

## Learning Love

A Christian vision for leadership is not just about the development of the individual leader or the team, but rather is centred on and defined by the love of God which underpins the entire biblical narrative. This is a love that is unfathomable and indescribable in scale, dimension, time and space: “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...” (Ephesians 3:17-18). It is a love that is unconditional and sacrificial: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8). It is a love that is gracious, practical, inclusive, dependable, generous, restful, empowering and forgiving.

It is a love that leads to freedom, and when we learn God’s love, our desires reflect this – as James K.A. Smith simply states in the title of his book: ‘You are what you love’ (Smith 2016). This love stands above and around all the other

virtues: “...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience... And over all these virtues, put on love which binds them together in perfect unity.” (Colossians 3:12-14). It is a love that envisages God not as a line manager appraising our successes and failures, but rather a compassionate parent cheering on our growth.

Learning this love challenges us as leaders to let go of other scripts or narratives in which we dwell – those of fear, comparison, or the sense that we are not good enough and do not truly belong. Learning love is discipleship – choosing who to follow (and who not to follow), and learning to serve in action, looking outward. This is a love that grounds great teaching and defines great leaders. It is never proven by words, but only evidenced in actions, and despite all our greatest endeavours, successes, triumphs or accolades, is the central definition of leadership in action.

1. Is love something you can learn? If so, how do you learn, and from whom could you learn?
2. To what extent do you see God ‘not as a line manager appraising our successes and failures, but rather a compassionate parent cheering on our growth.’ – and how does this affect our ability to love?
3. If ‘perfect love casts out fear’, how do we respond to ‘fear, comparison, or the sense that we are not good enough and do not truly belong’?
4. How can a community be encouraged to choose to ‘put on love which binds them together in perfect unity’?

