

Preface

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be servant of all.”

—*Mark 10:43b–44*

What does “servant leadership” mean to you? Best-selling books and online media portray it as humbly meeting people’s needs, but they leave out things like sacrifice, boldness, and risk. Of course, they also leave out God.

Perhaps it’s wise to visit the roots of the servanthood movement for some perspective. Robert K. Greenleaf introduced us to the concept in his groundbreaking 1970 essay, “The Servant as Leader.” He writes, “The servant-leader is servant first. . . . Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.”

In the ensuing decades, servant leadership spread into our vernacular. Several books, such as *Lead Like Jesus* by Ken Blanchard (MJF Books, 2005), sought to establish a more biblical beachhead upon Greenleaf’s foundational writings. Blanchard certainly caught the fancy of corporate thought leaders. But since

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then, secular media like the *Harvard Business Review* have referred to servant leadership without any mention of Jesus.

Today—especially in the marketplace—servant leadership is little more than a synonym for humility. If you're humble, you're a servant leader (so it goes); if you serve your people, you're part of the humble nobility.

Humbly serving is not a bad thing.

It's just incomplete.

Enter the Strong Servant

Do any of the following desires resonate with you?

- “I want to be a biblical leader, but I need some fresh inspiration.”
- “People often view my servanthood as weakness; I want to come across as more confident.”
- “I want to serve, but I need to get people's respect first.”

These sentiments echo through the board rooms of businesses, churches, governments, NGOs, and universities. If you feel the need to build authority and strength before trying out servanthood, you're not alone. It takes grit and confidence to be a humble servant.

Servant leadership is enabled by authority. But can we really command authority while we serve people? Is it possible to wield power and exhibit servanthood at the same time?

It is a strange coupling indeed.

My Own Journey

I needed to read this book as much as I needed to write it.

For many years, I struggled to lead in a difficult environment (which is where I got the title for my book, *Leading from the Lions' Den*). My colleagues seemed to thrive on conflict. I sure didn't.

I tried to lead like a servant but couldn't compete with their charisma and intensity. How do you lead when the culture rewards ego and power?

Things changed. I became CEO a few years ago. Several people left, and new A-players came on board.

I knew I needed to up my leadership quotient. I turned back to the Bible. Since I've used it as a leadership textbook before, I resolved to take a deeper look.

This time, instead of mining just one leadership verse from each of the sixty-six books, I marked every verse throughout the entire Bible that had to do with leadership. After a while, the Holy Spirit guided me toward a vision for this book you now hold: **to call servant-minded leaders to boldly champion God's will for their companies, churches, organizations, and families.**

As I read the Bible, I was flooded by truths, concepts, and stories that renewed my passion for God's Word and for leadership. The more I read, the more I believed the Bible needed a fresh introduction into the servant leadership conversation.

How to Use This Book

My hope for this book was to create a practical how-to tool for Christian leadership development. You'll see I've injected micro-devotions throughout the chapters, offering compact concepts and verses you can study, share, and discuss. For example:

"God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power, love & self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7, NLT). 3 top #leadership qualities!

Simply go to servantleaderstrong.com to access a list of all of these shareable micro-devotions.

My prayer is that God's Word would lodge itself into your heart and mind long after my own words fade from your memory.

But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

—*Acts 12:24*

Ready for Your Journey?

Before we embark on this biblical expedition together, I want to pass on some encouragement:

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When the godly are in authority, the people rejoice.

—*Proverbs 29:2a (NLT)*

People are happy when there is a godly leader at the helm. Talk about engaged employees!

But also notice the word *authority*. This implies more than a servant who happens to hold a title. It suggests control, strength, command, and rule. The Message translates the godly person in authority as the “person who runs things.”

So there must be a lot more to servant leadership than serving.

Which is exactly what this book is about.

Let’s now explore the riches and depth of the Bible and learn what it says about becoming servant-leader strong.