



# **THE HUMAN VALUE OF MEEKNESS IN SERVANT AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

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# The Allure of Toxic Leaders

## The Toxic Leader

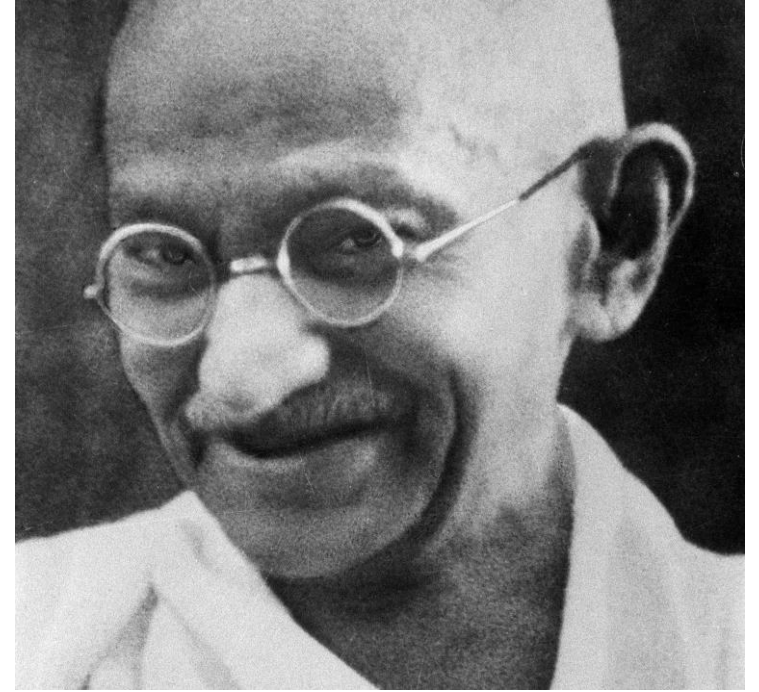
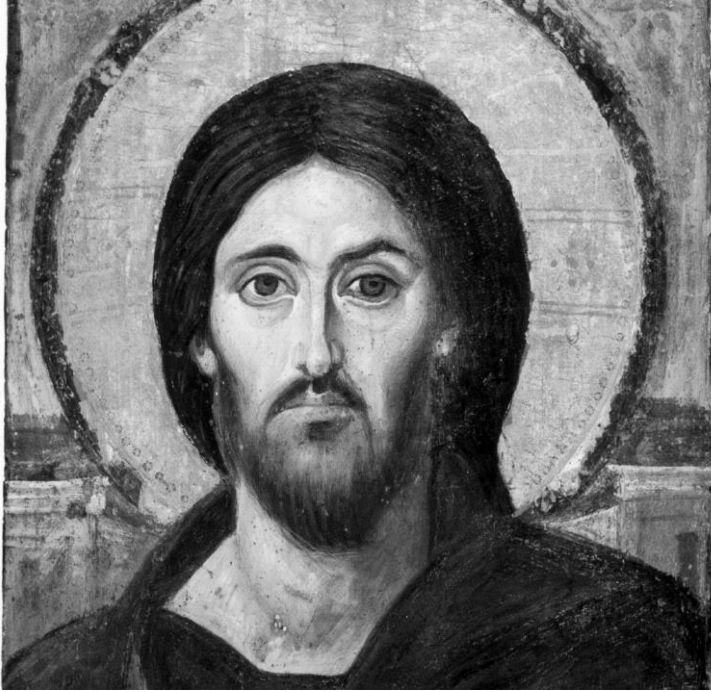
“Their leadership leaves their followers worse off than they found them, often violating the basic human right of others and playing to their followers' basest fears.... First, toxic leaders engage in seriously destructive behaviors; and, second, they exhibit dysfunctional personal qualities. Together, their actions and character concoct a deadly brew of significant and sustained injury.”

- Jean Lipmann-Blumen (2005)

## Defining Toxic Leadership

“Toxic leadership is a kind of maladjusted, malcontent and malevolent leadership by which an individual, by virtue of his destructive behavior and his dysfunctional characteristics, inflicts serious and enduring harm on the individuals, groups, organizations, and communities.”

- Semedo et al. (2022)



**IS THERE A DIFFERENT WAY?**

# David Molyneaux (2003)

- “Contemporary research by Collins (2001) has identified ‘meekness’ as a personal quality for highest-level leadership at great businesses, a theme identifiable also in religious and ancient philosophical narratives.”
- “‘Meekness’ is not about powers foregone but ‘powers controlled and exercised with discernment’.”
- “...a spiritual virtue, such as “meekness”, transcends individual and organisational purposes, being aspirational for any activities that involve providing services and being accountable.”

# Taming the Leader

"...the intents of their hearts were true and in all ways noble, and they showed 'balanced, accountable, kindly self-control joined with discernment' in dealing with the changes and chances of life and their dealings with one another'."

- Plato, The Republic (428-348 B.C.)

"Meekness is like the taming of a wild horse. Man is by nature a wild creature with a short temper, impatient, and self-opinionated. Without meekness we slide into an internal conflict of soul that manifests itself in anger, frustration, bitterness, resentment, and turmoil. Meekness tames the temper, subdues the self, calms the passions, and brings order out of chaos in the soul. Meekness calms, soothes, and subdues."

- Colin Smith (2016).

# Presentation Outline

01

A Classical and  
Judeo-Christian  
Theology of  
Meekness.

02

Defining  
Meekness in  
Leadership:  
Moses as  
Example.

03

Implications for  
Leadership  
Theory and  
Praxis.



# A CLASSICAL AND JUDEO-CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF MEEKNESS

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What is Meekness?

# The Strength of Meekness

James 3:13, ESV

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”

# The difficulty in describing meekness

- *Prautes* describes a condition of mind and heart—an internal attitude—whereas gentleness (mildness combined with tenderness) refers to actions—an external behavior.
- Although English has no direct equivalent words to *prautes*, "meekness" comes closest.
- According to some sources, this word was associated with the breaking-in of horses. Wild stallions were captured in the mountains and brought down to be broken and trained for a variety of uses. It was imperative that the horses retain their spirit, courage, and power. But without discipline and total obedience, those traits were useless.

# Meekness in Judeo-Christian Traditions

“Late twentieth-century Western culture does not hold meekness to be a virtue, in contrast to the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world, which placed a high premium on it. This dramatic shift in values is problematic for contemporary biblical translation. Most modern versions replace the noun “meekness” by “gentleness” or “humility,” largely as a result of the pejorative overtones of weakness and effeminacy now associated with meekness. These connotations were not always predominant in the word, for ancient Near Eastern kings were not reluctant to describe themselves as meek in the same context in which they described themselves as mighty kings (Babylonian *asru* and *sanaqu*; Aramaic *nh*). ”

- Walter E. Elwell (1996)

# Meekness in Judeo-Christian Traditions

“Meekness is therefore an active and deliberate acceptance of undesirable circumstances that are wisely seen by the individual as only part of a larger picture.”

- Walter E. Elwell (1996)

# Meekness in Judeo-Christian Traditions

“A spiritually meek person is not self-willed – not continually concerned with his own ways, ideas and wishes. They are willing to put themselves in second place and submit themselves to achieve what is good for others. Meekness is therefore the antithesis of self-will, self-interest, and self-assertiveness. This is a sign, not of weakness of character, but of strength.”

- Mark E. Caner (2010)

## Judeo-Christian Theology of Meekness

1. Refusal to inflate our own self-estimation; and
2. Reticence to assert ourselves *for* ourselves.

# Meekness and Reigning

King David



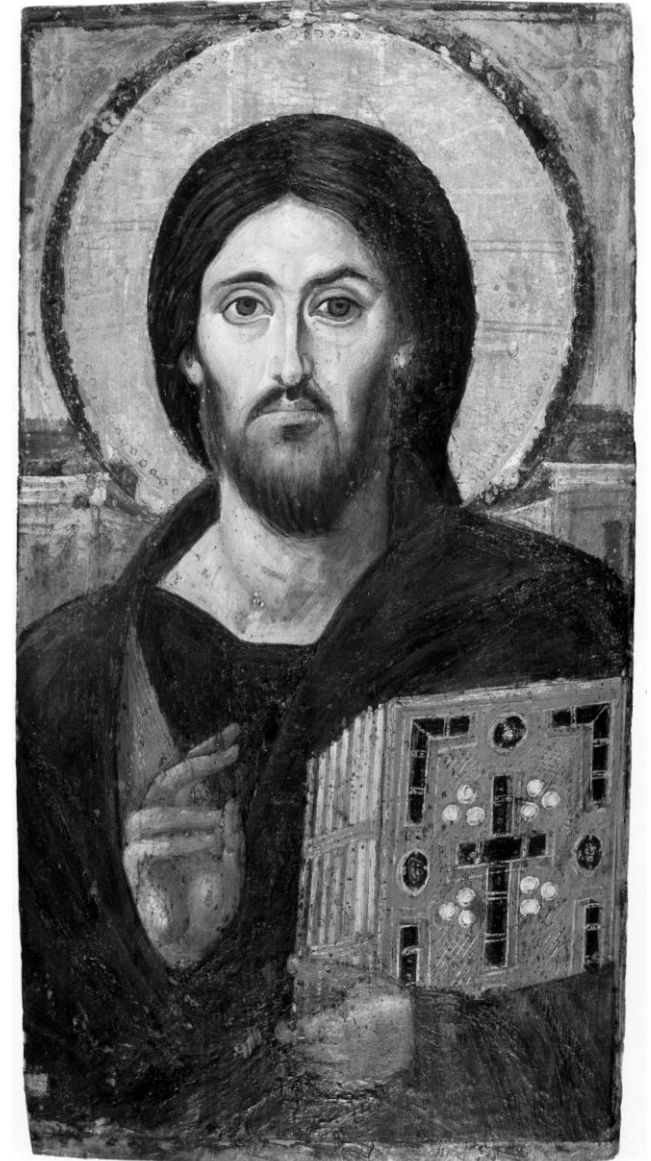
Psalm 37: 11, ESV

“But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.”

# Meekness and Leadership

“And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:  
‘Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn, for  
they shall be comforted. Blessed  
are the meek, for they shall inherit  
the earth.’”

- Matthew 5:2-5.ESV



# Leadership Meekness

Matthew 11:28-30, ESV

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle (meek) and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”



# DEFINING MEEKNESS IN LEADERSHIP

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Moses as an example

# Meekness as a Human Value

“Meekness is an attribute of human nature and behavior that has been defined as an amalgam of righteousness, inner humility, and patience. Meekness has been contrasted with humility alone insomuch as humility simply refers to an attitude towards oneself—a restraining of one's own power so as to allow room for others—whereas meekness refers to the treatment of others.”

- Matthew Henry (1806)

# Moses as a Meek Leader

“Among history’s pre-eminent leaders, secular or religious, ecclesiastical or political, social and practical, or theoretical and intellectual, ancient Israel’s slave-born son Moses occupies the rarest of rare ground. He stands, perhaps without equal, in his witness to the value and practice of great leadership, so transcending in his time, so compellingly impacting the millennia since his birth, that he is now freely acknowledged as the human fountainhead of three great world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.”

- Lael Caesar (2015)



## The Meekness of Moses

“Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.”

- Numbers 12:3, ESV

# Attributes of Moses' Meek Leadership (Lael Caesar, 2015)

Teachable  
Leadership

Open-Minded  
Leadership

Mission-  
focused  
Leadership

Firm  
Leadership

Shared  
Leadership



# Teachable Leadership

“Moses reports perhaps the most conspicuous example of teachable leadership in his life when he describes the meeting between Egypt’s recent liberator and his father-in-law in Exodus 18. The report of this meeting is significant, communicating the courtesies of desert hospitality (Moses providing a meal—vs. 12), generational respect (bowing and kissing—vs. 7), paternal pride (Jethro’s joy and praise—vss. 9–11), and family affection (welcoming, exchanging greetings, enquiries of well-being, sharing, and rejoicing over experiences—vss. 5–11). Yet these do not exhaust its import. For outstanding among its messages is the principle of teachable leadership that lets the prince of Egypt learn from his desert-dwelling father-in-law.” (Caesar, 2015)

# Open-Minded Leadership

“We see it grow alongside humility and wisdom in that it seeks another person’s interest at the expense of its own, and it’s pure, peaceable, gentle, and open to reason.”

- Kyle Denny (2020)

“Open-mindedness is certainly related to teachability. But it does involve more. Whereas teachability allows one to accept instruction, open-mindedness in his leadership permitted Moses to do the unprecedented, and on behalf of those for whom such action was not simply overlooked before, but held to be improper. Moses the open-minded leader could listen to and initiate in favor of disenfranchised women.” (Caesar, 2015)

# Mission-focused Leadership

“Our world is full of turmoil, and we add our own inner turmoil to it. But meekness brings quiet, a ‘composure of the soul’ that stills our turmoil. It brings clarity and purpose because it is ‘a victory over ourselves.’ That is why meekness brings true courage, that is, the will and ability to act selflessly in sacrificial ways.”

- R. C. Sproul (2018)

“Given Moses’ charisma and intellect, it is remarkable how willing he shows himself to be in paying attention to the wishes and counsel of those who were far from being his administrative equals. But if he was respectful to his fellow humans and their concerns, it was because he was first respectful to his God.” (Caesar, 2015)

# Firm Leadership

“But there is more than disappointment in God’s uncompromising position toward Moses. For it must also be recognized as a powerful confirmation of his practice of meek leadership. By stern rebuke of that single instance, God Himself witnesses to innumerable occasions when His servant did not fail: to times, reported and unreported, when he bore large insults with grace of manner and countenance; to the ways and days he drew on strength from nights in the mountain with his God, and persevered because he knew that tonight when the roar of their tumult and the whine of their complaining was momentarily stilled, he would be able to go again to his mountain or his desert secret place and share another hour with his God, drawing one more day’s worth of strength from his unfailing source of spiritual and physical sustenance.” (Caesar, 2015)

# Shared Leadership

“Meekness is humility, perseverance, patience, and tenderness of heart all wrapped together. Moses took criticism in stride. He endured the murmuring and constant complaining of the Israelites.”

- Alan Fong (2022)

“...it is leadership that respects the people’s abilities and allows them to serve in the areas of their gifts. It both refreshes the larger group, and preserves leaders’ energies, so they may continue to share the accumulated wisdom of their years even after they have passed their command to others and retired to less demanding schedules of service.” (Caesar, 2015)

# Attributes of Moses' Meek Leadership (Lael Caesar, 2015)

Teachable  
Leadership

Open-Minded  
Leadership

Mission-  
focused  
Leadership

Firm  
Leadership

Shared  
Leadership



# IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP THEORY AND PRAXIS

Transformational  
and Servant  
Leadership

# Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1985)

Transformational leadership behaviors consist of the four components of:

- idealized influence,
- individualized consideration,
- inspirational motivation, and
- intellectual stimulation

# The Behaviors of Servant Leadership

Focht and Ponton (2015) pointed out that Servant Leadership Behaviors should basically include “valuing people, humility, listening, trust, caring, integrity, service, empowering, serving others’ needs before their own, collaboration, love/unconditional love, and learning.”

# THE HUMAN VALUE OF MEEKNESS PROPELS SERVANT AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Meekness is the spiritual engine of  
transformative servant-orientated leadership

# Meek Leaders are Wise and Strong

Suzy Kassem

“Real greatness does not reside inside those who feel large. The truly wise are meek.”

John Stott (2016)

“Contrary to misconceptions, meekness is not synonymous with weakness; rather, it embodies the gentleness of the strong, who exercise control over their strength.”

“Meekness, we should understand, is not weakness. Though scoffed at by an assertive and bruising world, meekness demonstrates tremendous strength, for it is power under internal restraint. Meekness withholds force that could otherwise be brought to bear, keeping it in check for the right purpose, appropriate magnitude, and perfect time.”

- David C. Grabbe (2020)

## The Strength of a Meek Leader

# The Power of Meekness

Proverbs 16:32, ESV

“Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”



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