

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study 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.

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.



CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 2: SERVANT LEADERSHIP

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

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

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

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. Jesus described Himself as a servant, and if we aspire to Christ-like character, we will make it a priority to be a humble servant.

GETTING STARTED

1. 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?

2. 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?



STUDY

❖ **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!

- You can read Jesus' definition of servant leadership in [Matthew 20:26-28](#). Read the verses and write down what you learn. How do they apply to leadership?

- **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. 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 of ourselves, we think about God's love for us, and how we can care for others and lead them in joyful acts of service.
- Consider servant leadership in your life. What does it mean to put others before yourself? What are the dangers in being unselfish? How does your culture view people who put others' needs before their own?



❖ **SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP:** Traditional leadership involves acquiring power in order to carry out plans. It isn't necessarily evil; some leaders are benevolent and good to their people! However, leadership is often selfish, and sometimes abusive and corrupt.

- What would you say are the differences between servant leadership and traditional leadership?

- Consider the following points:

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

- Who do you know who leads by traditional leadership? Who do you know who leads by servant leadership? What is the outcome to their followers? Who would you rather be led by?

❖ **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.
- Look up the following verses. What is Jesus teaching about servant leadership?

Matthew 20:16	
Luke 9:46-48	

- **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.
- Look up the following verses. How do we see Jesus using His power to serve others?

Luke 8:24	
Matthew 4:1-11	

- **Jesus Taught us to Serve by Washing the 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. Jesus did not have 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 modelled servant leadership for us.



- Read John 13:1-20 and Luke 22:27. What did Jesus do, and what can you learn about servant leadership from Him?

- Jesus demonstrated to His disciples love in action.
- 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.
- 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.

❖ **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).
- What is God's criteria for people in Christian leadership?



- Who stands out to you most in the above examples of servant leadership?

❖ **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. For each of the verses below, write down what you learn.

Romans 12:1	
Galatians 1:10	
Philippians 2:1-11	

- Consider your motives when you serve, and pray that God would make them evident.
 - Ask those you work with how you can serve them better.
 - Ask those whom you serve if they have unmet needs.
 - Look for practical ways to demonstrate the love of God to those you serve.
 - 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.



SUMMARY

- ❖ Servant Leadership is not controlling, manipulative, or seeking power; rather, it puts God and others first. It seeks to love others and help them, rather than exercise power over them.
- ❖ Servant leadership is different than traditional leadership in that it considers what is best for those they lead, and does not see anything beneath their dignity if it serves the purposes of God.
- ❖ Jesus demonstrated servant leadership by washing the disciples' feet, teaching that they should not strive for status. It is more honourable before God to serve others.
- ❖ We can evaluate our actions in light of Jesus' example of servant leadership.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Consider the scenarios below. For each, reflect on 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 results 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 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.

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.