

A Flourishing Culture

Examples from the life of Jesus



By Jon Byler

About the Author

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Jon served in Kenya for 13 years and in different capacities in the church including pastoral ministry and leadership development, then another 15 years of international training with church leaders and 5 years of training within business organization. He has authored several books including *7 Keys to Financial Freedom*, *The Heart of Christian Leadership*, *The Art of Christian Leadership*, and *Signposts for the Journey, Vol. 1, II, and III* and several booklets on other topics. He writes a bi-weekly e-Zine *Reflections for Serving Leaders* which is distributed by email in English and Spanish. (Sign up to receive a free copy on his website.)

Jon is available for speaking and consulting especially in the areas of leadership, church growth, and missions. For more information see his website, www.LeadersServe.com.



The following is a compilation of a biweekly email newsletter series about a Flourishing Culture using examples from the life of Jesus. These “Reflections for Serving Leaders” were written for serving leaders around the world to learn what it means to lead like Jesus. The issue number and date used are the dates for the original publication.

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A Flourishing Culture: Servant Leadership

Issue #414, January 14, 2026

Flourishing things are attractive. We love to look at a well-manicured flower garden where all the plants are healthy and strong. The same is true for organizations that flourish—they are attractive. Flourishing plants require healthy soil; flourishing organizations require a healthy culture.

In this series we'll examine 6 elements of a flourishing culture* and look at how Jesus modeled these elements in his own leadership. The first element of a flourishing culture is a servant leader. The servant leader shapes the culture to help organizations thrive. Jesus illustrates this with His life and teaching.

²⁴ *A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.*
²⁵ *Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.* ²⁶ *But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.* ²⁷ *For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves (Luke 22:24-27, NIV).*

Jesus contrasts typical leadership with the way He serves.

Servant leadership brings flourishing by lifting others.

Jesus observes, *"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over"* those they lead. They see themselves at the top of the organizational chart. They are the bosses that tell others what to do. They rule; others obey! They lift themselves up. But Jesus challenges us to become like the youngest and to lift others up rather than ourselves. Some leaders lift themselves up. Servant leaders lift others up. People flourish when they know their leader genuinely wants to see them succeed.

Servant leadership brings flourishing by acknowledging others.

Jesus notes that *"those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors."* They give themselves nice titles and accolades. They celebrate their own success and watch for failure in those they lead. Jesus points to a different way of leading. He calls us to recognize the achievements of others, to celebrate their successes, to catch people doing what's right and call it out!

Some leaders shine the light on themselves but servant leaders shine the light on others. People flourish when their achievements are celebrated and when they know their leader is cheering them on.

Servant leadership brings flourishing by modeling for others.

After Jesus illustrates the difference between common leadership in the world and His leadership, He also states the obvious, *"I am among you as one who serves."* Jesus was the model of the radical leadership He was asking of His followers. He showed them that leadership was not about who has the highest title or position. He used His power, but it was always to serve others, not His own interests. He practiced what He preached. His mission was to lower Himself to become a man and to follow the path of humility to the cross. His serving was not a leadership technique—it was the heart of who He was.

Some leaders tell others what to do, but they don't follow their own standards. But serving leaders humbly model what they call others to do. They live out their heart of service. People flourish when their leader is a person of integrity who practices what they proclaim.

For further reflection and discussion:

Reflect on your own leadership journey in relation to being a servant leader. On a scale of 1-10 (10 is perfect) how would you rate your own leadership? Why?

In what way have I used my leadership role to lift others up? In what ways could I lift others up more often and deliberately? Are there things in my heart that keep me from lifting others up, eg. fear, pride, insecurity?

Reflect on how you can celebrate a recent success of those you lead. Develop a plan of action on what you will do and when you will do it.

How confidently can you say to others, "I am among you as one who serves"? What would it take for you to be able to say this more confidently?

In addition to the scripture used in this issue, reflect on the following verses from the life of Jesus: Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 5:25-34, 6:30-34, 10:13-16, 35-45; John 13:1-17; What additional insights do you find?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll look at the next element of a flourishing culture: Vision Clarity

*Note: This series is based on The LeadersServe Culture™ which is designed to help people flourish and organizations thrive. This happens when leaders serve. The LeadersServe Culture™ training provides an in depth look at each of these elements with practical exercise to clarify, communicate and cultivate each one into the life of your organization. For more information about this model and other training resources visit LeadersServe.com.

A Flourishing Culture: Vision Clarity

Issue #415, January 28, 2026

Vision, a compelling view of the future, is an essential ingredient in a culture that has energy, alignment, resilience and impact—a flourishing culture. In the last issue we examined how Jesus modeled servant leadership in ways that brought flourishing to His world. Now, we'll shift to how He used a clear vision to produce flourishing among His followers—and how that dynamic shapes healthy cultures today.

Jesus continually shared His vision for the future throughout His ministry, most clearly as He spoke of the rule and reign of God in the world—the kingdom of God. Perhaps the simplest expression of this vision was the phrase He encouraged the disciples to pray,

"...Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10, NIV).

Imagine a world in which God's will is done as it is in heaven! This is an amazing thought, nearly beyond our ability to imagine. The vision Jesus shared provided motivation for the disciples to flourish as leaders. By incorporating this phrase into the model prayer, Jesus ensured that it would be repeated often by His followers—continuing to shape and motivate us more than 2,000 years after He spoke it. We learn from Him the power of a clear vision.

Vision clarity brings flourishing by providing purpose.

The vision of a world that was more fully aligned with heaven provided purpose to the work the disciples were called to do. As they visited towns and villages and later took the message to the world, they were keenly aware that their daily actions were a part of something far larger than themselves. Their work had meaning.

Humans are designed to need purpose in their lives. We all want to be a part of something that is bigger than ourselves, something that stirs commitment inside of us. A clear vision meets this need by providing purpose.

Some leaders rely primarily on compensation to motivate their teams and do little to call others to a powerful vision. But serving leaders create a compelling vision for their organization. They recognize that every organization exists to bring good to the world and to make the world a better place in some way. Then, they ensure that every person in the organization understands how their work helps accomplish that purpose. This can be as simple as a question: "Do you realize that what you are doing helps us reach the vision?"

Vision clarity brings flourishing by stirring passion.

The vision of Jesus was so big that it stirred passion in the lives of the disciples. They willingly gave time and energy to bring the vision to reality. A clear vision that is compelling and exciting causes people to come to life by igniting their passion.

Some leaders offer their teams a vision of profitability or market dominance. While important, these goals alone are rarely large enough to stir passion on the team. But serving leaders stir passion in their followers by inspiring hope that together they can accomplish the nearly impossible dream.

Vision clarity brings flourishing by encouraging perseverance.

Jesus knew there would be a high cost to accomplish the vision and shared this often. He would die for it along with several of the disciples. All would suffer greatly. But a compelling

vision encourages perseverance. The vision is worth the pain and cost that it requires to accomplish.

Some leaders expect their followers to persevere simply to keep their jobs. But serving leaders remind their followers that accomplishing the vision is worth the cost.

The vision Jesus shared energized ordinary men into passionate champions of His cause. He calls each of us to do the same in the arena in which we lead and serve.

For further reflection and discussion:

Reflect on your own leadership journey in relation to this element, clarifying vision for your organization. On a scale of 1-10 (10 is perfect) how would you rate your own effectiveness in keeping the vision clear and in front of those you serve?

If the vision of Jesus is to bring God's will to the earth, what specific part of that does my organization exist to fulfill? How does my organization make the world a better place?

Does our current vision statement express this well? If not, what can I do to improve it?

What do I do as a leader to connect the work of each person I lead to the vision? What additional step can I take in my next conversation with someone on my team?

Is the vision I share for my organization large enough to inspire passion in people? What more can I do as a leader to connect their hearts with the vision?

In addition to the scripture used in this issue, reflect on the following verses from the life of Jesus: Matthew 10:5-8, 19:28-30, 25:31-46, 28:18-20; Mark 14:60-62; Luke 17:20-21, 21:12-19; and John 16:33. What additional insights related to vision do you find?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll examine the next element of a flourishing culture: Values Alignment

A Flourishing Culture: Values Alignment

Issue #416, February 11, 2026

Jesus invested time and energy to instill His values in the lives of His disciples. His first formal teaching, the Sermon on the Mount, begins with a list of values:

He said: ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3-10, NIV.)

Jesus begins His teaching, not with commandments for living but with values to practice. He wanted the values of His followers to align with His. His example guides serving leaders to clearly establish the values of the organization in ways that produce flourishing.

Values alignment brings flourishing by guiding actions.

The values Jesus described were not just great theories, they were meant to guide actions in daily life. He was focused on shaping behavior. Every organization chooses what actions are accepted and important. When done with intentionality and careful thought as Jesus did, this produces alignment and flourishing. Everyone understands what actions are expected and which ones are not.

Some leaders assume that people will find a good way to live and act while they are together without additional direction from the leader. But serving leaders carefully communicate the values in ways that guide the actions of those they serve.

Values alignment brings flourishing by setting standards.

The explicit list of values Jesus shared with His disciples set the standard for how they were to live. His values made it clear what behaviors were acceptable and at the same time clarified what behaviors were not acceptable. On several occasions He corrected them when their values did not represent His kingdom. He understood that values set the standard and everyone needed to be held accountable to live by the standard. He brought alignment by clearly setting the standards and holding everyone accountable to them. He understood that what leaders tolerate teaches values faster than what they articulate.

Some leaders expect that a list of values on the wall is sufficient to set the standard. But serving leaders talk about the values often and hold themselves and everyone else accountable to keep the standards that have been set. They work deliberately to get the values off the walls and into the hearts of their people.

Values alignment brings flourishing by shaping culture.

It was the expectation of Jesus that His followers would live out a new way of living and in time develop a new culture that reflected His priorities. Likewise, an organization that clarifies and lives out the values of the organization will develop a culture shaped by those values. Culture becomes powerful when everyone involved can say, “This is the way we do things here.” This becomes the foundation of a flourishing organization.

Some leaders allow their organizational culture to be shaped without intention. But serving leaders leverage the power of values to shape a healthy culture in which people flourish and the organization thrives.

For further reflection and discussion:

Reflect on your own leadership journey in relation to how clearly you have aligned values in your organization. On a scale of 1-10 (10 is perfect) how would you rate your own leadership in this area? What has been the result in your leadership?

In my organization are values expressed by default or by design? What can I do this week to more intentionally talk about the values which are important to my organization?

Is there someone I know on my team that is violating one of our values? What will I do to address this issue?

Do those I lead understand our values well enough to articulate them and help hold each other accountable? What can I do to strengthen this element of our organization?

In addition to the scripture used in this issue, reflect on the following verses from the life of Jesus: Matthew 26:51-52; Mark 10:41-45; Luke 9:51-55, 10:17-20, 22:24-27; John 13:1-17. What additional insights do you find?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll look at the next element of a flourishing culture: Mission Focus

A Flourishing Culture: Mission Focus

Issue #417, February 25, 2026

Organizations flourish when the mission is clear and everyone understands what is most critical to accomplish. The mission of an organization describes the activities that bring the greatest value to those being served.

Jesus had absolute clarity about His mission. This was perhaps most clearly stated at the beginning of His ministry when He read the words of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth.

¹⁸*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”* (Luke 4:18-19, NIV).

With these words Jesus identified the focus of His work on earth and the things that would characterize His ministry. In doing so, He shows serving leaders how a mission focus produces a flourishing culture*.

Mission focus brings flourishing by defining what is most important.

Jesus could have done many things that would have been good and beneficial, but He chose to define the actions that were most important to achieve His mission. The verbal declaration of His mission established where He would focus His energy and shaped His ministry. His mission would be defined by proclamation and acts that set people free.

Organizations that define what is most important are able to flourish when everyone understands the things that are mission critical. They do not try to imitate what others are doing, but stay laser focused on their own mission.

Some leaders aren’t willing to do the hard work of deciding what actions are critical to fulfilling the mission. But serving leaders define the actions that will bring the greatest return to the organization.

Mission focus brings flourishing by determining what brings greatest value.

The mission of Jesus was focused on meeting the felt and deeper needs of the people He came to serve. Had a survey been taken of the people in the area asking them what their greatest needs were, I’m sure that they would have mentioned most of the things that Jesus listed as His mission. Organizations flourish when they determine ways that they can serve that bring the most value to their members, clients, or customers.

Some leaders determine what products or services they will offer based on their own estimation of what their customers want. But serving leaders proactively ask questions to find out what things bring the greatest value to those they serve. Then, they clarify to the entire team the actions that bring the greatest value to their customers. They share stories of ways that people value the service or product provided by the organization.

Mission focus brings flourishing by disclosing what is not mission critical.

Jesus’ mission statement did not list things which He would avoid in His work. But the act of naming the mission critical items identified many other actions that would be a waste of time and energy for His calling.

Some leaders assume that all activity is important. But serving leaders continually watch what is being done in the organization and call out any activity that is a wasted effort. They understand that the “not to do” list is often as critical as the “to do” list. They remove

obstacles from their team that detract from the activities that are critical. As they do, they build an organization that flourishes.

For further reflection and discussion:

Reflect on your own leadership journey in relation to mission clarity. On a scale of 1-10 (10 is perfect) how would you rate your own mission clarity?

Have I talked to those I serve (our members, customers or clients) to ask what things they most value that we do for them? In what ways does this shape my understanding of what is central to our mission?

How clearly have I articulated to my team the actions which are most central to our mission as an organization?

Is my team clear on what activities we should not be doing? How well does our culture eliminate waste from our actions?

In addition to the scripture used in this issue, reflect on the following verses from the life of Jesus: Matthew 10:8, 28:18-20; Mark 10:45; Luke 4:18-29, 43, 19:10; John 10:20, 12:46, 18:37; Acts 1:8. What additional insights do you find?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll examine the next element of a flourishing culture: Team Synergy

A Flourishing Culture: Team Synergy

Issue #418, March 11, 2026

Every organization rises or falls on the strength of its teams. When leaders intentionally build teams with synergy, people flourish and remarkable outcomes are achieved. Jesus understood this principle well and carefully and prayerfully built a team that would eventually change the world.

¹³ Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons. ¹⁶ These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), ¹⁷ James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), ¹⁸ Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him (Mark 3:13-19, NIV).

After calling this unlikely group of twelve Jesus spent three years to shape them into a team with remarkable synergy that would literally change the world. Notice how He did it.

Team synergy brings flourishing by building relationships.

Jesus “appointed twelve that they might be with him....” The first concern of Jesus was that the disciples would be in relationship—first with Him and then with each other. He understood that the only way they would be able to change the world was if they learned to know, trust, and love each other. Relationships can be difficult, messy and challenging and Jesus’ team experienced all of this. But over the course of three years, they became a strongly united team. People are designed for relationships and effective leaders find ways to build healthy relationships with their team. They recognize that each person on the team has their own dreams, hopes and challenges. They are not simply machines to do tasks.

Some leaders build teams around tasks expecting that the common goal will result in synergy. They don’t spend time or energy building relationships. But serving leaders first build teams around shared relationships that build trust and respect.

Team synergy brings flourishing by uniting around a mission.

“He appointed twelve...that he might send them out to preach...and drive out demons.” Jesus had a mission to be accomplished with the team that He chose—they were to go out and preach. Strong relationships were the foundation that launched them into mission. All teams exist for a purpose and Jesus made it clear from the beginning what their task would be.

Some leaders build teams that relate well together but don’t accomplish the mission! Serving leaders hold teams accountable to accomplish the mission.

Team synergy brings flourishing by encouraging diversity.

“These are the twelve he appointed.” It is hard to imagine a more diverse group of 12 than this group. Some were uneducated fisherman or tradesmen; at least one was a professional. Some were outspoken; others didn’t say anything that was recorded! Some were working with the Romans; others were committed to resist their rule. Jesus deliberately brought together a diverse team. He understood that when relationships are built and a common mission is shared, diversity strengthens the team and maximizes impact.

Some leaders try to build diverse teams without relationships. The result is explosive! But serving leaders deliberately build diverse teams with a foundation of healthy relationships and a clear mission focus.

For further reflection and discussion:

Reflect on your own leadership journey in relation to the synergy of the team(s) you lead.

On a scale of 1-10 (10 is perfect) how would you rate your own leadership? Do I tend to focus on relationships or mission on my team? What is the result in my leadership?

How healthy are relationships on my team(s)? What is something I can do this week to strengthen relationships between myself and the team and between team members?

How do I keep my team accountable to outcomes that advance our mission?

Is my team diverse enough in strengths, personalities, and perspectives to accomplish all they can do? If not, what changes can I make?

In addition to the scripture used in this issue, reflect on the following verses from the life of Jesus: Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 6:12-13, 9:46-48, 9:51-55, 10:1, 22:24-31; John 1:35-51; Romans 12:3-8; and 1 Corinthians 12. What additional insights do you find?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll look at the final element of a flourishing culture: Growing Leaders

A Flourishing Culture: Growing Leaders

Issue #419, March 25, 2026

When leaders grow other leaders, the people flourish and the organization thrives. The primary work of every serving leader is to intentionally grow others. Jesus demonstrated this by empowering His twelve disciples.

¹ *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Luke 9:1-2, NIV).*

As Jesus sent out the twelve, He shifted His focus from doing the work to equipping others to carry it forward. In doing so, He demonstrated how growing others produces flourishing.

Growing leaders brings flourishing by sharing power.

Jesus “gave them power and authority.” His mindset was not simply to use His power and authority, but to share it with those who followed Him. He shared both power and authority. He gave the disciples both the capacity to do accomplish the task (power) and the legitimate permission to act on His behalf (authority). Prior to this passage, He spent time training them and demonstrating how to do the tasks He would ask them to do. Now He gave them permission to go and implement what they had learned.

Some leaders seek to gain power and authority for themselves. But serving leaders deliberately distribute both so that others can grow and contribute. Some leaders help others grow their capacity, but don’t provide a place for them to use what they’ve learned. But serving leaders share both power and authority.

Growing leaders brings flourishing by stretching capacity.

Jesus “sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” He had demonstrated preaching and healing to them; now He asks them to go and practice! This was undoubtedly a stretching experience for the disciples. They might have wondered as they headed out, “Can I really do this?” But the confidence of Jesus in them provided the impetus for them to rise up and do what He asked. Great leaders look for opportunities to stretch the capacity of those on their team. They evaluate where each person is at and what assignment would appropriately build their capacity. Then they assign responsibilities that builds capacity and confidence on their team.

Some leaders fear that increasing responsibilities of those they lead will result in mistakes and failures. So they keep people at the same level. But serving leaders see potential in every individual and provide them with growth opportunities that will stretch their capacity and build a stronger team. They recognize that mistakes and failures are a necessary part of the growth process.

Growing leaders brings flourishing by scaling the mission.

By sending out the twelve Jesus began to scale His mission. When Jesus preached and healed His impact was limited to the places He could physically reach. But when He sent out six teams of disciples He was effectively fulfilling His mission in many locations, ultimately reaching many more people and places than He could have done alone. He recognized that if He didn’t grow His team, the work would stop when He was gone. But with a strong team

empowered and prepared to do the work His impact would spread far beyond His physical presence.

Some leaders try to increase results by working harder and faster. But serving leaders invest in the growth of their team and slowly build the capacity to scale their mission and multiply their impact.

For further reflection and discussion:

Reflect on your own leadership journey in relation to this element of growing leaders. On a scale of 1-10 (10 is perfect) how would you rate your own leadership? How much of my time actually goes to developing people on my team? What portion of my time *should* I be spending on developing others?

How quickly do I share power and authority in my leadership? When I equip others, do I also find ways to give them platforms to use their new skills?

How much do I believe in the potential of those I lead? How does that impact my leadership with them?

Think about the people on your team. Identify one person that is ready for a growth opportunity. Who is the person, what new responsibility are they ready to take and when will you do any needed training and empowering for this to happen?

In addition to the scripture used in this issue, reflect on the following verses from the life of Jesus: Matthew 10:1-15, 14:16, 16:19, 21:1-3, 26:38-41, 28:18-20; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 6:12, 9:1-6, 22:8-13; John 20:21-23 and 21:15-17. What additional insights do you find?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler