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“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.”

— John 14:11-12

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The definitions of leadership we’ve covered from Hebrew and Greek are based primarily on a human understanding of leadership. But if we view leadership through the lens of a relational system with God, we must consider how it is that God leads us, and model our leadership accordingly. Because — over and over again — Jesus took our temporal ideas of what a leader looks like, and turned them inside out.

The idea of a leader as the one who is first, the highest, the one to be most honored was shattered by Jesus. Although Jesus was eventually understood to be the “head” of the church (*ro’sh* and *kephalēn*), during his lifetime he would say, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

His was not a place of honor among the elite of the land. As the Son of God Jesus was certainly the first (*prōtos*) among the creation to which he had come, but he was not recognized for his power or glory. The family chosen to raise the baby until he became a man was not influential or worldly, but impoverished and humble. How this must affect our understanding of Christian leadership is unmistakably clear. In Jesus’s own words:

*You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it 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. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

Then we have the concept of a leader as being the one “lifted up” (*nasi*’) to be admired. Instead of being honored as a leader to emulate, Jesus was lifted up with his hands and feet nailed to a criminal’s cross: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” Although he possessed limitless power (*dynatos*), he did not use that power for himself, but only to heal and to demonstrate God’s power.

He did not seek positional authority (*melek, sar*), but refused outright to be named as a worldly leader: “*Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*” Jesus’s authority for leadership was not bestowed upon him, but was a part of his very nature. Nearing the time of his execution, he proclaimed: “*My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.*”

Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus was the true teacher (*kathegetes*) and the genuinely wise guide (*hegéomai*). Jesus — the One through whom all things were made and in whom we live and move and have our being — this same Jesus was willing to put aside power and privilege and glory to teach and guide us. To lead us.

#### QUESTION:

Think of someone whose leadership has made an impact on your life. How did he or she lead? What in particular about that person’s leadership style was most impressive to you?

#### NOTES