REINVENTING LEADERSHIP
LDR 5293 - 530

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ASSIGNMENT 3:
ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Burns, Shoup, and Simmons' (2014) *Organizational Leadership* stands distinct and distinguished amongst the many voices and writings that flood the leadership conversation. The grand scope of review and detailed systematic approach ultimately leads to a clear definition of Christian leadership that is not limited to one method, personality, or leadership context. More broad and inclusive than the specialized approaches presented in other texts throughout the MOL program, this definition of Christian leadership serves as a solid foundation upon which I can build my own philosophy of leadership to guide my life and decisions throughout the different seasons and contexts that I may walk in my lifetime of leadership.

To accomplish their goal of providing "a practical theology of leadership from a Christian worldview for emerging and established Christian leaders…in both religious and nonreligious organizational contexts", the editors subdivided this book into three sections of review: theological foundations for Christian leadership, theoretical foundations for Christian leadership, and key skills and practices in Christian leadership (Burns et al., 2014, p.7). The first two of these sections build together, chapter after chapter, like building blocks culminating in a clear definition of Christian leadership, as we will discover below in a brief overview of these chapters. Following the development of this core definition, the final section identifies five key practices of Christian leadership and how these practices are dictated by and derived from the core definition. Altogether, these three sections offer a theology of Christian leadership largely applicable to other leadership materials and specific methods, yet wholly unlike anything I have read throughout my leadership development journey.

The first of these three sections, Theological Foundations for Christian Leadership, addresses leadership from the Biblical perspective. To get a full view of the Biblical relevance to this topic, the authors look not only at specific Biblical references to leadership but also at the Biblical call to leadership and the effect of the general Christian worldview on one's approach to leadership. From a Biblical perspective, it is clear all Christian leadership derives from the call and equipping of the Lord, secondary to the primary call of living in relationship with the Lord (Burns et al., 2014). In reflecting on the impact of the Christian worldview on leadership practices, the authors observe: "Whether a leader is in a secular or a Christian organization, the Christian leadership model equips leaders to serve transcendent purposes...in a manner worthy of the Christian calling" (Burns et al., 2014, p. 60). Through a holistic understanding of leadership teachings and stories in the Bible, the authors also discover a dominant theme of the "servant, shepherd or steward leader" (Burns et al., 2014, p.76).

Next, adding to these theological discoveries, Burns, Shoup, and Simmons (2014) look to history and science to review the theoretical foundations for Christian Leadership. By navigating through the "Leadership River", the authors uncover the impact of historical schools of thought on the development of leadership theory (Burns et al., 2014). With the river fully developed, the authors present a preliminary definition of Christian leadership: "Christian leadership facilitates the transforming and sanctifying journey of individuals and organizations from X^1 to X^2 in both material and spiritual ways." (Burns et al., 2014, p.119). In this definition, following the ideas of James MacGregor Burns about transforming leadership, "X^2 represents the purpose and

values of organizations or individuals, and X^1 represents an honest assessment of where they are today" (Burns et al., 2014, p.122).

With this preliminary definition in hand, the authors then dive deep into three new sciences in the fields of physics and biology. These new sciences reveal a deeper understanding of God's creation and the complexities that exist within living organisms. These principles of creation and life can be applied to human relationships and ultimately to whole organizations as they are not static mechanical systems, but rather living organisms themselves comprised of complex inter-relations of people, cultures, and the world around them (Burns et al., 2014). With the application of these new sciences and the revelations, a full, complex definition of Christian leadership emerges (Burns et al., 2014).

It is from this full definition that the authors then venture into the key skills and practices in Christian leadership, the third and final section of discovery. In this section, the authors identify five practices that are central to leadership and explore how these practices should be handled in the context of Christian leadership as defined at the end of the second section. The five practices they address are as follows:

1. *Communication.* Communication is a powerful, dynamic and diverse skill given to us as a gift from God, that has the ability to create identities, relationships, and cultures (Burns et al., 2014).
2. *Conflict and negotiation.* Conflict is unavoidable. However, as Christian leaders, we have the power to decide when and how to engage in conflict. For a Christian, the goal of conflict should always be restoration and reconciliation (Burns et al., 2014).

3. *Decision-making.* As Christian leaders, we must do our best to overcome natural and unintentional biases by collecting as much useful and important information as possible to make the best decisions (Burns et al., 2014).
4. *Financial integrity.* Financial integrity comes first and foremost from a strong Biblical theology of money. Christian leaders have to fight the temptation of money and power and continue moving toward financial integrity every day (Burns et al., 2014).
5. *Sustaining the leader.* Leadership in our modern context is turbulent and exhausting. Leaders can sustain themselves in these hard times by increasing personal margin, cultivating accountability, engaging in lifelong learning, and practicing spiritual disciplines (Burns et al., 2014).

These five leadership practices, when approached with care and utilized correctly, can help guide a Christian leader down the path of authentic, God-designed leadership, leadership that is marked by service and the transformation of others unto better, more fruitful lives.

Reading through *Organization Leadership*, I am struck first by the thorough approach taken by the authors, paying attention to the Biblical, theological basis for Christian leadership, not based on one or two passages or stories, but with the whole Bible in mind. Then they turn their attention, not solely to human experience or anecdotes, but to God expressed through creation, understood by us through science. I have not read another leadership text with a similar approach. I am also marked by the perspective of the authors. They did not approach Christian leadership as a single strategy or approach, a list of dos and don’ts, or a secret key to effective leadership and

success. Instead, they created a picture of the type of leadership that should flow naturally and genuinely from a Christian life.

In my own journey of study and discovery, I feel I have been dancing around a very similar quest to identify what a Christian life of leadership should really look like and what it should ultimately be unto. This personal quest has thus far led me to some of the same discoveries and determinations as the authors of this book. As a Christian leader, I can still strive for success, growth, and results, but when it comes to measuring and evaluating those results, I use a different measuring stick than most. Effective Christian leadership is not measured in dollars or products or in the stock markets. It isn't determined by popularity or status, or the number of followers on Instagram. It is measured by the transformation of lives around you, and it is determined at the feet of Jesus, on that fateful day. The role of leader is still the role of steward. As a leader, I serve. I serve not because it is an effective strategy of manipulation, to win influence and better navigate my team members towards my desired outcomes. I serve because that is my calling and purpose as a leader, to see the lives of those I lead and the organizations themselves be transformed by the power and presence of God.

Ultimately, Christian leadership, whether in religious contexts or the secular world, should be marked by the presence of God and His transformative power. Through theological and theoretical discovery, Burns, Shoup, and Simmons (2014) discover the definition of Christian leadership to be just that. A duty to facilitate the transformation and sanctification of those we lead, stewarding them unto God, the one to whom we will be held accountable.

References

Burns, J., Shoup, J., & Simmons, D. (Eds.). (2014). *Organizational leadership: Foundations & practices for Christians*. InterVarsity Press.