



Jesus as a Loving Leader

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In order to empower people, leadership has to be more than titles and positions, and it has to reflect Jesus in every way (Sanderson, 2017). Those who seek to lead others unto Christ should strive to emulate the Savior's example of a loving and empowering leader. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ constitute an unsurpassed example of such leadership. Furthermore, to be motivated by love is foundational to the Christian life. So, we must honestly ask ourselves as Christian leaders, what motivates our faith and leadership approach? Is it our love for Christ? Do we serve because we love? Do we lead because we love our followers or is it the bottom line only?

This chapter shares seven leadership principles based on Jesus' empowerment approach from John 21. Jesus as an empowering and loving leader is an exemplar who illustrated the ties between himself as leader and his love for his mentees and devoted followers. Jesus was flock-focused and a role model to his team whom he loved with unconditional and compassionate love. Jesus had a forgiving heart and empowered his team through

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his leadership approach, which is still appropriate for Christian leaders in contemporary organizational settings.

Love does not thrive as theory on its own. Paramount to effectiveness in leadership is love as a critical value in leadership that is firmly centered in a complex combination of other virtues (Caldwell & Dixon, 2009). Love is identified as the primary motivation for the incarnation of Jesus Christ (John 3:16). Jesus used it to characterize the way in which all of God's laws and commandments can be fulfilled (Matt. 20:37–40). Hackman and Johnson (2013) posited that an exemplar or role model plays a critical role in the development of high moral character of followers. In the study of how Jesus developed the Apostle Peter from Simon Peter to Peter *the rock*, it was evident that, to develop leaders, Jesus needed the right raw materials, the right experiences, and the right lessons learned for his followers to work with.

LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT THEORY

Empowerment has been an important and popular topic in organizations since the 1980s in a variety of circumstances under a variety of conditions. There are ample evidence to suggest that, if honestly applied, it is an organizational force multiplier (Bass, 2012; Chang et al., 2010; Emuwa, 2013; Purvis, 2010; Vecchio et al., 2010; Wright, 2018). Empowerment plays an explicit role in several modern leadership theories (Autry, 2012; Yukl, 2013).

In recent years, several theories and definitions of empowerment have been formulated; however, researchers have not arrived at a collective understanding of its definition (Bayes, 2018; Christens, 2011; Purvis, 2010; Wright, 2018). Some theories in which empowerment plays a substantial role include Bass' (2012) transformational leadership theory, McGregor's X&Y theory, transactional leadership theory, Vroom's expectancy theory, Greenleaf's servant leader theory, leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, Hersey's situational leadership theory, and Northouse's participative leadership theory (Purvis, 2010).

Empowerment plays a significant, but not necessarily a vital role in the workings of theory, and it does not address the issue of potential connectivity between secular empowerment theory and Christian theory (Purvis, 2010). Despite the tremendous popularity of the ideal of empowerment in leadership studies and the business world, there appears to be some disconnect between definition and application (Hoehl, 2008; Bonnet,

2020). Much discussion and debate about empowerment as a concept exist (Bayes, 2018). There is also a gap in the literature regarding the religious aspects of empowerment despite this construct being observed in various religious faith traditions (Purvis, 2010). Despite all the talk, change programs, and research, empowerment is still mostly an illusion and nothing more than lip service (Bayes, 2018; Christens, 2011). This may be a result of some misunderstandings regarding the nature of the empowerment and the implementation of an empowerment strategy (Hoehl, 2008; Purvis, 2010). Also, faith must be proven (1 Pet. 1:6–7) and the *litmus* test for faith is obedience (1 Pet. 1:22–23; 2:7–8), which is challenging to reach agreement on in research.

A general definition by Christens (2011) stated that empowerment consists of “various processes by which people gain greater control over their lives, participate in democratic decision-making, and develop critical awareness” (p. 114). Reza et al. (2010) defined empowerment as “the process coming from relational and psychological foundations...which enables others to gain power, authority, and influence over others, institutions, or society” (p. 65). Empowerment involves the perception by members of an organization that they have the opportunity to determine their work roles, accomplish meaningful work, and influence important events (Yukl, 2013). Empowerment also refers to the way leaders prepare followers to carry out necessary tasks and responsibilities (Wright, 2018; Yukl, 2013).

Concepts having similar meanings as empowerment referred to in literature include words such as delegation of authority, motivation, self-efficacy, job enrichment, employee ownership, autonomy, self-determination, self-control, self-influence, high-involvement, and participative leadership (Lee & Koh, 2001). In the empowerment process it is the leader’s responsibility to initiate the decision to start this transfer of power between leader and follower (Petrucci, 2011). In this chapter, empowerment as a theory refers to the transfer of knowledge and skills from the leader (in this case Jesus) to the follower (in this case Peter).

JOHN 21 AND JESUS’ EMPOWERMENT APPROACH

John 21:1–25 described a post-resurrection encounter between Jesus and seven of the disciples, including Peter and John. The plot of the story revolved around a three-part-question conversation between Jesus and Peter. It served to highlight Jesus’ empowerment approach of Jesus and

the missions of Peter, John, and the other disciples. Jesus' approach in the context of empowerment theory forms the basis of the exegesis of John 21. Christian leaders can learn a lot from Jesus' example as teacher and apply it in their succession planning, mentoring, and skills development to empower followers (Bonnet, 2020). From John 21 it is evident that despite Peter's biggest failures it could not separate him from Jesus' love and Christ' perfect plan for his life, which involved redemption from his biggest failures of betrayal, and despite his moral blunders Peter was still the leader Jesus wanted to lead for his church.

MacArthur (2018) observed that "John 21 is for every one of us. This part of the story needed to be told" (p. 308). It is the duty of every Christian leader to guard what Jesus has entrusted to us (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14), and to pass it on to the next generation (2 Tim. 2:2). Each Christian leader has a responsibility to carry God's message forward, even when they feel weak and frail at times. Part of the purpose of John 21 was that Jesus came to shepherd his wayward sheep by leading them back to sanctification through obedience. This is done by empowering them to recover their usefulness after their public failures so that they can be used for God's kingdom (Klink, 2016). The shepherd and the sheep relationship is used to illustrate Jesus' relationship to his followers who referred to him as "our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20).

According to Wilkins (2017), Jesus' empowerment as a leader was that of a master with disciples as an expression of the relationship that he developed with his followers. John 21:1–25 serves as an example of Jesus' actions empowering his followers. It is important to note that the major actions in John 21 include: (1) direction (i.e., coming, going, and following); (2) discourse; (3) loving; (4) knowing; and (5) feeding (Hoehl, 2008). Through the interaction between Jesus and Simon Peter in verses 15–22 the reader gets a clearer picture of Jesus' empowerment strategies and its applicability for leaders of today.

JESUS HAD A SHEPHERD'S HEART

Leadership with a steward attitude and shepherd's heart can only come from a heart transformed by God, and followed by a deeper understanding of the gospel, so that the transformed Christian leader can live a life of humility, faith, service, prayer, and focusing on emptying of the self (Leahy, 2010; Mathew, 2017). Jesus served the needs of his disciples

and never had an attitude of entitlement. He was known for his humility while serving his followers. Christian leaders must realize that they are servants of God and be humble while serving those around them like Jesus did. Christian leaders as shepherds must feed their sheep, allow the Holy Spirit to transform their hearts, and guide them on the path toward divine truth (Ellsworth, 2007). Such leaders have the wisdom to know that it is all about God's flock, taking care of the sheep, watching over the flock, and laying down their life for His flock (Osborne, 2018).

According to Bonnet (2020), in terms of the updated Petrine Four-Vector Model of Empowerment, one aspect of Jesus' empowerment approach to empower Peter to develop a shepherd's heart included the development of Peter's own competency, ability, agency, and performance as the key elements in this process. This principle of an empowering leader developing a shepherd's heart centers around Jesus' first command to Peter to "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15). Jesus said to Peter that if he (Peter) loved him (Jesus), then Peter should dedicate his life to Christ and tend to, and feed his lambs, with the truth of God's Word. It is vital for Christian leaders to remember that the followers they shepherd are not their flock, but Christ's flock, and that they are placed in their care as leaders to be nurtured and empowered—like Jesus did with Peter (MacArthur, 2018).

The Bible urged that Christian leaders should be accountable for their actions and decisions to God. Jesus gave Peter the accountability to care for Christ' lambs, their well-being, and spiritual formation process. In contemporary organizational settings leaders fail to care for the metaphorical lambs from their positional leadership platforms entrusted to them at the best of times. It is important that they look into their own hearts and examine themselves; then humbly look to Jesus to find the answers for any untransformed parts in their hearts, and then pray for guidance on how to change direction to transform their minds and hearts to be in full service of Christ. The Apostle Peter's understanding of Jesus' application of empowering leadership included the unique gifting of his personhood coupled with humility in imitating Christ as the ultimate leader who empowered his flock through a shepherding approach (Crowther, 2012, 2013).

Principle One: Christian leaders have shepherd hearts so that they follow the Good Shepherd's example and feed His lambs and sheep, care for them, and allow the Holy Spirit to transform their hearts.

JESUS WAS AN AGENT OF CHANGE

Jesus was an agent of change (Wilson, 2010), and as a patient and loving leader (John 21:15–17), Jesus gave his disciples important and specific tasks to do as part of his empowerment approach (John 21:4–6). At its most basic level, empowerment happens when leaders take action to increase the belief of followers that they can succeed at assigned tasks (Kark et al., 2003). This was evident on the case between Jesus and Peter in John 21 where Jesus modeled intimacy with God in his empowerment approach while delegating tasks to Peter as his follower and chosen disciple (Odgen & Meyer, 2007).

By asking good questions Jesus involved his followers to do self-reflection to discover the truth for themselves under his guidance. Jesus knew that there is great power in self-discovery to experience a new level of understanding. This was the case also with Peter in John 21:14–23. As agent of change Jesus had the courage to challenge his mentees and was not afraid to take exception to issues raised (Resane, 2014). Jesus also used the art of asking the right questions to teach his followers to be proactive to change and to draw out the truth as part of his empowerment approach. Jesus encouraged his disciples to ask questions as part of his role of change agent to ensure clarity, growth, and personal development (Belsterling, 2006).

As agent of change, throughout John 21 specifically, Jesus asked his disciples questions that challenged their current mode of thinking. In verse 14, Jesus challenged the disciples' current method of fishing. He challenged them to try a new method, throwing the net on the right side of the boat and promised that they would be successful. He then worked a miracle, and the disciples caught more fish than they were able to haul into the boat. Jesus also prepared the disciples for a vocational shift, from fishing for a living to winning souls through the Gospel message. In verses 15–22, Jesus challenged the current paradigm of his expectations for his followers, Peter in particular. Jesus questioned this paradigm and asked Peter about the degree of his love for him. Once Peter responded affirmatively, Jesus challenged Peter to step up to the next level of operation by ministering to the people on earth. Jesus also commanded Peter to follow him out of love as Christ's commands are instructional to a loving heart. Bailey (2018) wrote that this is important as love is foundational to obedience, and obedience is the outcome of love as loving leaders are motivated to love by obeying Christ's commands.

It is evident that Jesus challenged the disciples' values and beliefs in John 21:1–25 with the intent of empowering them for service in God's kingdom. In today's organizations, challenging followers' values, beliefs, and work practices can help overcome the obstacle of complacency and lead to increased innovation, creativity, and productivity (Hoehl, 2008). The spiritual inner battle to be transformed in the image of Christ is not an overnight process and will not be quickly won. This was evident in Peter's spiritual formation journey under Jesus' guidance. It is important to note that, when a leader provides too much assistance in the empowerment process, it ceases to be empowerment; instead, it becomes a handicap for the follower (Wright, 2018). Jesus mastered this practice well, which is evident in John 21.

Principle Two: Christian leaders are agents of change so that, coupled with the foundation of love, they can have a restorative impact on the lives they touch.

JESUS AS MENTOR WAS FLOCK-FOCUSED

Jesus saw the love of a leader as inseparable from caring for his flock (Minear, 1983). According to Huffman (2016), in the development of his character, Jesus as Peter's mentor mirrored Peter's language in John 21 to highlight that true love meant being like the Good Shepherd (John 10:11,15) who loved his sheep by laying down his life for them. As a caring shepherd leader Jesus knew that caring for his flock meant restoring them through a love that heals. Such a love for the flock also entailed searching, finding, and bringing them home (John 10:11; 21:15–17).

This also required that the shepherd leader protects the flock from danger by using God's rod and staff appropriately when needed from time-to-time. Jesus used this for disciplining his team and protecting his flock by alerting them to the pitfalls of the world and teaching them to be vigilant to deceiving leadership and falseness of the world (Resane, 2014). Wright (2006) referred to this provision as "the necessary work of justice and protection of the weak that needed to go on" (p. 277). This leadership task depends on the power and provision of the shepherd leader to direct the flock out of danger and teach them to stay together in unity. Jesus mentored his disciples to follow him by listening to his voice as mentor and the Good Shepherd (Tenney, 1975).

Jesus modeled to his disciples that shepherd leaders are watchmen who have learned and mastered the art of using both their rod and

staff in a balanced way as overseers based on the contextual environments and needs of the situation in protecting their flock (Resane, 2014). In Peter's spiritual formation journey, to develop his full potential as the founder of the first-century church, Jesus' empowerment approach was that of a caring mentor who called, disciplined, rebuked, affirmed, forgave, restored, and developed Peter's mindset and heart in his pursuit for knowledge (Howell, 2003). Peter had an important choice to make when Jesus invited him back home. However, at that point of calling him back, Peter was ready to accept the personal and steep cost of discipleship when Jesus' invited him to "*Follow Me!*"

In doing so, in alignment with Bayes (2018) empowering components, Jesus had an integrated perspective between the following: (a) social empowerment (i.e., participation, fair treatment, equality, significance); (b) structural empowerment (i.e., opportunity, information, support, resources); (c) psychological empowerment (i.e., meaning, competence, self-determination, impact); and (d) spiritual or divine empowerment (i.e., calling, participation, membership, authority, mediation role). As the Good Shepherd and mentor, Jesus' directed, empowered, restored, and guided his flock on paths of righteousness, and in this sense, Jesus demonstrated mentorship to Peter as he charged him to be a mentor going forward (Wilson, 2010).

In terms of the updated Petrine Four-Vector Model of Empowerment, the second element of this model referred to *encouraging followers* (Bonnet, 2020). In this regard, Jesus' empowerment approach encouraged Peter to become more Christlike as his follower with a well-developed ability to inspire him with hope, courage, and confidence. This was evident from the interaction between Jesus and Peter in John 21. Jesus knew that the morale of a follower was an important positive organizational or team characteristic that is closely associated with encouragement and that it would form an essential element of an empowerment leader's style (Purvis, 2010). This was the case between the interaction between Jesus and Peter in John 21.

As mentor, Jesus' empowerment and development approach taught Peter to submit to Jesus' authority as mentor, that he (Peter) should imitate Christ as role model, trust God to take care of all his needs and be loyal and respectful to Jesus as his leader and mentor. Coupled with the foundation of love, Jesus' mentoring example as leader had a restorative impact on his followers (Nouwens, 1974). This principle links to Jesus' second command to Peter to "Take care of my sheep" (John 21:16). In

Christian ministry this might include actions such as watching over the flock, talking to them, gathering them together, visiting them, protecting them from spiritual warfare, preparing them how to deal with it, guarding them from physical danger, and praying with them and supporting them in difficult times (Osborne, 2018).

Principle Three: Christian leaders as Shepherd leaders direct, empower, restore, and guide the flock on paths of righteousness.

JESUS WAS A ROLE MODEL TO HIS TEAM

As role model to his team Jesus had a strong moral focus based on a godly love as a foundation for his empowerment approach (Poon, 2006). Jesus used influence rather than authority or positional power to urge his disciples toward achieving the common goals set by Christ (Henson, 2020). While love is a power-base from which a leader exert such influence (Miller, 2006), godly love involves caring for people and not manipulating them (Caldwell & Dixon, 2009). Jesus' empowering approach as leader centered on an unconditional love that flowed from heaven and extended God's love to those Christ served and lead (Poon, 2006). Jesus' persistence in questioning Peter in John 21:15–17 focused on the one main point, namely: “*Do you love me?*” By asking this question, Jesus wanted to know from Peter whether love was at the core of who he was (Poon, 2006). This love command was linked with Jesus' instructions to Peter to follow his example as role model to tend/feed his lambs/sheep as an inseparable requirement of care for his flock (Miner, 1983).

Contemporary research efforts have described the empowerment process as focusing on three areas of follower development: (a) confidence and self-efficacy, (b) values and beliefs, and (c) work-related skills. Contemporary leaders can benefit from Jesus' example of developing and empowering his disciples' sense of confidence and self-efficacy. Careful observation and interaction with followers not only highlights areas where followers feel less confident but also offers insights into how to increase their levels of self-efficacy. Jesus as a role model to his team did this masterfully. He empowered his disciples in John 21:1–25 by building their confidence and enhancing their senses of self-efficacy. Jesus' ability to empower his disciples is evident by their response to his presence throughout John 21, particularly with respect to Peter.

Principle Four: Christian leaders as role models are driven by a strong moral love, and they use influence rather than authority to urge followers toward achieving common goals.

JESUS LOVED HIS TEAM UNCONDITIONALLY

According to Bailey (2018), the source of love that motive loving leadership is God's unending, unconditional love for His children. The foundation of Christian leadership in John 21 is about love and devotion to Jesus Christ. Oord (2005) wrote that "To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote well-being" (p. 924). Fung (1988) posited that love is the virtue from which all other virtues come and that the freedom to place oneself in loving service of others is characterized by the mutual service of one another, and given this, the implications of this fruit of the Spirit for leadership begin and end with love.

Agapao is the Greek word translated as love in John 21:15–16. A simple definition of *agapé* as a term for love is an unmerited, self-giving love (Hoehner, 2001, p. 709). Winston (2008) offered the concept of *agapao* as establishing the beliefs and principles of behavior that support good leadership. Winston (2008) maintains that *agapao* behavior produces higher respect for leaders and higher performance for followers toward achieving organizational goals. The leadership of Jesus in John 21:1–25 aligns with Winston's notion of *agapao* leadership. Jesus demonstrated genuine concern for his followers, particularly in his restoration of Peter. The disciples as followers demonstrated an undying loyalty to Jesus as leader and to his mission. Jesus demonstrated how good and effective leadership behavior was expressed as he engenders in his followers an ever growing sense of respect, commitment, and service. Therefore, leadership that is based on such unconditional love establishes a foundation for an altruistic relationship in which both leader and follower are benefited through a morally right process of interaction.

Love is a prominent word in John 21. In Jesus' first challenge, he asked Peter of his love in a relative sense when he said: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15). In the second and third questions, the questions were more empathetic and used the phrase: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" (John 21:16–17). Peter's response, however, progressed in the opposite way with his first response being: "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you" (John 21:15–16), and his

third response, however, being: “Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you” (John 21:17). In verses 15 and 16 Jesus used the word *agape/agapaó* when Jesus asked Peter: “Do you love me?” However, in verse 17 he used *phileó* when he asked the same question.

Regardless of which word Peter used for love in this three-question interview with Jesus (John 21:15–17), Jesus moved Peter every time back toward the true meaning of love, which was more than the personal relationship Peter was thinking of at that moment (Huffman, 2016). Jesus did not ask Peter the question “*Do you love me?*” because he did not know the answer; rather, he wanted Peter to examine his heart after he has sinned. Just like he did with Peter, Jesus asks of Christian leaders daily to examine their hearts to answer the question truthfully: “*My child, do you love me?*”

Love itself is an empowering agent of change, growth, and transformation in the human heart, and like a seed, it could grow from a germ of potential into a life-giving vine. Jesus saw that germ of love in Peter’s heart and he was willing to work with Peter’s imperfect raw materials as he knew his potential and the intentions of Peter’s heart. When Jesus commanded Peter to “Feed my sheep...tend to my sheep” he called Peter to love God’s flock as best as he could. This was the basis of Jesus’ example as role model. Jesus also invites Christian leaders today to love their followers as best as they could in their commitment as empowering leaders.

According to the structural theory of empowerment, followers are empowered when they are equipped with resources, information, and support necessary to accomplish an organizational goal (Kanter, 1979). Jesus’ leadership approach was not empowered by a sense of duty nor obligation nor by a desire to build an image, but by an inner source of unconditional and compassionate love. Sanderson (2017) wrote that Jesus teaches his disciples how love can radically change three areas of a leader’s life—i.e., purpose, perspective, and priorities—and how a leader view these areas can either make or break their potential to lead others. What makes these three areas so important is that if they are not funneled through godly love, it will impact adversely three of the most foundational areas in any leadership approach, namely self-leadership, self-awareness, and self-management (Sanderson, 2017).

According to the updated Petrine Model and its nine characteristics in the Fortosis Spiritual Formation Stage Model (SFSM) compiled by Bonnet (2020), great leaders like Jesus build a deep redemptive love for

people and move them to do far more than obligation, power and conditional love could ever do. Jesus' love for Peter in his restoration in John 21 was an example of such a deep redemptive and unconditional love for Peter as his mentee.

Principle Five: Christian leaders see the seed of potential in others, nurture that seed, and transform their minds and hearts to grow from a germ of potential into a life-giving vine.

JESUS HAD A FORGIVING HEART

Jesus was love and he modeled love. He extended compassionate love to sinners who were aware of their sin but unaware of God's forgiveness. Jesus healed the broken hearted—in this case Peter—by forgiving their sin and teaching them how to follow Christ as a loving leader. All Christian leaders are clay pots with visible flaws and imperfections, and when measured on their love for God, in His omniscience, God knows whether their love is real or not (MacArthur, 2018).

Hamilton (2018) posited that the meal that Jesus had with his disciples in John 21 was more than just a meal for connection and remembrance between Jesus and his disciples, but a meal of reconciliation and forgiveness. This was definitely the case for Simon Peter where Jesus had taken on the role of a servant at the meal once again. John 21:15–17 was a lesson in forgiveness, and a reminder that, Christian leaders should restrain from condemning others as unconverted just because they see the path of duty differently (Ryle, 2015). In this passage Jesus had a private meeting with Peter after his resurrection during which Jesus showed Peter a pure and transformed heart filled with godly grace, forgiveness, and unconditional love from his shepherd heart despite Peter's mistakes and betrayal.

Peter was transformed in John 21 from an ambitious, self-motivated, and inconsistent follower of Jesus, to a fully committed, charismatic leader of Christ's church (Leahy, 2010). The question may be asked: "*What has love and forgiveness got to do with empowerment?*" Peter's redemption, conversion, and restoration was a glimpse into the possibility that the human heart of Christian leaders can be transformed as there are many Peter's among us. Many of us are Peter's ourselves. The short exchange between Jesus and Peter in John 21:15–17 was a glimpse in the heart of Jesus as the Son of a faithful God, even when Christian leaders turn away from or disappoint Him—like Peter did when he denied Jesus three times.

God continued to love Peter despite Peter messing up. Jesus knew Peter's heart well enough and he believed that Peter was capable of immense spiritual growth and transformation of his heart; to such an extent, that Peter would become the rock on which Christ's church would be build.

Failure as a Christian leader did not disqualify Peter from serving Jesus or from being forgiven or empowered by Jesus to become one of the most well-known exemplars and Christian leaders of all times. Jesus predicted Peter's failures, then later instructed him how to empower others when he said: "...but I prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have returned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). After each of his failures, Peter made a comeback with a desire to continue to follow Christ. Jesus had the foresight that Peter was not perfect and that he had an untransformed heart, however, he knew Peter's heart. Jesus also knew that, with the right mentoring and experiences, Peter could become *the rock* on which the church could be build. It takes a deep and unconditional love to walk someone through the messy process of understanding their purpose, perspectives, and priorities (Sanderson, 2017). Jesus did not give up on Peter despite his many mistakes.

Just as Jesus forgave and reinstated Peter for usefulness as Christian leader, he is ready to do the same for all God's children. That include all of us. Peter's fall as Christian leader is a reminder that no believer could stand in his or her own strength. John 15:5 reminds that "Apart from me you can do nothing." Through Peter's redemption and restoration in John 21 unrestrained forgiveness is demonstrated by Jesus as his mentor, role model, and empowerment leader. Bailey (2018) wrote that loving leaders grow the capacity to love when they experience forgiveness often.

This is a direct contrast with contemporary empowerment theory, which generally values justice, retribution, revenge, or even disciplinary action for poor performance. Murray and Karl (1999) wrote that: "Unlike revenge, the concept of forgiveness has been almost totally ignored in the organizational literature" (p. 610). Jesus demonstrated a godly forgiving heart by loving Peter to such an extent that he restored him fully into ministry and ordained him as founder of the first-century church. Such an act of love is a feature of reconciliation offered from a forgiving and loving heart despite the human mind not being able to fully comprehend the depths of their offense or the depths of Jesus' love (Wells, 2007).

Principle Six: Christian leaders practice unrestrained forgiveness as an act of love as part of reconciliation, restoration, and empowerment.

JESUS EMPOWERED HIS TEAM

According to Sanderson (2017), like Jesus, real leaders seek to empower others and not themselves. Christian leaders' mission must be fueled by a desire to see people's lives improve and to empower them. Their mission—whether it is in business, churches, organizations, or personally—must in some way be ignited by their godly love for people. Jesus understood the human reality that leaders cannot be everything to everyone, therefore, he empowered the chosen people around him to use and develop their God-given talents to the best fulfillment of their higher purpose and in the service of God's mission.

According to Hoehl (2018), Jesus' actions offer insights into his empowerment strategies such as developing his disciples' confidence and self-efficacy, challenging their values and beliefs, and equipping them with the skills needed for their ministries and leadership path. In alignment with the principles of empowerment theory, Jesus taught Peter that empowering leaders support followers to develop the necessary skills and capability that might be under-developed or in need of strengthening (Choi, 2001). This supports principle six in this chapter and the notion where Jesus instructed Peter in Luke 22:32 to “strengthen your brothers.”

Christian leaders will not accomplish their highest potential until they learn to empower others. It was this deposit of God's grace in the life of Peter that caused him to become *the rock* on which Christ's church ultimately was built as foreseen by Jesus. When Peter's heart was ready and eager, the Holy Spirit's work became fruitful in his heart and the germ of potential that Jesus saw when he met Peter next to the sea of Galilee was ready to grow into a life-giving vine. Jesus invites Christian leaders every day to open their hearts to allow the Holy Spirit to work in their lives as the Spirit of God's love wants to awake this same divine love in their minds and hearts to make it real—like it did with Peter (see Rom. 5:5).

Receiving Jesus Christ was not an ending, but a beginning for Peter as a leader (Donnelly, 2012). Peter was a mentee who became a mentor later himself when he was adequately empowered to teach and to continue to empower others like Jesus did with him (see John 21:17). Jesus' final command to Peter in John 21:19 was to “Follow me!” At that moment Peter was at a crossroad and he had to decide whether he was willing to accept the new relationship with Jesus after his restoration as this new

calling came with a steep cost to the next level of discipleship (Wells, 2005).

According to Sanderson (2017), the answer to the question “*How do I lead with love?*” comes down to perspectives. Jesus taught his disciples that being in a position of leadership has very little to do with a title, and it has everything to do with their ability to be content in the purpose that God has set for them. As part of Jesus empowerment approach he taught Peter that following Christ had a deeper meaning than just forming an intimate relationship as it represented a deep commitment to do the “work of shepherding” and the work of Jesus Christ (Leahy, 2010, p. 2). In John 21 Peter came understood empowerment, not as a theory, but as a practical process that bring God’s children closer to Him and transform them into His image (Bonnet, 2020).

In today’s world with all its challenges, being a disciple of Christ does not mean that all Christian leaders would end up with the same faith statement as the Apostle Peter. It means that we all should try to walk on the same path that both Jesus and Peter did, namely, the path of love and service, and to accept that such a path would involve risk, challenges, commitment, and sacrifices. Peter’s spiritual formation journey is a reminder that discipleship and Christian leadership begin with a specific calling, choices, and changed behavior. Just like with Peter, Christian leaders are invited to reflect whether they are living the commands that Jesus taught and lived, and whether they are applying the leadership principles that Jesus left as an empowering and loving leader to follow.

Principle Seven: Christian leaders know that they will not accomplish their highest potential until they learn to empower their followers.

SUMMARY

Peter learned the answer to an important question during his journey with Jesus, namely: “*Why should I lead with love?*” The answer he learned from his Master and mentor was “*Because we are all called to love one another.*” Peter had to learn the lesson from Jesus that to love people is to lead them. Such loving leadership can simply mean to help others understand their gifts and talents or purpose or it may mean to lead them to the one who can help—Jesus.

God wanted Peter’s heart to empower him to become the Christian leader he was destined to be. It was the motif of love for Jesus and shepherding His sheep as imaged in the narrative of John 21 that

defined leadership as an approach for Peter. Jesus lead the disciples toward an inner transformation in themselves and toward ultimately becoming leaders who empower and transform others as well. Jesus' engagement with Simon Peter in John 21 was an encouragement for Christians today as it illustrated that, no matter how his people fail, and how many times they failed, Christ is willing to forgive and restore (Ellsworth, 2007).

This chapter illustrated that the function of Jesus as shepherd leader was that of loving and empowering leader that was caring, protecting, guiding, and directing his flock. This required courage, the need to act firmly and decisively. Jesus knew when to be gentle and when to use the staff as shepherd leader or when more discipline in the form of the rod was needed. He knew that kindness was key to effectively leading his team to achieve God's mission and empower them to become who they were born to become.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How will being a loving leader shape your leadership approach going forward?
2. What will it take for you to lead with love? Are you fully equipped to do this?
3. Can you lead people with love when there is nothing for you?
4. Are you serving those you love with your presence sufficiently?
5. Do you know those your serve (whether it is your business, your industry, your job, your customers, your employees, your suppliers, your peers, your supervisors, your community members) well enough? If not, talk to them, get to know, so that you can serve them in radical, loving ways.

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