

THRIVE

How to successfully navigate
the S-turns of leadership

PHIL STROUT



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PUBLISHING

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the S-turns of leadership

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Dedication

This is the easiest part of the entire project. There is this wonderful woman named Janet that I fell in love with 39 years ago. From that first day to this moment, no one has had more influence on my thinking and actions than her. Jan is a leader like no other I have ever known. I have watched her rise early every morning, gather her bible, books and journal, and then wander into the living room where she receives these holy downloads. She makes time in her day for almost anyone that asks and she is the absolute greatest mom and grandmother.

Janet Strout is a leader of leaders. She has learned how to navigate some very rough terrain in our journey. Her wisdom and courage are only surpassed by her kindness. When I grow up, I am hoping I get some of what she has.

Jan and I have two grown children who are married to wonderful people and together they have blessed us with six grandchildren. Life is like a race, you must plan, you must anticipate, you must respond to things that you never thought would happen, but when you have a family like this you simply say ‘thank you God you are so kind.’ To this wonderful wife and family I dedicate this work.

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Introduction

EYES ON THE ROAD

Understanding the antidote
for avoiding disaster

IN 1994 WHEN MY FATHER was fighting a tough battle with heart disease, I took off three weeks to visit him in Florida. Right after I returned home, I was preparing for a missions trip to Spain when I received the call: My father had another setback. I quickly returned to Florida and enjoyed another few days with one of the nicest men I ever knew. We had the funeral in Maine, and then I returned to the busy rhythm of life. A few days later I had a meeting in Connecticut and left early in the morning.

Exhaustion doesn't even begin to accurately describe how I felt. Emotionally and physically drained, I was doing my best to hold it together as I drove down the Maine turnpike. For just a second, I glanced down at the piping hot cup of coffee in the cup holder next to me and reached for it. When I looked back up, I was veering off the road. A guardrail loomed in front of me and I knew if I didn't change my direction then, my situation would be dire. I yanked the steering wheel to change the course of my direction. So forceful and sudden was the change of direction that I lost control of the car. Yet just when I thought I was nothing more than a helpless passenger, I regained control and began to steer the

car into a safe trajectory—then I lost control again. The tires caught on the grass and the car flipped on its side.

Less than a minute before, I had been thinking about how I had just lost my father—and now I was pondering how I could have been so careless and overcorrected in such a way that I spun into a major accident. Stuck in the car and momentarily praying that another vehicle didn't slam into me, I wondered how I had arrived at that moment. I had just lost my father, my negligent driving had undoubtedly totaled my car — and I still may not survive and would widow my wife. A state trooper quickly arrived on the scene, helping push my car onto its four wheels. Unbelievably, the car was in good enough shape that I drove it away.

In less than a minute, I had gone from being a grieving son to a man whose entire world hung in the balance, including my life. Was this nothing more than an accident, an unforeseeable event that landed me here? Or was there something more to it?

The truth is, what happened in an instant took much longer to occur—I had been building toward this. I was overtired, exhausted, drained. Despite the sweet time I had with my father, pressure mounted. I fell behind in my work and so many details demanded my attention as a leader. I wondered, *Was this a foreshadowing of something direr and darker to come in my journey as a leader?*

In his book *Deliberate Simplicity*, Dave Browning explains what it means to have passion in writing: “At a writer’s

workshop, the moderator asked a group of well known authors this question, what does it take to write a best seller? After a little discussion the consensus was that writers must *be in a fury*. If you write with passion, your words are intensified. Your message has force. Your readers can better sense your spirit and sincerity. The authors went on to suggest that if you cannot write with passion perhaps you have chosen the wrong subject.”¹

It is with a fury that I write about what it means not only survive but thrive in leadership when the most daunting of paths are laid before us. It is with great sadness that I reflect on some of the spinouts that I have witnessed. These were people who I never thought would be taken off course. I am compelled to share what I have learned about being diligent to survive the challenging moments of leadership. Some of those moments can be obvious, others sneak up on you and hit you when you least expect it. For years, I have observed dedicated people arriving at places in their lives where they were not equipped to navigate. The end result was a wreck—and oftentimes, a severe pile-up in their wake.

According to a study by the Barna Group, there are more than 1,500 pastors who exit full-time ministry each month. Over 18,000 a year move on to something else. If we don’t address that, we’re irresponsible in our position as leaders.²

But it’s not just ministers who have a corner on this market. Politicians, CEOs, coaches, businessmen—none of them started out thinking they were going to lie to people, em-

bezzle money or cheat to win. But at some point, it happens for many of these once well-intentioned leaders.

Professional racing isn't for the faint of heart. Just like in ministry, split-second decisions and timing can be the recipe for success — or disaster. In those cases where something goes wrong and a car spins out, it collects other cars in its wake. Likewise, when we have people spinning out at any level of leadership, there is collateral damage. People get collected into that mess. We have a responsibility to address, be prepared and train in order to eliminate the collateral damage at best or at least limit it.

So, my dear pilgrim friend, whether you are just beginning your leadership journey, halfway through or in the twilight of your leadership career, I invite you to consider the principles and ideas in this book. Let's explore how we can be agents of change in the world of leadership in both our personal leadership and the way we train others—and let us finish well the race that is set before us.

Chapter One

UNAVOIDABLE

Realizing the
S-turns are coming

ONE BIG IDEA

Leadership is a journey. Much like a road race, there are times when you can enjoy the speed and thrill of the straightaways and there are times when you have to navigate some incredibly challenging curves, called s-turns. In order to help people become effective leaders, we need to prepare them for all road conditions.

IN ROAD RACING, how a driver navigates specific road dynamics determines whether he or she wins or loses. Long straightaways are portions of the track that allow each car to run at its maximum speed. There are also some special places on the course that often determine the outcome of the race, otherwise known as the S-turns. Much like our lives, we find ourselves running well when there are few obstacles in the way. When the road is open and straight, we move right along and we do it at a quick rate. Nothing is there to slow us down. Then we suddenly find ourselves in the middle of an S-turn and discover the need to travel through it with care and skill.

Whether you are leading a small business, a large business, a church, a softball team or a family, the S-turns are those parts of the course that must be navigated with skill and finesse. If ignored, they can nullify the great speed gained in the straightaways, as it is here that most spin outs and wrecks occur. Before you can begin to understand how to navigate through such issues, you must realize that they are looming. There is a bend in the road, even if you can't see it from your current perspective. Maybe all you can see

is a wide-open highway that extends beyond the horizon. But rest assured, the S-turns lie ahead of you. However, if you're prepared for these impending challenges, your chances of not just surviving but thriving are exponentially greater.

These specific S-turns — or issues — I've chosen to address in this book are here because they seem to be the most common from my perspective. Respected leaders from various disciplines of life have written on many of these same issues, but some of them deserve more of a spotlight through the lens of leadership.

As a racing fan, I watch with great pain when a car careens into the wall after mishandling a turn. Unfortunately, when one car does not navigate the S-turns well, it often takes out other cars with it. There have been times while I was watching a race that I could sense disaster was about to happen, jumping out of my chair and saying something like, "Oh my, that is a train wreck looking for a place to happen!" In my 30-plus years of leading in the church, I have seen some of those train wrecks coming. Sometimes disaster is avoided with a few course corrections. Other times it isn't— —and the results are gut wrenching. Churches split. Pastors' families splinter. Communities of faith divide. As leaders, we must do everything possible to prepare people to understand that there are challenging curves ahead, helping them to navigate well and to stay on course. We need more effective voices in leadership, diligently alerting others to the warning signs in front of them: An S-turn is coming.

SHARPENING YOUR TOOLS

If you were to ask me whether I think leaders are born or made, I would simply respond: “Yes”. They are born *and* made. It doesn’t matter how you’re made; you’re always going to be developing your skills, you’re always going to be sharpening everything in your toolbox to be a better leader. I’ve had some great leaders in my life and I’ve been under some not-so-great leaders. I know what it’s like to be a leader who has dropped people on their heads, and I know what it’s like to be dropped on my head. It’s not a matter of pointing a finger when I think somebody has not been an effective leader because if we’re honest with ourselves, we’ve all made mistakes. However, I wish someone would have taken me aside when I was much younger and explained the importance of leadership, and all the implications that go with it. I wish I would have known that some of my antics were leading people down some bumpy paths.

The goal for this book is that you will become aware of these leadership issues and prepare to navigate well the S-turns that are coming your way. It’s not a matter of *if* you get to the S-turns but *when* you get to the S-turns.

I’ve been a leader my whole life. I’ve thought a lot about this in the past season. When I was little, I was a leader. When I was in little league, I was a leader. I got the boys in my neighborhood in trouble, leading them into mischief. Since those early days, I’ve led other guys into things that I’m not proud of. On the athletics field I was an agitator, a

leader, and I always wanted to keep my team pumped up and ready to go. My fifth grade teacher recently told me, “I always knew you were a leader, I just wasn’t sure where you would lead!” Yes, I was a leader and it wasn’t always good.

So is a leader born or made? I can buy into both. Through the years I’ve watched new people come into the church and advised our staff to work with them because I believed they were leadership material. It was clear that they would be a leader. They just needed to be developed. I don’t know why some people lead at the level they lead. It seems that in God’s sovereignty, He uses unlikely people in surprising ways.

St. Francis of Assisi is a good example of an unlikely leader. He was the leader of the Franciscans, a religious order who knew God in an incredible way. He was a most unlikely leader. He loved little birds and squirrels—and he found God in his everyday life. He once made pilgrimage to the Middle East, not to participate in the crusades, but to minister and be a light for Jesus Christ to those along the way.

Once, St Francis of Assisi was confronted by a brother who asked him repeatedly, “Why you? Why you?”

St. Francis responded in today’s terms, “Why me what?”

“Why does everyone want to see you? Hear you. Obey you? You are not all so handsome, nor learned, nor from a noble family, yet the world seems to want to follow you,” the brother said.

Then Francis raised his eyes to heaven, knelt in praise to God and turned to his interrogator and his response is pro-

found; “You know what, it is because the eyes of the Most High have willed it so, He continually watches the good and the wicked and as his most holy eyes have not found among sinners any smaller man, no any more insufficient and sinful, therefore, He has chosen me to accomplish the marvelous work which God has undertaken. He chose me because he could find none more worthless, and He wished to confound the nobility and grandeur, the strength the beauty and learning of this world.”³

So much for Superman! So much for the Type A driven personality that can only be the leader. So much for the George Patton image. Here’s Francis of Assisi, a man with a broken heart, a soft heart, who loved communing with God and His little creatures and communicating God’s truth! There were all sorts of criticisms toward him about his understanding of God and the animals, but he was a secure man because he knew God.

When somebody says, “Who do you think you are? Why are you so special? How come you’ve been chosen?” Francis says that it was because the Lord could find “none more desperate” on all the earth.

Perhaps you’ve thought, *I’m not a leader. I just don’t seem to have that. I’m an introvert, how can I be a leader?* We’ve got to get rid of the perceived limits in this. We’ve got to challenge the thinking that one person, because of personality type, will be a good leader while others won’t. Real leadership is not about personality! Leadership is a posture

of the heart. Leadership — the way I’m going to unpack it, — is about people who are willing to help, willing to risk, willing to use what they have for the benefit of other people.

The book *Heroic Leadership* by Chris Lowney⁴ has profoundly impacted my life. Until I read Lowney’s book, I think I was getting a little bored with much of the writing on leadership out in the market today. I think I was tired of reading some CEO’s understanding or some particular theory of leadership. Lowney, who today is a consultant for the Catholic Medical Mission, started out as a Jesuit in seminary and then went on to the world of finance. He became a managing director of JP Morgan in their offices in New York, London, Singapore, and Tokyo, working 17 years in the highest levels of finance around the world. In his research and writing of his book, he looked back into history and drew out the pillars that have held up this religious order called, “the Jesuits”, for 450 years. It has so refreshed my personal understanding of leadership. It helped me to understand that I don’t think anything heroic, 6.9 days a week. Most of the time, I do not feel anything heroic whatsoever. The only day I get to feel a little heroic is by the end of Monday, my day off, when I sort of regroup, only to start again, feeling like Francis of Assisi on Tuesday.

WE NEED YOU!

My simple prayer for you as you delve into this material is that there would be a supernatural understanding in your

heart, that would help you realize how much the body of Christ needs your leadership. I cannot emphasize it enough. If you lead in the your family, school, community, neighborhood, state, country; it's all good. I believe that the hope for our nation and the world is God. If you know the biblical narrative, you know that it means people like us will be involved. What would lead me to think that the answer to many complicated issues that the world is facing could be the people reading this book? I wouldn't write this book about leadership if I did not believe that you could make a difference. Without a doubt, the church is in trouble. Families are in trouble. Leadership in America is in trouble. But there is no other institution that is going to come in behind and clean up if the church can't fulfill its assignment. There is nothing else, there's no plan B hidden away in the Word of God. There is no saying, "The church didn't make it, the leaders of the church didn't make it. Oh, well." No, you are it. This is what we've got; this is it. Consider what Bill Hybels says: "That means that in a very real way, the future of the world rests in the hands of local congregations like yours and mine. It's the church or it's lights out. Without churches so filled with the power of God that they can't help but spill goodness and peace and love and joy into the world, depravity will win the day; evil will flood the world. But it doesn't have to be that way. Strong, growing communities of faith can change the tide of history. They can! Don't bother looking elsewhere. The church is it."⁵

If Hybels is right, it would be my argument that leadership has never been more important than it is right now!

In this writing we are going to cover eight topics. I am going to classify these eight issues as eight S-turns in the race we run as leaders. Every one of these S-turns we will trace back to Jesus' leadership because I will argue that Jesus navigated these S-turns well. Jesus embodied **servanthood**. He showed us how **spirituality** and **soul care** were crucial to staying connected to God and being in tune with what the Holy Spirit is telling us. Jesus was **stable**. He was also **secure**, uninterested in placating others for popularity's sake. That is an S-turn that spins out many people. Jesus was **studied**. As a boy He was found in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. Later he is the teacher in these same courts, quoting the law and the prophets. Jesus was **social**, the quintessential connector, who confused both the religious and the non-religious. His **skills** were obvious in the narrative of the gospels. No matter how painful the assignment or difficult the task, Jesus remained **submitted** to the Father and the Spirit. He was, is and will always be the greatest example of **sacrifice** we will ever know.

As we begin addressing these issues, let's start by building a firm foundation on the one attribute that underpinned Jesus' ability to lead with great credibility: demonstrating what it means to be a servant leader.

Chapter Two

SERVANTHOOD

Becoming a leader
for the Good of the Whole

ONE BIG IDEA

We desire to be a people who use everything the Lord has done in us and through us for the “Good of the Whole.”

Our leadership is using all that we are and have for the blessing and well being of others. We choose to lead in life, with deed and word as SERVANTS to all.

WHEN IT COMES TO RACING, drivers cannot simply power through every bend in the road. As mentioned earlier, there is a certain level of finesse that must occur while handling the delicate S-turns. Instead of revving the engine and hoping to use speed to pull the car through the S-turn, wise drivers master the skill of *feathering the throttle*. This tactic is almost an art form where the driver releases the gas pedal at just the right time and then recognizes when it is time to press the pedal again and continue accelerating. Another navigating skill used by good race teams is keeping an eye on the temperature of the track. The hotter the track, the weaker the traction. You don't want to fly into a turn of any kind without traction, as the results can be disastrous. While science helps determine this exact point based on the vehicle's speed and weight, it is wisdom and experience that help the driver realize the exact point to feather the throttle, maximizing speed without compromising safety and risking a spin out.

KNOW YOUR PEOPLE

In the comings and goings of political campaigns, there is one mantra that gets drummed by political election ma-

chines as a warning against the foe: “Politician A is out of touch with the people.” It’s a criticism that is levied with anger. It implies that the other aspiring political leader doesn’t know the reality of the people he is serving — and therefore would not be properly equipped to lead them. Instead of listening sensitively to the concerns of one’s constituents, a politician may do whatever they see fit without regard for how their new policies might impact others. It’s the antithesis of what we know we need as leaders. We need to find ways to make servant leadership a true core value so we can get a better grasp of what is required of our own leadership and those we are leading. Years ago I heard it said that “a good shepherd smells like sheep.” A servant leader will take the time to know the people they serve.

A friend of mine who is a senior pastor wanted to engage more people in serving in the children’s ministry at his church. He had served in children’s ministry before, but it had been a while. So, he took four weeks off from teaching the adults to serve in the children’s ministry. He wanted to know what it was like for the volunteers at every point—how easy was it to teach, what was it like dealing with uninterested children, how stressful was it to manage the intake of children and ensuring their safety once the parents handed them over to the workers. He wanted to experience every little detail all over again so that when he challenged people to serve, he knew exactly what would be required of them. As a result of his service there, he could speak with greater

authority and with greater compassion about the challenges of working in the children’s church. When he took the stage to speak about serving, he was very much in touch with what he was calling people to do. Instead of using guilt to coerce people to sign up, he was able to demonstrate the impact he experienced while serving the children. He clearly understood the power of his responsibility as a servant leader.

Identification with those you are leading is important because it helps us lead out of a place of empathy. It’s why Jesus’ time on earth was so important: it showed how God was seeking to identify with His creation in an extraordinary way. But Jesus went far beyond simply taking on human flesh. When it came to leadership, Jesus sought to teach us that identifying with people is one step, but the next step is actually doing the very thing you are calling others to do. Jesus didn’t call us to be servants without being a servant Himself.

In John, one of the preeminent passages on servanthood, Jesus explains how important this is:

“¹² So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for *so* I am. ¹⁴ If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought

to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

- John 13: 12-17

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus addresses being a servant by His deeds. It wasn't about what He said, but what He did. He washed other people's feet. It's to the last and the least, in season and out of season, that we are called to serve. A true leader does not choose when to be a servant; it's simply part of his or her DNA. We must take care to avoid falling for our culture's notion of leadership that says the leader is the king or queen, that leadership is a place of privilege, full of perks and entitlement. Jesus taught otherwise. He mentored and modeled in a way that He wanted us to see and understand that to lead is to serve.

At our church, we ask our leaders to commit to the following:

As servant leaders, we will be a people who use everything the Lord has done in us and through us for the greater glory of God and the well being of people.⁶

Our leadership foundation is to use all that we are and have for the blessing and well being of others, we choose to lead in life with deed and word as servants to all.

THE LOAFER LEADER

When it comes to serving others and being a leader in the process, Albert Lexie is in a class by himself. Mr. Lexie, an ordinary man from Pittsburgh, is a shoe shiner who has worked all of his adult life cleaning shoes on the streets. In 1981 Mr. Lexie watched a telethon from the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and was moved by what he saw. Deeply moved by what he saw and determined to act, he decided to give his tips from shining shoes to the Children's Hospital. During his first attempt, he raised \$730 dollars. He then decided that he was going to take the tips that he made for the rest of his life and donate them as well. Mr. Lexie is not a famous guy. He has never written a book. Even though he was on television after the fact, nobody really knows him: he's just Albert Lexie. However, over the years, Mr. Lexie has given over \$150,000 to the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh.⁷ Think about that. One hundred and fifty thousand dollars given to a children's hospital on the tips he made from shining shoes on the streets. He once wrote a letter to President Bush and asked if he could come polish his shoes, his reasoning being that if he polished the presidents shoes, he'd have to give him a big tip, which would be more money for the children.⁸

Mr. Lexie isn't a renowned world leader, but he is a servant. His leadership style embodies servanthood, all the way down to the way he makes his living and subsequently funds his donation drives. He has been interviewed and quoted because of his servant's heart to that hospital. He did not set out to be a leader, yet he has lead thousands of people into the world of charity by his example. This is what Jesus taught, modeled and mentored His key leaders to be—servants!

THE BENEFICIARY OF TRUE LEADERSHIP

Jesus' authority to speak about mercy and kindness though servanthood comes more from what He modeled. Mark explains it this way:

³²They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³ “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

³⁵Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

³⁶“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

³⁷They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

³⁸“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

³⁹“We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

⁴¹When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and 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. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your

servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- Mark 10:32-45

Jesus possessed great power, but He served people. Jesus accessed supernatural abilities, but He fed people. Jesus stayed among the people, listened to the people, healed the people, responded to the people, in all of their pain. Jesus served the people.

In Philippians 2:7, the apostle Paul writes of Jesus, “but he emptied himself and he took on the form of the servant.” Great leadership is about serving—serving others. When we truly embody servant leadership, we must understand that it is not us who are the beneficiaries of such acts—it is others.

One of my favorite phrases from Saint Ignatius, the Spanish founder of the Jesuit order, is this: “To the greater glory of God.” This phrase summarizes the “why” of being a servant leader. The foundation of the Jesuits was not that they were this incredible well-oiled machine; rather, the very philosophy and theology that drove the Jesuits, and has driven them for four and a half centuries is contained in that little phrase: “To the greater glory of God.” Their thinking was centered around the greater glory of God. Throughout the centuries, they did many heroic things—and continue to do

them even today—because they were and are committed to the greater glory of God. They were always able to take the place of the servant, caring less about the cost, since whatever they were doing was ultimately for the greater glory of God. And sometimes being a servant means doing the work that nobody wants to do.

No matter how long we have led, we never outgrow servanthood. When the first Vineyard Church was planted in Maine, Lance Pittluck, the Regional Leader at the time, likened the church to a ship, a working vessel, not a luxury liner. Consider the difference between a working vessel on the open sea and a luxury liner cruising the Caribbean. A working vessel is just what you might think it would be: a boat working for a particular purpose. Every ship's Captain needs excellent communication and problem solving skills. A Captain has been trained for every possible maritime scenario. If you were to step on one of these boats, you quickly realize that every crew assignment is crucial and critical for the well being of all. You get out into the high seas and a storm comes up, you can't say, "You know, it's not my job to shut that hatch. I'd rather not do that." Failing to lend a hand could result in the sinking of the ship. You could protest and say, "I command the overall operation and steer the ship," but when a storm is upon the ship, who's in charge is the last thing on the mind of the crew. Somebody has to batten down the hatches or prepare the life rafts. Its literally all hands on deck, and this includes the Captain.

Being a leader in the church is anything but a luxury line cruise. The church is a working vessel. The same is true for leadership. We're going to use all that we have—our intellect, our spirit, our understanding, and our experience for the benefit of other people. If we are leaders, we serve in any way possible for the wellbeing of the people. We are not in church to be served, but to serve. There are jobs in this. There is sacrifice in this. There is service in this.

John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, often emphasized this element of servant leadership in his teaching. And if he ever forgot it, he had his wife Carol to remind him of it. She once told John, “You know, man of God, when you get home you've still got to fix the toilet.” We are still going to have to get our hands dirty. It's just better to live with the paradigm that leadership is for serving, not being served.

Why is this S-turn so difficult to navigate? In fact, why would I even consider servanthood as being one of those S-turns in our race that challenges us? Because when leadership comes up in business, politics, and even in the church, it often comes with title, position, privilege, perks and power. Leadership has so often led to attitudes of entitlement and has been thought about in terms of moving up or advancing. And if we're not careful, we adopt that same corporate language in our church settings. Regardless of what title is added to our names or how we are promoted, we will never outgrow being servants, using what we have for the benefit

of the people. We have been entrusted with people and situations in which Jesus has asked us to wash smelly, dysfunctional feet. If we're not careful, we will spin out here.

One of the most powerful statements I've ever heard from a servant leader in the church came from a grandmother I knew. She once said, "I'll find my place in the good of the whole."⁹ That statement so resonated with me that I adopted it as part of the core language that I use when talking about church leadership. It was a revelation to me, an understanding, a paradigm, a

worldview. *I find my place in the good of the whole.* Whatever is good for the benefit of others is the issue in leadership. It's not about how I look, how can this initiative move my name forward, how can I use this for my own gain; rather, it's about how I can contribute to the good of the whole.

What would it look like if the people in your life, your family, your company, your community were to think about leadership only in the light of being a servant? What would the church of Jesus Christ look like if people were only conscious of how to serve rather than how to be served? If you've been in the church for any length of time, you have likely heard church people say, "You know, I come and I don't get anything out of it." Or, "My needs aren't being

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We have been entrusted with people and situations in which Jesus has asked us to wash smelly, dysfunctional feet.
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met”. I don’t take offense to these types of comments, even though many people do. What these people don’t realize is that the church wasn’t designed for them. We are called to give to the church, not take from her. In going and giving, we will receive. Dietrich Bonhoffer succinctly sums it up with a foreboding statement about following God: “The call of God bids you come and die!”¹⁰ If that mantra were repeated at our churches across the country, we likely would reduce membership numbers quickly.

As a leader, it’s important to remember that no matter what setting or situation you’re in to take on the mindset of a servant. I have a friend who once interviewed Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy at age 80. At being ushered in to meet the billionaire owner of the fast-food chain, he was asked by Mr. Cathy if he wanted something to drink. He nodded, and instead of Mr. Cathy pushing the intercom button and asking his receptionist to bring his guest a drink, Mr. Cathy walked across his office to a soda fountain machine, scooped ice out of the icemaker and filled a cup for his guest. If you have ever been into a Chick-fil-A during a busy time of operation, you will see this leadership trait in action by the employees of the restaurant. Each one has a specific role, but no one is above doing any other task, no matter how menial.

How transformative would it be for your church and community if your entire leadership team approached their roles with that mindset: “I’m going to church today, or the

office, or out in the neighborhood, and I'm going to find someone to bless. I'm going to find somebody and speak a kind word into his or her spirit. I'm going to find someone who's got nine kids and babysit for them"

The paradigm through which we see leadership is the way we will operate as leaders. We won't have cognitive dissonance where we separate the two. If we think of leadership as "Well, I've been around here and I'm a leader, so now I'm sort of special," we're likely to find ourselves leading a small group of entitled, miserable people. In the corporate world, people work their way up the ladder of prestige, honor, money, power, perks and privileges. In the Kingdom of God, Jesus comes and turns the whole paradigm upside down. He says, "He who wants to be great in the Kingdom of God becomes the servant of all" (Mark 10:43)

That's why there are so many leaders who spin out on this S-turn. We never outgrow serving.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Why is the servants' heart the foundation of leadership?
2. In what way can we grow in this area both individually and corporately?
3. If you are a leader, do you still find simple pleasure in serving? Explain.