

## True Leadership

**[Jesus said,] “The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves”** (Luke 22:26).

**Scripture:** Luke 22:25-30

**Song:** “O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee”

I lunched with a man who had served very successfully as president of a statewide nonprofit organization. I asked whether he had guiding principles that shaped his work. “Leading isn’t complicated,” he said with a smile. “Leadership means adding benefit to the lives of others. I can best lead the organization by serving the people who make up the organization.”

My friend’s leadership style certainly reflects the life and teaching of Christ. Jesus did not gather followers by looking down on others. Instead, the ministry of Jesus consisted of healing, feeding, and teaching. He modeled being like the lowly table servant who brings the food, fills the drinking cups, and clears away the dishes. Jesus rose to lordship by first kneeling in servanthood.

Jesus reminds us that authority is not about demanding our own way, and leadership is no excuse for special privileges. I am certainly grateful for the power of the risen Christ, but what draws me most is His servant-like love that washed feet and carried the cross. If I make any mark in the world, it will be by following—and living like—Jesus.

**Father,** give me courage to walk the path of true greatness, the way of loving and humble service. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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June 10–16. **Michael Brewer** lives in Kentucky, where he spoils his granddaughters, preaches frequently, and teaches college courses in Christian theology.

## Love Letters

**In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach (Acts 1:1).**

**Scripture:** Acts 1:1-11

**Song:** “Lord, I Have Made Thy Word My Choice”

As a young man, I spent one summer traveling in Europe. I slept on a rooftop in Greece, hiked a Swiss glacier, ascended the Eiffel Tower, and descended into an Austrian salt mine. However, among these grand adventures, the high points of my summer were the letters from a certain young woman back home. Nothing thrilled me as much as a message from my bride-to-be. Decades later, I still have those letters.

In both of his New Testament books, Luke dedicates his writing to Theophilus. Some scholars believe Theophilus was a particular person, a patron of Luke's. Others point out that the name *Theophilus* literally means “lover of God” and may be symbolic, Luke's way of welcoming all God-loving readers into his stories of Jesus and the early church.

Whatever Luke's intention, our appreciation is so much deeper if we approach the pages of Scripture as a lover of God. It's difficult to comprehend that the Lord of the universe loves us enough to send a whole book of messages for us to read! But when I open my Bible, I find letters from my true home, messages from God's heart to mine. How exciting to receive these “love letters” from God! No wonder I keep reading!

**Father**, thank You for the Bible! Through Your living and active Word, speak to me of Your love today, leaving me hungry for more. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Dressing for Blessing

**He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness** (Isaiah 61:10).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 61

**Song:** “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness”

Friends insist I have no sense of matching colors, and I have endured a lot of good-natured kidding about my clothing choices. One acquaintance challenged me to take a test for color discrimination. When I scored above average, she shook her head in mock sadness. “Now we know,” she said. “Good vision, but poor taste.”

I only hope to be better dressed spiritually than I am physically! Isaiah exults that God dresses His people in garments of salvation and robes of righteousness. The prophet compares the wardrobe of faith with the priestly turban of spotless white linen adorned with a gold plaque inscribed with the words *Holy to the Lord*. What a vivid image of life in Christ!

As I go about my days, I remind myself that I am clothed in righteousness. When we wear our dress-up clothes, we try to avoid stains and grime. In a good suit or a new dress, we’re generally on our best behavior. In the same way, when we are clothed in salvation, we don’t want to wallow in sin or practice habits that will soil our spirits. Although we don’t have a literal gold sign on our heads, our lifestyle can proclaim that we are holy (set apart) to the Lord. And if we live in that frame of heart and mind, it doesn’t really matter if our clothes don’t match!

**Father**, help me as I seek to match my outward deeds to the inward grace of Christ. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Harmony

**How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!** (Psalm 133:1).

**Scripture:** Psalms 133–134

**Song:** “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”

When I joined my first choir, I learned that making music with others is not like singing solos in the shower. I didn't get to choose my own key or set the tempo. For that matter, I didn't even get to select the song. Instead, I learned my part, sang when it was my turn, and blended my voice with the voices of others. Under the guidance of the conductor, our different voices became a unit. Together, we sounded better than any of us singing alone.

Since the Psalms were originally written for singing, the psalmist probably knew something about choirs. When he celebrates the goodness of God's people living in unity, maybe he is applying choral lessons to life within the family of faith. I've been a member of many groups, but the church surpasses them all in mutual support, encouragement, forgiveness, and fellowship. Although the church isn't perfect, it's the best community I've ever found.

Of course, just as a choir depends on the conductor, the church is healthiest and happiest when we faithfully follow our Conductor. The teachings of Jesus provide the invitation that draws us together, and the living presence of Christ supplies the love that holds us together. In other words, Christ himself is the unity we Christians seek. Christ is the key and pitch to which we tune our lives. The result is good and pleasant, indeed!

**Father,** I pray that You will bring Your children together not only in word and voice, but in heart and spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Common Ground

**There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called** (Ephesians 4:4).

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:1-7

**Song:** “The Church’s One Foundation”

As a camp counselor, I enjoyed taking the seven boys in my cabin to the obstacle course. Left to themselves, the more athletic campers would leave the others behind, but the goal was for everyone to complete the course together. Boys of varying builds, backgrounds, and beliefs enthusiastically stooped, hoisted, piggy-backed, and yelled encouragement until every camper succeeded. That moment of intense sharing was always a vital step in a group of diverse strangers becoming a camp family.

Church congregations are also made up of all kinds. Rising above our differences to become a genuine family in Christ can be tougher than running an obstacle course. Paul teaches that we can build a community of faith by focusing on what we have in common: one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one God and Father. In the light of how much we share, our differences become less distracting.

When some church members aren’t “acting very Christian,” I remind myself of our common ground. We are all forgiven sinners, at times falling short of God’s vision as we struggle to become more like Jesus. That makes it easier for me to practice the humility, patience, and gentleness that Paul encourages. Sometimes I get it right. And when I don’t, I hope others will be gentle and patient with me.

**Father,** I praise You that Christ is at work in all Your children, and that together we share the great grace that unites us in Your family. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Tending the Gift

**Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling** (Philippians 2:12).

**Scripture:** Philippians 2:1-13

**Song:** “Take Time to Be Holy”

My first bicycle was a shiny, blue beauty with a banana seat and butterfly handlebars. I didn't know how to ride yet, though, so I worked at it. There's no telling how many times I fell, how often I crashed, or how many scrapes and bruises I accumulated. Nonetheless, I did learn to ride that bike. Over the years, as I grew into my bicycle, it became my best friend.

Many gifts demand effort to make good use of them. This is true of God's gift of salvation. Yes, salvation is a gift, but God invites us to grow into that gift by exerting effort toward becoming mature. Thus, Paul invites us to work out our salvation. He is encouraging us to make the most of God's gift. The Holy Spirit prompts us toward prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship, good works, and godly living—all proven ways to work out our salvation.

When Paul mentions “fear and trembling,” I believe he is underlining the importance of showing reverence for the gift. Fortunately, the same God who saves us does not leave us to ourselves to grow in holiness. He works in our hearts by His Holy Spirit, stirring in us the desire to walk uprightly. Then God encourages us to follow through, putting our salvation into action. Along the way, we experience the joy of a gift well-received and well-tended.

**Father,** I will seek to grow into my salvation daily, increasing in faithfulness to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Leaky Hope

**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him** (Romans 15:13).

**Scripture:** Romans 15:1-13

**Song:** “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less”

On a picnic at the park, I grilled the hot dogs for varied preferences, charring some and lightly striping others. When I reached for my lemonade, the cup was empty. I had failed to notice a crack in the bottom of it, and though the ice remained, the lemonade had leaked away and soaked into the grass without leaving me a sip.

I have the same problem with hope. I know hope is important, but mine keeps leaking. Paul says that our God is the God of hope, and then the apostle prays that his readers may overflow with hope. I pray for this too, but every time I open a newspaper or overhear a news program, my hope seeps out from a broken heart. So I tell myself once again that God is in charge. I remind myself that nothing we hope for is too big for our God, whether it's hope for healing our hurting world, justice for the weak, peace among nations and races, or renewal of God's good creation.

Yes, these are huge hopes, but I refuse to give them up. I keep clinging to God's promises, and God's Spirit keeps topping off my leaky heart. I get through the dark places with God's help, and someday (hopefully) my hope will overflow.

**Father**, all things are in Your hands, and all will be well in the end. Light my way with hope, peace, and joy. In Jesus' name, amen.