We said leaders take us where we “ain’t.” We measure leadership because where we are isn’t where we were. We also said that leadership isn’t confined to a few select people. We recognize that people in certain positions with certain titles are expected to lead. But the danger with that is that the rest of us don’t expect ourselves to lead. When we talk about servant leadership, we’re talking about something all of us not only can do, but all of us must do.

We looked at some models that put wheels on servant leadership. We said servant leadership is a way of thinking, but it doesn’t show us what leadership actually looks like on the ground. We looked at visionary leadership, situational leadership, and transforming leadership in our last session. And in this session we want to look at three other models of leadership: primal leadership, adaptive leadership, and spiritual/moral leadership.

Primal leadership comes from the work done by Daniel Goldman on emotional intelligence. This approach to leading says that leadership at its base is about feelings. That we are more passionately led by people who we like, people who have some enthusiasm, people who themselves are passionate about where they’re taking us.

We are far more apt to end up where we ain’t if the person leading us feels deeply about where he or she is trying to get us to go. Very simply, primal leadership says that the first thing a leader has to give attention to is his or her own feelings. I have to understand me; I have to understand what’s driving me on a particular day or a particular moment.

If I come into the office, or if I come into my dinner table in a foul mood, I’m angry about something, I’m upset about something, I have to recognize the fact that—especially if I’m in a leadership position, if I am a parent, if I am the boss—that my feelings are
going to spill over into that environment. And if I come in there as an angry, frustrated person, it’s not going to take long before I have created an angry, frustrated environment. And that makes leadership a lot more difficult.

So what primal leadership says, first of all, is, “I have to be in touch with me. I have to understand me. I have to understand that I may not be an upbeat, happy-go-lucky kind of a person by nature, and so I have to factor that into my leadership equation.” So the first role of the primal leader is to understand myself.

The second role is to manage myself. Just because I’m angry doesn’t mean I have to give in to that anger. Just because I’m depressed doesn’t mean I’m a victim of my depression. I have to sit down and have a long hard talk with myself before I go into that leadership situation and say, “You know, I’ve got to get control of myself. I have to deal with me, before I deal with my followers.” So the first aspect of primal leadership is understanding me, the second is managing me.

Then the attention shifts for primal leadership. It says, “When I go into a leadership situation, I have to also realize that the people I’m leading are people. They may be in a foul mood; they may be upset; they may be depressed; they may be worried or anxious about something. And so this great word empathy says that, “As a leader, when I show up at my workplace, as a leader when I show up at my dinner table, I have to ask myself, ‘Am I in tune, am I in touch, with these people I’m dealing with?’ ”

As a leader I have a responsibility to create an environment, and if I walk into somebody who is angry, or somebody who is depressed, and I don’t take that into account and factor that into my leadership situation, I may light a fuse in that situation that causes an explosion.

As a leader, part of my responsibility is to say, “What am I walking into?” When I say, “Good morning,” and I get a “huh” . . . when I say, “How you doing?” and I get a “oh, OK” . . . I can’t assume that everything is OK, because there’s an enormous difference between ok and OK! My job as a leader, part of my responsibility as a parent, part of my privilege as a teacher, is to listen and to look and to analyze those situations and to say, “What kind of person am I leading in this given moment?”

So I manage—I understand myself and I manage myself. I also
try to get in touch with what the atmosphere is that I’m leading in and then I manage relationships. I don’t let the anger of my follower enrage me. I don’t allow the sadness of my follower to put me into a depression. That’s—a responsibility of a primal leader is to say, “Before we begin this workday, maybe it would be good for us to take a few minutes and to interact on these feelings that I’m sensing that you’re having.”

You say, “Boy, that’s touchy-feely. I’m not comfortable with that.” Welcome to the world of leadership. Primal leadership tells us that it is my responsibility as a leader, it is my responsibility as a parent if I’m going to be an effective servant leader, an effective servant parent, an effective servant friend, to say, “How am I feeling? What am I going to do about that? How are you feeling? What are you dealing with, and how can I manage that into this leadership situation?”

I would say of all the aspects of leading, this is certainly one of the most critical, and it is one of the most overlooked. And for many leaders, it is one of the most feared. Primal leadership is one of the strings on the violin. It’s one of the clubs in the golf bag, and you can choose to ignore it; we can choose to pretend it’s not there, but guess what, my friends? It is there, it is always there, and leaders who don’t play with that club will never be as effective as leaders who learn how to use that club with great dexterity.

Another model of leadership comes from Ronald Heifetz’s work. It’s called adaptive leadership. Heifetz describes two situations. One is a technical situation; one is an adaptive situation. Now Heifetz is a physician, so he uses this illustration to help us understand the difference between a technical leadership situation and an adaptive leadership situation.

He says . . . suppose somebody comes into the doctor’s office with a broken arm. That is clearly a technical problem. We understand the problem: The arm is broken. Both the leader and the follower—the physician and the patient—know that the patient can’t fix that broken arm. The doctor has to fix that for the patient. So the doctor sets the bone; the doctor puts a cast on it; the doctor tells the patient to come back at a certain time, and the doctor will take the cast off and check the break to see if it’s healed. That’s a technical problem. The leader has to diagnose, and the leader has to solve it.

An adaptive problem says the patient comes in, and the patient
is short of breath. The patient is feeling fatigued. Well, it's not clear why that patient is feeling fatigued, why that patient is short of breath. So the doctor and the patient through dialogue and mutual investigation diagnose what the problem is.

The leader, the doctor, then says to the patient, “I can’t solve your problem for you. You’re forty pounds overweight. You need to exercise; you need to change your diet, OK? Now I can’t exercise for you, and I can’t not eat donuts for you. You have to involve yourself in the solving of this problem. Let’s work together on an exercise plan, and a diet plan that will work for you, and then you have to solve your problem.” That’s an adaptive problem.

Now adaptive leadership says, “If I as a servant leader am committed to your development, there are certain problems you bring to me that I will not solve for you because I can’t. The process of solving that problem helps you grow. I say to you, ‘How do you think you should solve that problem?’ I will support you in it, but I can’t solve that problem for you. If I solve that problem for you, I don’t help you; I actually hurt you.

“You come to me with a question, and I say, ‘What do you think that answer is?’ You say, ‘I don’t know.’ I say, ‘Why don’t you take the next couple of days and do some thinking and do some research and do some reading? Come back to me in a couple days with some possible answers to your questions, with some possible solutions to your problem.’ ” It is that process of you answering your question and you solving your problems that forces you to grow.

We do this with our children. Hopefully a servant parent using adaptive parenting will say to the child, “What do you think is the solution to your problem? What do you think is the answer to your question?” We create a safe environment for that person to explore and to investigate and to come up with those answers, to come up with those solutions, and then we work with that person to apply that answer, to apply that solution to the problem.

It seems so simple but how many of us, because we’re in a leadership position, because we’re parents, think it is our job, it is our responsibility, to solve all the problems and to answer all the questions. And when we do that we are “lording it over,” and we are exercising authority over, and we’re cutting these people off at the knees by not only not forcing them but sometimes not even allowing them to grow by answering their questions and solving
their problems. Very simply, that’s what adaptive leadership is about.

The sixth leadership model we’re looking at is called spiritual/moral. Now when a person says, “I am going to come up with these visions. I am going to help you develop your skills by situational leadership. I am going to help you become a better person by transforming leadership. I am going to help you and me control this relationship and control ourselves through primal leadership. I’m going to help you grow by being an adaptive leader.” We are taking an enormous responsibility on ourselves.

That can be a heady, almost an arrogant, way of thinking about leadership. Until we come back to where we began, with servant leadership saying, “You know I too am a follower. I am not accepting this position because I think I am so much better, so much wiser than anyone else. If I’m going to be a servant leader, I have to be a servant follower. I have to make the commitment that I am going to first of all be a follower of Christ. Servant leaders have to be servant followers of Christ.

Luke, chapter 6 [see vv. 39–45], is an essential passage in leadership thinking. Jesus said to the apostles—very shortly after He named the twelve apostles in Luke 6—He talked about the blind leading the blind. He said, “If you don’t know where you’re going, if you don’t know who you’re following, don’t you dare set yourself up as a leader because you and your followers will end up in a ditch.” That’s Luke, chapter 6.

He also then talked about the student after he’s been fully trained will be like his teacher. If you’re going to set yourself up as a servant leader, as a leader/teacher, you have to recognize that unless you’re involved in becoming a better person, your student, after he becomes like his teacher, may be a very dangerous person.

Jesus said, “How can you look at the specks in your brother’s eye and not see the log in your own eye?” Jesus said, “First take the log out of your own eye, and then you can help your followers take the specks out of their eyes. Are you growing?” Jesus said, “The good person brings good things out of the goods stored up in his heart, and the evil person brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart.” The good person brings good things out of the heart.

Spiritual/moral leadership says, “If you think about being a leader,
if you think about being a servant leader, the first thing you have to think about is the cultivation of your own soul and your own personal growth process in your walk with Christ.

Leadership is a wonderful thing. It helps people be in better places. Leaders take us where we ain’t. The assumption is that where we are when we end up is better than we were when we started. If we think about being servant leaders, servant parents, servant friends, the first question we have to address is what’s going on in my own soul as I follow Christ.

Now before we leave spiritual/moral leadership, Jesus gave this teaching in Luke 6 right after He named the apostles as apostles. Spiritual/moral leadership isn’t just another method. It really is the heart and soul of what it means to lead. Leaders are first of all people. And Jesus said, “If you are not a good person, you will never be a good leader.” Lousy people are going to be lousy leaders.

Jesus said to His apostles before He taught them anything else about leadership—this is first and foremost about you the person. Are you growing as a person? The kind of person you are is the kind of leader you’ll be. My question is how heavily, how deeply, how passionately, are we involved in cultivating our own souls as people and then as leaders?