



## A Review of Servant Leadership Qualities From Esther 4:1-17, 5:1-8, 7:1-7, and 8:1-15

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George K. Nti

*Regent University, School of Business and Leadership*

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### **Abstract**

This article reports a study of servant leadership from Esther 4:1-17, 5:1-8, 7:1-7, and 8:1-15 through the framework of Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) servant leadership questionnaire. I give specific attention to aspects of altruistic calling, emotional intelligence, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship within the perspective of servant leadership. Further exploration of altruism, emotional intelligence, applying knowledge, persuasion, and stewardship aspects of servant leadership raises the consciousness of how in the person of Esther, having others' interests at hand, serving others, helping others with emotional healing, anticipating consequences of decisions, offering compelling reasons for others to do things, and encouraging others to have community spirit exist. An appreciation and understanding of servant leadership and its relevance in 21st-century leadership rings from Esther's example.

Keywords: leading through stewardship, biblical examples of wisdom, persuasive leadership, emotional healing in leadership, a study of Esther

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Falade (2018) supported that cultural values may influence how different leaders exhibit servant leadership attitudes because the elements of culture set the standards for a group of people from a geographical location to perceive, believe, communicate, and evaluate in a common language. Information from the Bible about Queen Esther shows how Esther's actions spared the Jews from destruction (Est. 4:1-17, 5:1-8, 7:1-7, 8:1-15, New King James Version, 1982; note, this version is used throughout this study). The steps of seeking the best interest of the Jews, being alert to what was happening, and convincing others to do things mimic servant leadership (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006) traits in Esther. However, being the queen and having favor before the king to speak on behalf of the Jews does not make Esther a servant leader.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended that researchers follow the direction of theories to conduct studies. Therefore, one must borrow the lens of a servant leadership theory to determine servant leadership in Esther. This study uses the lens of Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) servant leadership questionnaire to review altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship from Esther 4:1-17, 5:1-8, 7:1-7, and 8:1-15 and present Queen Esther as a servant leadership example that organizations can use as a character study.

## Why Servant Leadership

*Servant leadership* is attributed to Robert Greenleaf (1970) because he first coined the term. The term servant leadership was defined as a theory that considers the nature of leadership compared to the nature of people who are natural servants and those who are natural leaders (Greenleaf, 1977). Recent servant leadership research has transitioned from anecdotal to validation by empirical evidence (Washington et al., 2014). Patterson (2003) emphasized that a servant leader's focus is always on their followers, so the leader's behaviors are congruent with this follower focus.

Wang et al. (2021) asserted that a coworker support climate can moderate servant leadership and team reflexivity relationships. The significant association between servant leadership and customer satisfaction can come through the intervening variables: organizational behavior and culture (Setyaningrum, 2017). Leaders are influenced by traditions and culture when making decisions (Yukl, 2013). Thus, follower commitment level can relate to how a leader works to serve their followers and keep values simultaneously. In the Indonesian context, there is evidence of accordance between collective culture and empowerment, standing back, forgiveness, courage, authenticity, and humility (Amir & Santoso, 2019). Additionally, emotionally intelligent leaders consider the well-being of the organization and community at large (Miao et al., 2021). Miao et al. (2021) discussed that the relationship between emotional intelligence and servant leadership has been complex for researchers to tell from a single study if there was a weak, moderate, or strong relationship (p. 239).

According to Selladurai and Carraher (2014), servant leadership studies have continued exploring mechanisms servant leaders use to influence followers and organizational outcomes. After the translation of Greenleaf's concept into 10 servant leadership characteristics (Spears, 1995), others like Laub (1999), Dennis and Bocarnea (2005), Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), and Liden et al. (2008) created servant leadership instruments. Using the five factors of the servant leadership questionnaire – altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006) – this study discusses how Queen Esther portrayed servant leadership from the biblical text of Esther 4:1-17, 5:1-8, 7:1-7, and 8:1-15.

## Altruistic Calling

Altruistic calling means the leader is conscious of serving others (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Greenleaf, 1977). Thus, for leaders to efficiently influence their organizations, they must have the self-determination to accept every challenge that may come with their leadership. By taking selfless and sacrificial roles, servant leaders attract followers who become psychologically drawn through respect and loyalty (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). “The difference between transformational and servant leadership is being the intentions of leaders, with servant leaders more likely to embrace a selfless objective” (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006, p. 304). Altruism enables servant leaders to solicit suggestions from followers, which is a sign of selflessness (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006).

Consider Esther with an altruistic calling; she put the best interest of others ahead of her own and did everything possible to serve the Jews. Esther 4:4 recorded that after Esther heard about Mordecai’s anguish and tearing his clothes, she was deeply distressed and sent garments to clothe Mordecai. But when she later learned that Mordecai refused to accept the clothes, she commanded one of the eunuchs to go to Mordecai to understand what was bordering him (Est. 4:5). The statement “if I perish, I perish” (Est 4:16) indicates that Esther was ready to sacrifice her life to save the Jews. Queen Esther was not ignorant of the laws that prevented anyone from entering the king’s inner court without being summoned. She stated,

All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go into the king these thirty days. (Est. 4:11)

Esther’s altruistic calling featured three items: putting others’ best interests ahead of hers, doing everything she could to serve others, and sacrificing her interest to meet others’ needs (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). First, Esther presented values that portrayed the interests of others. She not only expressed emotional distress in people’s problems but conveyed the importance of attending to situations to address the issues of others. Second, aligning with Barbuto and Wheeler’s (2006) altruistic calling, the followers of Queen Esther identified and accepted the values Esther portrayed. Followers received Esther’s altruism, which positively affected the Jews, producing relief and victory.

## Emotional Healing

Emotional healing means there may be failed relationships, disappointments, or lost hopes a leader may encounter but must continue without being emotionally drained (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Spears, 1995). Servant leaders can influence feelings and emotions, which later become the emotional heart of the organization (Barbuto &

Wheeler, 2006; Weymes, 2003). Emotional healing also means leaders show empathy by allowing others to express their feelings (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Emmerich, 2001). According to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), servant leadership stands out from other leadership theories when considering healing. Thus, servant leaders appreciate the process of emotional healing, and they can know when and how to initiate a healing process. The five items of Barbuto and Wheeler's emotional healing are going above and beyond the call of duty to meet other's needs, others turning to you if they have personal trauma, being good at helping others with emotional issues, being talented at helping others heal emotionally, and assisting others to mend hard feelings.

Esther's emotional healing values led her to meet the needs of others and made people turn to her with their trauma by expressing themselves (Est. 4:4, 5). When Esther initiated the process by sending a messenger to Mordecai to hear his story (Est. 4:5, 10), Mordecai had the opportunity to express his emotions by sending the following message to Esther:

Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Est. 4:13-14)

Because Esther was talented at helping others heal emotionally and helping others mend hard feelings, she sent back a befitting reply to Mordecai with a cause of action:

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish! So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him. (Est. 4:15-17)

Esther's emotional healing pointed out Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) five items: going above and beyond the call of duty to meet others' needs, others turning to you if they have personal trauma, being good at helping others with emotional issues, being talented at helping others heal emotionally, and assisting others to mend hard feelings. First, Esther had a good cause not to enter the king's courts because of the laws, but she put aside every fear to ensure Mordecai and the Jews received the needed support. She went above and beyond the call of duty. Second, Esther could have ignored Mordecai's response because of the laws. However, Esther could console Mordecai and the Jews when she asked them to fast, and after the fast, she went to the king. Esther served the Jews and helped them heal emotionally by not ignoring their concerns.

## Wisdom

Wisdom pertains to a leader's awareness of environmental cues (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2002, 2006). Servant leaders seek knowledge about environmental factors and stay on top of resolving organizational issues. "The importance of great leaders seeking knowledge has been described as one of two key attributes of wisdom" (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006, p. 307). Awareness also paves the way for emotional intelligence (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Barling et al., 2000; Caruso et al., 2002). According to Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) servant leadership questionnaire, wisdom can be measured from five items: alertness to what is happening, anticipating the consequences of decisions, great awareness of what is going on, being in touch with what is happening, and knowing what is going to happen.

Esther was alert about what was happening, leading to her action to call the Jews into a period of fasting before she could go to the king (Est. 4:15-16) and tell the king what Haman had plotted against the Jews (Est. 7:4). After being alerted to what was happening, Esther also had the wisdom to anticipate both positive and negative outcomes of her decisions; she knew that going to the king uninvited could cost her life, for breaking the laws (Est. 4:11), but she also believed that through fasting she would find favor before the king (Est. 5:2-3). Let us not forget that Esther seemed to be in touch and knew what was going to happen; perhaps she did not put her request before the king on the first day (Est. 5:3-5) because she wanted Haman to be present while she informed the king about the plot (Est. 5:7-8). The following conversation between the king and Esther, on the second day, talks about the wisdom of Esther in her position at that time:

And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, what is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done! Then Queen Esther answered and said, If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss. So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?" And Esther said, the adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman! So Haman was terrified before the king and queen. Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house? As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. (Est. 7:2-8)

Esther applied wisdom through her actions, which aligned with Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) wisdom items. First, Esther presented values of awareness of environmental cues and alertness (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). With an excellent grasp of what was happening, Esther was able to strategically plan her meeting with the king and Haman, which ended with a positive outcome for the Jews. Second, Esther's ability to seek knowledge of environmental factors and resolve issues aligns with Barbuto and Wheeler's emphasis on being in touch with what is happening, anticipating the consequences of decisions, and knowing what will happen.

### **Persuasive Mapping**

Previous studies have found that persuasion is more effective in influencing others than relying on power and formal authority (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2002, 2006; Spears, 1995). Servant leaders are good at influencing others without exercising too much power (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). "Persuasion is operationalized as an ability to influence others outside of formal authority" (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006, p. 307). Besides knowledge, leaders must know how to apply context and guide purposeful action (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Bierly et al., 2000). There are five elements of Barbuto and Wheeler's persuasive mapping construct: offering compelling reasons for others to do things, encouraging others to dream big dreams, being good at convincing others, convincing others to do something, and the gift of persuading others.

Consider Esther's ability to persuade others to get things done. Esther 4:16 recorded the accounts of Esther's directives to gather all the Jews to fast and how she gave a compelling reason for the people to fast: "my maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" (Est. 4:16). Again, Esther 5 and 8 recorded the performances of how Esther offered compelling and convincing reasons to get the king to act in favor of the Jews:

So Esther answered, If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him. Then the king said, bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said. So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared. At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, what is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done! Then Esther answered and said, my petition and request is this: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said. (Est. 5:4-8)

Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews. You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you

please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke. (Est. 8:7-8)

As discussed, Esther's character exhibited the ability to convince others, mimicking all five elements of Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) persuasive mapping. First, Esther presented and endorsed values that fueled the interest of the king and the Jews. She convincingly and persuasively made the king keep the promise to honor Esther's request. Second, Esther knew how to guide purposeful actions; she dragged the process to the point where both the king and Haman had the appetite to hear her petition.

### **Organizational Stewardship**

As organizations contribute to society's growth, the process where leaders prepare members to uphold social responsibility is known as organizational stewardship (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Thus, servant leaders understand the organization's social responsibility and implement measures to teach all members. According to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), other researchers have emphasized prosocial behaviors that leadership must consider beyond the organization, like legacy leadership, stewardship for society, and sustainability for natural and environmental resources. According to Barbuto and Wheeler, organizational stewardship has the following aspects: the need to play a moral role in society, the need to function as a community, the potential to contribute to society, encouraging others to have a community spirit, and preparing for a positive difference in the future.

For Queen Esther, being a good steward was not far from her actions. She was prompt in calling all the Jews to a fast and go to the king (Est. 4:16). Also, Esther 8 recorded Esther's values of organizational stewardship in preparing for a positive difference in the future, which are evident in the following verses:

On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman. Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, and said, If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen? (Est. 8:1-6)

Esther's character traits align with Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) elements of the need to function as a community, the potential to contribute to society, and encouraging others to have a community spirit because of the belief to play a moral role in society. First, the Jewish community in Persia became relevant after Esther's dedication to changing their story of being killed. Esther identifying herself with the Jews revealed her concealed identity to the king, who spared the Jews at Esther's request. Second, Mordecai's call to replace Haman's royal position indicated that Queen Esther valued playing moral roles in society and the potential to contribute to the community.

### Summary

Through the lens of servant leadership theory, Queen Esther's life and royal position present illustrations of altruistic calling, emotional intelligence, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship. Detailed exploration of altruism, emotional intelligence, wisdom, persuasion, and stewardship aspects of servant leadership permitted an admiration of how, in the person of Esther, she had others' interests at hand, served others, helped others with emotional healing, anticipated consequences of decisions, offered compelling reasons for others to do things, and encouraged others to have community spirit. In summary, Esther presented a model through which servant leadership may be highly regarded and used as a 21st-century leadership approach.

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### About the Author

George K. Nti is a self-employed travel industry professional and Certified Project Management Professional. He also serves as a teaching elder at The Church of Pentecost USA, Inc. He is studying for a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership at Regent University. His research interests include human resource development, servant leadership, and employee relations. He is the author of *Christian Leadership and Church Growth: Integrating Theology and Leadership*.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to 134 Vintage Park Blvd, Ste A 328, Houston, TX 77070. Email: [geornti@mail.regent.edu](mailto:geornti@mail.regent.edu)

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