

We're down to the final couple of messages in our series called *Distinct*, which explores Cornerstone's seven distinctives—that mix of values and practices that combine to give us the unique character and culture we have as local church.

Over the past weeks I've been speaking with several of you who are newer to Cornerstone, and I've been encouraged to hear your feedback that this series has really been helping you understand and appreciate the heartbeat of this church.

In fact, last Sunday it made me very glad to hear someone who is relatively new to Cornerstone express that he sees us actually living out the values and practices we've been describing in this series. "You're not just paying lip service to these things," he said. "You put them into action." Let me tell you, as a pastor, it does my heart good to hear that.

Because if these distinctives are going to continue to define us as a local church, they must always remain a matter not of mere talk, but of action for all of us who call Cornerstone our church home. And that includes *you*, whether you're newer here, or not so new.

The Cornerstone distinctive we're going to unpack today is *Leadership Development*.

Some of you may hear that topic and your first instinct might be to think that it doesn't apply to you. "I'm not a leader, nor do I aspire to be one," you may be saying to yourself.

If so, I invite you to hear this message out nonetheless, keeping your mind and heart open. If you do, you may well come away today with a shift in perspective about what leadership is, and your own potential to lead and also to call out the leader in others.

Back in 2019, we did a whole sermon series on leadership, and declared our conviction that God is calling us to cultivate a leadership development culture here at Cornerstone. How many were here back then and remember that?

We had even made some significant early progress in the creation of a leadership institute—which unfortunately we've had to put on hold for now because the massive challenge of leading the church through and out of the pandemic continues to require our full attention.

Nonetheless, our conviction that God is calling us to cultivate a leadership development culture here at Cornerstone remains. With that in mind, we're going to take some time this morning to consider three things.

We'll start by talking about why leadership development is important. Then we'll look at what leadership means, according to Jesus. And we'll wrap things up by talking about different ways you can be involved in leadership development.

We begin by considering:

## **1. WHY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IS IMPORTANT.**

Cornerstone was growing fast before the pandemic, and by God's grace, we've continued to grow throughout it. We had been averaging about 900 people in weekly worship attendance pre-COVID, and now, when you combine online and in-person attendance, we estimate there are about 1200 people joining us for worship service each week, conservatively speaking. Let's give God our praise for that!

Indeed, growth is one of the key reasons why leadership development is so important, because:

### **A church needs more leaders:**

- **AS it grows**
- **To KEEP ON growing**

We see this illustrated in Acts chapter 6. There, we read of how the church in Jerusalem was growing like gangbusters. While that growth was wonderful and exciting, it was also challenging to deal with. Some tensions had emerged, which so often happens amid the flurry of church growth. In particular, a feeding program for widows was becoming a bone of contention between the believers who spoke Hebrew and those who spoke Greek.

The main leaders of the church at the time—the twelve apostles—recognized it would be unwise for them to just sweep in and try to sort out this program themselves. To do so would cause them to lose focus on their primary responsibility of teaching God's word.

They had more than enough on their plates already, so the apostles wisely recognized that they needed to raise up more leaders in the growing Jerusalem church. And so they gathered the believers together and said:

Brother and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group...<sup>1</sup>

These seven new leaders were appointed, and the text goes on to sum up the result of this expansion of church leadership:

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly...<sup>2</sup>

This is a classic biblical example of how the church needs more leaders not only *as* it grows, but also to enable it to *keep on* growing, reaching more people for Jesus. As Cornerstone continues to grow, we will need more of you to step up and lead. Maybe even in this moment, God is planting a seed in your heart about that— *a seed to lead*.

A second reason why leadership development in the church is so important is because:

**The church's future depends on the development and multiplication of leaders.**

A classic Old Testament illustration of this principle is found in Moses.

In Exodus chapter 18, we find Moses exhausted from leading God's people—thousands upon thousands of them. He's working morning 'til night every day trying to solve each dispute, each case that the people bring before him.

Observing this, his father-in-law Jethro basically tells him, "Dude, if you keep doing things this way, you're going to burn out."

Jethro then advises Moses to appoint leaders over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. In doing so, Moses learns that as a leader of God's people, he isn't called to cling to leadership all by himself, but to give it away—to *empower* others to share in the leadership of God's people.

That's what we want to see our existing leaders at Cornerstone doing more and more—to invest in others who can share in leadership, and who may well take the baton of leadership from us one day.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 6:3-5a (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> Acts 6:7 (NIV)

Because as much as any church may seem to be thriving today, to fail at developing and empowering new leaders is to put the next generations of the church at risk.

We see this illustrated in the story of Joshua, who was developed by Moses. In fact, by the time Moses died, Joshua was ready to take the baton and he successfully led the people of Israel into the Promised Land.

But unlike his mentor Moses, it seems that Joshua did not develop the next generation of leaders among God's people. Because the book of Judges tells us that as soon as Joshua and his generation died,

... another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.<sup>3</sup>

How heartbreaking! Suffice it to say we never want such a thing to happen with Cornerstone, amen? We should have a sense of urgency to identify, invest in, and multiply emerging leaders, because the church's future depends on it.

Having said that, perhaps the most fundamental reason why it's important to cultivate a leadership development culture is that:

**The people of the church are called to lead the world to Jesus.**

And that makes this congregation—all of us together— a leadership community. It's who we are.

The church exists for the sake of God's world-restoring mission in Christ, so shouldn't the church be raising up and releasing more leaders than any other organization or institution—leaders who will bless the world in every sphere of life, so that God's kingdom may come more fully on earth as it is in heaven?

Indeed, Jesus— the Head of the Church— was the greatest leader and developer of leaders ever to walk the earth. If the church's mission is to help people become like Jesus through discipleship like Pastor Kevin talked about last week, then an essential aspect of making disciples is developing people to lead like Jesus.

And it's at this point that we might ask a question. What *is* leadership, according to Jesus?

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<sup>3</sup> Judges 2:10 (NLT)

## 2. LEADERSHIP ACCORDING TO JESUS.

One of the main reasons many Christians don't see themselves as leaders or potential leaders is that they get their understanding of what leadership is from the prevailing culture, rather than from Jesus.

The prevailing culture often sees leadership as a position—a position that elevates leaders above others. Many assume that leaders are the people at the pinnacle of the org chart.

The prevailing culture often sees leadership as power and control. Leaders, it's often believed, are those with a certain force of will. To use a military term, it's been said that a real leader always "takes the hill."

The prevailing culture often sees leadership as the realm of those with a certain charisma, charm, or personal dynamism.

We may see leadership as the realm of the popular, the famous—the *influencers*. If you have a big enough platform to influence the masses, you're assumed to be a leader—regardless of what it is that you're trying to influence the masses to do.

Speaking of influence, a very popular Christian author defines leadership *as* influence. Leadership is influence, he says— nothing more, nothing less.

But is that true? If you held a loaded gun to my head you would influence me. But would you be leading me? Leadership certainly includes influence, but isn't there more to it than just that?

I mean, what is leadership anyway? Have you ever asked yourself that question?

We all kind of assume we know what it is, but in fact, it's been notoriously hard to define.

But when you make Jesus your focal point, the picture of what leadership really is starts to become clear, and it has little to do with what the prevailing culture has to say about it. Indeed, what Jesus has to say about leadership is so refreshingly countercultural as to be revolutionary.

So with Jesus as our focus, the other year we came up with the following definition of leadership:

### **A Definition of Leadership**

Partnering with God and serving others towards the fulfillment of a shared mission.

I'll take just a moment to break that down.

First, the Jesus Way of Leadership is about **partnering with God**. It's not about our personal wishes, goals, or plans. It's about partnering with God to carry out his plans. It's not about writing your own story. It's about the unspeakable privilege of being a co-writer with God as he authors his story.

Second—and this is the heart of it— the Jesus Way of Leadership is about **serving others**. According to Jesus, to lead is to serve. The Jesus Way of Leadership is servant leadership. Jesus makes this clear in Luke chapter 22 among other places. He is with his disciples at their Last Supper together before he goes to the cross. Jesus, the Master, is serving his disciples at the table.

Then they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them. Jesus told them, "In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.' But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves."<sup>4</sup>

Very soon after he said those words, Jesus would serve us by laying down his life on the cross so that we might be forgiven, redeemed and restored.

And while it's counterintuitive, Christ-like service for the sake of others is actually the most potent form of influence—of leadership—that there is. As Tim Keller writes:

If at the very heart of your worldview is a man dying for his enemies, then the way you're going to influence the world is through service rather than through power and control.<sup>5</sup>

When people are drawn to the attractiveness of your loving self-sacrificial service, that's when you'll have real influence. That's when you'll be a leader, whether or not you ever have a formal leadership position or role.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 22:24-27 (NLT)

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Keller, *King's Cross*, 149.

The third aspect of our definition of leadership involves **the fulfillment of a shared mission.**

Biblical leadership is not a solo enterprise. It's always rooted in God calling people to work together in order to fulfill some specific aspect of his world-restoring mission in Christ. Author Gene Wilkes puts it this way:

Servant leadership finds its motive from God's commissioning to carry out a divine plan among a group of people.<sup>6</sup>

So when you partner with God and serve others toward the fulfillment of a shared mission—say, for example, the mission God has entrusted to Cornerstone—you're engaging in The Jesus Way of Leadership, whether you have a formal leadership position or not.

Here again we see that leadership is for all of us—for *you*, even.

Because at the end of the day, what makes us leaders is following—following Jesus. The paradox of authentically Christian leadership is that:

**The only way to lead is to follow.**

This is completely upside-down from the way the world usually thinks about leadership.

Did you ever play the game follow the leader when you were a kid? I'm sure most of you know how the game works.

A leader is chosen, and everyone lines up behind the leader. The leader starts to walk around, and everyone in line has to go where the leader goes, and do what the leader does.

Follow the leader is a pretty straightforward game, in that the leaders lead, and the followers follow. Which is exactly how most people think of leadership today.

Leadership consultant Steve Tobak published a book about it in 2015 called *Real Leaders Don't Follow*. He's very clear in his assertion that, "Leaders lead. Followers follow. You can't do both."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> C. Gene Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership: Timeless Wisdom on Servant Leadership*.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Tobak, *Real Leaders Don't Follow: Being Extraordinary in the Age of the Entrepreneur*.

But that's not how Jesus understands it. According to Jesus, you and I can only lead others to the extent that we follow Jesus ourselves.

In John 21 when Jesus called Peter to servant leadership—in Peter's case, the call was to take care of Christ's flock, the church— Jesus very quickly added the exhortation, "Follow me."

Because the only way to lead others is by following— following Jesus.

We can only lead others to the extent that we follow THE Leader.

In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul didn't say, "Follow me as I lead you." What he said was:

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

We can only lead others to the extent that we follow THE Leader. Amen?

To quote Leonard Sweet:

The greatest way to create a movement is to be a follower and show others how to follow. Following is the most underrated form of leadership in existence... In walking with Jesus, we clear a path for others to follow.<sup>9</sup>

Servant leaders are always followers first. Because it is only out of your own journey of following Jesus, that you can help others to follow Jesus.

Before we celebrate the Lord's Supper together, let me wrap up this message by talking about:

### **3. HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.**

Now there is much more to leadership development than we can cover in this short space. But here are a few simple but effective ways you can be involved in leadership development starting today. First of all:

**Stay open to God's call to lead.**

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV)  
<sup>9</sup> Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower*, p. 14, 80.



Many of you have leadership potential in seed form that God longs to release, whether in the church's ministries, or beyond the church in your home, community, school or workplace.

Are you willing to hear and heed the call of Jesus to make the necessary sacrifices in terms of training, time, and sometimes maybe even tears, to become the leader God wants you to be, and this world needs you to be?

Remember that while not everyone has the spiritual gift of leadership per se, and while not everyone is called to a formal leadership position, there's always someone you can influence to take their next step forward in following Jesus. We're called to be disciples who make disciples, after all, and that's a form of leading others.

Having said that, if someone here at Cornerstone should tap you on the shoulder one day and invite you to consider a specific leadership role of some kind, don't be too quick to say no. Pray on it, staying open to God's call to lead.

Another way you can be involved in leadership development is to:

**Pray for the church's current leaders.**

At various places throughout the New Testament, we see the church actively praying for its current leaders. In his own leadership role, the Apostle Paul would often invite churches to cover him in prayer, such as in Romans 15, where he writes:

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.<sup>10</sup>

Those of us in leadership at Cornerstone desperately need your prayer cover, and you can help in our ongoing effectiveness and development as leaders through your prayer for us. Next:

**Pray for the church's future leaders**—those who may not be leading now, but who will be called by God to do so, perhaps soon.

Before he chose his twelve disciples, the gospel of Luke tells us that:

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<sup>10</sup> Romans 15:30a (NLT)

... Jesus went out on a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.

Like Jesus, you too can pray for eyes to see those with leadership potential. Those of you already in leadership roles here at Cornerstone, you can be asking God to show you who has potential to become a leader in your ministry area, and pay attention to what God shows you.

Then, you can **have an ICNU (“I see in you”) conversation** with any potential leaders God brings to your mind. Tell them, “Hey *I see in you* the potential to be an effective leader of this ministry or that ministry, in this or that sphere of life,” and explain what you’ve seen that causes you to think so.

Finally, one simple and effective framework for developing and empowering potential ministry leaders you can use is as follows:

- I do, you watch, we talk.
- We do together. We talk.
- You do, I watch, we talk.

Jesus himself used such a method in developing his disciples.

Well, today, we’ve looked at why leadership development in the church is important. We’ve talked about what leadership means, according to Jesus. And we’ve surveyed a few ways that you can be involved in leadership development.

When leadership development become part of this church’s culture, do you know what will happen? Unbelievers will be reached and discipled in greater numbers. We will never again have any problems filling volunteer and leadership roles in the church. Worship services will be added, new churches will be planted, many other communities and countries will be blessed, schools and business will enrich more lives and do more good. Social justice initiatives will be launched. Poverty will be relieved. God’s kingdom will come more fully, and his will shall be done more fully, on earth, as it is in heaven. Amen?

At this time, let’s prepare our hearts to celebrate **the Lord’s Supper** together.

Today we talked about the fact that lead is to serve. The Jesus way of leadership is servant-leadership.

In John chapter 13, Jesus powerfully embodies servant leadership at the Last Supper. How does he do it?

He gets up from the table, picks up a towel and a basin, and begins to wash the feet of his disciples—a lowly servant’s job. Jesus himself— the host and the greatest of them all— would act as servant to his disciples. The text goes on to say that:

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”<sup>11</sup>

Here we see that Jesus, the greatest of leaders, will always stoop to serve—and he did so in the ultimate way when he did for sinners—for you and for me— surrendering his life on the cross that we might be saved.

Jesus leads us—he wins our hearts, our allegiance, our trust, our obedience, our followership— by serving us so sacrificially in love. He leads us by serving us.

This is servant-leadership, and Jesus calls us— all of us— to follow his example in the power of his Spirit. It’s a paradox, but according to Jesus to lead is to serve.

The way of the world is to rise up in order to push others down. But the way of Jesus is to stoop down in order to lift others up. Jesus wants to serve you today, and he also wants to empower you for servant leadership to others, by offering you his body—broken for you, and his blood, shed for you...

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<sup>11</sup> John 13:12-17