

# discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership  
Leader's Guide

## CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

### LESSON 2: SERVANT LEADERSHIP

### INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Christian Character Development. When Christians fail and ministries fall apart, it is often due to a lack of character development in the leader. A Christian leader must take character development seriously, because discipleship requires that we grow in Christ-like character. This module examines a number of Christian character traits that are necessary for developing servant leadership. We will look at what the Bible teaches about these traits, and examples of Jesus and others displaying them. Godly character should be evident in the life of every follower of Christ, especially those who are leading others.

### 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](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).

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# CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

## LESSON 2: SERVANT LEADERSHIP

### PURPOSE

This lesson explores the Christian character trait of servant leadership, and its importance in our lives as spiritual leaders.

### LEADER'S NOTE

The cultural understanding of servanthood and being the slave of a master differs from nation to nation; however, it is seldom considered as being something good. In some regions where hospitality and serving one another has become a cultural expectation and even an art, Christianity has established an association of honour with serving. But the original language of the Bible uses the word 'slave' 130 times to refer to the Christian's new position in God's Kingdom. We are His sons and daughters, but we are also His servants and slaves. We serve a great King, and therefore have noble work to do. Slavery and servanthood are concepts that your participants may not like. So work through these ideas together as a group with the end goal of accepting this truth: a leader with Christ-like character will, above all, aspire to be a humble servant.

## INTRODUCTION

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

- ❖ What images does the word 'servant' conjure up in your mind? Are they different than the images you think of when you hear the word 'slave'? Are they connected?
- ❖ Who do you know who has the heart of a servant? What are some things they do that display this character trait? Of what value are they to you and to your church or ministries?
- ❖ Why do people often hesitate to take the position of a servant? What position do they aspire to instead? Why is this?
- ❖ What is the difference between a servant and a slave? Which are we, if we are 'in' Christ Jesus?



## STUDY

*Instruct the group on the following points.*

### TEACH:

- ❖ **The Virtue of Servanthood:** All Christian leadership should be *servant* leadership. But when people take a position of leadership, it is often without a desire to serve. Many are willing to bear with the difficulties and stress in exchange for rewards of power and honour and wealth. After all, there is security in being the one who sets direction and having your followers do the work. However, this is a picture of worldly leadership. It isn't the leadership Jesus Christ displayed or called us to!
  - **Servanthood is not Controlling, it is Contributing:** We must be careful not to try and gain control of others by leading them, insisting that all things go our own way. Christian servant-leaders must contribute to the lives they lead, inspire their followers, and help them work hard in order to be successful. It puts pride aside and does what is necessary so others can attain their goals. Servants give, love and set a good example, rather than ruling through fear or feelings of insecurity.
  - **Servanthood is not Manipulative, it is Mission Focused:** We must be careful not to manipulate others by what we do, instilling a sense of guilt or debt in them as they watch us serving. Much of our work as a leader will not be seen by others. We must be focused on accomplishing God's mission, and in the process honour others as we work together. They are not just a tool to be used, but led in the right direction, people can be useful.
  - **Servanthood is not Self-Hatred or Self-Exaltation, it is Selflessness:** Being a servant doesn't mean we put ourselves down by self-criticism or self-hatred. Neither does it mean we exalt ourselves or boast about our servant actions – rather it is selflessness. Instead of thinking about ourselves, we think about God's love for us, and how we can care for others and lead them in joyful acts of service.
  - **Servanthood is Putting God and Others First:** We find our definition for servant leadership in [Matthew 20:26-28](#), where Jesus Himself said: "But 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."

### ASK

How could people use the pretense of servanthood to control or manipulate others, or elevate themselves? Why must we be cautious of this?

What does it mean to be selfless? What are the dangers in being selfless? How does your culture view people who put others' needs before their own?

What might we be afraid of in practising servant leadership?



What is the difference between servant leadership and traditional leadership?

**TEACH:**

- **Servant Leaders versus Traditional Leaders:** There are some differences between these two styles of leadership, as seen in the chart below. *(Use ideas the participants have generated and add them to this list on a chalkboard, paper or other media.)*

Traditional Leadership	Servant Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– leaders alone are responsible</li> <li>– authoritative, does not consult others, sets vision alone</li> <li>– demands obedience and exerts power</li> <li>– motivated by financial growth or completion of tasks</li> <li>– sees some work as beneath them or only fit for the lowest ranks</li> <li>– is threatened by other leaders</li> <li>– refuses to follow others, and fights for power</li> <li>– ranks people by position and worth</li> <li>– insists people either serve or lead</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– followers share responsibility</li> <li>– democratic, considers others' input, and works as a team</li> <li>– inspires, influences and encourages</li> <li>– motivated by wellbeing of people and pursuit of vision</li> <li>– sees nothing as being beneath them if it is needed to accomplish goals</li> <li>– encourages other leaders – knows when to lead and when to follow</li> <li>– sees all people as having value and worth</li> <li>– able to both serve and lead</li> </ul>

❖ **Servant Leadership in the Life of Jesus:** 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 seek the world's glory. Instead, He ate and drank with ordinary people, bent down to heal lepers, and stooped to wash His disciples' feet. His style of servant leadership was completely unexpected!

- **Jesus Taught Servanthood:** Jesus' parables were often marked by the words, "you have learned... but I tell you," correcting thoughts, beliefs, and understanding of Scripture. Jesus taught that those who are greatest in the Kingdom of God are children, slaves, the weak and the humble. He taught that the Kingdom of God is not about us struggling for power and prestige, but about God's power and glory and honour. In all His parables, He did not teach how to control others, but how to love them. God would bless the meek and humble rather than the proud and mighty.

- o [Matthew 20:16](#)
- o [Luke 9:46-48](#)
- o [Matthew 19:30](#)

- **Jesus Used His Power to Serve Others:** Jesus demonstrated great power in His actions and His speech. He possessed all wisdom, and exercised authority over creation. But He did not use this power to save Himself when in danger, nor to draw attention to Himself. He brought glory to God the Father by serving others. Jesus refused personal



glory, knowing His Kingdom was not of this world. He served to the point of exhaustion. He was moved by love when someone was sick, lost, apart from God, or unclean.

- o [Luke 8:24](#)
- o [Matthew 4:1-11](#)
- o [Matthew 14:14](#)
- o [Mark 10:45](#)

➤ **Jesus Washed His Disciples' Feet:** Jesus had established Himself as a powerful leader who drew crowds of fans and disciples from the least of society. This angered other leaders. Jesus washed the dust and dirt from His disciples' feet before they ate. This was a regular ritual before taking a meal together, but it would be the responsibility of the lowest servant ([John 13:1-20, Luke 22:27](#)).

- o Jesus demonstrated to His disciples love in action.
- o Jesus had to lay aside His garments and take up a towel to wash their feet. This was a demonstration that sometimes leaders need to lay aside their honour so they can serve others.
- o Jesus' disciples didn't ask Him to serve them in this way; in fact, it horrified them! Jesus didn't do what the disciples wanted Him to do, but He did what they needed to see Him do. In the same way, servant leaders should do what is needed, not always what is wanted.

➤ **Jesus Submitted Himself to the Will of God:** Even though Jesus is equal with God the Father, He submitted Himself to the Father's will. Jesus paid the ultimate price in sacrificially laying down His own life for us. Jesus experienced humility and scorn as part of God's plan for Him. ([Philippians 2:1-8, Matthew 26:36-39](#))

➤ **Jesus Taught Us to be Servants Too:** Jesus did not need to take the position of a servant or slave – it was voluntary on his part. If there was ever a leader who was above those He led, it would be Jesus! But Jesus came to teach us how to serve and love one another. He said that a servant is not above his teacher; therefore, we should not think we are above serving His people! He modelled servant leadership for us. ([Luke 22:26, Luke 14:12-14, Mark 10:42-45](#))

❖ **Biblical Examples of Servant Leadership:** Many of the individuals who were called to lead the people of God were servant leaders. They did not strive to be in power for glory or personal gain. Their sights were not on their own prestige and comfort, but on God's will and the needs of others. .

➤ **Deborah, Judge of Israel:** Deborah was a well-liked judge in Israel. Barak, the military leader, refused to go and fight unless Deborah went with them. She consented. She encouraged, inspired and courageously led God's people, and the result was that they pressed harder against their enemies. Deborah gave the glory to God rather than taking it for herself. After her obedient service to God, her people had peace for 40 years ([Judges 4:4-10, Judges 5:3-5](#)).



- **Nehemiah:** He was personally involved with the work that needed to be done, and he worked alongside his people. He did not consider his life worth more than those who followed him, but treated others with honour and respect. He considered God's mission as the most important thing for him to complete. He, as leader, went without normal provisions (such as wages, food allotment, and protection from danger) (Nehemiah 4:22-23, Nehemiah 5:14-19).
  - **Paul, the Apostle:** He refers to himself not as a leader or overseer, but as a servant of Christ. He embraced the concept of servant leadership (1 Corinthians 4:1, 9:19, Philippians 1:1).
  - **Peter, the Apostle:** Peter was one of a few select disciples to receive special instruction from Jesus. Yet he did not hold this over the others, but humbly served them and the Church. He did not take glory for himself, but demonstrated true servant leadership (Acts 3:12, 1 Peter 5:1-11, 2 Peter 1:1).
- ❖ **Evaluate your Own Servant Leadership:** Servant leadership does not seek selfish gain, power, or control through intimidation, but rather inspires, guides and encourages others to obey God through love. It may be firm at times, but is always for the good of the followers. It may often look as though a servant leader is doing tasks that are beneath his or her position, but no task is too small or menial if it is done for God. Servant leadership positively impacts followers, and does not give in to the temptation for personal pride and power. In short, it is modelling our lives after the life of Jesus Himself.
- Look at what the Bible says about servanthood, and consider your own style of leadership! Choosing servant leadership means choosing God's way over the world's way.
    - o Colossians 3:24
    - o Romans 12:1
    - o 1 Peter 2:16
    - o 1 Peter 4:11
    - o Galatians 1:10
    - o Philippians 2:1-11
  - Consider your motives when you serve, and pray that God would make them evident.
    - o Ask those you work with how you can serve them better.
    - o Ask those whom you serve if they have unmet needs.
    - o Look for practical ways to demonstrate the love of God to those you serve.
    - o When you feel superior to a specific task, it may be necessary to do it anyway in order to practise servant leadership and take away your pride.

### TASK:

Developing our Christian character is about choices: we either make use of opportunities to be a servant leader, or turn away from them. Divide your participants into small groups of 3-6. Have each group discuss the scenarios in "Choosing Christian Character" at the end of the lesson and answer the questions.



## DISCUSSION

- ❖ After participating in this lesson, how would you describe servant leadership to someone who was not aware of the concept?
- ❖ Is servant leadership common or uncommon in the churches, ministries and public offices of your community?
- ❖ What are some of the struggles and difficulties of putting God's will and the wellbeing of others before our own?
- ❖ What was the result of Jesus' servant leadership?

## PRAYER

*Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants would choose to have a servant's heart as they look for opportunities to model Christ's example. Pray that they will choose to follow through with action when these opportunities arise. Pray that their motives for serving will be pure, and that they won't be driven by fear or personal insecurity.*



## CHOOSING CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

### —SERVANT LEADERSHIP—

In small groups, consider the scenarios below. For each situation consider these questions:

- o What would your natural response to this situation be?
- o How would a servant leader respond to this situation?
- o What might the consequences be of demonstrating servant leadership in this situation?

You are first to arrive at the church, where you will be teaching a Bible study. No one will arrive for another hour, and you notice that there is a large mess by the church door. There is garbage everywhere, and those attending the class will have to walk right through it. You could clean it up yourself, but you are wearing your best clothes.

A number of women from the church have gathered to make food for a community meal. There is much work to be done and people will be arriving shortly. You are done with meeting people from the congregation for the day, and you stop in to see how the women are doing. You notice that they could use help – trays of food need to be brought outside and there are many dishes to wash.

On your way to visit some members of your congregation, you see a woman up ahead with a flat tire. You have tools in your car, but stopping to help will make you late for your visit. Besides, you do not know this woman and may never see her again. Anyway, there are other people around, though no one is stopping to help!

A decision needs to be made about the direction a ministry will take in the next few years. You consider your options. You are in a position to make the decisions about this ministry yourself, but you are not the one carrying it out. Those participating in the ministry want to start something new, but you don't see that decision as best for the church or the people it serves.