

Christ-Like Leadership: Being Motivated by the One

In high school, I had the opportunity to serve as a peer tutor to help those with learning disabilities. At the beginning of the semester, I was assigned to help a girl who I will call Kate. Previously, I had worked with a boy with Down syndrome. He usually needed a lot of assistance with projects and assignments. Kate, on the other hand, tried to ignore me. She would quietly hunch over her papers and never volunteered to help in class. It frustrated me when I could see that she was struggling but would not accept my help. I worried she didn't like me or was afraid of me.

One day during English class, Kate had to write a response to the prompt, "What is your greatest fear?" I watched as without hesitation she wrote, "My biggest fear is when people think I can't do something."

Suddenly I felt bad for thinking it was all about me. Kate wasn't afraid of me; she was afraid of what I thought of her. That day my approach to being Kate's peer tutor changed. Instead of seeing her as a person needing to be helped, I focused on seeing her as a person needing to be loved. While in class, I would let Kate do her own work, but then I would talk to her about her life: her family, her favorite after-school activities, even her hopes for the future. I watched as Kate's self-confidence grew to the point where she would even ask me for help sometimes. She smiled more, laughed often, and started talking with others in the class as well. On the last day of school, Kate gave me a card that said, "Congratulations! Thank you for being the best peer tutor ever. I'm going to miss you."

I miss Kate and her smile. She taught me more about Christ-like service than I ever taught her about math or science.

That is one of the purposes of this life: to become more like Christ through our service to others. One resource that the Sorensen Center at Brigham Young University uses to teach this principle is the Christ-Centered Leader Model. This model teaches that true leaders strive to serve God and others through principles of love, agency, and accountability. Most importantly, this model teaches us that anyone who puts forth effort can become a Christ-like leader.

To understand the Christ-Centered Leader Model, we first must understand what makes Jesus Christ our best example of leadership. The Bible records the many miracles that Christ performed during His earthly ministry. While reading these accounts, we see that Christ was a leader in word and deed. He taught the people that the way to return to our Heavenly Father is through faith in His name. Then, He went out and served so the people could have hope and increase their faith. While He did all this, He never claimed glory for Himself, always giving gratitude to our Father. This was the purpose of Christ's life. His purpose was selfless and full of love, always seeking to serve others.

Though He is perfect, Christ's ministry was not easy., despite the difficulties, His motivation for good was the greatest:

“For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

“How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

“And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

“Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” (Matthew 18:11-12)

Christ was motivated to serve by the “one”. Not just one “one”, but every single one. He loves us perfectly and desires to help us through all the trials that we must pass through during this mortal life.

Thus, while finding our own motivation to become Christ-like leaders, we need not look further than the one. My experience with Kate taught me that sometimes we try to treat service like an assembly line. We think that a plate of cookies will make everyone happy, or compromises will solve all disputes. Yet sometimes one person needs help with assignments while another just needs to feel loved.

The hard part about leadership is there is no one answer to how it must be done. Instead, we need to adapt and learn as we focus on the one in need. I never would have connected with Kate had I not learned that the deepest desire of her heart was to have a friend – to have someone who would believe in her no matter what.

Going back to the Christ-Centered Leader Model, we see that it does not provide specific attributes of a leader but instead a framework for focusing on the one. The outer rings of this model focus on the relationships that a Christ-like leader fosters with others. Some may be surprised by the inclusion of God and self in this model. We cannot expect to be Christ-like leaders without strengthening our relationship with God. We need His power to help us discern the inner longings of the souls of others. Good leaders need to set aside time to develop their own personal gifts and talents so that they will be prepared to help others no matter the situation.

Also included in the outer rings are outward relationships: our relationships with God’s children and our stewardships. These reference our planned and unplanned service opportunities. While I was in high school, you could say Kate was under my stewardship because I was assigned to help her. Meanwhile, I was still responsible for helping others in the class when a

need arose, even though Kate was my only official buddy. As followers of Jesus Christ, it is our covenant responsibility “to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” (Mosiah 18:9). In doing so, we always stay aware of the ones in need.

Once we have identified the one, we take the next steps in the model of ministering to the one through expressing love, inviting accountability, and honoring agency. Christ showed us that these actions take faith and courage but can help even the most wayward child return home. At times we serve others with all three of these actions; sometimes, we choose to focus on one aspect. No matter how it is done, we can use these steps to change lives.

It is no coincidence that the two great commandments are about love. Our Heavenly Father’s plan was created because of love: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Our leadership becomes more divine when we focus on actions that show our love for God and our love for others.

To invite accountability is to inspire change. Sometimes being a leader means helping those who have made mistakes make things right. Other times, it is persuading people to become the best version of themselves.

We can give others the tools they need to move forward in faith, but in the end, the individual must choose their path for themselves. Not everyone will change or find joy because of the efforts of a leader, but as we learn in the Bible, “joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth”, meaning that even one person is worth all the effort (Luke 15:7).

We may never know the impact our Christ-like service can have on someone. The effects of our leadership may not be evident in the moment. As we focus on the one, we aren’t discouraged by failure. We stay motivated to serve no matter the outcome.

At times, I have been the leader, and at other times, I have been guided. I will never forget a hot summer day when I was feeling discouraged. I felt alone and misunderstood. I focused on my failures and that made me ignore every little victory.

That day, I was at a youth camp. As I stood in the food line lost in my thoughts, I met the eyes of a girl in my group. She smiled at me and said, “Sarah, I’m so impressed by you. You are beautiful inside and out.”

Tears welled up in my eyes. This humble girl had no idea that I needed her encouragement at that moment. She had no idea how much her words meant to me then and how much I treasure them now. She simply was doing her best to seek out the one, every single one.

May we all strive to seek out the one. The world is in desperate need of Christ-like leaders who seek to serve “with all their heart, might, mind, and strength” (Doctrine and Covenants 4:2). As we focus on finding the one, we will be those leaders. We will change the world one precious soul at a time.