

# LESSON ESSENTIALS

## CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

### LESSON 2: SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Who would sign up for life as a slave, or to be someone's servant rather than the master? It is upside down kind of thinking – but this is precisely the life that Jesus Christ has called all of us to. But we may wonder what it means to both serve others and also lead them? How can a person be the least and the greatest at the same time? This lesson looks at the character virtue of servant leadership which Jesus set the example for. It requires putting the will of God and the good of others before our own. Read on to find out more!

“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

*Galatians 1:10*

“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. “

Matthew 20:26-28

The disciples must have been very perplexed as they were sitting down for their Passover meal. Instead of a servant laying aside his robe and washing the dirt off their feet before they ate, Jesus Himself was doing it! Any one of the disciples should have been washing Jesus' feet.

Jesus didn't come to earth to be served, but to serve. Saving us from our sins required sacrifice on His part.

Why was Jesus washing the disciples' feet? In the Gospel of John, we read: “He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”... When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” (John 13:4-7, 12-17)

Jesus was no less a leader because He humbled Himself, and no less a king because He took up the work of a servant. He simply demonstrated what it means to lay aside our own personal will for the will of God. This is what servant leaders do.

When people take a position of leadership, it is often difficult and stressful, but many are willing to bear with it for the rewards of power and honour and wealth. After all, there is security in being the one who sets direction and have people follow you. But this is worldly leadership, and not the leadership Jesus Christ displayed. All Christian leadership should be *servant* leadership.

Here is Jesus' definition of servant leadership: “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many“ (Matthew 20:26-28).

But this leaves us with all sorts of questions! Can a leader really maintain his or her position if they do the work of the servants they lead? What will people think of them? How can they have sufficient time to both serve and lead?

Jesus' life confused many people because they were expecting something different of the Messiah, the promised Saviour from God!

They expected a leader who would take power from the Romans, amass an army, and draw worldly glory to Himself. Instead, Jesus was a man who ate and drank with ordinary people, bent down to heal lepers and the unclean, and stooped to wash His disciples' feet.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus taught servanthood by the words He spoke and by His actions. Even after His resurrection, in His glorified body, Jesus made breakfast for His followers (John 21:4-14). And yet, Jesus is remembered as one of the most powerful leaders in all of history. He did not rule by oppression or fear, but with love and truth. What other leader in the history of the world has had such a following?

Jesus used His power not to control others, but to love them and call them to the truth. He set aside His own honour in order to obey the will of His Father, even to the point of dying a humiliating death on a cross. In the same way, we can lead with the power that comes from putting God's will first and acting out of love for our followers. It is love that changes hearts and minds and brings about repentance and faith.

As a leader, if you truly want to follow Jesus' example, consider it an honour to serve those you lead, and do it for their good rather than your own glory. This is the call of Jesus Christ on our lives: that we serve as He served and love as He loved!

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## IN REVIEW

- Servant leadership is acting for God's glory rather than our own, and the good of others before ourselves.
- Jesus modeled servant leadership, and demonstrated that it is more powerful than worldly models of fear and control. Jesus told us that we must serve one another, even to the point of humiliation.
- If we truly want to be disciples of Jesus Christ, we will examine how we lead and choose to please God.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

- What would being a servant leader look like in the place where you lead? In your church and community, how could you serve others and take on tasks that might be beneath you in order to put the will of God and needs of others first?
  
- What is your heart reaction to the idea of serving others? Does it make you angry, afraid, skeptical or delighted? Does God need to change your heart so that you are able to serve others as you lead? Spend some time in prayer talking to God about how servant leadership makes you feel.
  
- Think of leaders you respect and admire. Do they demonstrate servant leadership? What would change if people knew that their leaders desired to serve God and others before themselves? Would they gain followers? Be taken advantage of? Be a good witness of the Gospel?

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