

The Kenotic* Leadership Model

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Most of the effective leaders I know are individuals who willingly serve the purposes of those who appointed them while doing the best for those they lead—even at significant personal cost. For intentional Christians desiring to honor Jesus in their callings, His *kenosis** process is essential to that objective. It appears that there are four main dimensions of a kenosis model for leadership.

Kenotic leaders **think deeply** about the theories and theologies—the *what* elements—that inform their leadership callings. They stay current with, evaluate, and as appropriate, adapt (not necessarily adopt) the major theoretical constructs from valid research. For those who believe that leadership is a God-given, spiritually enriched and sacred calling, they explore the theological implications of leading as communicated in the scriptures in general and the life of Jesus in particular.

Kenotic leaders examine the **character and motivations at the heart** of leadership—the *who* and *why* of their leadership calling. They believe character counts as an essential foundation. And they know that what drives them as leaders determines the legacy that will persist after they have left their positions of authority and influence. In particular, a desire to “lead like Jesus” is informed by the *kenosis* motivation that willingly sets aside privileges and perks as described in Philippians 2 to focus more on doing the will of the One who called/appointed them and achieving the highest “good” for those they lead, then on the needs, preferences, agendas, or predispositions of the leader.

Kenotic leaders perfect the skills and techniques relevant to their respective callings and contexts—the *how*, *when*, and *where*. Their **hands know what to do and how to do it**, evaluating results against their organization’s goals and values. Means as well as ends become the focus of their leadership practices and strategies.

Finally, kenotic leaders **master the essential disciplines** that guide their thinking, guard their hearts, and continuously equip their hands for the leadership mission they have accepted.



* The term *kenosis* comes from the Greek word for Christ’s voluntary self-emptying. Philippians 2:6–8 tells us that Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men, humbled himself and became obedient unto death on the cross”—doing the will of His heavenly Father for our ultimate redemption. It is important to note that Jesus did not lose His divine essence during His incarnation—He remained, as orthodox theology affirms, very God and very man. From a theory/theology perspective, *kenosis* is the idea that leaders, whose obligation is to fulfill the responsibilities they have to those who appointed them and those they lead, willingly limit personal privileges, perks, preferences, power, and predispositions as required to ensure that the highest purposes of their leadership calling are achieved.