



5 New Testament Leadership Principles/ Competencies

2024 Fall
PMCL9407-01 Biblical & Theological Basis for Christian Leadership
Sarah Kimball-Grunblatt, MPH, MS, MS, MEd, MEd, MA

Five New Testament examples that provide timeless principles that modern leaders can apply to their own contexts, encouraging servant leadership that prioritizes:

1. Humility (Mary, the

mother of Jesus)

2. Listening (Mary of Bethany)
3. Empathy (Dorcas/Tabitha)
4. Selflessness and Sacrifice
(The Poor Widow)
5. Stewardship (Lydia)

1. Humility (Mary, the mother of Jesus)

- **Example:** Mary humbly accepted her role in God's plan, saying, "I am the Lord's servant" (Luke 1:38), even though it meant personal sacrifice and social stigma.
- **Implication:** Mary's humble submission shows that true leadership starts with surrendering one's desires for a greater purpose. Leaders today are called to accept responsibilities with humility, fostering trust and respect. Humility ensures leadership is focused on serving others, not personal ambition.



1. Humility (Mary, the mother of Jesus)

- **Example:** The story referred to is from the Gospel of Luke, where the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, a young woman living in Nazareth, to deliver an extraordinary message. Gabriel tells her that she has been chosen by God to conceive and give birth to Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah (Luke 1:26-38). Although she is a virgin and engaged to Joseph, Mary is informed that the Holy Spirit will enable this miraculous event. Despite the personal and social implications of becoming pregnant before marriage, Mary responds with faith and humility, accepting her role in God's plan.
- Mary's humility is deeply evident in her response to the angel Gabriel's announcement: "I am the Lord's servant" (Luke 1:38). This simple yet powerful statement captures her willingness to embrace God's will, even though doing so came with significant personal challenges. By accepting her role as the mother of the Messiah, Mary faced the prospect of social rejection, misunderstanding, and even danger. Yet, her response was free of hesitation, pride, or self-concern. She did not seek honor, nor did she question the wisdom of God's plan. Instead, she quietly took on the role of servant, trusting in God's purpose and direction for her

life.

- **Implication:** Mary's humble submission provides a profound example for leaders who seek to serve rather than to be served. True leadership, as demonstrated by Mary, is not about seeking recognition or advancing personal ambitions, but about yielding to a higher calling and serving others with humility. Her actions remind modern leaders that authentic leadership is grounded in service, trust, and selflessness. In a world where leaders often feel the pressure to assert their authority or pursue personal success, Mary's example urges them to focus on their greater mission, prioritizing the well-being of others above all else. Her humility builds credibility and fosters trust, the core elements of servant leadership, which inspire those around them to follow not out of obligation, but out of shared purpose and respect.

2. Listening (Mary of Bethany)

- **Example:** Mary of Bethany sat at Jesus' feet, listening to His teachings while Martha was busy with preparations. Jesus commended her for choosing "what is better" (Luke 10:39).
- **Implication:** Mary of Bethany shows that listening is foundational to wise leadership. In leadership roles where quick decisions are expected, listening first ensures leaders make informed, thoughtful decisions. Leaders who listen well build trust and strong relationships.



2. Listening (Mary of Bethany)

- **Example:** In the biblical story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), Jesus visits their home, and while Martha is busy preparing and serving, her sister Mary chooses to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His teachings. Martha, frustrated by her sister's lack of help, asks Jesus to tell Mary to assist her. However, Jesus gently corrects Martha, affirming that while her work is important, Mary has chosen "what is better" by prioritizing His words over busyness. This story highlights the value of attentiveness to spiritual growth and learning, even amidst the demands of everyday responsibilities.
- Mary exemplifies the importance choosing to place spiritual nourishment above the distractions of daily tasks. By sitting at Jesus' feet, Mary demonstrates a deep desire to learn, showing that growth and wisdom come from prioritizing listening over constant activity. Her choice reveals a willingness to put aside the culturally expected duties of hospitality in order to focus on what truly matters—being present with Christ and absorbing His teachings. Jesus' response praises Mary's decision, affirming that attentiveness to spiritual truth has eternal value. While Martha's work was necessary, Jesus emphasizes that Mary's heart for learning had

chosen the "better" part, which would not be taken from her.

- **Implication:** Mary's example underscores that effective leadership begins with careful listening and prioritizing moments of reflection. In leadership, it is easy to get caught up in the demands of tasks, deadlines, and quick decision-making, much like Martha. However, Mary's actions reveal that leaders must make time for deep listening and learning to gain the wisdom needed for thoughtful and effective decisions. In modern, fast-paced environments, leaders often feel pressure to respond quickly, but Mary's example encourages them to first pause, reflect, and seek understanding before acting. This approach not only enhances decision-making but also fosters a culture of respect, where people feel heard and valued. Leaders who prioritize listening can build trust and strengthen relationships, ensuring their decisions align with the needs and well-being of those they lead.

3. Empathy (Dorcas/Tabitha)

- **Example:** Dorcas was known for her acts of service and kindness toward the poor, making clothing for widows (Acts 9:36-42).
- **Implication:** Dorcas's empathy highlights that leadership requires more than understanding—it demands action. Leaders must respond to the needs of others, fostering a compassionate culture. Empathy builds loyalty, belonging, and mutual support, qualities essential to servant leadership.



3. Empathy (Dorcas/Tabitha)

- **Example:** In the biblical story of Dorcas (also known as Tabitha) from Acts 9:36-42, she is introduced as a disciple in Joppa who was "always doing good and helping the poor." Dorcas was especially known for making clothing for widows, who were among the most vulnerable in society. After she fell ill and died, the community, particularly the widows she had helped, mourned her deeply and showed Peter the garments she had made as a testament to her generosity. Moved by their grief and the impact she had on the community, Peter prayed for Dorcas, and she was miraculously raised from the dead. This act not only restored her life but also strengthened the faith of those around her, leading many to believe in Christ.
- Dorcas's empathy is powerfully demonstrated through her actions, particularly in her dedication to providing for the poor and widows, two groups often overlooked in her society. Her service went beyond mere sentiment; she took practical steps to meet the needs of those around her, embodying the love of Christ through her generosity. Her influence was so profound that when she passed away, the community gathered to mourn and celebrate her life, showing Peter the garments

she had lovingly crafted as symbols of her care. Peter's decision to pray for her resurrection is a reflection of how deeply Dorcas was valued, and her restoration to life allowed her compassionate influence to continue within the community.

- **Implication:** Dorcas's life of empathy and service teaches that true leadership is founded on compassion and taking action to meet the needs of others. Leaders, like Dorcas, who empathize with the struggles of their communities, understand that leadership involves more than just understanding—it requires tangible efforts to uplift and support others. Empathy-driven leadership not only addresses the immediate needs of the vulnerable but also creates a culture of care and mutual respect. In modern leadership contexts, this approach builds trust and loyalty, as people feel genuinely supported and valued. Dorcas's example also demonstrates that leadership rooted in empathy inspires others to practice kindness, creating a ripple effect of compassion and mutual support that strengthens the entire community.

4. Selflessness and Sacrifice (The Poor Widow)

- **Example:** The poor widow gave two small coins to the temple treasury, which was all she had (Mark 12:41-44). Jesus praised her for giving out of her poverty.
- **Implication:** The widow's selflessness reminds leaders that leadership involves personal sacrifice. Putting the needs of others first builds credibility and inspires commitment. Leaders who sacrifice for the good of their community or mission gain trust and loyalty from those they serve.



4. Selflessness and Sacrifice (The Poor Widow)

- **Example:** In the biblical story of the poor widow (Mark 12:41-44), Jesus observes people giving offerings at the temple treasury. While many wealthy individuals contribute large sums, a poor widow catches Jesus' attention by offering two small copper coins—an amount seemingly insignificant compared to the rich donations. Yet, Jesus praises her for giving more than anyone else because, unlike the wealthy who gave out of their abundance, she gave all she had to live on. Her act of selfless giving demonstrated a deep trust in God and a willingness to sacrifice everything, despite her own poverty.
- The poor widow's contribution to the temple may have appeared meager by material standards, but Jesus recognized the extraordinary nature of her gift. Her offering was significant not because of its monetary value, but because she gave all she had, a demonstration of complete selflessness and trust in God. Unlike the wealthy, who contributed from their surplus, the widow's gift was a true sacrifice. She put the needs of the temple and her devotion to God above her own well-being, reflecting a profound generosity of spirit. Her selflessness was not defined by the size of her contribution, but by the fact that she gave everything,

embodying the ultimate act of sacrifice.

- **Implication:** The widow's example of selflessness and sacrifice offers a powerful lesson for leaders, reminding them that true leadership is not measured by what they have, but by what they are willing to give. Leaders who prioritize the well-being of others, even at personal cost, demonstrate a level of commitment that inspires trust and loyalty. Just as the widow gave out of her poverty, effective leaders are willing to make sacrifices—whether it be time, energy, or resources—to serve the greater good. This form of leadership builds credibility and motivates others to be generous and committed to the shared mission. The widow's offering also serves as a reminder that even the smallest acts of selflessness, when done with a sincere heart, can have a lasting and profound impact on a community. Leaders who adopt this mindset foster a culture of generosity, where personal sacrifice becomes a model for others to follow.

5. Stewardship (Lydia)

- **Example:** Lydia, a businesswoman who sold purple cloth, opened her home to the early Christian community after being converted by Paul (Acts 16:14-15).
- **Implication:** Lydia's stewardship of her resources teaches that leaders are responsible for managing their resources—whether financial, human, or otherwise—for the greater good. Wise stewardship fosters sustainability, ensuring the long-term success and growth of both the leader's mission and their community.



5. Stewardship (Lydia)

- **Example:** In the biblical story of Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), she is introduced as a dealer in purple cloth, a valuable commodity, making her a successful businesswoman. While living in Philippi, Lydia hears Paul preach and is moved to believe in Christ. After her conversion, she immediately offers hospitality to Paul and his companions, insisting that they stay at her home. Her house soon becomes a central gathering place for believers, contributing significantly to the establishment of the early Christian church in Philippi. Lydia's willingness to use her resources for the fledgling Christian community showcases her leadership and stewardship.
- Lydia exemplifies wise stewardship by using her wealth and resources to support the early Christian movement. As a successful businesswoman, she could have focused solely on her own prosperity, but instead, after her conversion, she chose to serve others with what she had. By offering her home as a meeting place for believers, Lydia helped create a safe and supportive environment where the early church could flourish. Her actions went beyond financial contributions—her hospitality and willingness to use her space for the collective good made a lasting

impact on the growth of Christianity in Philippi. Lydia's stewardship of her wealth, time, and influence demonstrates her commitment to the Christian mission, showing how leaders can use their resources to create a meaningful and lasting impact.

- **Implication:** Lydia's story emphasizes that stewardship in leadership involves not just financial management, but also the wise use of all resources—whether time, talent, or property—for a greater purpose. Effective leaders, like Lydia, understand that their resources are tools for advancing the mission and goals of their communities. By allocating resources wisely, they create sustainable, long-term growth and success. Lydia's example challenges modern leaders to manage their resources with a sense of responsibility and purpose, ensuring they are used to serve others and advance collective goals. This type of stewardship fosters trust and loyalty, as it reflects a leader's commitment to the well-being of the community. Lydia's actions serve as a reminder that leadership is not just about personal success, but about using one's position and resources to nurture and support those around them, ensuring lasting impact and growth.