

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 5: BUILDING AND MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

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.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God. The lessons will be especially helpful to those who are pastors, church leaders, mentors or teachers, but also anyone wishing to grow in their relationship with God.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 5: BUILDING AND MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

PURPOSE

This lesson examines the importance of quality relationships in the leader's life, and how to build and maintain those relationships.

LEADER'S NOTE

This lesson, like others in this module, is full of helpful suggestions for pastors, elders, teachers and lay leaders within the Church or Christian ministry. In compiling these lessons, a wide range of successful Christian leaders in various parts of the world were surveyed and some shared their experiences. These responses are included at the end of each lesson in a 'leader to leader' page which you can distribute to your participants, or use in other ways throughout the lesson. The best voice of experience for your participants is yours. In this lesson especially you may want to share some of the relationships that have been helpful in your leadership, or bring other leaders in to share theirs. Your participants will benefit from your experiences and wisdom! Even if you feel like you don't have much to offer, being honest will help build a healthy relationship with them – one that could benefit all of you for many years to come!

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ What are the most important relationships in your life? What do those relationships provide for you? How have you benefited from them?
- ❖ How does a friendship begin? What sustains a friendship? What can ruin it?
- ❖ Why is it difficult for leaders to maintain quality relationships? Why are quality relationships important? Are you a relational person, sometimes known as a 'people-person'? Or do you place more value on systems, procedures, and the tools needed to get the job done?
- ❖ What role have mentors and advisors had in your life? What is the greatest lesson you have learned from someone you looked up to?



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH:

- ❖ **The Importance of People:** The life of a leader is sometimes a lonely one. It is often difficult to be your authentic self around others when you are seen as their leader. Leadership is about influence, and the ability to give people direction and have them follow you. Most of the people in a leader's life are *followers* – people seeking wisdom, guidance, direction or knowledge. But this is often a one-way relationship. Leaders need people in their lives who give as well as receive.
 - **Leaders Need Fellowship:** The word fellowship refers to relationships with other believers that result in mutual benefit. Relationships with other Christians are important to leaders. Without them, a leader can experience little personal growth and may become discouraged.
 - **Iron sharpens Iron:** We all want to be better leaders. Life, ministry and the church are all about relationships! Proverbs 27:17 states that “iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another”.
 - When two blades are scraped together, they sharpen each other. Two people can encourage and build one another up through close friendship. It is also true that when an iron blade is sharpened by using an iron file, it becomes sharper yet. In the same way, people who are different than we are can challenge and sharpen us in a positive way even though their personalities may sometimes be annoying!
 - Iron that is struck against wood can carve the wood into something useful, but it will dull the iron. In order to keep its usefulness, an iron knife must be struck against something just as hard. This is why good friendships – peers even – are necessary for every leader. Our character and abilities to lead are improved rather than dulled by them.
- ❖ **Most Important Relationships for Leaders:** If you want to be a better leader, you need quality relationships beyond those of your followers. The following is a list of the most valuable relationships in the life of every leader.
 - **Family:** God has given us our family to love and support us, and give us a safe place to be ourselves. Single people are blessed when they receive this support from parents and siblings. Those who are married are encouraged by their spouses. Protect and nurture relationships within your family. If your family members are not believers, pray that God would bring into your life those who would adopt you as a spiritual child, and nurture your faith.
 - Moses was corrected by his father-in-law (Exodus 18).



- o Moses' wife, Zipporah, challenged him when he failed to obey God (Exodus 4:24-27).
 - o Mary and Martha of Bethany served Jesus together, and learned from one another (Luke 10:39-42).
 - o Job's family comforted him in his distress (Job 42:11).
 - o Husbands and wives love, comfort, and serve each other (Proverbs 31:10-12, Genesis 2:18, Genesis 24:67).
- **Friendships:** God gives us friends who share common interests and activities. Friends are equals and treat one another with respect and admiration. Friends journey with you through good and bad times. They contribute to your happiness, listen to you, and encourage you.
- o David and Jonathan had a model friendship. They protected, helped, believed in each other, and shared common goals (1 Samuel 18:1-4, 19:1-9, 20:1-46).
 - o David had other friends – those who helped him, supported him and demanded nothing in return (1 Chronicles 12:17, 2 Samuel 16:16).
 - o Job's friends were a comfort to him at the start (Job 2:11-13). Though they were critical and condemning in their response to Job's problems, they had at least been with him in his sorrow.
 - o Friends can mutually encourage one another (Hebrews 10:24-25, Romans 1:12).
 - o When friends correct us because they care for us, even their harsh but helpful words can eventually bring healing (Proverbs 27:5-6).
 - o Those we spend time with influence our lives. This is why it is important to select good friends (Proverbs 13:20, Proverbs 22:24-25).
- **Peer Advisors:** In addition to family and friends, we need peers to advise us. Peer advisors see the issues we face and can give us their perspective and advice. In a leadership position you may have fellow teachers, elders, pastors or administrators whose wisdom and perspective you can trust.
- o Proverbs 15:22 warns that plans fail for lack of counsel, and Proverbs 1:5 tells us that a wise person still needs guidance. There is wisdom in having many counselors (Proverbs 24:6).
 - o Our ultimate trust should not be in people who give us advice, but in God who speaks through them and uses them to help us.
 - o Sometimes getting another opinion on how to deal with a problem can reveal our own sinful attitudes and fears. While we might easily deceive ourselves into thinking we are doing right, bringing the matter before others helps us see the matter more clearly.
- **Mentors:** When selecting someone to act as a mentor, choose someone whose character you admire, someone with experience in leadership, and someone you can trust. These may be spiritual mentors who can help you grow in your faith and knowledge of God, or those who are leaders in their profession who can help you acquire skills in your position.



- o Proverbs 19:20 tells us that when we listen to advice and accept instruction, we gain wisdom. We can get instruction by asking someone to be our mentor. This may involve meeting regularly with them for instruction. It requires humility to learn from someone else – but the rewards are many!
 - o Moses and Joshua are an example of a mentor relationship in Scripture. Moses modeled action and character, and gave Joshua an important task to complete (Exodus 17:9). Joshua was called a servant of Moses, but through serving, he acquired skills and confidence to take up leadership himself. Moses let Joshua join him in his work until he was ready to lead, giving him increasingly difficult leadership assignments (Exodus 24:12-14, Numbers 27:15-23, Joshua 1:1-3).
 - o The Apostle Paul (earlier called Saul) was mentored by Barnabas who had been a preacher and a faithful follower of Jesus. Barnabas initiated this mentor relationship which allowed Paul to be accepted by the other Christians. They served alongside one another for a time and were fruitful in ministry together (Acts 9:26-28, 11:22-26, Acts 13:2).
 - o A mentor relationship has a purpose – helping the person being mentored to mature. This can happen through regular meetings, shadowing the mentor during work, or being coached on a specific area or weakness. Mentors are guides, coaches and teachers. They cannot solve every problem, but are integral to the growth of a leader.
- **Disciples:** Allowing and cultivating specific followers to take on responsibility can do wonders for developing your own teaching and leadership skills. Having your own 'disciples' may mean choosing a few people who demonstrate interest in spiritual growth, and display leadership potential.
- o Jesus often explained things to His disciples that were not revealed to the larger crowds. He relied on the disciples to continue His ministry, and invested much time and energy in them. He demonstrated His power, taught them, and then sent them out to work and teach as He did (Matthew 11:1, Luke 9:1-3).
 - o The Prophet Elijah faced threats at every turn, and was discouraged in his ministry, feeling alone. God gave Elijah rest and comfort by assigning him a friend, disciple and successor in Elisha (1 Kings 19:4-5, 19:15-21, 2 Kings 2:1-15). Elisha learned from his mentor, but also provided companionship and comfort for Elijah.
 - o Paul was a mentor to Timothy, whom he dearly loved. Their unique relationship was similar to a father and his son. As Timothy grew in his faith and leadership, Paul was encouraged in his own ministry. The relationship progressed from one of mentoring to one of partnership (1 Timothy 1:2, Romans 16:21, Philippians 2:19-22).
 - o As leaders we should always be a Paul to a Timothy, and a Timothy to a Paul – that is, we should be teaching disciples and learning from mentors. In this way, the faith and knowledge gained in leadership is passed from one generation of leaders to the next.



- **Supporters:** There will be times of discouragement in our ministry during which we need supportive followers. Their role is to encourage and uphold us when we are weak, and to keep us on track with our vision. They pray for us, serve us in practical ways, and even defend us. These are dear people who are given to us by God. Consider leaders in your life whom you can support in this way!
 - Moses wanted to follow the commands of God, but his body was not strong enough! Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands when he was too weak to do so ([Exodus 17:12](#)). Who encourages you to keep going when you are discouraged? Who reminds you of your vision and is an instrument of God in restoring faith?
 - Jonathan faced an impossible task of having to take down an entire army. He was not discouraged because his armor-bearer accompanied him and supported him with his life ([1 Samuel 14:1-8](#)). Consider how much more effective you would be if you had such a person carrying your weight and cheering you on!

- **Adversaries:** Any leader who attempts difficult things will face those who challenge leadership, question decisions and act as adversaries. Rather than avoiding these people, an excellent leader will actually welcome the opinion of those who think differently. Sometimes God uses opposition to humble us.
 - God sometimes sends adversaries to us for a reason. David was sent Shimei. ([2 Samuel 16:5-14](#)).
 - Enemies sharpen our skills, require us to defend our position with logic, and keep us honestly evaluating the decisions we make. Being challenged by those who think differently strengthens our character ([Romans 5:3-5](#)).
 - When we are persecuted, it means we are blessed by God ([Acts 5:41](#), [1 Peter 4:14](#)).
 - Adversaries sometimes tell us the truth when often our friends won't ([Proverbs 27:5-6](#), [Proverbs 17:10](#)).
 - Surrounding ourselves with those who think exactly as we do will not help us make better decisions. Sometimes we need those who are brave enough to challenge us!

- ❖ **Valuing Relationships:** Each of the previous relationships adds value to the life of a leader. When these relationships are in place and in a healthy balance, a leader will not feel alone, and will not have to make decisions without support or wise counsel. Relationships take time and effort. Learn to value the many different relationships in your life. To begin with:
 - **Pray:** Pray that God will bring into your life those whom you need right now, and that you will recognize their importance to you.

 - **Watch:** Look for those who follow you faithfully and whose wisdom you trust. Look for people who have a God-given belief in you as a leader. Keep these people close to you by giving them responsibilities in your area of leadership, and by cultivating a friendship with them. God will bring into your life the people that you need, but you will have to recognize that you need them.



- **Cherish:** When God brings these special people into your life, learn to cherish them and treat their friendships as precious. They are not 'tools' to equip you for ministry, they are not means to ends, but rather ends in themselves. Many relationships are mutually beneficial. As they serve you, find ways to serve them!
- ❖ **Cultivating Relationships:** Healthy relationships that are beneficial to leaders must be actively cultivated. Relationships are costly to maintain! And yet, for a leader, nothing is more valuable. People will follow you when they know you care about them. The following are characteristics of a healthy relationship:
 - **Be Trustworthy:** When you are a person of your word, a person of integrity, a person who keeps in confidence things spoken to them, people will trust you and follow your example. You can demonstrate trustworthiness through keeping private matters private and through good stewardship of finances (Exodus 18:21, Proverbs 11:13).
 - **Esteem Others:** This is one of the most important keys for developing strong relationships. Your encouragement of others and recognition of their worth make people feel good in your presence. Leaders who take the time to know others and identify their strengths will have loyal supporters and faithful friends! Esteem both those above and beneath you in status, and treat each person as important (Philippians 2:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14).
 - **Keep Healthy Boundaries:** Boundaries are the guidelines we place around relationships so that we have time for all the people who are important for us. Meeting together regularly is important, and it is wise to schedule a specific time and place. You can become weary when always giving to others; you need encouragement as well! Jesus often needed times alone or with specific friends. (Matthew 26:36-38).
 - **Love Sacrificially:** Love puts others first. This is where strong relationships come alive. Do you love people according to the criteria in 1 Corinthians 13? When we love others and serve them, they will be more inclined to listen to our words. Love accepts people for who they are and where they are, but also sees the potential for who they can be! Love pays attention to the details of people's lives and to their needs.
 - **Invest Time:** Strong relationships require regular time spent together. Look for creative ways to enjoy this time. When you invest your time in people, there are shared personal benefits, growth of your ministry and leadership, and growth of the Kingdom of God. While your time is costly and precious to you, you really cannot afford not to invest in people. With all the demands on Jesus' time, He spent much of it with His disciples (John 3:22, Matthew 17:1).
- ❖ **Conclusion:** A leader has the potential to grow the Kingdom of God by building healthy ministry partnerships, encouraging and uplifting others, and fulfilling the call of God in their life. Leadership *is* relationships. Without followers, you are not a leader! You must cultivate those relationships that bring out the best in you; you will experience growth in your personal life and in your ministry, and see God's Kingdom expand here on earth.



DISCUSSION

- ❖ Of the seven types of relationships listed, which do you have in your life right now? Which do you lack and need most?
- ❖ When have you been a 'supporter' of someone in leadership? Do you tell anyone that you are 'with them heart and soul'? Whose burden can you make lighter by carrying some of it for them?
- ❖ What tool for cultivating relationships do you find most difficult?
- ❖ What puts stress on relationships between leaders and followers? What can we do to prevent that?
- ❖ What relationship in your life right now have you been neglecting? What can you do about it, and to whom will you be accountable?

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that every participant will see the need for quality, authentic relationships in their lives. Pray that they would work towards being honest and transparent with themselves and others, leading by love and not by power or coercion. Pray that each participant would be blessed with many healthy relationships, that they would not feel alone in their ministry, but see people as God-given gifts to them. Pray that love would abound more and more, and that through the love of these people the Kingdom of God would grow.



LEADER TO LEADER

QUOTATIONS FROM LEADERS PAST AND PRESENT ON THE TOPIC OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

"I attempt to maintain good relationships by not trying to manage too many, keeping clear in my mind that I can't be all things to all people, and striving to be specifically what I am called to be to the various people in my care: for example, to the whole crowd on Sunday mornings, I should be a well-prepared preacher; to some of the people in crisis, I should be available to sympathize and to help; for those whose needs I cannot or choose not to attend to, ensuring that there are other trained leaders able and willing to sympathize and help. I must be faithful in my responsibilities to my staff members, and my key volunteers."

Michael - Pastor

"Relationships take time – you can't expect them to flourish while neglecting the one thing that feeds them! They will grow if we are intentional about their cultivation. To grow friendship requires sacrificial love. To attract supporters we must esteem people and share our vision with them. People are not part of what we do – they are the heart of it."

Adele – Christian Ministry Worker

"An area of weakness for me was allowing the program to become more important than the people. I had to work at avoiding that. There was always a small group of people with whom I worked, either on staff or among those with whom I ministered, who I considered close friends. Meeting for coffee, or visiting in their home or ours, were times of refreshment for my wife and me. Only a very few were close enough friendships to be able to share at a deep and personal level."

David - Pastor

"I believe good relationships, more than any other metric, define leadership. The ability to form and sustain healthy, loving, honest relationships is the most important element of leadership. Jesus died to demonstrate that, and lives to ensure it forever."

John – Christian Ministry Leader

"I believe the Lord guards my relationships. If he wants me to lead people, then He puts it in their hearts that they should follow me and listen to the Word of God I share with them. I don't have to work at this. He protects my leadership just like He protected Moses' leadership. I do pray for the people I teach. I pray for their prayer requests. I care about them; I try to show compassion for them. I also care about where they are at spiritually and I try to call them upward. If I can minister to them in a physical way, I do that to. I believe they sense that I am concerned for them and that helps maintain our sense of community together.

My most important relationship is with my husband. We pray together every day and that makes all the difference. My second most important relationship is with my small group Bible study. I also have strong relationships with those in my church and the staff I lead in my field of ministry."

Shawna – Christian Ministry Leader

"I may have learned just as much from instructing disciples as I have from my own mentors – but I try to maintain both relationships in my life. They both show me areas of weakness and encourage me to become strong but in different ways. In addition, the elders of my church are some of my biggest supporters, and dear friends of mine.

Without them my ministry would not be as fruitful."

Jovan - Pastor