

The Way I See It

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The study of leadership is a massive industry in our nation. As with many current “hot topics,” the popular culture that pervades our world has great influence on the subject of leadership. An example might be the “free gift” sent to me recently entitled the *Leadership Secrets of Santa Claus*.

Parallel to the growth industry of leadership studies is the decline of the respect for leaders in general. Whether disgust is targeted at Enron, MCI, Arthur P. Andersen or Catholic priests, the result can be seen in the increasing number of Christian leaders who struggle for the human and spiritual resources to navigate their assignment effectively.

We do not work as leaders in the church with a static reference point. The Church itself and the realities of the world the churches serve are increasingly complex. Pundits rush to describe these new realities and prescribe formulas for effectiveness. We must be careful to avoid the dilemma described by 1960s political activist Paulo Freire when he said, “*If to be is to be like, then to be is to be like the oppressor.*” In other words, if you are limited to the models of leadership that are most conveniently observed, you may lead like those models observed, only in their most destructive forms.

The quest for power (the potential for influence) is central to consideration in any model of leadership. As Christian leaders, it is not enough to acquire professional skill or even biblical knowledge. Our task is to replicate in character, purpose and motivation the ministry of Jesus Christ. Skills are necessary and knowledge is foundational, but Christian leadership also requires connectedness to the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ to stay centered on efforts that have eternal consequences.

While we must engage leadership perspectives from *Harvard Business Review* to the *Leadership Secrets of Santa Claus* (that is from the serious to the popular), a steadfast reference point must remain the awareness of the mission of Jesus Christ recorded for us in Scripture and continuously empowered to this day by the Holy Spirit. The equation of leadership inevitably requires skill and knowledge, but for the Christian skill and knowledge can never be separate from connection to the present tense of Jesus and His redemptive mission, guaranteed by Pentecost.