



## Leading through Contribution: The Generous Leader

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

Susan Gibbons

### Scripture Passages

*“The wicked borrow and do not pay back, but the righteous are generous and keep giving” (Psalm 37:21a)*

*“All day long the wicked covet, but the righteous give and do not hold back.” (Proverbs 21:26)*

*“For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son.” (John 3:16a)*

*“When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, ‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’” (Mark 10:41-45)*

### Theme: Leading through Contribution

For the American sports fan, the month of February is possibly the best time of year. Fresh off the football season’s climax, the Super Bowl, fans still have hockey and basketball playoffs and championships to enjoy and baseball training camps open! It’s a virtual smorgasbord of sports, a true sports epicurean delight!

This year, one important aspect of all the competition has caught my eye, however, the selection of each sport’s “Most Valuable Player.” Selected by sports writers, each sport crowns one player the “most valuable” at the conclusion of the season, generally based on the team’s record of wins and losses and the individual player’s record. The problem with that system is, of course, that players often use their talents for their own

gain, rather than using them to make other players successful. In 2007, Head Coach of the Los Angeles Lakers Phil Jackson explained the problem with that system. “Last year (2006) Kobe (Bryant) was the reason why the Lakers were able to come out of the season with over a .500 record. And yet we weren’t contenders...during the whole year...The MVP has to, I think, generally make the other players better players on the floor...I think that’s always the mark of great players, how much better are those players when he’s on the floor.”<sup>1</sup> For Jackson and others, just having skills and playing well is not the mark of excellence. And apparently Kobe got the message because in 2007 he had his, “Best year ever as far as an overall team player,” and won the MVP award. Jackson commented further, “I think the judgment that I kind of make is, how much better do you make your teammates? This has been one of Kobe’s finest years in that regard.”<sup>2</sup>

2006 World Series MVP David Eckstein, then a feisty shortstop on the St. Louis Cardinals Baseball team, serves as another model of what really makes a player “most valuable”; his (or her) willingness to use his talents to the best advantage of his team mates. Eckstein is known for his willingness to play “small ball,” to put down sacrifice bunts, to give himself up by hitting behind the runner to advance him to the next base, giving himself up for an out which lowers his own batting average but which may set up the winning run for his team. For many professional athletes, however, putting the needs of others before their own is just not in the cards. They have more talent than any one person should possess, yet their team is not really better off for having them.

In Galatians 5:22, Paul lists the sixth characteristic of the observable effect of Holy Spirit living and thriving in the Christian as generosity, *agathosune*, in Greek. Translated as “goodness” in the New King James, American Standard, and New International versions of the Bible as well many others but as *generosity* in the New Revised Standard version, this characteristic denotes benevolence, or active good. Whereas kindness, *chrestotes*, described a *disposition* characterized by easy graciousness and goodness that could result in action *agathosune*, “is character (disposition) energized, expressing itself in active good.”<sup>3</sup> It is benevolent behavior, the conferral of property, qualities, or skills that are conducive to the personal or social well-being from one who possesses it to one who does not.<sup>4</sup>

It’s hard to imagine being generous without first possessing a kind disposition anymore than we can imagine being full of agape love without also being joyful. And of course, joy and peace are also dependent on each other with peace being crucial for patience. So it is with kindness and generosity. And like the other characteristics of God’s fruit, generosity is not merely something we *do*; it is a reflection of that part of the prism of *who God is*, for “He calls us to him to impart himself to us. He does not call us to do what he did, but to be as he was, permeated with love. Then the doing of what he did and said becomes the natural expression

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<sup>1</sup> Broderick Turner. “Kobe Gets MVP Talk.” *Press Enterprise* 19 Jan. 2007, morning ed.: C4.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Abrams. “Jackson Calls this Kobe’s MVP Year.” *Los Angeles Times* 03 Apr. 2008 Retrieved July 5, 2008, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/03/sports/sp-lakerep3>

<sup>3</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed, *The Complete WordStudy Dictionary New Testament*. (Chattanooga: AMG 1993) 63.

<sup>4</sup> *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., 260.

of who we are in him.”<sup>5</sup> This ontological perspective of generosity as *being* rather than *doing*, therefore, is the basis for all Christian giving.

When we think of being generous, we may think in terms of three broad categories of property or qualities God conferred on us for which we are to be responsible stewards by sharing them with others. In Ephesians 5:15-16, we learn that we are not to be foolish with our *time* but are to use it wisely. In Jesus’ parable of the *talents* (Matthew 25:14-30) we learn about the high value God places on what we do with what He’s given us.<sup>6</sup> And in the parables of the shrewd manager (Luke 16:1-13) and the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), Jesus explains that our material possessions such as money or property, our *treasure*, all of the “things” that keep us so busy accumulating and preserving, should be used for our future eternal benefit by investing in others now. In the former, we see that “the judgment of God excludes the excuses with which we deceive ourselves” about the reasons why we couldn’t and didn’t use what we’ve been given<sup>7</sup> and in the latter Jesus’ “Condemnation falls on lack of community which barriers of wealth create and which actions of rich men protect, confirm, and fortify. ‘How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!’ (18.24).”<sup>8</sup> Further, through the rich man’s ongoing relationship of insensitivity (lack of kindness) toward Lazarus, we learn that selfishness becomes “a long-established and calloused posture in life...”<sup>9</sup> Whether “wealth” takes the form of time, talent, or material treasure, the barriers it can create always take the form of broken or damaged relationships and no excuse is acceptable to God.

In their research, Kriger and Seng adopted Giacalone and Jurkiewicz’s definition of workplace spirituality: “... a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy.”<sup>10</sup> In this context, “service to others” appears on their list of emerging core spiritual values and we can readily understand this value in terms of the leaders’ willingness to serve others by giving of their time and talent. Let us, therefore, view the spiritual fruit of *generosity*, through the lens of being God’s servants in our relationship with our followers.

Throughout the Old Testament, the evidence of God’s favorable disposition toward those who lead by serving is readily available. Abraham, Moses, and David are just three men who led from their position of committed service to God and their followers and who enjoyed His favor.<sup>11</sup> Their assignments weren’t easy, nor were the people they led, yet they gave their time and talents for the benefit of the people, regardless of how paltry

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<sup>5</sup> Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God. (San Francisco: Harper 1998) 183.

<sup>6</sup> David Steinmetz, “Matthew 25:14-30.” Interpretation 34 (April 1980): 174 07 Feb. 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

<sup>7</sup> Steinmetz 175

<sup>8</sup> Eugene Wehrli, “Luke 16:19-31.” Interpretation 31 (July 1977): 279 07 Feb. 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

<sup>9</sup> Wehrli 278

<sup>10</sup> 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): 775.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Russell, “A Practical Theology of Servant Leadership.” Servant Leadership Research Roundtable, August 2003. (Virginia Beach: Regent University School of Leadership Studies 2003).

they believed those talents were (see Exodus 3:11, 4:1, 10). They were righteous before God (Genesis 15:6, 2 Samuel 7) and this righteousness produced character in them that placed God and His people first. David illustrates this quality throughout Psalm 37 as he contrasts the wicked and the righteous. In verse 21a, he instructs that the wicked take but don't give back, a trait indicative of their selfish character, while the righteous man is so concerned about others that he continues on in giving.<sup>12</sup> For him, generosity is not something he *does*; it is part of the fabric of who he *is*. As the wicked man in Proverbs 21:26 covets "all day long" because that is simply who he is, the righteous man cannot help giving. Further, God blesses generosity so that as the righteous man gives, his warehouse of God's treasures is refilled and even overflows (see Proverbs 11:25, 22:9 concerning giving material blessings, Luke 6:38 regarding giving forgiveness and mercy) in order that he has even more to give! The wicked man who will not give of himself, however, perishes (v 20). He becomes unable to give because he becomes hollow and empty inside and has not the power to give from his wealth, even if he wanted to (see Proverbs 25:14). He knows nothing of God's righteousness which is "a humanizing call, and only as we grasp it is a humane life possible"<sup>13</sup> and so he lives inhumanely, only for himself, dying more each day to the authentic, Godly man he could be.

In a stunning display of perfect love translated into perfect generosity, God *gave*. In John 3:16 we read that His love was so pervasive that, "He gave all he had, 'his only Son,' and in so giving, he gave us himself. He thus identified himself with us in our sin, even dying the scandalous death of the cross. This was the divine necessity springing from God's holiness."<sup>14</sup> It is not what the Jews envisioned, understood, or could accept. And we, like them, "prefer God's dealings to be less drastic, to come within the range of our own rational processes. We want reconciliation without redemption, attunement without atonement, amnesty without amends, the olive branch without the rod, truce without truth, mercy without holy majesty, love without holiness, a God who is a friend but not a Redeemer. But, we cannot have it so."<sup>15</sup> God's grace is not cheap and we cannot bestow it on ourselves. It is very costly both in its giving and its receiving. This grace, found only in Christian discipleship, "is costly, because it costs people their lives; it is grace, because it gives them their lives. It is costly because it condemns sin; it is grace because it justifies the sinner."<sup>16</sup> If we are to love as God does, we must also give as He gave; willingly and completely out of costly grace.

This concept proved most difficult for the apostles to grasp. In Mark 10:35 and 41, we read of James' and John's request for position and the other apostles' anger, and see that they still didn't understand Jesus' model of greatness or leadership, so Jesus spelled it out for them; greatness was demonstrated through service and servitude, not power and control like the Gentiles displayed. In Jesus' Kingdom, "The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which the world has invested so much but the way of downward

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<sup>12</sup> Life Application Study Bible, New American Standard edition. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1995) 932.

<sup>13</sup> Wehrli 279.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Miller, "John 3:1-21," Interpretation 35 (April 1981): 177-8 08 Feb 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 178

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Kelly and F. Burton Nelson, The Cost of Moral Leadership: The Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2003) 132.

mobility ending on the cross...It is not leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest.”<sup>17</sup> Jesus’ message was unmistakable. “Greatness consisted not in reducing others to one’s service, but in reducing oneself to their service. The test was not what services can I extract?, but, what services can I give?”<sup>18</sup> Then, pointing to his own life as the consummate example of service to others, He showed them how, “with such powers as he had, he could have arranged his life entirely to suit himself, but he had spent himself and all his powers in the service of others,”<sup>19</sup> His own righteousness serving as the impetus for His divine gift. This “radical servanthood” was driven by His love for His Father and His compassion toward man. And it was far more purposeful than striving to affect “individual or social change.” For Jesus, servanthood was the way to encounter God Himself and to help others encounter Him as well. He saw beyond “wealth and poverty, success and failure, fortune and bad luck” and saw *God* in the humiliation and persecution and rejoiced in the opportunity to “reveal the gentle presence of our (His) compassionate God in the midst of our broken world.”<sup>20</sup> And it is into *this* radical form of service that He invites us still today. To this end, Paul exhorts the Christian to, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).

Clement of Alexandria, the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian teacher and writer in his book of instructions to new Christians particularly interested in their spiritual development, speaks at length about the impact of God’s grace in the soul. For Clement, the disposition of the soul is the real matter of concern in Christian giving, and grace is the agent of giving that is present in the Christian’s soul alone. By grace, the Christian is able to give and manage his possessions well and to the benefit of others. It is the measure that makes a true difference in people’s lives, both to those who give and to those who receive.

It’s safe to say that Jesus came into the world to make a difference. He meant to leave it better off than when He arrived, to speak His love into the lives of everyone He encountered in order that they would be better for knowing Him. I have been blessed to have leaders in my life who, like Jesus, want to make a difference. They resist the temptation to “choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led.”<sup>21</sup> As a result, they are more concerned with the contributions they make to people’s betterment than with their own “success,” with leading others to realize their full potential by serving them instead of controlling or overpowering them and ultimately toward Jesus by *being* who God wants them to be instead of worrying about *doing* the right things and *not doing* the wrong things. They don’t worry about what they don’t have to offer or won’t acquire, they just freely contribute what they do have, and in that, they are truly rich

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<sup>17</sup> Henri Nouwen in Kenneth Carder’s, “The Call to Downward Mobility.” Christian Century 114 (Oct. 8 1997): 869 08 Feb 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

<sup>18</sup> William Barclay, The New Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Mark. (Louisville: Knox 2001) 298-299.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid* 300

<sup>20</sup> Donald McNeil, Douglas Morrison, and Henri Nouwen, Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life. (Garden City: Doubleday 1982) 31-32.

<sup>21</sup> Nouwen 869.

and I am richly blessed. I can hardly wait to witness their utter joy when they meet Jesus and hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21 NIV) as He confers heaven’s Most Valuable Player award on them.

## Leadership Concept

Servant Leadership

## Wisdom of the Ages

*“But if we must distinguish, let it be granted that he is rich who has many possessions, loaded with gold like a dirty purse; but the righteous alone is graceful, because grace is order, observing a due and decorous measure in managing and distributing. “For there are those who sow and reap more,” of whom it is written, “He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever.” So that it is not he who has and keeps, but he who gives away, that is rich; and it is giving away, not possession, which renders a man happy; and the fruit of the Spirit is generosity. It is in the soul, then, that riches are.” ~ Clement of Alexandria, “The Christian Alone Rich.”*

## Example of the Devotional

Bob was so excited when he received his first contract as a new professor. He loved his subject, philosophy, had studied for years to learn as much as possible about it and believed he could make a real difference in people’s lives by sharing the depth and breadth of his education and life experience with them. He looked forward to learning about being an effective professor from his new colleagues who had already invested so much of their lives teaching others. He admired the many accomplishments of these men and women and was eager to come under their tutelage.

The first semester was uneventful, and although Bob sought advice and guidance from the head of his department, he received only polite affirmation that he “was doing just fine.” While he knew his students appeared to be learning, he also knew there must be so much more he could do to enrich their experience and enhance their learning, so he asked a few of the professors in his department to share some of their insights and experiences with him. While they were all very polite, none were willing to talk about their particular teaching styles with him, nor give him any suggestions. Then one semester, Bob encountered Mitch, a very difficult student. He did not appear willing to work to earn his grade, was argumentative and rude to Bob and to other students. He would ask for extensions on due dates, which Bob granted, and still not submit his work on time. His work was generally of low quality and each time Bob spoke with his boss throughout the semester about this student, he was told to give the student the grade he deserved and not to worry about the student’s continued poor performance. At the end of the semester when Bob gave Mitch the grade he had earned, Mitch promptly filed a grievance with Bob’s boss. (Ironically, that was the only deadline all semester he didn’t miss!)



Much to Bob's dismay, his boss told him to raise the student's grade one grade. When Bob asked why, his boss refused to explain the decision to him, saying only that this student had never had a problem in this school before and felt he had been treated unfairly by Bob; therefore, raising his seemed like a reasonable solution to Bob's boss. The next year Bob's contract was not renewed.

### **Application of the Devotional**

It seems the competition, not compassion, ruled the hearts of Bob's colleagues.<sup>22</sup> More concerned for their own success and preserving their false selves, which as you recall answers the question, "Who am I?" in terms of what I *do* (doctor, lawyer, or in this case professor,) instead of who I *am*, a beloved child of God bought with a price, his peers would not give of their time or talent to him. They chose to hoard the wealth of experience they had amassed instead of investing any of it in Bob or in their own eternal "success." Likewise, Bob's boss, motivated by his selfish ambition to maintain enrollment, which translated into more money for the university and more job security for himself, also failed to respond to Bob's ongoing request for guidance. It was easier, safer, and took much less time to patronize him with false assurances than to get into the trenches with him and help him work through the situation with this student.

But Bob wasn't the only one who was denied the benefit of time and talent in this case; Mitch also lost out due to the unwillingness of Bob's boss to get involved. This student was cheated out of the growth that could have occurred when Bob and his boss strove to serve Mitch's *real* need, to learn to accept responsibility for himself and his work.

### **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, the Holy Spirit creates new space in our hearts, a sanctuary, wherein He meets us, reveals more and more of Himself to us, and

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<sup>22</sup> McNeil et al 19.

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.

## Practical Exercises

Renowned conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra and teacher Benjamin Zander wrote, “The drive to be successful and the fear of failure are, like the head and tail of a coin, inseparably linked.” Realizing the devastating effects of this mindset, he realized that the “game of success was just that, a game.” He chose to invent another game, “I am a contribution.” Unlike “success” and its alter ego “failure,” this view has no other side. In this game, the only question to be answered is, “How will I be a contribution today?”<sup>23</sup> This wonderful new paradigm takes our minds off ourselves and helps us see others through God’s eyes, to see their need, and meet it out. As you think about the people you lead, reframe your concept of success to align with God’s formula for success. Choose to be a “contribution.”

Richard Foster warns us, however, that “self-righteous service comes through human effort... (but) true service comes from a relationship with the Divine deep inside. We serve out of whispered promptings, divine urgings.”<sup>24</sup> He recommends several areas in which we could be sensitive to those promptings including the service of hidden things, small things, guarding the reputation of others, the service of being served, common courtesy, hospitality, listening, bearing the burdens of others, and sharing God’s word. You may want to start by humbly telling God each day that you’d like to be contribution and ask Him to arrange it for you!

## Suggested Further Reading

Alcorn, Randy. The Treasure Principle: Unlocking the Secret of Joyful Giving. Sisters: Multnomah, 2001.

Blanchard, Ken and S. Truett Cathy. The Generosity Factor: Discovering the Joy of Giving your Time, Talent, and Treasure. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

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<sup>23</sup> Rosamund Zander and Benjamin Zander, The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life. (New York: Penguin 2000) 56-57.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. (New York: HarperCollins 1998) 128.



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