

Chapter One

Love: The Cornerstone of Kingdom Character

All people need to know love, forgiveness, and acceptance.

Richard Mohline

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 13:34

I had my first opportunity to serve when I was a young leader in a campus ministry. I was asked to present a slide show on world evangelism at a large group gathering. I practiced changing the slides along with the narrated script and was well prepared the night of the presentation—or at least I thought so. When it came time for my part in the program, the lights were turned off and the slide projector whirred on. My heart sank as I realized that my practice had always been during the daytime. Now, with a darkened room, I could not see the script to know when to change the slides! The entire presentation was not in sync, with the narration ending several slides ahead of my rapid changing. I was really embarrassed, knowing I had failed to carry out my responsibility well.

After the meeting I was not looking forward to talking with the ministry leader and explaining why the presentation was such a disaster. I knew how important excellence was in serving Christ and others, and now my first responsibility was a flop! I began my explanation of poor preparation but was cut short when the ministry leader said, “Hey, don’t give this another thought. I’m sure you’ll be better prepared for something like this in the future.” I learned two great lessons that night. The first one was to be sure to pay attention to details when planning a responsibility. But a greater lesson I

learned that night was the impact of a leader who exercises love and forgiveness and instills hope and confidence in people.

We have all known, and perhaps have served under, leaders who have a different kind of impact on others. Wounded, hurting people who don't feel like they ever measured up are left in their wake. Leaders who lack love focus on themselves instead of others; they seek to be self-promoting rather than self-sacrificing. Their egos and identity are closely attached to their success as a leader, and those who threaten that success are dealt with harshly. In addition, their acceptance of others is based upon good performance, as judged by the leader. They have never learned to separate people's actions from their personhood, so those they lead are used and discarded as their performance warrants.

Many times these loveless leaders are those who have spent their careers scrambling to acquire skills rather than diligently pursuing growth in their character. After all, love is first and primary of the four foundational character qualities essential for a spiritual leader. It is love that marks all the followers of Christ (see John 13:34-35), and it is this quality that is the greatest of all according to the apostle Paul (see 1 Corinthians 13:13). Love, in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ, manifests itself first of all in complete obedience to the commands of God (see John 14:15,21). It is also the type of love that shows itself when others fail, disappoint, or sin against us.

The English word *love* in our Bibles is translated from two different Greek verbs in the New Testament: *agapao* and *phileo*.¹ *Agapao* is the love that God expresses toward His Son, the entire human race, and believers in Jesus Christ. God's love is unconditional and self-sacrificing, demonstrated for us by sending His Son to die for us (see Romans

5:8). It accepts others for who they are, not what they may become, and differentiates between people and their unacceptable actions. It is this love that helps define the very nature of God Himself (see 1 John 4:8,16). *Phileo* is the love of a brother to a brother or a sister to a sister. It is a tender affection toward another and carries the idea of a commitment to serve or help another.

Agapao love is the foundational character quality of a spiritual leader, for without it we are disqualified as followers of Jesus and His undershepherds. Love marks us as His disciples and is the primary fruit of the Spirit of God, who lives within all believers (see Galatians 5:22-23). If the Spirit, rather than our own desires, controls us, we will see love (and the other qualities of Christlike character) manifested in our lives and leadership. It is this type of love that distinguishes a Kingdom leader's character from all other types of leadership.

The world would have us believe that leaders who demonstrate *agapao* love in their leadership are weak. The world's leadership model would have leaders project a strong, sometimes overbearing or demanding persona that intimidates others. This, the world says, allows a leader to maintain control, one of the highest values in the world's leadership model. The world places a high value on positional authority and power in order to accomplish leadership responsibilities.

Jesus tells us that Kingdom leadership has a different look. He said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you" (Mark 10:42-43). Jesus modeled for us the personal power of love in His leadership. He was not weak but powerful in His life and ministry. He accomplished His responsibilities, testifying to that at the end of His

life, when He said, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do (John 17:4). His love was attractive to those around Him, especially those closest to Him. It motivated His disciples to sacrifice and follow His leading. His real control rested in His trust in His Father, who was overseeing all.

As Kingdom leaders, we must demonstrate love in all we do and say. It will create a tone in our leadership environment that is attractive to others and will cause them to want to follow our lead. Rather than making us seem weak and creating doubts about our ability to lead, love motivates others to want to come with us. It finds a ready response in the hearts of men and women who inherently know when they are truly loved. James Friesen helps us understand loving others and being loved with this comment: “One way you can tell you are in a love-bonded relationship is by the way you feel after you have been with that person. If you generally feel content, energized, secure and confident after being together, it is very likely you have a love bond. Love bonds tend to empower and bring out the best in us.”ⁱⁱ

Acceptance Means No Conditions

Leaders who love accept those around them without conditions. That is, people do not have to perform or conform to certain standards of behavior in order to be valued. Jesus modeled this type of loving acceptance by dying for us “while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8). God does not love us more now that we are believers, for if He did, that would mean His love was incomplete or somehow lacking before we trusted Him. His love is always perfect, before and after we trust Jesus as our Savior. It is perfectly complete and not based upon our response to His love.

Leaders who love will always seek the highest good for other people instead of

using them as tools to accomplish a goal. This type of love and acceptance is not to be equated with tolerance of all behavior. Rather, we want what's best for those we lead, even if it means having to say hard things sometimes, rebuking them for sin, or disciplining them. Jesus showed this type of love when He did not tolerate the actions of the woman caught in adultery (see John 8). By telling her to leave her life of sin, He communicated clearly that her behavior was not acceptable. But He also demonstrated great acceptance, forgiveness, and love by not condemning her.

The world has a functional-worth value system. The world says that people's value is based upon their function or contribution to society. Those functions that are deemed important by society are highly rewarded (usually with high salaries) and their positions carry with them societal esteem (prestige and status). But in the Kingdom, all people, regardless of the function they perform, are considered of great value because they are created in the image of God. Their function has no bearing on their value.

Just as Jesus loves and accepts us unconditionally, spiritual leaders will value all those around them because they are human beings created in God's image. It does not mean that performance reviews related to specific jobs or tasks are irrelevant. Leaders need to give feedback to those who are being led. But the outcomes of these reviews will speak only to the value of the work done, not the worth of the individual. We separate the worth of individuals from their work. Workers can be outplaced because of poor job performance, but this reflects only on their failure in performance, not their worth as people.

The Affirmation Deposit

Leaders who love others are quick to affirm and encourage those they lead, just as the

Father was constantly affirming the Son, even to the point of stating it for the hearing of His followers (see Mark 1:11; 9:7). Far from feeling threatened by another's success, good leaders celebrate others' successes and acknowledge their important contributions on their team, never taking personal credit for another's work. In doing so, they communicate a confidence and belief in the individuals' ability to do what they are striving to accomplish. This belief is based on the knowledge that God Himself is at work within believers and will enable them to carry out His purposes.

We might think of affirmation as making regular deposits into a bank account. We want to build up a positive balance in someone's life so that when it comes time to make a withdrawal (correction, rebuke), we don't bankrupt the relationship. Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, in their book *The One Minute Manager*, tell us to "find someone doing something right and tell them about it."ⁱⁱⁱ Affirmation is most influential when done in front of others. Lorne Sanny, former international president of The Navigators, reminds us, "Always praise in public and correct in private."

Some leaders are concerned that the giving of praise or affirmation will cause people to slack off or underperform. They even fear a sense of pride may ensue if too much positive feedback is given. Therefore, they crack the whip, pointing out the shortcomings of another's performance, constantly raising the performance bar a little higher. These leaders assume that this will cause achievers to continue to strive and avoid complacency, but instead this type of leadership frequently demotivates people rather than inspiring them to do more. People want to please those who are supervising them and want to be thought well of by their leaders. Leaders who are constantly pointing out shortcomings are taking away one of their followers' great motivators. These people soon

figure out that they hear from the leader only when something is wrong or bad, and they sense that they can never do enough to please. They cringe when the phone call or e-mail comes from their supervisor, knowing it will likely contain more work to do or a message pointing out that though their efforts are appreciated, they are not doing quite enough.

Young leaders are often very zealous in their tasks and assume that those around them are too. They can unknowingly place high expectations on their team and are disappointed when signs of differing commitments arise. “Well, I’m willing to work this weekend. Why aren’t you?” “I’m sorry you have a family wedding, but we really need to get this done.” The egos of leaders are often attached to the performance of the team they lead. If the team seems to be underperforming or demonstrating a lack of commitment (at least according to the leaders’ standards), they chastise the group or individual—sometimes harshly! All this serves to discourage those they lead and cause them to look for opportunities to serve with other leaders who believe in them.

Sacrifice—It’s About Who You Serve

As important as affirmation is, leaders who love must also be willing to give of themselves for the benefit of those they lead. Words give way to action on their behalf. Love is self-sacrificing, not self-promoting or selfish (see 1 Corinthians 13:5). It thinks and acts for the benefit and service of others rather than self. Love gives rather than takes.

Sir Ernest Shackleton was a British explorer who demonstrated amazing courage and self-sacrifice in his tragic expedition to Antarctica. Paul Lee Tan tells of Shackleton,

His worst [moment] was one night in an emergency hut. He and his fellows were lying there; he rather apart from the rest. They had given out the ration of the last biscuits. There was nothing more to divide. Every man thought the other was asleep.

He sensed a stealthy movement and saw one of the men turning to see how the others were faring. He made up his mind that all were asleep and then stretched over the next man and took his biscuit bag and removed the biscuit. Shackleton lived through an

eternity of suspense . . . then [he] sensed another movement. He saw the man open his own box, take the biscuit out of his own bag and put it in his comrade's, and return the man's biscuit and stealthily put the bag back at the man's side. Shackleton said, "I dare not tell you that man's name. I felt that act was a secret between himself and God."^{iv}

Leaders are often people of special privilege. To enable us to carry out our leadership effectively, we have access to resources, knowledge, and opportunities that are not available to all. But, if we are not careful, we can begin to mistake our privileges for rights because we tell ourselves, *I'm the leader and I need this*.

We would do well to remember the example of sacrificial leadership demonstrated by Nehemiah:

Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people. (Nehemiah 5:17-18)

We are to use our resources as a leader for blessing and helping others, not ourselves. We are to give away resources, rather than consume them, and entrust ourselves to God for any reward due for service, as Nehemiah did: "Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people" (verse 19). Love sacrifices for others.

Forgiveness and Progress Reviews

Even as we seek to maintain a high standard for ourselves as leaders, we cannot allow ourselves to become judgmental of others. People in whom we have put our trust will disappoint us. They will sin against us and even perhaps take advantage of our trust and love, but love "keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:5). Kingdom leaders do not hold a grudge. They are quick to forgive, for they know how much Christ has forgiven them. Our forgiveness is predicated on the forgiveness we are given and must not be conditional upon better behavior first. This kind of love shows forgiveness that enables us

to separate an individual's wrong actions from the individual. We forgive the sin and continue to love the sinner.

Being quick to forgive does not mean that standards and policies go unenforced. We need policies to deal with commonly encountered issues. Employees should be given clear job descriptions with our expectations (desired outcomes, focus items) defined. Volunteers should also have clear job descriptions, and expectations need to be explained to permit future feedback on performance. Periodic evaluation (progress reviews) should be a part of our responsibility as a leader toward those we lead. But we can't give evaluation on some responsibility or task that was not clearly defined and agreed to beforehand. If we do, people will feel confused or defrauded.

People do want to please their leaders. They want their approval, and they often know when they have not done their best. If they fall short or fail to do their best, we as leaders owe it to them to speak up, for we want them to be and do their best. This is motivated out of service toward God, not just service for an organization (see Colossians 3:23-24). But we give evaluation and feedback with a spirit of gentleness, not harshness. A friend once told me, "Leaders speak at a volume of two, but they are heard at a volume of nine!" That's been a great reminder to temper my feedback with kindness and gentleness, especially if I have to say some difficult things to someone. But the opposite is also true. A word of affirmation or encouragement from a leader is heard very loudly and remembered for a long time. We can use this to help with team morale and motivation.

Leaders Who Lack Love

The primary sign that leaders are lacking love in their leadership is found in their value

system. These leaders will tend to have a performance-based value system rather than a love-based system, built on the grace of God. Leaders who adopt this set of values quickly signal to their team that they are not interested in relationships. Their relationships are determined only by the task at hand. Once a person's contribution to the task ends, the friendship also ends, because the person's usefulness has now diminished. The leader is on to a new task and develops new relationships that help contribute to accomplishing the new goals. This is anything but motivating.

Those people being led are judged to be successful team players if they perform according to the leader's expectations. Those who don't perform are thought of as bad or "the B team" or something worse. Sometimes this performance-based value system can be very subtle. It can masquerade as a positive value of striving for excellence. Now, there is nothing wrong with striving for excellence in our work, but if it moves to perfectionism and becomes a means for determining who's okay and who's not okay, we have crossed a line.

A leader's performance-based value system can also manifest itself in personal disciplines not related to job descriptions. Leaders can project their personal disciplines onto the group they lead. For example, the employee is paid for a workday from eight to five with an hour lunch break. But their supervisor arrives thirty minutes early and stays thirty minutes late and takes a shorter lunch. Those who arrive or go home on time can be the subject of some not-so-subtle humor or find themselves missing meetings that started before they arrived or after they left. Their lunch breaks are interrupted by a boss's work request, and attendance at "special meetings" called outside of normal work hours is expected. They soon get the message—perform or you're not part of the "A team."

Leaders who lack love are generally oblivious to the needs of others, as they endlessly promote themselves rather than making personal sacrifices for those they lead. Their egos and identity are closely attached to their success as a leader, and those who threaten that success are dealt with harshly. They cling to their leadership titles, which are temporary, rather than building a legacy of loving leadership that will be passed on to another one day.

These kinds of leaders forget that love is the cornerstone of the Christian life and the core of a Kingdom leader's character. Christlike love differentiates Christian leaders from all other leadership models—business, military, political, athletic, or other religious leadership models. If we focus our lives on love, our leadership will be honoring to God and attractive to others. As you invest time completing the character development plan that follows, consider the exponentially increased impact you will have if you are able to infuse everything you do as a leader with Christlike love. And consider that only when you begin to do so will you unlock the real potential in those you serve to lead.

Character Development—Love

Bible Study

1. God is love, but He is also much more. We are forgiven and promised eternal life because of His love. Read the following verses and note your observations about the love of God. Write how you can reflect God's love for you to others.

Deuteronomy 33:12:

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Isaiah 54:10:

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Jeremiah 31:3:

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Hosea 2:19-20:

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Zephaniah 3:17:

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Matthew 9:36-38:

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John 3:16:

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John 15:9-15:

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Romans 5:5,8:

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Romans 8:35-39:

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Ephesians 2:4-5:

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1 John 3:1-2:

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1 John 4:9-10:

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2. Study Hebrews 12:4-13 and note your observations about the relationship between love and discipline. How can you apply these principles in your life and leadership?

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3. We love God because He first loved us. Study the following passages and note your observations about our love for God.

Deuteronomy 6:5:

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Deuteronomy 10:12:

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Psalm 31:23:

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Matthew 22:37-38:

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2 Thessalonians 3:5:

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4. Study 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 and note your observations about biblical love. How can leaders begin to apply this type of love in their leadership?

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Memory Verses

John 3:16

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Galatians 5:6

Ephesians 5:1-2

Prayer

In addition to asking God to make you a person who loves like He loves, here are some ideas to help stimulate your prayers in the area of love. Pray regularly about them.

- Ask God to reveal to you if there is an area in your life that is lacking in love.
Ask Him to sensitize you to blind spots in your behavior that may be lacking love.
- Pray and think through your recent personnel decisions. Do you have a performance-based value system?
- Pray over your leadership lifestyle choices. Are you self-seeking or self-sacrificing as a leader?
- Pray over your past two weeks of interactions with acquaintances and family.
Are you too harsh or overly zealous with others?
- Pray about your current position or role. How important to you is this role or title? Are you prepared to step aside from your leadership should God ask you to?
- Are you preparing to leave this role to another one day? Prayerfully consider

who God has prepared for you to begin to coach or mentor as your potential replacement.

- Ask God to search your heart for true motives for your desire to lead. Pray that He will replace any impure motives with His love-based ones.

Exercises

Here are some practical exercises for help in developing in this area.

1. Ask for feedback in this area from those you lead. Let them know that you want to grow in this character quality and need their help. Define for them specific manifestations of how love might be demonstrated in leadership and ask them for their thoughts. Consider making the feedback anonymous or to a third party so that people are free to be honest. Just knowing that their leader is seeking to grow in this area will be inspirational and motivational to all who follow your leadership!

2. Begin to look for ways to affirm and encourage those around you. Compliment others on a job well done. Seek to affirm or encourage at least one person every day this week.

3. Seek to specifically encourage those around you by asking them questions and listening well. Seek to keep the focus on them in conversations, rather than yourself and your ideas. Draw them out about their ideas and insights. What can you learn from them?

4. Is there a success that you can celebrate? Perhaps the success is not job related, for example a birthday, engagement, anniversary, birth of a child, or a professional development milestone or service milestone. Just your presence as a leader at such an event means much to all. Don't be afraid to allow others time off from the work schedule to celebrate these milestones. The celebrations will diminish in value if this is something

that employees feel they have to attend outside of normal work hours.

5. What privileges of your leadership can you use to bless or help others? Are there frequent flyer miles from business travel that you could give away to another? Could you pay for another's travel to a special development event or give someone a gift certificate to a local restaurant to celebrate a special personal event (birthday, anniversary). Note that if these "gifts" are all connected to work-related issues, you may be reinforcing a performance-based value system.

6. Send a short personal note every day for the next two weeks to someone you lead, thanking him for his hard work and noting an outstanding strength that you see in him. For greater impact, make sure the note is handwritten, not an e-mail!

7. Are there perks that come with your leadership role or title that you should do away with? How important are these perks to you? Remember not to make your convictions norms for others in your organization, unless you have the authority to set policy. If that's the case, be sure to include others in discussing the reasons behind any policy changes.

8. Perhaps the Lord has brought to your attention that you have taken advantage of organizational systems for your personal profit. If so, make restitution quickly! Are there policy changes that need to be made to ensure this doesn't befall others? Remember, too, that there are no small matters with God (see Luke 16:10).

9. Ask God to bring to mind anyone you should extend forgiveness toward or ask forgiveness from. By extending forgiveness, we set ourselves free from many traps of the Enemy, like bitterness, envy, and jealousy. If He reminds you that you need to go and ask forgiveness for wronging another, be quick to go and make it right (see Matthew 5:23-

24).

10. Do you have well-defined job descriptions and expectations for those you lead? Do you give regular feedback or performance reviews? If not, create these job descriptions with the help of the employee and others on your leadership team. Helping people know what's expected and telling them how they're doing is a way to love and lead them well. Schedule performance reviews for those who have not had them recently. Performance reviews are great opportunities for praise and affirmation!

ⁱ. W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, vol. 3 (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1966), 20–22.

ⁱⁱ. James G. Friesen et al., *Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You* (Pasadena, CA: Shepherd's House, 2000), 18.

ⁱⁱⁱ. Kenneth Blanchard, PhD, and Spencer Johnson, MD, *The One Minute Manager* (New York: Berkley Books, 1981), 39–41.

^{iv}. Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* (Rockville, MD: Assurance Publishers, 1985), 757.