This chapter would better be entitled “Toward a Biblical Model of Leadership”; that is, I want to suggest what I believe to be the most important elements and considerations of a biblical model of leadership, but I do not claim either to be exhaustive in my presentation or to have correlated theologically all of the ramifications of these proposals. In fact, it is probably impossible to set forth in writing a comprehensive biblical model of leadership since by its nature, and as indicated by Scripture’s use of the idea of wisdom, biblical leadership is something that not only is read about but also is learned through experience. Nonetheless, ideas about leadership are important, and therefore I will suggest some of the most important of these for a biblical model.

First we must be clear about what we mean by leadership. Leadership is the art and practice of exerting an influence on the behavior and beliefs of others. Leaders shape and influence people, institutions, and events. Leaders and leadership are determined not by the number of followers but by the changes effected over time for the good of God’s world. Clearly we are talking about changes for the good. Some leaders whose ideas and deeds were decidedly on the side of evil have effected enormous change in
human history; Hitler and Stalin in the last century come immediately to mind. They attracted followers, but the evidence is clear that their motives, ways, and ends were evil.

With reference to leaders and leadership, we must not shy away from the word power. By definition leaders exert various kinds of power, or else they would have no influence on others or lack the ability to effect change in the world. Though the word power often has a negative connotation, the stewardship of power and influence—a softer form of power—marks the nature of leadership. Like money and fire, power is capable of producing change, but it is the nature of that change—here change involves the full spectrum of motives, means, and ends—that determines the good use of power. Power may come from the sheer force of one’s position, from physical strength and/or the ability to marshal the strength of others, and also from ideas, persuasion, and example. Those with power by virtue of the force of their position are often in political or corporate jobs where money, executive authority, and military might are at their disposal. The power of ideas, persuasion, and example is often associated with individuals like Rosa Parks, Mother Teresa, or Saint Augustine. All of these means of power—whether from position, example, or ideas—can be good or evil. Again, the ways they are used, the animating motivations and the nature and limits applied to each means, and the ends to which these ways are used determine the moral character, whether good or evil, of such uses of power. Christian leaders, and all leaders who follow biblical patterns, exercise their power to the greatest extent possible in ways and for ends consistent with all things good, honorable, and according to the will of God.

We must therefore begin with the ways and character of God. The ultimate leader is, of course, the living God, since His power, will, and character ultimately create, shape, hold together, and influence all things. A biblical view of leadership must begin with God. Human leadership, if it is good leadership, is analogous to the ways and motivations of God’s ultimate acts of influence.

God has, however, created human beings as His agents in the world. We are made in the image of God, and at each place in Genesis 1 where the image of God is referenced, the idea of dominion or responsibility for human creatures is close at hand (1:26–28). There are many debates about what the image of God in Scripture may consist of, but at the very least it relates to the responsibilities that God has given men and women, the highest creatures in the creation—Adam was, after all, given the responsibility for naming the animals—in caring for, superintending, cultivating,
and thus managing His creation. Humans have been given the greatest role of leadership with respect to the created order, and it is a functional responsibility directly connected to their being made in God's image.

The importance of the image of God (\textit{imago dei}) for a biblical model of leadership goes even deeper than the fact that the human creatures, men and women, have been made in God's image. Scripture goes on to say that Christ is the image of God (Col 1:15). Put another way, Christ is not \textit{made} in the image of God as Adam and Eve were. Rather, He \textit{is} the image of God. Thus, in the fullness of New Testament theology, the first humans were made according to Christ, the Son of God. Christ, who is God's agent in creation, who is the one who sustains creation, and is the one to whom all of the created order and all of human history are directed (John 1:1–4; Eph 1:3–10; Col 1:15–20; cf. also Hebrews 1:1–3), is the one after whose likeness men and women are made. Thus, the responsibility for stewarding and managing God's creation—the significant leadership role that we as humans have been given—is accentuated because of the centrality and lordship of Jesus Christ in all things, whether we think of creation or whether we think of His distinctive role, by His death and resurrection, in salvation.

A biblical model of leadership that begins with God must therefore find its behavioral and convictional patterns in Christ the Lord. He is the distinctive, supreme presence and revelation of God in human history. Again, the one true Creator God, the God who has spoken through Israel and the prophets, the God who reveals Himself in Scripture and in history, has definitively spoken and revealed Himself through Jesus, who, as the image of God and the superintending Lord of the universe, is the clearest model and declaration for how God acts and how He uses His power.

As Lord He acts with purpose, including ends; and for His desired ends He is constrained by His nature (for example, God cannot lie: Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Ps 89:35; Ezek 24:14; 2 Tim 2:13; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:17–18). With Him there is thus no moral fragmentation between ends and means. To act as He acts is to lead, to use power, as He uses it. To be sure, we are not God, but we have been given by God—again, we are made in the image of God—responsibilities over His created order. We cannot, as He did, create from nothing; but we are put in charge of that which He has created; and we are to tend it, cultivate it, manage it, and shape it in ways that reflect and honor His original purposes for creation. To understand the responsibility, therefore, that we, as creatures made in His image, have been given, we must look to the one who \textit{is} that very image and see what He has done to fulfill the will of His Father. The Son Himself has been
given great responsibilities by the Father, and one day the Son Himself will bow before His Father when the tasks given to Him have been fully completed (1 Cor 15:28). To God’s Son we turn.

Looking at Christ

Leadership theory is accustomed to thinking of mission, vision, and strategies. The New Testament does not organize itself or the life of Christ around such categories, but it is nonetheless not difficult to see that Jesus clearly understood Himself to have an assigned mission from His Father. We can, therefore—knowing that Jesus acted to perform the overarching work given Him by His Father—also look at the behavior of Jesus as indicating, though perhaps with different orders of magnitude, the various tactics and strategies He employed for accomplishing the will of His Father.

Before looking at the habits and teachings of Jesus, we must note that, first of all, it is clear from the Gospels that Jesus understood and presented Himself as having a mission. In John, He repeatedly uses phrases like “I am come . . .” (cf. 5:43; 6:38; 7:28; 8:14,42; 12:46–47; 13:3; 15:22; 16:28; 18:37). These passages, and many others, point to the larger mission of Jesus as received from His Father. In John, He also says that He does what the Father does or wills (cf. 4:34; 5:19,30; 5:36; 8:28–29; 10:25,37–38), or He speaks what the Father wills Him to speak (cf. 7:17; 8:26,28,38; 12:49–50; 14:10). The Gospel of Luke, as well, points to the larger mission of Jesus. In Luke 4:16–30, Jesus is the long-awaited Servant of the Lord predicted in Isaiah 61 who announces “the favorable year of the Lord” (v. 19 NASB), fulfills the long-awaited promises of God, and inaugurates the end of the world. In the conclusion to that Gospel, when speaking to the two on the road to Emmaus and also shortly thereafter to His gathered disciples in the upper room, Jesus uses Scripture to tell them of the divinely ordained purpose of His mission, that everything He did was in fulfillment of the scriptural plan of God, and that it was not accidental but in fact necessary “that the Christ would suffer” (24:25–27,44–47) and that as a consequence “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations” (24:47 NASB).

The narrative presentation and theological comments of the Gospel authors likewise frame the mission of Jesus as being according to the intention of God. The Gospel of Matthew, for example, points to the comprehensive plan of God for human history through Jesus. The genealogy, which goes from Abraham to David, from David to the deportation, and
from the deportation to Jesus, has three series of 14 generations (1:17). The point for Matthew is that God is in control of human history and that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish history, a history that ultimately involves not just Jews but also Gentiles (28:19–20). The birth of Jesus in Luke 2:10 causes the angels to sing of the good news which shall be for all people. The Gospels—though they include many particular incidents, scenes, and sayings of Jesus—never lose sight of their overarching message: specifically, that Jesus, according to the eternal plan of God, is the Son of God who has come from heaven for our salvation. He is mysteriously and supernaturally conceived; His story is the fulfillment of all of Jewish history; and beyond that, His genealogy (see Luke 3:23–38) extends all the way to Adam, the father of us all. But beyond Adam, we are reminded, Jesus was the Word of God present at creation. He is the one through whom all things were created, and this Word ultimately became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), so that we might have now the life of the age to come (John 5:24–25; 10:10; 11:25–27).

It is not just in the Gospels that Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s larger plan for human history is seen. In Romans 5, Jesus is the one who reverses the dismal story of Adam and by His obedience initiates in the midst of the old and fallen creation the new creation for which He is the second Adam. Colossians 1:15–20 refers to Him as Lord of both the old and the new orders. He is preeminent for both the original creation and for the new creation that has now begun. In Heb 10:1–10, Jewish Scripture is used to point to the work of Jesus, and the life and work of Jesus are summarized by the single phrase, “I have come . . . to do your will, O God” (Heb 10:7–9 NASB). Similarly, in Revelation, Jesus is described as both the beginning and the end, the ultimate steward of life and death and the firstborn of God’s creation (1:5,17).

Whether in the sayings of Jesus, in the narrative and editorial comments of the Gospel writers, or embedded within the letters and other literature of the New Testament, the overarching thesis is clear: Jesus was sent by God to restore, reconcile, and recreate God’s original creation. He did so by being obedient to the will of the Father in all things, an obedience that led inexorably and predictably to His death (Phil 2:8). The New Testament thus also contemplates a conclusion to Jesus’ cosmic mission, a deep and final mystery, that after the return of Jesus, in His final work of raising all the dead who are loyal to Him, transforming all the living who embrace Him, judging all those who have rejected Him, and inaugurating the new heaven and the new earth, He will finally Himself bow before the Father,
having completed all the purposes given Him by the Father, in full and complete obedience (1 Cor 15:22–28). Since, therefore, the convictions and behaviors of Jesus reflect His obedience to the will of God and His devotion to the mission His Father gave Him, we must now look at the actions and words of Jesus in broad categories to see how, whether strategically or tactically, they reflect His intention to implement the overarching mission of God.

The Behaviors and Attributes of the Lord Christ

Our goal in this section is to provide brief summary statements of the kinds of things Jesus taught and did, supplying scriptural references. The goal is not to work out the managerial implications of these various summary statements but to provide a series of brief statements that reflect on Jesus’ typical actions and thus to hint at those implications. Leadership and even managerial theories that derive from these can best be constructed when all of these are seen together. For now we are interested in considerations toward a biblical model of leadership.

Jesus Spoke Knowledgeably

From the beginning of His ministry, the crowds were amazed at Jesus’ theological assertions. In the Nazareth sermon (Mark 6:1–6; Luke 4:16–30), His hearers were amazed that one from their own hometown could speak with such authority and boldness as an interpreter of Scripture. The same is true in the Gospel of Matthew at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (7:28–29). The crowds were amazed that He spoke to them as one possessing authority, not as their scribes and teachers. These statements are reflections of Jesus’ repeated actions and declarations to have either fulfilled the Scriptures (cf. Matt 5:17–18; 11:5; 21:1–11; 21:33–46; Luke 4:21) or of His public pronouncements whereby He starkly reinterpreted the Scriptures. The Sermon on the Mount has several of these where Jesus, after citing an Old Testament text and the traditional interpretations applied to it by Jewish rabbis, said, “You have heard that it was said of old, but I say to you . . .” (Matt 5:21,27,33,38). Such assertions—to have fulfilled the Scriptures or to have reinterpreted virtually the whole of Jewish cultic law (Matt 9:10–19; 12:1–8; 15:1–20; John 2:19–22)—show Jesus to have been a knowledgeable thinker. Christian circles rightly refer to the events of Jesus’ life, especially His death and resurrection, as the center of the gospel message and the events that deliver the accursed creation and its peoples from the consequences of sin. Nonetheless, it must not
be forgotten that Jesus was a thoroughgoing \textit{interpreter of Scripture} who first criticized and then reformulated Israel’s role and mission, its cultic system, and its understanding of the temple and the role of the Messiah.

Jesus knew, based on His reading of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:25–32,44–47), that the Scriptures had been profoundly misunderstood by Israel and that it was of paramount importance for His followers to understand not only how rightly to interpret the Scriptures but also how \textit{He} interpreted the Scriptures, especially as they found their fulfillment in Him. All of subsequent Christian thinking with regard to the sacrificial system, the temple, the nature of the Messiah, the character of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, the nature and mission of the church, the judgment of the end times, the resurrection of the dead, the coming of the Son of Man in glory, and God’s final purposes for Israel, the nations, and creation found its corrective formulation and theologically foundational reinterpretation in the thinking and teaching of Jesus, \textit{both} in His words and in His actions, not omitting, of course, His death and resurrection. Jesus the theologian, Jesus the preacher, Jesus the teacher and interpreter of Scripture radically altered the established Jewish understandings of religious life and formed the underpinnings of later New Testament and Christian theology.

There is no substitute for leaders whose \textit{knowledge} of life, reality, their business, work, and the facts related thereto drives their behavior and decisions.

\textbf{Jesus Was a Teacher Who Gathered around Himself Concentric Circles of Learners}

Whether it was (1) Peter and John (cf. Acts 3:1), or (2) Peter, James, and John (Matt 17:1), or (3) Peter and Andrew, James and John (Matt 4:18–22; cf. 10:2), or (4) the Twelve (Luke 6:12–16), (5) the 120 (Acts 1:15), (6) the 500 (1 Cor 15:6), or (7) the multitudes (Matt 5:1), Jesus had different levels of audiences with whom He could share His thinking and convictions. The Twelve, of course, were in most instances His most intimate circle, but He also had various groups around Him, as, for example, on the Mount of Transfiguration, He had with Him Peter, James, and John (Matt 17:1), and on other occasions He had with Him a group of financial supporters called the “women from Galilee” (Luke 8:1).

Jesus taught regularly, had different circles of hearers and constituents, and used the opportunities available to Him to teach and to instruct. Leaders know their various audiences and can appropriately relate to them.
Jesus Corrected Clearly, Quickly, and Impartially

Coming down from the Mountain of Transfiguration, Jesus spoke with great frustration to the disciples there who could not heal a boy of his falling sickness (Matt 17:17). On other occasions Jesus showed surprise and sometimes an amazed irritation at the dullness of the disciples in their inability to understand His metaphors and His ways of speaking (Matt 16:5–12; John 11:11–14). Jesus honored sincere seeking (Matt 8:5–11; Mark 9:24) but was not reluctant to criticize dullness (Mark 9:19) and to correct either bad thinking, as in Peter’s completely erroneous view of Jesus’ messiahship and mission (Matt 16: 21–23), or petty jealousies (Mark 10:41; Luke 22:24–27).

Jesus was not afraid to offer public critiques of public figures. The woes by Jesus in the marketplace and in the temple area upon the scribes and Pharisees are remarkable for their biting quality and for the accuracy of their prophetic critique. The religious leaders who should have nurtured and fed Israel with the Word of God were publicly blistered by Jesus both in tone and in rhetoric for their hypocrisies and failures as leaders (Matt 15:12; 21:44; 23; Luke 11:45–46). But not only religious leaders felt the sting of Jesus’ verbal attacks: His earthly sovereign, Herod, was also the object of a sharp critique. When Jesus detected Herod’s hypocritical motives for seeking Him, He sent a message back to “that fox” that He (Jesus) would do the will of God how and when He discerned God’s purposes in doing it (Luke 13:31–35 NASB).

Jesus, unlike many leaders in public life today, was not afraid to criticize either His friends or His enemies and to do so in a way that made clear that He neither sought their approval nor feared their reprisal. His remarks give no evidence of being politically diplomatic merely for the sake of sparing others’ feelings. Jesus had a wide range of religious, economic, and political associates, and He had a reputation of deferring to no one (Mark 12:14). Though it is commonly thought that Jesus spent time only with the poor and the outcast, which He certainly did and for which He was roundly criticized by the elite, He nonetheless also numbered both wealthy and prominent people among His friends and associates (Nicodemus, John 3:1; Lazarus, John 11; the women from Galilee, Luke 8:1–3; and Joseph of Arimathea, Luke 23:50). His blessings and His instructions were for all, and He was not above scolding even His closest friends when they chose trivial priorities over the priority of listening to Him (Luke 10:38–42).
Jesus the Teacher Used Both Public and Common Settings for His Teachings

The Gospel of John orients the activities and teachings of Jesus around the great festivals in Jerusalem. There we see that Jesus was present for the Feast of Booths and especially the Passover. On these occasions the ceremonies involving light and water became great opportunities for His public teachings (John 7–8). He frequented the marketplaces and the great porches of the temple for opportunities to teach; and He amazed the crowds, criticized the powerful and hypocritical, expelled the business leaders from the temple while upsetting their money-changing tables, and took on all questions, whether of good faith (Mark 12:28–34) or bad (Matt 22:15–33).

Jesus also particularly used everyday settings, especially meals, as a format for teaching. He enjoyed eating and drinking with friends as well as with religious outcasts (Matt 4:24; 9:9–11; Luke 19:1–10). At a meal He could forgive the downcast (Luke 7:36–50) as well as stifle the religious exuberance of His shallow supporters (Luke 14:15–24). For the biblical leader every circumstance and setting, large or small, constitutes a teachable moment and should be so seized and understood.

Jesus Had a Strong Devotional Life

His public experiences of stress and controversy in the temple, the marketplace, and at the great festivals did not prevent Him from a rich life of private prayer. Though we do not have biblical narratives that refer explicitly to Jesus’ study of the Scriptures, from the time of His youth, when at the age of 12 He was discussing with the theologians in the temple the “concerns of his Father” (Luke 2:46–49), to the times in His public ministry when He profoundly and repeatedly expounded and reinterpreted the Scriptures (Matt 7:28–29; 13:54; Luke 4:16–30), Jesus had a rich life of prayer and study. We know that He often went off by Himself to pray (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18,28) and that He commended prayer to His disciples (Matt 6:5–13). So touched were they by His life of prayer that they asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). He warned against showy public prayer (Matt 6:5–6), but He did in fact pray in public (Matt 11:25–27; John 12:27–30). His life of devotion is referenced throughout the Gospels (recall especially His 40-day period in the wilderness and the temptations by Satan, Matt 4:1–11), but it is most profoundly expressed in His pervasive conviction that all of life must be lived according to the will of God (Matt 6:32–33) and that nothing is so trivial as to be unnoticed by
God (Matt 10:29) or so obscure as to be unimportant for God's purposes (Matt 6:32; 10:30).

His tortured dying on the cross gives every evidence that His instinctive vocabulary and frame of mind were directed toward the things of God. He prayed the words of Scripture, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22). He prayed for forgiveness for His torturers (Luke 23:34), and He cared for His mother by committing her to the care of the beloved disciple (John 19:26–27). He paid attention to the agony of the penitent thief by promising him that he would soon be in paradise (Luke 23:39–44), and He interpreted all of His life and particularly His obedient dying as a fulfillment of the mission given him by God (“It is finished!” John 19:30 NASB) and prayed from the hymnbook of Israel with His final breaths (Luke 23:46). Such prayers and spontaneous uses of Scripture indicate a life saturated with prayerful, reflective, and intentional interactions with God as revealed in Holy Writ.

**Jesus Had a Shrewdness that He Practiced and Commended**

The Jesus of the older Hollywood films, the Jesus who walked about almost passively, staring into the mid-heavens, was not the Jesus of the Gospels. In the Gospels, He told His disciples to be as shrewd as serpents but as harmless as doves (Matt 10:16), and He followed His own advice. When taunted by His brothers, who thought Him insane, to go to Jerusalem and “show Yourself to the world,” Jesus refused. Nonetheless, He did go up secretly, though not for the purposes they intended (John 7:1–10 NASB). He commended in one of His parables a shrewd steward and told His disciples that they, too, should “make friends . . . by means of the wealth of unrighteousness” (Luke 16:1–9 NASB). He showed shrewdness in timing, in the strategic unfolding of His heavenly identity. Jesus repeatedly evidenced His awareness of the importance of “the hour” of His disclosure as Messiah, thereby wisely and strategically doing the will of God (cf. John 2:4; 7:6,8,30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1,31). When the crowds or even individuals misunderstood the kind of Messiah He was and thus wanted to speak quickly of His messiahship, He severely warned them to hold their tongues (Matt 8:1–4; 9:27–31; 12:15–21). After commending Peter for the Caesarea Philippi confession that He is “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus told His disciples that His messiahship necessitated His rejection, suffering, and resurrection; but He severely warned them to tell no one (Matt 16:16,20–21 NASB). His disciples did not understand, and Peter even chided Jesus for speaking of a suffering messiahship, but
the rebuke was turned back on Peter, whose voice was described, rather undiplomatically, as that of Satan (Matt 16:21–23). The timing of His ministry and particularly of His death was critical. He had work to do, teaching to spread, and a gathering of His disciples to accomplish before His mission could be consummated in His death and resurrection, and so He lived with shrewdness. He never spoke for the purpose of deception, but neither did He always tell everything He knew (recall the story of Nicodemus, who could not understand heavenly things, John 3:1–12).

An honest shrewdness is a gift to be sought and cultivated by today’s leaders.

Jesus Commended God-Honoring Risk Taking

In the cause of His Father’s kingdom, the Parable of the Talents continued a well-known teaching by Jesus that His followers were expected to live with a sense of urgency in light of a coming day of reckoning and that they must accept the responsibilities given them and, unlike the “worthless servant,” be faithful for the cause of Christ (Luke 19:11–27). Jesus Himself knew that obedience to the Father would require His own suffering and death. He had to reject the temptations of Satan to take the path of plenty, fame, or self-protection (Matt 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13) and instead, as He told His disciples, drink the cup He was chosen to drink, undergo the baptism He was sent to endure (Mark 10:35–45), and thus precipitate the beginning of the world’s end as He “cast fire upon the earth” (Luke 12:49–53 NASB).

Jesus’s all-consuming commitment to the will of His Father (Luke 2:49; John 2:13–17) was borne irrespective of the consequences for Himself. Such faithfulness meant that He was willing to put everything on the line to accomplish what the Father sent Him to do. This faithfulness is seen also in the lives of some of His greatest New Testament followers who, like Paul, counted all things to be loss in view of the unsurpassed gain of knowing Jesus, the Lord (Phil 3:8). As Paul wrote, Jesus’ obedience to the will of the Father was accomplished at a great cost, not only death but a tortured death by Roman crucifixion (Phil 2:8). Such self-sacrificing behavior by Jesus was also what He expected of His followers, to whom He said that they must be willing to give up all—money, family, homes, and possessions—to follow Him (Matt 19:21–30). They, as He, had to take up the cross (Matt 10:38; 16:24–26).

Leadership must always be willing to take a path of resistance, rejecting the plaudits of the cultural elites and accepting the slurs of the majority for
the sake of doing what is right, whether popular or not. A leader does not have the luxury of refusing to choose or testing the winds. The leader leads in spite of the whims and fickle chants of the crowd.

Jesus Had an Uncompromising View of the Provisional Nature of Possessions

The Sermon on the Mount represents much of the teaching of Jesus that His disciples were to learn, teach, and live out. The treasures of earth can be eaten by moths and rust or stolen by thieves (Matt 6:19). The only ultimate values are those that have an honorable motivation and ultimately a heavenly destination. For Jesus there is a continuity between this life and the life to come, and that continuity is seen in those ultimate goods and good things that have their roots in this life but are laid up in heaven (Matt 6:19–34). Paul, too, believed that all things committed to Christ and done in faith are things that are not “in vain” and thus have an ongoing power and value (1 Cor 15:58 NASB). The world is good—it was made by God—but it is now, because of the great rebellion and universal human complicity in that rebellion, deeply flawed. Even the good things of this world—food, shelter, and ornate clothing—are secondary (Matt 6:25–34) and can have a perverting tendency on those who hold them as being too dear. Whether family, fortune, goods, or power, Jesus understood and taught and lived the true view of these things—that is, the provisional and qualified nature of them. Quarterly earnings and the rush to give the kind of guidance that protects stock values and bonuses are a short-term substitute for the long-term stewardship of a business or a life that belongs to God. Decisions whose sole criterion is financial gain or self-promotion are likely to be gravely flawed.

Jesus Had a Strong View of Family and Marriage, Based on Genesis 1–2

Jesus was known for His rejection not only of adultery, which every honorable Jew would have rejected, but also for His critique of the commonplace practice, even among Pharisees, of divorce. Jesus regarded adultery as something that started in the heart (Matt 5:27–28) but was also expressed in the behavior of serial marriages and divorces. Those who divorce except for the cause of impurity and marry another not only commit adultery but also cause those who marry them to commit adultery, according to Jesus (Matt 5:31–32; 19:3–6). So startled were the Pharisees at such teaching that they defensively pointed to the command of Moses that they should put away
their foreign wives (Matt 19:7), to which Jesus responded sharply, “It was not so from the beginning, but Moses permitted you to put away your wives because of your hardness of heart” (Matt 19:8). Jesus’s appeal to the time “from the beginning” indicates that God’s original plans were revealed in Scripture in the story of Adam and Eve (see Gen 1:27; 2:24) as involving one man and one woman.

His strict teachings on the sanctity of marriage were preserved, reiterated, and also applied in the new circumstances of the church, where Christian and non-Christian were married and had children (1 Cor 7:12–16). Though the natural bonds of family could never take precedence over the claims of the kingdom of God, where the two come in conflict, the foundational nature of Genesis 1–2 for Jesus’ understanding of marriage, remarriage, divorce, and adultery is clear: one man and one woman is the basis of marriage. There is to be no divorce except where sexual infidelity has already broken the bonds of marriage (Matt 5:32) or where an unbelieving spouse voluntarily leaves (1 Cor 7:15). Remarriage is permitted only when the unbelieving spouse has left or death takes the husband or the wife. If two Christians separate, they must either be reconciled or remain unmarried (1 Cor 7:10–11).

Jesus honored marriage and the family by His presence at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, the site of His first miracle (John 2:1–11), by His promise that in the kingdom of God the blessings of family would be multiplied (Matt 12:46–50; Mark 10:28–31), by His care for His mother from the cross (John 19:26–27), and by His and the early church’s continued use of the language of family to describe the relationship between Jesus and the God of Israel (He is, as the disciples learned from Jesus, “Abba,” Father; Matt 26:39,42; Rom 8:15). The early Christians continued the verbal and conceptual habits of Jesus by describing the whole complex of relations between and among Christians as that of children, brothers, and sisters (Gal 4:21–31). Christian leaders, by example, policy, and practice, affirm marriage as between one man and one woman and support the family as a natural and spiritual unit established by God.

Jesus Profoundly Honored the Truth Both in Living and in Speaking

Jesus’ description of Satan as the father of lies (John 8:44) and of Himself as the true and faithful expression of the will of the Father (John 8:38, 46–4) places enormous premium for the followers of Jesus on the truth, whether in speaking or in learning. The gospel in the New Testament is referred to as the word of truth (Col 1:5; cf. Rom 2:8; 1 Pet 1:23–25), and
such a description not only points to the faithfulness of God in keeping His word by fulfilling His promises but also honors the words of God as spoken and fulfilled by Jesus. Jesus severely criticized those who misrepresented the words and ways of God as hypocrites and deceivers (Matthew 23). His entire life and ministry were built around the conviction that His understanding of God was true and that the God who revealed Himself in Scripture was deserving of obedience. Such obedience is justified only on the basis of the truthfulness of those assumptions and convictions.

Leaders today, especially in times of stress and conflict, must always seek to know the truth. They cannot be like those whom Jesus criticized as following the currently popular political whims. Referring to His kinsman, the prophet John the Baptist, Jesus, with a weary humor, mocked the hypocritical rejection of John as a crazy ascetic by the same people who disingenuously opposed Jesus for being a glutton and a drunkard (Matt 11:1–19, especially 16–19). The inability to apprehend the truth goes far beyond an objective appraisal of the facts, according to Jesus. There can be an unwillingness to see the truth (Matt 12:24–37; 13:14–15), recognize the truth, and obey the truth that reflects a deeply spiritual moral flaw, a scornful pride that wills not to know the truth and be set free by it (John 8:31–32). Leaders humbly submit to all the truths they encounter and order their lives, and the processes and goods under their influence, accordingly.

Conclusion

The study of leadership began as a cottage industry several decades ago and today has exploded into a flood of pamphlets, books, and case histories on the topic of leaders and leadership. Many of these works are excellent and can be used to great benefit. In fact, it is interesting to note how many of the best books on leaders and leadership reflect old and traditional Christian truths. But if leadership theory and practice is to be truly Christian, it must be grounded in a biblical model that begins with Christ. Though I have in this chapter pointed to the convictions and behaviors of Jesus that must go toward a biblical model of leadership, I conclude by observing, based on the elements I have mentioned above, the following central features of a biblical model of leadership.

First, in beginning with Christ, Christian leaders do not merely, as some clichés indicate, “see the future” but in fact, like Jesus, study the ancient sources of the past in order to establish a foundational depth from which to lead. We have seen the profundity of Jesus’ understanding of the Scriptures
and with it His knowledge of the character of God, the mission and role of Israel and Israel’s law, and the mission and work of the people of God in the world as God’s agents in building a new creation. His theological brilliance must not be dismissed as merely a reflection of the divine omniscience, but—to be true to Luke’s depiction of the 12-year-old Jesus in the temple—understood to be the result of a willing heart and a disciplined mind immersed for thousands of hours in the words of Scripture.¹

Second, to follow Jesus, and to follow the ways of Jesus, leaders must steel themselves with the knowledge that their decisions will not always lead to popularity or to success, as popularly understood. Christian leaders, based upon all that we bring to bear from Scripture and Christian tradition, seek to affect the present and the future in ways that shape people, institutions, and events along the lines of God’s ultimate values. We do so at the risk of being misunderstood. We do so without fear of being either traditional or different. We lead without regard for whom we offend (Gal 1:10) or how others label us (1 Cor 4:9–13). We seek to know the will of God, the facts of the world around us—especially the flawed nature and brokenness of human beings and the world we inhabit—and the desire of God to shape us into Christ’s likeness as He marshals us, His people, to live faithfully and courageously.

Finally, leaders have a strong sense of purpose that is adaptable to the facts of reality. Jesus called and used humble, broken, arrogant, petulant, selfish, impetuous, and sometimes even traitorous followers. He worked through institutions whose leaders were often power hungry, deceitful, murderous, hypocritical, greedy, and abusive to the poor. But He did the will of His Father and, at the very moment of apparent defeat, entrusted Himself in obedient abandonment to His Father (Luke 23:46; Heb 5:7) and, in the end, experienced a vindication that only His Father could bestow. What others meant for evil, God meant for good (Acts 2:23–24: cf. Gen 50:20).

Knowing God’s will and having the courage—amid the frustrations of a broken world—to live it out, with a humility born of the wisdom He gives to those who persevere (Jas 1:2–5), are the attributes and practices that evidence the leadership of Jesus.

Resources for Further Study
Questions for Further Reflection

1. What characteristics of Jesus’ behavior and personality most surprise you?
2. Why is it important to recognize Jesus as the very image of God?
3. Jesus voluntarily laid down His life for us. But why did the Jewish leaders of His day want to kill him? What aspects of His behavior or teaching were offensive and threatening?
4. What patterns of behavior in Jesus’ life are most unlike the stereotypical descriptions of Jesus?
5. Leaders are sometimes described as authoritarians, visionaries, coaches, autocrats, teachers, etc. Is there another way to think of Jesus’ leadership style? Does He fit several or none of these patterns?
6. If you had to pick one characteristic of Jesus’ behavior that is key to His fulfillment of God’s plan for Him, what would it be? Why?

Endnote

1 B. Reicke, Outliers: The Story of Success (New York: Little, Brown, 2008), 35–68. A brilliant New Testament scholar and my doctoral advisor at the University of Basel, Switzerland, once told me that he was persuaded that the mind of Jesus was saturated with the Scriptures, especially the Psalms. I am intrigued by Malcolm Gladwell’s reference to “ten thousand hours” as an important threshold of practice and learning for anyone who would achieve expertise in any discipline or craft.