



Jesus as Transformational Leader

By Natasha LeShawn Gadson

Transformational leadership is a follower-focused way of leading that generates commitment and turns followers into leaders and moral agents. Transformational leaders inspire their followers with a compelling vision that motivates their pursuit of higher goals. They embody charisma with confidence, demonstrated moral values, and clarity of purpose. They develop their followers through ongoing personal interaction. And they teach in ways that challenge generally accepted ways of thinking and stimulate innovation and creativity. Many aspects of transformational leadership are exemplified in Jesus' earthly ministry.

A leader's continual presence among followers is integral to transformational leadership. It creates teachable moments, fosters relationship, and allows for targeted and personalized interactions. Transformational leaders focus on the whole person, attending to their followers' needs for growth and achievement in ways that acknowledge and manage individual needs and desires. All this is possible because the leader is readily available for two-way dialogue.

Luke's record of Jesus' interactions with his disciples as they journeyed to Jerusalem exemplifies how such practices characterized Jesus' leadership.

Training by example. As Jesus and his followers embark on their journey, they are refused by a Samaritan village (Luke 9:51-56). This incident becomes an opportunity for Jesus to reemphasize the nature of his mission and his focus on Jerusalem. This teaching prepares the way for the rejection that Jesus and his followers will experience at their destinations. In the tradition of the prophet Elijah, James and John ask permission to call down fire upon the Samaritan village. Jesus, however, demonstrates and asserts his mission as one not to destroy, but to save and reconcile, initiating the disciples into his ways of doing ministry.

On the job training. With the commissioning of the seventy (Luke 10:1-16), Jesus delegates assignments to his disciples – for their own development and for the purpose of announcing the Kingdom. This large-scale commissioning foreshadows the mission of the early church, establishing a pattern for those who are sent out with the message. Jesus gives his disciples very detailed instructions as he assigns them the task of preparing the way for his arrival.

First, he instructs them on the harvest nature of their assignment and the need for additional laborers. This imagery would resonate with the commissioned because harvest is a time of heightened urgency in every culture. And Jesus teaches the disciples that prayer must be their first response to the task set before them. Jesus also provides instruction on the level of hostility they will encounter. But, instead of recommending protective measures, Jesus instructs them to walk in the same vulnerability he modeled throughout his ministry – particularly in the rejection by the Samaritan village. They are not to adjust their message based on the host's level of receptiveness. The unchanging message remains that the kingdom of God is near.



Jesus gives equally detailed instructions concerning how to respond to rejection. They are to wipe the dust from their feet and publically proclaim woes against the unreceptive towns. The woes are significant because they lend authority to the disciples' work. If they are rejected by the towns, then the towns will be rejected. Verse 16 confers legal agency onto the disciples, with all of its rights and authorities. As agents sent on behalf of Jesus, the commissioned carry the authority of the sender.

The disciples were instructed to eat what is provided, heal the sick, and announce the in-breaking of the kingdom – continuing the three key aspects of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. These involve creating community (in the context of table fellowship), caring for the physical needs of the people, and proclaiming the kingdom.

Lessons in church administration. In Luke 17:1-10, Jesus engages in a little succession planning, offering guidance on how to continue his work and his mission. The disciples are first warned they should not harm others by creating offense or cause for stumbling. This underscores the disciples' responsibility for the influence of their actions and words on others. The disciples are also called to correct and forgive one another – even to forgive seven offenses in the same day. The responsibility is not placed on the repentant one, but on the disciple to adhere to Jesus' instructions and forgive the one who repents.

In the face of the high standards established by Jesus, a request for more faith springs forth. Jesus responds with an answer that both instructs and empowers. His response assumes that the apostles indeed do have such faith and informs them that if their faith is no bigger than a mustard seed, they could speak to nature and expect obedience. The assurance of faith that is this powerful would undoubtedly support them in upholding their responsibilities.

Finally, Jesus concludes this teaching with a statement regarding the demands of discipleship (Luke 17:7). They should not expect additional compensation for their hard work. The question that introduces this section of the teaching assumes that no one would show a slave gratitude for work that is expected of them. While this introductory question casts the apostles in the role of the slave masters, Jesus suddenly reverses the roles. The apostles are presented with the challenge of viewing themselves as God's servants. Jesus attempts to lead them to the understanding that even if they have accomplished all that is required, they have still not done anything for which they should expect to be rewarded.

These teachings speak to the level of leadership Jesus expects his disciples to provide to those they are called to serve. Jesus' example challenges us to move beyond simply providing effective leadership to a place of demonstrating transformational leadership.

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