

## *Leadership—Jesus was the Perfect Leader*

JAMES M. PARAMORE

**T**he first time I was asked to speak in the tabernacle some twelve years ago, Elder Paul Dunn told me that if I could just get rid of the little cotton man, the one who puts cotton balls in your mouth when you get up to speak in the tabernacle, I'd be okay. I'm still struggling with him, and I pray for your faith and prayers this morning.

It is an awesome responsibility to be here. I've told many today, as I've told many over the years, that I prefer a smaller setting. I enjoy being in a classroom situation with a smaller group where interaction can take place.

With leadership in attendance here from outlying areas, I would like to thank you all, on behalf of all the Brethren, for the things you do for us when we attend your conferences—your gentleness, your accepting us, your spirit. We come home every weekend feeling the Spirit of our Father in Heaven. Someone once asked us how we get recharged. We say, "By going into the field and bonding with the Latter-day Saints wherever they are. We come back filled with the Spirit." We thank you this day.

The subject I would like to talk about today is sacred and central to all we do. A little story about President Spencer W. Kimball illustrates the point. President Kimball was being

wheeled into an operating room for one of his many operations, and one of the orderlies took the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in vain. Even though President Kimball was under sedation, he rose up and told the orderly not to take the name of his Savior in vain, for he was his friend and the Savior of the world.

I would like to say a few words today about the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect leader. In 1968 at a general conference, President David O. McKay said this about Christ's example of leadership:

*Now a word to you officers and leaders in the stakes and wards, in missions, and in temples. It was the divine character of Jesus that drew the women of Palestine to him, that drew as a magnet the little children to him. It was the divine personality which attracted men, honest men, pure men. It was also that divine personality which antagonized the impure, the evil men and women.*

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*In the realm of personality, and in the kingdom of character, Christ was supreme. By personality, I mean all that may be included in individuality. Personality is a gift from God; it is indeed a “pearl of great price,” an eternal blessing. [CR, October 1968, pp. 143–44; or “Spirituality in Leading and Teaching the Gospel,” Ensign, December 1968, p. 108]*

### **The Cosmic View**

Jesus Christ was the supreme leader about whom not enough can ever be said. His task was to lead all people back to their Father in Heaven, to give us all the unlimited potential of eternal life and its blessings. We almost walk on sacred ground as we approach any phase of his life, his character, his personality, his atonement for us, and his leadership in bringing it all about. Not enough can ever be said or done about this Elder Brother of ours, the Holy One of Israel. His majesty and leadership transcend the loftiest of our thoughts and actions. He was, and is, the central figure in the creation of this earth, our placement upon it, and all the things that involve us. He was not just a manager of all of this, but was the leader, the initiator. By inspiration and direction from his Heavenly Father, he has led us.

Imagine the problem first and then the painstaking plan to affect all the children of God—the plan of God. Life would be divided into three essential parts:

1. A premortal life when we were in the presence of our Father in Heaven and his Son and would progress as far as we could go there.

2. An earth life when the children of God would come to earth to work out their probation, looking for a model along the way, an example, the sure way.

3. Then the postmortal life, where eternal opportunities, accountability, and blessings would be given.

Imagine the logistics and the principles involved in guiding the billions of his sons and

daughters through the process from having them shout for joy just to come to earth to making the actual move. Many of us have a hard time moving from one residence to another, let alone building a habitation in which to live, establishing eternal truths to guide the earthly family, managing and handling the trillions and trillions of actions that would run counter to the plan of God and that would frustrate nearly every righteous human effort, and then providing absolute justice and mercy for all (not always immediate, but always certain).

Think of the plan of God in its review and acceptance by us in the council in heaven (of course, God knew of its value and efficacy before it was ever presented). It was accepted. Jesus our Brother was accepted. This same Jesus knew what his part would be: the Creator of this mortal habitation, the Lamb, the Redeemer, the Mediator between all the children of God and their Father in Heaven, the One who would atone for us, the sure Guide—absolute in every way, and the Leader in all dimensions. Now contemplate his leadership over the centuries: the creation of the earth and all things thereon, even man and woman; his counsel and communication with the Old Testament and Book of Mormon prophets; his prophecies about his own coming forth to be the Firstborn of God; his leadership among the people; his example; his establishment of truth; his church; and the ordinances. Any one of these would be overwhelming to contemplate with the mortal mind—his great service for all humankind, his atonement for all the children of God.

All through the centuries he was involved in preparing everything to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of all men and women, living and dead. Those years were spent in leading behind the scenes and also in preparing to lead personally.

I would like to share with you an experience I had with one small dimension of his efforts to lead a wayward son. A year and a

half ago, I was assigned to go to a stake conference in New Mexico. The normal route would have been to fly to Albuquerque, rent a car, and drive to Grants, where the conference was to be held. But for some reason I was impressed that I must go to Gallup and get a car there. It had meant taking a little tiny plane. I was the only passenger on the plane with two pilots. It was a terribly windy day, and I wasn't sure we were going to arrive.

When we arrived safely at Gallup, I was very, very happy to land. I went into the airport, took out my driver's license, and put it on the desk to pick up my car. The gentleman there said, "Mr. Paramore, I'm sorry, I can't let you have a car."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Your driver's license has expired."

It had expired a week earlier on my birthday! What was I going to do? I picked up the phone and called the local bishop. He was on his way out the door to perform a marriage ceremony. I told him I was Elder Paramore, and he said, "Who?"

I told him again and I'm not sure he believed it.

He replied, "I'll see what I can do."

But I knew he didn't believe that I was there because he said, "We don't have a conference here today. What are you doing in Gallup?" I was out of my pattern; I was out of the route that I should have taken.

Sitting over in the corner of the room was a young man with his teenage son. He was dressed in tank top and construction clothes and had long clean hair. He came over to the desk, and he said, "I understand you are in a little trouble. I just came by to get some applications to take flying lessons, and I couldn't help hearing that you need help. Could I take you somewhere?"

I said, "You would be a great Christian if you could." I explained my dilemma.

"You buy my gas," he said, "and I'll drive you over." We had sixty miles to go. So we got

in his old, old worn-out car, filled with junk, and we started toward Grants, New Mexico.

On the way, I asked what every Latter-day Saint would ask:

"What do you know about the Mormons?"

"Have you ever been to Salt Lake City?"

"Have you ever read the Book of Mormon?"

To all of them the answers were affirmative.

When I asked him if he knew the Book of Mormon was true, there was a long, long pause. Finally he responded by saying, "I'm an elder in the Church, and two years ago my wife left me and my two children for another man. I was a member of the branch presidency where I live. The members of my branch cut me off and blamed me for the departure of my wife. We've never been able to go back to church because of those feelings.

"Do I know if the Book of Mormon is true, Brother Paramore? (I knew who you were.) I've read the Book of Mormon many times, and I know it's as true as anything on this earth."

In the hour and a half that passed as I rode with him to Grants, I began to see that I was sitting in the presence of a great man of God; that he knew the gospel is just as true as I did; that he had been deeply hurt by some of the members, and he hadn't been back among them. We had a wonderful conversation, including a discussion of his son some day going on a mission. I've written him every week, sent him copies of the *Church News* every week, and given him other things to read. He is making great progress. Now, think about it. There are five billion people upon the earth, and here was one man out in the wilderness about whom the Lord was concerned. So he sent a General Authority, all unknowing, out of his way, redirecting his path. It could have been anyone, but it happened to be me. And when I came home that day, I knew that God loves all his children.

### Jesus Christ, the Perfect Leader

Jesus is the perfect leader. How he does all that he does, I don't know. But he is the perfect leader. Jesus taught us that good leaders show us what we should do and then create an environment in which we can do it. Let me read you a scripture from Nephi's record of the Savior's words:

*And as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church, among my people who do repent and are baptized in my name. Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you. [3 Nephi 18:16]*

And in Matthew:

*And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. [Matthew 4:19]*

I've been on hand several times when prophets have been sustained. When President Lee and President Kimball were sustained, I was the recorder, and I was sitting on the stand watching them. I watched President Benson also. I remember their words: "Jesus Christ is at the helm in this church; he is the head of this church. Yes, I know I am the prophet, but Jesus of Nazareth leads this church; he is at the helm; he presides."

There are several characteristics of leadership that the Savior demonstrated that I would like to talk about, but I will just mention a few.

### Jesus Loves His Father and Each of Us

Jesus Christ was motivated by love, love of God and a love for us, his brothers and sisters. You remember the classic statement in Matthew that lays this attribute as the cornerstone for everything:

*Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment.*

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. [Matthew 22:35–40]*

That love is cardinal, and it is in first place among all the things that he, as our leader, would have us know. God sent Jesus to the earth as an expression of his love. Jesus' atonement for all of us was motivated by love: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Can anyone of us imagine the feelings of God in those last hours of Jesus' life, when this beloved Son was going through agonizing pain beyond anything anyone had ever experienced before? Jesus seeks to lead us to this kind of love, as recorded in John:

*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. [John 13:34]*

We love each other in this kingdom. A Latter-day Saint should never be a trial to another Latter-day Saint. A Latter-day Saint is one who makes goodness look attractive, makes love an integral part of every thought, word, and action.

### Jesus Carried Out His Father's Will

Next, Jesus did the will of his Father:

*But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever. [Moses 4:2]*

Unlike Satan, he wanted to do the will of his Father. It's important to focus on that point

because there are many implications. For those who want to do the Father's will, it is easy to be led by a prophet. It is easy to be led by a righteous father or mother or by a bishop who is doing everything he can do to help build the kingdom. Jesus further declared, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16), and much later, in his extremity, "he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39).

There is an example from the life of one of our latter-day prophets that I would like to share with you today, an example of following the will of our Heavenly Father. How many times do we have the opportunity to make that kind of decision, to determine whether we will follow God or mammon? It is cardinal to our progression. It is cardinal to having the Spirit with us. It is cardinal to personal righteousness. It is cardinal to becoming of one mind and one heart in this kingdom.

*"On Sunday the 4th day of June 1837," says Heber C. Kimball, "the Prophet Joseph came to me, while I was seated in front of the stand, above the sacrament table, on the Melchizedek side of the Temple, in Kirtland, and whispering to me, said, 'Brother Heber, the Spirit of the Lord has whispered to me: "Let my servant Heber go to England and proclaim my Gospel, and open the door of salvation to that nation."'"*

Imagine what happened after this prompting by the Lord.

*The day of departure came; Tuesday, June 13, 1837. The solemn scene of Heber's parting with his family cannot be more tenderly or graphically told than in the words of Elder Robert B. Thompson, who thus describes it:*

*"The day appointed for the departure of the Elders to England having arrived, I stepped into the house of Brother Kimball to ascertain when he*

*would start, as I expected to accompany him two or three hundred miles, intending to spend my labors in Canada that season.*

*"The door being partly opened, I entered and felt struck with the sight which presented itself to my view. I would have retired, thinking that I was intruding, but I felt riveted to the spot. The father was pouring out his soul to that 'God who rules on high, Who all the earth surveys: That rides upon the stormy sky, And calms the roaring seas,' that he would grant him a prosperous voyage across the mighty ocean, and make him useful wherever his lot should be cast, and that He who 'careth for sparrows, and feedeth the young ravens when they cry' would supply the wants of his wife and the little ones in his absence. He then, like the patriarchs, and by virtue of his office, laid his hands upon their heads individually, leaving a father's blessing upon them, and commending them to the care and protection of God, while he should be engaged preaching the Gospel in a foreign land. While thus engaged his voice was almost lost in the sobs of those around, who tried in vain to suppress them. The idea of being separated from their protector and father for so long a time was indeed painful. He proceeded, but his heart was too much affected to do so regularly. His emotions were great, and he was obliged to stop at intervals, while the big tears rolled down his cheeks, an index to the feelings which reigned in his bosom. My heart was not stout enough to refrain; in spite of myself I wept, and mingled my tears with theirs. At the same time I felt thankful that I had the privilege of contemplating such a scene. I realized that nothing could induce that man to tear himself from so affectionate a family group, from his partner and children who were so dear to him — nothing but a sense of duty and love to God and attachment to His cause." [Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), pp. 103, 108–9]*

### **Jesus Taught with Authority**

Jesus taught his followers "as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:29). Mark tells us:

*Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,*

*And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. . . .*

*And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. [Mark 1:14–15, 21]*

And he taught through stories and examples. He matched the illustrations to the needs of the people and built his lessons upon things they knew and understood.

Think of Luke 15. It is a short chapter, but in it Luke records three wonderful parables used by the Savior—the prodigal son, the lost sheep, and the lost coin—to describe how important it is to bring someone back into the arms of God.

President David O. McKay stated:

*No matter how attractive the personality may be, that leader or teacher fails in the work assigned if the leader or teacher directs the love of the member only to the personality of the leader or teacher. It is the leader's duty, or the teacher's duty, to teach the member to love— not the leader or teacher, but the truth of the gospel. Always, everywhere, we find Christ losing himself for his Father's will; and so also should our leaders and teachers, so far as their personalities are concerned, lose themselves for the truth he desires to have them teach.*

*When the people came to Jesus and asked for bread, or the truth, he never turned them away with a stone. He always had truth to give. He understood it. It radiated from his being. He understood how to use illustrations, the natural things around him, to impress that truth upon his hearers. In other words, he was filled with his subject and then was enabled to give that subject to his hearers. [CR, October 1968, p. 143; or "Spirituality," *Ensign*, December 1968, pp. 108–9]*

Now look at our current prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson, and how he has taught us to

know, use, and give the blessings of the Book of Mormon to the world. I'll never forget his first remarks to the General Authorities after he was called as prophet. He said to us: "Brethren, I've read many of your talks again, and they are wonderful, but you don't use the Book of Mormon enough. May I ask you to know it and use it more, to testify of it to the world, and to have it go into every corner of the world." His words and counsel were profound and needed as he did his Father's will. We walked back from that temple meeting sobered.

I remember who I was walking with, and I remember what I was thinking. I remember that, as director over audiovisuals in the Church, I needed to do something about putting the Book of Mormon on tape into the lives of people. They needed to understand the blessings of the Book of Mormon. Thus began a two-year experience that ended in a great video that we have in our libraries today.

Today, ten times as many copies of the Book of Mormon are sent to the world every year than ever before. And today, instead of having the Book of Mormon and other scriptures translated into thirty-five languages, President Benson has set an objective to have them translated into all the major languages by the year 2000. So there are translators around the country doing the work of translation in about eighty languages. He is a prophet of God, not afraid to tell the truth, not afraid to challenge the people, not afraid to teach what he has been called to teach in his gentle, loving, supportive way.

### **Jesus Used Leadership Skills**

Yes, Jesus taught his followers personally. But he also used leadership skills. No coercion, but gentleness, meekness, kindness—just a simple "Come, follow me." He listened. Remember the story of the adulterous woman?

*They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.*

*Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?*

*This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.*

*So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. [John 8:4–7]*

President Kimball has left us some wonderful thoughts about Christ's leadership:

*Jesus knew who he was and why he was here on this planet. That meant he could lead from strength rather than from uncertainty or weakness.*

*Jesus operated from a base of fixed principles or truths rather than making up the rules as he went along. Thus, his leadership style was not only correct but constant. . . .*

*Jesus said several times, "Come, follow me." His was a program of "do what I do," rather than "do what I say." His innate brilliance would have permitted him to put on a dazzling display, but that would have left his followers far behind. He walked and worked with those he was to serve. His was not a long-distance leadership. He was not afraid of close friendships; he was not afraid that proximity to him would disappoint his followers. The leaven of true leadership cannot lift others unless we are with and serve those to be led. . . .*

*Jesus was a listening leader. Because he loved others with a perfect love, he listened without being condescending. . . .*

*Because Jesus loved his followers, he was able to level with them, to be candid and forthright with them. . . .*

*Jesus saw sin as wrong but also was able to see sin as springing from deep and unmet needs on the part of the sinner. This permitted him to condemn the sin without condemning the individual. We can show forth our love for others even when we are called upon to correct them. We need to be able to look deeply enough into the lives of others to see the*

*basic causes for their failures and shortcomings. [TSWK, pp. 481–82]*

President Kimball has given us many other thoughts. Let me just read one or two others.

*Jesus trusts his followers enough to share his work with them so that they can grow. . . .*

*Jesus was not afraid to make demands of those he led. His leadership was not condescending or soft. [TSWK, p. 482]*

I remember an experience President Kimball had with the navy chief of chaplains a few years ago. We invite military chiefs of chaplains to visit Church headquarters so we can continue our wonderful relationship with them and maintain our chaplaincies throughout the services. It was this chaplain's first trip to the Church. He came, and Elder Hanks was with him. They saw the various leaders, they came to BYU, they went to Temple Square. They saw what we were doing with the chaplaincy, and finally they were to meet with the prophet, Spencer W. Kimball. At that time we were trying desperately to get more navy chaplains. President Kimball had been trying for years, and so had the other Brethren, without success. The two of them had a wonderful talk; it went on for about an hour. Four or five times during the conversation this navy chief of chaplains said, "President, is there anything we can do for you?"

President Kimball said, "No, I don't think so. We just love our servicemen and women so much we want to do everything we can for them."

The chaplain went on talking and then asked again, "Well, isn't there something I can do?"

Finally, the chief of chaplains said, "Well, would it be of any help if we let you have more chaplains in the United States Navy?"

President Kimball replied, “I think that would be just wonderful if that is what you would like to do.”

A perfect example of never demanding, but inviting. And when he walked out of that building with Elder Hanks that day and stopped on the front steps of the Church Office Building, this man, who would be a counterpart to an archbishop in his Catholic church, looked at Elder Hanks and said, “There is a holy man of God.”

Elder Hanks said, “He is a wonderful man.”

And he replied, “Elder Hanks, that is not what I said. He is a holy man of God.”

### **Jesus Set an Example of Personal Righteousness**

Think about Christ’s leadership style and all the things he did—his being with the people constantly. He set an example of personal righteousness. His righteousness was the thing that drew people to him. He was ever a minister to his people. He said these words:

*Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.*

*But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.* [Matthew 20:25–26]

And the Savior said to Paul on the road to Damascus:

*But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I shall appear unto thee.* [Acts 26:16]

### **An Example of His Loving Leadership**

Jesus, the perfect leader! We could conduct seminars about Jesus in all the classes that you are attending during this week—about each of these dimensions and hundreds of others.

I would just say in closing, he loved the Lord, he loved his fellowmen, he loved being with them. It was never a strain for him to be with them.

When you read 3 Nephi 17:3, 5–18, you find that, after a long day, Jesus finally exhorted the people, “Go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again.” But the people didn’t want to leave, and he sensed that they didn’t. And so he said, “Bring all your sick to me.” And so all the sick, the lame, the infirm were brought, and each one was healed. After that he asked, “Where are your little children?” They brought all the little children to him, and after awhile he set them on the ground. Then he knelt down on the ground by them and talked to them and ministered unto them. It was such a wonderful day that the heavens were parted, and the angels came out of heaven, blessing this day, giving acknowledgment to this super-wonderful Elder Brother of ours.

### **Another Example of Christlike Leadership**

In conclusion, I’d like to tell you about a man I’ve met who lives in the Magna Central Stake. About a year ago I went to his stake conference, and in an evening meeting on Saturday they had a video about this man, John Cash. It was a video about a man who is paralyzed from the neck down, a quadriplegic. I could not believe what I was seeing. He was a man who, at age 27, just recently out of military service, had gone to work for Kennecott Copper. He was working up in one of the high areas and fell thirty-five feet. Because of that fall he became paralyzed. For thirty-one years he has lived in his bed. His legs and his hands are so malformed now that it tears you apart when you visit him.

He knew nothing about Christ, he knew nothing about the Church, and he knew nothing about righteousness when he had that fall. But



little by little he began to study the words of his great Leader, his great Teacher. He began to take them into his life, think about them, and pray about them. He became active in the Church. In the early years they were able to take him in a wheelchair to the house of the Lord.

For twenty-seven years, beloved brothers and sisters, a paralyzed man has been doing his home teaching to six families every month. He does it over the phone. He has a woman who rings the number, and on the first or second day of every month he calls up his six families: "John, how are you? How is your wife? How are the kiddies? Is there anything I can do for you? I have a little message I would like to leave with you tonight that the prophet has asked us to share with you." While the family listens through their phone receivers, he delivers his message.

I went over to see him after the conference, I was so touched. I saw his wall. He has a great, big, long wall in the basement where he lives with pictures of missionaries, couples who have been married in the house of the Lord, former Speaker of the House of Representatives "Tip" O'Neill, and many, many others. I learned that every month he writes to every serviceman in the stake. Every month he writes to every

missionary. He tells them how Magna is doing in their ball games and all about the community and about the gospel.

The bishop told me that when they want people to go to the temple, they have John Cash call to invite them to go to the temple. When they want someone to work on the welfare farm, they have Brother John Cash call. Beloved brothers and sisters, he has followed the mandate, the example, of Jesus of Nazareth. He has become a lot like him. He is blessed and accepted by thousands of people who have known him over those twenty-seven years that he has been exercising leadership that is unbelievable.

May God bless us who have all our faculties and the Spirit. May he bless us to love more, serve more, minister more, teach more, help more than we do. That is the message I would like to leave. I think it is the message that Jesus lived and left and that all the prophets I have known have emulated in their lives. May God bless us. I leave you my personal testimony that I know Jesus is the Savior of the world. I know he loves me and that he loves each of his children. I know he cares about me even when I'm estranged and far away from his immediate watchcare. May God bless us to think about this, this day and always, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.