



Spiritual Formation: The Basis for All Leading

The first in a series of nine leadership devotionals based on the fruit of the Spirit

Susan Gibbons, DSL

susan@smgassociates.org

*"Not only do we not know God except through Jesus Christ;
we do not even know ourselves except through Jesus Christ."*

~Blaise Pascal¹

At the center of each human being dwells a unique spirit that is the essence of who he is. According to Genesis 2:7, God created Adam's body first but Adam did not become a "living being" until God breathed breath into him. The Hebrew word used here for breath, *nišmat*, means inspiration, soul, spirit and so we see that our spirit IS our life, without which our bodies would be dead (compare this to James 2:26). Breathed forth from its perfect Creator, each human spirit was designed to share in and reflect God's holiness and love as we lived and ruled with Him in the paradise that He lovingly created. But sin destroyed the godly condition of our of spirit replacing it with what Thomas Keating calls "the human condition,"² the broken, wounded spirit that was born of original sin that directs us away from God in search of happiness, and which is an ever-present influence, both consciously and unconsciously, in how we relate to God, respond to the world, think, feel, act, make decisions, and treat each other. It is a deep-seated, highly complex aspect of our humanity that actually forms another "self" that overshadows the "authentic self" God intended and created us to be - a "false self"³ that operates not from a place of one-ness with God but from the uniquely personalized fortress of carefully constructed and vehemently guarded "emotional programs for happiness."⁴ These paradigms began forming even as we grew passively in our mother's womb and continue their dark evolution well into our adult lives, clouding our perceptions and casting their shadow over virtually everything we do.

¹ Popular quotation attributed to Blaise Pascal.

² Thomas Keating, The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation. (Snowmass: St. Benedict's Monastery 1999).

³ Thomas Keating, Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation. (New York: Continuum 2003) 10.

⁴ Keating, Invitation 5.

The basic construct of the false self determines how I see myself, others, and God through the lenses of “what I have, what I do, and what others think of me.”⁵ It is the false-self that is the sinful, worldly, undisciplined, debased aspect of man Paul often referred to as “the flesh” (see Romans 7:14-15, 8:7-8. Galatians 5:16-17 and Ephesians 2:3) which causes us to do things we don’t want to do and frequently prevents us from living according to the Gospel values we want to embrace.

Sadly, “In the highly individualistic culture of North America, the existence of the spiritual dimension of human existence is often ignored or treated reductively...yet the spiritual self-identity is precisely what characterizes inner psychological worldviews...”⁶ and an integral part of the psychological worldview is the origin of values. While there are many theories about how values are derived, all involve the intangible, spiritual nature of man including experiences and feelings, commitment to divine absolutes, exposure to values modeled by others within relationships, and even one’s own self-identity.

Consequently, one very visible but often unrecognized result of neglecting the spiritual dimension is a “values void” from which people try to function without benefit of mores and norms that provide a secure underpinning for work and life.⁷ For example, if my inner psychological world view (that was formed based on my spiritual identity) is relativistic, my values system will be fluid and my ethics situational, the ends justifying the means in many cases. Values voids results in alienation from others, or “anomie,” that leaves people disillusioned and disrupted. Lacking cohesive social and interpersonal guidelines for interaction, “there is no sense of personal identity, mission, or purpose...no bonding power for individuals within a group.” People pursue their own brand of happiness and fight vehemently to protect their “rights” at all costs. (Of course they do. In fact, they must! The survival of the false-self depends on the fortitude of “the personal programs for happiness”.) In organizations this values void exhibits itself as backbiting, cynicism, frustration, absenteeism, increased work-related injuries, lack of commitment to one organization and/or to producing the best products and services, and employment-related lawsuits. At the executive level, anomie often leads to corporate accounting scandals that have far reaching individual and societal implications we are just beginning to understand.

But lately, perhaps in response to our many public moral failures, a movement of spirituality is awakening in businesses across the country. As people begin to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo they are calling out for leaders who will help them find meaning in their work and help them reach their full potential as human beings by acknowledging and nurturing their spirits as well as their minds at work. As leaders begin to work with their followers to create an environment that is emotionally safe and fiscally secure, spirituality in the workplace, and particularly the spiritual dimension of leadership, is emerging as an essential topic in the leadership discussion. Numerous associations and centers devoted to the study and practice of spirituality in the workplace are readily accessible through a basic internet search as are organizations that provide coaching, workshops and seminars on the topic.

⁵ M. Basil Pennington, *True Self/False Self: Unmasking the Spirit Within*. (New York: Crossroad 2000) 32.

⁶ Rabindra Kanugo and Manuel Mendonca, *Ethical Dimensions of Leadership*. (Thousand Oaks: Sage 1996) 59.

⁷ Susan Kuczmarski and Thomas Kuczmarski, *Values-Based Leadership: Rebuilding Employee Commitment, Performance, & Productivity*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall 1995) 17-18.

One leading international academic journal of political, social and behavioral sciences recently dedicated an entire issue to the topic of spiritual leadership while bookstores expand their offerings to accommodate the influx of new work.⁸ And bloggers worldwide seem eager to explore the topic (often discussed as “work-life balance,” “holistic work,” or “values-based leadership”) and its many possibilities and implications.

As the literature on spirituality in the workplace proliferates, agreement is forming around which values are “core spiritual values” that is, those “terminal, desirable end-states in themselves, but which can also be instrumental in creating greater personal competence and organizational effectiveness.”⁹ It is worthwhile noting that all of the seventeen “core” spiritual values span religious and cultural boundaries and are reflected either directly or indirectly in the fruit of the Spirit Paul described when instructing the Galatians on the evidence of a disciplined Christian walk. For example the “core” spiritual values of love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness are direct matches to Paul’s list while others like equanimity, humility, integrity, and service to others align so closely with other evidences of the Spirit such as self-control, gentleness, faithfulness, and generosity respectively that they may be considered synonymous. Comparison of the two lists reveals that people are searching for true meaning at work that transcends their own humanity by acknowledging, feeding, and integrating their spirits in their work. And such meaning can be found at work through the fruit Holy Spirit produces in the lives of men and women who will yield themselves to His purposes.

So even as academicians and business practitioners grapple with the implications of a possible marriage between leadership theory and spirituality, Christians already know that such a union is not only possible it is a given, for better or for worse, a reality of daily life because man is first and forevermore a spiritual being that temporarily occupies a destructible human body (see Matthew 10:28, Romans 8:16, 2 Corinthians 4:16, and Revelation 6:9) so that in “every action taken, every response made, every dynamic of every relationship, every thought held, every emotion allowed...we are shaped into some kind of being...either into the image of Christ or into a horribly destructive caricature of that image.”¹⁰ Therefore, while the world tries to identify the appropriate place for spirituality in organizational life, the Christian should be sobered by the realization that her spiritual formation is already directly impacted by the details of daily life including how she leads and that in turn, her spirit impacts her organization whether or not she engages her heart, mind, and will in the process.

Each of the nine devotionals that follow examines one of the nine characteristics of the Galatians 5:22-23 fruit of the Spirit as a product of the Christian’s spiritual formation in Christ and considers practical, organizational aspects of nine of Kriger and Seng’s corresponding “core spiritual values.” Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, Oxford. May we each be encouraged to sacrifice the “false self” in order to be transformed into the image of Christ through our vocations and in the process, bring glory to God as He uses us to bring His values to life for those we are privileged to lead.

⁸ *Leadership Quarterly: An International Journal of Political, Social, and Behavioral Science* 16.5 (2005).

⁹ Mark Kriger and Yvonne Seng, “Leadership with inner meaning: A contingency theory of leadership based on the worldviews of five religions.” *Leadership Quarterly: An International Journal of Political, Social, and Behavioral Science* 16.5 (2005): 771-806.

¹⁰ M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*. (Nashville: Upper Room 2000) 25-26.

Leading through Love

Scripture passages:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love." (Jeremiah 31:3)¹¹

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

Theme: The Loving Leader

According to Paul's letter to the Galatians, the first manifestation of Christ living in a believer is *love* (Galatians 5:22). It precedes and makes the eight other characteristics of the indwelling Holy Spirit, or fruit, possible. It is the love Jesus spoke of when He commanded us to love each other as He loved us (John 15:12), the same love with which the pre-incarnate Christ loved and continues to love Israel throughout her history of rebellion against Him (compare Jeremiah 31:3) and that love is the medium through which God reaches out to draw sinful man into a relationship of salvation today.

This love, *agape* in Greek, denotes God's great benevolence toward man, His undaunted determination to shape all things for the good of those who believe in His Son, Jesus, regardless what man believes is best for himself. It reflects a positive and willful attitude of His mind toward us rather than an emotional response to a person or their sin. It also speaks of God's joy over His created beings and the delight He takes in them. Because God loved man in this way, He would do whatever was necessary to save man from himself (see John 3:16) for God knew that man was unable to repair his own brokenness or to restore his relationship with God. So when God commands us to love each other as He loved us, we are compelled to examine our relationships with those around us to determine the quantity and quality of our love toward them. At work, that means looking at business in terms of relationships and personal connections, in addition to profitability and strategy.

In his classic book about leadership, business executive James Autry highlights the importance of relationships in the success of business. He writes, "No matter what anyone tells you, when you lose business it's almost always a relationship problem. Good relationships and personal connections can only come when you abandon the patterned thinking and language of business."¹² He then quotes Peter Drucker on the subject and declares that, "management always lives, works, and practices in and for an institution. And an institution is a human community held together by the bond that, next to the tie of family, is the most powerful human bond: the bond of work." So work relationships form fabric of the organization and are the bonds that endure, critical to organizational success and personal satisfaction.

Meg Wheatley, renowned chaos theorist and organizational development expert, traces the phenomenon of relationships in science through the mechanistic and materialistic (Newtonian) age, to the "new sciences" born out of quantum physics in which "relationship is the key determiner of everything."¹³ In her work we see how the development of leadership theories closely aligns with prevailing scientific theories and soon recognize the temporal nature of both. As knowledge expands, however, so does our capacity for breaking free from linear, compartmentalized

¹¹ All the Scripture quotations in this project is from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), unless stated otherwise.

¹² James Autry, *Love and Profit: The Art of Caring Leadership*. (New York: Avon 1991) 46.

¹³ Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler 1999) 11.

models of leadership to more holistic reflections on the abstract, “unseen *connections* between what were previously thought to be separate entities are the fundamental ingredient of all creation.” These unseen connections, or relationships, are what God calls us into with Himself and with others when He commanded us to love one another as He loved us.

But there is more to relationships than first meets the eye. Wheatley comments on this when she writes, “...because power is energy, it needs to flow through organizations; it cannot be bounded or designated to certain functions or levels. What gives power its charge, positive or negative, is the nature of the relationship...If power is the capacity generated by our relationships, then we need to be attending to the *quality* of those relationships. We would do well to ponder the realization that love is the most potent source of power.”¹⁴ Please stop and consider her assertion: The love that is demonstrated in relationships, not knowledge, influence, position, or possession, is the key to unlocking personal and organizational power.

The concept is at the same time tantalizing and repugnant: Love. We can do that. Isn't it as natural as breathing? No. This kind comes from a place deeper than our fickle hearts, a place within our spirit. This is the love that compels us to reach out to others, to meet them where they are and help them up to a higher level, the love that causes us to be happiest when we are serving others and helping them satisfy their highest priority needs, loving others with the same depth, concern, and commitment with which we love ourselves – the *agape* love that Jesus poured out for us on the cross, the same love God commands us to manifest toward one another. This love is patient and kind, doesn't envy or boast, isn't proud, rude or self-seeking. It doesn't get angry easily, doesn't keep a list of other people's faults, and doesn't enjoy evil. Rather, it loves truth, always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres, and never fails (as in I Corinthians 12:4-8). Can you imagine following someone who loved you like that? Can you imagine *being* a leader like that?

But when we start to love like that we become vulnerable and that's not how we want to feel in business or organizational leadership. People might misunderstand us, not return our love or worse yet take advantage of us. Still, it is this love that affords us the opportunity to forge mutually beneficial relationships with people, the kind of relationships that bring meaning into the work we do, the kind people are searching for at work.

So it's not surprising that as the discussion about spiritual values at work progresses, “loving kindness” appears at the top of the list of spiritual values people want to experience in their daily work lives. Old hierarchical bureaucracies have been replaced with sleeker, faster structures powered by a rich diversity of people, ideas, and technical competencies. In the 21st century more than any other time, relationships will be pivotal to organizational success and failure. In 1985 the leadership scholar Warren Bennis predicted of this age, “...most organizations will be filled with knowledge workers. They'll have substantial expertise in their own areas, often beyond that of their so-called leaders, and they'll expect to be free to make decisions in their own areas of competence...In such a setting, decisions are shaped far less by leadership authority than by collaboration, shared values and mutual respect...Therefore, the challenge to leaders will be to act as compassionate coaches, dedicated to reducing stress by ensuring that the whole team has everything it needs.”¹⁵ It's critically important to understand “compassion” for what it really is; in Greek, *splagchnizomai*, bowels and from the Latin words *pati* and *cum*, suffer with, compassion literally means to feel deeply, as from the bowels and, therefore, to suffer

¹⁴ibid 40

¹⁵ Warren Bennis, “Toward the New Millennium.” Leading Organizations: Perspectives for a New Era, ed. Gil Hickman (Thousand Oaks: Sage 1998) 6.

with another. To be compassionate coaches, therefore, means to enter into the suffering and struggles of our employees with them, not to merely stand by and offer words of support. To be compassionate requires a willingness to take on another's pain. So how can we be "compassionate coaches" without cultivating loving relationships with our followers?

But even if a man wants to cultivate these relationships, he has an inherent problem. In Mark 7:20 Jesus declares that evil (*poneros*, meaning moral or spiritual evil that corrupts others; malevolence in contrast to benevolence that is attributed to *agape*) including evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly comes out of men's hearts, not *agape* love or "loving kindness". Of his own nature man is, therefore, incapable of authentic concern for others. Without *agape* love as the foundation of our relationships our coaching/leadership efforts will amount to little more than rhetoric and will be received with cynicism and contempt, much like the Pharisees in Jesus' day were viewed by their followers. Concerned more about legalism and wealth than the people they led, the Pharisees did not respond to others with *agape* love and met with Jesus' sharp disapproval more than once!

Yet even in those encounters Jesus showed us how to be compassionate coaches and leaders, motivated by *agape* love to tell people the truth about themselves, to expose the false self that kept them from entering into a relationship with Him. His *agape* love for them demanded no less and gave Him the courage to speak boldly even in the face of death. In fact, every encounter Jesus had, whether with a large crowd or with another human being one-on-one, was motivated and shaped by His *agape* love for them. From the crowds who needed to learn the truth about who they were under the law before they could understand His call to living in true righteousness found only in Him (Matthew 5:19-20), to the woman at the well who needed to hear the truth about herself before she could hear the truth about God (see Luke 4:10-24), to Martha who needed to see her busyness for what it was so she could come to a deeper appreciation of who Jesus was (see Luke 10:40-41), and finally to Peter who needed to face his betrayal of Jesus before he could be commissioned to his new ministry (see John 21:15-19), Jesus was a compassionate coach who lead with authority out of His great love.

The Greek word for authority, *exousias*, expresses not only permission to do something but also tells of the power, *dunamis*, of the person acting or speaking. And *dunamis* is the same word used to describe an intrinsic moral and/or physical power described in Acts 1:8 when Jesus told the apostles of the Holy Spirit's power they would soon receive. The same power and authority to preach the Good News that stirred the hearts of Jesus' followers and that filled the apostles on Pentecost are promised to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ today because God's *agape* love fills their heart. But this power and love are not given for the sake of the believer – they are given so that the believer can then serve others – as Jesus first served us.

So the Christian in a leadership position has some choices to make. The first is whether or not to accept Jesus' command to love one another. If we do, this most certainly means entering into a relationship with our followers through which we must choose to serve. As we serve, we may be used by them for their own selfish reasons or we may be used by God to transform them, and/or us, into His image. Loving our followers will also mean that our false self, the one that houses the evil nature, will have to be crucified anew each day for only then we will be refilled with God's *agape* love. Filled with this love and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will tell our followers the truth about their performance no matter how uncomfortable or unpopular we feel and take positions that may be politically incorrect or even career-threatening with humble resolve. We'll be transparent about our own mistakes and human-ness because our authenticity as Christ's followers depends on letting others see how God has worked in us. We'll make sure credit

is given where it's due and work with our followers to create and sustain an environment that protects the dignity of each person as we seek to understand others more than to be understood by them. Our love for them will do even more than bring spiritual values into the workplace, however. It will bring God's love to life in real, tangible, contemporary ways to people who need Him through our relationships with them.

Leadership Concept

The leader/follower relationship

Wisdom of the Ages

“And now regarding love, which the apostle says is greater than the other two—that is, faith and hope—for the more richly it dwells in a man, the better the man in whom it dwells. For when we ask whether someone is a good man, we are not asking what he believes, or hopes, but what he loves.” Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love. ~St. Augustine (354-430)

Example of the Devotional

A nurse named Kathleen worked for a local hospital for more than twenty years. An active member in her community and in professional associations, Kathleen knew that the wages and benefits offer at her hospital were comparable to those offered by other facilities. She enjoyed steady work, enjoyed her coworkers, and planned on working hard for her hospital until retirement. She was, by all accounts, a contented worker. Although rumors of union organizing activities had circulated from time to time, Kathleen believed that her employer was fair and truly cared about its employees and refused to take any action against the hospital. That is, until 2001.

From 2001-2003, Kathleen worked hard to organize the other nurses. She met with union representatives to learn all she could about the nurses' union and how she could help the union get established at her hospital. Within two years, the hospital fell not only to the nurses' union but to a service union and a professional union, as well.

What happened to turn a long-term employee into a union organizer? The answer is shockingly simple; Kathleen was present when Joe, the Vice President of Human Resources and Mary, the hospital's Chief Operating Officer confirmed the time of a meeting later that day to discuss possible upcoming layoffs. This COO was relatively new to the hospital and had been received by most employees as uncaring, even vindictive.

Kathleen had no personal experience with her, however, and had not bought into the concerns expressed by her peers. On this day, however, as Kathleen shared a lunch table with Joe, Mary approached and reminded him of the meeting. She told him that the meeting would not take long because the decisions about what cuts to make would be simple enough. She then flipped her hand four times in the air and winked at Joe before turning and strolling away.

After she left, Joe explained to Kathleen the meaning of the hand gesture. “When we (the Executive team) meet, we use that signal to indicate that the hospital's four core values (Dignity, Service, Excellence, and Justice) are not in play. Each flip of the hand signifies one of the values artwork on the wall being turned over. I guess this is going to be one of those meetings.” Kathleen was stunned by both the gesture and the VP's casual explanation and knew in that moment that these leaders didn't care about the employees at all; that they were as easily dismissed as the four values. She concluded that she and the others had no real value to the hospital and that they were not even regarded as human beings. She believed that they needed to be cared for and protected, even if it meant paying a union to do it.

Application of the Devotional

How differently things would have gone for Kathleen and this hospital if the executives understood the importance of loving relationships to the overall health of the organization. First, Joe would have been willing to risk his personal security to work with the COO about her lack of integrity long before this encounter because he truly loved her and wanted the best for her, as well as for the hospital. His agape love for her would have empowered him to tell her the truth about herself and to help her see the benefit of living out the hospital's values instead of ignoring them when they seemed too difficult to embrace.

But Joe would have also known that sometimes we can't affect the changes we know are needed and have to deal with the consequences of the poor choices made by our leaders. In this case, Joe's relationship with Kathleen, and every other hospital employee, was at risk because of the COO. As he sat at the table with Kathleen he had to decide what was most important – loving the employees enough to try to ensure that the decisions made later that day were made according to the values or bowing to his unloving, unethical leader. Had he chosen the way of love, his concern for the people involved would have overshadowed his self-centric need to appear important to Kathleen by revealing the information about the twisted gesture, opting instead to deal directly and privately with the COO about her behavior. His agape love for Kathleen would have evoked compassion for her and he would have asked her to express her concerns about the upcoming layoffs, listening carefully to identify tangible ways he could lessen her apprehension by entering into with her. It's not difficult to imagine the impact that this simple act of love would have had on Kathleen and the hospital's future.

Leadership Exercise

Look closely at your followers and ask yourself if you love them enough to suspend your own aspirations, thoughts, and needs in order to spend time getting to know *them*, listening to *them*, working with *them*, and developing *them*. Then set time aside for them and let them know that they are important to you – as people.

Think about leaders you know or have heard of who are loved by their followers. How do they demonstrate agape love for others? What can you learn and incorporate from their leadership relationships? You might want to recall a leader who seemed to despise his followers. How did he act toward them and what *opposing* values and behaviors can you adopt?

Prayerfully consider which spiritual discipline the Lord might have you incorporate into your life in order to begin the dismantling of the false self, in order to see your followers as He sees them - spiritual beings to be loved without reservation. For example, through the spiritual discipline of meditation, Holy Spirit creates new space in our hearts, a sanctuary, wherein He meets us, reveals more and more of Himself to us, and speaks to us. It is in this place that our spirit learns to hear His voice with clarity and to follow where He leads. And although this space is created and enriched privately, it is revealed to others throughout our day as the intimacy with which He graces us fills our hearts with His love and overflows into our relationships with others.

Suggested Further Reading

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About the Author

Dr. Susan M. Gibbons is an adjunct professor in the School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship at Regent University where she earned a Doctor of Strategic Leadership degree. Additionally, she serves as an adjunct faculty member at Indiana Wesleyan University, Kaplan University and Regis University. She also provides consulting services to business owners, corporations and churches. Susan brings 20 years of experience to her teaching and consulting work in her areas of expertise: strategic leadership, human resources management and healthcare administration.