Leading With Love

By Ray R. Troyer

To lead with love, we need first to understand God's love. We need to understand where this love comes from, what this love does, and what this love does not do. Having God's love in our hearts will then enable us to love our fellow men properly.[1]

As leaders, we must recognize the importance of committing our lives into the hands of the Lord. We get different results depending whose hands we commit things to. For example, a shepherd uses a rod to protect the sheep and chase away wild animals. Moses also used a rod as he was leading the Israelites out of Egypt; God asked him to hold out this rod over the Red Sea to part the waters. A little boy went to a meeting one day with two fish and five pieces of bread. That would've been his lunch, but by giving those two fish and five pieces of bread into Jesus' hands, thousands of people were fed. The results depend on whose hands we surrender our lives to.

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The Source of Love. God is love. We can love other people, and we can receive love from other people, but God is the only source of love. In 1 John 4:7–8 it says, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

The most quoted verse in the Bible says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God has demonstrated what His love looks like through His Son.

True Love. In our world today, the word *love* in English is used very liberally and often has a distorted meaning. You can "love" almost anything—the weather, your pet, your pizza, or your spouse. Whereas English only has one word for *love,* Biblical Greek has four distinct words: a sacrificial love, a romantic love, a friendship love, and a familial love.

Leaders need sacrificial (*agape*) love. Sacrificial love isn't the type of love you might have for your horse, unless you would be willing to die for your horse. Sacrificial love is unconditional. It's focused on giving, not on receiving. It will go the second mile.

The love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, defines love practically. Love is patient and kind. It doesn't envy, boast, or dishonor others. It isn't proud or defensive. This is a

[1] "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).

barometer for you. As you lead in the workplace, ask yourself, "Am I leading with this kind of love?"

To find out if you are leading with love, read 1 Corinthians 13 and ask yourself these questions: How is your patience? How is your kindness? Do you dishonor others by criticizing them to make yourself look good? That's what Jesus calls being a hypocrite—having a beam in your own eye while trying to take out your brother's little splinter.

As a leader, showing true love doesn't depend on the behavior of others. It's not a result of merits, circumstances, happenings, or performance. If you think God's love depends on behavior, you are making love a reward. That's conditional love. Love from God is unconditional. It doesn't matter who the person is or what that person does.

There is a difference between loving a person and loving his or her actions. God loves every person. He doesn't always love the individual's actions, but He loves the person. We sometimes struggle to love another person, because we're looking at the person's actions or behavior, which distract us from loving the individual. We forget that every person is created in God's image.

Receiving Love and Loving Others

Jesus said in John 3 that if you're not born again, you can't enter the kingdom of God. Being born again means receiving God's love, and receiving God's love will change your life, because God's love is powerful and alive. His love will penetrate your heart, and like detergent, it will cleanse the stain of sin. You won't be a perfect person from that day forward, but God's love will change you, and you will mature spiritually.

To understand what a great gift this is, you need to see how much God has forgiven you. God's love is not based on your righteousness, but on His love. "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done" (Titus 3:4–5). Luke 7:47 says, "But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." If you don't realize how much God has forgiven you, you won't have a lot of love to give.

That doesn't mean you should go out and commit major sins in order to experience more forgiveness, so you can have more love to give. We often think of disobedience to parents and a rebellious life as major sins, but a major sin can be as simple as a negative way of looking at other people. Instead of seeing how much God values others, we tend to think of ourselves as better and forget how much we've been forgiven.

Removing Blockages. If you have a heart issue, symptoms will show on the outside. Clogged arteries restrict blood flow to and from the heart. If you are struggling in sin, you won't be able to love other people unconditionally. The way God's principles work is that you can only love freely when the blockages of sin are removed from your life.

Psalm 139:23–24 contains a powerful prayer inviting God to remove these blockages in your life. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Praying this sincerely allows God to search all areas of your heart, leaving nothing unturned.

Obeying the Greatest Commands. A lawyer asked Jesus what the most important commandment is, and Jesus replied that it is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). In 1 John 4:19 it says that you didn't love God first, but He loved you first. And that is why you should love Him. Your love for Him enables you to love others.

Jesus' second command is to love your neighbors as yourself. This impacts how you think about yourself and others. You aren't the most important person. Esteem others as more important.

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"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). You need to love God before you can love your fellow men the way Jesus asks you to. You can't obey these commands in your own strength.

Following these two commands enables you to obey these principles woven throughout the Bible. If people tell you that they have God's love in their hearts, but they

aren't upholding the commands of Christ, then they aren't following the two greatest commands.

Leading With Love Is…

. . . Not About You. If you are leading for your own personal gain, you are not leading with love. The best way to understand how to lead with love is to look at a person who has lived that kind of life. Jesus is leading a "business" called the kingdom of God, and His life is the ultimate example of unselfish love.

John 15:13 says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Jesus was used and abused. He was blindfolded, mocked, and spit upon. His hair was pulled. And after all the abuse and torture, He was nailed to the cross. He forgave those who crucified Him. We have an awesome King whose suffering was undeserved, yet He did this willingly for us. This is the perfect example of how leading with love is not about ourselves.

Leading With Love Is
...Not About You
...For the Good of Another Person
...From the Heart
...Sacrificing for the Sheep

Have you ever been mistaken for Jesus? Let me tell you a story. Three salesmen were away from home for a couple days attending a sales conference. On Friday afternoon, they were in a hurry to get back home. As they ran through the airport to catch their flight, one of their suitcases caught the corner of an apple stand. The stand fell over and apples went flying all over the terminal.

Without stopping or looking back, the men all managed to reach the plane just in time to board. All but one!

He paused, took a deep breath, quickly assessed the situation and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl whose apple stand had been overturned. He told his buddies to go on without him and waved good-bye. Then, he returned to the terminal.

He found the owner of the stand, a 16-year-old blind girl, groping around on her hands and knees, gathering up the spilled apples. As she was struggling to find her apples, all the other people in the terminal kept walking right past her.

This man, in his nice suit and tie, got down on his hands and knees and helped the blind girl gather up the apples. Some apples were bumped and bruised and no longer of any value, so they put those apples in a different basket. After they were done, he got out his wallet and gave the blind girl $40 to pay for the damaged apples.

As he started to leave, the blind girl called after him, "Are you Jesus?"

What do you think went through this man's mind? At that moment it didn't really matter to him that he had missed his flight and would get home late. All the other people had ignored the girl. They did exactly what you and I do many times. We see people struggling, but we keep right on going. When we see people struggling, let's stop and help them. Let's be an example to them of Jesus.

. . . For the Good of Another Person. In 1921 Lewis Lawes was appointed warden at the Sing Sing prison in New York, a notorious prison where wardens usually didn't last long. His wife Kathryn was warned to stay away from the prison because of the dangerous inmates.

Motivated by God's love, Kathryn went in anyway to care for the inmates. She noticed a blind inmate and asked if he knew Braille. When Kathryn found out he didn't, she learned Braille herself, so she could teach this blind inmate how to read. Later, Kathryn observed that one of the inmates was deaf and didn't know sign language, so she learned sign language and taught him, so he could communicate.

One morning Lewis didn't show up for his job as warden. They asked the substitute where Lewis was and found out Kathryn had been killed the previous night. The inmates were shocked.

The following morning the substitute warden came into the courtyard and noticed the inmates standing together facing the same direction, their faces solemn. Some had tear streaks on their cheeks. The substitute warden realized that they were facing Kathryn's house three quarters of a mile down the road where Kathryn lay in a coffin.

The warden told them, "I'm not allowed to do this, but I will unlock that door, and you can walk down the road to Kathryn's house and pay your last respects. Just be sure that you all report back to prison tonight." The warden put his job on the line by letting those prisoners out on the road, unguarded.

That night every last prisoner reported back to prison.

The power of God's love through Kathryn had prevailed. This kind of love will motivate you to do what is best for your fellow men. It is intentional about helping other people without expectation of a return. It can powerfully impact people's lives and make a difference in even the most difficult situations.

. . . From the Heart. If we are going to lead with love, we will bring out the BEST in our employees:

Believe in them.
Encourage them.
Share with them.
Trust them.

If you look at your employees as objects, you will expect them to function as a machine. You will get upset when you hit the start button but not everything functions as it says in the owner's manual. You need to understand, however, that your employees are people created in God's image. They are all different and operate in unique ways. Leading with love is from the heart; it means genuinely caring for your employees.

. . . Sacrificing for the Sheep. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). The true shepherd sacrifices for the good of the sheep.

In contrast, the hireling won't personally sacrifice for the sheep because the hireling doesn't value the sheep as much as the true shepherd does.

A good shepherd knows and understands his sheep. He knows every sheep by name. He knows the behavior of every individual. He immediately notices if one is missing. He will sacrifice personally because every sheep has value, and taking care of his sheep is his top priority. He makes sure they are well-fed, watered, and healthy.

Leading with love in your business requires you to know and understand your employees. You will sacrifice personally for them since they are valuable and made in God's image.

In conclusion, being rooted in Christ—the only true Source of love—enables loving leadership. We must recognize the importance of committing our lives into the Lord's hands and letting Him use us as channels of love. Remember, the results will drastically differ depending on whose hands you commit things in to. You can only give love freely if you have removed any blockages to receiving love freely. Truly loving God enables you to love others unconditionally. Leading with love isn't about you. It's about the good of the other person.

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