

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study Guide

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 4: MANAGING FAMILY AS A SPIRITUAL LEADER

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Leadership Lifestyle. The lessons examine the practical and spiritual requirements for those in Christian leadership. Being a leader is so much more than standing up in front of a group of people asking them to follow you! To be a great leader, one must maintain high standards in both public and private life. While every one of us struggles in many ways, a leader faces unique challenges. This module identifies some of these struggles and how to combat them, with practical advice from men and women who have experienced the trials and joys of following God's calling in leadership. Each lesson concludes with a Leader to Leader page. It features quotes from historical Christians, current Christian leaders, and people (not in leadership) who share their perspective on the topic.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 4: MANAGING FAMILY AS A SPIRITUAL LEADER

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

To help spiritual leaders create a healthy balance in their lives between family and ministry.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

“There are only so many hours in a day!” is a phrase that expresses the many demands on one’s time and energy. As a leader you may be passionate about the ministry God has called you to, but find it difficult to balance the demands of your ministry with the needs of your family. This lesson looks at managing your family well. While some leaders are single men or women without family and children, it is still an important topic of discussion for everyone. One of the major risks to accepting a call to ministry is that family life can be neglected while doing God’s work. Regardless of how influential, powerful or gifted a leader is, their first priority is their relationship with God. Their second priority is family, and the third is ministry work. When these priorities get out of order, leaders lack a vital connection to God, families are hurt, and ministry is weak.

GETTING STARTED

1. If you were looking for someone to pastor a church or administer a school, what would you want to know about their home and family life? What would be some signs that they would not be a good candidate for the job?

2. Is it possible to keep private life at home entirely separate from public life as a leader? In what ways does one affect the other?



STUDY

❖ **FAITHFUL IN SMALL THINGS:** A leader in any position can easily lose sight of what is most important in life. In serving God, the work can seem endless! There is always more evangelism and discipleship, another sermon or a person in poverty, another meeting or a class to be taught, and always more money to be raised. It is a problem when leaders neglect their families and devote all their time to ministry. This is not Biblical. When selecting a pastor or a leader, a major consideration is how they treat their families!

- Read the following verses. Write down what you learn about how a pastor or church leader should manage his or her family life:

1 Timothy 3:1-5	
Ephesians 6:1-4	
Ephesians 5:25	

- What do the following verses tell us about the importance of being faithful in small areas of responsibility before moving on to greater areas?

Jeremiah 12:5	
Luke 16:10-12	
Colossians 3:23-24	

- From what you have just read, what are some practical applications? How would a good leader who is following Biblical teachings lead his or her family?



- **The Family is where we practise Leadership:** God trains His servants by giving them small tasks to accomplish before the big ones! Anyone in leadership should practise leadership at home first. The home is a small church within the larger church. The church is made up of relationships just as the home is, and learning to lead a family is excellent training for all types of Christian leadership (Luke 16:10-12).
- **The Family is where we practise Obedience:** As a leader, we obey and honour God by loving and leading our family. Our obedience is a model to our children who are commanded to obey their parents (Colossians 3:20). All our work and parenting should be done as service to God whether at home or in our place of ministry (Colossians 3:23-24).
- **The Family is where we practise Faithfulness:** Faithfully attending to the needs of our family (relationships, finances, etc.) prepares us to serve the entire family of God. If we stumble with one, we will not succeed with the other. Our homes should be a safe place of peace and trust. We must be a good spiritual leader there before taking on more difficult and demanding challenges in the community (Jeremiah 12:5).
- Given that families are important to God, how is leading a family like working in other areas of ministry? What can a person learn from leading their family that they can apply to other areas of life?

❖ **A PERSONAL MINISTRY:** Every Christian leader is responsible to minister personally to their family, whatever type of family God has given them. To review our priorities, we are to nurture our own relationship with God first, care for the needs of our family next, and then lead with integrity those in the community we are called to minister to. God has given us specific commands to obey in leading our family. Neglecting these is disobedience to God.

- Read the passages of the Bible written for each family member, and write down the responsibilities they have been given.

Family Member	Verses	Responsibilities
Children	Exodus 20:12, Luke 18:20, Ephesians 6:2, Colossians 3:20	
Parents	Colossians 3:21, Ephesians 6:4, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Proverbs 29:15, 1 Timothy 5:8	
Husbands	Colossians 3:19, Ephesians 5:25, 1 Peter 3:7	



Wives	Colossians 3:18, Proverbs 12:4, 1 Peter 3:5-6, Proverbs 31:10-31	
Everyone	John 3:34-35, Colossians 3:13, 1 Timothy 4:12, Ephesians 5:21, 1 Timothy 5:8	

❖ **QUALIFICATIONS FOR MINISTRY:** The Bible gives qualifications of character and conduct for those who serve in leadership within the Church. These attributes should be displayed first at home. A person in a position of leadership must set a good example. Someone who is not faithful in serving, loving and supporting their own family will not be able to lead those they are not related to.

- **Character:** Our character is often seen by how we behave when no one is watching, or when we let our guard down at home. When we are in a bad mood, do we have the self-control to not take it out on family members? Do we manage our finances wisely? Are we people of integrity who follow through with commitments?
- **Conduct:** What we do and how we behave is determined by our character. If we have strong Christian character our behaviour will be more in line with God’s will. We will do what we say, and not behave in a shameful manner. A leader (though not perfect), should be a good example of what Christians strive to be.
- Read the following verses, and make a list of the qualifications for ministry that involve character (that is, the kind of person we are) and those that involve conduct (that is, the way we behave). Circle anything you write down that may relate to home, or leading one’s family.
 - 1 Timothy 3:1-13
 - 2 Timothy 2:1-13
 - Titus 1:5-9

Character	Conduct



- From what we have discussed in this lesson so far, how can you identify someone who manages his or her family well, and demonstrates obedience to God in their home life? How will their family interact with them? What attitude will their family have?

❖ **FIVE WAYS A LEADER MIGHT NEGLECT THEIR FAMILY:** Once a person begins a leadership position, there is tremendous pressure on their time. Sometimes this comes from church members, students, co-workers, elders or from their own tendency to overwork. But even the most ardent servant of God can sometimes neglect their own family in pursuit of following God's calling on their life.

- 1. Giving their Family Too Little Time:** Ministry can happen all hours of the day or night. Evenings and weekends are often primary ministry times, but they are also times for families to be together. When a servant of God cannot schedule time away from their ministry to spend with family, they are too busy. When family celebrations are neglected, or a parent is absent on a daily basis, that parent has neglected their duty.
- 2. Giving their Family Too Little of Themselves:** Your family might see your face daily, and you may be able to join them for meals and celebrations, but your mind and heart may be elsewhere. If you are too tired after ministering to others to spend time in real conversation, to share yourself with your family, or to laugh and play with them, you are withholding a part of yourself that they need. Stress can rob your family of knowing the real you. You are a limited resource, so be careful to reserve time and energy for your family!
- 3. Giving their Family Too Little Respect:** Children of pastors are sometimes used as sermon illustrations, or a private family matter could become public if it is used as a teaching example. These can be embarrassing and disrespectful to children. It is important to respect children and spouses – their time, their calling, their abilities and their preferences. They are not tools to further ministry; they are partners and loved ones.
- 4. Failing to Provide for their Family:** In some places, those who devote their life to ministry make very little income, sometimes not enough to support a family. While we must not covet more than we need, it is a Biblical command that we work to provide for our families ([1 Timothy 5:8](#)). At the same time, we must do the work of the Lord ([1 Corinthians 15:58](#)). This may require multiple family members to work so that one can commit to full-time ministry. Other times this may mean working part-time to provide for the family ([1 Thessalonians 2:9](#)). Churches that require full-time hours from their pastor should provide the means to support their pastor's family.



5. Failing to Protect Their Family: A leader’s family is often under attack. Spouses of leaders sometimes receive unfair criticism: sometimes the way a wife dresses, how their children behave or whether the family attends every function the church holds. When ministering in a particularly dangerous area, a leader's family may need to temporarily live elsewhere. If you are a leader, consider how to best protect your family from potential threats, and pray that they will endure and gain the victory over spiritual attack.

- Can you think of other dangers to the family of someone in ministry?

- Have you experienced any of these in your life? Are you presently at risk?

❖ **FEEDING FAMILY FIRST:** Since our own relationship with God is of primary importance in our lives, it may feel natural that our service to Him should also take first place. However it is dangerous to expect a pastor or other Christian leader to put ministry before the needs of the family. Every leader who belongs to a family should:

- **Make Time for Family:** Appoint a specific family time, and keep that appointment. This includes certain days, evenings, and vacation times. Family is important enough to mark these times in your weekly schedule.
- **Set Boundaries:** Sometimes boundaries must be set, such as not counselling people at home, not taking phone calls after a certain hour or limiting the frequency of meetings. If family is a priority, you will sometimes have to say ‘no’ to other things. Time together as a family must be protected.
- **Consider Seasons of Life:** The window of opportunity for a pastor to minister to his own children is a narrow one, and children require more time and discipline when they are young! If you are single, you have an excellent opportunity to devote yourself to the ministry of God.

❖ **HOW TO SUPPORT LEADERS:** Christians should consider the weight that a family carries if one or more is engaged in leadership. Expectations placed on a leader should not jeopardize time spent with their family. Leaders teach people to walk with God; they don’t do the walking for them! Church members should:



- **Provide Adequate Time Off:** Insist that your pastors and leaders take a day off each week, and receive adequate vacation time to rest and reconnect with family. This is an opportunity for others to take leadership responsibility. Jesus Himself took times of retreat, and God built times of rest and refreshment into the very nature of creation – we are not exempt.

What does the Bible tell us in these verses?

Genesis 2:2	
Psalms 1:3	
Psalms 104:19	

- **Pray:** Pray not only for your leaders, but also for their families. Wives of pastors and elders often carry heavy burdens of stress that are unseen. They are also held to a high standard and often feel lonely. Children sense unrealistic expectations and spiritual attacks. Pray for wayward children, rebellious youth, and wisdom for your leaders as parents.

1 Thessalonians 5:25	
1 Peter 5:8	
Luke 22:31-32	

- **Befriend:** Leaders and their families need authentic friendships that will build them up and encourage them in their work. They need supporters and champions. Consider how you can come alongside a leader’s family and help them through a difficult time! Leaders may need help and support from others in order to put their families first. Leaders’ families will have times of stress and struggle just like any family (Galatians 6:2).
- **Respect:** When you call on a leader to help you, remember that their time is limited. While they are a servant of God, they also have responsibilities to their family, and many other people. Do not expect so much from them that they will fail! They should be held to a high standard, but they are not perfect.



- ❖ **CONCLUSION:** Family can be a tremendous source of strength and comfort for each of us. Home is a place of belonging and love. For the leader who pours his time and energy into the work of God, home is an especially important place and must be protected. Spouses of leaders can help them become successful at what they do through their love, support, and prayers. Lack of support can cause them to fail. Family is of critical importance for leaders, and putting relationships in the home first will allow for more successful ministry.

SUMMARY

- ❖ God gives us our families as a great training ground for future ministry – but our ministry to our families never stops! For leaders, serving their own families according to Biblical teaching is a priority.
- ❖ The family is where we exercise faithfulness and obedience, and practise leadership.
- ❖ Every individual in a family has a responsibility to it. This is clearly outlined in Scripture.
- ❖ Biblical qualifications for ministry leaders include how they treat their families. This is an important consideration when selecting candidates for leadership!
- ❖ Leaders are especially susceptible to neglecting their own families due to the demands of ministry responsibilities.
- ❖ Each of us should support our leaders and their families.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How can a church help their pastor to serve and lead their own family first, yet not neglect the responsibilities God has given them? What can you do to support the families of leaders in your life?

2. If you are a leader who is married, could someone tell by your actions and attitudes that you put your spouse before your ministry work? How is this revealed?

3. Why is it often difficult for ministry leaders to put their families first before their work?



LEADER TO LEADER

QUOTATIONS FROM LEADERS PAST AND PRESENT ON THE TOPIC OF FAMILY LIFE AND MINISTRY

“As a young, ambitious, prideful pastor I almost destroyed my relationship with my wife and daughter because I neglected them and put my career first. The stresses of my job made it impossible to ever see my family and I felt as though I was not giving my all to God. I failed both as a husband and a pastor. Now after a time away from leading, my wife and I have healed our relationship. God has called us to plant a Church together. My wife is my biggest cheerleader; I need her by my side. This is a real problem for pastors – it is important that leaders have time for their families.”

Jeremiah – Pastor

“I tell the young pastors I mentor that there are a thousand other men that can take your place as a pastor, but no one else can adequately take your place as a husband and father in your home. This is how it should be – Faith first, Family Second, Finances Third. Your work – even if it is for God - cannot come before family.”

Paul – Seminary Teacher

“For a servant of God, family is number one! Why? Because relationships define the Church, and the chief qualifier for leadership in the church is healthy, nurturing family life – governing one's own household well.”

John – Christian Ministry Director

“My family has been impacted for good by our positions of leadership, but it doesn't always look that way! Anytime my husband and I step into a position of leadership we feel the attack of Satan. We have seen our children attacked and those attacks have not diminished over the years – they just look different. However, all our children and their spouses are currently walking with the Lord and our grandchildren are being raised for Christ. So, has Satan prevailed? No. In fact, just like in the story of Balaam who tried to curse the Israelites, God has blessed my family instead even in the midst of the adversities. Prayer for the family has been the key to overcoming Satan's devices. We have asked many people to pray over the years and I believe those faithful hearts who cared for us have made all the difference.”

Shawna – Christian Ministry Leader

“The impact of ministry on my family has been good, generally speaking. My children and wife have their own places to serve. I was taught both by precept and example in my apprenticeship to set boundaries so that I was able to devote appropriate amounts of time and energy both to my church responsibilities and to my family responsibilities. I set aside time during the year to get away with my wife. Although work-life balance is not unique to pastors, spiritual leaders are perhaps especially vulnerable to failure in this regard because of the personal and spiritual nature of the work demands. It can be difficult to separate the two!”

Mike – Pastor