



Chapter 01

Jesus & True Leadership

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UNDERSTANDING

What do I need to know about this passage?

He is one of the most influential people in history. From the beginning, he was talented and charismatic. His intelligence was second to none. His ability to strategize, accomplish his goals, and apply the best techniques, methods, and systems in pursuit of his mission was unmatched. He could persuade others and recruit them to be a part of his team with incredible effectiveness. He remained fully committed to achieving what he set out to do and didn't allow himself to be distracted by other things. And while not always perfectly successful, more often than not, his performance in pursuit of his goals was exceptional. It would not be incorrect to say that he has influenced billions of people in human history.

Who is this influential person? Who was it that had all these incredible gifts and talents and made such an impact on the world? It is the devil, Satan, the accuser, the adversary, the deceiver, the enemy of mankind.

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In today's world, leadership is often measured by a person's talents and abilities, their charisma and "people skills," their titles and positions, or their impact and influence. But just because someone possesses these qualities doesn't mean they are a good leader. At the heart of leadership is something much more important.

In the beginning, God made the world and mankind good. He designed everything in creation to bring about what was best for His people. He provided for their every need. He made a world full of order and great harmony that was meant to allow us to flourish as human beings. He knows who we are, what we are made for, and what is ultimately best for us—eternal life with Him. God Himself is the one true leader.

God also invites us to share in His leadership. He said, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen 1:28). He allowed Adam to till the soil and name the animals, sharing in His creative work. This brings us to the center of Christian leadership: participation with God in bringing about His good plan for the world. Indeed, "All true leadership is a participation in the leadership of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit."¹

¹ Habiger Institute for Catholic Leadership, *True Leadership*, pp. 8-9.

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Without this foundation, leadership often devolves into mere worldly pursuits, self-aggrandizement, or worse. If we want to be great leaders, then before we consider our talents, our goals, or our influence, we need to be committed to what is good, to participating in the beautiful plan that God has for us.

Vision and Character

We often struggle to be great leaders because we are fallen creatures. Our minds are “conformed to this world” and not aligned with the “mind of Christ” (Rom 12:2, 1 Cor 2:16). We don’t readily see the world as Christ sees it, and often place value on pleasure, prestige, worldly success, ease, attention, efficiency, productivity, and comfort more than Christ does. And even when we do see things clearly, we can struggle to do it. Like St. Paul, we lament, “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Rom 7:19). The good news for us is that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be made new. Not only can we know the good, but we can desire it and choose it as well by acquiring virtue.

Virtue is “a habitual and firm disposition to do good,” that enables us to choose what is right consistently, promptly, easily, and with joy (CCC 1833). It allows us to not only perform good acts, but to give the very best of ourselves to God and

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others. Virtue leads us to the good life because it closes the gap between who we are today and who we know we are called to be. It directs us away from sin and toward the good. The goal of the virtuous life is to put our freedom to good use and become like God, loving as He loved, which leads to the happiness and joy that we desire most.

To be great leaders, we need vision and character, and there are two kinds of virtues that we need for this purpose, the theological and the cardinal. Both sets of virtues shape our vision and character, but there is a particular way that the theological virtues direct our vision and the cardinal virtues build our character. Let’s look at each.

Vision – The Theological Virtues

If we don’t know what life is for, what is most important, and what Christ values most, then we won’t be able to lead others well. We will be like “blind guides,” of whom Jesus says, “if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Mt 15:14). As leaders, if we hope to lead someone to a certain goal, do we know what the best goal is? Or do we understand how the smaller goals in life—a business or a family—fit into God’s larger purposes for each individual and community? Do we know the best means by which to achieve that goal? And do the right principles guide our decisions?

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Some aspects of leadership praised today might actually be despised by Christ and His example on the Cross. The world often seeks the praise of men: more likes and followers, more applause, and the satisfaction of worldly success. But Jesus lived differently. He embraced a hidden life for thirty years. Then, in His public ministry, He was misunderstood, rejected, and ultimately killed by the very people He came to serve.

Examine yourself. Are you willing to lead like Jesus? What do you value most in life? Are these the things that Christ values? Is that what you see in His example, especially in His passion and death on the cross, which is the true measure of our lives and our leadership? Do you have a vision that values patience, humility, generosity, sacrifice, and kindness? Are you convinced that the truth is worth suffering for, even when it is hidden, nobody notices, or it leads to criticism or rejection? Do you have wisdom to see the whole of life, perceiving what matters most, what is true, good, and beautiful? Do you give most of your attention to quantifiable technical, administrative, or procedural questions, or do you engage more with the deeper questions of life: Who are we? What does God want for us? How can we fulfill His good plan for our lives? If you are like most people, you need help to renew your vision.

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How can we ensure that we have the right vision, so that we can lead effectively? The answer is the theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. These virtues “relate directly to God” and are “infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life” (CCC 1812-1813). The theological virtues enable us to participate in God's divine life, draw us into a living relationship with the Holy Trinity, and are the foundation of the Christian life.

Faith elevates our intellect, so that we can see reality clearly. It allows us to value what Christ values, see what He sees, and live by same principles by which He lived. By faith we “believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us” (CCC 1814). This isn't merely accepting Catholic doctrine—though it includes that too—it's allowing our minds to be fully reshaped by Christ, so that we can see everything in a new, fuller light. Hope elevates our desires to a supernatural level enabling us to “desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1817).

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And charity upholds and animates all the other virtues, enabling us to “love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God” (CCC 1822). Each of these virtues will be discussed further in future chapters.

Character – The Cardinal Virtues

But vision alone is insufficient. We also need strong moral character. If we don’t have character, the disharmony within us will prevent us from leading well. For example, we might make bad decisions because we want people to like us too much. Maybe we will gossip about people and tear them down because we want to feel important. Perhaps we won’t give the best of ourselves because we are lazy. Or maybe we will struggle to deny ourselves pleasure and comfort when good leadership requires it. In other words, we need character to act in accord with our vision. Without it, our vision will simply become a lofty ideal that we won’t be able to bring to fruition.

The cardinal virtues shape our moral character. They are “firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith” (CCC 1804). Cardinal comes from the word “cardo,” which means “hinge.” These virtues are the four habits on which the ability

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to live a moral life depends. They are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. **Wisdom 8:7** proclaims, “And if anyone loves righteousness, her labors are virtues; for she teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage nothing in life is more profitable for mortals than these.”

Prudence perfects our intellect and “disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it” (CCC 1806). Justice perfects our will, driving us to give to God and others their due (CCC 1807). Fortitude perfects our desires, ensuring “firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of good” (CCC 1808). Temperance also perfects our desires, “moderat[ing] our attractions to pleasures and balance[ing]” our “use of created goods” (CCC 1809). We will discuss each of these virtues in more detail in future chapters.

The cardinal virtues can be achieved through human effort, strengthened by God’s grace. When we pursue these virtues in our everyday lives by asking for them in prayer, learning about them, practicing them, and striving to persevere in them, even when we struggle or fail, the Holy Spirit sustains us and transforms us into the people we desire to become. By growing in these virtues, we become people capable of doing the good and accomplishing what is right according to our Christian vision of the world.

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Jesus

Jesus had both perfect vision and character. He is our model of the theological and cardinal virtues. His clear vision often upended worldly wisdom: “the last will be first,” “blessed are the poor in spirit,” “seek first His kingdom,” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 5:3, 6:33, 20:16, 22:39). And not only did He teach these things, but He also had the character to act on His vision. He cared for the poor and lowly. He took the “form a servant” (Phil 2:7). And, ultimately, He gave His life for the good of others.

Then, He taught His apostles to lead like He did. Consider this episode with James and John:

James and John spent almost every day with Jesus, either seated at His feet learning about the kingdom of God or watching in amazement as He healed the sick, fed the five thousand, walked on water, and was transfigured before their eyes. But on one journey, James and John reveal that they don’t fully understand Jesus’s leadership yet. Boldly, they approach Jesus and ask, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mk 10:37). Although Jesus repeatedly predicted His own death, the two apostles still believed that Jesus would set up an earthly kingdom, defeat the Roman’s, and usher in a new age of glory for Israel. The two

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brothers were asking for elevated ranking, a place of honor in the kingdom as they perceived it.

But instead of responding directly, Jesus answers, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?” (Mk 10:38). Then, He gathers the apostles together and clarifies what true leadership is all about. He points out that the rulers among the Gentiles “lord it over” others, and then firmly says, “[I]t shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (Mk 10:42–44). Jesus then points to His own example, how He “came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). By referencing His coming Passion, Jesus shows the apostles that the pinnacle of true leadership is laying down one’s life for the good of others.

Later, Jesus commissioned His apostles to imitate His example of servant leadership by washing their feet on the night of the Last Supper: “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:12–15).

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After His resurrection, the apostles went out and served just as Jesus had commanded, caring for others in love and preaching the Gospel with courage, in imitation of their master. Their outstanding lives of virtue became a bright, refreshing light, in middle of the corruption of the Roman empire. Pagans marveled at their lives, saying, “See...how they love one another!” Their leadership flowed from their vision and their character, shaped by the virtues they imitated in Christ Himself.

Application: Moral Authority

The saints are the best Christ-like leaders in history. People like St. Francis of Assisi brought about radical reform and renewal in the Church. Saints like St. Teresa of Calcutta challenged the world to uphold human dignity for all people, no matter their color, background, or economic status, and people followed them—even non-believers. But the saints were not great leaders primarily because of their gifts, talents, positions of authority, or because they used the best techniques. They were great leaders because they had moral authority.

Moral authority is the ability to lead others not by title or position, but by the way we live. But moral authority is more than simply practicing what we preach; it is a spiritual principle. As Christians, and especially as Christian leaders, we aren’t simply

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trying to do what is right—make good decisions, be kind, serve generously—as good as all that is. As Christian leaders, we want Christ to work in and through us. We want to say with St. Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). By serving like Christ, giving like Christ, and ultimately dying to ourselves for the sake of others in imitation of Christ, we aren’t merely giving of ourselves, we are allowing Him to work through us. We aren’t merely doing good things; we are becoming like Jesus. This is the leadership we are called to as Christians.

How can we begin to live in this way? What does it look like? First, it means making Christ the center of everything we do, committing ourselves to prayer, following His teachings, and receiving His grace in the sacraments. It means living honestly, humbly, and generously, inviting Christ into every corner of hearts, so that when others look at us, they will be able to see Him. If we do this, then we will be free to say, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

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So, what about you? Will you embrace your call to Christ-like leadership? The Lord is calling you to lead with the right vision and character from a place of moral authority. He is inviting you to take your place among the saints and build His kingdom. Over the course of this Bible study, take advantage of the opportunity in front of you. Study the virtues deeply, and let the Holy Spirit transform you, so that you can follow Christ's example, become more like Him, and lead like He did.

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DISCUSSION

Mark 10:35–44
Wisdom 8:7

Discussion guide for your Bible study

Please read aloud:

He is one of the most influential people in history. From the beginning, he was talented and charismatic. His intelligence was second to none. His ability to strategize, accomplish his goals, and apply the best techniques, methods, and systems in pursuit of his mission was unmatched. He could persuade others and recruit them to be a part of his team with incredible effectiveness. He remained fully committed to achieving what he set out to do and didn't allow himself to be distracted by other things. And while not always perfectly successful, more often than not, his performance in pursuit of his goals was exceptional. It would not be incorrect to say that he has influenced billions of people in human history.

01. Launching Question: Who do you think this person is? Who was it that had all these incredible gifts and talents and made such an impact on the world?

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Answer: It is the devil, Satan, the accuser, the adversary, the deceiver, the enemy of mankind.

02. Few would say that the Devil is a good leader. Yet it's hard to deny that he had many of the qualities that leadership is often measured by in today's world. If it's not merely these qualities, what is it that makes a good leader?

Allow the group to discuss.

Note to the leader: Draw out that leadership must also include leading others toward the good—ultimately to God and His plan for us—not merely “winning friends and influencing people.”

Please read aloud:

In today's world, leadership is often measured by a person's talents, titles, and ability to impact others. But just because someone possesses these qualities doesn't mean they are a good leader. At the heart of leadership is something much more important.

God is the one true leader. All true leadership, therefore, is a share in His own. When He created man, He said, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion... over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). God invites man to participate in His leadership to bring about His good plan for the world.

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If we're wondering what a perfect leader looks like, we need to look no further than the incarnation. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, was the perfect leader. By studying his example, we can learn how to participate in God's leadership, bringing about His good plan in the world.

Let's take a moment to study Christ's leadership.

Read Mark 10:35–44

03. What do James and John ask of Jesus? What sort of leader are they imagining that Jesus is going to become?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: James and John ask Jesus for positions of power and influence in His Kingdom. They still seem to believe that Jesus is on the brink of establishing a worldly kingdom, despite Jesus' repeated predictions of his own suffering and death.

04. How does Jesus respond? What does his answer reveal about leadership in the Kingdom of God?

Allow the group to discuss.

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Answer: Jesus answers, "You do not know what you are asking" (Mk 10:38) before elaborating on the differences between "Gentile" leadership and the qualities of leadership proper to a disciple, among them the imitation of Christ (drinking His "cup," even to the point of laying down one's life for another) and humble service.

05. Christ's leadership consists in serving others and laying down his own life out of love. How does this vision of leadership clash with James and John's expectations? How might it clash with certain modern ideas of what leadership looks like?

Allow the group to discuss.

Possible answers: While James and John are expecting personal advantages and positions in the Kingdom, Jesus offers them the Cross with all its suffering, humiliation, and apparent failure. This paradigm of selfless service and sacrifice often clashes with a worldly ideal of leadership—filled with likes, followers, applause, and satisfaction in worldly success.

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Please read aloud:

While it may be easy to believe that we value Christ's leadership style over predominant modes of leadership, it can be helpful to pause and examine ourselves. Consider:

- Do you consistently make small decisions in light of your ultimate goal, informed by the Gospel?
- What do you value most in life? Are these the things that Christ values?
- Have you found yourself suffering to lead others well, as Christ does?
- Do you value patience, humility, generosity, and sacrifice over efficiency, results, notoriety, and success?
- Do you consistently consider the deeper questions of life: Who are we? Who is God? What does God desire for us? How can we fulfill His plan for our lives?

If you're like most people, you need help renewing your vision of leadership according to the mind of Christ.

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06. In what ways do you value Christ's vision of leadership over that of the world? In what ways does your idea of leadership need to be conformed to Christ's?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

So how are we to go about conforming our leadership to that of Christ's? For this, we will need what's called "virtue." The virtues give us both the vision and the character we need to be Christlike leaders.

Virtue is "a habitual and firm disposition to do good" (CCC 1833). It enables us to choose what is right consistently, promptly, easily, and with joy. The goal of the virtuous life is to put our freedom to good use and become like God, loving as He loved, which leads to happiness and joy.

There are two kinds of virtues we will be studying today, the "theological" virtues and the "cardinal" virtues. Though both shape our vision and character, there is a particular way in which the theological virtues shape our vision and the cardinal virtues form our character.

We'll start by looking at the theological virtues in the Catechism and consider how they shape our vision.

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Read Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 1812–1813:

The human virtues are rooted in the theological virtues, which adapt man's faculties for participation in the divine nature: for the theological virtues relate directly to God. They dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive, and object.

The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity.

07. What does the Catechism tell us about the theological virtues? How would you describe faith, hope, and love?

Note to the leader: Consider taking them one at a time. Draw out the following definitions without spending too much time on the topic.

- **Faith** elevates our intellect so that we can see reality clearly. By faith we “believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us” (CCC 1814). This

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isn't merely accepting Catholic doctrine—though it includes that too—it's allowing our minds to be fully reshaped by Christ, so that we can see everything in a new, fuller light.

- **Hope** elevates our desires to a supernatural level, enabling us to “desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1817).
 - **Charity** perfects our will, upholding and animating all the other virtues, enabling us to “love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God” (CCC 1822).
08. How do the theological virtues – faith, hope, and charity – give Christian leaders the proper vision? Why are they necessary for leading well?

Allow the group to discuss.

Possible Answers: The theological virtues allow us to see clearly who we are and where we are going. Faith allows us to see reality clearly, believing in God and all that God has revealed to us. Hope gives us confidence that the journey is not in vain—

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we really can arrive at perfect and eternal beatitude with God forever in heaven and bring others with us. Finally, charity animates all our activities and prayers, grounding them in love of God and love of neighbor.

Please read aloud:

Without the theological virtues, we won't know what life is truly for, what is most important, or what Christ values most. But vision alone is insufficient. We also need character to act in accord with that vision. The next set of virtues that we'll look at are known as the "cardinal" virtues, which form our character.

Read Wisdom 8:7**Please read aloud:**

Cardinal comes from the word "cardo," which means "hinge." Traditionally, these are the virtues on which every other moral virtue "hinges." The ability to live a moral life depends on mastering them.

09. What are the four cardinal Virtues? How would you define each of these virtues?

Note to the leader: Consider taking them one at a time. Draw out the following definitions without spending too much time on the topic.

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Answer:

- Prudence is "right reason in action," it "disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it" (CCC 1806).
- Justice perfects our will, driving us to give to God and others their due (CCC 1807).
- Temperance (or Self-Control) perfects our desires, "moderat[ing] our attractions to pleasures and balance[ing]" our "use of created goods" (CCC 1809).
- Fortitude (or courage) also perfects our desires, ensuring "firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of good" (CCC 1808).

10. How do the cardinal virtues form our character as Christian leaders? What would it look like if we had a proper vision (ie. faith, hope, and love) but lacked prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude?

Allow the group to discuss.

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Possible Answers: A leader that has vision but lacks character would know who he is and where to lead others, but his character would prevent him from reaching the destination. In difficult moments, he might fail in fortitude, turning away from the right path out of fear or weakness. Or perhaps this leader, because he lacks prudence, attempts to pursue some real good but with the wrong methods, priorities, or timing, preventing the effort from bearing real fruit. Or perhaps he may fail to give the best of himself to those he serves because he is lazy and intemperate in his desire for rest, ease, and comfort.

Please read aloud:

We've discussed the need for virtue in Christian leadership and discussed both the theological and cardinal virtues, which are the foundations of a virtuous life. But why do these virtues make us effective Christlike leaders? The answer lies in the lives of the saints.

Briefly share 1-2 of your favorite examples of saints and the impact they had on the Church and world.

The saints are the best Christ-like leaders in history. People followed them—often even non-believers. But the saints were not great leaders primarily because of their gifts, talents, or positions of authority. They were great

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leaders because they had moral authority, the ability to lead others simply by the way we live.

11. Have you ever been inspired by someone and desired to follow or learn from them because of the way they live? What were they like? What virtues did they possess?

Allow the group to discuss. Draw out that the reason that these people are inspiring is because they have moral authority.

12. What about you? Do you think you have moral authority? If not, what virtues might you need to grow in so that you can lead others in Christlike fashion?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

Moral authority is more than simply practicing what we preach; it is a spiritual principle. As Christians, and especially as Christian leaders, we aren't merely trying to do what is right - we want Christ to live in us. We want to say with St. Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

This means making Christ the center of everything we do, committing ourselves to prayer, following His teachings, and receiving

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His grace in the sacraments. It means living honestly, humbly, and generously, inviting Christ into every corner of hearts, so that when others look at us, they will be able to see Him.

Over the course of this Bible study, take advantage of the opportunity in front of you. We'll be learning about each of the cardinal and theological virtues in more depth, examining them one at a time through various biblical characters. In learning about these virtues, we'll be better equipped to become the Christlike leaders we were meant to be.

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