

## 6. Jesus Provided a Model of Servant Leadership

As we develop leaders who are becoming like their Savior, one of the things we want to show them, by our example, is what it means to be a servant leader. Today, such examples are greatly lacking. Some Christian leaders follow the example of the world. They act like they are the CEO (boss) of a large corporation. Such leaders have never even heard of servant leadership. Christ said, in Mark 10:42-43, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant...”

Other Christian leaders claim to be servant leaders, because they obey Christ and expect others to obey them. They use as their model the centurion whose servant Jesus healed in Luke 7:1-10. Verses 7-9 say, “Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does *it*.’ When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, ‘I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!’” This is a military leader, telling how he exercises military leadership, who recognizes the authority Christ has over sickness. It is not an example of servant leadership; it is a recognition of the authority of Christ over all things – Matthew 28:18.

Mark 10:42-45 give us the meaning of what Jesus means by servant leadership. Those verses say, “But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” Three things are mentioned about servant leadership in these verses:

- ◆ A servant leader chooses to serve others.
- ◆ A servant leader chooses to become a bond slave of all.
- ◆ A servant leader chooses to give his life for the sake of others.

As you can see from these three things, servant leadership is a choice, by a leader, to follow the example of Christ. He will lead by serving, becoming a bond servant, and giving his life for others. It says nothing about what those who are being led are to do. Servant leadership is an inner attitude of the heart, by which a person chooses to place himself or herself under the leadership of Christ (submission). Christ often invited people to follow Him. Some followed, but many did not. (See Luke 9:57-62; John 6:66)

One of the things to understand is the difference between obedience and submission. A person in authority can command obedience. The centurion recognized that he had to obey his commanding officers. He also recognized that his soldiers had to obey him. He knew that Christ had that same kind of authority over sickness. In contrast, submission is a choice by the follower to follow a leader. Submission is an inner attitude of the heart and can never be commanded. Some chose to

submit to Christ and follow Him. Many chose not to submit to Christ, and they followed other things. Christ gave them the freedom to make the choice not to follow or submit.

Christ did give a promise that He would serve those who did choose to follow and submit to Him. Mark 1:17 says, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’” Christ told those who chose to follow Him that He would invest His life in them and show them how to become fishers of men. He would show them, by His example, how to become something that was not presently true in their lives. In fact, He would even give His life in the process of helping them become fishers of men. He would serve them by giving their lives eternal meaning and value. That is the meaning of servant leadership. Servant leadership means we promise to serve those who are following us.

After more than three years of following Him, Christ gave these men one commandment. In John 13:34-35, we read, “‘A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.’” True servant leadership means that we choose to obey this command of Christ. We show our love to one another by serving one another.

In fact, Christ has set us free so that we have the power to serve one another. Galatians 5:13 says, “‘For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.’” True servant leadership means that, because Christ has set us free, we are now free to serve one another, instead of living to please ourselves.

Earlier in His ministry, a lawyer asked Christ what the great commandment in the law was. Christ answered, in Matthew 22:37-40, “‘...You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’” This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second is like it: “‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” As we put these “love” commands of Christ together, we see that they summarize our three relationships:

- Our relationship to God – Love the Lord our God with our whole heart, soul, and mind.
- Our relationship with the people of the world – Love our neighbor as we love ourselves.
- Our relationship with other Christians – Love one another as Christ has loved us.

Christ showed that love, and servant leadership, meant doing the will of the Father. In John 6:37-39, Christ said, “‘All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.’” In these verses, we see that Christ showed His love for the Father by doing His will. That meant Christ received all that came to Him. It also meant that He did not lose any the Father gave Him.

Christ also showed that love and servant leadership meant loving the lost and serving them. When a lawyer tested Christ by asking Him the question, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan. In that parable, Christ made it very clear that “to love our

neighbor” means *to show mercy to those who are lost*. We love the lost, and become a servant leader to them, when we share with them how they can receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Just as the Good Samaritan showed that love by actions, we are to show our love by actions as we share the Gospel with those who do not know Christ.

A servant leader is one who has chosen to lead people by serving them and adding value and meaning to their lives. This is true whether the people are Christians or have not yet come to believe in Christ. For those who are not yet Christians, the servant leader chooses to show them how they can receive forgiveness of sins with the result that they receive eternal life. For those who are Christians, value and meaning are added to their lives because the servant leader chooses to show them, by his life, how their lives can make a greater impact for eternity. This kind of service will produce spiritual results that will last for eternity, not just earthly works that will perish with this world.

It is a great privilege to show developing leaders how to love and serve God, love and serve the lost, and love and serve other Christians as servant leaders by our example. As we serve them, by showing them how to love and serve others, we will model for them how their lives here on earth can have eternal purpose and value because we show them how to focus on spiritual things, not just worldly things. May the Lord richly bless you as you show developing leaders how to follow the example of Christ and become effective servant leaders.