

"Grow your faith, accelerate your leadership." —KYLE IDLEMAN

THE

12 WAYS

MASTER

TO LEAD LIKE JESUS

LEADER

MARK E. MOORE

The mantle of leadership can be heavy. Nothing, however, outweighs the cross. Jesus led with such power and clarity that it changed the world. It changed you. Dr. Moore will help you dive deep into Jesus' leadership strategy. This book will empower you to carry your load well and, perhaps, change your own world.

Matt Chandler, elder and lead pastor, The Village Church

As a CEO aiming to integrate my faith into the business world, I can say that *The Master Leader* offers a valuable guide for pursuing excellence and displaying leadership qualities inspired by Jesus. Typically, these qualities are viewed as conflicting, but this book illustrates how together they optimize results. I am convinced that this resource can benefit leaders striving to lead with intention and purpose.

John K. Solheim, president and CEO, Ping Golf

If you're a leader, you're a reader. So many books on leadership may fill your shelf. Why add another? Because this one baptizes leadership wisdom in the life that Jesus lived. It adds the critical lens of Scripture to the common view of leadership principles. It will grow your faith as well as accelerate your leadership.

Kyle Idleman, senior pastor, Southeast Christian Church

If you're like me, your shelves are overflowing with leadership books. But before you decide you don't need another one, I urge you to dig into this tool from two authors who offer tremendous wisdom based on the example of our leader, Jesus. In these pages, you will find both big-picture principles and practical tools that can have a lasting impact on your ministry.

Nancy Beach, leadership coach and author

This book will bolster your commitment to leading with excellence, something that is not easy to accomplish. I love how Mark and Jeff take a serious look at how Jesus led, which is spiritual gold for the leader who bows the knee to Jesus.

Doug Crozier, CEO, The Solomon Foundation

As an executive leader over the past two decades, I've prayed for guidance on how to navigate the many challenges I face daily to ensure I stay true to my faith and don't lose sight of who I am. *The Master Leader* was an answer to my prayers. This book is a great leadership playbook with practical and sound advice that will enable any leader, whether new to leadership or a seasoned veteran, to grow in leadership and lead like Jesus at the same time. I wish I had read this playbook sooner.

Jim Brady, COO of a Fortune 250 company

The Master Leader is a book that truly stands out in the crowded field of leadership resources. This book, focused on the twelve Master Leader values and actions, provides a unique and powerful perspective by juxtaposing these well-worn truths with the life of Jesus. I highly recommend this book to anyone looking to grow as a leader and bring positive change to their organization and community.

Julie Laulis, president, CEO, and chair of the board,
Cable One, Inc.

Having just finished a PhD in Business Administration, I'm wondering, *Why didn't they just make me read this book?* It would have been so much more helpful. *The Master Leader* will help you figure out how to think, be, and lead like Jesus. Isn't that what life is all about anyway? Loved all the practical tools and action steps.

Doug Lucas, president, TeamExpansion.org

To be influential leaders of faith who aspire to make a meaningful impact, we must first decide how we want to influence others and the way we want to go about it. *The Master Leader* is the "how-to" book for leading like Jesus. This book provides both foundational and practical direction for embodying effective Christian leadership.

Pastor John K. Jenkins Sr., senior pastor,
First Baptist Church of Glenarden

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MARK E. MOORE

WITH JEFF OSBORNE



Nashville, Tennessee



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The Master Leader

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To the two leaders who impacted my leadership journey more than any others: Ken Idleman, former president of Ozark Christian College in Joplin, Missouri; and Don Wilson, founding pastor of Christ's Church of the Valley in Phoenix, Arizona.

— *Mark E. Moore*

Leadership is all about influence. No one influenced me more than my father, Duane Osborne. Thanks for being the most significant influence in my life. To my wife, Pam, who lives out leadership better than anyone I know. Thanks for always being the wind beneath my wings—without you, my leadership journey simply wouldn't have happened.

— *Jeff Osborne*

CONTENTS

The Making of a Master Leader 11

Part 1: The Values of a Master Leader

1. Integrity 23
2. Servanthood 35
3. Stewardship 47
4. Consistency 59
5. Caring 71
6. Nimbleness 85

Part 2: The Actions of a Master Leader

7. Build Culture 99
8. Cast Vision 111
9. Develop Strategy 123
10. Focus Priorities 135
11. Take Action 147
12. Mentor Leaders 159

The Challenge of a Master Leader 169

Notes 173

About the Authors 175

THE MAKING OF A MASTER LEADER

John Maxwell says, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.”¹ I’ve tried to argue with that, since it is an absolute statement and absolute statements are seldom true. I’ve tried. But I can’t think of an exception to that rule in any organization, whether civic, religious, or business. Leadership is the fuel of human flourishing in families, churches, tribes, and nations. It appears that this is by God’s design. It was a king who wrote, “The LORD is my shepherd” (Ps. 23:1). He led the nation; God led the king. In Romans 13:1, the great theologian Paul wrote, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” God designed and designated leaders to care for the world he created.

When leaders carry out God’s will and shepherd his people, the flock flourishes. Not only does everything rise and fall on leadership, but all leaders are God’s leaders, even those who are not godly. Some attain power to guide and guard God’s people, such as David and Moses. Some are raised up by God for discipline or retribution, such as Nebuchadnezzar or Caesar. If you are in leadership, whether in a church, business, or government, it is because God put his hand on you and expects (even demands) you to carry out his will.

If it is your desire to lead on behalf of the Good Shepherd, then this book is for you. I have spent my professional career chasing hard after Jesus. For more than two decades, I taught a course called “The Life of Christ” at Ozark Christian College. Since 2012, I have been

a teaching pastor for Christ’s Church of the Valley in Phoenix, Arizona, working with leaders in churches, businesses, and nonprofits. My purpose in writing this book is to introduce you to the leadership principles of Jesus and how they apply to your own leadership context. However, I have never been the point leader of an organization. So to authentically apply these biblical principles, I have asked a colleague of mine to join this project.

Allow me to introduce Jeff Osborne. He has worked as a C-level leader in multiple organizations and has coached hundreds of leaders in the business world. He came on staff with Christ’s Church of the Valley in 2020 as one of our executive pastors. Jeff’s career “crossover” makes him the ideal collaborator. In each chapter, I’ve asked him to address a key question from a C-level leader’s seat. His perspective will be invaluable as you apply the principles of Jesus. I invite you to hear part of Jeff’s story.

As Mark mentioned, my journey of leadership has been filled with successes, failures, and—most of all—lessons. As I share some of these lessons with you in this book, let me start by sharing one of the most important lessons, which is to have the proper leadership mindset.

It was an excellent operational model. I presented it with such conviction. As I sat back down at the intimidating, oversized table in our executive boardroom, the heads of our business division politely nodded and thanked me. Following my presentation, a colleague offered an alternative plan. He received a rousing round of applause.

I had a pit in my stomach. *He won. I lost.*

You can see the problem. We were on the same team. I chose a scarcity mindset over an abundance mindset. For years, that soundtrack ran on repeat in my head. I’m embarrassed to admit that more than a few times after that meeting, I wished ill on my colleague—that he would fail.

This scarcity mindset robbed me of collaborating with this leader and sharing ideas that would make both our divisions great. I

could have celebrated his success and worked to raise my game. We probably could have done some great things together.

Since those days, I've worked hard to lead with an abundance mindset, to be a more mature and confident leader who believes there is room for all of us to be successful. Our mindset matters. That's what this book is all about.

Before we manage others, we must first master the management of ourselves. And that requires a strong and healthy leadership mindset. We must determine the type of leader we want to be—a critical step in leading like the Master. Settle it now: *What kind of leader do I want to become?* One of the best ways to think about this might be to ask yourself: *What do I want my leadership brand to say about me and how I lead others? What do I want to be known for as a leader?*

Often, the problem with leadership isn't that we don't know how to lead, but rather, that we haven't clarified the leadership brand for which we want to be known. We simply wing it. I think you'll agree that when it comes to leadership, "winging it" isn't a great strategy. Effective and influential leadership demands that we consider deeply the desired impact of our leadership.

We all know leaders whom we deem to be great or who have had significant impact on our lives. We just don't often think about *why* they were able to make that level of impact and how we might be able to have a similar effect. Often, we are too busy focusing on the "doing" aspect of leadership and fulfilling our responsibilities to worry about who we are as a leader.

We need Jesus' model of leadership. Leading like Jesus is not as difficult as it may seem! We have so many examples of both good and bad leaders from a myriad of sources—Scripture, the marketplace, history, and personal experience. Once we develop the values of a Master Leader and begin to act on the values and actions Jesus taught and showed us, we'll be well on our way to becoming Master Leaders.

To adopt the right leadership mindset—the mindset of Jesus—we must think strategically about the attributes, styles,

characteristics, and values we want to exercise in our own personal leadership. This all takes time, focus, and energy—valuable resources few of us have in abundance. What can we do? The first half of the battle of leadership is fought between our ears.

When I was a young, inexperienced leader and wanted to grow in my leadership, I would sit in meetings with high-level leaders and think about how they would respond to a question or a situation. At first, I would get about half the answers right. Over time, it was closer to 75 percent. Eventually, I was able to think like the leaders above me. This mindset training required me to be present in the moment and not merely half-listening to the leadership exchange taking place around me.

Being intentional about the mindset we want to possess as leaders is a helpful exercise for our “leadership muscles.” Our mindset ensures we have spent time thinking through how we want to lead before we find ourselves in the middle of a situation where we can easily be caught off guard. Ask yourself: *Do I want to be a leader who’s known for getting things done, or do I want to be a leader who’s known for equipping and empowering others to do great things? Do I want to be a leader others fear or follow? Do I want to be a leader who always has the right answer, or a leader who listens generously to feedback?* When you choose the type of leader you want to be, you create a mindset and a mental map to set the course you’ll follow as you lead others. As Christians, Jesus is our model for becoming a Master Leader.

Determining our leadership mindset requires us to be mindful of each situation, which simply means that our leadership style and approach will need to ebb and flow depending on the situation and the people we lead. Most church leaders strive to be servant leaders—providing encouragement, delegating well, or empowering their team. Though we all aspire to be this type of leader, many situations require us to direct, tell, and guide our team, spending less time on collaborating and coaching. Great leaders master servanthood,

flexibility, and nimbleness. The best leaders know how to fly at different altitudes depending on the situations or challenges they are required to manage. Determine the kind of leader you desire to be, but remember that leadership is a journey—a muscle group, if you will—and that it will require constant attention, training, and investment to achieve excellence.

How to Use This Book

Jeff and I sincerely desire that the twelve Master Leader values and actions in this book empower you to be the kind of leader you are called to be as a disciple of Jesus. If you are leading people in any capacity, you likely have a voracious appetite for leadership resources: books, conferences, websites, and podcasts. Perhaps that's why you picked up this book; you want to grow as a leader. But if you have a line of other leadership books on your shelf, you may be asking, "How is this book any different than the plethora of other offerings?" After all, a wise man once said, "There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9). Sure enough, the values and actions in these pages are well-worn truths. What makes them unique in this context is their juxtaposition to the life of Jesus.

Our goal is to tie leadership principles to the model of Jesus. After all, he is literally the founding father of servant leadership. Prior to him, there were no leaders who practiced servant leadership or philosophers who advocated for it. By tracing the teachings of Jesus, as well as his actions, we can sleuth the origin of the heart and habits of the Master Leader.

The title of this book, *The Master Leader*, goes back to the fact that Jesus was the greatest leader of all time. Starting with just a small number of disciples, Jesus made more of an impact on humanity than anyone else in history. He embodied the twelve leadership values and actions of this book better than anyone. Our prayer for

this book is that these twelve leadership principles will empower you to have a greater impact than you ever imagined.

Your impact will be in direct proportion to your allegiance to the Master and alignment with him. He's not merely our personal Master. He is *the* Master Leader, unmatched in history. Whereas one of my previous books, *Core 52*, focused on fifty-two Bible passages, this book focuses on twelve leadership principles. Both books, in different ways, point squarely to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Standard leadership books focus on core pillars such as identity, vision, mission, values, strategies, and stewardship. This book will filter these through the model of Jesus. Whether you lead a church, a ministry, a nonprofit organization, or a marketplace venture, if you want to lead like Jesus, this book will help you identify the original values and actions of the Master and apply them in a contemporary context.

I've broken the book into two main parts. Part 1, "The Values of a Master Leader" (chapters 1 through 6), looks at six characteristics of a Christian leader, and Part 2 looks at the actions of a Master Leader—how those values can be practiced in the rough and tumble of our leadership roles.

Leadership begins with *integrity* (chapter 1), not merely doing the right thing, but being the right person. Who we are comes from what we believe about ourselves. When we look at the life of Jesus, we discover that his integrity came from his revolutionary idea that God was his Father. His Father's love, approval, and calling gave him the courage to live consistently according to God's agenda. This can be you too. The second characteristic is *servanthood* (chapter 2). Jesus expressed this in his relentless and unique self-designation: "Son of Man." His ability to serve and suffer as the Son of Man came from his confidence in his Father. Chapters 1 and 2 explore our identity as leaders, providing both confidence and humility.

Because Master Leaders are under God's authority, they aren't really *masters*, but servants. They are not rulers who wield power,

but *stewards* (chapter 3) of what God has entrusted to them. Jesus demonstrated how to steward all the resources God entrusted to him. It went well beyond material resources to include people, time, and communication. But no one can steward God's resources well without being *consistent* (chapter 4). That comes through habits, what the church fathers called "disciplines." Though we have nothing like a comprehensive list of Jesus' disciplines in the Gospels, what we do have is telling. He addressed two priority habits: prayer and Sabbath. While there are plenty of other habits leaders should master, these two are particularly important to Jesus for leading a life of balance.

In chapter 5 we'll focus on Jesus' primary value of love, which I am calling "*caring*." It drove all his actions, up to the cross. It was the primary command that summarized all the Mosaic law. But values without behaviors are just plaques on a wall. The final character value of a Master Leader is *nimbleness* (chapter 6). By tapping into the shepherding practices of leaders in the Bible, particularly the ones we see through Jesus' ministry, we can see how to move adroitly and adjust with agility to confront the challenges that face the flock.

In Part 2, "The Actions of a Master Leader" (chapters 7 through 12), we examine some tactical behaviors that will grow both the depth and breadth of your church or organization. After all, the health of the group always starts with its leader. We begin in chapter 7 with the specific actions that embedded Jesus' primary value of love into real-world situations through practicing mercy and inclusion. This is precisely how organizations *build culture*.

Chapter 8 addresses *casting vision*. That is your main role as a leader—to cast a compelling vision of a preferred future. Jesus' vision, in a nutshell, was to restore Eden. That is precisely what will happen someday in the new heaven and the new earth. But in the meantime, Jesus set out to bring a bit of heaven to earth as a precursor of things to come. In chapter 9 we look at how we *develop strategy* and how Jesus adopted the shepherding metaphor for his own role. The shepherd's duties are still a good template of what we could (read "must") do in our organizations. Leaders lead, feed, heal,

and protect the flock. Developing strategies around those priorities keeps us focused.

In chapter 10 we examine what it looks like to *focus priorities* with Jesus' vision of God's kingdom. His focus models for us the importance of keeping our "main thing" the main thing. His effectiveness shows us the importance of doing less to get more done. In chapter 11 we observe that leaders prefer *taking action* over discussion. So did Jesus. In fact, his final words on earth were a proactive commission, sending his followers to establish his kingdom globally. That's a task larger than any of us, which leads us to our final chapter.

We need to *mentor leaders* (chapter 12). This ultimately means we make our own disciples in order to carry on the mission. Jesus had his Twelve, and they passed the torch to those who traveled with them. Down the line it went, until here we are today.

You are a leader following in the steps of the Master. My goal in writing this book is not simply that you would become a great leader, but that you would be a Master Leader—leading like and leading *for* the one who initiated this whole thing we call servant leadership.

In each chapter, I offer three consistent building blocks, opening each with a tangible example of the principle we are addressing. This will pull the principle from the philosophical ether and ground it in our present reality. My hope is that you can use these stories or ones like them to help your team see the relevance of your training on these topics.

Also, each chapter answers a specific question that leaders face. I invited Jeff, whom I introduced above, to write these sections so you can hear from an experienced leader who has spent significant time leading in the marketplace. You will feel the significance of his contributions in these practical sections of each chapter. He speaks authentically and experientially to the issues you face at the top of your team.

Following Jeff's contribution, I tap into my twenty-two years of Bible college teaching on the life of Jesus, mining for leadership principles. My goal is to summarize and synthesize the jewels of

the Master’s leadership and present them to you, polished and ready to set in the gold studs of your own leadership setting. We’re not just looking for quotes and quips. We are finding patterns in Jesus’ leadership that are both repeatable and transferable. This is what sets *The Master Leader* apart from other excellent leadership books. I filter legitimate biblical scholarship through a leadership lens to give you an executive summary of the historical Jesus. Our hope is this approach will help inform and ground you in the values and practices of Jesus that most impact your leadership decisions and leadership style.

As you read, make sure to use the “Take Action” sections at the end of each chapter. You will also find bonus material on some of those exercises, which are available at TheMasterLeader.com/tools. Each of these exercises was carefully culled and analyzed for practical leadership development. We urge you to do more than just read this book and shelve it with the others. These action steps can turn this book into a training manual for leadership development. Consider reading this with your team, a mentoring group, or other leaders with whom you consult, and work through the exercises together. Also, make sure to access the video course and group discussion questions we created to go with this book. Visit TheMasterLeader.com/tools for access. These will help you process the content of this book as a team through supplemental material and dialogue.



Your leadership is a gift from God and a responsibility to him. The marketplace is full of great resources and good advice. Like you, Jeff and I have used and benefited from them. As Christians, however, we have a Master who stands above all kings and CEOs. His path to achievement and success is different, sometimes counterintuitive. To lead like him—to become a Master Leader—doesn’t just encompass the highest stakes. It includes the highest privileges.

PART 1

THE VALUES OF A MASTER LEADER

Leadership is more about *who* we are than what we *do*. That's why this book begins with six character values of Jesus, the Master Leader, that we must embrace and imitate to lead like him.

We begin with *integrity* birthed out of an identity found in our heavenly Father. This identity frees us for *servanthood*. This leads to *stewardship*, recognizing we are merely managers for the Father, not owners. Good stewardship requires the discipline of *consistency* in our own habits, *caring* for the children of God, and *nimbleness* for the ever-changing needs and challenges of the flock. These leadership values are the prerequisites to living out the actions of the Master Leader (Part 2). When we get the *who* right, the *how* will more easily follow.

INTEGRITY

The thirty-seventh president of the United States was massively successful. He ended a very unpopular war and normalized relations with China. Domestically, he was equally impactful—so powerful that he was reelected by a landslide in 1972. Undoubtedly, he would have gone down in history as one of America's greatest presidents had it not been for a tiny glitch called Watergate.

After Richard Nixon's reelection, the country learned that members of his party had broken into the Democratic National Headquarters to steal information that would help secure his reelection. Though Nixon didn't order the break-in, subsequent audiotapes revealed he was complicit in covering it up. Rather than facing impeachment, Nixon became the first president in U.S. history to resign his office. His name is now synonymous with duplicity and ignominy. Leadership is more than what you do on the public stage. It begins behind the scenes with *who you are when no one is watching*. Integrity is the foundation of trust and is essential to a legacy that lasts.

Richard Nixon's resignation is etched in my memory. I recall watching from a black-and-white TV at a public swimming pool in the summer of 1974. I was eleven years old and as imperceptive as one would expect a tween to be. Even so, I remember thinking, *Oh no! If we can't trust the president, who can we trust?* Nixon didn't merely destroy his own presidency; he irreparably damaged Americans' respect for the office. From that day to this, the esteem of the

highest office in the country has diminished precipitously. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of integrity in leadership. As James Kouzes and Barry Posner say, “If you don’t believe in the messenger, you won’t believe in the message.”² So before I answer the question “Where did Jesus’ integrity come from?” I want you to hear from Jeff as he speaks to what it means for a leader to have integrity.

What Does It Mean for a Leader to Have Integrity?

Sometimes we think of integrity as synonymous with morality. But it’s more than that. Integrity is not just doing the right things; it’s being the right person. Simply said, integrity is when the inside aligns with the outside. Ergo, as leaders, we must know what’s inside ourselves to have integrity. What are we trying to model in and through our leadership? Leading with integrity requires us to be crystal clear on the standards we want to uphold. And just as important, we must be aware of how our thoughts and actions are aligning to those standards.

As Christian leaders, we know to look to the Bible for the standards we should uphold. Though each of our leadership situations are nuanced and the Bible doesn’t always directly address our specific challenges, overarching principles of Scripture are relevant to any situation we find ourselves in. We must identify the standards of integrity we want to live out. These standards will be a combination of attributes we know to be true from Scripture and the examples of what we’ve seen demonstrated through godly leaders—parents, teachers, coaches, etcetera. Let’s be honest: there are very few situations where it’s unclear if a leader is acting in ways that align with God’s standards.

Are we living out these standards? To be certain, we must develop the muscle group of self-awareness. To do the right thing when

no one is looking requires that we look honestly at ourselves first and be honest about what we see.

Over the decades of leading both individuals and organizations, I have realized that self-awareness is one of the most important skills to master. It's also one of the greatest deficiencies in leaders today. Without strong self-awareness, we as leaders often find ourselves in a place of self-deception. We want to do the right thing and truly believe we are doing the right thing, but due to our lack of self-awareness, we can easily fall into feeling like an imposter or poseur, that we are not being genuine to the values we believe to be true. An example of this is when we act like a hard-nosed “tough guy” about a situation in a way we think will impress the leaders around us, but deep inside there is a caring person who wants to show compassion and empathy.

Self-awareness, though simple, is not always easy. It requires us to ask for input, listen generously, and then have the humility to act on the input. In most leadership roles these days, getting feedback is not optional. It comes through performance reviews, one-on-one meetings, engagement surveys, and frank conversations with our leaders, peers, direct reports, family, and friends. The challenge is not just asking for and receiving feedback but also leveraging that feedback into specific meaningful changes in our behaviors. These behaviors become the foundation of being a leader of integrity.

One of the most helpful tools for turning feedback into actionable change is a “blind-spot board.” This is nothing more than a list of our top five blind spots that can become liabilities if we don't remain aware of them and counteract them wherever possible. I created a blind-spot board for myself years ago. It is still displayed in my office for two main purposes: 1) to be a keen reminder for me of my blind spots, and 2) to allow my team to see them so they can hold me accountable. Blind spots can cause significant damage if we, as leaders, are unaware of them and do not find ways to mitigate them.

Here are a few examples of blind spots from my board: don't get ahead of the team; listen, pause, respond—don't react; don't let

perfection get in the way of progress (GETMO: Good Enough to Move On); spiking the ball on the five-yard line is a fumble, not a touchdown; and always finish.

Our leadership blind spots are not much different than the blind spots we encounter when driving a car. They keep us from seeing potential danger in our periphery. Blind spots cause collisions. The issue is not that we have blind spots (we all do); it's that we don't take time to check our blind spots. As leaders, we tend to focus on our many strengths and not worry about our blind spots. Although we all should lean toward leveraging our strengths first, if we're unaware of our blind spots, we can significantly diminish the effectiveness of our leadership to those we serve. It's just too big a risk to ignore our blind spots.

Now that we are aware of how we are seen by others and of our blind spots, the key to maintaining integrity is to make sure we make the right next choice. Integrity involves knowing the right thing to do and then doing it. When we lead, many of our daily decisions and actions feel isolated or separate from who we are as a leader, but they have a tremendous compounding effect when it comes to integrity. As Christian leaders, there are no small things, no insignificant decisions; there are all big decisions wrapped in small packages.

Jesus often focused on small and seemingly insignificant illustrations to help us understand that there are few decisions or behaviors that don't matter. He reminds us of the significance of a small splinter in our own eye. If we have faith as small as a mustard seed, we can move mountains. A couple of fish and a few loaves can feed thousands. A simple deceit from Ananias about holding back money caused him and his wife to literally drop dead. Because each decision we make creates a ripple effect on those we lead, there are no unimportant or insignificant decisions as a Christian leader. We first must take care to ensure we know how we are behaving with heightened self-awareness and then be diligent to make sure we pay attention to make the right next choice, even in the small things.

Where Did Jesus' Integrity Come From?

Jeff's perspective is invaluable as we turn now to the Gospels. No one questions that Jesus was a man of integrity. He lived his values. He was the same person in private as in public, with the wealthy as with the poor, with morally impeccable religious leaders as with cunning tax collectors. How was it that Jesus managed to have such integrity—to be so integrated in his values? It's no secret. He talked about it frequently. His values, and his value, came from his Father in heaven.

Jesus was the same person in private as in public.

Because Jesus talked so frequently about the Father, speaking about God as our Father feels normal, at least for Christians. In Jesus' age, however, that was a radically revolutionary idea. It changed the landscape of religion. Until Jesus, no one imagined having a personal relationship with God. I would suggest that it is equally revolutionary today and never more needed. Why? Because the greatest barrier to integrity is our fractured identity. Our brokenness creates spiritual confusion when we try to meet competing and inappropriate expectations.

The good news is that Jesus provided a way for us to connect with our heavenly Father. We can find our identity in him as an antidote to the competing voices in the world around us attempting to impose a different identity on us. Therefore, as a starting point for integrity, leaders must find their identity and value in a Father who has already called, equipped, and approved them. That's why we begin our investigation into Jesus' leadership with his own identity.

Jesus' Identity in the Gospels

Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus' sense of intimate and personal connection with the Father. Look at the number of times he references his relationship.

The following chart is a summary of the data:

Jesus Identified God As	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	Total
“Father”	39	4	22	103	168
“My Father”	18	1	8	44	71

Why does it matter that Jesus perceived himself as God’s Son? Because that’s where his identity came from. He didn’t need the approval of religious leaders. He didn’t fear the contagion of sinners. He didn’t have to self-promote or fight to protect himself. He was secure in his Father’s approval, fully free to live his life and carry out his calling with perfect integration and integrity—personally, professionally, and spiritually. The same can be true of you. By imitating Jesus, your leadership can be freed from inappropriate expectations and demands from others and from yourself.

Jesus’ identity as the “Son of God” allowed him to claim his rightful and exalted role without an ounce of arrogance or pride. It allowed him to be in full submission to the Father’s authority without fear of losing his own independence. He had both bold confidence and radical humility because of his connection with his Father.

Jesus had confidence and humility because of his connection with his Father.

For years I struggled with my identity and felt the impact it had on my integrity. My father is a good and godly man, but due to his own upbringing and a painful divorce, he struggled with expressing his emotions. I carried that wound for decades. In my college years, I excelled academically, partially out of a desperate need for approval from father figures. In my thirties, I found my professional achievements filling an emotional need that should have come more naturally from my marriage and children. It wasn’t until my forties that I began to accept the approval of my heavenly Father. This began to free me from the need for approval, which liberated me for more humble service, transparent vulnerability, and intimate friendships.

This is but a brief glimpse through the window of my own soul that may serve as a mirror to your own. Hopefully, it's a reminder of the impact your identity can have on your integrity. Powerful leaders can be driven by insecurity rather than divine responsibility. Many times I have witnessed how insecurity can jeopardize a leader's integrity, putting their legacy at risk.

To lead with maximized integrity, we must follow Jesus' example and find our identity in being a child of our heavenly Father. As we do this, we can live under the Father's authority, building both confidence and humility, which in turn, empower our integrity.

Below is a sampling of what being under the Father's authority meant for Jesus' ministry. Take a moment to circle or highlight two or three principles that you could implement immediately into your leadership practices to make the most impact most quickly.

1. *Jesus delegated authority based on his Father's revelation:* "I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29–30; see also Matt. 16:17–18; 18:19; 20:23).
2. *Jesus prioritized people based on God's priorities:* "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10; see also Matt. 18:14; John 10:29).
3. *Jesus submitted to suffering because of his Father's will:* "And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will'" (Matt. 26:39; see also John 10:18).
4. *Jesus was secure enough in his identity to submit to his Father's will:* "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Luke 10:22).

5. *Jesus' self-confidence empowered his endurance as he imitated his Father:* "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5:17; see also John 10:37).
6. *Jesus was glorified only by his Father:* "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God'" (John 8:54).
7. *Jesus freely communicated what his Father shared with him:* "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

Each of these connections with the Father reveals Jesus' integrity as a leader that flowed from his confident identity. Knowing who you are as a leader is of paramount importance. Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas make this observation: "When the 75 members of the Stanford graduate school of businesses advisory council were asked to recommend the most important capability for leaders to develop, their answer was nearly unanimous: self-awareness."³

Our Integrity as Leaders

How does all this relate to our integrity as leaders? A common misconception of leadership is that leadership leads to freedom. As you probably know, it does not. Leadership is not "freedom from" but "freedom to." We have the freedom to carry out obligations. It's the people you feel obligated to who will determine your level of integrity. If you feel obligated to an unethical boss, you'll lose integrity. If you feel obligated to your own pride, it will lead to catastrophic mismanagement. If you feel you have multiple competing obligations—family, lust, greed, reputation—you will lose integrity to multiple masters.

For example, leaders are often blinded by the sycophantic praise of their followers who hope to cling to their coattails for success and significance. Church leaders are certainly not immune to this. We

are often *more* vulnerable because the praise of men is in the shadow of the Almighty who has ordained us to lead—or so we believe. It’s easy to lose ourselves if we’re not connected to the Father and obligated first and foremost to him.

If your exclusive obligation is to your heavenly Father, he will not only endow you with his authority; he will also grant you his unmitigated approval. You can, therefore, be free to serve, free to obey, free to give, free to speak hard truths, and free to delegate. It’s this “freedom to” that comes from God the Father and brings uncompromised integrity in our leadership.

Chapter Summary

Integrity is the foundation of leadership. It is not just doing the right things; it’s being the right person—aligning our actions with God’s values. This seems simple enough. However, without a clear view of the Father and close connection to him, the values we want to embody can become mere rules; and rules without relationship typically lead to rebellion. As we come to know the Father, we sense his approval and love. His value of us allows his values to live in us, resulting in a life of integrity. It also develops a deep humility—a humility that enables us to serve others sacrificially. We’ll talk about this servanthood in the next chapter.

TAKE ACTION ON INTEGRITY

Jesus’ identity was the foundation for his leadership integrity. He had clarity on his relationship with his Father, and that clarity empowered his integrity. It is the same for all Master Leaders following in the Master’s footsteps. When we are clear about who we are and our foundation, our integrity can be unfettered from the pressures of our personal or professional stakeholders. With the Father’s authority and approval, we can

lead with humility and serve with integrity the people God has called us to lead. Here are two actions you can take toward this end.

The Father Index

Uncover the Influence of Your Earthly and Heavenly Fathers

Carve out an hour free from interruptions. Turn off your phone. Open your journal to two blank pages. On the left page, write “Earthly Father” and make three columns: *Descriptors*, *Memories*, and *Gratitude*. Do the same on the right page under the title “Heavenly Father.” The columns will look like this:

Descriptors	Memories	Gratitude

For the first twenty-five minutes, write single-word descriptors in the first column that aptly describe your earthly father. These might include words like *caring*, *distant*, *sullen*, *angry*, *fun*, *responsible*, or even *absent*. If you did not grow up with an earthly father (or if you had an abusive father), this will be a difficult exercise, and I am sorry if this triggers pain. Be encouraged, however, that this exercise can still drive you to your heavenly Father. You may choose to either leave the first column blank or substitute a father figure from your life who helped shape your identity.

In the middle column under “Memories,” briefly summarize important events in your life that you experienced with your earthly father (or didn’t have if he was absent or abusive). This could be a camping trip, words of wisdom, habits he had, a moment of discipline, a gift he gave you, or something he taught you. It might help to break up your life into stages: ages one to ten, eleven to eighteen,

nineteen to twenty-five, twenty-six to thirty-nine, etcetera. Finally, make a list of things you appreciate about your father under “Gratitude.” For example, these could be lessons learned, habits formed, gifts given, or words spoken. You don’t have to complete one column before moving to the next. Often, all three columns will explode at once with a memory.

After twenty-five minutes, move to the next page. Do the same as above while thinking of your heavenly Father. Do *not* write what the Bible says about God in the first column. Write only what you have experienced with him. In the middle column, your memories might be (and often will be) arbitrated through a human or group experience. You might have experienced God’s provision through a neighbor, his beauty through an artist, or his power in creation, the birth of a child, or corporate worship at church.

For the final ten minutes, compare the lists. Write two summary conclusions: first write one titled “The Way I See God Through the Lens of My Earthly Father,” and then write one called “The Way I See God as Different from My Earthly Father.” The purpose of this exercise is to clarify and magnify your heavenly Father in your life so that his approval and agenda can drive your identity, because it is your identity that empowers your integrity.

Personal Declaration

Create a Blueprint for Your Identity

Please do not procrastinate on this exercise. Several years ago, I went through a difficult season (partially of my own making). I was considering leaving my ministry. This exercise sustained my ministry through the dark night of the soul. I pray it does the same for you, today or someday—a crisis is always looming for leaders. A personal declaration is a statement about what you believe could and should be true about you. This is both a description of who you are and a promise to yourself of who you will become.

Here are some steps to pull it off:

1. Find a solitary place to think and write without interruption for at least thirty minutes.
2. Imagine yourself at your own funeral. In your mind, watch specific people come up to the front. Listen as they describe what they appreciated about you. Feverishly write down everything you want these important people to say about you at the end of your life.
3. Now organize those thoughts into five to ten deliberate statements (not more than two paragraphs). See my example below.
4. Let that sit overnight. The next day, read what you wrote out loud three or four times and then edit it for clarity.
5. Let it sit overnight again. Repeat the editing process, adding anything important to you and deleting anything unnecessary.
6. Repeat your personal declaration out loud until you have it memorized. Feel free to continue editing it as you say it dozens of times.
7. Recite it out loud every day for a month. Then repeat it at least once a week until your actions align with your intentions.

Here is my personal declaration (in case you would like to get a feel for what might be helpful): “I am spiritually sound, physically fit, mentally sharp, emotionally resilient, and relationally wise. I am inspired by Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and loved by the Father. Therefore, I can work relentlessly, fight fearlessly, love radically, and serve selflessly. I am a Christian.”

This is who I am, partially. It is also the trajectory I am on. By repeating this statement frequently, I keep these priorities in view during my daily activities to create habits that result in the character I want to embody and display. Once again, the purpose of this exercise is to clarify your identity, because it is your identity, more than any other factor, that empowers your integrity.

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NOTES

1. John Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You: How to Help Others Reach Their Full Potential* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 6.

2. James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, 5th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 38.

3. In Bill George, Peter Sims, Andrew McLean, and Diana Mayer, “Discovering Your Authentic Leadership,” in *HBR’s 10 Must Reads on Leadership* (Boston: HBR, 2011), 168.

4. Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 12–29. The authors observe that these moments can be far more powerful than much more extended investments if we are able to elevate the moment with true connection.

5. David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 17.

6. Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 14.

7. Loehr and Schwartz, *Power of Full Engagement*, 40. They go on to cite a word in Japanese, *karoshi*, that means “death from overwork,” which is responsible for 10,000 deaths a year in Japan.

8. Henry Cloud, *Trust: Knowing When to Give It, When to Withhold It, How to Earn It, and How to Fix It When It Gets Broken* (Nashville, TN: Worthy, 2023), 41–120.

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