

Are You a Towel Leader or Title Leader?

How Jesus showed us the true meaning of leadership.

The night before Jesus died was a night like no other for Him and His 12 disciples—the men into whom He had poured the principles of His kingdom for the previous three years and who were destined to change the world. When they gathered for the Passover and began eating supper together, the disciples did not know the meal would be their last supper with their Teacher. They did not know Jesus had come to the end of His earthly ministry and was preparing for the cross. They did not know on that night He would face the most intense moment of His life.

If they had known, they might have wondered what final lesson Jesus would leave with them. They wouldn't have had to wait long to find out.

As soon as supper was over, Jesus took the opportunity to give them one more illustration of what true power, authority and servanthood look like. The Bible tells us that He got up from reclining at the table and set aside His garments, which represented His power, position and prestige. Then He took a towel and began to do the unthinkable: He began to wash and dry the disciples' feet (John 13:3-5). Amazing! The Son of the living God chose the towel over the title. On the most painful night of His life, when He should have been the one receiving ministry, He elected to minister to others.

When Jesus finished washing His disciples' feet, He told them they should follow His example: "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you

should do as I have done to you” (vv. 13-15).

And then He explained why He had given them this mandate: “Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master” (v. 16). Jesus was telling them that because they were not greater than their Master, they should be as willing as He was to humble themselves and serve the rest. Jesus, in one act, demonstrated that the towel is greater than the title.

Why is a towel so much more powerful than a title? One represents a spirit of humility and the other a spirit of pride. One is concerned with serving others, while the other is concerned with self-fulfillment.

Often I am faced with the decision to choose one over the other, not only in my ministry but in my home as well. I have realized that true fulfillment and joy come only when I choose to take up the towel.

When I take up the towel and serve, I reap powerful benefits, just as Jesus promised the disciples they would: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (v. 17).

What are these benefits?

First, serving others by taking the towel actually puts me first. When I put myself last and others first, I become first in the kingdom. It’s a biblical principle! Jesus Himself expressed it this way: “The last will be first, and the first last” (Matt. 20:16).

Second, serving others by taking the towel helps me fulfill my calling. Jesus declares that we ought to serve one another as He has served us.

Third, serving others by taking the towel makes me more like Jesus. We look most like Him when we serve others. When Jesus came to earth, He gave up His reputation (His title), took the

form of a bondservant and came in the likeness of men in order to reach us (Phil. 2:6-8). He didn't strut around, declaring He was God and expecting people to do His bidding.

Because of Jesus' humility, God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9). As we follow His example, God will promote us as well.

However, our goal is to have the heart of a servant. My prayer for all of us is that we choose to lay aside our titles and reach for the towel of serving others, that we may fulfill the two greatest commandments: to love God with everything in us and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

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