character of Christ? I hope so.