

9 Keys to Successful Leadership

James Merritt



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9 KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP

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*To my mentor and hero in the faith,
Dr. Adrian Rogers*

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The Heart of a Leader

I know before you say it: “Not another book on leadership.” Trust me—if this were one of *those* books on leadership, I would not only say the same thing but also tell you not to buy this book, much less read it. Search “leadership” on Amazon, and you will get more than 300,000 matches. Yet as prolific business and leadership author Jeffrey Krames plaintively asks, “Where on earth are all the leaders?”¹ I think it’s safe to say we don’t have 300,000 truly great leaders in America!

I want to ask the question a different way: “*Where are all the leaders who lead by example and inspire emulation of their character?*” In many ways, one could argue that Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, and Adolf Hitler were very influential leaders. But do we admire their methods or their manners and would we want our children to grow up to be just like them?

I believe that leadership is measured not just by how much you can accomplish through followers or how many followers you have. I believe that the highest level of leadership is measured by the person you are and the virtues you display. Great leadership begins with *who you are*, not *what you do*. Simply put, *the level of your leadership will never rise above the content of your character.*

Think of leadership in terms of an iceberg. The 10 percent above water represents your skill. The 90 percent below water is your character. The vast majority of leadership books deal with the 10 percent, but this book focuses on the 90 percent. Why? Because it's what's below the surface that sinks the ship.²

Like the iceberg, there is far more to leadership than meets the eye. The greatest impact truly great leaders have comes from the personal qualities you can't see on the outside, not the productive qualities you can see. I am convinced that 90 percent of our leadership comes from the values that form us and the virtues that flow from us. In other words, *character ultimately trumps competency*.

Inherently and instinctively, we know this to be true. Authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner surveyed almost 1500 managers from around the country as part of a study sponsored by the American Management Association. They asked this opened-ended question: "What values, personal traits, or characteristics do you look for and admire in your superiors?" Put differently, they were asking, "What characteristics apart from title or authority would make you want to voluntarily follow a leader?"

More than 225 values and traits were identified, which were then grouped into 15 categories. The number one thing respondents said they wanted most from their leaders was *integrity*. The categories that immediately followed were "is truthful," "is trustworthy," "has character," and "has convictions." These qualities ranked above "competency," "intelligence," and "is inspiring."³ These responses focus on the hidden 90 percent of the iceberg.

I have read and collected leadership books for years. Time management, conflict management, staff management...my head swims from all the advice and practical suggestions that I

have gleaned—and yes, used successfully. These books greatly enhance the 10 percent of the iceberg and make it shine, and some may have a chapter or two on the 90 percent. But almost all of these books focus on the leader's head. Very few focus on the leader's heart.

Great leaders don't just produce great results; they portray great character and inspire others to become better people by the way they lead their own lives.

I'm reminded of the story of a hot-air balloonist who had drifted off course. He saw a man on the ground and yelled, "Excuse me, can you tell me where I am?"

"Yes, you're in a balloon," the guy replied.

"You must work in IT," the balloonist said.

"I do indeed! How did you know?"

"What you told me is technically correct but of no use to anyone."

So many leadership tomes pontificate on...

- how to move an organization forward but not how to move people upward
- how a company can go from good to great but not how a leader should be good in order to help his people become great
- how to grow profits and productivity but not how to grow people as you grow yourself

This is the big difference in this book. A great leader doesn't just have a great mind; he has a great soul. A brilliant brain is

no substitute for a pure heart. To paraphrase Jesus, “What does it profit a person to double the revenues, increase productivity, and satisfy the stockholders while sacrificing his integrity, cutting corners, and treating people like property?” Great leaders don’t just produce great results; they portray great character and inspire others to become better people by the way they lead their own lives.

In the classic work *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Captain Christian stood before the tribunal that would determine his fate. They concluded, “If decency does not abide in the captain of the ship, then it is not on board.” I have learned as a pastor that no one sets the tone among our staff, lay leadership, or the church as a whole like the pastor. This is also true if you are a coach, principal, manager, or CEO.

I have worked with hundreds of people over decades, and I have learned that without exception, every person is either a thermometer or a thermostat. Some people register and reflect the climate around them; others set it. Some people dance to the beat of the music; others set the beat and direct the band.

Most people—by far—are thermometers. They “go along to get along.” They are perfect reflections of the style, dress, actions, attitudes, and directions of those around them. They are mirrors of their culture and perfectly happy to be so.

Leaders, on the other hand, are thermostats. They set the tone and the temperature of their culture and the people they lead. The currency of their leadership is influence, and they spend it wisely but liberally. The buck stops with them, and that’s exactly where they want the buck to stop. They know the values they live by and the virtues they exude, and they want them to be mirrored in their followers.⁴

Leaders can *drive* others to follow them by force and mandated authority, or they can *move* others to follow them by their character and convictions. Both may get a job done, but the impact and influence of the latter remain long after those of the former have faded.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote this in his poem “A Psalm of Life”:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

The leaders who have the best and most enduring impact live that sublime life, which is the focus of this book.

The character instilled in a nation, a family,
followers of any ilk and sort will linger long after
competency has evaporated into thin air.

God warned Israel of the priority of character over competency in leadership. Did you know that Jewish kings were required to make a copy of God’s law in their own handwriting and keep it on their person at all times? Like American Express, they couldn’t leave home without it. Why would God require this of the king? He knew the constant presence of the law would force the king to internalize it, personalize it, and use it as a portable guard around his heart.⁵ According to this scriptural admonition, it would cement his legacy and multiply his influence:

This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. And it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel.⁶

Did you read that last sentence? The character instilled in a nation, a family, followers of any ilk and sort will linger long after competency has evaporated into thin air. This was illustrated to me in an unforgettable way in China more than a decade ago.

I was president of the Southern Baptist Convention (a true test of leadership if there ever was one) and was on a trip to China to visit Christians and churches there. One morning I was taken to the Great Wall and was fascinated by this magnificent engineering feat, constructed more than 2200 years ago and stretching more than 13,000 miles. It was built for border control—to protect against invasion of various nomadic tribes.

The wall was built so thick and so high the Chinese felt it could neither be scaled nor breached. A confident air of security filled the homes of the Chinese people. Yet during the first 100 years of the wall's existence, China was invaded three times! How? Not once was the wall broken down. Not once did an enemy invader climb over it. All three times a gatekeeper was bribed and the enemy marched right through the gates. The Chinese relied on the competency of the wall builders and the concrete of the wall itself, but they forgot the importance of the character of their people.

Leadership is not vested in the position one holds in his title but in the principles one holds in his heart.

I am reminded of the story of a train that was about to leave a large railroad station. The conductor began to take tickets. Looking at the ticket of the first passenger, he said, "Friend, I think you're on the wrong train."

"But the ticket agent told me this was my train," the man said.

After a little discussion, the conductor decided to check with the ticket agent. Before long, it became clear that the conductor was on the wrong train! When the leader is lost, how can the followers be going on the right track?

Leadership is not vested in the position one holds in his title but in the principles one holds in his heart. Dwight D. Eisenhower, one of our greatest military leaders and finest presidents, put it best:

In order to be a leader a man must have followers. And to have followers, a man must have their confidence. Hence the supreme quality of a leader is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, on a football field, in an army, or in an office. If a man's associates find him guilty of phoniness, if they find that he lacks forthright integrity, he will fail. His teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need, therefore, is integrity and high purpose.

Eisenhower was dead-on. I believe that who you are, what you believe and live by, and how you treat others is far more important than what you accomplish, build, and produce. In

the long run, character will accomplish far more lasting results, both in time and eternity, than competence alone ever will.

Paul Borthwick writes this in *Leading the Way*:

The world needs leaders...
 who cannot be bought;
 whose word is their promise;
 who put character above wealth;
 who possess opinions and a will;
 who are larger than their vocations;
 who do not hesitate to take chances;
 who will not lose their individuality in a crowd;
 who will be honest in small things as well as in great things;
 who will make no compromise with wrong;
 whose ambitions are not confined to their own selfish desires;
 who will not say they do it “because everybody else does it”;
 who are true to their friends through good report and evil report, in adversity as well as in prosperity;
 who do not believe that shrewdness, cunning, and hardheadedness are the best qualities for winning success;
 who are not ashamed or afraid to stand for the truth when it is unpopular;
 who can say no with emphasis, although the rest of the world says yes.⁷

I agree, and I believe the way to become this kind of leader is found in the greatest leadership book in the world, the Bible, which tells us about the greatest leader who ever lived—Jesus Christ. Tucked away in this book is a list of virtues that, if sown

in the heart to bear fruit in the life, practically guarantee the character needed to be the best leader one can be. The Bible even calls these virtues “fruit.”⁸ Jesus was the very embodiment of these qualities and wants to reproduce them in leaders today.

My hope is that this book will be the plow that opens the soil of your heart so that these seeds can be planted and this fruit can be borne.

The importance of this can be seen in the following study. One might think that knowledge, experience, expertise, and competence might be the greatest assets for vocational and leadership success. The Carnegie Foundation discovered that relational skills are far more important to success in leading and managing. Their research found that only 15 percent of a person’s success is determined by job knowledge and technical skills. The other 85 percent is determined by an individual’s attitude and ability to relate to other people.⁹

If you were told that you were going to work for someone who constantly displayed love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, do you think you might be interested? You think this person would not only be worth following but would make you an even better person by doing so?

If you would like to meet that person and *become* that person, hop on board. It’s going to be a fun-filled, eye-opening, life-changing ride.

Chapter One

The Key That Always Fits

*"The loneliest place in the world is the
human heart when love is absent."*

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Sitting in a cold hospital room, you play with the frayed strings on the edge of your shirt. You're trying to occupy your mind, pretending not to be nervous for the sake of your wife. Suddenly, the latch clicks and the door swings open.

"I'm going to give it to you straight," your doctor says. "You have only a few days to live."

The doctor says his prognosis is certain. No chance for error, no possibility the files were mixed. No cure. No antidote. No treatment. Nothing. Your ticket for the train to eternity has been punched, and you will be at the station on time whether you like it or not.

May I suggest that the most important thing in your life will not be the bottom line of your balance sheet, the size of your portfolio, the number of people who reported to you, the title you carried at your company, the size of your pension, or the letters behind your name on your business card. The one thing that *will* leap to the top of your priority list will be relationships.

A recent Harris Poll asked many Americans to name what they considered most important in life. Consider their response.

- Relationships—56 percent
- Religious faith—21 percent
- Making the world a better place—12 percent
- A fulfilling career—5 percent
- Money—5 percent

Respondents to this poll ranked relationships higher in importance than either career or money by a ratio of more than *10 to 1*. While it could be debated that not everyone in the survey responded truthfully, at least the poll reveals what, deep down, people know is truly important.

John Donne was right: “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main...any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

Think about how crucial relationships are:

- A successful marriage depends upon the *relationship* between the husband and wife.
- A happy home depends upon the *relationship* between the parents and the children (and between the siblings).
- A prosperous business depends upon the *relationship* between the employees and the customers.
- A peaceful community depends upon the *relationship* between neighbors.

- A successful political campaign depends upon the *relationship* between the candidate and the voters.
- A stable nation depends upon the *relationship* between nations.

Everyone needs someone. Even Batman needed Robin. Variety may give life spice, but *relationships* give life significance, purpose, and meaning.

That principle will help you to understand and appreciate something John Rockefeller once said. In his day, Rockefeller was the richest man in the world. Accounting for inflation, he was far wealthier than Bill Gates is today. A business mind *par excellence*, Rockefeller once said, “The ability to deal with people is as purchasable a commodity as sugar or coffee, and I will pay more for the ability than any other under the sun.”

Variety may give life spice, but *relationships* give life significance, purpose, and meaning.

Rockefeller’s words still ring true today. Who you are in the core of your being and how you relate to others will be more valuable at the end of life’s journey than the political acumen of Bill Clinton, the wealth of Oprah Winfrey, the fame of LeBron James, or the influence of Barack Obama.

No one on earth has the power to influence the people you know more than you do. If you can harness and control your relationships, you will possess incredible power. That’s one of the principles that makes this book so different. Other books discuss the “how” of relationship building, networking, influencing, and ultimately leading; this book deals with the “who.”

If you want to have the maximum influence and the greatest impact on others, you must believe that *who you are matters more than what you do*.

Over the last several years, a debate has raged in this country over whether character really counts or ability is all that matters. The consensus appears to be that a person's behavior in private has little bearing on his or her ability to lead or influence in public. Yet this belief contradicts public sentiment.

A core of character exists within us that, if activated and lived out, enables us to achieve the greatest possible impact on others. One of the biggest components of our character is the subject of this chapter. This component is the most powerful emotion and experience in the world. When expressed, it can forge new partnerships or destroy dreams.

In German, *Ich liebe dich*.

In Mandarin, *Wo ai ni*.

In Japanese, *Sukiyo*.

In Russian, *Ya tyebya lyublyu*.

In Greek, *S'agapo*.

In Spanish, *Te amo*.

In Polish, *Kocham cie*.

In English, *I love you*.

The Best App You'll Ever Add to Your iLife

I recently broke down after much resistance and joined the other six billion people of the world and bought an iPhone. I previously owned a "crackberry," and I was frankly very pleased with it. What pushed me over the edge to make the switch? The applications. Everyone knows that the iPhone apps are killer cool. Today, as a proud iPhone user, I visit my neighborhood Apple store at least once a week to see what new apps have been released.

If life were an iPhone, love would be
the first app you should add.

Tim Sanders wrote a tremendous book with an amazing title: *Love Is the Killer App: How to Win Business and Influence Friends*. He states that love is the crucial element in the search for personal and professional success. According to Sanders, if life were an iPhone, love would be the first app you should add.

From everything I've learned, Sanders is onto something. I am convinced that the greatest leaders are loving leaders—their followers, friends, and employees know that the one above them always has their best interests at heart. Stop and think about this: Would you say that the people who had the greatest and most lasting impact on you were people you felt genuinely loved you and cared for you?

I've studied love a lot over the years. My mentor on this topic knows more about love than anyone in history. You've probably heard of Him: Jesus. Even non-Christians agree that Jesus knew something about loving others. He taught about it, but most importantly, He lived it. In fact, Jesus gave the greatest, most succinct explanations of love ever recorded:

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:35-40).

This sounds good, but how do love and influence interface? Why is love such a crucial component of an influencer's toolkit? To answer these questions, I propose we delve into Jesus' words. No matter your religious tradition, no one denies that Jesus was a person of profound influence and impact even two millennia after His life. I am convinced that if Jesus were alive today, He would be teaching aspiring influencers everywhere how to love others and impact the world.

Love Is a Must

Jesus' love is a command not a request. This command clues us in about the true nature and behavior of love. If love can be commanded, then it cannot be merely emotional—only a matter of feelings—as is often portrayed in the entertainment industry. That may be an accurate depiction of juvenile ardor, but genuine love is much more than a mere feeling. Love is a matter of the will. That's why Jesus is able to command us to express it. It's a commandment followed by a commitment. Although feelings are important, true love functions regardless of feelings.

For thousands of years (and to this day in some Eastern cultures), parents arranged their children's marriages. Many brides and bridegrooms never saw each other until their wedding day.

A certain young lady from India was to be married to a young man she had never met. One day she received a letter from her fiancé to acquaint her with him prior to the wedding. But the young woman returned the letter unopened, saying she believed love should be developed after marriage and not before. "When we are born," the woman said, "we cannot choose our mother and father or our brothers and sisters. Yet we learn to live with them and to love them. So it is with our husband or wife." In

societies that accept such a philosophy, divorce is almost non-existent.

While I do not suggest that we return to the practice of arranged marriages, I do insist that “romantic love” as popularly understood has little to do with a successful marriage. Love is more than feelings.

My marriage is a perfect example of this. I have been married for over three decades. I proposed to my wife and told her I “loved her” on our second date. I actually experienced “love at first sight,” but I thought the first date might be rushing it a bit, and I wanted to give her time to get used to the idea that she loved me too. Did I *really* love her after only two dates? I can honestly say that I loved her as much as anyone can after only two days of interaction. But my love then was galaxies away from the real love I have for her today.

Thirty years later, I understand that love is a choice rather than a sappy let’s-all-hold-hands-and-sing “We Are the World” sentiment. Love is a commitment to caring for others and doing for others regardless of our feelings. We choose to love.

Mark Sanborn in his wonderful little book *The Fred Factor* made this observation:

I learned a long time ago that liking people and loving them are different. Liking someone is an emotional response. Unlike love, “like” is a feeling. The tough part is that we can’t control our emotions. We can control how we choose to express those emotions but not the feelings themselves. A healthy person can choose to be angry and still choose to act lovingly...A feeling is a reaction. Maybe that’s one reason Jesus didn’t say “Like your enemies.” He knew that liking or not liking someone was not always in our immediate control...I

have learned that love is, among other things, an action. I can love someone I don't necessarily like. I can do something or act toward that person in a certain way because I know it is the right thing to do even if I don't feel warm and fuzzy doing it.¹

Those of you who are managers and leaders would do well to remember that. You may not like your employees, but if you stop loving them, you've gone too far. Your boss may not be likeable, but you must do your best to love him or her despite this sentiment. Jesus commanded us to love, and taking His words seriously makes us better leaders and influencers.

Love Has an Upward Dimension

Real love is multidimensional. In the passage in Matthew, Jesus reveals three directions for love: toward God, others, and ourselves. The first love—for God—is an upward love that must take priority. We should love God first, most, and best. Jesus tells us that God deserves all of our love, not only part of our love. We should love no one more than God. Jesus taught that if love is to be fully manifested, maximally beneficial, and mutually satisfying, we should love God first, others second, and ourselves last.

Some readers may squirm in discomfort at this juncture and prefer to leave any reference to deity out of the influencer equation. This is neither completely possible nor desirable. Love for God *only enhances* our love for others and hence strengthens our ability to influence and impact others in a positive way.

You might be asking, "Is it possible to love others or to experience love apart from God?" Certainly, for people do it every day. But if Jesus was right, unless we first love God and receive His love, we can't fully experience or manifest the greatest love.

If you love God, your love for others will grow even greater, for this upward love supernaturally produces a love for others.

Love is like a river—it always flows *downstream*. When the vertical dimension of love is experienced, the horizontal dimension will be a natural result.

When you love God the most, you will love others the best. British author C.S. Lewis once said, “When I have learned to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now.” Indeed love is like a river—it always flows *downstream*. When the vertical dimension of love is experienced, the horizontal dimension will be a natural result.

Love Has an Outward Dimension

Jesus also calls us to love our neighbor. A love for God inescapably motivates a love for others. Of course, it’s hard to love everybody. As C.W. Vanderbergh wrote, “To love the whole world for me is no chore. My only real problem is my neighbor next door.”

Most businesses would benefit greatly if the boss truly loved his employees and they knew it. Most marriages would be happier if spouses heard and saw constant reminders that they were loved. Most families would be happier if the parents constantly and lovingly affirmed their children.

Consider this simple but powerful principle that can transform any relationship almost overnight: *When it comes to love, say it.*

My dad went to heaven more than 10 years ago. He grew up in a relatively good—but loveless—home. Between them, my

grandparents lived a total of 180 years. In the combined 106 years my dad knew them, they never once told him they loved him. I am so glad that the last time I saw my dad alive, I told him, “You are my best man and I love you.”

About 20 years ago I met Tony, a Palestinian who has since become a part of my family. Until I told him “I love you,” he had never heard another man say those three words to him. At first, all he could say was “thank you.” I just kept on speaking those three words. After years of telling him, he said to me, “I love you, man.” Later he told me that he has never felt so good about expressing his love to others in such an open way.

Why not start now to become a loving person or a person better at loving? For the next 30 days, try the following:

- Tell every member of your family that you love them, and give them several loving touches, pats, hugs, and kisses every day.
- If you are a boss, manager, or employer, tell your employees that you love and appreciate them for the work they do. Find some way to give a tangible expression (note, card, or pat on the back) of your loving affirmation.
- If you are an employee, do the same for your employers.
- If you have been at odds with someone, go to that person and affirm your love for him, regardless of your differences.

One word of warning: loving others and expressing that love verbally and tangibly can entail great risk. But the risk is worth taking. I can name at least four reasons why those three words

need to come from our lips regularly and often: (1) you need to say it; (2) you need to hear yourself say it; (3) others need to hear you say it; and (4) you need to hear it from others. What's wrong with a general telling his troops he loves them? Why doesn't a boss tell his employees he loves them? Why shouldn't a coach tell his players he loves them? In my mind, they should.

In 1999, Duke University played the University of Connecticut for the NCAA men's basketball championship. Duke had a chance to win, but in the last five seconds a Duke player lost the ball and, with it, the game.

What did Coach Mike Krzyzewski say after he lost for the fourth time in a national championship game? "I'm really proud of my team," he declared. "I really love these guys. I have a hard time being sad. I don't coach for winning. I coach for relationships." Coach K really does love his players, and people know it. That's one reason why he is considered one of the outstanding coaches and recruiters in America.

Husbands, your wife needs to hear you say those three words, repeatedly, every day. Don't be like the husband and wife who were sitting on a swing one afternoon. The woman turned to her spouse and said, "You never tell me you love me." Without looking at his wife, the man dryly replied, "I told you 37 years ago that I loved you, and if I change my mind, I will let you know."

Your spouse may *know* it, but they still need to hear it.

If love is going to be maximally effective,
it should be seen, heard, and felt.

But saying it isn't enough. There's another action piece at work here: *When it comes to love, show it.* Love must not only

be articulated but also demonstrated. Love is proactive, practical, and personal. It is tangible—something to be seen as well as heard. If love is going to be maximally effective, it should be seen, heard, and felt.

A simple touch can convey an incredible sense of love, affirmation, and acceptance. A study conducted at UCLA several years ago found that to maintain physical and emotional health, men and women need eight to ten meaningful touches each day. These researchers defined meaningful touch as a gentle tap, stroke, kiss, or hug, given by a “significant other” such as a husband, wife, parent, or close friend. Of course, in a professional relationship (and in certain personal relationships), caution should be exercised in touching anyone of the opposite sex. The point is, love should be tangibly expressed in the right place and time.

An old commercial appropriately asked parents, “Have you hugged your kids today?” Good coaches high-five their players, good husbands hug their wives, and good bosses give employees encouraging pats on the back as a way of expressing loving affirmation. It may sound trite but a “pat on the back” really can be beneficial.

Dr. Dolores Krieger, professor of nursing at New York University, has done numerous studies on the effect of human touch. She found that both the toucher and the one being touched receive great physiological benefit. Here’s how: Red blood cells carry hemoglobin, a substance that carries oxygen to the body’s tissues. Dr. Krieger found that hemoglobin levels in the bloodstreams of both people increase when one lays hands on the other. As hemoglobin levels rise, body tissues receive more oxygen. This oxygen increase invigorates both parties and can even aid in the healing process (the healing power of love in action).

An incredible true story illustrates this power of a loving touch. Leprosy patients feel no physical pain except in the early stages of the disease. Lack of feeling is the problem, for after leprosy bacilli deaden nerve cells, patients lose pain as an all-important danger signal. They may step on a rusty nail or scratch an infected spot on the eyeball without even knowing it. The result can be the eventual loss of a limb or vision, but at no point does the leprosy patient actually hurt.

Although they do not feel physical pain, leprosy patients do suffer incredibly from the rejection of the outside world. Dr. Paul Brand, a leprosy specialist, tells of a bright young man he treated in India. In the course of his examination, he laid his hand on the patient's shoulder and informed him through a translator about the treatment he would receive. To the doctor's shock, the man began to tremble and sob uncontrollably. Brand immediately asked the translator what he had done wrong. She quizzed the patient and explained, "No, doctor. He says he is crying because you put your hand around his shoulder. Until he came here, no one had touched him in many years." Dr. Brand expressed love for this man, and it translated into both influence and impact.

The law says, "What's mine is mine; I'll keep it."

Our lust says, "What's yours is mine; I'll take it."

True love says, "What's mine is yours; I'll share it."

Love sets off a divine chain reaction. Love is the spark that kindles the fire of compassion. Compassion is the fire that lights the candle of service. Service is the candle that ignites the torch of hope. Hope is the torch that lights the beacon of faith. Faith is the beacon that reflects the power of God. And God is the power that creates the miracle of love.

The way of love is not only the right way; it is the best way.

You can experience nothing as self-gratifying or encouraging as loving others through both words and deeds.

Love Has an Inward Dimension

Many forget that Jesus said we should love our neighbors *as ourselves*. On the surface, this seems to be a mandate for self-love. But when we consider His words in context, we see the principle Jesus gave was radical and refreshing. Jesus declared that if we love God properly, we will come to love ourselves properly. The great Swiss psychologist Paul Tournier once said, “If a person will love God the way he ought to love God, he will then love others the way he ought to love others; and when he loves God and others the way they ought to be loved, he will never need a psychiatrist.” Love can give you a healthy mental picture of yourself, enhancing the type of self-esteem that avoids self-worship or self-idolization.

The topics of self and self-esteem have generated an incredible amount of press in recent years. Much of the coverage has been counterproductive, fostering an unhealthy obsession with self and spawning a culture of selfishness that chants the mantra, “What’s in it for me?” Simply affirming “I’m okay and you’re okay” is not good enough, for neither you nor I may really be okay. If you are okay with God and okay with others, chances are you will be okay with yourself. When you love God and your neighbor, self won’t seem so important. You will find that love can motivate in a way that fame or fortune never could.

If you are not loving, you are not living.

If you wrestle with insecurities, self-doubt, even self-loathing, it will eventually be revealed in your relationships. Unless dealt

with, these traits will greatly hinder your ability to impact and influence others. I have found that people who are irritable, hard to work with, or hard to get along with usually are most unhappy with themselves.

A wise writer and evangelist, Henry Drummond, once said:

To love abundantly is to live abundantly; and to love forever is to live forever. Hence, eternal life is inextricably bound up with love. We want to live forever for the same reason we want to live tomorrow. Why do you want to live tomorrow? It is because someone loves you, and you want to see them tomorrow because you love them back. Being loved and loving others is the only reason why we should continue living. It is when a man has no one to love him, or thinks that he has no one to love him, that he commits suicide. So long as he has friends, those who love him and whom he loves, he will live; because to live is to love.²

Drummond was right. If you are not loving, you are not living. Even the poorest person on earth can give away love. We all need to be loved and we all need to love someone else, for someone always needs our love. I must warn you that a life of love is risky. Choosing to love makes you vulnerable. But that is the difference between losers and winners: *A winner is willing to risk not being like others to rise above others.* As author and poet William Arthur Ward says, “Only the person who risks is free.”

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

Love involves risk, pain, and heartache, but it can bring a tidal wave of joy that washes the tough times away. David Ireland wrote *Letters to an Unborn Child* while dying from a crippling neurological disease. He composed these letters to the

unborn child still in the womb of his wife—a child he knew he'd probably never see, hold, rock, kiss, or take to a ball game or a movie. A child he might never shoot baskets with, take to the circus, or comfort after a bad dream. He desperately wanted that child to know that, whether dead or alive, “Daddy loves his son or daughter.” With that in mind, David wrote the following:

Your mother is special. Few men know what it's like to receive appreciation for taking their wives out to dinner when it entails what it does for us. It means that she has to dress me, shave me, brush my teeth, comb my hair, wheel me out of the house and down the steps, open the garage and put me in the car, take the pedals off the chair, stand me up, sit me in the seat of the car, twist me around so that I'm comfortable, fold the wheelchair, put it in the car, go around to the other side of the car, start it up, back it out, get out of the car, pull the garage door down, get back into the car, and drive off to the restaurant.

And then, it starts all over again; she gets out of the car, unfolds the wheelchair, opens the door, spins me around, stands me up, seats me in the wheelchair, pushes the pedals out, closes and locks the car, wheels me into the restaurant, then takes the pedals off the wheelchair so I won't be uncomfortable. We sit down to have dinner, and she feeds me through the entire meal. And when it's over she pays the bill, pushes the wheelchair out to the car again and reverses the same routine.

And when it's over—finished—with real warmth she'll say, “Honey, thank you for taking me out to dinner.” I never quite know how to answer.³

I have never met this tremendous woman, but I guarantee you she knows how to impact and influence *anybody*. I want her on my team anytime! Even while her husband was dying, she kept him *really* living by her loving. Risky? Yes. Difficult? Absolutely. Yet she teaches us all that the greatest rewards in life come when we love and are loved.

Like Ireland's wife, we too have been given the task of loving. We must learn to love God, others, and ourselves in the proper proportions and order. It is risky, but it's worth it. And it will pay dividends from the bank of influence and impact for years to come.

Principle One—Lead with love, and people will gladly follow.