

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN ISAIAH

I. Isaiah 42:1-4

1 "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Servant leaders don't serve themselves. They always serve someone or something outside themselves. In the case above, God calls the servant leader "my" leader. Servant leaders may also serve the vision or mission of the organization they lead.

Servant leaders also serve the people with whom they work. Their delight comes from a higher source of satisfaction, seeing people fulfilled and work accomplished in an atmosphere of peace.

Servant leaders are concerned with justice. What is justice? It is fair and equitable treatment for all people according to common sense standards. As a servant leader would like to be treated, so they treat others.

This requires that the leader understand what motivates people, which of course is different from person to person. What is just for one may not be fair and just for another. At the same time, there need to be policies that allow everyone the chance to have input into the work done, how it will be done, and how they will be compensated.

**QUESTION: A servant is concerned with justice.
How do you define justice in the position you are in at present?
What injustice exists that you see and have the power to correct?**

2 He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.

Servant leaders are not demonstrators. They don't utilize authoritarian tactics in their service or leadership. Anger isn't a usual motivating tool that they have the luxury of using. They use power to serve, not to break people or draw attention to themselves. This doesn't mean that servants won't speak up. They are reluctant to draw attention to themselves, however, for others must be front and center in the servant's work.

If servant leaders are visible in the work, they use their visibility to serve the vision, not to build their own kingdom

They do, however, usually draw attention to themselves when things go wrong. At that point, they cover for their team until the real issues can be identified and resolved.

3 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

Servants work with whatever they have been given. They are careful not to discourage the smallest work that may be going on in someone's life. A servant leader does not set the agenda for other people, rather follows the other person's agenda to serve that person effectively.

If the person's agenda doesn't match the organization's agenda, then a servant leader must take steps to see that this is rectified. That may mean assisting the person in finding a place where their person vision is more in line with the corporate goals. This is never done in a condescending or harmful manner.

To not break a reed or snuff out a flame, a servant leader must be gentle with people. The servant is not the center of attention, but rather makes the other person the focal point.

QUESTION: How gentle is your style with other people? Do you quickly extinguish their ideas, hopes or creations? If so, have you been guilty of putting out smoldering wicks that could burst into flame at some point?

4 he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.

This is the third time in four verses that the word justice is used. What does this Hebrew word mean?

mishpat (mish-pawt')--properly, a verdict (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a sentence or formal decree (human or [participant's] divine law, individual or collective), including the act, the place, the suit, the crime, and the penalty; abstractly, justice, including a participant's right or privilege (statutory or customary), or even a style:

How are some of the ways this word is translated in the Old Testament?

adversary, ceremony, charge, X crime, custom, desert, determination, discretion, disposing, due, fashion, form, to be judged, judgment, just (-ice, -ly), (manner of) law (-ful), manner,

measure, (due) order, ordinance, right, sentence, usest, X worthy, + wrong.

A servant is concerned with what is fair: fair pay for work, a person's feelings taken into consideration when decisions are handed down, humane treatment for the least and greatest. For fairness to occur, the servant must make sure that all sides have been heard. Thus, the servant must be a good listener.

No work situation is perfect, even in a church or charitable organization. When things happen that aren't right, servant leaders work as quickly as possible to resolve them. This involves listening to the perspective of all involved and working toward a satisfactory resolution.

The islands, symbolic of those cut off from all sources of help or communication, will put their hope in the law of one who is fair. Servant leaders help the weak when they can't always help themselves.

II. Isaiah 49:1-6

1 Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.

The role of a servant is a calling. The Lord chooses His servants. No one decides to take the role by an act of the will.

Service begins with a sense of purpose that comes from the still voice within. From that knowledge, leaders desire to serve out of a sense of duty and calling, not for personal gain.

2 He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.

It isn't always easy to find a servant leader. The Lord has prepared them through a work of His own hands. Very often they appear on the scene suddenly but were there all along, being prepared by the Lord in a secret place, the "shadow of his hand." King David, Daniel, and Joseph in Egypt were all servants that fit the description above. God hid them in His quiver and then when they burst on the scene, they were an "overnight" success, years in the making.

Sharpened swords and polished arrows are effective weapons that pierce through opposition to hit the target. Servant leaders are effective leaders; they hit the mark. Yet they see themselves as a means that God uses, not the end unto themselves.

EXERCISE: Why not study one of the lives of the men mentioned above (Joseph, David, or Daniel) to see how God prepared them to lead the world? Create a journal to record what you learn and then determine how you can apply those same lessons in your life to be an effective servant leader.

3 He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."

Once again, we see that servants of God belong to God alone. They aren't for hire, nor do they build their own kingdom. They represent God.

Servant leaders in a non-religious setting belong to the organization. They serve the vision that they may have helped formulate. Servant leaders do not build kingdoms, unless a kingdom is part of the vision.

God will reveal His gentle splendor in the lives of those He has prepared to be servant leaders. There is a sense of satisfaction that comes to all servant leaders that is their reward. Often, they serve in obscurity so that reward must satisfy them or they will feel cheated.

4 But I said, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."

The results of servant leadership are often slow and hard to measure. Because servant leaders don't draw attention to themselves, often others can take the credit for what they have accomplished. Thus, servant leaders can be easily discouraged.

God Himself rewards servant leaders. They cannot allow themselves to take the rewards that others claim and demand.

QUESTION: Do you expect the special rewards and perks of a leader? What are you willing to surrender to communicate that you are a servant leader who is ready to serve and not be served? Your parking space? The corner office with a view? Other special privileges?

5 And now the LORD says-- he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength—

Servant leaders don't establish their own kingdom, but build God's kingdom. Therefore they don't talk about *their* vision, *their* people, *their* work, *their* staff, or *their* money. It all belongs to God and they are to keep pointing the people to God in every way possible.

Even if servant leaders are in a non-religious workplace, it seems that they march to the beat of a different drum. What excites them doesn't excite a leader who employs an authoritarian style.

God honors servant leaders in His own manner. The reward for a job well done is a job well done!

God gives servant leaders strength, because they need it! They cannot use others to strengthen themselves, because they cannot use people for their own ends.

Jesus criticized the Jewish leaders because they worked for the praise that came from men and not the praise that comes from God. God's praise is less visible but more lasting. In fact, it is everlasting! (see Matthew 23:5-7; Luke 16:15; John 5:41-44; 1 Thessalonians 2:6)

6 he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

God promotes servant leaders once they have restored and brought back the lost ones. Servant leaders make other people the focus, not their own vision, ministry, building program or desires.

God increases the influence of servant leaders. God is their agent and spreads their fame without them having to do so. Servant leaders do not have a staff that serves them. The servant leader serves the staff.

Servant leaders will help set the vision and direction and then become the servant of the vision and direction they helped set. Since people usually achieve the vision, servant leaders ultimately serve people.

Servant leadership isn't doing demeaning work, although there may be times when that needs done. Servant leaders understand that they are there for others, to help them "win", to help build a team that will accomplish the goals.

III. Isaiah 50:4-11

4 The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

Servant leaders are careful what they say, because they don't speak for themselves. They know they are where they are to encourage and sustain the weary. People aren't there to serve the leader; the leader is there to serve the people.

God gives servant leaders daily instruction. It seems that these leaders have an intuitive sense of what people need to carry on and be effective.

As I am writing, I had an appointment with a man whose pastor resisted his desire to leave and plant a church after four years of faithful service. That pastor is not a servant leader. He was more concerned with his own work and how this man's departure was going to affect the pastor's work. The pastor was not concerned with this man's call or welfare. The pastor was simply concerned with how this was going to hurt his world.

But you ask, "What if that pastor is truly concerned and doesn't feel the man is ready?" A servant leader would give the man hope, establish a plan of what he needed to do to get ready, and pledge the church's resources to help the man fulfill his God-given purpose.

A pastor's or leader's role, in fact the role of an apostle, prophet, evangelist and teacher, is to equip the people for the work God has assigned for them. Their role is not to use the people in building their own world. (see Ephesians 4:11-13). Even if you are a business leader, you can be a servant leader, equipping your employees for their own success within the context of your corporate vision.

QUESTION: Are you using people for your own ends or are you working with them to see God's will done in their lives?

5 **The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back.**

Servant leaders are excellent listeners. They don't talk at or down to people, but listen carefully to what others are saying. They let other people set the agenda or guide it in a gentle way. When a servant leader has to assume leadership, they base it on who people really are, not who they want them to

be. Listening requires practice and patience. It also requires that leaders keep their mouths shut so that others can say what is on their heart. Good listening also requires asking questions to insure that the true intent of what was said is understood.

Servant leaders practice the fifth habit of highly effective people: seek first to understand, then to be understood.

QUESTIONS: How effective are your listening skills? Do you interrupt people or finish their sentences if they are slow in verbalizing their thoughts? Do you give people feedback to make sure you have understood what they are saying? Do you talk too much?

6 I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.

Servant leaders can be found among the people they are serving. That makes them vulnerable to criticism and pain. That is the price that any leader pays to lead and serve.

Leaders aren't perfect people. That is why they receive what people say about them, because they know those things may be true. That isn't always easy.

7 Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.

8 He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me!

9 It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.

Servant leaders throughout history have been abused and misunderstood. Martin Luther King is one example that comes to mind. At one time or another, every group he tried to help was disillusioned with his leadership. He had many enemies who portrayed him either as a communist or one who didn't go far enough in civil rights reforms.

Today there is a U.S. national holiday honoring his memory. The Lord truly vindicated him.

Nelson Mandela is another servant leader who comes to mind. He was imprisoned for 27 years for opposing a corrupt apartheid system. Yet when he became the first elected president of South Africa, his vindication was

complete. He did not use his power, however, to seek revenge, but became a servant of all the people, even those who had imprisoned him.

Strong, authoritarian leaders usually don't leave a positive legacy behind. They may be remembered, but usually for their mistakes and not their achievements. The Bible is correct: they wear out like a garment and get eaten up by the moths of history.

10 Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

11 But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment.

Know-it-all leaders seldom do. No one person is smart enough to lead any organization of significance. The above passage is encouraging leaders that they don't have to be afraid of the dark—not knowing all that has to be done. There is help outside of the leader's abilities if they will trust in God.

Authoritarian leaders tend to rely on fads and “new” plans and strategies to keep things moving. These are called “torches you have set ablaze” that enable leaders to “walk in the light of your fires.” Strong leaders pride themselves in shaking things up and setting new directions in a crisis. They walk in the light of their own understanding for no one is as smart or clever as they. Servant leaders walk in the light that is outside of their own existence. That light emanates from the collective wisdom of those around them.

Servant leaders are wise in how they lead and in the speed with which they implement changes.

IV. Isaiah 52:13-53:12

13 See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him-- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness--

15 so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Jesus is the model servant leader. He was meek, humble, patient, worked with just a few key followers, yet was able to launch a worldwide movement that has survived for 2,000 years. This passage holds additional insight for the servant leader who would follow in Jesus' footsteps.

Through suffering, others will see what the servant leader could never communicate. The lessons from Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King go beyond what they ever said publicly. People studying their lives have learned what they never said and understood what they did not hear from either of those two men.

The goal of servant leadership is not control but influence. Influence requires time, patience and suffering.

- 1 **Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?**
- 2 **He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.**

Servant leaders aren't always the most visible or charismatic. They are faithful to the vision and work, and have the interests of others at heart.

Servant leaders aren't always recognized at first glance.

- 3 **He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

Servant leaders have been trained by experience that is rooted in their own suffering and pain and that of others.

It's easy to overlook a servant leader. They don't always stand out in the crowd.

- 4 **Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.**

It's easy to misinterpret what a servant leader is trying to do. Servant leaders can be agents of change, and any change can bring with it criticism, misunderstanding, and people protecting their own positions.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

The pain of the servant leader will become someone else's gain as they help others interpret the sufferings necessary for success.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

A servant leader understands that life isn't perfect and no organization can be perfect when imperfect people work there. While every work team strives for perfection, it's seldom achieved in reality. Thus, effective leaders work with the imperfect people around them toward achieving common goals.

Servant leaders work well with imperfect people, because they know that they are imperfect themselves.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.

9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Often office or church politics and the quest for power cause the credit to go to someone else. Servant leaders take risks daily by leading from a position of vulnerability. Their only "power" is the benefit they bring to the organization, which often isn't visible.

Many feel that the servant leader's role is expendable, but it isn't. Often the true leaders isn't recognized until that leader is removed. Then the people see who the true leader was.

A Chinese proverb says, "When the leader leads well, the people say, 'We did it ourselves.'"

10 yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

- 11** after the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.
- 12** Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Servant leaders must have faith: faith that their work will be rewarded, if not where they are, then someplace else; faith that some people will see and understand what they did; faith that they will have another opportunity to serve if the current situation didn't work out as they had hoped.

QUESTION: Do you have a leadership style and philosophy that are consistent and compatible with the principles of servant leadership? If not, what can you do to adjust? Keep in mind that this isn't a short-term project.

**Please go to my website,
<http://www.purposequest.com/recommend.htm>.
There is a category entitled *Book List* that contains
recommendations for further study on servant leadership.**

Dr. John Stanko