

# Leadership Track Theme: LEADERSHIP CHARACTER

## Session #1

### AN ATTITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE

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Key verse: “Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God”  
Romans 15:7

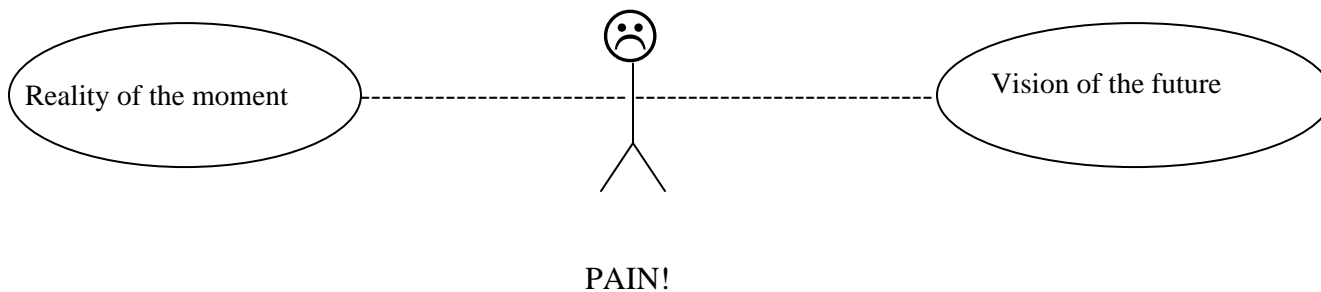
#### **Introduction:**

Recently, I read the statement, “Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without strategy” (Military strategist General Norman Schwarzkopf). Character counts. And because it is so basic to Christian leaders, I want to discuss with you during these two sessions two vitally important character shaping values:

Session One: An Attitude of Acceptance

Session two: The Blessing of Brokenness

At the Madrid, Spain, 2006 Ibero-American conference for Latino leaders in the Church of the Nazarene, I spoke to leaders on “The Joy and Pain of Leadership”



I discussed the “pain” we experience when leaders hold tightly to a ‘vision’ of the future while ACCEPTING the ‘realities’ of the present, especially ‘good and godly people who do not embrace the vision we have for our ministry assignment. This leadership position often produces pain for the leaders.

Six anchors were discussed to hold us steady in these times of conflict or collusion:

- \* speak gracefully
- \* live gratefully
- \* listen intently
- \* forgive freely
- \* lead decisively
- \* care deeply

These “anchors” were suggested for leaders to hold us steady in the midst of pain (or storms) while leading others within the faith community for which we are responsible. I now see more clearly that some basic ATTITUDES are required in order for the leader to use the anchors referenced above.

In this session, I want to focus on one distinctively Christian attitude that leaders must cultivate if we are to be worthy our identity as Christ-like leaders. I speak of the ATTITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE.

The author of the book, CROSS CULTURAL CONNECTIONS, states that “what John 3:16 is to the unbeliever, Romans 15:7 is to the believer. Romans 15:7 reads: Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Increasingly, this ATTITUDE of ACCEPTANCE must identify and define us as biblical servant leaders. It is the heart of all we are.

“Acceptance” is the ability to communicate value, regard, worth and respect to others. It is the ability to make people feel significant, honored and esteemed. This is leading “with the mind of Christ.” To intentionally accept and serve others is to love them.

\* Acceptance is a profound biblical principle for Christian leaders, especially when good and godly people collide over vision and values in a community of faith.

What is the opposite of acceptance? Is it not rejection? How does the rejection by others make **you** feel? How do you think rejection of **others** make them feel? How does rejection of others within a community of faith affect your own relationship to God?

I believe this grace-filled Acceptance of Others is a core Christian leadership quality that must be cultivated. And, I am convinced that an ATTITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE is shaped and nurtured by three compelling convictions about:

- who we are as the People of God;
- what we are to do in the work of God; and
- how we live together as the family of God.

And these convictions become driving forces within us as we live and lead with an *acceptance* of those with whom we live and work.

Let’s explore these three convictions.

***Conviction #1: ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS is rooted in A VISION ...FOR MINISTRY***

A vision is a consuming, fervent, and compelling inner picture. It is seeing what others do not see. At the very heart of servant leadership is a *theological vision* of our identity within the Christian fellowship. Notice the biblical imagery that defines our relationship with other Christians. We are:

- “Brothers and sisters in Christ”
- “Members together of Christ’s body”
- “A fellowship of God’s people”
- “A microcosm of the Kingdom of God on earth”
- “A community of faith”
- “A sacramental community in and through which the grace of God flows.

\*\*\* NEVER LOOSE THE VISION THAT WE ARE THE **GRACED, BLESSED, CALLED AND GIFTED PEOPLE OF GOD!**

Effective Christ-like leadership is grounded in these biblical perspectives of the Christian community, and not just in organizational skills. Of course, skills are needed. However, sharp skills without Christian motives easily lead to manipulation. The primary orientation and motivation of our actions as servant-leaders must be deeply theological. .

The People of God are **CALLED** AND Spirit-empowered to incarnate *His* healing, guiding, sustaining, and reconciling work in the lives of those with whom we work and live. ALL Christians are called to this ministry of serving others in Jesus' name!

You and I may be specifically called to and gifted as a pastor, teacher, evangelist, musician, or missionary, but we are on a leadership journey to use OUR gifts and graces in developing the equally specific gifts of OTHERS—The People of God whom we lead.

**Perhaps the following outline of my model of ministry will summarize this discussion on ministry, and will conceptualize the relationship of the leadership ministry of the pastor-teacher to the ministry of the People of God whom he/she serves.**

**Figure 1.1**

**The relationship between the ministry of the pastor/teacher and the ministry of the community of faith whom he/she leads.**

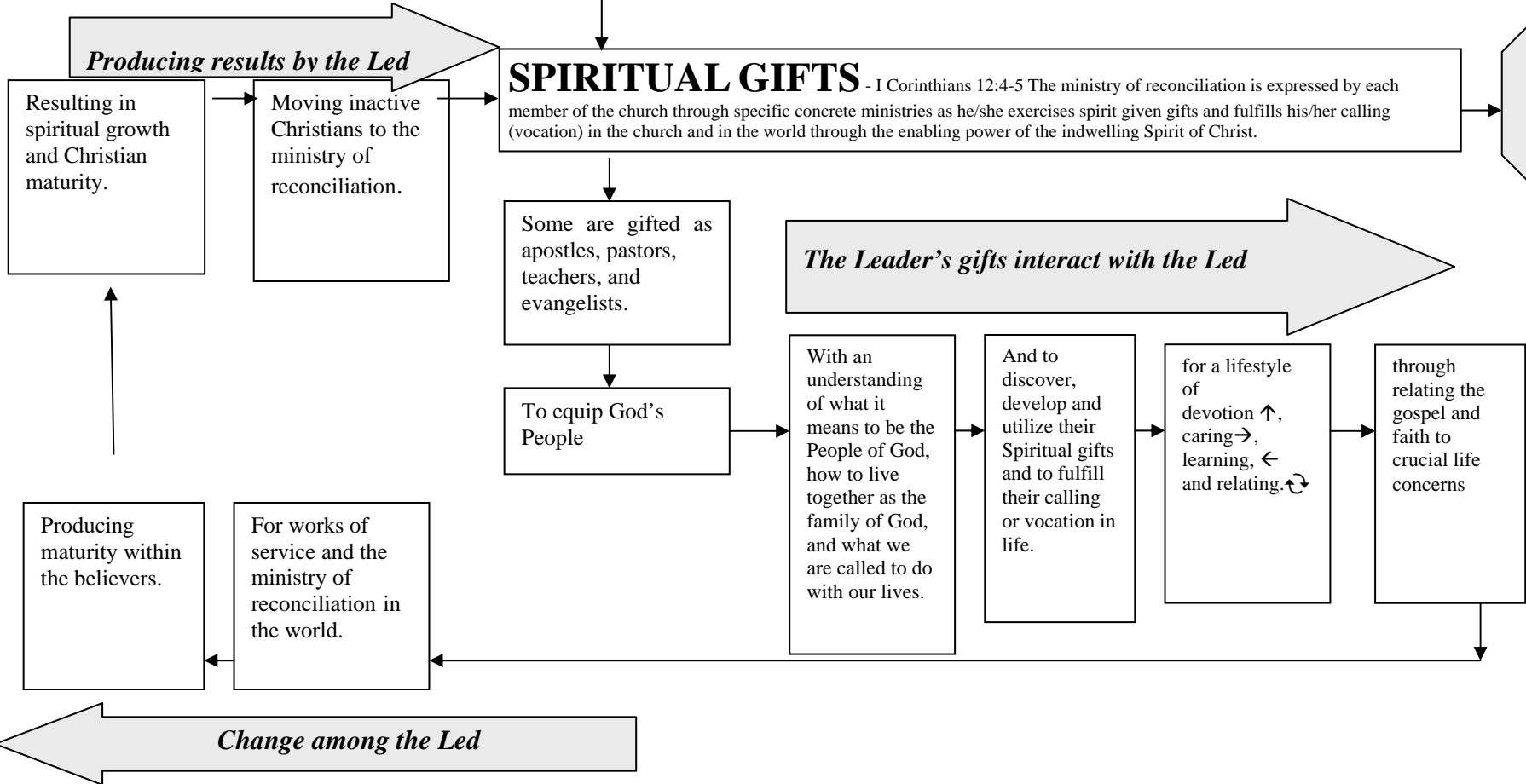
**GRACE** - Ephesians 2:8-9 We were dead. By grace through faith...now we are alive! God first loved the world. God initiates all activity for reconciliation and enables His children through grace to participate with Him in His ministry.

**CHURCH** - Ephesians 2:19-22 By grace we are incorporated into God's family and become: The People of God, The Body of Christ, and The Fellowship of the Spirit.

**MINISTRY** - II Corinthians 5:18; 9:12 The Church's mission is the continuing ministry of Jesus, the ministry of reconciliation... "As the Father has sent me, so send I you." God acts in the world through His People. The ministry of reconciliation is made known through the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

**SPiritual Gifts** - I Corinthians 12:4-5 The ministry of reconciliation is expressed by each member of the church through specific concrete ministries as he/she exercises spirit given gifts and fulfills his/her calling (vocation) in the church and in the world through the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

Outside the Faith Community



. This leadership call and command to **accept, serve and equip** the People of God must increasingly define and shape our *vision for ministry*. What a vision! We accept and embrace **all** who profess Jesus as Lord because they are the **graced, blessed, called and gifted People of God** with a ministry to each other and mission to the world!

Acceptance of Others is rooted in a Vision...for Ministry! What a vision!!

***Conviction #2: ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS is rooted in A PASSION FOR FORMATION.***

Christian leadership is humble service to others, in a community of faith whose head is Christ,...for the purpose of enabling (or forming) them, through spiritual formation, visioning, collaboration, and example, to live their lives under the Lordship of Christ, and to understand, accept, and fulfill their ministry to each other, their vocational calling and their mission to the world.

*E. LeBron Fairbanks*

Leadership, according to the late Dr. Harold Reed, “is known by the personalities it enriches, not by those it dominates or captivates.”

This perspective on leadership will force some probing questions:

- How can *my* ministry of servant leadership enable *others* to fulfill *their* ministry to each other and *their* mission in the world?
- Are the people being served growing as Christians?
- Are they themselves becoming servants?

These are crucial concerns for leadership in the community of faith - even those who sometimes make life so difficult for the leader. On the basis of their testimony of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives, they are *called* and gifted for the ministry of Christ. Tempting as it may be, Christian leaders will not ignore even the most “challenging” people. They remain our responsibility—demanding keen insight, deep “caring,” and Spirit-empowered understanding.

Paul is not so much talking about administrative *techniques* but Christian *attitudes and values* underlying our actions and activities.

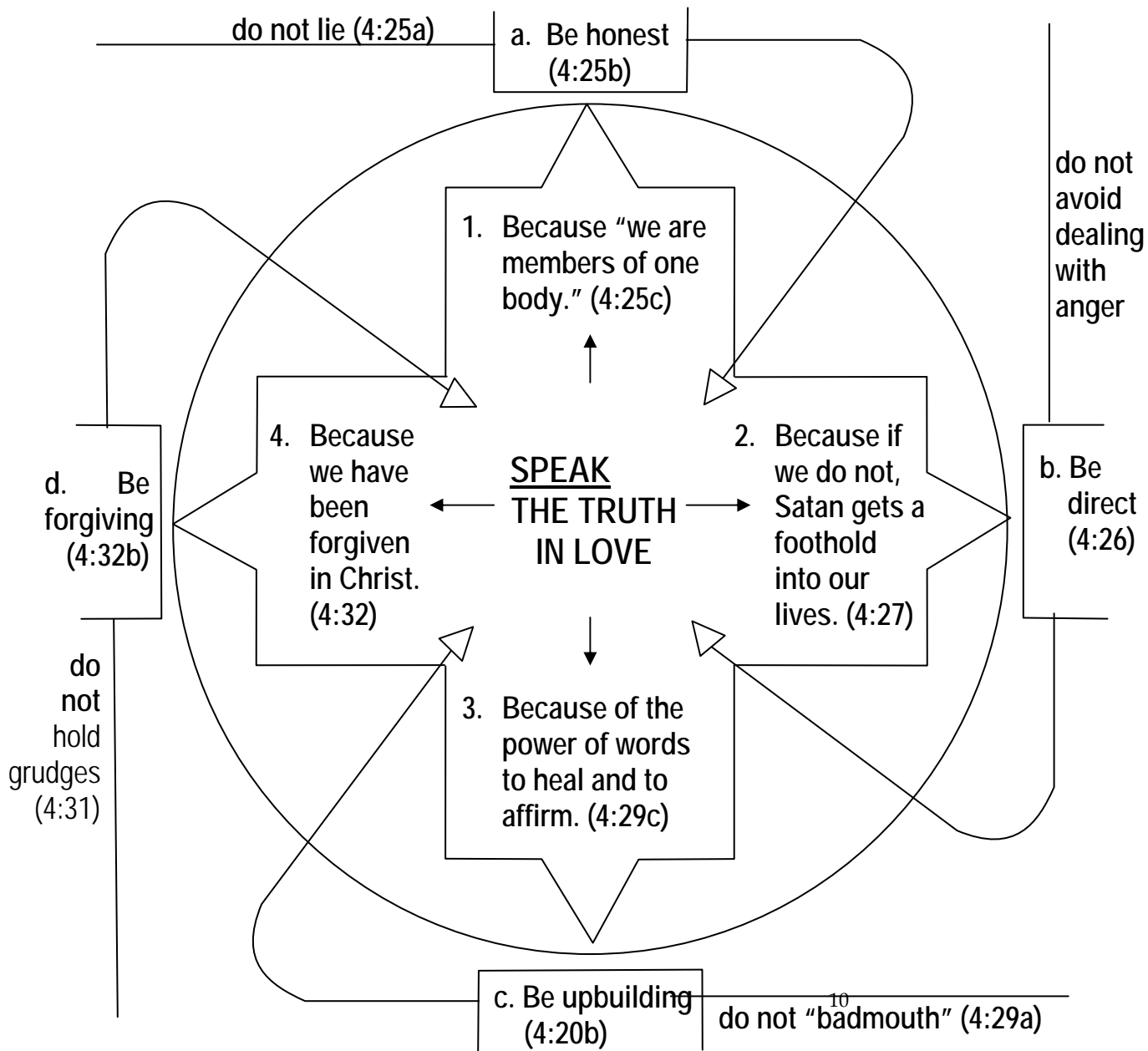
We passionately desire for our faith community to mature in their faith and to participate with God in the reconciling of a lost world to Himself! With the Apostle Paul, we remain intense and focused on equipping our people to “walk worthy” of their calling.



The fourth chapter of Ephesians begins with the challenge to walk worthy of our calling as Christians. The characteristics of the person “walking worthy” follow the challenge. We are instructed to be gentle, humble, patient, and supportive of each other (v2) through “speaking the truth in love” (4:15).

Ephesians 4:25-32 provides more specific direction on how Christians are to “speak the truth in love.” Let me explain by way of a diagram.

## A COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR LEADING



## THE PEOPLE OF GOD

We are co-laborers together in the body of Christ (v. 25). The people with whom we work are God's own creation. Because of this fundamental Christian conviction, we can *be honest* with the believers; *immediate* in dealing with conflict; *up-building* with our words; and *forgiving*, even when others do not forgive us. Words and deeds done by

others to us must never be permitted to create bitterness and resentment within us.

When we ignore our "family" relationship with Christ and treat those with whom we work as "means to an end,"--persons to be manipulated for our purposes--Satan gets a "foothold" into the Christian community. The enemy of our soul laughs at unresolved conflict, which divides the fellowship of the faithful.

Our words are to be channels of God's grace to others (Ephesians 4:30). Dialogue, for Paul, is a sacrament. And God's forgiveness frees us to take the initiative in forgiving those who hurt us. When we do not live together by these guidelines as a Christian community, the Spirit of God is grieved (Ephesians 4:30a). In reviewing Ephesians 4:25-32, we as leaders see more clearly the means by which to "maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace," and, in so doing, walk (lead) worthy of our calling as leaders.

**What are we to do in the work of God?** We are passionate about shaping and forming CHRIST-LIKE disciples and leaders for **their** ministry to each other and **their** mission in the world.

Again, AN ATTITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE is rooted in a PASSION, AN INTENSE PASSION, FOR THE FORMATION OF CHRIST-LIKE DISCIPLES AND LEADERS.

**Conviction #3: ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS is rooted in AN OBSESSION FOR COMMUNITY.**

Let me probe more deeply. As you think of your leadership environment—home, community, district, church, region, denomination—who do you have the most difficulty accepting? As you view yourself as a leader of leaders, What kinds of people are hardest for you to accept?

- \* Why do you think this is so?
- \* How do you think this makes God feel?
- \* How do you think God sees that person—or those persons?
- \* How does your response affect your own relationship to God?

The overarching question is this: How can we increasingly reflect an acceptance of others with the community of faith we serve?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*<sup>1</sup>, lists seven expressions of ministry by which a Christian community must be judged and characterized.

**1. The Ministry of Holding One's Tongue**

"He who holds his tongue in check controls both mind and body," James tells us. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth..." is an admonishment from the Ephesian epistle. When this passage characterizes us, we will be able to cease from constantly criticizing the other person, judging him and condemning him, putting him in his particular place. We can allow the other to exist as a completely free person.

**2. The Ministry of Meekness**

This is "caring more for others than for self." "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought," Paul tells us in Romans 12:3. John tells us to make no effort to obtain the praise that comes only from God. He who serves must learn to think first of others.

**3. The Ministry of Listening**

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening. Listening can be a greater service to people than speaking.

**4. The Ministry of Active Helpfulness**

Simply assist others within the Christian community in external matters, big and small.

**5. The Ministry of Bearing (Supporting)**

"Carry each other's burden" is the challenge of Galatians 6:2. Bearing means forbearing and sustaining one another in love. Ephesians 4:2 commands us to "be humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

**6. The Ministry of Proclaiming**

This is the ministry of the word of God. Bonhoeffer does not mean the message of Scripture proclaimed in a formal setting such as in the worship service. He is referring to the free communication of the word of God from person to person. He is referring to that unique situation in which one person becomes a witness in human words to another, with Christian consolation.

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<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1978.

### **7. The Ministry of Authority (Leadership)**

Jesus states in Mark 10:43, "Whosoever wants to be great among you must be first your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave." This is the paradox of ministry. Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service.

For Bonhoeffer, these practical expressions of Christian ministry provide the *context* that our specific ministries must function within. This is particularly true as it relates to the specific ministry of leadership.

Permit me to share some **practical lessons on accepting others** within **our** community of faith as you and I work with the tension of holding to our vision for the future while holding just as firmly to the realities of the present.

1. Good and godly people often see things differently.
2. Many issues over which we experience conflict are culturally based and not a violation of scripture.
3. Differences that divide us have the potential to alienate members of the body of Christ and to impact negatively the work of

God in our communities.

4. Acceptance of our brothers and sisters in Christ who differ with us is to love, respect and honor them as God love them.
5. Acceptance of others implies that we can learn from them.
6. We must find ways to communicate acceptance to those who have not yet bowed to the Lordship of Christ.

In times of conflict and collision within our faith community, we must find ways to increasingly:

\* speak gracefully

\* forgive freely

\* live gratefully

\* lead decisively, and

\* listen intently

\* care deeply.

Learning to communicate a lifestyle within the community that is distinctly Christian—and self-giving at the core—is a daunting challenge. You will see that communicating right living, teaching commitments, priorities, values and spiritual disciplines, depends on how well *you've* lived that lifestyle.

Jesus challenges in Luke 6:40, “When a student is fully trained he will become like his teacher.” Ministry is always incarnated, is always lived out in mission and ministry to others! What do you want your community—parishioners—to catch? It should be a servant spirit, committed to motivating, equipping and enabling others to also serve in Jesus’ name.

The principle of imitation is both demanded and demanding. Herbert Mayer, in his book, *Pastoral Care, Its Roots and Renewal*, reminds us that this principle was a key in Christian leadership for eighteen centuries. It is the Christian leader’s responsibility to recapture it. Paul humbly instructed church leaders under his care to imitate him as he imitated Christ. The principle

of imitation is the only way to effectively transfer vision, passion, and obsession within the Christian fellowship. It must possess our thinking.

A “community compulsion” is a must for the servant leader; imperative, even in the throes of conflict. Because relationships are so important, we “care enough to confront” others with a Christ-like spirit. Caring too much about the relationship to ignore destructive behavior, we speak the truth in love. It also means allowing others to speak truthfully to us.

Again, AN ATTITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE is rooted in AN OBSESSION FOR COMMUNITY where expressions of

I love you,  
 I accept you,  
 I respect you,  
 I need you,  
 I trust you,  
 I serve you; and  
 I *forgive* you...are increasingly given and received.

Again, we will see that Paul’s instructions are not psychological in nature. They are deeply theological. They are the foundations for servant-leaders who are serious about leading *Christianly*. You will ask yourself: “What does it mean to be a servant to those I must direct in the role of authority?” In other words, “What does it mean to be a servant *in the midst* of leadership expectations and functions?”

Is not an “obsession with community” risky? Yes! Will there be misunderstandings, abuses, betrayals, or pain? Absolutely! Is it worth it? The answer: Of course. You and I really don’t have any choice! If we are to follow the leadership model of Christ, we must accept the risks—and serve people with humility, gentleness, patience, and encouragement.

You and I will be challenged. People will not see us as finished products. Rather, they will discover that you and I are in the center of an on-going process of transformation into Christ-likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Our challenge is to lead from a reconciled and transformed heart. Captured by a vision for ministry, motivated by a passion for ministry formation, and characterized by an obsession for a Christ-like leadership lifestyle within the community, the faith community for which we are responsible—regardless of its size—will be life-giving, growth-producing, and *distinctly Christian*. Increasingly, this will *empower* our responsibility groups to reach out and serve others in Jesus’ name.

## CONCLUSION

How can leaders increasingly and consistently cultivate a Christ-like ATTITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE even in the conflict situations wherein we are called to lead? By nurturing three compelling convictions within the faith community about:

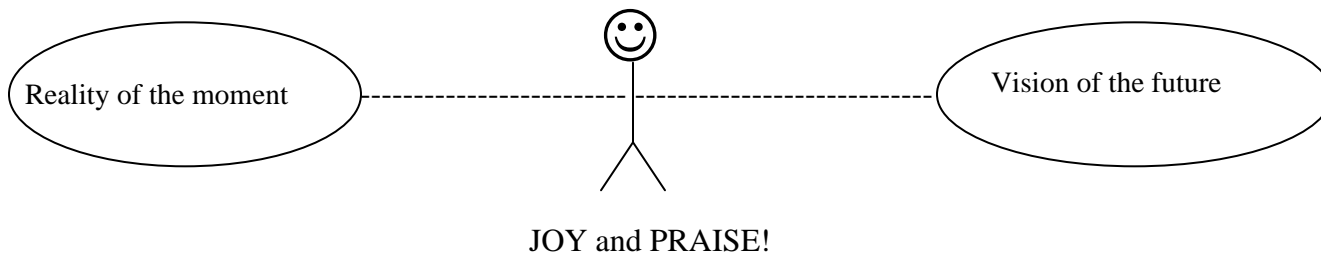
- \* who we are as the People of God (we are the graced, blessed, called and gifted children of God with a ministry to each other and a mission to the world);
- \* what we are called to do in the work of God (we are to walk worthy of our calling



to participate with God in the reconciling of the world to Himself); and  
\* how we are to live together as the family of God (we are to live together as a community of faith nurturing and supporting each other in ministry and mission).

These convictions cultivate and shape *An Attitude of Acceptance* within us deeply and powerfully through

- \* A **VISION ...FOR MINISTRY;**
- \* A **PASSION ...FOR FORMATION;** and
- \* AN **OBSESSION... FOR COMMUNITY!**



My brother in law, Dr. Lee Woolery, district superintendent of the Northwest Indiana district in the United States, recently shared with me this closing quote.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTE OF A LEADER IS  
NOT KNOWLEDGE OR TECHNIQUE BUT WHAT THE  
LEADER BRINGS IN HIS/HER PRESENCE.  
AND THE PRESENCE HE/SHE NEEDS IS  
A NON-ANXIOUS PRESENCE.”**

**Edwin H. Friedman LEADERSHIP IN THE AGE OF THE QUICK FIX: A FAILURE OF NERVES**

*This* is leadership character. It is Christ-like servant leadership! \*To *this* leadership ministry we are uniquely called!

A biblical servant leader brings a “non-anxious” presence to difficult situations in a fellowship of faith. This “non-anxious” presence is nurtured by a grace-given ACCEPTANCE of OTHERS with whom we live and work.

A final Question. In difficult situations, when you encounter the “reality” of “good and godly people differing and colliding with you,” where do you place yourself on the following scale?

ACCEPTANCE    1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10        REJECTION

**Remember, “what John 3:16 is to the unbeliever, Romans 15:7 is to the believer.”**

**“Accept one another then,  
just as Christ accepted you,  
in order to bring praise to God.”**

- Let this CHARACTER QUALITY of ACCEPTANCE increasingly identify you and me in our leadership assignments.

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See also: [www.nazareneblogs.org/lebronfairbanks](http://www.nazareneblogs.org/lebronfairbanks) for additional material from E. LeBron Fairbanks