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DISRUPTIVE LEADERSHIP:
THE ART AND PRACTICE OF LEADING LIKE JESUS

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**DISRUPTIVE LEADERSHIP:
THE ART AND PRACTICE OF LEADING LIKE JESUS**

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To my girls, Ellie Kate, Pressley Grace, Abby Mae.

You are my gift of grace.

And to my beautiful and amazing bride, Beth.

“An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain” (Prov 31:10-11)

Your love and support make me better.

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PREFACE

The genesis of this work began within my own heart and life several years before I started this doctoral journey. Since I stepped into vocational ministry, God has been forming a deep conviction and passion for leadership and the church. As I conclude this work, God is continuing to cultivate my conviction that Christian leaders are needed more than ever and that the church is still God's plan to redeem and rescue all of creation. During this process I have been reminded of how the Lord has redeemed, rescued, and made me a co-heir with Him as a beloved son of the King. To that end, I find my solace and purpose as a beloved son of the King, who is called to serve and lead in His kingdom.

To my wife, Beth, you are the greatest gift of grace and truth in my life, outside of my salvation. The kindness, encouragement, willingness to listen, help me be a better writer, and patience you displayed toward me throughout the doctoral program overwhelms me. To that end, I am reminded, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord" (Prov 18:22). You are my constant reminder of God's favor and light in my life.

To our girls, Ellie Kate, Pressley Grace, and Abby Mae, you are my gifts of grace. You are my daily reminders to focus on what matters most in my life. You have sacrificed time with me and served your mom so well while I was away during this doctoral journey. My deepest longing for them, and any other children who might come into our family, is to be known by God, to know Him, and to be graceful and full of grit.

To Shoreline Church, elders, and staff, you have been so generous and encouraging in your affirmation and support for me to continue my education. My prayer is that this work continues to strengthen and shape our church and future ministry in Knoxville.

I am also grateful for Southern Seminary’s commitment to train and equip ministry leaders and pastors for the work of ministry. Dan Dumas’s leadership and his intentional investment of wisdom and teaching have been a gift of grace in this journey. Dan is a Psalm 78:72 type of leader, who guides with an upright heart and leads with a skill of hand. Thank you, Uncle Dan!

My doctoral supervisor, Dr. William Beau Hughes, and second reader, Dr. Charles W. Smith Jr., I cannot begin to express my gratitude for your influence and impact on me and on this work. Thank you both for the e-mails, phone calls, Zoom calls, and conversations full wisdom and guidance. More than you know, your investment and influence have taught me more about what it means to be a spiritual leader. May the Lord continue to bless your ministry and the work of your hands.

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Finally, to the men in Rambo 9, our doctoral cohort, I consider it a joy to consider you friends and partners in the gospel. Chandler Vannoy, Jared Price, Austin Holmes, Jeffrey Carlson, Scott Urbanek, Chip Dean, and Matt Thibault emboldened and edified me throughout the journey. To my professors, Dr. Josh Patterson, Dr. William Beau Hughes, Dr. Chris Kouba, and Dr. Kevin Peck, thank you for your investment and intentionality with our cohort. Your leadership was like Proverbs 27:17, “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.”

Brandon Kennedy

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Disruption. That word has infiltrated the vocabulary of the day in various forms. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, disruption can be defined as a noun, meaning, “The action of rending or bursting asunder; violent dissolution of continuity; forcible severance.”¹ The etymology of disruption finds its origin as a verb, disrupt, which means, “To burst asunder.”² These definitions provide a fascinating insight into why the words associated with disruption have such negative connotations, i.e., disrupt, disruptive, and disrupting.

Throughout 2020, the word disruption has been the best descriptor for how COVID-19 impacted the world’s economies, healthcare systems, families, activities, and everyday living. The global pandemic disrupted everything. Yet, not all disruptions are harmful. Some are good and even necessary. Netflix disrupted the way one would rent movies making Blockbuster and the like obsolete. Amazon.com forever changed the brick-and-mortar stores where consumer goods are sold and purchased.

Disruption brings change. At the core of disruption is the idea or breakthrough of something new. It could be a technology, a business model, or even a new virus. Therefore, disruption cannot automatically be perceived as positive or negative. Instead, whatever the conduit of innovation or that which leads to change must be examined. When innovation or change interrupts the status quo of any event, activity, organization, or process, the people or the organization will naturally resist any change effort. Human

¹ Oxford English Dictionary, “disruption, n. 1,” OED Online, 2nd ed., 1989, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/view/Entry/55344?redirectedFrom=disruption#eid>.

² Oxford English Dictionary, “disruption, n. 1.”

beings have a natural tendency to resist change. Change challenges stability, and stability is an innate desire of humanity.

Todd Bolsinger notes, “Leading change is disruptive. And everything within us resists disruption.³ Therefore, the person leading change is focal point of such disruptions. Sadly, when the person conducting the change in any organization lacks self-awareness or, worse, has selfish motives, it creates an environment of pain and hurt to the ones they lead and serve. Patrick Lencioni describes these types of leaders as reward-centered leaders.⁴ These leaders forget their responsibility of leading and become focused on being rewarded in their leadership with status, salary, and power.

These trappings are nothing more than a lure to the leader’s heart, where indwelling sin will take root within them (Heb 12:1). When this happens, leaders have the potential to fail in three common ways: morally, emotionally, and relationally.⁵ The fallout from a leader who fails in one of these ways causes disruption. However, one must not confuse the failure of a dysfunctional leader with a disruptive leader. Disruptive leaders, for this project, create change for the organization’s good. They are aware that leadership is a responsibility of service, where dysfunctional leaders view leadership as a reward that causes dysfunction within and possibly the destruction of an organization.

This thesis highlights the need for the connection and combination of the skill of innovation, the art of leading change, and the effectiveness of servant leadership.⁶ This unique combination differentiates a disruptive leader from a dysfunctional leader. A disruptive leader maintains the posture and affections of a servant leader while uniquely

³ Tod Bolsinger, *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders Are Formed in the Crucible of Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 4.

⁴ Patrick Lencioni, *The Motive: Why So Many Leadership Abdicate Their Most Important Responsibilities* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), 131.

⁵ Eric Geiger, “3 Common Ways Leaders Disqualify Themselves,” Eric Geiger.com (blog), accessed March 21, 2021, <https://ericgeiger.com/2018/02/3-common-ways-leaders-disqualify-themselves/>.

⁶ See appendix 1 for definitions of key terms innovation, leading change, servant leadership and disruptive leadership.

combining the skill of innovation and the art of leading change that produces health and flourishing for the organization and for those they lead.⁷ This type of leadership is seen throughout the gospel in the life of Jesus and will be described as disruptive leadership throughout the rest of this study. The example of Jesus’s leadership provides a framework for Christian leaders found within ministry and the marketplace.

Familiarity of Literature

The conversation about leadership has exploded over the last several decades. Leadership has not only been a topic of discussion for the public but has become a focal point for researchers and academics, which has resulted in numerous works produced about past and current leaders, leadership theory, and how to be a leader. Peter Northouse says,

Many people believe that leadership is a way to improve their personal, social, and professional lives. Corporations seek those with leadership ability because they believe they bring special assets to their organizations and, ultimately, improve the bottom line. Academic institutions throughout the country have responded by providing programs in leadership studies.⁸

That reaction has created an array of literature centered on leadership theory. This thesis reviews literature that falls within two broad categories: change theory and servant leadership, with additional classic works on leadership. These categories are central to disruptive leadership and will further be divided between contemporary leadership theories and Christian leadership theories.

Contemporary Leadership Theories

Over the last several decades, there have been critical voices in leadership theory in the public square. One of the most influential voices in leading change has been John Kotter, the Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership, Emeritus, at the Harvard

⁷ Psalm 78:72 reads, “The disruptive leader has the integrity of heart and the skill of hand.” All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

⁸ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 1.

Business School. In *Leading Change*, he says that the engine that drives change is leadership.⁹ In addition to his understanding of what creates change, he provides a framework for leading change derived from an article¹⁰ he wrote in the summer of 1995. In this article, he presents the eight common errors of transformation failure. He discusses a helpful and much-needed delineation between management and leadership. In short, management looks inward and is concerned about stability, that is, the status quo. Leadership looks outward and dreams of what could be.¹¹

In the 1990s, John Kotter was asking the question, “Why do most transformation efforts fail?” Another young leader, Clayton Christensen, asked similar yet different questions: “Why is success so difficult to sustain?” and, “Is successful innovation really as unpredictable as the data suggests?”¹² Those questions have been Christensen’s life’s work and led him to coin the term *disruptive innovation*.¹³ While *The Innovator’s Dilemma* is his most famous work, it focuses more on innovations, like technologies or new products. However, this work has provided a unique perspective and foundation for another book, *The Innovator’s DNA*. This work is a critical resource for this thesis because it focuses on the person or innovator. Most books published around innovation focus on product or process. *The Innovator’s DNA* focuses on the person in the organization coupled with an extensive study of business innovators like Jeff Bezos (Amazon.com), Scott Cook

⁹ John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 1996), x.

¹⁰ John Kotter, “Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail,” *Harvard Business Review*, May/June 1995, <https://hbr.org/1995/05/leading-change-why-transformation-efforts-fail-2>.

¹¹ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 27.

¹² Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2016), viii, Kindle.

¹³ This business theory describes disruptive innovation as any innovation that creates a new market or value, while simultaneously disrupting an existing market or value network. That ultimately displaces established organizations and/or products, i.e., Blockbuster.

(Intuit), and Peter Thiel (PayPal), to name a few.¹⁴ The authors share their findings regarding innovators:

We found that innovators “Think Different,” to use a well-known Apple slogan. Their minds excel at linking together ideas that aren’t obviously related to produce original ideas (we call this cognitive skill “associational thinking” or “*associating*”). All were *questioners*, frequently asking questions that punctured the status quo. Some *observed* the world with intensity beyond the ordinary. Others *networked* with the most diverse people on the face of the earth. Still others placed *experimentation* at the center of their innovative activity.¹⁵

As they combined and studied the research, they recognized consistent patterns of action within all innovators. These patterns have been distilled into five skills: associating, questioning, observing, networking, and experimenting. Providing pivotal insight concerning one’s ability to create ideas was not merely a function of intellect, but included key habits, which implied that creating habits or behaviors can improve one’s innovative ability.

Sharon Pearson, founder of The Coaching Institute, provides an excellent resource about disruptive leadership. In *Disruptive Leadership*, she examines the essence of leading change while simultaneously seeking a healthy workplace culture and the secret sauce to creating the winning team. Sharon defines *disruptive leadership*¹⁶ within her work and provides a four-step framework for creating a winning team. Her work’s focus is primarily on leadership culture within an organization that brings the best out of the team and creates space to disrupt the status quo. She provides excellent insight into what makes a leader and the purpose of leadership. She argues that this organizational

¹⁴ Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA: Mastering The Five Skills of Disruptive Innovators* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2011), 10, Kindle.

¹⁵ Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA*, 7, emphasis added.

¹⁶ Sharon Person defines disruptive leadership as “the willingness and ability to challenge a status quo that no longer serves the greater good, so that individuals can come together and create something they love, they’re proud of and that makes a difference.” Sharon Person, *Disruptive Leadership: 4 Simple Steps to Creating the Winning Team* (Melbourne: Global Success Institute, 2015), 23, Kindle.

health begins not from the leader’s message but from within the leader’s motive. She says, “Leadership is an inside job before it is about others.”¹⁷

The genesis that leadership is an inner quality, not an outward skill, is central to servant leadership theory. In 1977, Robert Greenleaf pioneered this new paradigm of leadership for boards and corporate America. His work, *Servant Leadership*, promoted a method that shattered management theory at the time. He writes,

The servant-leader concept emerged after a deep involvement with colleges and universities during the period of campus turmoil in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was a searing experience to watch distinguished institutions show their fragility and crumble, to search for an understanding of what happened to them (and never be satisfied that I knew), and to try to heal their wounds.¹⁸

It is hard to believe the words “serve” and “lead” had little connection and impact in leadership structures. Greenleaf noticed a significant gap in institutions and organizations, where the focus was on instruction and production. Thus, the idea of providing care and support to individual students or employees was otherworldly. Greenleaf was the pioneer of servant leadership theory. He brought together the worlds of support and challenge—suggesting that a critical skill for a leader is self-awareness. Thus, the leader is attentive to his team’s needs and is more concerned about those he leads, pushing them to become the best version of themselves.

This same skill is the basis for Jeremie Kubicek and Steve Cockram’s work *The 100x Leader*.¹⁹ For Kubicek and Cockram, leadership is critical with the digital age’s birth, where communication and collaboration are becoming more complex with teams working in different locations. With all the world’s uncertainty, it is evident that leaders are needed who will fight for the highest possible good of those they lead. It is fascinating to see Greenleaf’s influence and impact on leadership theory, where leaders fight for the

¹⁷ Person, *Disruptive Leadership*, 24.

¹⁸ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist, 2002), 17.

¹⁹ Jeremie Kubicek and Steve Cockram, *The 100x Leader: How to Become Someone Worth Following* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2019).

highest possible good for a team member and organization—indicating that the leader is intentional in helping others achieve their full potential, which is a central theme of Greenleaf’s work in *Servant Leadership*. Kubicek and Cockram build upon this theme, arguing that helping people reach their full leadership potential is half of the battle. The other half is equipping them to take those same skills and multiply those skills to others. They describe this process of leading using the imaginary of a Sherpa leading teams on expeditions to climb Everest:

Figuratively speaking, the making of a Sherpa is the making of a 100x leader who must learn all the technical aspects of leading, from communications to performance management to alignment and execution to dealing with people on every level. Our objective then is to develop fully acclimated leaders who, like the sherpa, can move up and down mountains while helping others move up themselves.²⁰

Becoming a 100x leader is not an easy journey but is one that encompasses the true spirit of a disruptive leader. It is not natural for a leader to learn the climb and willingly climb back down to bring more people along in the journey.

In the sixth edition of *Leadership Theory and Practice*, Peter Northouse presents a wealth of knowledge and description expertise of all things leadership while adding an entire chapter on servant leadership. He calls servant leadership “a paradox—an approach that runs counter to common sense.”²¹ He also provides a thorough examination of servant leadership, its underpinnings, and its praxis. Servant leadership seeks to put followers first, develop them, and help them reach their full potential. Northouse also explores this servant leadership’s strengths and weaknesses, paired with case studies of servant leadership.

²⁰ Kubicek and Cockram, *The 100x Leader*, 21.

²¹ Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice*, 219.

Christian Leadership Theories

To further understand the need for disruptive leadership, this study examines various voices on leadership from a Christian perspective, discussing the biblical foundation for leaders, servant leadership, and leading change.

It would be hard to talk about Christian leadership and not mention *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders. This work has been recognized and recommended as a go-to resource for studying biblical leadership principles for more than four decades. Overall, this book aims to present fundamental leadership principles illustrated with great leaders' scriptures and stories. The book is not concerned with methods but with the leader. It is laser-focused on the leader's ambition, character, and characteristics of a leader.²²

Andy Stanley's *The Next Generation Leader* continues the same approach of focusing on leadership principles. Yet, this work goes a bit further in answering the following questions: What are the principles of leadership that young leaders need to know? And, what are the essential elements for next-generation leaders? Stanley writes, "In leadership, success is succession. If someone coming along behind me is not able to take what I have offered and build on it, then I have failed in my responsibility to the next generation."²³ Stanley is not only concerned about the leader but about the leaders that are next up to bat. He would argue five concepts are essential for next-generation leaders: competence, courage, clarity, coaching, and character.

The Conviction to Lead by Albert Mohler provides a full view of the principles of leadership. Mohler says, "My goal is to change the way about leadership."²⁴ He would argue that despite leadership being a cultural obsession for the last thirty-plus decades,

²² J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody, 2007).

²³ Andy Stanley, *The Next Generation Leader: 5 Essentials for Those Who Will Shape the Future* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 11.

²⁴ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2012), 15.

something is missing. Leadership involves more than best practices and being the best manager. Mohler describes a significant leadership shift for all Christians regardless of profession. For Christian leaders, their leadership must be centered and driven by Christian conviction.²⁵ Mohler seeks to address leadership not with methods or managerial practice but something much more profound. He points out that the missing piece is the lack of attention to what leaders believe and the division between what he calls “believers and leaders” in evangelical circles.²⁶

While the previous works discuss biblical leadership principles, Justin Irving and Mark L. Strauss’s *Leadership in Christian Perspective* provides a biblical foundation for contemporary practice leadership with a focus on servant leadership. They argue that the Bible was never intended to be a leadership guide, though it does speak a great deal about leadership. Besides, one must be careful using any leader in the Bible, whether in the Old Testament or New Testament, as clear models in leadership. There are both good and bad examples of leadership models found throughout Scripture. However, Irving and Strass would argue that Jesus was the exception to the rule: “Jesus’ teaching and life presented a real revolution in leadership that introduced a new model- servant leadership.”²⁷ Servant leadership involves two key distinctions of empowering and equipping others. Empowering leadership is when the leaders are primarily concerned with others’ development into God’s design for them and pursuing their calling. Equipping leadership is focused mainly on providing the tools and experience for the training of new leaders. The authors suggest that this should be the pursuit of all leaders from the Christian perspective.

²⁵ Mohler, *Conviction to Lead*, 19.

²⁶ Mohler, *Conviction to Lead*, 20.

²⁷ Justin Irving and Mark L. Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 4.

Another great work that discusses Jesus’s leadership model is *Lead Like Jesus Revisited*, by Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges. They argue that the model of leadership Jesus demonstrated was love-based leadership: “Leading like Jesus is essentially a matter of the heart. It is also the highest thought of the head, it is the principal work of the hands, and it is both expressed through and replenished by the habits.”²⁸ This framework of heart, head, hands, and habits of a leader describes that leadership is more than managerial technique or leading change. Leadership involves the whole person, where the leader’s brand is rooted and grounded in love. Paul would say that if you do not have love then you are nothing (1 Cor 13:1-3). Thus, the authors agree with Paul and apply this formula to leaders that everything - love = nothing. This is the embodiment of the kingdom ethic Jesus modeled in the Gospels.

Lyle Shaller’s *Strategies for Change* is not just another book on the change process.²⁹ Instead, it is a distillation of wisdom from an experienced church consultant. This work contains many unique perspectives, where he asks questions all church leaders raise, but few authors answer. For example, what is the difference between “benevolent dictators” and “enablers”? How does one introduce change in established churches that have “earned complacency” from the comfort of stability and status quo? How does one create the “self-identified discrepancy” in which the people become dissatisfied with the status quo? Then, he provides a twenty-five-point checklist for change agents.

A more contemporary companion to *Strategies for Change* would be *Who Moved My Pulpit* by Thom Rainer—written for pastors and other church leaders who desire to lead change in their churches. The work is full of stories and case studies of change in the local church. Rainer uses those stories to simply communicate an eight-stage process on how to lead change in a church. He argues that the church’s message

²⁸ Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus Revisited: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016), xiii, Kindle.

²⁹ Lyle Shaller, *Strategies for Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

does not have to change just the methodologies in a rapidly changing world. He also encourages readers that the change process is like eating an elephant.³⁰ The eight stages are stop and pray, confront and communicate a sense of urgency, build an eager coalition, become a voice and vision of hope, deal with people issues, move from inward focus to outward focus, pick the low-hanging fruit, and implement and consolidate change.

In an additional work, *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry*, Jeff Iorg writes, “The stakes are high. Leadership decisions in ministry organization have eternal consequences. Almost every ministry organization needs—or soon will need—some form of major change.”³¹ Throughout his work are examples of how the author leads major change initiatives while highlighting the transition at Gateway Baptist Theological Seminary. The work is formatted in two sections. The first focuses on the foundation of leading major change, and the second organizes the foundation of leading change into a model for how to lead change. Iorg notes, “God’s glory—achieved through advancing his kingdom—must be the ultimate end of every major change.”³²

Tod Bolsinger, in his book *Tempered Resilience*, attempts to discuss the formation of leaders through the practice of leading. He argues that if one is going to be able to lead and last for the long haul, then one must go through the process of becoming “tempered.” Throughout the book he compares a leader’s tempering to the similar function of the forgotten art of a blacksmith forging and tempering steel into a new creation. This tempering process for a leader is not about being more intelligent or tough; instead, it is about being stronger and flexible to withstand the crucible of leading.³³

³⁰ Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit: Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 125.

³¹ Jeff Iorg, *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), xix.

³² Iorg, *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry*, 166.

³³ Bolsinger, *Tempered Resilience*, 5.

Void in the Literature

Leadership principles regarding innovation, servant leadership theory, and leading change theory have been studied independently, though it appears literature on each discipline rarely makes the connection for the combination of the above approaches in leaders today. However, it is within that combination where disruptive leadership takes place. A leader rejecting the status quo, leading change, and simultaneously seeking a servant's posture is a rarity. At that intersection disruptive leadership is born, which is why this study will turn to look at the life and leadership of Jesus while asking more questions like, is it possible to be a disruptive leader? What are the qualities of a disruptive leader? How does a leader lead change while keeping a servant's posture?

Thesis

Leadership is a topic of discussion as vast as the Grand Canyon when considering how many theories, approaches, and best practices are available today. Yet even with all the resources available, something is missing.³⁴ The missing link is a model of leadership worth following and replicating. There have never been more biblical resources, theological institutions, and online content readily available at any moment. However, this resurgence and emphasis on leadership continue to not address the missing link. There continues to be a void in the formation of leaders at an institution level. Leaders still struggle with leading change and empowering, equipping, and serving the ones they lead.

Some advocate that leadership does not belong in the church, dismissing its need, while others quickly embrace leadership principles from books, conferences, or podcasts. The tension in this cultural moment is theology versus leadership. Regardless of the polarization of opinions on leadership, there must be a better way forward that brings clarity to the art and practice of leadership in the local church.

³⁴ Mohler, *Conviction to Lead*, 19.

Sometimes the way forward means one must go back to the very beginning. God said in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the seas and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” This text alludes to a model of leadership designed from the beginning. This model of leadership should have brought both clarity and conviction to leadership; though, as the story would unfold, that first man, Adam, failed in leadership, thus breaking God’s good design. Despite the brokenness, there was a promise of another: God himself in the flesh (Gen 3:15).

The arrival of Jesus was a catalytic disruption. Even as a baby, Jesus interrupted Herod, causing a genocide of all Jewish boys under two, which led to Mary, Joseph, and Jesus fleeing to Egypt (Matt 2:13-18). That was just the beginning of the disruption Jesus would introduce. Throughout the Gospels is clear evidence that Jesus interrupted many Jewish traditions, culture, and even theology. However, those disruptions were byproducts of something bigger, Jesus’s leadership. Jesus was revolutionary in leadership from the beginning of his ministry.³⁵

Jesus’s life and leadership were a positive disruption. No one lived and led people the way He did. Jesus’s leadership centered on love and law, grace and truth, challenge and support. Few people can hold those tensions together in any facet of life, but He did every single day. Who He was in private was the same in public. His life was an exact representation of His leadership in action. His leadership and life never outpaced each other.

Jesus uniquely held the tension of leading self and leading others. At the same time, Jesus and His disciples started a movement called “The Way” in the earliest days with twelve untrained men. Acts 4:13 says, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished.

³⁵ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 4.

And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” Jesus’s leadership was so influential that just being around Him changed others, but that did not stop with the apostles. Jesus’s influence spread like wildfire, creating a movement that was a massive disruption. It got an official name, “Christianity,” and eventually, during Constantine’s leadership, became the Roman Empire’s official religion. All these facts beg the question, “Why was Jesus’s leadership so disruptive?”

One could say Jesus was disruptive because He was God clothed in flesh (John 1:14) and filled with Spirit (Luke 4:1), which seems like the clear response. While it does give him a leg up since he is the Son of God, Jesus was also fully human. He was not Jack Bauer, who seemed somewhat robotic, who never slept, ate, or went to the bathroom. Jesus experienced the full range of emotions, temptations, and experiences. Donald MacLeod writes, “There is a divine consciousness that he is the eternal Son of God and there is a human consciousness of the same fact. These two forms of consciousness remain distinct, united in the one person, communicating through the Holy Spirit.”³⁶ He lived life on life’s terms like everyone else. So, again, what made Jesus’s leadership so disruptive?

When looking at the leadership of Jesus, one will find a leader who knew how to lead and love. He was the embodiment of leading change and servant leadership. Jesus was disruptive to everything the Jews held dearly, that is, how He interacted with sinners, Gentiles, and women, His interpretation of the law, claim to be God, and condemnation of the Temple. On the other hand, He was the personification of love, which frustrated the religious elite of the day and endeared Him to all. To fully understand Jesus’s disruptive leadership requires understanding Jesus’s model, means, and goal of leading for God’s glory and good of others. Leadership is the ability to influence followers toward a clear vision. Jesus did that but maintained the affection of a servant leader and the act of disruptive leadership. This thesis aims to explore disruptive leadership as the art and practice of leading like Jesus.

³⁶ Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 193.

Outline of Chapters

The following advance the need to combine servant leadership and leading change theory with an overview of contemporary leadership theories, Christian theories, looking at the life and leadership of Jesus as an example, and concluding implications of disruptive leadership on both the leadership community and the church.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces key concepts, misconceptions, and definitions that are central to disruptive leadership. It surveys both non-Christian and Christian theories written on two fundamental leadership theories: servant leadership and leading change, while considering the influence and impact of innovation as well. Additionally, it highlights literatures' void and the call to combine servant leadership, innovation, and leading change theory. Leadership is the ability to influence followers toward a clear vision. Jesus did that but maintained the affection of a servant leader and the act of disruptive leadership. This thesis aims to explore disruptive leadership as the art and practice of leading like Jesus.

Chapter 2: Focus on Contemporary Theories on Leadership

This chapter surveys theories and works produced in contemporary leadership, focusing on servant leadership, innovation, and leading change. It summarizes central themes related to the leader as a servant and innovator. This is accomplished by interacting with *Leading Change* by John Kotter, *Servant Leadership* by Robert Greenleaf, and the *Innovator's DNA* by Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen.

Chapter 3: Focus on Christian Theories on Leadership

This chapter surveys servant leadership, innovation, and leading change theory from a Christian perspective. It interacts with various works seeking to draw out central

leadership principles critical to innovation, leading change, and servant leadership. It then discusses the leadership pitfalls in each theory building a case for a new approach to leadership. Finally, this chapter seeks to reconcile both leadership theories by creating a “disruptive leader.”

Chapter 4: Leading Like Jesus: The Art and Practice of “Disruptive Leadership”

This chapter takes a deeper look into the leadership of Jesus. It seeks to build the argument that Jesus was the epitome of disruptive leadership. This is accomplished by observing the motive, message, and method of Jesus’s leadership. These areas further build the framework created in chapter 3 for “disruptive leadership.” Specifically, by describing the art and practices of a disruptive leader who maintains the effect of a servant leader, skill of an innovator, and the art of leading change (Ps 78:72).

Chapter 5: Implications of Disruptive Leadership

This chapter surveys disruptive church trends³⁷ and the implications for disruptive leadership for the church and its leaders. These implications require a rethinking of church practices. This chapter requires further study in disruptive trends. The chapter concludes with a call for a new type of leader leading the church in the age of disruption.

³⁷ Carey Nieuwhof, “8 Disruptive Church Trends That Will Rule 2021 (The Rise of The Post-Pandemic Church,” Carey Nieuwhof (blog), accessed March 8, 2021, <https://careynieuwhof.com/8-disruptive-church-trends-that-will-rule-2021-the-rise-of-the-post-pandemic-church/>.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP THEORIES AND PRACTICES

The previous chapter suggested a need for leadership that combines the effectiveness of servant leadership, the art of leading change, and the skill of innovation. Throughout this work this style of leading will be known as *disruptive leadership*.¹ To further develop an understanding of the need to combine servant leadership and the capacity to lead change, this chapter will consider the impact and influence of innovations that challenge leadership practices in the twenty-first century and examine how the characteristics of innovated leaders redefine leadership practices. Next, the chapter will interact with Robert Greenleaf's contemporary leadership theories and practices of servant leadership, and John Kotter's idea of leading change. Both Greenleaf and Kotter have shaped and impacted the study of leadership within their respective areas. Their works and contributions will play a vital role in shaping this thesis. Finally, the chapter will conclude by considering what is missing or incomplete within contemporary leadership literature, why the theories of leading change and servant leadership coupled with characteristics of innovative leaders should be integrated to create a new style of leadership, as a way forward for leaders today, and what makes a leader worth following in this complex world.

Leadership in a Complex World

The world is in a constant state of change. Every couple hundred years, a breakthrough of innovation in technology changes the landscape of work and everyday

¹ *Disruptive leadership* is an integrated leadership model that combines the effectiveness of servant leadership, the art of leading change, and the skill of innovation.

life. Consider the impact of the printing press. According to most historians, Johannes Gutenberg’s printing press innovation of using screw-type wine press instead of woodblock printing was the key to unlocking the modern age.² Fast forward several hundred years, and the world has moved into a new era—the digital age.

The digital age has accelerated life faster than any other time in history, and it does not appear to be slowing down any time soon. Then, add in a global pandemic that accelerated trends that have been unfolding for years. According to Paul Leinwand, Mahadeva Mani, and Blair Sheppard in “7 Leadership Paradoxes for the Post-Pandemic Era,” leaders are forced to adapt to a world of digital complexity. Leaders are required to make strategic and tactical decisions in an era of uncertainty.³ The world is experiencing major global shifts and changes. Mark Sayers describes this global shift as “a shift from a complicated world to a complex world.”⁴ In a complicated world, things work linearly; when a problem is presented in work or the world, then a solution is found, and life keeps moving forward. A great example is Henry Ford’s innovation of assembly lines that created a repeated process to mass-produce the Model T. There is always a cause and effect to innovation, which impacts leadership.

The innovation of factory lines and the advent of an industrialized society influenced leadership and popularized management theory.⁵ As a result, hierarchical leadership was born, where management became synonymous with leadership, and the bottom line of overseeing a process to ensure the company was effective and stable. Yet,

² Dave Roos, “7 Ways the Printing Press Challenged the World,” History.com, September 3, 2019, <https://www.history.com/news/printing-press-renaissance>.

³ Paul Leinwand, Mahadeva Matt Mani, and Blair Sheppard, “6 Leadership Paradoxes for the Post-Pandemic Era,” *Harvard Business Review*, April 23, 2021, <https://hbr.org/2021/04/6-leadership-paradoxes-for-the-post-pandemic-era>.

⁴ Carey Nieuwhof and Mark Sayers, “Future Church Trends, How to Lead through Profoundly Disorienting Change, and What to Expect in 2022,” Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast, January 12, 2022, 1.32.14, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-carey-nieuwhof-leadership-podcast/id912753163>.

⁵ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 6th ed. (London: SAGE, 2013), 12.

the world has moved on from complicated to complex, where hierarchical power means less, managerial practices are frustrated, and destabilization is the norm. In a complex world, things do not occur linearly in step 1, step 2, step 3. A complex world is changing everything; thus, leaders must retool, unlearn the old, and adapt. If that is true, then future leaders must consider the impact and influence of innovation in the twenty-first century.

Innovation and Influence

There is an old saying, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Dartmouth professors Vijay Govindarajan and Chris Trimble wrote an article in *Harvard Business Review* called “Stop the Innovation Wars.” They were working with a client of a Fortune 500 company and proposed the creation of a new team, the innovation team, to help accelerate growth. The client’s response is telling:

He rolled his eyes saying: Let’s call it anything but that. What is this so-called innovation team going to do? Brainstorm? Sit around being creative all day? Talk condescendingly about a superior organizational culture? All of this while operating with neither discipline nor accountability? All of this while the rest of us get the real work done?⁶

Govindarajan and Trimble concluded that there is a hostility between the innovators and the people responsible for day-to-day operations. This begs the question, ‘What is the cause of the innovation wars?’ According to Clayton Christensen, innovation creates dilemmas for executives in some of the most successful companies. Innovation creates and presents problems in the status quo, stability of cash flow, and structures of management.⁷ Innovation impacts the cherished processes that reduce chaos and ensure effectiveness. Most organizations’ *modus operandi* is management, and management produces a culture that is safe and reliable, which is why the client in the article responded

⁶ Vijay Govindarajan and Chris Trimble, “Stop the Innovation Wars,” in *HBR’s 10 Most Reads on Innovation* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2013), 11.

⁷ Clayton Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2016), 226-27, Kindle

so negatively to the proposed “innovation team.” The client of the fortune 500 company was responding as a manager.

Managerial culture emphasizes rationality and control.⁸ Something lurks beneath the surface of their tensions and resistance to innovation: confusion between leadership and management. Any new challenge an organization faces creates the need for innovation, and innovation is a process that needs management but cannot be managed. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the similarities and distinctions between management and leadership, to discover what influences leadership, and to clarify why innovation needs leadership.

Management and Leadership

The focus of management is on the present not the future, and is a critical operating system of any organization. Innovation brings unique challenges to the order and stable operation of an organization and feels risky to managers. The risk of challenge and innovation creates a natural resistance to innovation as illustrated previously. At times, in efforts to avoid tension and potential infighting between managers and innovators, institutions will isolate each group, even moving innovators outside the company. Govindarajan and Trimble response to this common practice is telling: “It is flat wrong. Isolation may neutralize infighting, but it also neuters innovation.”⁹ Both management and innovation are equally necessary, but what is the source of the hostility between management and innovation.

Understanding the source of hostility requires further explanation of the motivations and practices of management. Management is concerned with maintaining the status quo and taking care of the organization’s most critical assets. The focus is on the production of short-term results and predictable performance expected by the

⁸ Abraham Zaleznick, “Managers and Leaders: Are They Different?” *Harvard Business Review*, January 2004, <https://hbr.org/2004/01/managers-and-leaders-are-they-different>.

⁹ Govindarajan and Trimble, “Stop the Innovation Wars,” 11.

constituents.¹⁰ As a result, when managers or management are introduced to the possibility of change and innovation there is a wall of resistance asking, “Why is the change is necessary, everything is running smoothly?” Regardless of resistance or hostility from management, change and innovation are necessary disciplines within any organization. When change takes place, managers are needed, yet the best management practices fall short in adapting to the complexity and pace in the world.¹¹ The biggest challenge for any team, institution, or organization is not management but a lack of leadership. John Kotter explains that in change efforts only leadership can break through corporate inertia, motivate actions to change behavior, and cement the change into the ethos of an organization. In summary, management and leadership are similar in their common goal to ensure the growth and success of a company through strategic objectives. Without leadership the transformational process would never start and without management the transformational process could get out of control. So, what are the differences between leadership and management different?

W. G. Bennis and B. Nanus write, “Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right things.”¹² According to Peter Northouse, many scholars, including Kotter, argue that leadership and management have similarities but with distinct constructs.¹³ A few of the similarities include leveraging influence, working with people, and accomplishing objectives. However, the distinction is most recognizable

¹⁰ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 1996), 26.

¹¹ Herminia Ibarra and Anne Scoular, “The Leader as Coach,” *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-leader-as-coach>.

¹² W. G. Bennis and B. Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 221.

¹³ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 12-13.

from the function within an organization. For example, management is concerned with order and stability; leadership focuses on change and advancement (see table 1).¹⁴

Table 1. Functions of management and leadership

Management Produces Order and Consistency	Leadership Produces Change and Movement
Planning and Budgeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish agendas ● Set timetables ● Allocate resources 	Establishing Direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a vision ● Clarify big picture ● Set strategies
Organizing and Staffing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide structure ● Make job placements ● Establish rules and procedures 	Aligning People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communicate goals ● Seek commitment ● Build teams and coalitions
Controlling and Problem Solving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop incentives ● Generate creative solutions ● Take corrective action 	Motivating and Inspiring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inspire and energize ● Empower subordinates ● Satisfy unmet needs

Although management and leadership can be viewed as interchangeably related, there are key differences, as seen in the table. The distinction between leadership and management explains why innovation is a primary function of leadership, not management. Innovation adds stress to the key functions of management like control and performance. There is a bias within management to look inward, which is a key to understanding how innovation creates stress within the framework of management, where process and order are king, and leadership is looking outward in the future. Leadership is dynamic, never

¹⁴ Table 1 is adapted from Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 12. For a more in-depth study of the relation between management and leadership see John Kotter's *A Force for Change*. He provides a full taxonomy on how leadership and management function. John P. Kotter, *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management* (New York: Free, 1990).

satisfied with the status quo, saying “good is the enemy of great.”¹⁵ Consequently, leadership and innovation rise and fall on three key influencers: choice, crisis, and change.

Choice, Crisis, and Change

The genesis of leadership begins with a choice. Jim Collins notes, “Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice.”¹⁶ Choosing to lead is a catalytic moment of picking great over good enough. James Macgregor Burns explains, “If an ultimate test of leadership is transforming change, executive decision-making is only one step, however crucial, in a long chain of causation.”¹⁷ This chain of causation begins with someone making a choice to lead, despite resistance. Interestingly, some of the greatest resistance often comes from within the leader.

Choice and Leadership

Leadership is multidirectional influence¹⁸ with others, supervisors, and direct reports. However, leadership originates from within the leader. The first step of leadership is the leader choosing to overcome his or her limiting beliefs, which is the first line of resistance a leader is required to navigate. Resistance¹⁹ is more than an external reality,

¹⁵ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 1.

¹⁶ Collins, *Good to Great*, 11.

¹⁷ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 382.

¹⁸ J. C. Rost advocates that leadership is not the same as management. He stresses that leadership is first and foremost about multidirectional influence. Leaders and followers work together to create change, whereas managers and subordinates join forces to sell goods and services (J. C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 149-52.

¹⁹ The topic of resistance is considered by many to be the basis of change leadership theory and is a focal point of research. Kurt Lewin discovered and described modern change leadership theory with emphasis on the nature of leadership, change, and resistance. Kurt Lewin, “Frontiers in Group Dynamics,” *Human Relations* 1, no. 2 (1947): 5-41. Edgar Schein expands Lewin’s work with emphasis on insecurity,

and at times it originates from within the leader. As a result, leaders feel resistance through in two possibilities: prohibition or inhibition.²⁰ Prohibition is the act or action of authority restricting something or someone. Inhibition is the act or action of an inner hindrance to an act or activity through limiting beliefs. Oddly enough, one of the greatest resistances comes from within, where leaders inhibit themselves from that act of initiating or leading because of limiting beliefs.²¹ So, when a leader is faced with the choice to move and act it is wise to ask, “Who says you can’t?”²²

Those limiting beliefs can paralyze leaders from using their leadership voice. The source of these limiting beliefs could be past experiences, others’ perceptions, and ultimately the fear of failure. Each of these inhibitors is a reality that every leader will face. Jeremie Kubicek and Steve Cockram elaborate on how leaders can stop the inhibition cycle:

Inhibition is a default position for everyone. All of us can be inhibited to act on dreams and visions that could lead to a greater future. However, left untouched, inhibitions can be a dangerous reality. To be inhibited is to be limited and limited is never a way to live or to lead. Being concerned with what others think can seriously rob us of amazing feats. The fear in you is keeping you from the best in you.²³

Choosing to act is at times the hardest aspect of leadership because the natural tendency is self-preservation. The courage to move past self-preservation is only possible by embracing vulnerability. Andy Crouch states, “The vulnerability that leads to flourishing requires risk, which is the possibility of loss—the chance that when we act, we will lose

anxiety, and fear experienced by individuals during change efforts. See Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010)

²⁰ Jeremie Kubicek and Steve Cockram, *100x Leader: How to Become Someone Worth Following* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2019), 24

²¹ Kubicek and Cockram, *100x Leader*, 25.

²² Kubicek and Cockram, *100x Leader*, 24-25.

²³ Kubicek and Cockram, *100x Leader*, 25-27.

something we value.”²⁴ When choosing to lead, leaders must face their greatest enemy—themselves. Causing the leader to muster up enough courage to embrace meaningful risk. However, sometimes there are more factors to leadership than the leader itself. At times, unfortunate events and unforeseen situations force a leader into action.

Crisis and Leadership

Peter Drucker once described leadership as a foul-weather job.²⁵ Sometimes other factors demand leadership. For example, a crisis can be a catalyst for a leader and their leadership. Winston Churchill said, “Never let a good crisis go to waste.” While leadership is a choice, a crisis is an external pressure that functions as a crucible for forming leaders. For almost twelve years until Dunkirk in 1940, Churchill sat on the sidelines because there was no need for him. All appeared to be steady and under control. Yet when the calamity arose, Churchill was ready to lead. Drucker writes, “Fortunately, or unfortunately, the one predictable thing in any organization is the crisis. That always comes. That’s when you do depend on the leader.”²⁶

The ability to intuitively perceive the need for change or anticipate crisis is an integral part of leadership. The goal here is not to avoid crises but to have the foresight to sense them. One could consider the goal of meteorology. A meteorologist not only predicts weather but forecasts what will likely happen. In a similar fashion, a leader must learn the skills to adapt and innovate. Drucker states, “One has to make the organization capable of anticipating the storm, weathering it, and in fact, being ahead of it. That is called

²⁴ Andy Crouch, *Strong and Weak: Embracing the Life of Risk, Love and True Flourishing* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016), 31, Kindle.

²⁵ Peter F. Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization: Practices and Principles* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 9.

²⁶ Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit*, 9.

innovation, constant renewal.”²⁷ Adversity and crisis are like a forge that strengthens and shapes leaders. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner write, “When people recall their personal-best leadership experiences, they always think about the times of challenge, turbulence, and adversity.”²⁸ Yet, sometimes the greatest adversity comes from within the organization.

Change and Leadership

Leaders choose to lead by facing their own fears. Leaders are made in crisis by facing outside fears. Also, leaders embrace change by facing the fears of others within the organization. To lead from a perspective of constant renewal means embracing challenges head-on from others. Embracing change is a necessary and a critical step to move from good to great. Wherever there is change, challenge or resistance will not be far behind. Possibly what is most interesting in leadership is the locus of the challenge or resistance. When leading change, the origin of resistance often comes from the people the leader is leading or from within the organization. Todd Bolsinger explains, “Leadership is often met with stubborn resistance from the very people we are called to lead.”²⁹ Change is a difficult process for individuals and institutions to accept and is naturally met with resistance.³⁰ As result, Edgar Schein stresses the importance and need to “unfreeze” the individual, group, and/or organization in efforts to decrease resistance.³¹ Thus, when

²⁷ Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit*, 9.

²⁸ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, 6th ed. (San Francisco: Wiley, 2017), 147.

²⁹ Tod Bolsinger, *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders Are Formed in the Crucible of Change* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 2.

³⁰ Charles Smith Jr., “Fear, Faith, and The Fatherhood of God: Toward a Pauline Approach to Leadership and Change” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 10.

³¹ Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 300-301.

understanding and dealing with resistance, it is important have a clear picture of the status quo, and be able to articulate a process to navigate the resistance.

Northouse defines, “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”³² To help individuals achieve a common goal, a leader must be focused on the vision, alignment of people, and inspiration in the face of resistance to make it happen. A key term in Northouse’s definition of leadership is the word *process*. If leadership is a process, then that would indicate leadership is an interactive, integrated event that not only influences followers but primarily the leader. For leaders, some primary influencers shape the leadership process: choice, crisis, and change. Each aspect of influence is critical and plays a significant part in the influence of leadership today. The irony of the process of leaderships is that it is never-ending process that repeats itself starting with the leader and moving outward. A great example of formation of leader is the “Three Cs of Leader Formation Tool” (see figure 1). This tool was created during this study to articulate the formation of leaders and illustrate how choice, crisis, and change influences the formation of a leader. These influences move outward like a concentric circle from within the leader (choice), inside or outside the organization (crisis), and inside the organization (change) (see figure 1). With each challenge presented, whether an internal choice, a crisis, or resistance to change within the organization, the leader will be forced to grow, improve, and ultimately innovate, making the case that innovation has always had an important relationship with leadership.

³² Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 5.



Figure 1. The three Cs of leader formation³³

Leadership and Innovation

The complexity and pace of life and work cannot be approached as a business-as-usual mindset any longer. Change is here and it is constant. The good news is that change is the work of leaders.³⁴ As mentioned, leadership and innovation have a mutual binding relationship. Both function in this mutual need that is constant and never ending like an infinity loop. The goal in this section is to explore this unique relationship between leadership and innovation by (1) tracing the connection between leadership and innovation; (2) examining potential qualities or characteristics of world-class innovators; and

³³ The tool is shaped like a target using concentric circles to diagram the layers of leader formation that fall into one of three spheres that impact and influence the leader from different points of view. The tool starts at the center and then radiates out in order of the significance of its impact on one's leadership. The starting point begins with (1) *choice* because self-leadership is the most pivotal aspect of leadership. How one thinks, speaks, prioritizes, or values oneself impacts health, performance, and effectiveness at every level. (2) A *crisis* is the next layer of leadership formation. The locus of crisis is not fixed but can come from within or outside the leader and within or outside the organization. Crisis is a pivotal layer that requires decision, determination, and direction. Finally, (3) *change* is the moment of transformation, where the leader makes the necessary changes and steps to improve and intentionally grow as a leader in response to a crisis big or small. There is an arrow moving from the center "choice" circle outward through the rest because when a leader decides to lead, they are making a choice to lead themselves, which in turn impacts the health and effectiveness of all other relationships from work to family; it creates a ripple effect. By reflecting and understanding the relation of how each circle shapes and forms one's leadership enables the leader to grow in awareness. Growing in this awareness is how leaders are shaped and formed. Using this tool to reflect, gather feedback, and even serve as a lens for sharpening understanding of other tools helps leaders take their growth, intentionality, and performance to the next level.

³⁴ Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership Challenge*, 147.

(3) exploring the challenges both innovation and leadership face in the twenty-first century.

Connection between Innovation and Leadership

According to Kouzes and Posner, “leadership is inextricably connected with the process of innovation.”³⁵ This conclusion from Kouzes and Posner is from their extensive research on leadership, where they came across the similar conclusion from Rosabeth Moss Kanter with her work on innovation.³⁶ The association between leadership and innovation is fascinating when considering that both studies were done independently of each other. The connection between innovation and leadership is a key association to understand because the influences that make a leader, such as choice, crisis, and change, are the similar influences that serve as a catalyst for innovation. Kanter describes it this way: “But neither deviance nor crisis alone guarantees changes without the next two conditions in place: leadership for making strategic decisions in favor of change and creating an orderly plan, and individuals with enough power to act as ‘prime movers’ pushing for the implementation of changes once the decision has been made.”³⁷ Given the unique relationship between both leadership and innovation, what are the connection points within both disciplines of study?

First, leaders are committed to search for opportunities to make the extraordinary happen. When the leader is committed to make things happen, essentially he or she chooses to lead or take initiative. Again, leaders are faced with the dilemma of how good is good enough. The desire to make the extraordinary happen is the force behind

³⁵ Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership Challenge*, 148.

³⁶ Kouzes and Posner write, “Rosabeth Moss Kanter, director of the Harvard University Advanced Leadership Initiative, was investigating common human resource practices and innovative organizations, seeking to discover what encouraged and discouraged innovation.” In addition, Kouzes and Posner, assert that they were studying leadership and she was researching innovation. Both discovered a unique connection between leadership and innovation. Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership Challenge*, 148.

³⁷ R. M. Kanter, *The Change Masters: Innovation for Productivity in the American Corporation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 294.

leaders taking initiative and looking for improvements from outside the organization, even if it is incremental. Kouzes and Posner describe these type of leaders as exemplary leaders who search for opportunities or good ideas around every corner.³⁸ One aspect of these leaders is that they face challenge with challenge. The established order or status quo of inertia from organizations or institutions does not stifle their efforts. It almost does the opposite. A leader does not wait for permission or instructions, they simply make things happen when they realize something is broken or will not work. Ultimately, these leaders challenge the process by looking for opportunities, choosing to act, and gathering intel from outside the organization to improve.

Next, these leaders not only look for opportunities and think big picture, but they also produce results by creating small wins and value feedback loops to improve. Kouzes and Posner write, “They test and they risk with bold ideas.”³⁹ A great example of this would be the origin of the Starbucks Frappuccino:

Dina Champion, a district manager for Starbucks, was frustrated that many of her customers were going elsewhere for cold blended drinks. Corporate was hesitant to off such a product. Yet, Dina, notice an opportunity and acted on it. She bought a blender, placed it in one of her stores, began experimenting with different drinks, and then began testing it with her customers. Eventually more and more people sought after the product. When corporate noticed the success, they began to invest in the idea and launched the product nationwide. Ultimately, the Frappuccino became the most successful new launch in Starbucks history.⁴⁰

The leadership and innovation Dina exemplified in the illustration demonstrates the interconnectedness of how choice, crisis, and change are the influences on both leadership and innovation. Dina had a choice to follow her intuition or cave to corporate inertia. Additionally, Dina faced a crisis—her stores were losing profits and customers to other competitors due to an innovated product. Finally, she encountered resistance to change from corporate and took an incredible risk by experimenting with the product.

³⁸ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge Workbook*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Wiley, 2017), 75.

³⁹ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge Workbook*, 75

⁴⁰ Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership Challenge*, 152.

Leaders like Dina embrace the influences of choice, crisis, and change to have a breakthrough innovation.

Dina’s story began with a choice—a choice to lead and ultimately a choice to embrace meaningful risk. The genesis of innovation begins with the leader, where a choice must be made to act and initiate. Challenges and hardships are fertile soil for leaders to innovate and without them there would be little need or desire for innovations. For example, Kouzes and Posner discovered this connection in capturing stories of leaders discussing change and the concluded, “We didn’t ask people to tell us about change. They could review any leadership experience. What people chose to discuss were the changes they made in response to the challenges they faced. Their electing to talk about times of change underscores the fact that leadership demands altering the business-as-usual environment.”⁴¹ With that said, when a leader chooses to lead there will be a direct correlation to innovate. With this clear connection between both concepts, a few questions must be asked. What are the qualities or characteristic of these leaders? Are these qualities or characteristics universal? Or could there be a specific “DNA” to innovative leaders?

Characteristics of Innovative Leaders

The link between leadership and innovation leads one to believe that there must be more than meets the eye. This observation is keen. If the connection between leadership and innovation is the tip of the iceberg, then the characteristics of innovative leaders is what lurks deep below the surface. This unseen leadership component is often overlooked and neglected. Much of the research available today is often focused on the act of innovating. Questions like, “How do companies like Apple, Starbucks, Netflix, eBay, Tesla, Uber, and Southwest Airlines revolutionize industries?” While the questions are appropriate and should be asked, it may be helpful to reorient the question. Possibly

⁴¹ Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership Challenge*, 148.

giving more attention to the source of innovation, such as, where does innovation originate in those highly successful companies?

The answer is simple: the leader. To that end, over fifteen hundred CEOs identified creativity and innovation as the number 1 “leadership competency” of the future.⁴² The skill of innovation has become the driving force of the global economy and a priority of every CEO. A fascinating eight-year collaborative study conducted by Jeff Dyer and Hal Gregersen with insights from Clayton M. Christensen uncovered a pattern of this high-demand leadership competency. The original findings were published in the article “The Innovator’s DNA.”⁴³ The motive behind the research was to discover and investigate the thinking of the innovators themselves.⁴⁴ Through interviews with the innovators themselves, a consistent pattern of thinking or leading emerged. Meaning, innovative entrepreneurs and executives had a pattern of behavior when discovering breakthrough ideas. These behaviors were synthesized into a framework of five primary skills that comprise what the authors call the “innovator’s DNA.” The five primary behaviors are associating, questioning, observing, networking, and experimenting. Dyer and Gregersen explain why they use “behavior” instead of “skills or gifting”:

⁴² IBM, “Capitalizing on Complexity: Insights from the Global CEO Study,” May 18, 2010, <https://www.ibm.com/downloads/cas/1VZV5X8J>, 8.

⁴³ Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen, “The Innovator’s DNA,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 2009, <https://hbr.org/2009/12/the-innovators-dna>. The article was the runner-up for the 2009 HBR McKinsey Award. In addition, Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen’s research was published in *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, the top academic journal focused on entrepreneurs. Eventually the article was expanded and made into a book.

⁴⁴ Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen write,

Our project’s primary purpose was to uncover the origins of innovative—and often disruptive—business ideas. So, we interviewed nearly a hundred inventors of revolutionary products and services, as well as founders and CEOs of game-changing companies built on innovative business ideas. These were people such as eBay’s Pierre Omidyar, Amazon’s Jeff Bezos, Research in Motion’s Mike Lazaridis, and Salesforce.com’s Marc Benioff. For a full list of innovators, we interviewed whom we quote in this book, see appendix A; virtually all of the innovators we quote, with the exception of Steve Jobs (Apple), Richard Branson (Virgin), and Howard Schultz (Starbucks)—who have written autobiographies or have given numerous interviews about innovation—are from our interviews. (Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA: Mastering the Five Skills of Disruptive Innovators* [Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2011], 6, Kindle)

When engaged in consistently, these actions—questioning, observing, networking, and experimenting—triggered associational thinking to deliver new businesses, products, services, and/or processes. Most of us think creativity is an entirely cognitive skill; it all happens in the brain. A critical insight from our research is that one’s ability to generate innovative ideas is not merely a function of the mind, but also a function of behaviors. This is good news for us all because it means that if we change our behaviors, we can improve our creative impact.⁴⁵

The discovery of these functional behaviors is critical important for this thesis. While some people might have a natural gifting toward innovation, a leader can begin practicing some behaviors or habits to increase innovative capacity.

One of the most critical skills discussed in “The Innovator’s DNA” is associating. The authors describe *associating* as the ability to intake a plethora of new information or ideas which trigger new connections for novel ideas or solutions.⁴⁶ As a result, innovators possess the unique cognitive skill to connect things or experiences to new things. It is best to think of this skill as the webbing that provides the structure for the other four skills (questioning, observing, networking, and experimenting) to work together. These skills being practiced regularly can increase the associating muscle for leaders. Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen explain, “Disruptive innovators shine best at associating when actively crossing all kinds of borders (geographic, industry, company, profession, discipline, and so on) and engaging the other innovator’s DNA skills.”⁴⁷

Next, the art of questioning is the second skill found within the DNA of the innovator. Questioning is an integral part of the innovator’s DNA. Innovative leaders do not ask safe questions; rather, they ask challenging questions that push against good enough and the status quo. Peter Drucker notes the importance of asking good questions: “The important and difficult job is never to find the right answers, it is to find the right question. For there are few things as useless -if not dangerous- as the right answer to the

⁴⁵ Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA*, 7.

⁴⁶ Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA*, 55-56.

⁴⁷ Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA*, 57-58.

wrong question.”⁴⁸ The standard for innovator leaders is that they must ask insightful questions and ask questions that challenge the status quo.

The art of asking questions cultivates and strengthens one’s ability to observe—careful observation of how things work and recognition of what does not work is found through the art of asking good questions. The authors have found that observers are most successful at figuring out jobs to be done and better ways to do them when they “(1) actively watch customers to see what products they hire to do what jobs; (2) learn to look for surprises or anomalies; and (3) find opportunities to observe in a new environment.”⁴⁹ Through observation companies have the power to transform, adapt, and find creative solutions.

The final two skills are networking and experimenting. Networking for an innovator has less to do with relational capital and more to do with tapping into new ideas or insights by talking with people who have diverse ideas and perspectives.⁵⁰ If associating is the webbing, then networking is the connection of multiple webs that gather and generate new ideas for the innovators. That connection is where experimenting is so critical as the last skill—if there were no implementation of the ideas then it would only be ideation without innovation. Thomas Edison once said, “I haven’t failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that do not work.” Through the process of experimentation, one sees how an idea works and can explore better ways of doing things. Thus, innovators experiment in three ways, as shown in figure 2.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Peter Drucker, *The Practice of Management* (New York: Wiley, 1954), 352-53.

⁴⁹ Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA*, 109.

⁵⁰ Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA*, 127.

⁵¹ Figure 2 is from Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA*, 152.

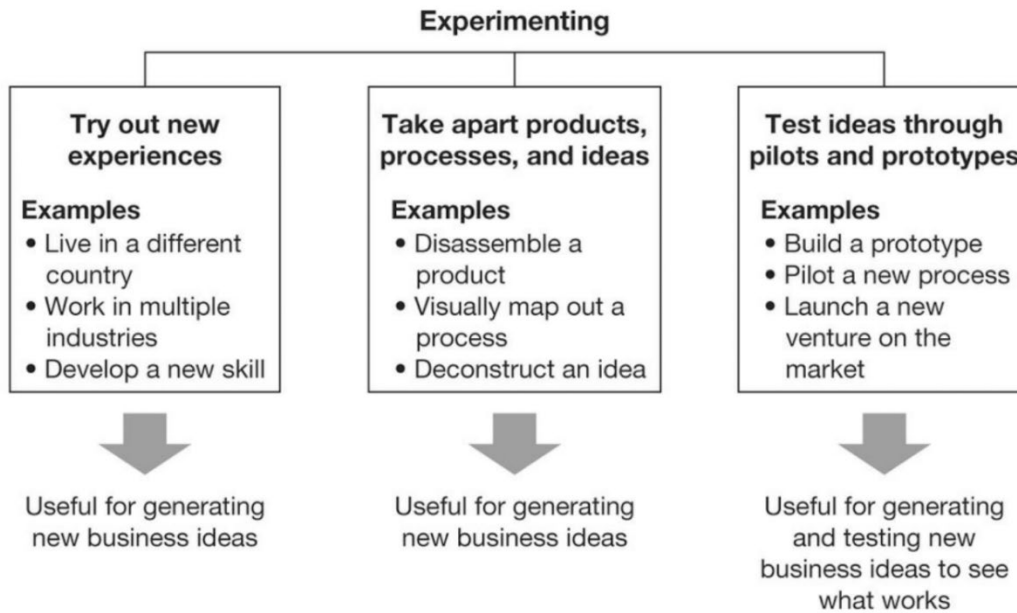


Figure 2. Three ways that innovators experiment

Traditionally the last approach of testing ideas through pilots and prototypes is the most common and classic approach to experimenting. Yet, for innovators the definition must be broader to reflect how innovators create and cultivate new ideas. Jeff Bezos writes, “Experiments are key to innovation because they rarely turn out as you expect, and you learn so much.”⁵² Innovators experiment through new experiences, taking apart products, processes, and ideas, and finally through testing pilots or prototypes.

As mentioned, the new leadership competency of the future is one’s ability to innovate. Innovation and leadership will be linked together for the foreseeable future. The next generation of leaders must consider cultivating a pattern of leading that increases innovation. One develops this leadership competency by practicing the five behaviors of innovation: associating, questioning, observing, networking, and experimenting. The good news is that it possible to grow in all five behavioral skills. It is not limited to an innate mental function of an individual; rather, it is a pattern of leadership behavior. Therefore, institutions and organizations must consider how they can help, support, and resource

⁵² Jeff Bezos, quoted Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA*, 149.

their employees to acquire and grow in these behavioral skills because these behaviors are critical as leaders face significant challenges in both innovation and leadership in the twenty-first century.

Challenge of Innovation and Leadership in the Twenty-First Century

The twenty-first century has quickly become a labyrinth placed on the side of a mountain for leaders. Each turn looks the same while presenting different obstacles with only one way forward. Obstacles and complexities are constantly shifting from work, life, and culture, making it all move at warp speed. The amount of change experienced in the last thirty years has made the workplace and everyday life unrecognizable. Institutions, parents, world leaders, non-profit organizations, and for-profit organizations are all trying to catch up, which means people are either adapting or not.

The future is here. The only question is, are leaders going to make the changes to keep up. Kouzes and Posner write, “The domain of leaders is the future. The work of leaders is change.”⁵³ The world does not need more leaders copying and pasting the last thirty years of theory or practice. Instead, the world needs the right kind of leaders. The right kind of leaders learn how to adapt to these five challenges: find the work-life balance in a twenty-four-seven, three sixty-five digital world; learn to lead from influence rather than positional power; change communication style from oral and static to visual and interactive; winning through agile collaborative teams than talented individuals; and learn how to lead in the digitally connected, geographically dispersed world.⁵⁴

Two Is Better than One

In the last several decades, the study of leadership has developed into several disciplines. According to Northouse, in the last sixty years there have been as many as sixty-five different classification systems to describe the theory and practice of

⁵³ Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership Challenge*, xiv.

⁵⁴ Jeremie Kubicek and Steve Cockram, “Toolkit,” 100x Summit Keynote 2019.

leadership.⁵⁵ Could it be that many leaders and scholars are looking for model of leadership that gives clarity to what it is and where to find it? Could it be that one definition or aspect of leadership is not enough? Clearly there are challenges for leaders in the twenty-first century. Is it possible that the leadership that is required is not one type but a unique combination of a few practices of leadership? Perhaps two leadership styles is better than one.

Two theories and practices of leaderships could possibly come together to forge a new path forward. Entering the twenty-first century, it appears that change leadership and innovation are vital and key competencies for future leaders, and equally important is a type of leadership that looks more at the inner quality than outward skill: servant leadership. The focus of this thesis is to consider and combine the best of change leadership theory and servant leadership practices in relation to innovation. This section will interact and explore the contemporary leadership theories and practices of servant leadership from Robert Greenleaf and leading change by John Kotter by carefully considering the best of both theories, their association with innovation, and finding connections that provide a foundation for new way leading by innovative, servant leadership.

Leading Change—John Kotter

Over the last several decades, there have been critical voices in the public square's leadership theory. It would be a difficult task to not consider John Kotter as one of those leading voices, especially when it pertains to leadership and change. Many regard the best-selling author, award-winning business and management thought leader, Harvard Professor, and business entrepreneur as the authority on leadership and change.⁵⁶ Kotter has numerous works in the field of leadership and a majority focus on leading change. Most notably, his 1996 book *Leading Change* has taken the spotlight and was named one

⁵⁵ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 4.

⁵⁶ Kotter Inc., "Meet the Team," accessed August 24, 2022, <https://www.kotterinc.com/who-we-are/our-team/>.

of the twenty-five most influential business management books ever written.⁵⁷ The genesis for this work began in an article exploring the eight common errors of why transformation efforts fail.⁵⁸

Leading Change outlines an intentional process that enables organizations change effectively. This roadmap is derived from the eight reasons why transformation efforts fail in an organization. The eight reasons were identified through Kotter's analysis during a fifteen-year span that yielded significant change in organizations from downsizing, strategizing, restructuring, implementation of quality programs, and setting new culture.⁵⁹ Eventually these eight reasons provided a new process of leading change. One might wonder why change is needed and if there is a definition of leading change. Change is necessary, but irrelevance is not, which is the tacit assumption for the importance of change and why leaders must engage in the status quo trap. Consequently, change leadership is best defined as the art and practice of influencing people to engage in change and then leading them on a journey together from their current state to desired state. The engine of change leadership rises and falls on leaders and their leadership. The driver of change is solely based on leadership. Therefore, one must examine and consider how this leadership functions in three aspects: motive, message, and method. Another way to say it is that leadership has three movements: the why (motive), the what (message), and the how (methods).

Motive of leading change. The why, or motive, behind change leadership or leading change is a fascinating driver. It is the ability to push through the comfort and security of the status quo by envisioning a new and better future. To stop and think about the advancement in technology alone in the last twenty-five to fifty years is fascinating.

⁵⁷ Kotter, "Meet the Team."

⁵⁸ John Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail," *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 1995, <https://hbr.org/1995/05/leading-change-why-transformation-efforts-fail-2>.

⁵⁹ Kotter, *Leading Change*, ix-3.

Such advancements and breakthroughs, like cell phones, computers, modern medicine, artificial intelligence, and even the ability travel in space, were once science fiction fifty plus years ago, but now they are part of daily life. These advancements in technology and globalization of the world's economy have created the winds of change. Kotter says, "No one is immune to these forces."⁶⁰ These forces challenge the desire of comfort and security provided by the status quo. Embracing the status quo is like embracing a slow death. However, something deep within change leaders recognizes the dangers of the status quo and understands the necessary nature of change. Kanter calls these types of leaders *change masters*. *Change masters* are people and organizations adept at the art of anticipating the need for, and of leading, productive change.⁶¹ Consequently, the motive behind change leadership is to create breakthrough advancements for a better future coupled with the ability to adapt to changing circumstances to ensure an organization does not move to decline or death. Understanding that the motive for why change is necessary is an integral part and provides a foundation for any change effort that must be continually communicated.

Message of leading change. Throughout history, larger than life leaders have led change and captured their constituents with their ability to cast a compelling vision. However, Kotter notes that modern organizations are far too complex to lead widescale change like Winston Churchill or Martin Luther King Jr. did.⁶² He argues that change is likely led through a team of leaders instead of a singular, larger than life leader. Therefore, in change efforts, this team of leaders must have the ability to articulate a compelling vision through regular and clear communication. Kotter describes three aspects of communicating the change vision.

⁶⁰ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 18.

⁶¹ Kanter, *The Change Masters*, 13.

⁶² Kotter, *Leading Change*, 30.

First, the change vision must be a sensible vision.⁶³ Second, the vision must and should stay front and center. Kotter describes vision as a key component in useful change by directing, aligning, and inspiring the actions of people and organizations.⁶⁴ Finally, the change vision cannot and must not be owned by a singular person. It must come from a team of leaders who keep the vision front and center and can articulate the sensible vision. When leading change, the vision of change can never be underestimated or under communicated by that team of leaders. If that happens, then the vision fails to produce the required level of engagement because the vision never connected to the hearts and minds of employees, followers, or customers. Kouzes and Posner say it this way:

When you communicate your vision of the future to your constituents, you need to talk about how they're going to make a difference in the world, how they're going to have a positive impact on people and events. You need to show them how they can realize their long-term interests by enlisting in a common vision. You need to speak to the higher meaning and purpose of work. You need to describe a compelling image of what the future could be like when people join in a common cause.⁶⁵

Visions give people a direction of exciting possibilities.

In conjunction with that change vision, constituents must be reminded of the organization's mission. At times, leaders create confusion because vision and mission get blended together. Leaders must remember that vision communicates the direction of the organization; mission is what the organization is trying to achieve. Finally, leaders must communicate the "how or strategy" of arriving or accomplishing said vision. They must remember that communication is delivered in words and actions. The common adage applies to the change vision and leaders: "Actions speak louder than words." Kotter emphasizes, "Nothing undermines change more than behavior by important individuals that is inconsistent with the verbal communication."⁶⁶ He indicates the critical nature for

⁶³ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 7.

⁶⁴ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 7.

⁶⁵ Kouzes and Posner, *Leadership Challenge*, 120.

⁶⁶ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 10.

leadership teams and others to move in one accord and to take the next right step in the change process. Leaders must know the appropriate pace in the process and understand how to identify the next step.

Methods of leading change. Kotter would argue that successful transformational efforts have two important patterns. First is a multistep process that creates power and motivation to overcome resistance. Second, the methods of change efforts cannot be led by great management but can only be driven by high-capacity leadership.⁶⁷ For Kotter, the magic is found within the methods, specifically what he calls “the eight-stage process of creating major change.” He explains, “The methods used in successful transformations are all based on one fundamental insight: that major change happens when a method is designed to alter strategies, reengineer processes, or improve quality that is able to overcome resistance and address it well.”⁶⁸ Thus, his eight-stage process was designed to address the eight fundamental errors that cause transformational efforts to fail.⁶⁹

In Kotter’s eight-stage transformation process, the first four stages help weaken the status quo. Those stages are establishing a sense of urgency. The goal of the first stage is to provide a sense of reality, identify opportunities, and discuss challenges to those opportunities. Stage 2 focuses on putting together a group of leaders who have enough power to lead said change. A major hurdle is getting the group to work together like a team. If that takes place, Kotter calls this group ‘the guiding coalition.’ In stage 3, the guiding coalition begins creating a vision that directs the change effort coupled with strategies for accomplishing that vision. Stage 4 is where the guiding coalition focuses on the message; where they communicate the new vision and strategy constantly with making

⁶⁷ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 20.

⁶⁸ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 20.

⁶⁹ See Kotter, “Leading Change.”

sure the coalition models the behaviors of employees. Again, the goal of the first four stages is to weaken the comforts and security of the status quo in the organization.

The last four stages have two specific objectives. First is to introduce new strategies or best practices, which occurs within stages 5-7. One of the most critical phases is step 5, where the goal is to empower a large group of people to act by removing obstacles, changing systems or structures that impede or undermine the change vision, and empowering people to take risks.⁷⁰ This stage cannot and must not be overlooked and rushed through. It is like a linchpin of the eight-stage process that transitions from the first four and creates a pathway for new practices to be implemented. As a result, the new practices must and should create short-term wins, which is stage 6. Short-term wins are best understood as visible improvements in performance. In this stage, it is best for the guiding coalition to recognize and reward the people who made the wins possible. Next is stage 7, where the goal is to consolidate gains and produce more change. This is a major step of a transformation effort. The temptation is to think an organization has made it with those small-short term wins, yet it is not enough. Stage 7 is highly dependent on the leadership of the guiding coalition. The guiding coalition accomplishes stage 7 by producing more change, adding more staff to help with all the changes, and ultimately reducing unnecessary interdependencies.⁷¹ Within stage 7 it is important to know that it is a long road to change anything of significance. Then the question becomes, when does stage 8 happen?

Stage 8 is the final stage of the transformation process. The main goal in this final stage is to recreate a new culture by anchoring the new approaches within the organization. One of the first things that must be done in this phase is to create better performance through customer- and productivity-oriented behavior, which requires excellent leadership and more effective management. Next, the guiding coalition begins

⁷⁰ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 102.

⁷¹ Kotter *Leading Change*, 143.

communicating and linking new behaviors to organizational success. Last is developing a plan to ensure the transformation process lasts with leadership development and a plan for succession.

Kotter provides a compelling and clear path forward for leading change. In 1996, he wrote, “Powerful macroeconomic forces are at work here, and these forces may grow even stronger over the next few decades.”⁷² Change is necessary for organizations to adapt to the pace of change occurring in the world. Kotter explains,

The typical 20th century organization has not operated well in a rapidly changing environment. Structure, systems, practices, and culture have often been more of a drag on change than a facilitator. If environmental volatility continues to increase, as most people now predict, the standard organization of the 20th century will likely become a dinosaur.⁷³

This volatile environment with an increasing global economy with shifting markets requires that the change process be driven by high quality leadership, not just management.⁷⁴ That is why in the twenty-first century both the ability to lead change and the ability to innovate are some of the most sought-after competencies for next generation leaders. For Kotter, change and leadership are inseparable, like two sides of the same coin. Leadership drives change and change requires leadership.⁷⁵

These next generation leaders must be more collaborative in creating and casting vision, leading managers, and setting strategies that accomplish the change vision. The world is moving faster than ever, thus requiring a team that can provide the needed leadership to respond to the pace of the twenty-first century. In a slow-moving world, all an organization needs is a singular, larger than life individual running the show.⁷⁶ These types of singular leadership structures face significant challenges, regardless of how

⁷² Kotter, *Leading Change*, 3.

⁷³ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 161.

⁷⁴ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 29.

⁷⁵ Kotter, *Leading Change*, x.

⁷⁶ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 163.

talented the individual might be, such as not having enough time or expertise to absorb rapidly shifting competitor, customer, and technological information.⁷⁷ Change leadership of the future has to be more collaborative, where teamwork is not only necessary but the norm. Organizations must cease looking for Superman and begin looking for the Avengers. Organizations need a group of world-class leaders who understand the motive, message, and method of leading change in the twenty-first century. Therefore, the next section will consider how the theory and practice of servant leadership cultivates a more collaborative ethos of leadership to lead change.

Servant Leadership—Robert Greenleaf

In 1977, Robert Greenleaf pioneered and introduced a paradigm of leadership. His work *Servant Leadership* promoted a method that shattered management theory at the time.⁷⁸ Northouse describes servant leadership as a paradoxical concept that is counterintuitive to the assumed image of leadership.⁷⁹ Within a traditional image or framework of leadership, there is a tacit assumption that servants follow and leaders influence. Is it possible for someone to embody both characteristics simultaneously? For Greenleaf, the origination of the idea of servant leadership was influenced by Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*.⁸⁰ This epic tells a story of a band of men on a mythical journey built around the premise that "the great leader is seen as a servant first." Greenleaf says that the concept of servant leadership derived from an intuitive insight from contemplating the role and function of the main character, Leo, in *Journey to the East*.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 163-64.

⁷⁸ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist, 2002).

⁷⁹ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 219.

⁸⁰ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 21.

⁸¹ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 26.

As a result, Greenleaf noticed a significant gap in institutions and organizations within their leadership structures and practice of leading, where the focus was on production and power. Thus, the idea of serving others through care and support to the individual or team was otherworldly. In the 1970s there was little focus on self-awareness of the leader and being attentive to those he or she led. Greenleaf brought together the worlds of support and challenge—suggesting that a critical skill for a leader is self-awareness. Thus, the leader is attentive to his team’s needs and is more concerned about those he leads, pushing them to become the best version of themselves. This results in a leader who impacts and influences through serving the greater good of the company, constituents, and community.

There is a shift in perspective when it comes to servant leadership. Greenleaf notes, “It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first.”⁸² That shift was a drastic turn from the natural state of leading where the focus might be on power, prestige, and possessions. There have been many attempts to define and describe this approach to leadership. The task is arduous because servant leadership is nuanced and better explored than explained in definition. The starting point for understanding servant leadership begins with motive. Greenleaf writes, “It is a conscious choice, to serve first, that brings one to aspire to lead.”⁸³ Northouse explains that while serving first comes more naturally to some than others, anyone can learn to serve first.⁸⁴ The implication is that servant leadership cannot be treated as a trait but as a learned leadership behavior. Ultimately, servant leadership is not just a novel and paradoxical idea, but the prescriptions, provided by Greenleaf and others, is now considered as model for leaders today. Therefore, the aim of this section is to explore and examine the motive, behavior, and outcome of servant leadership.

⁸² Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 27.

⁸³ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 27.

⁸⁴ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 220.

The motive of servant leadership. Servant leadership is an intentional style of leading—a choice. Everything begins and ends with the initiative and intent of the servant leader. The focus with this practice of leadership holds the tension between the why and what. Greenleaf explains this complexity:

The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them are shadings and blends that part of the infinite variety of human nature. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?⁸⁵

Consequently, servant leaders focus on the good of followers over their own good. Ensuring that their followers have everything they need to succeed in life and work. While the focus is on those being led, there is a catalytic impact and outcome of servant leadership. Greenleaf writes, "Servant leaders are ethical and lead in ways that serve the greater good of the organization, community, and society at large."⁸⁶

Additionally, Greenleaf emphasizes a connection between the choice of the servant-first and the behaviors of servant leadership. Between those two realities is the idea of trust between the leader and followers. Trust is the by-product and glue for making servant leadership a reality. When a person accepts another's leadership, that individual is placing faith in the direction and decisions of that leader. It is worth noting that the servant leader's motivation for direction and decisions is based on what is best for the people under his leadership and in the community. The motive for servant leaders is rooted in their understanding that leadership is a responsibility, not a reward. Leaders with a reward mindset view the seat of leadership as positional power and authority to do as he or she pleases because of tenure and talent. Whereas the servant leads out of responsibility and is driven out of choosing to go first for the people.

⁸⁵ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 27.

⁸⁶ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 219.

In Greenleaf’s view, a leader says, “I will go first, follow me!,” which is the very essence of leadership—going out ahead to showing the way.⁸⁷ The servant leader carries the weight and responsibility of leadership. They do not wield their position as a reward. For example, followers can develop uncertainty with a decision or new direction, but the leader is always building trust by stating and restating the goal. Ultimately, the leader is accepts the potential for success or failure for those they lead. Trust is the currency of this model of leadership because the servant leader does not use power and authority for gain. Rather, consensus is built within groups through behaviors and practices of servant leadership.

The behaviors of servant leadership. In *Servant Leadership*, Greenleaf describes nine leadership behaviors that make a servant leader: listening, language, withdrawal, empathy, persuasion, intuition, foresight, awareness, and stewardship. These nine behaviors capture the essence and message of Greenleaf’s pioneering work of the leader as servant first. Within this section these behaviors will be reviewed and explored.

Listening is the first behavior Greenleaf lists. It is as if he is saying this is a matter of first importance. Greenleaf would argue that a servant leader listens as an act of first response. There is a difference between reacting and responding to a problem. So, the first method of a servant leader’s communication is listening, not talking. Greenleaf notes, “True listening builds strength in other people.”⁸⁸ There is good news for all leaders: listening is a learned behavior that involves hearing, being present, and receiving what others have to say. Greenleaf underscores the importance of listening with this quote from Saint Francis: “Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand.”⁸⁹ Through this behavior of listening servant leaders build trust of others and validate alternative perspectives.

⁸⁷ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 28.

⁸⁸ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 31.

⁸⁹ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 31.

It is by no accident that Greenleaf places language and words second in his leadership behaviors of servant leadership. He says, “One of the arts of communicating is to say just enough to facilitate that leap. Many attempts are nullified by saying too much.”⁹⁰ A pivotal skill for servant leaders is understanding when to speak and when not to speak. At times, leaders can use too many words, which creates dissonance between themselves and their followers. This dissonance is tragedy of epic proportions. Greenleaf explains, “One of the greatest tragedies is when a proven, able leader becomes trapped in one these closed verbal worlds and loses the ability to lead.”⁹¹ What a great irony of statements. Leaders have the potential to lose influence of leading by a lack or excess of language. Therefore, language is a powerful tool for leaders to master, to cultivate, and to invite followers in to inspire their imaginations of what could be. Language is a tool used wisely of the servant leader.

Another unlikely behavior is withdrawal. Greenleaf describes leaders as individuals under physical and emotional pressure. Some leaders thrive in such environments, while others embrace the intensity because the end justifies the means. For both type of leaders there is a need for a period of rest and withdrawal. After those intense pressure filled opportunities, leaders must practice the ability to pause and recalibrate oneself. Greenleaf describes it as the law of optimum:

One may govern one’s life by the law of the optimum (*optimum being that pace and set of choices that give one the best performance over a lifespan*) — bearing in mind that there are always emergencies, and the optimum includes carrying an unused reserve of energy in all periods of normal demand so that one has the resilience to cope with the emergency.⁹²

The law of optimum could be better understood as the disciple knowing one’s pace with intentional rhythms of rest, which encourages leaders to recognize that it is not right or

⁹⁰ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 32.

⁹¹ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 32.

⁹² Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 32, emphasis added.

appropriate to do everything. The servant leader is attentive to the load of leadership they carry and their capacity to carry it.

Not only are they attentive their own capacity, but they have a unique ability to empathize with others. Greenleaf states, “Empathy is the imaginative projection of one’s own consciousness into another being.”⁹³ Some leaders tend to project their own view of the world onto others. For Greenleaf, a servant leader can see the world from another perspective by understanding what followers are thinking and feeling. When a servant leader shows empathy, it makes their followers feel seen and heard. This characteristic of the servant leader enables the leader, when communicating challenge, to not use coercion but persuasion.

Persuasion is a posture taken by the leader, where communication is clear and persistent to convince others to change. Greenleaf writes, “Leadership by persuasion has the virtue of change by convincement rather than coercion. Its advantages are obvious.”⁹⁴ The advantage of using persuasion means that the leaders are not using positional authority or forced compliance to make changes through coercion. The communication of persuasion is clear and constant in reminding why change is needed. It builds a common ground through gentleness, but it is not softer or weak. Servant leaders make a conscious choice to not wield power to force conformity. Therefore, it appears that persuasion is the penultimate interpersonal behavior of servant leadership.

The first five behaviors are more focused on the interpersonal skills of leadership, while behaviors six and seven, intuition and foresight, appear to originate as more natural, innate acumen that cannot be gained in a classroom or exercise. It is reasonable to believe that the practice of the skills like listening, knowing when to speak, withdrawal, and empathy can aid one to be more intuitive and foresee the unforeseeable. However, foresight and intuition are two intellectual abilities that are more natural to the

⁹³ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 33.

⁹⁴ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 44.

person. Greenleaf says, “The leader needs to have a sense for the unknowable and be able to foresee the unforeseeable.”⁹⁵ In describing intuition as the ability of knowing the unknowable, it is linked to a person’s ability to sense and feel patterns from past experiences. Closely related to intuition is foresight—the ability to anticipate the future reasonably. For Greenleaf, a leader’s ability to have foresight is a central ethic of leadership because there should be accountability for leadership failures, where events were reasonably foreseen and failed to act.⁹⁶ There might not be a better summary of what it means for a leader to possess both intuition and foresight than this quote from Greenleaf. In describing a true leader, he says, “One is at once, in every moment of time, historian, contemporary analysts, and prophet—not three separate toles. This what the practicing leader is, every day of his or her life.”⁹⁷ That is the role of the leader, which comes from the intentional practice of the four intrapersonal behaviors of awareness, stewardship, commitment to people, and the community flourishing.

Greenleaf concludes his list of behaviors by focusing on the intrapersonal behaviors of awareness and stewardship. One of the most powerful intrapersonal behaviors might be self-awareness. It is like the skill of empathy, but the perspective is different. Awareness is not empathizing with that person. Awareness is learning what it is like to be on the other side of the leader’s leadership. Specifically, awareness is the ability to understand the degree of one’s influence on the physical, social, and political environments. Northouse describes this skill as the ability to step aside and view themselves and their own perspectives in the greater context of the situation.⁹⁸ The mark of a true leader, according to Greenleaf, is one who can tolerate a sustained wide span of

⁹⁵ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 35.

⁹⁶ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 39.

⁹⁷ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 38-39.

⁹⁸ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 222.

awareness from all angles so that one better “sees it as it is.”⁹⁹ Leaders gaining a better perspective enables them to intentionally keep an understanding that leadership is a responsibility not a reward.

The behavior and practice of stewardship is the final mark of a servant leader. The stewardship of servant leaders is defined by their commitment to people and community. When it comes to the idea of stewardship, Greenleaf describes this behavior as accepting the responsibility to carefully lead the people and organization through ultimate trust.¹⁰⁰ The servant leader builds trust with their followers through asking questions and understanding instead of abusing the position to demand and dictate. When leaders view their position as reward then they will likely use power and control as their primary way of leading. Yet, servant leaders embrace the commitment to people and the community as their chief responsibility to steward.

Due to the key practice of stewardship, a servant leader has a hyper focus on people and the community. Servant leaders place a dramatic emphasis on helping people become the best version of themselves personally and professionally. This type of commitment to growth of people takes many different forms. It could involve providing growth opportunities in skills, new trainings, and even including someone in meetings or making decisions who does not normally participate.

From this emphasis on treating each follower as servant, a cause-and-effect relationship impacts the community through the stewardship of people. If a better society is to be built, then one must provide opportunities for people both in the capacity to serve and their very performance as servants as regenerative forces in major organizations.¹⁰¹ Greenleaf called this people-building.¹⁰² Northouse describes people building as fostering

⁹⁹ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 41.

¹⁰⁰ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 54.

¹⁰¹ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 62.

¹⁰² Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 53-54.

community: “Servant leadership fosters the development of community. A community that identifies something greater than themselves that they value.”¹⁰³

In conclusion, these nine behaviors provide context to what is essential and unique within the servant leadership. Northouse describes servant leadership behaviors as a multidimensional process, where it is more about the collective power of each behavior making an impact in the leadership process.¹⁰⁴ From examining these behaviors and Greenleaf’s writing there are three potential outcomes from servant leadership: development and growth of followers, organizational performance, and influence on society.

The outcome of servant leadership. Typically, the conversation around servant leadership has a laser focus on the leader’s behaviors, however, that was not Greenleaf’s goal. His aim was focused on the outcomes of servant leadership. Namely, that servant leadership would produce healthy organizations that nurture growth in individuals, strengthen organizational performance, and ultimately make an impact in society, which is evident in Greenleaf’s work of *Servant Leadership*, where he weaves a subtle yet clear message throughout the work that servant leadership produces something better for people, institutions, and the world. For example, Greenleaf says, “This is my thesis: caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built.”¹⁰⁵ Is that true? Does servant leadership produce such outcomes?

Pertaining to the outcome of performance and growth, further research is needed to affirm the hypothesis that servant leadership will have a favorable impact on performance.¹⁰⁶ However, there is research suggesting a positive influence on

¹⁰³ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 223.

¹⁰⁴ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 227.

¹⁰⁵ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 62.

¹⁰⁶ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 231.

organizational performance influenced by servant leadership behaviors. The research indicates that there is correlation between servant leadership practices and subordinate behaviors that goes beyond the basic requirements and helps the overall function of the organization.¹⁰⁷

The same is true for societal impact. It is important to note that societal impact is not commonly measured but examples of servant leadership are highly visible as having substantial impact in the world. Northouse highlights Mother Teresa's societal impact years of practicing servant leadership behaviors played a critical role in the creation of the Missionaries of Charity.¹⁰⁸ The impact of this charity continues today with more than one million works in forty plus countries in hospitals, schools, and hospices for the poor. It is interesting to see such a correlation between servant leadership behavior's causation of the common good in organizations and society. A more contemporary example is the impact of Southwest Airlines. Northouse notes,

Leaders at Southwest instituted an "others first" organizational philosophy in the management of the company, which starts with how it treats its employees. . . . Because the company thrives, it impacts society by providing jobs in the communities it serves and, to a lesser extent, by providing the customers who rely on it with transportation.¹⁰⁹

The examples of Southwest Airlines and Mother Teresa show how servant leadership impacts both organizational performance and societal impact. Could these examples indicate that the behaviors and outcomes of servant leadership might fit in the framework of lead and lag measures from *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*?¹¹⁰ Greenhouse

¹⁰⁷ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 231.

¹⁰⁸ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 231.

¹⁰⁹ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 232.

¹¹⁰ The terminology of *lead and lag* measures is derived from *The Four Disciplines of Execution* by Chris McChesney, Jim Huling, and Sean Covey. The authors suggests that progress and success will be based on two kinds of measures: lag and lead. Lag measures "indicate if you have achieved your goal" and a lead measure "is an indicator or performance that might indicate future success." Chris McChesney, Jim Huling, and Sean Covey, *The Four Disciplines of Execution: Achieving Your Wildly Important Goals* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 11-12.

would affirm this inference that the outcome of servant leadership aims to impact and influence the common good for all.

In Greenleaf's *Servant Leadership* one sees that servant leadership consists of three aspects: motive, behaviors, and outcomes. At the center of this way of leadership are the nine servant behaviors: listening, language, withdrawal, empathy, persuasion, intuition, foresight, awareness, and stewardship. Through these behaviors the leader leads their followers or organization by serving first.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the leadership theories of change leadership and servant leadership by considering the motive and model presented in John Kotter's *Leader Change* and Robert Greenleaf's *Servant Leadership*. Additionally, it sought to uncover the challenges to leadership, how leadership is connected to innovation, and the characteristics of innovators. These steps were considered in efforts to examine how these concepts fit together to produce disruptive leadership.

By surveying and examining these concepts, three patterns emerged to demonstrate how these ideas fit together. First, change leadership and servant leadership have similar goals in mind. Both concepts seek to produce healthy organizations. Servant leaders focus on serving their subordinates, where change leaders focus on making the necessary changes to ensure the organizations remain successful. Second, innovators and servant leadership focus on behavioral practices. For some leaders these behavioral tendencies are more natural, but the good news is that most behaviors examined in this chapter are learned behaviors. Third, because of change leadership's focus on the art of a change process there is room to consider how servant leadership behaviors can be combined to effectively lead change. In summary, the chapter affirmed the possibility of fitting and combining the best of both worlds. Because the world is changing at an incredible pace, leaders must learn to change themselves, while simultaneously learning

how to lead change and serve others, while possessing the skills to innovate in a change world.

For current and next generation leaders, these patterns are telling that there is a gap in the leadership ethos. Power and authority are no longer the currency of leadership for marketplace or ministry leadership. Business as usual is no longer accepted. In the twenty-first century, leadership must evolve to this highly adaptive world. Could it be that the evolution is not finding a new method but a better way forward? What if that way forward is taking an approach of innovative, servant leadership?—an approach that combines the leadership capacity of leading change and servant leadership behaviors.

Chapter 3 will seek to compare these patterns regarding servant leadership and leading change while considering what other Christian leaders say about innovation in the church. The chapter will review the works of Todd Bolsinger, Lyle Schaller, and Justin Irving and Mark Strauss to affirm the need for a new way leading in the twenty-first century within the church.

CHAPTER 3

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP THEORIES AND PRACTICES

The previous chapter provided a framework and foundation of the thesis by examining leadership in a complex world, how leaders are formed, how innovation and leadership are uniquely connected, and, finally, the contemporary theories of change leadership and servant leadership. It was shown that leadership and innovation are both future oriented behaviors, and by nature are disruptive to the status quo. In addition, the works of *Leading Change* by John Kotter and *Servant Leadership* by Robert Greenleaf were examined to distill the best of both leadership practices in conjunction of understanding how the innovators DNA are critical for disruptive leadership.

To further explore the need for disruptive leadership, this chapter will examine current Christian leadership theories and practices in association to innovation. The patterns of innovation, servant leadership, and change theory will be considered with the understanding that the twenty-first century world has changed for both marketplace and ministry leaders. Todd Bolsinger notes, “In this changing world we need to add a new set of leadership tools. And this applies equally well to Christians serving in leadership beyond the parish. The challenges of a changing world come even more rapidly in business, education, and nonprofit leadership.”¹ The world is no longer the same and the same is true of leadership. The overcorrection and implementation in management as leadership in the institutions in the last century have yielded ministers as mangers, not leaders.² In a

¹ Todd E. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 13, Kindle.

² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 19.

rapidly changing world that is unknown, managerial leadership will no longer make it. The last decade, not including a post-COVID world, demands a new type of leader with new tools. A leader is required who understands that disruption is continuing and not slowing down. There are limited options. Be disrupted or be disruptive, leaders' choice. Therefore, a linchpin to this study is considering how innovation is a necessary skill for leaders in ministry or the marketplace in association with both servant leadership and leading change theories.

Additionally, when analyzing servant leadership and leading change theories four insights were found in the contemporary research. First, both theories have a deep motivation to do what is best for the organization. Second, there is a misguided assumption that servant leadership is more focused on the behaviors of a leader than the outcome. To that point, Robert Greenleaf's focus for servant leadership was the outcome of healthier followers produce healthier teams, which yield high performing institutions. Third, change leadership is hyper focused only on the implementation and execution of the change vision—the outcome. While that is true, change leadership is highly dependent on a group of leaders that know how to lead a process of planned change. Kotter's *Leading Change* indicate that there are opportunities to practice servant leadership behaviors by the leadership team throughout the eight-step process. Finally, both theories appear interdependent upon each other, revealing that the leadership required in the future is multi-dimensional and possibly paradoxical. Tim Elmore writes,

Leadership is seldom easy, but today it affords us the challenge of collaborating with a more educated, more entitled, more savvy population that has greater expectations of satisfaction and rewards than in past generations. Uncommon leaders stand out because they are able to juggle seemingly contradictory traits to lead such people. They balance paradoxes that make them worth following. Their paradoxical qualities are conspicuous as they require not just intelligence but the differentiating qualities of emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and moral intelligence.³

³ Tim Elmore, *The Eight Paradoxes of Great Leadership: Embracing the Conflicting Demands of Today's Workplace* (Nashville: HarperCollins, 2021), 9-10, Kindle.

Could the void in the literature be a lack of connection in paradoxical leadership realities where leadership is both an art and practice, that is, disruptive leadership? Could disruptive leadership hold the tension of focusing on innovation, high performance, and healthy followers? Is it possible to lead change with a motivation of serving-first? Could the disruptive leader provide this uncommon art and practice of leading by combining the skills and behaviors of leading change and innovation paired with the practice of servant leadership?

To further explore the need for disruptive leadership, this chapter will examine current Christian leadership theories and practices. Like the previous chapter, this will be accomplished by surveying three disciplines: innovation, leading change theory, and servant leadership from a Christian perspective. It will interact with works from Todd Bolsinger, Lyle Schaller, and Justin Irving and Mark Strauss. Each section will discuss the major tenants of each leadership practice, the contribution of each leadership practice, and what is unique or missing in this leadership practice. By observing what is missing or unique about each theory, the chapter will close by briefly connecting similarities and distinctions to show how combining innovation, leading change, and servant leadership produces a new art and practice of leading—disruptive leadership.

Innovation from the Christian Perspective

One of the leading voices on navigating uncharted territory and innovation in the Christian context is Todd Bolsinger. Bolsinger currently serves as the Vice President for Vocation and Formation, and Assistant Professor of Practical Theology, at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is a frequent speaker and consultant, and serves as an executive coach for corporate and nonprofit, specializing in transformational leadership. He was the senior pastor of San Clemente Presbyterian Church in San Clemente, California for seventeen years and earned his PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary.⁴

⁴ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 276.

Bolsinger has authored several books with an emphasis on leadership development, formation, and adaptive leadership. His work *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* introduces five vital lessons for Christian leaders to grasp to adapt and innovate in an unknown world. A major focal point of his work is reframing leadership and connecting leadership to adaptive capacity. He writes, “In order to act or function differently in a changing world, all true leadership will require transformation. To that end, all true leadership will be anchored in the principles of adaptive leadership.”⁵ Adaptive leadership is the transformation process of leading and finding a new way of approaching problems when there is no map for uncharted territories. This is innovation in its purest form. Bolsinger continues, “An understanding of this kind of adaptive leadership has three characteristics: 1) a changing environment where there is no clear answer 2) the necessity for both leaders and followers to learn, especially the leader’s own ongoing transformation 3) the unavoidable reality that a new solution will result in loss.”⁶ These characteristics are needed for leaders at this present moment. For any leaders, marketplace or ministry, the choice is simple: embrace innovation or become irrelevant. That choice is why *Canoeing the Mountains* will serve as a focal point for understanding innovation and leadership in the Christian perspective.

Adaptive Leadership and Innovation— Todd Bolsinger

Why is innovation an important skill for Christian leaders today? Is there a clear need for adaptive leadership in the Christian perspective? Bolsinger points out that church leaders have been primarily trained for a world that no longer exists.⁷ The world has grown into a complex, interconnected leadership reality that no longer has the

⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 40.

⁶ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 41-42.

⁷ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 12.

Christian faith at the center. The days of the Christian faith and church being an integral, focal point of day-to-day life is quickly diminishing. To that end, Bolsinger notes,

When cities are now considering using eminent domain laws to replace churches with tax-revenue generating big-box stores, when Sundays are more about soccer and Starbucks than about Sabbath, when Christian student groups are getting derecognized on university campuses, when the fastest growing religious affiliation among young adults is “none,” when there is no moral consensus built on Christian tradition (even among Christians), when even a funeral in a conservative beach town is more likely to be a Hawaiian style “paddle out” than a gathering in a sanctuary, then Christendom as a marker of society has clearly passed.⁸

When the church was at the center of the western world there were three primary areas of leadership for the Christian leader: (1) teaching that provided Christian education; (2) liturgies to lead Christian services; and finally, (3) pastoral care to counsel and support Christians.⁹ The world has changed and Christian leadership needs a new set of tools. At the heart of this new set of tools of leadership is the capacity to change and adapt—innovation. An innovation of Christian leadership that moves current Christian leaders from maintenance to a missional movement in an uncharted, rapidly changing world is needed. The church and Christians leaders must seek innovation to spark a movement in a changing world that resembles the early leadership of Jesus and the apostles.

The ability to adapt, innovate, and lead the Christian faith, and be the church in an unknown world, is contingent on leaders and leadership. For Bolsinger, he reorientates his readers on what leadership is and what it is not.¹⁰ Leadership and management have a close relationship but are different in form and function. He describes that management is about keeping what is going and running smoothly, whereas leadership sets its gaze toward what could be or might be. In the previous chapter, the relationship and differences between leadership and management were discussed. In summary of that discussion, management looks inward, and leadership looks outward. The implication for church

⁸ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 12.

⁹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 13.

¹⁰ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 19-21.

leaders is critical to understand that leadership is about mission looking outward, whereas management is about looking inward maintaining the current ministries—or more commonly known as the status quo.

Protecting and maintaining is not bad or wrong. Yet, it becomes dangerous when it is the focus of leadership, where maintenance is cherished, celebrated, or confused as the mission, resulting in Christian leaders adopting a maintenance framework as the scorecard that tracks butts, budgets, and buildings. Those metrics have been and continue to be the leading metrics, though is that working for church leaders? When observing trends within the maintenance as mission framework of butts, budgets, and buildings from a big picture view it shows one thing—decline and death. Barna notes, “In actual numbers, 36 percent fewer Americans attended church weekly in 2020 than in 1993.”¹¹ If those metrics communicate decline, then why are Christian leaders not concerned with reaching and fulfilling their mission. Is it sufficient for Christian leaders to return to the maintenance as mission framework in the post-COVID world of the twenty-first century? Bolsinger thinks not. Keeping in mind that *Canoeing the Mountains* was penned in 2015, he calls for a drastic shift to unlearn old patterns and learn new ways of navigating. It is an adventure-or-die mindset, he exclaims,¹² bringing a new demand of Christian leaders. Quite possibly the invitation could not be more urgent for Christian leaders to understand this new demand. It is a demand that will require adaptation and innovation by letting go, learning on the go, and to keep going.¹³ So, what is required for this type of leadership? What is the leadership model for leading in a changing world?

¹¹ Barna, “Signs of Decline & Hope among Key Metrics of Faith,” Barna Group, March 4, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

¹² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 23.

¹³ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 14.

Transformational Leadership

For Bolsinger, the leadership requirement is transformation.¹⁴ It is a level of transformation that looks like personal development and high performance of the organization. Bolsinger defines leadership as “energizing a community of people toward their own transformation to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world.”¹⁵ The scope of this definition is not limited to church leaders but can be broadly applied to any Christian leader in any place of work. As a result, *Canoeing the Mountains* outlines five key lessons for leaders to navigate the unknown: understanding uncharted territory, the on-the-map-skill set, leading off the map, transformation of the leader, and relationships and resistance.¹⁶ Leadership transformation is at the heart of adaptive and innovative leadership. Those five lessons are like trail markers that support Bolsinger’s transformational leadership model. He describes this model as the overlapping intersection of three leadership components: technical competence, relational congruence, and adaptive capacity (see figure 3).¹⁷

The three components of transformational leadership (as seen in figure 3) describe and define the unique combination and characteristics needed for Christian leaders according to Bolsinger. He writes, “These three spheres indicate the different ways that leader’s function in a system in order to bring transformation.”¹⁸ As a result, this section will provide a summary of each of these leadership components and examine the void in this model.

¹⁴ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 44.

¹⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 36.

¹⁶ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 14.

¹⁷ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 43.

¹⁸ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 43.

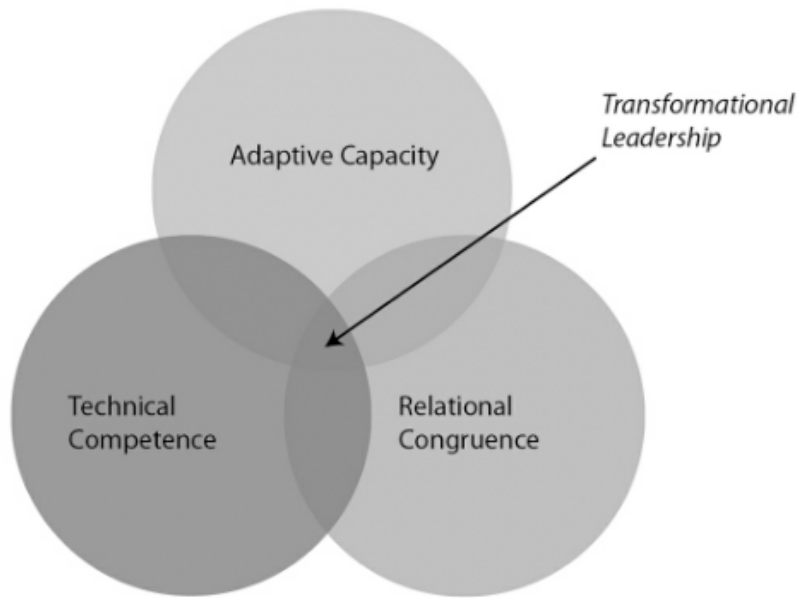


Figure 3. Three components of transformational leadership

The transformational leadership model begins with technical competence. The reality that transformational leadership begins with competence could come as a shock because it would be safe to assume that it begins with character or personal attributes. While competency is not the only skill required of leadership, for if it were that would be dangerous, it is a catalyst for why someone could receive the opportunity to lead. When a person demonstrates competence he or she is recognized and rewarded. For example, high performers in organizations receive promotions, increased compensation, and more opportunity to lead based on one aspect: competency. A biblical example is King Saul. He was selected to be King of Israel because of his physical stature and attractive appearance (1 Sam 9:2; 10:24).

Technical competencies create and build trust with others to lead off the map when leaders provide capable leadership by fulfilling duties, meeting expectations, and being faithful stewards.¹⁹ In shorthand, do the job one was hired to do. As a result, church

¹⁹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 52.

leaders are to demonstrate competent stewardship in three areas of leadership: Scriptures and traditions; souls and communities; and teams and tasks.²⁰ These three areas describe unique aspects of pastoral leadership. Another way to reframe those areas is to think of three words Scripture, shepherd, and serve. Considering these layers of stewardship required to prove competence could be overwhelming; however, for church leaders, these are the requirements of the role. Leaders should handle and be faithful to Scripture for their congregation's good. They should love and care for the sheep in the flock under the guidance of the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). And they should serve and equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:12). Bolsinger writes, "Pastors of congregations need to be both personal and organizational."²¹ Therefore, a leader demonstrating capable competency in these areas begins to build a foundation of credibility—a foundation of credibility that can lead to deep personal trust or relational congruence.

As the next component of the transformational leadership model, relational congruence is the deep personal trust that moves well beyond credibility while maintaining consistency in behavior. Bolsinger defines relational congruence as "the leader's ability to cultivate strong, healthy, caring relationships; maintaining healthy boundaries; and communicating clear expectations, all while staying focused on the mission."²² To that point, relational congruence is a byproduct of hard, meaningful work with others, which means the leadership competency of relational congruence is never accomplished alone. To further underscore this point, Bolsinger highlights that one of Lewis and Clark's most overlooked contribution from the Corps of Discovery is their effective model of a leadership partnership: "Indeed, in my experience working in business, higher education,

²⁰ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 54-58.

²¹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 56.

²² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 67-68.

nonprofit and church settings, I have rarely seen the level of collaboration and partnership that Lewis and Clark demonstrated.”²³

Relational congruence is not something built from team building activities but from being in the trenches together and making it through the battle. The implication for church leaders is that ministry is about togetherness. It is ministry accomplished in and through the congregation at large, not by the leader alone. At the core of relational congruence is mission, and the mission is the driving forces that pulls a team, organization, or church together. When that happens, culture is produced, which is a way of behaving and shared values that creates behaviors of how a team, organization, or church function. When a leader demonstrates technical competency, develops relational congruence, and builds healthy culture then and only then should the leader enter uncharted territory.²⁴ Leading in uncharted territory demands adaptive capacity, which is the final leadership component of Bolsinger’s model.

Developing the adaptive capacity to lead in an unknown territory forces leaders to face three challenges: learning, loss, and change. He notes, “This adaptive capacity is the critical leadership element for a changing world.”²⁵ Those challenges result in the continual transformation of the leader. The three challenges follow a similar path of the three Cs leader formation tool.²⁶ Therefore, adaptive capacity requires three practices from the leader: leaders must *choose* to learn again; embrace the *crisis* of loss; and engage in a *change* process.

Consider the first challenge: learning or learning again. Learning demands a new perspective; an acceptance where the old map does not work and forces a leader to make a choice to adapt or die. Bolsinger writes, “At the heart of every leadership challenge

²³ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 70.

²⁴ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 76.

²⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 90.

²⁶ See “Three Cs Leadership Formation.”

beat deeper identity questions that demand answers.”²⁷ Those moments can be disorientating, creating uncertainty and inner turmoil for the leader. Thus, choosing to engage in the challenge of learning or learning again requires the leader to recenter on values, reframe strategy, and relearn, again. Learning or learning again helps to identify and clarify what is necessary and essential for adaptive work in asking and answering the questions, “Who we are and why we exist?” Through that intentional and clarifying process, the vision and values of an organization are refined. To that point Bolsinger notes, “Vision is about seeing clearly what is even more than what will be.”²⁸ During the refinement process of learning again comes the reality that a leader embraces loss and engages change. Embracing loss is letting go of the things that prevent growth, while reminding everyone of the aspects of the organization that will never change and making the needed changes to go further.²⁹

A loss occurs the moment the leader embraces letting go. Loss is a difficult reality for a anyone to metabolize and navigate. It is more challenging for a leader and at times might create a crisis of leadership. Bolsinger says,

When we are faced with competing values that demand a decision which will inevitably lead to loss, we can get overwhelmed. At exactly the moment when the congregation is looking to the leader to give direction, the leader’s own anxiety and inner uncertainty is the highest. But this is the moment when the transformational leader goes off the map and begins to lead differently.³⁰

A transformation process begins for the leader when navigating and embracing the reality of loss. Part of this transformation process occurs because of the reality of resistance and relationships. Bolsinger states, “Leadership is often met with stubborn resistance from the

²⁷ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 95.

²⁸ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 101.

²⁹ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 105.

³⁰ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 89-90

very people we are called to lead.”³¹ When a leader lets go and loss happens, resistance immediately follows. To that point, Bolsinger writes, “Resistance is considered a rational response to both real and perceived change.”³² Thus, it is vital for leaders to grasp and realize that resistance is a normal response. Consequently, the reality of resistance only further emphasizes the need for the change vision. Vision defines the current state of things, and simultaneously defines for everyone why change is necessary.³³

Leading a change process is no easy task. It is more difficult for the leader of an organization, especially the founder. The change process is linked to vision and the DNA of an organization. It is at the critical juncture of innovation where the skill of adaptive capacity is needed, by filling in the rest of the puzzle in the transformational leadership model. For Bolsinger, the change vision has three layers: (1) defining what will not change; (2) determining what must go; and (3) deciding what needs to be created to accomplish the mission.³⁴ Bolsinger’s change vision guides leaders to make wise decisions during the change process by focusing on the necessary innovation required to make changes and the leadership needed for the road ahead. The change process and skill of change requires leadership to navigate resistance and avoid major conflicts. A few examples from within church leadership include the tension around worship styles, church size dynamics, ministry programming, and church growth practices. A church leader must continually ask, “Is this necessary, preference, or adaptable?” To that end, Bolsinger notes,

When pausing to think about a church in light of its system or DNA gives us a frame for considering the challenges we face and at the same time, acknowledge a tension in all adaptive work: To learn and adapt we need new, creative experiments

³¹ Tod Bolsinger, *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders Are Formed in the Crucible of Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 3.

³² Charles Smith Jr., “Fear, Faith, and The Fatherhood of God: Toward a Pauline Approach to Leadership and Change” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 17.

³³ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 102-5.

³⁴ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 105-6.

in relationships and purposes. Although the old solutions may have been good and effective once, the old solutions are inadequate. When we are experimenting with new solutions within a living system, we are doing so with something that has a history, is alive and precious, and must be handled with care.³⁵

At the heart of leading innovation within a congregation, a leader needs the awareness that the church is a body, a living system, and change must be handled with care, while communicating the concern of reality for the living system: adapt or die. Death is hard to predict and at times comes suddenly and unexpected. However, some tools and assessments provide insight about the health of the organization. For the church, the health report from Barna Research³⁶ is not promising. Church leaders are at a critical juncture. A juncture where the old maps will not take the church in the United States further. Innovation is necessary, but more critical is innovation of leadership philosophy and practices.

Transformational Leadership and Innovation

In summary of Bolsinger's position of adaptive leadership, three unique components come together to create his model of transformational leadership: technical competence, relational congruence, and adaptive capacity. For Bolsinger, the heart of adaptive leadership is highly dependent on the leader's own ability to transform. He writes, "In a changing world, the leader must be continually committed to ongoing personal change, to develop new capacities, to be continually transformed in ways that will enable the organization's larger transformation."³⁷

The model and insight provided by Bolsinger in *Canoeing the Mountains* is critical for disruptive leadership. There were three major emphases to consider for disruptive leadership. First is the emphasis on shared leadership between Lewis and

³⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 106-7.

³⁶ Barna Research, "Signs of Decline & Hope among Key Metrics of Faith," March 4, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

³⁷ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 216.

Clark, which is illustrated throughout Bolsinger’s storytelling of the Corp of Discovery in *Canoeing the Mountains*. Second is the affirmation of the need to see a major shift in leadership practices, models, and training for current and future Christian leaders. Finally is the pastoral-heart of technical competence from Bolsinger.³⁸ The aspects of preaching, shepherd, and serving are areas that can be overlooked when surveying leadership from the Christian perspective.

Canoeing the Mountains presents a great framework for innovation from the Christian perspective and is helpful for leaders to develop the skill of innovation. However, innovation is more than praxis, or a pragmatic skill developed from experience alone. There is a void of connection to Scripture and a biblical framework on why innovation is a needed skill. Another area that felt incomplete was the need for leaders to grow in self-awareness.³⁹ There is a brief section discussing the important to have a level of “differentiation.”⁴⁰ These areas will be considered as whole and addressed in chapter 4 when looking to the model of disruptive leadership.

Canoeing the Mountains adds and examines the important relationship of the leader and innovation. That innovation begins and ends with the leader going through a continually transformation of process of letting go, continually learning on the go and the resilience to keep going. An organization experiences change through the transformation of the leader. The insight and connection between adaptive leadership and transformational leadership model provide a foundation on innovation from a Christian perspective. Considering what type of innovation is needed for Christian leaders in the twenty-first century.

³⁸ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 40.

³⁹ While Todd Bolsinger does not spend considerable time and attention on the formation of a leader regarding self-awareness. In *Tempered Resilience*, Bolsinger addresses the gaps in *Canoeing the Mountains* from external challenges leaders face to the internal resistance that prevents leaders from leading.

⁴⁰ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 211.

The next section will shift from understanding the skill of innovation to the art of leading a change process. While a leader must change, the art and ability to lead change is a necessary tool for leaders. It does no good if the leader changes and does not know how to lead others to change. Therefore, in the next section is a careful study of the work of *Strategies of Change* by Lyle Schaller.

Change Strategies from the Christian Perspective

Lyle Schaller was known as a significant contributor in helping church leaders be successful in effecting planned change. A great deal of his insight and expertise can be found in his work, *Strategies for Change*.⁴¹ Sam Roberts from *The New York Times* describes Schaller as the “nations dean on church consultants.”⁴² Schaller’s impact and influence on Protestant church is hard to grasp. He began his ministry in the 1960s as a former city planner and thirty years later was named the most influential church leader in the *Los Angeles Times*.⁴³ Schaller’s scope of leadership and influence reached across many denomination and theological traditions.

Schaller was a prolific writer. In his ministry career he exceeded more than three million words through his publications. He is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin and the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. For several years he was a professor at the seminary in Naperville, Illinois. Within those years he pioneered the role as a church consultant. Eventually he left the seminary and joined the Yokefellow Parish Institute, a nondenominational study and retreat center in Richmond, Indiana. During his time at the Yokefellow Institute he authored *Strategies for Change*. It is the fourth book out of a five-book series written on planned change. In this specific work he guides and leads his

⁴¹ Lyle Schaller, *Strategies for Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

⁴² Sam Roberts, “Rev. Lyle E. Schaller Dies at 91; Helped Protestant Churches Survive and Grow,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/27/us/rev-lyle-e-schaller-dies-at-91-helped-protestant-churches-survive-and-grow.html>.

⁴³ Paul Franklyn, “Remember Lyle E. Schaller: The Interventionist,” *Ministry Matters*, March 19, 2015, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/5884/remember-lyle-e-schaller-the-interventionist>.

readers through the process of leading change in any context, specifically in the Christian perspective. The book provides teaching points coupled with cases studies that describe the uniqueness of congregational life. Based on the impact and influence of Schaller's contributions of leading change, his *Strategies for Change* will next serve as guide to understand strategies for change from a Christian perspective. Case in point, many Christians and church leaders can thank him for helping congregations installing air conditioning.

The Place of Planned Change

Schaller opens his work by addressing the most important variable in leading planned change: the place of planned change.⁴⁴ Within these contextual variables of change are two sub contexts: the church and the leader. Schaller breaks down the context of church into categories: covenant community and voluntary association. Leading change in either of these environments is drastically different and unique. For example, a covenant community places emphases on a high commitment of people called together by a leader to create a new community,⁴⁵ whereas the voluntary association is a more established, institutional environment and is the byproduct of a carefully managed covenant community that is no longer focused on mission.⁴⁶ The focus of the voluntary association is more supportive of the status quo with a focus on traditions and preferences. Thus, change appears as a threat rather than an opportunity. Overall, when considering the environment of covenant communities, change is generally more accepted, and resistance is less tense than in the context of voluntary association. As Schaller, concludes, when implementing

⁴⁴ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 14.

⁴⁵ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 18.

⁴⁶ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 20.

planned change, the leader must consider and carefully plan the organization's tolerance for change.⁴⁷

Additionally, when leading planned change, the organization is not the only variable to know, observe, and consider. Another critical nuance to planned change is the leader. Similarly, just like the leader must have a healthy awareness of the climate of the organization, the leadership must have a great deal of self-awareness of the senior leader or leadership team's competency, people skills, and change tolerance. Therefore, strategies of planned change are highly dependent on the personality and competency of the leader. Schaller describes these dynamics in three pastoral leader-types: the benevolent dictator, charismatic leader, and persistent plodder.⁴⁸ Understanding the leaders' abilities and personality aids in estimating the level of difficulty experience, time required, and amount of support needed when leading planned change.

The persistent plodder is a purposeful, determined leader that comes in and changes the game by changing the players over a period of three to four years. With a new set of players picked by the new leader, resistance to change is eliminated and the goal is then to win over converts to the new, proposed change. What is interesting is the duration that this type of leader implements a change process. Schaller says, "For this alternative to have transformational long-term results normally requires ten to fifteen years in that office for that leader."⁴⁹

The charismatic leader is magnetic and deeply respected due to skillful people skills and persuasive powers. Throughout *Strategies for Change*, Schaller describes the charismatic leader as a rare, unique, and hard to find leader. In Schaller's experience and assessment, these leaders' ability to gain and earn trust out paces the other two types. The specific nature of leading planned change requires leaders to win surprising support for

⁴⁷ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 11.

⁴⁸ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 92.

⁴⁹ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 92.

what some might perceive as radical ideas.⁵⁰ Schaller equates that to the unique combination of a high degree of competence, people smart, and persuasive powers. Charismatic leaders are future-oriented leaders that rally support and gain trust by (1) sowing discontentment with the status quo, (2) casting an attractive, magnetic vision to change the world, and (3) continually rallying and enlisting new recruits.⁵¹ Schaller notes that this pattern of leadership can be found in historical leaders of the past, such as like Martin Luther, John Wesley, Martin Luther King Jr., and many of the reformers.⁵² Again, these type of leaders are rare. Therefore, with a clear shortage of charismatic leaders, Schaller encourages leaders to create environments that are supportive of innovation and change.⁵³

The final type of leader Schaller describes is the benevolent dictator. Most often these types of leaders are known as the founding pastor who starts the church. The benevolent dictator is a unique type of leader who possesses the power to initiate and implement change or resist it all together. When a senior leader sits in this seat and has a strong resistance to change it is not an easy problem to solve, especially in a voluntary association.⁵⁴ For example, “a failure to adapt to a changing world is the most highly visible legacy of the inept benevolent dictator.”⁵⁵ Yet, there are instances and scenarios where this failure of leadership is not an issue. Schaller explains, “In general, the benevolent dictator tends to be acceptable in the numerically growing organization in which the results, especially in terms of quality, greatly exceed people’s expectations. That style of leadership usually tends to be rejected when (a) the organization is shrinking

⁵⁰ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 30.

⁵¹ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 28.

⁵² Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 28.

⁵³ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 30.

⁵⁴ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 49.

⁵⁵ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 50.

in size and/or (b) goals are not being achieved.”⁵⁶ When evaluating and considering the last type of pastoral leader, it appears that the style of benevolent dictator is compatible and at times accepted by most churches when things are going well and with planned change. However, when the church is in decline or is entrenched with the “good ole days” the benevolent dictator becomes an issue. Overall, the benevolent dictator earns a great deal of trust and benefit of the doubt, making the leader successful in leading change but also at times can be a dam of resistance when the leader is stuck in yesterday.

Understanding the context of the church and leader dynamics are necessary factors to consider when leading change from a Christian perspective. Schaller explains that frustration, disappointment, and rejection are realities in change efforts when the context of the leadership and church is not observed.⁵⁷ It is worth noting before considering Schaller’s change methods that leading change begins with a careful methodical and analytical grasp of the contexts of where change will occur. Schaller even suggests that some situations are beyond remedy.⁵⁸ Schaller stresses the importance of understanding that critical nuances are at play before creating and implanting strategies for change. The next section will consider the process for change strategies from the Christian perspective.

The Process of Planned Change

The process of planned change from a Christian perspective comes at a timely moment. Currently, the church and other faith-related non-profits are entering into a new frontier; a frontier where the Christian faith is no longer widely regarded or accepted. Almost thirty years ago Schaller made this statement regarding Christian organizations’ need to change: “The number one issue facing Christian organizations in North America

⁵⁶ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 51.

⁵⁷ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 14.

⁵⁸ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 48.

today is . . . the need to initiate and implement planned change with an organization.”⁵⁹ It is no surprise that Christian organizations are on the decline overall, while there some outliers in North America. The trend and metrics of practicing Christian faith and regular involvement in the local church have a downward trajectory.⁶⁰ Schaller points to both the apathy and complacency of local churches and church leaders who abdicate their role as change agents.⁶¹ The abdication and lethargic motivation of maintaining or recreating the status quo is a contributing factor to the state of the church and the reluctance to change. As a result, one must consider several factors in leading change: the context, types of change needed, process of change, and choice all leaders or organization must face. In the last section context was examined specifically in relation to the church and the leader. With that said, there are three aspects to further examine regarding leading change from the Christian perspective: (1) Schaller’s description of the degrees of change; (2) sequence of leading change; and (3) a critical decision to create or reform.

According to Schaller there are three levels of change.⁶² The first level of change is best explained as modest changes. A focus of this level of change is specifically a minor improvement within the system. For example, the church decides to switch from a black and white one-page bulletin to a trifold, full color, card stock bulletin. Another example of first level change might be changing a communication provider to another system. Again, first level changes focus on minor adjustments, whereas second level change is a substantial change. Schaller explains that second level change is vastly more complicated.⁶³ Second level change maintains some degree of the status quo. At this level change, while a company might not change, a whole department might embrace major

⁵⁹ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 10.

⁶⁰ Barna, “Signs of Decline & Hope among Key Metrics of Faith.”

⁶¹ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 36-40.

⁶² Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 90-92.

⁶³ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 91.

change. Finally, the third and final level change is radical change that calls for departures from the status quo. Third level change calls for major change in every area of an organization, involving the organization strategy, values, programs, and practices. An example would be for a mega church to decide to decentralize Sunday morning worship gatherings, and sell all property and equipment, retrain church staff as micro-church leaders and move to a micro-church movement where groups of 10-35 adults meet in homes weekly. Each of these levels of change are important to grasp because a leader must define the degree of change: minor, substantial, or radically different. Once a leader defines the level change to initiate, Schaller encourages a five-step sequence after a consensus is reached on the degree of change required.⁶⁴

The five-step sequence of change is a straightforward linear process of planned change, indicating that the steps must be accomplished in sequential order. For Schaller, planned change does not happen unless a substantial degree of discontent is present with the status quo.⁶⁵ Therefore, change agents must take the first step of enlisting supportive allies who are equally discontent and have a strong desire to see some level of change implemented. Once this step is accomplished, the second step involves the creation of an initiating group.⁶⁶ Schaller describes step 2 as one of the most important steps in leading a change effort. The task and function of the initiating group is to determine who else needs to be involved, what degree of change is necessary, and how the change vision is communicated.⁶⁷ The third step in sequence is building another group with the primary task of support for the proposed change. Schaller admits that it is a great temptation of the change advocate and initiating group to rush toward approval and acceptance of the

⁶⁴ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 92.

⁶⁵ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 92.

⁶⁶ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 93.

⁶⁷ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 93-96.

proposal of planned change, though he cautions, “Often this is the road to rejection.”⁶⁸ Rejection is imminent when there is a lack of buy-in from the support group in a change effort. As a result, traction and buy-in from the support group is a key indicator to the change agent and initiating group to move toward approval and implementation. According to Schaller, there is a great deal of nuance in step 4 contingent on the scope and scale of the proposed change, level 1, 2, or 3.⁶⁹ Within the final step, the initiating group determines and decides what changes need to be institutionalized as permanent. Schaller concludes with a word to change agents at the end of the change process that any level 3 change with permanent departure from the current reality must be handled with great care, and intentional, tedious work must be allocated toward implementation plan.⁷⁰

Schaller explains that the five-step sequence represents a widely used strategy for planned change initiated from within a Christian organization.⁷¹ However, there are three exceptions to process of planned change: (1) a crisis that changes the rules; (2) the benevolent dictator imposes changes unilaterally; and (3) the charismatic leader replaces sequence by using influence to achieve change.⁷² While these exceptions are rare, they do occur and must be considered when leading change. Schaller concludes that at times adaptation is necessary in the five-step strategy circumstantially.

The Contribution of Strategies for Change

Schaller’s *Strategies for Change* is a valuable resource when considering change from the Christian perspective. His insight provides a great deal of expertise and experience for any Christian leader to consider when leading planned change, whether in

⁶⁸ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 96.

⁶⁹ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 98.

⁷⁰ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 100.

⁷¹ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 100.

⁷² Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 100.

an established organization or founding a new venture. Overall, the contribution of *Strategies for Change* is best understood by Schaller's intent: "The distinctive focus of this volume is on the institutional context and climate for change and sources of authority required to initiate change."⁷³

Schaller's conclusion stands out, where he places the genesis of change with a leader's choice: reform or create.⁷⁴ For leaders, this is a fork in the road moment that has confronted many agents of change throughout history. He writes, "The person who is discontented with the status quo in any institution or organization has five choices."⁷⁵ The first choice is to be the reformer, and a great deal of patience is required for this journey. The second choice is to decrease frustration by creating something or finding a new outlet within the organization for energy and effort. The third choice is to drop out. A fourth choice, while like the last one, is where the person decides to leave and join another organization. Finally, the fifth choice is to go out and create something new.⁷⁶

When considering *Strategies for Change*, there are similarities to John Kotter's *Leading Change* throughout the work. However, the most notable differences between *Leading Change* and *Strategies for Change* can be found in Schaller's emphasis on (1) understanding the context and multiple variables at play: the leader and the church; (2) the more streamlined sequence focused on acceptance and support from the congregation; (3) how the degree of change informs and shapes the five-step sequence of planned change; and (4) Schaller's recognition that a leader's choice is the catalyst to the change process.

In conclusion, *Strategies for Change* provides a unique contribution and framework to consider in relation to this work's thesis. Disruptive leadership is both a

⁷³ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 11.

⁷⁴ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 109-10.

⁷⁵ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 110.

⁷⁶ Schaller, *Strategies for Change*, 110-11.

skillset and art of leading institutional change. Leading change is a major component to the integrative leadership model of disruptive leadership by combining the skill of innovation, the art of leading change, and the effectiveness of servant leadership. The close of this chapter will consider servant leadership from the Christian perspective.

Servant Leadership from the Christian Perspective

A key aspect for the integrative model of disruptive leadership is servant leadership. Servant leadership theory in the previous chapter was examined in three perspectives from the contemporary perspective by Robert Greenleaf: motive, behaviors, and outcome. In this chapter, servant leadership from the Christian perspective examines those same perspectives by interacting with a new work on servant leadership titled *Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundation and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders*.⁷⁷ This work combines the experience and expertise of Justin A. Irving and Mark L. Strauss. Mark L. Strauss is a New Testament scholar who received his PhD from University of Aberdeen, and serves the University Professor of New Testament at Bethel Seminary.⁷⁸ Justin A. Irving currently serves as the Professor of Leadership and the Duke K. McCall chair of Christian leadership at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He received a PhD from Regent University and brings with him twenty plus years of experience from Bethel Seminary.⁷⁹

Leadership in Christian Perspective emphasizes four themes that draw from the Bible and leadership theories: (1) servant leaders and followers; (2) transformational leadership and organizational transformation; (3) collaboration; and (4) leader

⁷⁷ Justin A. Irving and Mark L. Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundation and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019).

⁷⁸ Bethel University, "Mark Strauss," accessed November 16, 2022. <https://www.bethel.edu/academics/faculty/strauss-mark>.

⁷⁹ The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, "Justin A. Irving," accessed November 16, 2022. <https://www.sbts.edu/academics/faculty/justin-a-irving/>.

purposefulness.⁸⁰ They write, “These four leadership priorities call leaders to see their role primarily as equipping and empowering the people they lead for effectiveness.”⁸¹ The authors present a leadership framework that encompasses these major themes in three parts: authentic and purposeful leadership; the priority of people; and effectiveness.⁸² In this section, the primary focus will be to examine these aspects through the perspectives of motive, behavior, and outcome of servant leadership from the Christian perspective. The perspective of motive will focus on part 1, authentic and purposeful leaders. The perspective of behavior will consider part 2, the priority of people. Finally, the perspective of outcome will examine part 3, navigating effectiveness.

The Motive of Servant Leadership

Irving and Strauss explain, “It stands out when leaders truly *understand their purpose* and then authentically guide others out of this sense of purpose.”⁸³ It seems there are enough examples of leaders who do otherwise and serve as a great example of inauthentic leadership. What is the cause for this level of dissonance among Christian leaders? There might be several factors to such discrepancies in leaders today. Yet, the authors argue that servant leaders are first and foremost authentic and purposeful: “Authentic and purposeful leaders model what matters, are self-aware, and foster collaboration.”⁸⁴

Modeling, self-awareness, and collaboration are key practices for servant leaders. The authors describe modeling as something measured in both actions and

⁸⁰ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 11.

⁸¹ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 12.

⁸² Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 12-14.

⁸³ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 13, emphasis added.

⁸⁴ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 15-16.

attitudes.⁸⁵ When a leader is consistent in both areas of life he gains followers, and those followers will most likely emulate the leaders.⁸⁶ In addition to modeling, Irving and Strauss call for leaders to have a great deal of self-awareness or honest self-evaluation.⁸⁷ On this point, they allude to Paul's instructions to young Timothy "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim 4:16). Irving and Strauss add, "Christian leaders are encouraged to look to their own life and consider issues at the core of their personhood."⁸⁸ Consequently, a self-aware leader has both a realistic and healthy view of self. When a leader has done the work of awareness, it provides the opportunity to foster collaboration with others. Fostering collaboration comes from the basis and understanding that there is danger in trying to be the hero or "great man" as a leader.⁸⁹ The authors assert in chapter 3 that servant leaders have a high value in partnership, are humble, and recognize the giftedness of others.⁹⁰ What is the origin for servant leaders to practice modeling, self-awareness, and collaboration?

Those three key practices come from the motive of servant leadership. Deeply held beliefs from leaders contribute to a leader who is authentic and purposeful in their leadership. To this point, Irving and Strauss write, "In order for leaders to effectively nurture their other-centered orientation, they must begin the journey by fostering authentic

⁸⁵ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 28.

⁸⁶ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 32.

⁸⁷ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 35.

⁸⁸ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 36.

⁸⁹ According to the authors, from 1900-1940 there was a widely accepted concept in leadership theory known as "the great man" theory. It was derived from a focus on well-known historical figures and leaders. At the root of the theory was the presupposition that leaders are born, not made. Thus, the characteristics of intelligence, confidence, relational skills, and determination were exemplary traits by all leaders. Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 7.

⁹⁰ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 59-70.

and purposeful character.”⁹¹ An other-centered orientation comes from the motive that others matter. Having an others matter view in leadership comes from the character of a person, where humility and sober judgment are vastly important. Both character traits go together and serve as a foundation for servant leaders. To this end, Jim Collins says, “Level five leaders have a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.”⁹² Disruptive leaders possess a unique combination of personal and professional humility. Through that unique combination servant leaders create patterns of behaviors or practices with others.

The Behaviors of Servant Leadership

As mentioned, servant leaders are known for their behavioral characteristics. Irving and Strauss write, “We emphasize the importance of leaders prioritizing and focusing on followers.”⁹³ Within the model and theory of servant leadership is a dramatic emphasis on the priority of people. For the authors, servant leaders understand the priority of people by valuing the intrinsic worth of image bearers, creating a place for individuality, and finally possessing strong relational skills.⁹⁴

Valuing others, cultivating individual expression, and connecting relationally should be repeated behaviors. For example, the authors describe two nuances in valuing and appreciating others from servant leaders in the Christian perspective: (1) leaders value people because they have intrinsic value, and as result (2) people are appreciated because they provide value in their contribution to the organization.⁹⁵ These are practices of repeated behaviors not a one-time exchange of value or appreciation. Since followers

⁹¹ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 15.

⁹² Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 20.

⁹³ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 75.

⁹⁴ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 75-76.

⁹⁵ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 91.

are valued as people, leaders create an environment where individual expression is not only allowed but encourage. Irving and Strauss write, “The affirmation of individuality and creativity is not only healthy and nurturing for individuals; it is also beneficial to the organization as a whole.”⁹⁶ When servant leaders begin valuing others and creating an environment for individual expression, the servant leader must be equipped with relational skills. Relational skills are critical for leaders. The authors write, “Leadership is essentially a relational practice.”⁹⁷ Christian leaders must carefully pay attention and be reminded that people are the mission. Scripture places a high standard on interpersonal relationship skills. The authors point out, “Although relational dynamics can be complicated and conflict an inevitable way of life, the key to successful relationships is presented as a simple formula: ‘Love one another’ (John 13:34).”⁹⁸ The leader’s ability to practice relational skills is critical for effectiveness. Therefore, there might not be another more important behavioral characteristic than developing relational skills.

According to the authors, the primary behavior for developing relational skills is love.⁹⁹ For example, they write, “Love is the defining character trait of an authentic Christian.”¹⁰⁰ While love is the foundation of the relational skills there are two other key components: understanding people and engaging them with intelligence. Understanding people is about having human skills at the relational level. To that point, Irving and Strauss explain, “Human skill is really about leaders having the capacity and skills needed to get along well with others -playing in a cooperative manner in the sandbox of organizational life and work.”¹⁰¹ The ability to have human skills also requires the leader to have a level

⁹⁶ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 106.

⁹⁷ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 120.

⁹⁸ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 121.

⁹⁹ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 121.

¹⁰⁰ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 121.

¹⁰¹ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 129.

engagement intelligence. Engagement intelligence requires leaders to have the practical social awareness and the awareness of seeing the world through someone else's point of view.¹⁰² The authors note, "There is no getting around the priority of relational skills in today's organizations."¹⁰³ As previously mentioned in chapter 2, there is a unique aspect to the behaviors of servant leadership. While some behaviors are more innate, anyone and everyone can and should grow in their love toward others, learn people skills, and develop multidimensional intelligence. Yet, what do these behaviors or leadership characteristics produce? The next section will consider the outcome of servant leadership.

The Outcome of Servant Leadership

Irving and Strauss note, "While it is easy to argue that servant leadership is a biblically consistent approach to leading, this contemporary study is demonstrating the positive effect servant leadership has on teams and organizations."¹⁰⁴ The effectiveness of servant leadership is deeply connected to leaders being intentional through authenticity (motive) and emphasizing the importance of the contributions of others (behaviors). As previously mentioned in chapter 2, servant leadership impacts not only followers, but the health of teams and overall performance of organizations in a positive outcome. How does the practice of servant leadership create healthy teams and high-performance organizations from a Christian perspective?

According to the authors, servant leaders navigate effectiveness with clear communication, accountability, and finally, ensure others have everything to be successful.¹⁰⁵ The first practice of clear communication from the Christian perspective is primarily concerned with motivating followers toward mission. To this point, Irving and

¹⁰² Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 129-32.

¹⁰³ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 120.

¹⁰⁴ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 139-40.

Straus explain that effective communication has four components: (1) a clear, compelling message; (2) an understanding one's audience; (3) good listening skills; and (4) the goal to benefit the listener.¹⁰⁶ Communication is key for leaders, especially when holding others accountable. Accountability is a leadership practice that involves communication, whether written or verbal. The authors note, "Not holding people responsible for their actions encourages further irresponsibility and greater immaturity."¹⁰⁷ The goal of accountability is for growth, both personally and professionally. To illustrate the importance of accountability, consider how Jesus incorporated accountability through discipleship. The authors use the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30):

The master of the household rewards those who invest his money wisely and receive a good return while he is away. But he condemns the one who simply hides the money and makes no profit. Jesus clearly expects faithful and responsible services from his followers and holds them accountable for the things he has taught. The best leaders are not only kind and compassionate, but they also hold their followers to high standards and keep them accountable with constructive feedback.¹⁰⁸

For Christian leaders, accountability begins with setting expectations, honest conversation, and constructive feedback.¹⁰⁹

When servant leaders are clear in communication and provide accountability, it will ultimately provide an environment of support and success of others. Irving and Strauss note, "Having the right support and resources can contribute to a healthy and profitable organization."¹¹⁰ There is a tendency to recognize servant leadership as a theory that focuses on motives and behavioral practices alone. While true, the assumption is incomplete. Servant leadership is effective and successful leadership based on three aspects: (1) healthy people that (2) produce healthy teams that (3) create high performing

¹⁰⁶ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 142-46.

¹⁰⁷ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 165.

¹⁰⁸ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 165.

¹⁰⁹ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 169-72.

¹¹⁰ Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 182.

organizations. Similarly, Robert Greenleaf's contemporary theory on servant leadership in chapter 2 placed a high emphasis on both behavioral practices and high performing organizations. Servant leadership in the Christian perspective is a practice of leadership theory with a focus on high performance. Now the mode and methods look different. Servant leadership places a high emphasis on people, and equally emphasizes the importance of high performance and production. Servant leadership cannot be limited to a practice of behavioral characteristics. Servant leadership seeks to help and assist people to be their best so that the organization accomplishes its mission.

Similarities and Distinctions of Perspectives

After briefly describing the theories of Todd Bolsinger, Lyle Schaller, and Justin A. Irving with Mark L Strauss, this study can identify similarities and distinctions between contemporary and Christian theories on innovation, leading change, and servant leadership. Both groups are consistent in describing innovation as a skill, leading change as an art and process, and that servant leadership is practice of being both outcome oriented and follower focused. However, neither contemporary nor Christian leadership theories seek to integrate other theories to strengthen and improve their perspective theories.

To that end, both perspectives suggest and share similarities in each theory. In *Canoeing the Mountains* and *Innovator's DNA*, both authors focus on the skill of continuous learning as necessary skill for innovative leaders. The change strategies of John Kotter and Lyle Schaller, who were both considered leading consultants at the publications of their works, describe leading change as an art—where a leader follows a specific process toward implementation that involves discontent with the status quo, the development of a leadership team, creating short-term wins, and anchoring change within the organization. Finally, servant leadership defines an intentional practice of behaviors that aim to lead toward the outcomes of healthy people, healthy teams, and ultimately high performing organization. Each of the theories and practices of innovation, leading change and servant leadership, from the contemporary and Christian leadership perspective, have

proven to be trusted practices of leadership independently. However, there is something incomplete or missing when each leadership theory and practice stands in isolation.

With that said, this study provides a potential framework that complements the strengths and fills in the voids of the leadership theories and practices of innovation, leading change, and servant leadership. Consider the following example to the degree of how all three perspectives of leadership come together. According to the authors, both contemporary and Christian perspectives consider innovation as a natural and learned skill. However, little attention is given to the process of implementation and execution. The aspects of implementation and execution are given more attention in leading change strategies found in *Leading Change* and *Strategies for Change*. Even more interesting is considering how leading change is a heavily people-oriented process, yet it speaks sparingly on necessity of relational skills; whereas servant leadership places a considerable amount of time on people development. After all, according to J. C. Rost, leadership is a multidirectional process of influence.¹¹¹ Therefore, why is there so little work in seeking to integrate multiple leadership theories and practices?

Conclusion

The next chapter will suggest that Jesus was a multidirectional leader who uniquely integrated the skill of innovation, art of leading change, and practice of servant leadership. This study is not to replace the previous leadership theories and practices discussed; rather, it comes alongside and complements them to help leaders lead in the twenty-first century in ministry and the marketplace by providing a new style of leadership that is intentional and dynamic to lead organizations and people to a better future. This leadership model is known as disruptive leadership.

¹¹¹ J. C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 149-52.

CHAPTER 4

LEADING LIKE JESUS: THE ART AND PRACTICE OF DISRUPTIVE LEADERSHIP

This study proposed from the outset for a new art and practice of leadership. A leadership style that was disruptive for the good of others and organizations. A style of leadership that combines the theories and practice of innovation, servant leadership, and leading change to create an integrated model called disruptive leadership. Up to this point, the study has briefly explored the skill of innovation, the art of leading change, and the process of servant leadership. This examination has complemented existing theories by considering how each leadership functioned, looking for similarities, and exploring how each practice complements strengths and weaknesses. It was shown that innovation is a unique leadership skill that begins with competency and credibility. Furthermore, when considering servant leadership in both the contemporary and Christian perspective, the study highlighted that servant leadership is motivated by three outcomes: healthy people, healthy teams, and high performing institutions. Lastly, change leadership from both contemporary and Christian perspective was shown as a process that follows very specific methods and steps. Leading change varies on multiple factors, and no one change process is the same. Ultimately implying that, when leading a change process, it is more like a work of art than a replicative process.

Contemporary and Christian perspectives on leadership have provided helpful and informative theories and practices to aid the practice of leadership in ministry or the marketplace. However, an incompleteness is found within leadership at large today. Peter Northouse notes, “In the 15 years since the first edition of this book, *Leadership: Theory*

and Practice, the public has become increasingly captivated by the idea of leadership.”¹ To that end, the idea of leadership is a highly sought-after commodity like the holy grail. Multiple authors, institutions, and the like believe in their perception of what leadership is and philosophy of leadership, as they should. However, the purpose of this study is not to compete in the lists of theories and practices of leadership; rather, it is to compliment them by describing and demonstrating that Jesus’s teaching and leadership cannot be limited to a theory or practice. Jesus’s leadership was a robust and revolutionary type of leadership that disrupts the tacit assumptions of leadership and integrates multiple theories and practices of leadership. Thus, this study affirms the work of both contemporary and Christian scholars while seeking to combine the theories to capture why Jesus’s life and leadership were so disruptive. Could it be that the leadership needed for the twenty-first century is nothing new but something old? An older, more complete model of leadership that was multidimensional and multifaceted. Could it be that the best example of leadership is found in the life and leadership of Jesus? I believe so. Therefore, this chapter will consider the previous research from both contemporary and Christian perspectives showing how Jesus was a disruptive leader.

Consequently, the following pages will examine Jesus’s leadership in three critical areas related to this study: the skill of innovation, the art of leading change, and the practice of servant leadership. The areas of innovation, leading change, and servant leadership will be briefly observed from three angles: explaining the biblical foundation, connecting the leadership theory to Jesus’s teaching and life, and showing how an integrative model of leading like Jesus is disruptive. This chapter will present disruptive leadership as the integration of three major themes of Jesus’s leadership specifically by describing the art and practice of disruptive leadership as the unique combination of the effectiveness of servant leadership, the art of leading change, and the skill of innovation (Ps 78:72).

¹ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 6th ed. (London: SAGE, 2013), 1.

Jesus and Innovation

The authors of *Innovators DNA* note, “Innovation. It’s the lifeblood of our global economy and a strategic priority for virtually every CEO around the world.”² Innovation as previously mentioned in chapter 2 has become a highly sought-after skill for every CEO and organization. Humanity has benefited from the critical skill of innovation. Without innovation, inventions of the wheel, indoor plumbing, electricity, central heating and air, and the advances in all things technology in the last half-century, would not exist. Humanity are the benefactors of innovation. However, where does this skill of innovation come from? Peter Drucker writes,

Innovation is the specific function of entrepreneurship, whether in an existing business, a public service institution, or a new venture started by a lone individual in the family kitchen. It is the means by which the entrepreneur wither creates new wealth-producing resources or endows existing resources with enhanced potential for creating wealth.³

Drucker’s explanation that innovation is limited to the function of entrepreneurship indicates that innovation is a creative expression and enterprise. While agreeing that innovation is a creative expression based on the research provided from both perspectives on innovation, innovation is not limited to the enterprise of entrepreneurs alone but is a primary skill and function of leadership and humanity. Therefore, the following section will ask three questions of innovation: Is there a biblical framework of innovation provided in Scripture? How does Jesus use the skill of innovation? And What are implications of innovation as a leadership skill?

A Biblical Framework of Innovation

When building a home, the foundation is the building’s starting point and most critical aspect. It does not matter if the builder uses Legos, Lincoln Logs, or legitimate building materials, like concrete. The Foundation matters because it provides support for

² Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator’s DNA: Mastering the Five Skills of Disruptive Innovators* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2011), 6, Kindle.

³ Peter F. Drucker, “The Discipline of Innovation,” in *HBR’s 10 Most Reads on Innovation* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2013), 143.

the entire home. Understanding the genesis of innovation is no different. To fully grasp what innovation is, how it works, and why it matters today are necessary foundations for any Christian leader to comprehend. In new construction it is helpful to start at the beginning, and the same is valid for innovation.

In the opening moments of the Bible, the creation story provides a biblical framework for innovation. Consider the teaching of Genesis 1 and 2, where God makes the world and everything in it and rests on the seventh day. Within the reality of creation, innovation comes from the Creator's creativity. To that point, the most significant implication from the creation account is creation *ex nihilo*.⁴ Theologian John M. Frame writes, "The world was made neither from a preexisting, finite substance, nor from God's being. There is no third alternative. So, the world was not made from anything. It was made from nothing."⁵ As a result, the reality of creation reveals God as Creator whose innovative genius is seen in and through His creative expression of the world and everything in it. The fascinating part of the creation account is that it does not stop with God speaking the cosmos into existence from nothing; instead, God speaks his own image into existence, a representative, on his behalf, who is given a mandate to cultivate and keep God's design (Gen 1:26-28).

Genesis 1:26-28 provides a drastic change in the creation narrative. Moving from God's innovation and creation of the world toward God's plan and command of the *Imago Dei*.⁶ Genesis 1:26 says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the seas and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." For centuries, many have tried to explain and exegete the image of God. It is probably

⁴ *Ex nihilo* means "out of nothing." Therefore, the concept of creation *ex nihilo* indicates that God created all that exists "out of nothing." John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 298-99.

⁵ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 302.

⁶ *Imago Dei* (image of God) is a description of man being created in God's image and likeness.

best summarized that “the heavens declare God’s glory” (Ps 19:1), yet only man “is made in God’s image” (Gen 1:26). At that moment, God declares that man will reflect who he is and be his representative to all of creation. Man will be God’s representative by fulfilling what scholars describe as the cultural mandate⁷ found in Genesis 1:28. God commands both male and female to exercise dominion over the earth, subdue it, and cultivate its latent potential (Gen 1:26-28; cf. Gen 2:15). Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum note, “The creation of humans as the divine image involves a covenant relationship between humans and the creator God on the one hand and a covenant relationship between humans and the creation on the other hand.”⁸

To that end, three aspects of innovation are found in Genesis 1 and 2. First, innovation is a creative process spoken into existence by God; and that creative responsibility is now shared with the *imago Dei* for two purposes: (1) make beautiful things and (2) create life through procreation. Second, innovation involves the intentional work of cultivating and curating all of creation. The work of cultivating indicates the skill of developing, whereas curating describes the process of organization. Both skills of developing and organizing are key aspects of innovation (Gen 2:15). Finally, innovation requires improvement and at times change. Throughout the narrative of creation, all aspects of creation were good, except one: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him” (Gen 2:18). In Genesis 2:18, God makes a change, an improvement, in creation to ensure man has a helper suitable for him. The innovation of God created good, beautiful things and solved the first problem in creation, man being alone, so that the *imago Dei* and creation would flourish according to God’s good design.

In summary, Genesis 1 and 2 provides a starting point to understand where innovation originated, how humanity is commanded to partake in innovation, and the goal

⁷ The cultural mandate is God’s command for both male and female to exercise dominion over the earth, subdue it, and cultivate its latent potential (Gen 1:26-28; cf. Gen 2:15).

⁸ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum. *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 582.

of innovation, that is, human flourishing. Therefore, the biblical framework for innovation describes three skills of innovation: (1) *create*: leaders are called to express their God-given creativity for the good of others; (2) *cultivate or curate*: leaders are responsible for the stewardship of creation for the good of others; and (3) *change*: leaders are permitted to exercise God's rule by making creation better for the good of others. Innovation is a divine attribute given to *imago Dei* to ensure that all of creation flourishes.

Create, Cultivate, and Change

At the heart of innovation is the expression of creativity and continual improvement. The biblical aim of innovation is primarily for the flourishing of others and creation. Within this section, Jesus's leadership and teachings will be explored as he sought to ensure the flourishing of all of creation. While there are no precise moments in the New Testament that explicitly states Jesus as an innovator, there are moments throughout the New Testament that imply Jesus creating or restoring for the good of others, cultivating or curating as a godly steward of creation, and exercising his authority as a change agent for the good of others.

Create. Throughout the New Testament Jesus is mentioned as the catalyst of creation (John 1:1-4,14; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:1-4). Additionally, Jesus is presented as God's agent who exercises authority to restore creation (Mark 1:40-45; 5:21-43; Luke 13:10-17). Not only does Jesus restore creation but he also is seen as controlling the chaos of creation and the demonic forces (Mark 4:35-41; 5:1-20; 9:14-29; Luke 8:22-39). What is the significance of these examples? These examples show Jesus exercising divine rule and reign as God's anointed King (Ps 2). Jesus uses his power and position to ultimately restore the cosmic and social orders of the world. To that point, Thomas Schreiner notes, "Jesus is Lord because his reconciling work embrace the whole universe."⁹ Jesus's agency in

⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ: A Summary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 90.

creation in the New Testament is more often seen as an agent of change redemption (John 1:3; Col 1:16, 20; Heb 1:2-3). By nature, that is who Jesus is, was, and will be. His identity alone as creator, sustainer, and redeemer of all things speak to his very nature. And from that nature he innovates through creating and at times recreating.

Change. In conjunction with his redemptive work in restoring the cosmic and social orders in creation, Jesus change's realities of creation based on his authority. Throughout the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, he exercises his authority as a change agent for the good of others and creation. For example, he changes the water into wine (John 2:1-11); he brings light into the darkness (John 8:12); and he gives life to the dead (John 11:1-44). These examples of change are mere shadows of the eschatological reality of Jesus's changing creation finally from not good to great, darkness to light, and death to life. Schreiner writes, "What is remarkable in reading John is his emphasis on the gift of life now. He does not focus on the future age when the resurrection will occur."¹⁰ To that point, the ultimate triumph over death, darkness, and distortion was accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection, as well be realized at his second coming of Christ. Schreiner notes, "The inauguration of the new creation in the present age (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) points forward to the future, for Christians anticipate with confidence and joy the life of the age to come, when they will enjoy life (e.g., Rom 2:7; 5:21; 6:23; Gal. 6:8; Titus 1:2)."¹¹ Again, Jesus embodies the cultural mandate through his authority to change for true flourishing, similar to God's prerogative to see Adam's being alone as not good and providing a solution (Gen 2:18). Change is a divine expression of the cultural mandate demonstrated through Jesus's life and leadership.

Cultivate and curate. As mentioned, innovation involves the intentional work of cultivating and curating all of creation. Cultivating and curating creation as stewards was

¹⁰ Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 26.

¹¹ Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 30.

God's good design and intent in Genesis 2. Adam was given the command to "work and keep" the garden (Gen 2:15), which are words for cultivation and curation. The cultivation of the garden meant that God told Adam to develop and make it better. The intent of curating the garden was to keep it organized according to God's design. Tim Keller describes the work of cultivation and curation in *Every Good Endeavor* as a

pattern for all work. It is creative and assertive. It is rearranging the raw material of God's Creation in such a way that it helps the world in general, people in particular, thrive and flourish . . . we are continuing God's work of forming, filling, and subduing. Whenever we bring order out of chaos, whenever we draw out creative potential, whenever we elaborate and 'unfold' creation beyond where it was when we found it, we are following God's pattern of creative cultural development.¹²

The patterns of ordering chaos, cultivating latent potential, and cultural development are key distinctives of cultivating and curating observed in Jesus's life and leadership. The purpose behind the actions of cultivating and curating was to better creation and bless others in three ways: provision, protection, and developing potential.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus follows God's pattern of cultural development through provision, protection, and developing potential. In Matthew 6:25-33, Jesus reminds and encourages his followers that the Father knows their needs and provides for them. Consider the feeding of the five thousand in Matthew 14:13-21, where Jesus, in his compassion, heals the sick and feeds the great multitude with only five loaves and two fish. A part of Jesus's ministry was centered on provision of people and protection. The best examples of Jesus providing protection is found where he orders the winds and the waves to obey him. In the gospel of John, Jesus proclaims, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Jesus protects from chaos and guards from calamity to the point of death so that the *imago Dei* and creation function and flourish according of God's design. Ultimately, in the Gospels, Jesus does lay down his life to redeem and restore to its proper design of flourishing (John 19:30).

¹² Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 47-48.

Finally, one of the most unique features of the Gospel accounts is how Jesus develops the potential in humanity through his interactions with others and development of the disciples. For example, he breaks all social norms with his exchange with the woman at the well (John 4:1-43; cf. 4:27). This account is a primer for his interactions with others, where he balances truth and grace in all interactions. He calls out sin when needed, while simultaneously calling others up toward a new way of life (John 4:16-26). That calling out and up practice is a great summary of his interactions with the religious leaders too. He continued those practices with the disciples by calling them to follow him—a non-traditional practice for rabbis in the first century. Schreiner writes, “Jesus summons the disciples to follow him and does not merely say that they should be devoted to God. The available evidence indicates that rabbis did not summon others to follow them. Instead, would-be disciples sought rabbis out and asked to serve as their disciples.”¹³ Jesus’s initiative to call out the potential in others, from the woman at the well and the disciples, are just brief examples of how Jesus cultivated others. He called them to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. He did not see them for who they were but who they could become. He gave them a new identity through calling them to follow, developing them, and finally involved them in kingdom work as agents of cultivation and curation (Matt 28:19-21; Luke 10,11; John 10:22-42; Acts 1:8). Jesus’s life and leadership is a great example of embodying the cultural mandate. His initiative and invitation cultivated and empowered image-bearers to be the best version of themselves.¹⁴

Summary of Jesus and Innovation

In summary, innovation is not limited to an entrepreneurial skill but is talent hard-wired within the *imago Dei* and task to fulfill. The *imago Dei* was called and commanded to fill, form, and subdue creation like God (Gen 1:27,28). Sadly, humanity

¹³ Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 61.

¹⁴ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 59.

failed to fulfill the cultural mandate to rule, work, keep and cultivate creation when Adam and Eve took from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:7). Thus, God's creation was broken instead of a blessing. Schreiner notes, "The failure of human beings is not the end of the story. Jesus is the representative human being. He succeeded where the rest of the human race failed."¹⁵ Jesus was the faithful son who fulfilled his mission, where Adam failed in helping creation function and flourish according to God's design. "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col 1:19-20). Based on the observations provided, Jesus's life and leadership involved the following practices of innovation: create, change, cultivate and curate. These practices were according to God's design, to ensure that creation functions and flourishes like in the garden of Eden (Gen 1). Innovation was a skill Jesus modeled throughout his earthly ministry. Additionally, his life and leadership called for radical change that not only changed the realities for some in the first century, but change that is still reaching forward in the twenty-first century. Jesus not only innovated but he led widespread change. Eventually, it cost him his life. The next section will explore how Jesus instituted and lead change.

Jesus and Leading Change

Leading change in any context is a demanding and difficult task. In previous chapters of this study, change leadership theory was explored from John Kotter's contemporary perspective and Lyle Schaller's Christian perspective. Both Kotter's "8-Stage Process of Creating Major Change"¹⁶ and Schaller's "5 Step Sequence for Leading Change"¹⁷ describe a methodology of leading significant change that places a high demand

¹⁵ Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 112.

¹⁶ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 1996), 21.

¹⁷ Lyle Schaller, *Strategies for Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 92-100.

on leadership. Kotter goes so far to write, “The engine that drives change is leadership.”¹⁸ While, both Schaller and Kotter use language of methodology, change leadership cannot be reduced to following a process or sequence. If change leadership was that simple to follow or implement, then leading change would not be so demanding and dependent on leaders to lead. To that point, there is a dynamic and dependent relationship between a leader and leading change. Leading change, alone, is hard. Leading change that changes others is even more difficult. Leading change that ultimately transforms society and governments is a monumental, ambitious goal. Yet, Jesus’s life and leadership produced systemic change that sparked a movement in the first century. A movement that is still active in the twenty-first century impacting the world today.

The point of this section is not to examine why Jesus led change. That was explored and considered through the perspective of Jesus innovating as a faithful Son fulfilling the cultural mandate by creating, changing, cultivating, and curating creation to function and flourish according to God’s design. The purpose of this section is to briefly explore how Jesus led change. If change is driven by leadership, then what type of leader was Jesus? How did a carpenter from Nazareth, who was known as a Galilean rabbi, begin a movement that changed human history? What practices can be observed from Jesus’s leadership that can be useful for leading change today? Why should twenty-first century leaders lead like Jesus?

A Carpenter Who Changed the World

When considering the life and leadership of Jesus, it is tempting to understand His message of change without understanding the political, social, economic, and religious realities of his time. To that point, Mark Clark notes, “If we fail to acknowledge and understand Jesus’s historical setting, we will inevitably twist his agenda and message in

¹⁸ Kotter, *Leading Change*, x.

light of our own.”¹⁹ Jesus was a first-century Galilean Jewish carpenter whose message changed the world (John 3:16-17). That message was delivered to an oppressed people under the rule of the Pax Romana. Jesus lived in a political system that provided a peace through oppressive taxation, all while religious leaders and local political leaders were exercising their own agendas. The dynamics within the first century, politically, socially, economically, and religiously, exacerbated an oppressive situation, with a people group, the Jews, who were looking for a new and better Moses—the Messiah (Matt 5:2-11). Charles Quarles writes, “Through his motif in which he identified Jesus as the new Moses, Matthew beautifully and powerfully emphasized that Jesus came to lead His people on a new spiritual exodus, to rescue His people, to break the power of sin, and set its captives free.”²⁰ While the point of this study is not to examine cultural and political dynamics at length, it is beneficial to grasp, even if briefly, the historical setting of Jesus’s message and methods of leading change. The oppressive environment of the first century was fertile ground for change; a change that transformed the first century and continues impacting lives today. What did Jesus do to bring radical transformation? How did a rural, carpenter change the world?

Leading Change Like Jesus

Jesus’s strategy for change was radical yet profoundly simple. The strategy for change focused on a vision of a new kingdom—the kingdom of God (Luke 1:14-15). Yet, his followers, including the disciples, had a different agenda all together. The kingdom Jesus was establishing was not the kingdom expected. The people of Israel placed their hope on a coming Messiah whose reign and rule would remove the Roman oppression, free the temple, and usher the everlasting kingdom of God ruling over all the nations (Dan

¹⁹ Mark Clark, *The Problem of Jesus: Answering a Skeptic’s Challenges to the Scandal of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 16, Kindle.

²⁰ Charles Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ’s Message to the Modern Church*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 26.

7:10-14; Isa 9:6-7). Even Jesus's triumphal entry on Palm Sunday was a reception for a king, where the crowd adorns and gives adulation, saying, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel (Matt 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19)." Yet, Jesus's gaze was not fixated on an earthly kingdom but an everlasting kingdom—an eternal kingdom that required a wooden crown of thorns with the purpose of redeeming and delivering the people from their spiritual bondage (Matt 27:29; Mark 15:17). Jesus's message for change centered on the kingdom of God and his methods of change were unique.

Kingdom of God. Jesus's life and leadership were poignantly and purposefully about the kingdom of God (Matt 4:23; Mark 1:14-15). Even toward the end of Jesus's earthly life, he stands before Pontus Pilate in John 18, and in a unique exchange Jesus answers Pilate's question: "So, you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose, I was born and for this purpose I am come into this world" (John 18:37). So, what did Jesus mean by "for this purpose" and "the kingdom of God?" First, Jesus was pointing to how the reign of God relates to all of creation. *In Gospel and Kingdom*, Graeme Goldsworthy writes,

Jesus Christ contains in himself the Kingdom of God. The gospel is a gospel of man restored to proper relationships in Christ. Now, these relationships involve the whole reality: God, man, and the created order. As Eden and Canaan are in Christ, so God's perfect world is in Christ. This truth has one vital implication often forgotten by evangelicals, but which the Old Testament reinforces by its historicity. The gospel is not simply "forgiveness of sins" and "going to heaven when you die." The gospel is a restoration of relationships between God, man and the world.²¹

All of Jesus's life and leadership passionately proclaimed the kingdom of God. Second, he announced a new reality within the world that the kingdom was presently active in and through him, but with an unrealized future reality.²² In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand" (1:15). Throughout the Gospel

²¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Milton Keys, England: Paternoster, 2012), 122.

²² Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 21-23.

of Mark are small pictures of Jesus's rule and new reality. For example, Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God through parables (Mark 4:1-34). Jesus commands nature to be still, demonstrates his power over demons, disease, and death, all of which declare his authority as King (Mark 4:35-41; Mark 5). Clark, in referring to Jesus's actions, writes, "They were his announcement to the world that God was breaking through the veil in a special way."²³ The kingdom of God proclaimed and presented by Jesus points back to a past reality of a good, whole creation with no death, disease, or destruction, while simultaneously foreshadowing a new reality not yet realized.

Methods of the kingdom of God. While Jesus's actions and activity in the Gospel of Mark provide a brief overview the change Jesus inaugurated, what is even more unorthodox was the means and methods he used to usher in God's kingdom in five actions. First, he led from a vision of the kingdom of God, which stood in contrast to the reality of the status quo. All the while Jesus stayed true to the core convictions of Judaism. As a result, his message of the gospel of the kingdom fulfilled, redefined, expanded, and brought all things to a climax in and through Jesus (Matt 5:17-18; Luke 22:44).

Second, Jesus enlisted a group of followers to be his disciples. He called twelve ordinary men to follow him. He modeled the kingdom in everyday life for about three and a half years. To the point, Clark notes, "He called twelve normal men away from their normal lives—lives as fishermen, tax collector, husbands, and fathers. He essentially said, 'Drop all of that, and come follow me.'"²⁴ There was a cost to the discipleship Jesus demanded of the original twelve, and believers today. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Jesus was clear: discipleship in the kingdom means denial, potential death, and allegiance.

²³ Clark, *The Problem of Jesus*, 24.

²⁴ Clark, *The Problem of Jesus*, 89.

Third, Jesus called other people to follow him. Jesus not only cast a clear vision the kingdom, but he invited men and women to learn how live in the kingdom, and his life embodied the kingdom. Fourth, Jesus embodied the way of the kingdom of new behaviors and beliefs through his example of sacrifice, suffering, and servanthood (Mark 8:31; 34-35; 10:42-45). Finally, Jesus institutionalized the message of the kingdom and organized the disciples, followers, around mission (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:48; John 21:22; Acts 1:8). It is worth noting that Jesus gathered people around mission not methods. Throughout the Old Testament and the Gospels, the Jewish people confused methodology, rules and constructs, as the mission. The above briefly outlined the five ways Jesus led change with the central message of the kingdom of God.

Implications of Leading Like Jesus

Leading change like Jesus shapes and informs the function and practices of leading change within the marketplace and ministry settings. There are six perspectives of leading change like Jesus. While these perspectives are not exhaustive, the six perspectives provide a starting point for those looking to lead change. The first perspective is clarity in vision. Jesus was clear about the vision: the kingdom of God. That mission and vision trump methodology. Second, Jesus communicated the vision consistently and regularly before anyone and everyone. Third, Jesus challenged others by calling them to the kingdom of God. Fourth, Jesus confronted resistance with clarity and honesty. He filled conversations with grace and truth. Fifth, Jesus was committed to the vision. He embodied the vision through service, shared leadership by involving the disciples, endured suffering, and ultimately paid the price through sacrifice on the cross. It is worth noting that the perspectives of clarity in vision, creating teams, consistency in communication, challenge by calling up, confrontation to resistance, and commitment to the vision were actions done over a three- and half-year span.

Consistency over that duration is a leadership lesson in and of itself. For leaders today there is an overestimation of what one can accomplish in a month and an

underestimation of what one might do in a year. With that said, the final perspective of Jesus's leadership in leading change is commencement. *Commencement*, at times, can be confused with "ending"; however, the true meaning of the word indicates the beginning. Hence, the commencement speech at graduation is a sending-off to something new. Jesus leading change did not end with him, for he asked and sent another "helper" to be with believers forever. That is possible through the empowerment and help of the Spirit, whose main work is to guide the Christian believer toward truth (John 14:16). Sinclair Ferguson notes, "The ministry of the Spirit in this increasing identification with Jesus is in order that, being 'shaped' as a messianic Spirit by the life and ministry of Jesus, he may come to us thus qualified to reshape us to be 'like Christ,' from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:17-18)."²⁵ Therefore, His commencement speech is known as the Great Commission, where he reminds his disciples of who He is, who they are, and what they are to do next (Matt 28:17-20). Jesus's commencement was His invitation to do greater works than He, empowered by the Spirit (John 14:12, 16).

Jesus the Servant-Leader

Up to this point, this chapter has considered Jesus as an innovator and change-agent. This section will explore Jesus as a servant leader. As mentioned, Jesus modeled and embodied the kingdom of God for his disciples and followers regularly by his life and leadership. Even though he was a king, he modeled the practices of servanthood. Jesus asserted, "The Son of Man came not be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many" (Matt 20:28). Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges write, "For a follower of Jesus, servant leadership isn't just an option; it is a mandate."²⁶

²⁵ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christianity (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 56.

²⁶ Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *The Servant Leader: Transforming your Heart, Head, Hands, & Habits* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 12.

In previous chapters, this study considered the contemporary and Christian perspective of servant leadership. From a careful observation of the theory and practice of servant leadership, I observed that servant leadership must not be reduced to behavioral or habits of leadership. If one were to only view servant leadership from that point of view, he or she would have an incomplete view of servant leadership. As previously mentioned in chapter 3, servant leadership seeks to help and assist people to be their best so that the organization accomplishes its mission.

Jesus: Serve or Be Served

As mentioned, Jesus's life and ministry was centered on one thing: the kingdom of God. A central motif to the kingdom of God was servanthood. J. Oswald Sanders writes, "Christ taught that the kingdom of God was a community where each member served the others."²⁷ Servant leadership begins with a choice—a choice to follow a vision that service is better than being served. The choice to serve others is a leadership decision with a focus on effectiveness, not success. To that point, Blanchard and Hodges note, "Success can involve accomplishing short-term goals at the long-range detriment of those engaged in creating the success. Effectiveness accomplishes the long-range growth and development of those involved in producing the desired end as well as the result itself."²⁸

All of Jesus's life and leadership demonstrated servanthood. Paul illustrates this point when he pens these words to the church at Philippi: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, through he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:5-7). The text explains two critical theological aspects of Jesus the servant leader. First, Jesus chooses to become a servant, which is shown by him taking on human form. Second, Jesus had equality with God.

²⁷ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 21.

²⁸ Blanchard and Hodges, *The Servant Leader*, 58.

Schreiner notes, “Paul assumes that Jesus is equal with God. The verse does not teach that Jesus ceased trying to attain equality with God. Rather, Paul emphasizes that Jesus did not take advantage of or exploit the equality with God that he already possessed.”²⁹ Jesus, who shared the divine nature, chose humanity. Robert Greenleaf writes that servant leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first.”³⁰ Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is seen as a leader willing to serve first. Though, how did Jesus serve first? What were the practices of Jesus’s servant leadership? Why was Jesus so effective as a servant leader?

Jesus’s Praxis of Servanthood

As mentioned, serving begins with a choice. Yet, servant leadership involves more than just a choice. Blanchard and Hodges explain, “The journey to effective servant leadership turns outward when the heart and mind now guide the behavior of the leader in interaction with those who follow.”³¹ Within the Gospels are three perspectives of servant leadership that guided Jesus during his earthly ministry: lead with love, foster collaboration instead of control, and move from reward to responsibility. Each of these perspectives involves and incorporates practices that guided the praxis of Jesus, the servant leader.

Led by love. The journey toward servant leadership begins on the inside. Blanchard and Hodges note, “Effective leadership starts on the inside. Are you a servant leader or a self-serving leader?”³² It begins with a leader having the humility to think of others first, or thinking of oneself last. It is a motivation of the heart of the leader to lead with love; a motive to serve rather than be served; a motive rooted in the love and heart

²⁹ Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 88.

³⁰ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist, 2002), 27.

³¹ Blanchard and Hodges, *Servant Leadership*, 61.

³² Blanchard and Hodges, *Servant Leadership*, 18.

of God (John 3:16, 17; 1 John 4:7-12). The motive for servant leadership was and is love. Love led Jesus to clothe himself with humanity and love led Jesus to hang on the cross (Phil 2:5-6; Mark 10:45). The practices of love displayed by Jesus are selflessness and service. One should consider the picture of selfless service, when Jesus poured the basin of water and washed the disciples' feet even though he knew his hour and time had come (John 13:1). He tells the disciples, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). Jesus's example of service and selflessness defined his leadership and redefined what true leadership for the disciples. Again, Jesus was a king who lowered himself to serve. The apostle John tells why in John 13:1b: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." Jesus was led by love.

Collaboration over control. While servant leadership begins on the inside, it is not limited to the inner life of the leader. Servant leadership has an outward focus to achieve mission with the conviction that people are essential as the mission. Albert Mohler writes, "At the center of the true leader's heart and mind you will find convictions that drive and determine everything else."³³ Jesus led with the conviction that people matter; yet, He never deterred from the mission—the kingdom of God. Jesus could have used power and position to exercise his authority, controlling events and people to usher the kingdom of God, but instead he fostered collaboration over control.

Jesus fostered collaboration through the regular acts of submission to Father, and regularly seeking solitude, friendship, and being sober minded. First, Jesus fosters collaboration through submission and obedience to the Father in his baptism, high priestly prayer in the garden, and death on the cross (Matt 3:13-17; John 17; John 19:28-30). Collaboration is also seen when Jesus withdraws from the events and people, seeking solitude with the Father as regular rhythm (Matt 4:1-11; 14:23; Mark 1:35; 2:13; 3:13; Luke 5:15-16; 6:12). Luke writes, "But, Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayer"

³³ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2012), 24.

(Luke 5:16 NIV). Blanchard and Hodges note, “One of the greatest of spiritual attainments is the capacity to do nothing.”³⁴ It was in Jesus’s solitude that he would realign and reform his attitudes and actions.

Next, Jesus developed deep and meaningful friendships. For example, in John 11, Jesus knows Lazarus is near death and is delayed in arrival. Upon his arrival, Jesus is told that Lazarus is dead. What does Jesus do? “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). He wept as friend. It is a picture of his humanity and a depth to his relationships with others. Jesus did not see people as instruments to command and control. He saw people as having value and dignity. He invites them in to follow him and share leadership (Luke 10:1-12).

Finally, Jesus was sober-minded. Sober mindedness indicates living with a rational, singular focus. Jesus was rational in his thoughts and actions with others. All the while he kept focus on the kingdom of God. He was sober minded with a present, intentionality with the disciples, followers, outcasts, sinners, and the religious elites, while having the awareness of future death. Through the practices of submission, solitude, friendship, and being sober minded, Jesus fostered collaboration, even though he had the ability and authority to control anything he wished.

Responsibility not reward. The last perspective of servant leadership seen in Jesus’s life and leadership is his view that leadership is about responsibility, not reward. Reward based leadership is concerned with title, money, power, and status. To that point, Patrick Lencioni notes, “When leaders are motivated by personal reward, they will avoid the unpleasant situation and activities that leadership requires.”³⁵ Jesus did the opposite. He led as a shepherd willing to walk into the unpleasantness of shepherding people. A good shepherd cares, feeds, protects, keeps, and is ever present. Jesus is the good shepherd who took on the responsibility of leading people towards the still waters and green pastures of

³⁴ Blanchard and Hodges, *The Servant Leader*, 88.

³⁵ Patrick Lencioni, *The Motive: Why So Many Leaders Abdicate Their Most Important Responsibilities* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), 132.

the kingdom of God (Ps 23; John 10:1-18). Jesus is not only described as a shepherd but a shepherd willing to lay down his life (John 10:14-15). Having the duties of a shepherd and the high cost of personal sacrifice sound the opposite of reward. Jesus says at the end of the passage, “This charge [laying down his life] I have received from my Father” (John 18:18). The Father granted Jesus the freedom to choose, and he chooses responsibility not reward.

Servant Leadership Revisited

In summary, servant leadership was a key aspect of Jesus’s life and leadership. Blanchard and Hodges write, “Servant leadership starts with a vision and ends with servant heart that helps people live according to that vision.”³⁶ To that end, Jesus’s servanthood began with His love for the Father and the *imago Dei*. Because of that love, he came to serve and redeem all of creation. As a servant leader, Jesus displayed the leadership of the kingdom, through three perspectives: leading with love, fostering collaboration over control, and viewing leadership as a responsibility not a reward.

Conclusion: Disruptive Leadership

The chapter examined three major themes of Jesus’s life and leadership: innovation, leading change, and servant leadership. These themes were examined because the church and the world are facing a leadership crisis. This crisis is challenging leaders to grow as leaders and as people, to be the best versions of themselves, resolute to truth, and keep advancing the mission Jesus called everyone to.³⁷ A leadership that is disruptive for the good of the others and the glory of God is needed—a leadership modeled and observed in the life and leadership of Jesus. Jesus uniquely combined skill and service with art and practice to produce a leadership that was disruptive—a leadership that was so disruptive that it created lasting change, while changing the world simultaneously. The

³⁶ Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus Revisited* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 257, Kindle.

³⁷ Todd Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 42, Kindle.

beauty of this leadership is that Jesus invites leaders to follow him on the same mission, similarly to how God invites the *imago Dei* into the mission to rule, subdue, work, and keep creation according to God's design. So, what is a disruptive leader in the twenty-first century? What is the combination of skill, methods, and character needed for a Christian leader in a rapidly changing world?

Disruptive leadership is both an art and practice of leading like Jesus. It is multi-dimensional model of leadership, requiring the heart, head, hands, and habits of a leader to be disciplined in practice and artistic in application. Just like there are no two works of art alike. The disruptive leadership imperative demands leaders to become the best version of themselves and in the process to help others to do the same, all the while living with gospel intentionality at work and with family or friends to continue God's work and mission in a world that is constantly changing. Therefore, disruptive leadership lies at the intersection of the three leadership practices of innovation, leading change, and servant leadership.

The starting point of disruptive leadership begins with a choice—a choice to serve others and not to be served. Disruptive leaders do not seek greatness but are great because of the humble choice to serve (Matt 23:11-12). Disruptive leaders master the motive, behaviors, and motivation of servant leadership. Disruptive leaders are motivated by love and lead with love. They have a general and specific love for all people. This style of leadership conviction views all people with value and dignity because they represent the *imago Dei* (Gen 1:26-27). Leading with love shapes and forms the practices and behaviors of disruptive leaders.

Like Jesus, disruptive leaders do not use power and position as an advantage. Instead, power and position are leveraged to create collaboration by sharing leadership and submitting to others' idea, points of view, and authority. Disruptive leaders realign and reorient themselves around their vertical relationship and God-given mission through solitude and prayer, like Jesus. While there are moments of isolation for working on the

inner life, disruptive leaders have to build rich, deep, and meaningful friendships. Leaders who are disruptive never lead alone. It has been often said that leadership is lonely at the top. Who said it must be that way? Leadership might be lonely at the top because some leaders are afraid of losing power and leverage. Insecurity has a magnetic pull toward isolation and self-protection. Disruptive leaders lead from the practice of personal security in who they are and what they do; a disruptive leader engages in risk and vulnerability.

Finally, the choice to lead as a servant leader instructs the leader's thinking on what leadership is and is not. Disruptive leaders believe that leadership is not a reward-based position; rather, it is responsibility of mission and outcome. Like Jesus, disruptive leaders protect, provide, and lead their followers. As a result, a key component of disruptive leadership is the practice of servant leadership. Servant leadership practices disrupt leaders' natural thinking and tendencies to lead by rule, control, and reward. Like servant leadership, disruptive leaders produce trust and safety, protection, and significance. Those realities are byproducts of leading with love, fostering collaboration over control, and leading from responsibility not reward. Therefore, followers believe that the leader has their best interests in mind, while simultaneously being motivated to achieve mission because they have ownership with the mission.

Mission is a catalyst of disruptive leadership. Every aspect of Jesus's life was shaped and formed by the mission—the kingdom of God. In a similar way, disruptive leaders are led and directed by mission. Leading change stems from being driven by mission. For disruptive leaders, mission cannot be inhibited by preference or methodology. Thus, addressing the status quo and navigating resistance is why the art of leading change is a necessary and vital component of disruptive leadership. The advantage of the integrative model of leading like Jesus is that disruptive leaders have built trust and credibility to lead change. However, disruptive leaders do not power through nor leverage charismatic giftings to bring about change. Rather, disruptive leaders lead like Jesus with clarity of vision, creating teams, communicating the vision in words and deeds, challenging

others to live by values from the vision, confronting resistance with grace and truth, committing to the vision for the long haul, and finally, commencing others to take the vision as their own.

Last of all, leadership becomes disruptive through the skill of innovation. It is a skill to know when to change or keep, it gathers input from multiple sources to make wise decisions, is highly dependent on asking good questions without leading with answers, and is the capacity to lead a process of finding solutions through curiosity, creativity, cultivation/curation, and change. Most of all, innovation allows a leader to practice the skill of association ideas, concepts, and constructs into an interconnected web of thought so the leader can make quick, clear decisions on what to fix, what to keep, what to change, and what to make new.

Each of these leadership practices listed are different in form and construct but functionally bring about change. Servant leadership emphasizes the importance of helping, supporting, and coaching people to reach their personal and professional potential, which results in a positive effect on communities and institutions because of its focus on people. Leading change is a process of successfully implementing the change vision to ensure the organization grows and achieves its goals, keeping organizations and institutions from the dangerous reality of the status quo and a slow death. Kotter writes, “Past success provides too many resources, reduces our sense of urgency, and encourages us to turn inward.”³⁸

Finally, innovation is a skill set of curiosity, improvement, and invention to fix broken things, keep good things better, and making new things for good. Therefore, disruptive leadership is an integrative model of leadership that combines the skill of innovation, the art of leading change, and the effectiveness of servant leadership. In the next chapter, the implications of disruptive leadership will consider how Christian leaders lead with the upright heart of a shepherd and guide with skill of hand (Ps 78:72).

³⁸ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 42.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS OF DISRUPTIVE LEADERSHIP

Embracing the call toward disruptive leadership requires the church and leaders to fundamentally change its teaching, praxis, and constructs of leadership. This thesis examined theories and practices from contemporary and Christian perspectives, explored the leadership of Jesus, and presented that disruptive leadership is art and practice of leading like Jesus; a leadership model that combines the effectiveness of servant leadership, skill of innovation, and art of leading change. There is urgency more than ever to return to Jesus’s model of leadership for Christian leaders. To that point, the church is standing at a crossroads: disrupt for good and God’s glory or be disrupted by keeping old methodology and isolating the church from culture making.

The tragic events of a worldwide pandemic only exacerbated the unhealthy ethos of old methodology leaving leaders with a choice. Andy Crouch, Kurt Keilhacker, and Dave Blanchard write these poignant and powerful words in the spring of 2020 to business, nonprofit, and church leaders:

We are not going back to normal. If you are a leader in an organization, it is time to rewrite your vision deck. . . . This is a time to urgently redesign our work in light what we believe is not just a week-long “blizzard,” not even just a months-long “winter,” but something closer to the beginning of a 12-18 month “ice age” in which many assumptions and approaches must change for good.¹

It has been almost three years since Crouch, Keilhacker, and Blanchard wrote those words. Did leaders listen? Yes, when large gatherings were limited, humanity and church leaders operated in the world of creativity, change, cultivation, and curation. Did it last? In some

¹ Andy Crouch, Kurt Keilhacker, and Dave Blanchard, “Leading beyond the Blizzard: Why Every Organization Is Now a Startup,” *The Praxis Journal*, March 20, 2020, <https://journal.praxislabs.org/leading-beyond-the-blizzard-why-every-organization-is-now-a-startup-b7f32fb278ff>.

areas yes, sadly in other places it has not. When leaders do not know how to navigate the unknown, leaders revert to the status quo of past methodology. When leaders revert back to old patterns and methodology, the move is mistakenly understood as faithfulness, while failing to realize that things change when something is disrupted for 12-18 months. Reverting to the way things were is not faithfulness, it is foolishness. At this cultural moment, Christendom is over, and the Christian faith is no longer at the center. Tod Bolsinger writes,

When I went to seminary, we were trained in the skills that were necessary for supporting faith in Christendom. When churches functioned primarily as vendors of religious services for a Christian culture, the primary leadership toolbox was teaching (for providing Christian education) liturgics (for leading Christian services) pastoral care (for offering Christian counsel and support). In this changing world we need to add a new set of leadership tools. And this applies equally well to Christians serving in leadership beyond the parish. The challenges of a changing world come even more rapidly in business, education and nonprofit leadership.²

The primary leadership toolbox of teaching, services, and pastoral care are good and right. However, that is not what needs to change. Bolsinger is correct that there needs to be an addition of leadership tools. Yet, those leadership tools cannot be improved or added to unless old methodology of the hierarchical, complicated, control-based, and self-serving church leadership ends. Consequently, this final chapter is a reminder that the way forward requires everyone to return to Jesus’s example of leadership and follow his way of leading by serving first, innovating for the good others, and leading change for the glory of God.

Clarifying Disruptive Leadership

Disruptive leadership is a new kind of leadership—a leadership that appears paradoxical in its combination of service and skill paired with art and practice. Tim Elmore notes, “Old-style leaders appear invincible; fully in control and knowing all the answers.”³ Disruptive leadership is a new style that focuses on mastering technical skills of leading

² Tod E. Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 13, Kindle.

³ Tim Elmore, *The Eight Paradoxes of Great Leadership: Embracing the Conflicting Demands of Today’s Workplace* (Nashville: Harper Collins, 2021), 197, Kindle.

and developing the art of people skills. The disruptive leader is one who can collaborate and challenge, solves problems, who is secure, models servanthood, and is vulnerable, humble, and consistent in word and deed. When observing the life of Jesus, he uniquely and accurately demonstrates this style of disruptive leadership. He mastered the technical skill in conjunction with people skills. He taught with authority and lead as servant. He was humble in heart and confident in the mission before him. He leveraged service over power, was visible to the public all the while practicing solitude and never walked alone, and was kind and full of grace, but never shy about the truth. What is fascinating about the “old-style” of leadership described above is that only person in historicity was all-knowing, fully in control, and invincible; yet, Jesus did not consider that something to be leveraged. He humiliated himself to create a way for creation to flourish again (Phil 2:7-11).

The purpose and driving motivation for this style of leadership is found in creating and cultivating a place for true flourishing. The idea of flourishing and thriving cannot be mistaken for success. While success might happen along the way. The goal is to create spaces and environments for humanity to flourish, which is what Jesus did throughout his life and leadership and what he accomplished through his death and resurrection. Jesus created a new reality with a new commission that captures the heart behind the cultural mandate (Gen 1:28). To that point, Lance Ford, Rob Wegner, and Alan Hirsch write, “God entered the creation through his son to re-create this world and restore shalom. That plan for restoration would once again be contingent on the ability to multiply.”⁴ Christian leaders are to exercise their God-given divine potential to cultivate a place for human flourishing, while being fruitful, multiplying the image of Christs across creation (Gen 1:28; Mark 16:15). Are Christian leaders truly creating spaces and places that produce this level of flourishing according to God’s design?

⁴ Lance Ford, Rob Wegner, and Alan Hirsch, *The Starfish and the Spirit: Unleashing the Leadership Potential of Church and Organizations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 40.

The Need for Change

Chapter 4 stated that churches and Christian leaders have a choice to make: disrupt or be disrupted. Christian leaders are at the proverbial crossroads. The world has somewhat normalized after a global crisis. Leading out of a crisis places a high premium on leadership and how Christian leaders navigate the next decade is critical.

At the beginning of 2022, Carey Nieuwhof urged leaders to pay close attention in his article, “12 Disruptive Church Trends That Will Rule 2022 (and the Post-Pandemic Era).”⁵ Nieuwhof is a former attorney, church planter, podcaster, speaker, and best-selling author. His area of expertise is leadership, change, and personal growth.⁶ The article outlines future trends for Christian leadership and the future of the church. He lists the following trends for 2022 and beyond: (1) “the demise of the old model of church,” (2) “growing churches will innovate beyond weekend services,” (3) “the vision for the future will become clearer,” (4) “attendance will normalize (and you’ll have a new church),” (5) “hybrid church will simply become church,” (6) “in-person will become more personal,” (7) “information will move online and transformation will move to in-person,” (8) “location-independent church members will increase,” (9) “pastors will sense a diminished authority,” (10) “the brain drain will become acute,” (11) “the exit of uninvested investors,” (12) “less predictability.”⁷

Pertaining to this study, five trends mentioned by Nieuwhof, items 1, 2, 6, 9, and 12, sound the alarm for the need or urgency of change for the church and are an indictment to old models of leadership. First is the demise of the old model of church. Second is growing churches will innovate beyond weekend services. Third is the trend that in-person gatherings will become more personal. Fourth, pastors will experience a

⁵ Carey Nieuwhof, “12 Disruptive Church Trends That Will Rule 2022 (and the Post-Pandemic Era),” accessed December 9, 2022, <https://careynieuwhof.com/12-disruptive-church-trends-that-will-rule-2022-and-the-post-pandemic-era/>.

⁶ Carey Nieuwhof, “About the Author,” accessed December 9, 2022, <https://careynieuwhof.com/author/carey/>.

⁷ Nieuwhof, “12 Disruptive Church Trends.”

diminished authority. Fifth, the future will be less stable and less likely to predict. These five areas are not exhaustive but serve as indicators that there are more unseen changes ahead. From an academic perspective more research is required; however, from a practical perspective leaders must adapt wisely and swiftly, sooner rather than later.

When examining and exploring possible connections to explain and find cause to these unsettling trends. There appears to a correlation with four out of the five trends. The fifth trend of a new era of instability and unpredictability is an outlier. With a more connected society via technology and a global economy, church leaders must become more agile, comfortable with change, and innovative in hopes to adapt. That is the heart behind disruptive leadership.

However, the remaining four trends of decline, diminished authority with pastoral leadership, need for churches to equip for life during the week, and need for more personal, engaged Sunday gatherings are all pieces of a puzzle. Within these trends, the rapid decline and effectiveness of the old model of church is the outcome of current pastoral leadership practices and the church's practices for the last several decades. Lyle Schaller wrote in the early 1990s about that reality: "The need to initiate and implement planned change from within an organization is the number-one issue today for most congregations, denominations, theological seminaries, parachurch organization, and reform movements."⁸ Still today, a failure to change and innovate has led the Western church to this crossroads, specifically as it pertains Christian leaders, church strategies, and the lack of mission.

For starters, when Nieuwhof states that pastors will see diminished authority, he is implying that the title and position of pastor has lost its power, similar to how the place of the church and Christian faith has lost its significance within the western world. In some ways this is good. The position of pastor or elder was never about wielding power through position or title. The intent and aim of a pastor or elder are defined by the

⁸ Lyle Schaller, *Strategies for Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 10.

characteristics of service, humility, and responsibility within the construct of plurality. Biblical eldership is a responsibility to teach, care, lead, and pray for health and flourishing of the church alongside other able and willing qualified men (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 2). Like in the Garden of Eden, it is not good for man to be alone, and it is equally not good for man to lead alone. When men lead in isolation bad things happen. For example, leadership becomes about reward, power, and authority. Isolation in leadership produces a toxic form of leadership, a dysfunctional leadership that harms people and hurts organization, whereas disruptive leadership is about helping people and creating healthy organizations.

Another connection for the decline of the American church is the behaviors related to church strategies and a lack of mission, or it might be mission confusion where methodology is confused as mission. Nieuwhof's language indicates these missteps and mistakes of bad strategies and mission confusion.⁹ Why does the church need to become more personal? Could it be that the entertainment driven, performance-based gatherings led by experts are not personal? Sunday mornings have become an exclusive environment, where only a few use gifts and talents. It treats and trains the congregation to come and watch. Categorically, the old model of church and leadership has created a new term for this behavior in believers—attenders not disciples. Attending an event is a passive action that requires little sacrifice, low commitment, and certainly no mission. Those passive actions are the direct opposite of Jesus's words to his disciples of sacrifice, allegiance, and mission (Luke 14:27).

Closely related to the emphasis on performance is the emphasis on programming for one to two hours a week. There are 168 hours in every week, yet there is a tendency for church leaders to plan and prepare for two hours. Gathering with believes is important to the Christian faith but Sundays are not the mission. The mission is found in the hours outside of Sunday morning. Nieuwhof writes, "A lot of innovation that has to happen in

⁹ Nieuwhof, "12 Disruptive Church Trends."

the church needs to take place outside of Sunday and outside the building.”¹⁰ When the church and Christian faith were at the center of society, it was easy to see how church practices became program oriented around one day a week. However, the Christian faith and the church are no longer at the center of society. So, strategy must change with an emphasis on mission, and people need to be equipped for all of life (Eph 4:12-14).

The outcome of declining church attendance is a lag output from the behaviors and practices of bad leadership, church strategies, and lack of mission. As mentioned, all are pieces of a puzzle that have contributed to this current reality. According to Gallup in 2021, for the first time ever in the United States church membership has fallen below 50 percent.¹¹ That is a staggering statistic when considering that membership is broad terminology not limited to Christian churches of all mainline denominations but includes membership to synagogues and mosques. The Barna Group conducted research in 2020 that focused on trends defining American Christian church engagement.¹² The research focused on two categories for adults with recent experience in a church: churched adults¹³ and practicing Christians.¹⁴ While new data and research is currently under way, there is a high likelihood it will show further decline.

To that end, Nieuwhof notes, “The current approach to church not only isn’t effective, it hasn’t been effective for decades. Yet leaders keep moving forward as though

¹⁰ Nieuwhof, “12 Disruptive Church Trends.”

¹¹ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls below Majority for First Time,” Gallup, March 29, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

¹² Barna Group, “Five Trends Defining Americans’ Relationship to Church,” February 19, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/current-perceptions/>.

¹³ Barna researchers define *churched adults* as “Americans who have attended a Christian church at least once in the last six months, representing about 49% or 124.4 million adults.” Barna Group, “Five Trends Defining Americans’ Relationship.”

¹⁴ *Practicing Christians* as “a subset of all church adults, are those who attend at least monthly and say their faith is very important. This more committed group comprises about 25% and 63.5 million adults.” Barna Group, “Five Trends Defining Americans’ Relationship.”

somehow things are going to turn around.”¹⁵ Nothing changes if nothing changes. That motto might be appropriate for church leaders to describe the rapid decline over the last decades. Again, Christendom is over, and the training church leaders were given is incomplete and lacking the necessary tools to navigate a new reality—a post-Christian reality. If Christian leaders were taught and trained for a world that has changed and will continue to change, how should church practices evolve and what must church leaders do?

The change required begins with confessing and repenting from the Church Growth Movement’s functional great commission. Will Mancini and Corey Hartman have written out the functional great commission as, “Go into all the world and make more worship attenders, baptizing them in the name of small groups, and teaching them to volunteer a few hours a month.”¹⁶ The next step is for Christian leaders and churches to engage in disruption. Disrupting the status quo and reclaiming the original mission, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt 28:18-20). Reclaiming the original mission will require leaders to remember Jesus is with them and to lead like Jesus by disrupting the status quo within leadership and church practices through the effectiveness of servant leadership, the skill to innovate, and the art of leading change. This practice of disruptive leadership indirectly reshapes the church around mission, dependence on the Spirit, and Christian leaders to lead like Jesus.

¹⁵ Nieuwhof, “12 Disruptive Church Trends.”

¹⁶ Will Mancini and Corey Hartman, *Future Church: Seven Laws of Real Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 15, Kindle.

Implications for the Church

Nearly thirty years ago, Aubrey Malphurs wrote, “Not only are the United States churches plateaued and declining, many are dying.”¹⁷ His statement is a prophetic statement that has only continued to accelerate according to more recent research from Gallup and Barna. For the last several decades, the functional great commission and the ministry of maintenance (i.e., providing religious goods and services of teaching, liturgy, and care) have clearly been ineffective approaches to unleashing the potential of churches becoming a movement of multiplication (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:48; John 21:22; Acts 1:8). Ford, Wegner, and Hirsh write, “Movements require a new culture and a new language.”¹⁸ Therefore, if disruptive leadership is a return to Jesus’s example of leading then the church must return to the culture and language of a New Testament movement. Returning the church to a New Testament movement requires two shifts: (1) move away from an organization of power to being organized to empower, and (2) organize around mission not maintenance.

To shift from an organization of power to organized to empower requires a move away from centralized leadership to a catalytic leadership structure. Centralized leadership structures thrive on hierarchy, where there is a singular leader with support of another set of senior leaders. One should think of a typical corporate structure, where knowledge and power are concentrated in a few, not distributed throughout the organization. Direction and vision are typically communicated top down, whereas approval for decisions is sent up the ladder for final approval. The catalytic leadership structure focuses on decentralized influence, service, development of others, and collaboration among elders and deacons. The catalytic leadership structure is not dependent on a singular leader to give direction. Rather, it is guided by Word and the Spirit to provide direction and vision to move throughout teams of leaders, empowering others toward action through

¹⁷ Aubrey Malphurs, *Pouring New Wine into Old Wineskins: How to Change a Church without Destroying It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 32.

¹⁸ Ford, Wegner, and Hirsch, *The Starfish and the Spirit*, 5.

development, discipleship, and dependence on the Spirit (Eph 4:12). Additionally, centralized leadership structure thinks of a centralized place and time, that is, Sunday mornings or Wednesday nights. Whereas catalytic leadership structure views every aspect of everyday life of work, family, and play as part of the kingdom of God. The implication for the church is to not throw out the baby with the bathwater but to shift from power to empowerment. That requires leaders to seek and submit to the Word and the Spirit's leading. To that end, J. Oswald Sanders notes, "Spiritual goals can be achieved only by spiritual people who use spiritual methods. The secular mind and heart, however gifted and personally charming, has no place in the leadership of the church."¹⁹ The New Testament leadership position of elder and deacon were both defined and described as servant leaders, not to seek after or gain power but to empower others for mission of God.

In the beginning, God's intent for creation and for man was to "be fruitful and multiple" (Gen 1:28). Now, through his Son, he gives the same command to the church, "be fruitful and multiple," by making disciples across the earth. God's intent has never changed. Mark Sayers notes, "God is intent on inviting us into His mission in the world, He primarily uses the pattern of renewal to realign us with His purposes."²⁰ Realignment with mission requires moving away from ministry maintenance. Ministry maintenance keeps programs and people running toward the centralized building, where "ministry and discipleship" takes place. This action only communicates a mission that is functional, not fruitful. It is functional because it gives the impression of discipleship, but it is an incomplete discipleship. Thus, the implication for the church, especially in the West, is to focus on mission and multiplication. Real discipleship begins with mission, not worship attendance, small groups, or serving in a ministry. Those activities are the effects of an

¹⁹ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 35.

²⁰ Mark Sayers, *Reappearing Church: The Hope for Renewal in the Rise of Our Post-Christian Culture* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 34.

effective mission. Ford, Wegner, and Hirsh explain, “Jesus’s commission is for us to continue this multiplication forever until disciples multiply among every tribe, every tongue, and every nation.”²¹ Therefore, the church must realign around the mission of multiplication.

For the church to change its practices it must disrupt itself. That process begins with a realignment around mission and multiplication, and changing from a centralized structure toward a more catalytic structure. When the church structure of leadership is built to mirror the corporate centralized leadership structure it will reproduce function and order. While not evil, God has bigger plans for the church. The local church is more than an organization, a place, or a program. It is a vibrant, dynamic, living body organized around a mission—a mission to “be fruitful and multiple” that can only be accomplished with two radical New Testament normal shifts: (1) move away from an organization of power to being organized to empower; and 2) re-organize around mission not maintenance. To that end, G. K. Chesterton notes, “The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it has established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.”²² Disruptive leadership creates a culture and a church for good things to run wild for the glory of God and the flourishing of creation.

Implications to Christian Leaders

Disruptive leadership not only reshapes the church but reforms Christian leadership practices. It is critical to remember that leadership is first and foremost about influence. Sanders notes, “Leadership is influence, the ability of one person to influence others to follow his or her lead.”²³ How one stewards that influence of leadership can positively or negatively impact others and organizations. Unfortunately, some Christian

²¹ Ford, Wegner, and Hirsch, *The Starfish and the Spirit*, 41.

²² G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon, 2020), 101.

²³ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 29.

leaders make headlines more for harm than good, indicating that those leaders have stewarded the position of leadership in a way that has negatively impacted others and the organization. While these leaders disrupt, the disruption comes from dysfunctional leadership traits, hidden sin, and abuse of power. Sanders continues, “Yet spiritual leadership transcends the power of personality and all other natural gifts. The personality of the spiritual leaders influences others because it is penetrated, saturated, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. As the leader gives control of his life to the Spirit, the Spirit’s power flows through him to others.”²⁴ The spiritual leadership of Jesus influenced and impacted others for their good and for the flourishing²⁵ of creation according to God’s kingdom mandate. Therefore, there are seven implications for Christian leaders when considering disruptive leadership as the art and practice of leading like Jesus.

First, disruptive leaders are motivated by mission. There is a clarity in vision, and vision is the guiding light for disruptive leaders. There is little interest in maintaining or keeping something due to preference or pragmatism. For Christian leaders, the mission has been decided and defined: proclaim the gospel to all of creation and make disciples who multiply disciples (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15). God’s gift of leadership is for his sake and for his renown.²⁶ Disruptive leaders are not motivated by flesh or vain pursuits but from a holy ambition to see the kingdom of God expand.

Second, disruptive leaders seek to serve. At the heart of a disruptive leader is humility to serve and not be served. It is a guiding belief that leadership is a responsibility to serve. Leadership is not a reward to be served by others or to tell others what to do. In *The Motive*, Patrick Lencioni notes, “It’s long past time that we, as individuals and as a society, reestablished the standard that leadership can never be about the leader more than

²⁴ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 30

²⁵ Flourishing includes both physical thriving as well as spiritual thriving Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 40.

²⁶ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 62.

the led.”²⁷ Within the practice of disruptive leadership is a deep conviction that followers come first and the leader comes second. Jesus was the quintessential example of a servant leader. His teaching and example were revolutionary, and it overturned the existing order.²⁸ Servant leadership places emphasis on others, not self. It is a guiding implication for disruption; it does not seek power but looks to empower. It is not motivated by self-interest but rather is led to the interests of others.

Third, disruptive leaders are loving leaders. Becoming a leader that loves begins with accepting and abiding in God’s unconditional love. Accepting and abiding in God’s love toward oneself is the genesis to loving others as Christ has loved them (John 13:34-35). A leader known by Christ and knows Christ’s love is kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving (Eph 4:32). To that point, Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges write, “The antidote for fear and pride is faith in God’s unconditional love for us. The true servant leader is one who clearly understands what unconditional love is all about and puts it into practices every day.”²⁹ Disruptive leaders are known by love; a love that is honest and humble, full of grace and full of grit, and it is tenacious and tender.

Fourth, disruptive leaders are trusted guides in chaos. When the future is unclear, disruptive leaders are calm and collected in the face of chaos. The reason disruptive leaders can guide others and are viewed as trustworthy is related to communication practices. Communication is clear and is clearly communicated. Leaders communicate the present reality to followers and provide direction for the future even with uncertainty looming. The leader’s decisive voice is comforting to others and quiets the tempest within others. Within the marketplace or ministry, these leaders are seen as guides to lead the way built on the creditability of who they are and what they do.

²⁷ Patrick Lencioni, *The Motive: Why So Many Leadership Abdicate Their Most Important Responsibilities* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), 170.

²⁸ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 21.

²⁹ Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *The Servant Leader: Transforming your Heart, Head, Hands, & Habits* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 99.

Fifth, disruptive leaders are curiously creative. These leaders take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. While some leaders might have a more natural tendency toward curiosity and creativity, being curiously creative is a behavior learned by questioning, observing, connecting, and experimenting. The authors of *Innovators DNA*, Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen, describe this attribute with a story from Walt Disney:

One day, a little boy was curious about Disney's job, and Disney vividly recalled the conversation: "I was stumped one day when a little boy asked, 'Do you draw Mickey Mouse?' I had to admit I do not draw any more. 'Then you think up all the jokes and ideas?' 'No,' I said, 'I don't do that.' Finally, he looked at me and said, 'Mr. Disney, just what do you do?' 'Well,' I said, 'I think of myself as a little bee. I go from one area of the studio to another and gather pollen and sort of stimulate everybody.' I guess that's the job I do."³⁰

Disruptive leaders have this natural or learned creativity through curiosity, learning how things work, and finding connections on how things work together. From there, disruptive leaders learn and master the skill of innovation. Innovation is learned and mastered when leaders regularly practice curiosity through learning when to create, how to cultivate, from where to curate, and when to make a change.

Sixth, disruptive leaders break necessary rules. For church leaders, more rules need to be broken. There are few limitations placed on leaders outside of personal constraints. In a constantly changing world, disruptive leaders nurture and develop a healthy challenge toward the status quo. When necessary, disruptive leaders know the correct time to challenge, confront, and make changes to the status quo. The aim for the disruption is not anarchy or leading from arrogance; rather, it comes from the number one implication for disruptive leaders: a conviction of truth and mission. To that point, R. Albert Mohler writes, "The starting point for Christian leadership is not the leader but the eternal truths that God has revealed to us—the truths that allow the world to make sense,

³⁰ Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator's DNA: Mastering the Five Skills of Disruptive Innovators* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2011), 51, Kindle.

frame our understandings, and propel us to action.”³¹ Rules are broken when truth becomes twisted and mission is prohibited through the order and rules of process. Mission trumps methods and man’s preference of comfort and security.

The final and seventh implication for disruptive leaders is a focus on the flourishing of others. The future for Christian leaders is to learn how to become trusted guides to help others reach the summit of potential. Leaders should be a like a sherpa and shepherd; a shepherd that cares and provides (Ps 23) combined with a sherpa that leads and guides up the mountain. Sherpas regularly guide and lead climbers to the summit of Everest, avoiding mistakes and pitfalls along the way. To become an expert guide in leading to the summit, the leader first must be willing to be led, learn, and keep learning. The journey of helping others flourish is risky because it requires meaningful action and meaningful vulnerability; to help others flourish the leader must become a ladder for others to climb on the mountain. The process requires leaders to care and cultivate health within the follower. According to Steve Cockram and Jeremie Kubicek, “To be a leader worth following, it requires the leader to become a leader people want to follow.”³² Disruptive leaders focus on flourishing of others, but before that begins, the leader must be flourishing themselves. A leader can share what they know but will ultimately reproduce who they are.

Conclusion

In conclusion, disruptive leadership is not about creating disruption for the sake of disruption. Nor is it a quick fix to explosive church growth. Disruption is the outcome of a new way of leading—a new of way leading that is for the good of others and the flourishing of creation. That new way of leading is needed for Christian leaders in ministry

³¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2012), 27.

³² Jeremie Kubicek and Steve Cockram, *The 100x Leader: How to Become Someone Worth Following* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2019), 10.

settings and the marketplace. The world is changing at a rapid pace and the time is now to act. Disruption is needed in a good way. A disruptive outcome from the art and practice of leading like Jesus through combining the skill of innovation, art of leading change, and effectiveness of servant leadership—a leadership model that is not limited to a practice and theory but a model of leadership worth following and replicating. Disruptive leadership is a style of integrative disruptive behaviors and skills that, namely, reshape leadership. Jesus was disruptive because he served first. He was disruptive because he innovated according to God’s command. He was disruptive because he led change for the good of the world and God’s glory. Eventually it cost Him his life but that is the call and cost of leading like Jesus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”³³ Leading like Jesus does not create celebrity or success. It is a leadership of dying to oneself, suffering on the behalf of others, serving, and sacrifice. Imagine the potential of what could or might be if Christian leaders practiced this type of leadership in the marketplace and in local church. Leaders that lead through service, have the skill to innovate, and the ability to leader change for the good of others and the community. Disruptive leadership is the art and practice of leading like Jesus because it is a style of leadership that leads with an upright heart and guides others with skillful hands (Ps 78:72).

³³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 89.

APPENDIX 1

KEY TERMS

Servant Leadership: a posture of Leadership that places the flourishing of others first as a primary focus, where the leader serves their follower by seeking their highest possible good through empowerment, support, and challenge as their primary responsibility as a leader.

Change Leadership: the art of effectively influencing people to embrace change, implementing necessary changes within an organization to enable future growth, and navigating the change process from the current state to a future vision of what might be.

Innovation: the skill to identify and assess new opportunities while creating, cultivating, curating, or changing that inspire others to embrace new ways of thinking, products, or approaches to opportunities.

Disruptive Leadership: an integrated leadership model that combines servant leadership's effectiveness, the art of leading change, and the skill of innovation.

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ABSTRACT

DISRUPTIVE LEADERSHIP: THE ART AND PRACTICE OF LEADING LIKE JESUS

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This thesis presents disruptive leadership as a unique combination the effectiveness of servant leadership, the art of leading change, and the skill of innovation. Chapter 1 details and explains the need for a new model of leadership. Within chapters 2 and 3, this study surveys leadership theories and practices from the contemporary and Christian perspectives examining the potential combination of servant leadership, innovation, and leading change theory. Those chapters present an integrative model, disruptive leadership, that compliments the literature and practices on leadership. Additionally, those chapters argue that leadership is multifaceted and multidimensional, meaning it is skill and process while art and practice. To illustrate this model, chapter 4 examines the life and leadership of Jesus as the penultimate disruptive leader, whose leadership does not fit in one unique theory and practice. The study concludes, in chapter 5, by exhorting the church and Christian leaders that the world has changed and therefore Christian leaders to must take the necessary steps be disruptive or they will be disrupted. This change requires leaders to lead with a servant's heart, with the skill of innovation and with art of leading in uncharted territory.

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