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DANIEL AS AN EXAMPLE OF EXCEPTIONAL CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

DEBBY THOMAS

This paper presents Daniel as a prototypical model of an excellent cross-cultural Christian leader. The GLOBE project research on cross-cultural leaders is consulted and five cross-cultural leadership qualities are identified based on their acceptance in all cultures studied: integrity, performance oriented, visionary, inspirational, and team builder as found in Dorfman's research originating from the GLOBE project.¹ God's intervention in Daniel's leadership is also considered as a significant factor in Daniel's cross-cultural success as a leader. Exegetical analysis of Daniel 1 and 2 verifies that Daniel meets the criteria of an excellent cross-cultural leader as proposed by Dorfman. Daniel presents a strong model of a cross-cultural Christian leader who keeps his identity while respecting and embracing the host culture, staying in a vital relationship with God, and practicing exemplary cross-cultural leadership qualities.

The first two chapters of Daniel present a story of a boy who is captured from Jerusalem and taken to Babylon. Despite his captive status and cross-cultural nature, he rises into a position of power in Babylon in a relatively short period of time. This paper explores the reason for Daniel's success as a cross-cultural leader who rises to leadership from a position of youth and captivity through the exegetical study of the first two chapters of the book of Daniel, and presents relevant leadership material on cross-cultural leadership.

¹ Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, and House, "GLOBE: A Twenty Year Journey Into the Intriguing World of Culture and Leadership."

I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF DANIEL CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

Daniel is a book of prophecy, and the second half (which is not studied here) is apocalyptic.² Daniel 1 and 2 are prophetic in nature, but are written in narrative style. Nebuchadnezzar takes Daniel captive from his home in Jerusalem (1:6) in 605 B.C.³ This is the first of three attacks that Nebuchadnezzar makes on Jerusalem over the course of his reign, ending in the destruction of Jerusalem.⁴ Daniel is taken as a spoil of war. Historical research indicates that Daniel was no more than 14 years old at the time of his captivity.⁵ Daniel is of royal birth, “without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king’s palace” (1:4) as were his three friends who were captured with him. The purpose of Daniel’s captivity is to teach him “the literature and language of the Chaldeans” (1:4) and train him to serve in Nebuchadnezzar’s court. Many fellow Jews were taken into Babylon with Daniel, and many more in the following two attacks on Jerusalem, but not all of them were to be trained for the court of the king. The Jews see Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Jerusalem as God’s judgment on them for not following God (2 Kings 24–25; 2 Chronicles 36; Daniel 1:2). For the Jews, this time of destruction and captivity was a trial almost beyond bearing. God placed Daniel in the king’s court to encourage the Jews and to assure them of God’s continued presence.

Daniel 1 and 2 consists of two main parts: the introduction of Daniel and his surroundings, and the interpretation of the king’s dream. Daniel begins with a description Nebuchadnezzar taking Daniel and his friends (along with many others) captive. It quickly moves to Daniel being renamed and refusing the king’s rich food, Daniel and his friends applying themselves to their studies, and finally, the king finding them ten times superior to all other students in every way (1:1-20). The second scene features the king having a dream and insisting that the magicians recall the dream to him and interpret it. The magicians deny the possibility of such a deed and the king quickly escalates to threatening to kill all magicians if they do not comply. On the day of execution, Daniel becomes aware of the situation and asks the king for time to interpret the dream. Upon recruiting his friends to prayer, God reveals the dream and the interpretation to Daniel, which Daniel shares with the king, giving God the glory. The king immediately promotes Daniel and his friends to positions of leadership in Babylon.

II. CROSS-CULTURALLY EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP TRAITS

Research on cross-cultural leadership has identified qualities of leaders that are appreciated and express exceptional leadership in all cultures. Whereas literature on cross-cultural leadership normally focuses on differences in leadership in different

² Richard D. Patterson, “Holding on to Daniel’s Court Tales,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1993): 445–445.

³ Lawrence Richards and Larry Richards, *The Teacher’s Commentary*, (David C. Cook, 1987), 437.

⁴ R. Jamieson, D. Brown, and A. R. Fausset, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁵ Johann Peter Lange, William Greenough Thayer Shedd, and Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Daniel*, (Logos Bible Software, 2008); Jamieson, Brown, and Fausset, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*.

cultures, there are also universal similarities.⁶ This paper focuses on those similarities. The GLOBE Project, an ambitious study of 62 nations evaluating leadership cross-culturally, identified two domains of leadership that were universally endorsed in all cultures studied: charismatic/value based leadership (includes visionary, inspirational, self-sacrifice, integrity, decisive and performance oriented), and team oriented leadership (includes collaborative, team orientation, team integrator, diplomatic and malevolent (reverse scored)).⁷ Jarvis authors a paper offering practical application of the GLOBE research on cross-cultural leadership and further defines effective cross-cultural leadership as: integrity (trustworthy, just and honest), visionary (foresight and planning), inspirational (positive, dynamic, encouraging, motivating and building confidence), and team builder (communicative, informed, a coordinator and team integrator).⁸ Grisham and Walker present five main attributes of an effective cross-cultural leader that emerged out of a doctoral thesis on cross-cultural leadership: “trust, empathy, transformation, power, and communications.”⁹ From these sources and for the purpose of studying Daniel as a cross-cultural leader, the categories of universally accepted leadership that will be considered are: integrity, performance oriented, visionary, inspirational, and team builder as found in Dorfman’s research originating from the GLOBE project.¹⁰ Each of these five attributes was rated very highly in all cultures. In affirmation of these as primary cross-cultural leadership qualities Dorfman quips, “Perhaps to state the obvious, ideal leaders are expected to develop a vision, inspire others, and create a successful performance oriented team within their organizations while behaving with honesty and integrity – easier said than done.”¹¹ In addition, because God has an obvious and vital role in Daniel’s success as a cross-cultural leader, God’s role in effective cross-cultural leadership will also be considered. This is not a comprehensive list of universally endorsed leadership qualities, but since these qualities have a broad base of support, and fit into the limited scope of this paper, they will be the backbone of the study of Daniel’s successful cross-cultural leadership.

Integrity

Dorfman finds integrity to be one of the most highly rated leadership qualities across all cultures according to the GLOBE project.¹² The components of integrity in the

⁶ Peter Jarvis, “The Church and the Learning Society,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 14, no. 2 (2004): 75.

⁷ Felix C. Brodbeck, Jagdeep S. Chhokar, and Robert J. House, eds., *Culture and Leadership Across the World: the Globe Book of in-Depth Studies of 25 Societies*, Kindle Edition. (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007).

⁸ Jarvis, “The Church and the Learning Society.”

⁹ Thomas Grisham and Derek H. T. Walker, “Cross-Cultural Leadership,” *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* 1, no. 3 (2008): 440, doi:10.1108/17538370810883873; Thomas Grisham, “Metaphor, Poetry, Storytelling and Cross-Cultural Leadership,” *Management Decision* 44, no. 4 (2006): 486–503.

¹⁰ “GLOBE: A Twenty Year Journey Into the Intriguing World of Culture and Leadership,” *Journal of World Business* (February 16, 2012): 1–15, doi:10.1016/j.jwb.2012.01.004.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 4-5.

¹² *ibid.*

GLOBE project consist of a leader being trustworthy, just and honest.¹³ Integrity was rated by 95 percent of countries as higher than a 5 on a 7-point scale¹⁴, showing the significant agreement among countries that quality of integrity indicates an excellent cross-cultural leader. Grisham's quality of 'trust' is located at the hub of the wheel of successful cross-cultural leadership showing its importance.¹⁵ Trust, for Grisham (2006), is the ability for a leader to be vulnerable enough to build trusting relationships.¹⁶ Grisham's view of trust will be included in the definition of leader integrity since trustworthiness has already been established to be a component of integrity.¹⁷

In the Old Testament scriptures, outside of the book of Daniel, Daniel is recognized as a man of righteousness and integrity (Ez. 14:14, 14:20) and as a wise man (Ez. 28:3). Also in the book of Daniel, when his enemies are looking for a way to accuse him, Daniel 6:4 reports that "they could find no grounds for complaint or any corruption, because he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption could be found in him." These scriptures point to Daniel as a man of integrity. One way that Daniel shows his integrity in the first two chapters is by refusing to eat the king's rich food. As a captive, being offered the best and richest food of the king was a great privilege that not many received.¹⁸ Rather, Daniel chose a diet of vegetables, which upheld the purity laws that God had given to the Israelites.¹⁹ More importantly, since the act of eating royal food involved giving a portion to the gods, by partaking in the king's feasts, Daniel would be taking part in idol worship, or worse, devil worship.²⁰ Daniel showed his deep, personal integrity in this vital and pivotal decision not to defile himself with the king's food. Emanating trustworthiness and creating a bond of trust with others is also mark of a leader with integrity. ²¹ When Daniel initiates a conversation with the palace master over the issue of not eating the king's food, he is artful in building trust and respect. Rather than making demands or outright refusing it, he dialogues with the palace master and devises a way to take on the responsibility for his actions and to absolve the palace master from any responsibility for the change in diet (1:8-16). Through these actions, Daniel shows himself to be trustworthy and full of integrity.

The episode of Daniel interpreting the king's dream also reveals Daniel's integrity. After receiving the dream and interpretation, Daniel breaks into a beautiful song crediting God for his awesome powers. He concludes, "You have given me wisdom and power, and have now revealed to me what we asked of you, for you have revealed to us what the king ordered" (Daniel 1:20). In his integrity, he gives credit to God and acknowledges that the revelation of the dream and interpretation was from God. Although this psalm of thanks is spoken with only his friends to hear, when he reveals the dream and interpretation to the king, he opens with the acknowledgment of his own inability and gives credit to God, outright telling the king that God has disclosed

¹³ *ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ Grisham and Walker, "Cross-Cultural Leadership."

¹⁶ Grisham, "Metaphor, Poetry, Storytelling and Cross-Cultural Leadership," 297.

¹⁷ Jarvis, "The Church and the Learning Society."

¹⁸ James Midwinter Freeman, *New Manners and Customs of the Bible*, (Bridge Logos Fndtn, 1998), 383.

¹⁹ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1989, 539.

²⁰ Jamieson, Brown, and Fausset, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*.

²¹ Grisham, "Metaphor, Poetry, Storytelling and Cross-Cultural Leadership," 497.

this information (2:27:28). Daniel acts in complete integrity in private and in public concerning God's role and his role in the interpretation of the dream.

Performance Oriented

Dorfman found that performance orientation is an integral part of all cross cultural leadership.²² Performance orientation is marked by a leader who recurrently strives for continuously improved performance.²³ The GLOBE project identified improvement, excellence, and performance orientation as marks of an excellent global leader.²⁴ Daniel's performance orientation is evident in a number of ways in the first two chapters of Daniel. In the way Daniel studied he applied himself, and strove continuously for high performance in his studies. This was coupled with the fact that "God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom" (1:17) to produce a student who excelled ten times more than all his fellow students. Achieving a ten-fold advantage over all magicians in the kingdom was certainly a performance-oriented task in which Daniel and God both took part. Also, in Daniel's request to eat vegetables, he convinced the palace master to allow his request by setting performance standards: "then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations, and deal with your servants according to what you observe" (1:13). Only after these performance standards were met was the guard willing to continue to replace the king's food with vegetables. Daniel's performance oriented nature is seen in his quickness to apply a standard in this situation.

Visionary

Similar to integrity, Dorfman found that being visionary is a leadership quality that is highly endorsed in all cultures studied by the GLOBE project.²⁵ The GLOBE study measured eight qualities that contribute to visionary leadership: "visionary, foresight, anticipatory, prepared, intellectually stimulating, future oriented, plans ahead, inspirational."²⁶ A visionary leader creates an appropriate vision for the future of the organization that produces motivation in followers and has the planning and inspirational skills to make the vision become a reality.

Daniel's prophetic nature places him strongly in the domain of being a visionary leader. Daniel not only articulated the dream to the King and interpreted it, but he added to the end of the interpretation God's vision to be spoken to his people in exile: "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these

²² Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, and House, "GLOBE: A Twenty Year Journey Into the Intriguing World of Culture and Leadership," 3.

²³ *ibid.*, table 7.

²⁴ Brodbeck, Chhokar, and House, *Culture and Leadership Across the World: the Globe Book of in-Depth Studies of 25 Societies*, loc. 32499.

²⁵ Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, and House, "GLOBE: a Twenty Year Journey Into the Intriguing World of Culture and Leadership," 4.

²⁶ Brodbeck, Chhokar, and House, *Culture and Leadership Across the World: the Globe Book of in-Depth Studies of 25 Societies*, loc. 32487.

kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.” (2:44-45) Daniel demonstrates the ability to articulate a vision for God’s kingdom and this vision that elevated hope for God’s people is pivotal to the theme of the book. The theme of Daniel is for Daniel to encourage the Jews in Babylon, to show that God’s kingdom will ultimately reign, to be ‘God’s man’ on the inside of Babylon while in captivity along with God’s people.²⁷ Daniel’s message reminded them that although believers now face persecution and may never be promoted on the earth, the servants of God belong to another kingdom where they will be promoted, and God’s kingdom will be the one that lasts.²⁸ Bruce see’s this vision as reflecting Daniel’s purpose:

Daniel’s overall purpose, obviously reflecting God’s purpose in giving him these revelations, was to strengthen the faith of the people of God against the prospects of future events. Instead this section was given to encourage God’s people to live within terrifying earthly kingdoms by remaining confident that only God’s kingdom will last forever, for only He is truly sovereign. ²⁹

Daniel’s vision encompasses the purpose that God set forth for Daniel, and gives hope and encouragement to God’s people while they were enduring a horrifying exile experience. Daniel skillfully articulated this message during the interpretation of the king’s dream ensuring that the audience would be large and that the message would be heard by all Israelites in captivity. The later chapters of Daniel (not covered in this paper) show Daniel’s ability to follow through with the vision.

Inspirational (Charismatic)

Inspirational leadership, according to Dorfman, is one of the highest rated qualities for leaders cross culturally and Javidan concurs.³⁰ ³¹ Grisham’s attribute of communication follows along the lines of an inspirational leader since he acknowledges the need for a leader to listen and communicate to be effective, both of which form a basis for inspirational leadership. ³²

The way that Daniel comported himself and the way he communicated in captivity were inspirational to his friends, but also to the greater Jewish community. Daniel applied himself to studying and at the same time refused royal food; helping his fellow Israelites realize that they could remain faithful to God in a pagan culture while still finding acceptance and even advancement. ³³ Daniel’s courage to live a pure life before God while performing well in the king’s court was an inspiration to all Israelites to live through an excruciatingly difficult captivity together with God. Daniel showed his ability to listen and communicate in the interpretation of the dream. Daniel listened to

²⁷ Les P. Bruce and Leslie P. Bruce, “Discourse Theme and the Narratives of Daniel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (2003): 182.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 183.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 182.

³⁰ Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, and House, “GLOBE: A Twenty Year Journey Into the Intriguing World of Culture and Leadership,” 4.

³¹ M. Javidan et al., “Cross-Border Transfer of Knowledge: Cultural Lessons From Project GLOBE,” *The Academy of Management Executive (1993-2005)* (2005): 75.

³² Grisham, “Metaphor, Poetry, Storytelling and Cross-Cultural Leadership.”

³³ Richards and Richards, *The Teacher’s Commentary*, 439.

and understood the king's need to have the dream interpreted. His extremely articulate interpretation of the dream to the king showcases Daniel as an excellent interpreter. Daniel also listened to the plight of his people, he knew their pain and knew they needed encouragement and hope. He artfully weaved God's vision of an eternal, everlasting kingdom into the interpretation of the dream and in so doing articulated a vision that met God's people in their place of greatest need. Daniel was an inspirational leader to Israelites in captivity.

Team Builder

A team builder is seen by Dorfman as a leader who is capable of "building and implementing a common purpose or goal among team members."³⁴ GLOBE measures team building through five leadership dimensions: "(a) collaborative team orientation, (b) team integrator, (c) diplomatic, (d) malevolent (reverse scored), and (e) administratively competent."³⁵

When Daniel and his friends were renamed, the king intended to strip their Jewish identity from them in the renaming and gave them wholly pagan names.³⁶ Daniel, 'God will Judge', was named Belteshazzar, taken from the name of the chief God of the Babylonians.³⁷ Daniel, by not eating the royal food, and by continuing to serve God began to build a team spirit in his friends and eventually in his fellow captive Israelites. He acted as leader for his three friends, and rather than acting alone, included his three companions in his quest for purity before God, and to retain his identity while also serving in the king's court.

When Daniel asks the king for time to interpret his dream, his first action is to enlist his friends in prayer. Daniel does not presume to be able to accomplish this huge task on his own, but builds a team of intercessors to accomplish the task. In Daniel's thanksgiving prayer to God after he has received the interpretation, he acknowledges the work of his team by using the words 'we' and 'us': "and [you] have now revealed to me what we asked of you, for you have revealed to us what the king ordered." (2:23) When Daniel delivers the revelation from God to the king, the king "promoted Daniel, gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon." (2:48) However, Daniel's first response is to request the same for his teammates, and the king promotes them as well. Daniel is a team builder among his closest friends, but he also works at building a 'team spirit' amongst the Israelites who are captive in Babylon. Although not directly connected with the Israelite community in this passage, Daniel leverages all of his leadership capabilities to continue to offer hope to his fellow Israelites.

³⁴ Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, and House, "GLOBE: A Twenty Year Journey Into the Intriguing World of Culture and Leadership," 3.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 3.

³⁶ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 539.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 539.

God's Role in Effective Cross-Cultural Leadership

The story of Daniel is a delicate balance between Daniel's exceptional character and leadership qualities and direct intervention from God. Although Daniel's cross-cultural leadership qualities are amply evident, without God's intervention Daniel would not have been able to reach such heights. God's intervention in the first two chapters of Daniel begins with God allowing the defeat of Jerusalem. (1:2) God, therefore, intervenes on behalf of his children, the Israelites, for their good, which in this case involves disciplining them. Next, God gave Daniel and his friends "knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams." (1:17) In addition to Daniel's acceptance of and personal application to learning the Babylonian language and literature is a specific and unique gift from God. God provided Daniel the means to excel academically, in practical skill, and gave him the special and unique gift of having insight into all visions and dreams. Daniel's ten-fold success over his colleagues was in large part due to God's gift of knowledge and wisdom. (1:19) It is presumed that God gave Nebuchadnezzar the dream (2:1), and apparently it was God who did not allow the king to rest until he knew the interpretation. God revealed the dream and the interpretation to Daniel. (2:17-18) God caused the King to worship him as a result of the interpretation (2:47) rather than rejecting God's signs as Pharaoh did. God's intervention in this story of a young boy rising to power in a cross-cultural situation is undeniable. The chapter begins with God allowing Jerusalem to be destroyed because of King Jehoiakim's poor character and leadership, and it ends with God elevating Daniel to a place of leadership because of his strong character and leadership to encourage and uphold his people in their difficult circumstances. Daniel could not have risen to power without God, but God also did not choose to place in power those with poor character and leadership (such as Jehoiakim).

The cross-cultural leadership research that was consulted in this paper does not take into account God's part in cross-cultural leadership. However, God's consistent and clear intervention cannot be ignored in the story of Daniel. Christian cross-cultural leaders need to embrace exceptional cross-cultural leadership methods, Godly character and God's intervention in their lives and work.

III. CONCLUSION

Daniel exemplified the universally accepted leadership traits of a cross-cultural leader: integrity, performance oriented, visionary, inspirational, and team builder. If this study were expanded to the first six chapters of Daniel, and expanded to include more of the universally acceptable traits of a cross-cultural leader more evidence would be found. This paper offers Daniel as a practical example of a God fearing man who, in desperate circumstances, embraced relationship with God *and* living well in a cross-cultural context, displaying qualities of an excellent leader. Daniel's heart was wholly committed to loving and honoring God throughout the story. God used Daniel in nearly impossible circumstances to encourage and uplift the people of Israel. God chose to

work through Daniel because of his outstanding character, and yet the success of Daniel's leadership relied heavily on God's intervention. Daniel found a balance between keeping his own identity, honoring God, and respecting and embracing the new culture. An over emphasis on any one of these to the exclusion of the other could have been disastrous.

Christian cross cultural workers today need to find ways to keep their identity while respecting and embracing their host culture, all while staying in a vital relationship with God. Studying, understanding and exemplifying the qualities of an exceptional cross-cultural leader is necessary for successful cross-cultural leadership. Cross-cultural Christian leaders need to strive for excellence in their leadership while at the same time fully relying on God to intervene. Daniel was a genius at balancing all the elements of excellent cross-cultural Christian leadership; he is a prototypical example to Christian leaders today.

Further Research

There are multiple articles pertaining to servant leadership as a cross-cultural model for an excellent leader.^{38 39 40 41 42} Some of these also take into account a Christian perspective, which would include the addition of God's intervention. Daniel's rise to power in a cross-cultural context could be measured against cross-cultural servant leadership, with rewarding results that could further the study of servant leadership in a cross-cultural and Christian context.

³⁸ Maureen Hannay, "The Cross-Cultural Leader: the Application of Servant Leadership Theory in the International Context," *Journal of International Business & Cultural Studies* 1 (2009): 59–69.

³⁹ B. E. Winston and B. Ryan, "Servant Leadership as a Humane Orientation: Using the GLOBE Study Construct of Humane Orientation to Show That Servant Leadership Is More Global Than Western," *International Journal of Leadership Studies* 3, no. 2 (2008): 212–222.

⁴⁰ E. E. Joseph and B. E. Winston, "A Correlation of Servant Leadership, Leader Trust, and Organizational Trust," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 26, no. 1 (2005): 6–22.

⁴¹ Rakesh Mittal and Peter W Dorfman, "Servant Leadership Across Cultures," *Journal of World Business* 47, no. 4 (October 1, 2012): 555–570, doi:10.1016/j.jwb.2012.01.009.

⁴² Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, (IVP Books, 2006).