

LESSON 8

Developing Leadership Ability

God develops people. Those three words sum up the biblical perspective of leadership development. As a Christian matures spiritually, God can increase the influence that person has on others. God has a definite plan for your life, and it includes helping others and serving as a leader in the body of Christ.

To serve as a leader does not mean you have to be a pastor of a church or a missionary living overseas. The Lord has many ways that He can use you in leadership. This lesson will help you learn skills and practices of leadership that will result in a healthy life and fruitful ministry. We will consider the life of Jesus Christ as the foundation for a life of leadership.

LESSON OUTLINE

The Leader Defined
Character of a Leader
The Biblical Principle of Servant Leadership
Snapshots of Biblical Leaders
Identifying and Developing Leadership Gifts

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Describe the qualities of a leader.*
2. *Assess key aspects of your character.*
3. *Summarize the biblical principle of servant leadership.*
4. *Identify good and bad leaders portrayed in the Bible.*
5. *Discuss ways to develop your leadership gifts.*

The Leader Defined

Objective 1:

Describe the qualities of a leader.

What is a leader? What does a leader do? The most common understanding of leadership is influence. In that sense, everyone has the potential for influence and for leading. Effective leaders, however, live in connection or community with others, pouring themselves out for others.

This is in contrast to the traditional or hierarchical forms of leadership. A hierarchical leader asks: Who is following me? How can I show my superiority? Who will support me? Connective leaders ask: Where is our common ground? How can we help one another?

Where do our hopes and dreams intersect? How can we make more room around the table? How can we bridge the gap that has separated us? Connective leaders focus on what people have in common, not on what separates and divides them. Christ calls individuals to be influencers of those around them. Thus, He calls you to leadership.

Character of a Leader

Objective 2:

Assess key aspects of your character.

Excellent character is key to good leadership. Character is who you are when no one is looking. Character is not the same as reputation. Reputation is what others think of you, character is what God knows you are. Character is not the same as success or achievement. It is not what you have done, but who you are. Jesus Christ will develop His character in you as you follow Him. While all Christians should grow in character, those in leadership must exhibit exceptional character. Skills can be learned but character is what you are in your heart. A leader's character is what prevents him or her from grabbing for power, prestige, publicity, or other perks. These temptations, left unchecked, can bring about a leader's downfall.

The teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5, commonly known as the Beatitudes, outlines seven characteristics that distinguish a leader.

- Great leaders display an attitude of humility (v. 3). If you are humble as a leader, others will observe that you are teachable. You will be submissive enough to consult others in the organization when you may not have all the answers. Furthermore, you will not center attention on your own accomplishments.

- Leaders demonstrate a genuine concern for others (v. 4). Those who guide an organization value all people in the group by showing interest in each individual's personal or family issues. The leader is genuinely interested in each individual and shows care and concern for others by encouraging them.
- An effective leader has power under control (v. 5). Rather than condemning and crucifying others in a fit of rage, a charitable leader curbs his or her anger. This leader's behavior is controlled, consistent and predictable. He or she looks for solutions to problems rather than blames others.
- Leaders seek not only their good but also what is right and good for the organization (v. 6). Such leaders work towards the organization's benefit, not just their own. This does not mean a leader cannot accept recognition for his or her efforts. It does mean the leader should always turn the focus back on the entire group and other team members.
- A skillful leader shows mercy (v. 7) to all people. When your team members fail, support and additional training should be offered to help them become productive once again.
- Able leaders concentrate on the purpose of the organization (v. 8). Are you determined to do what is best for the team? Are you passing on Christlike values and commitments to followers? Do team members willingly sacrifice time and energy to accomplish the mission of the organization?
- Positive leaders create an environment of peace (v. 9). Peace is not the absence of conflict but the successful resolution of conflict. When a team is characterized by battles, competition, jealousy, rivalries, dissension, and factions, the energy of

team members is wasted. People are not able to focus on accomplishing the mission.

The Biblical Principle of Servant Leadership

Objective 3:

Summarize the biblical principle of servant leadership.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we pursue a style of leadership different from that of the world—we seek to be servant leaders. Great leaders are servants first. Christ said that if anyone would be great, he must serve. Read what He told His disciples in Mark 10:42–45,

“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

From a biblical perspective, greatness does not come through the exercise of power, position, or prestige. Instead, it comes through service to God and people. Servant leaders put people ahead of systems, goals, and objectives. They follow the example of Christ. Though the terms *servant* and *leadership* appear contradictory together, humility and sacrifice are the way to greatness in God’s kingdom. Leading from the position of service is true spiritual leadership.

Servant leadership is not weak, easy, or natural. Servant leaders possess the inner strength of character, marked by integrity and humility. They are confident as they rely on God’s guidance and power. They walk in faith. Because they care about the members of the team they lead, they seek input

from them and share decision-making power with them. They courageously and lovingly hold team members accountable. They inspire, motivate, and persuade members to accomplish the mission of the organization through commitment, dedication, discipline, and excellence.

Profile of a Servant Leader

Servant leaders are communicators and listeners. They allow for two-way communication—listening more than telling (James 1:19). They are also prepared to give a gentle and respectful answer to anyone who asks a question (1 Peter 3:15). Not fearful or lacking in courage, they are willing to share their experiences.

Servant leaders are learners. They are devoted to discovering truth from Scripture through prayer (Acts 2:42). Feeding continually on the Word of God, such leaders are not afraid to admit that without Christ they can do nothing. They turn to God, being confident that He will supply the help they need.

Servant leaders are coaches. Servant leaders use positive reinforcement—encouragement, appreciation, and rewards. They are good coaches who do all they can to motivate others to develop their skills.

A servant leader is self-sacrificing. The servant leader is willing to lose his or her life for the cause of Christ. Successful leaders plant their lives in the lives of others. For example, the apostle Paul counted all things in his life as loss for the privilege of following Christ. So although the price seems too great, anything done for Christ is simply a privilege.

A servant leader accepts responsibility. Someone once told me that the way he identified potential leaders was to watch for those individuals who picked up the small piece of litter from the floor. A leader feels a strong sense of obligation to do what ordinary people would not do.

A servant leader is accountable. He or she gives others the right to respectfully question what he or she does. Moreover, there is consistency between what this leader says and what he or she does. The servant leader willingly admits his or her error.

A servant leader accepts the cost of loneliness. Often servant leaders face loneliness, isolation, and criticism as not everyone agrees with or supports them. Take Moses for instance. Moses stood alone as he led the Hebrews across the Red Sea. They praised him one day and blamed him the next.

It is easy to give your best when everyone is watching and cheering you on. It is hard to keep going when words of appreciation or encouragement are lacking. But remember this. God is with you and He is watching. The rewards of leadership are not always in this life.

Snapshots of Biblical Leaders

Objective 4:

Identify good and bad leaders portrayed in the Bible.

Good Examples of Leadership

- Abraham cared about people. He showed hospitality to strangers (Genesis 18). He pleaded with God to spare the evil city of Sodom. He found the courage to live a godly lifestyle different from the people (nations) around him (Genesis 12:8; 13:18). Leaders must summon the boldness to challenge tradition and do things differently if old ways are not effective.
- Joseph did not seek revenge for past injustices; he overlooked hurts from long ago (Genesis 50:19–21). An admirable leader is not concerned with retaliation over personal slights. He or she is more concerned with what is best for the church as a whole.

- Moses' strong sense of justice was matched by his humility. He was willing to intervene in the conflict of others (Exodus 2:11). When male shepherds drove away Jethro's daughters, Moses stood up for Jethro's daughters. He had no problem sharing power. He took the suggestion of his father-in-law Jethro by setting up a panel of seventy judges to share the responsibility of representing the people before God (Exodus 18). Moses was so secure in his position that he was not jealous of the seventy elders. A secure leader should have no fear of sharing power. He or she gives team members the authority they need to do their jobs and is not envious of their success.
- The actions of Boaz expressed his compassionate leadership. When he learned that Ruth, a poor Moabite foreigner, was gathering the leftover grain from his fields, he ordered his workers to purposely drop some grain so her needs would be met (Ruth 2:16). This act of compassion led to a marriage between Boaz and Ruth. And from their lineage eventually came Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:16). The kind deeds of a leader will bring immeasurable benefits to the organization.

Poor Examples of Leadership

- The Pharaoh in Exodus illustrates the need for leaders to be flexible. Apart from his paganism and his despising of the Hebrew slaves in his land, Pharaoh's major weakness as a leader was his unwillingness to change. Contrary to the advice of his advisors, it took ten destructive plagues to humble Pharaoh to the extent that he would finally allow the Hebrew slaves to leave Egypt (see Exodus 8–11). The lesson learned here is that an effective leader must be willing to modify his or her plan. Leaders cannot be

so stubborn and inflexible that they are not inclined to try new methods and approaches.

- The son of King Solomon, Rehoboam, was asked to give tax relief to the people (1 Kings 12). His older counselors advised him to take a gentle approach, reminding Rehoboam that the role of a leader is to serve the followers. However, his young friends suggested that he take a tough stance. Rehoboam followed the recommendation of his young friends and treated the people harshly. This resulted in civil unrest and the dividing of the kingdom of Israel into two nations. The leadership lesson to be learned from this story is obvious. Leaders should listen to wise counsel and avoid unnecessary harshness.

Identifying and Developing Leadership Gifts

Objective 5:

Discuss ways to develop your leadership gifts.

Everybody Has At Least One Gift

God has given us gifts and callings with which to serve Him and the body of Christ. Leaders should understand the purpose of their gifts. God's equipping is not given so you can achieve worldly success but rather so God can accomplish great things through you. Each of us has received at least one gift from God. Peter writes, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:10). Remember, you did not earn or deserve your gifts and talents but have received them according to God's purpose and grace.

Determining Your God-given Gifts

How do you discover what gifts, call, and special capabilities have been given to you? Here are some recommendations:

- **First**, ask yourself what your likes and dislikes are. What are some things you enjoy doing and do well? What tasks are very hard or unpleasant for you? Many of God's giftings will be recognized initially as capabilities that you enjoy and excel in.
- **Second**, be willing to try new things. Do not limit how God can use you by placing conditions on where and how you will serve.
- **Third**, ask other mature Christians how they see God working in your life. Your pastor, Bible class leader, or friend may be able to see strengths and abilities in you when you cannot.
- **Fourth**, what are you passionate about? What occupies your thoughts most of the time? What do you love to talk about when it comes to serving God? When God gives you a gift, He also puts within you a strong inner drive to use it. For example, if you have the gift of teaching you probably want to teach. Presenting information and knowledge to others will give you great satisfaction. God has no desire to make you miserable in His service. He wants you to enjoy what you do for Him! David wrote in Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart." Most of the time, what you desire to do for the Lord is a very good clue of His will for your life.
- **Fifth**, get involved in your church and outreach ministry. Do not wait until you know for sure what your gifting is before you serve. Some people never do anything because they do not take initiative. It is much easier to steer a moving vehicle than a parked car. So, try your hand at

several things to see what fits. Later, you can specialize or settle on doing particular things.

- **Sixth**, once you have identified your gift or gifts, focus on intentionally using them. If you are right about your choice, you will probably experience immense satisfaction and fulfillment.
- **Seventh**, seek to improve the effectiveness of your ministry by improving your giftings and skills through additional training. You can do this by reading books, watching videos, taking courses, or learning from others who have the same gift.

New Testament References to God's Giftings

There are three main New Testament passages that list various gifts God gives to His people. While there may be other gifts that God may endow us with, these lists reveal gifts and abilities necessary for the accomplishing God's purpose and plans.

- Romans 12:6–8
 1. *Prophecy*—the proclamation of God's truth. This supernatural gift enables certain believers to speak with authority as they bring relevant pronouncements from the heart of God concerning situations, needs, problems, and challenges. Prophecy must agree with the revealed truth of God's written Word.
 2. *Serving*—meeting the needs of others
 3. *Teaching*—effectively sharing truth from God's Word, the Holy Bible
 4. *Encouraging*—building up others, motivating them to continue in the faith
 5. *Contributing to the needs of others*—giving to help others in need
 6. *Leadership*—the ability to exert influence and lead people

7. *Showing mercy*—demonstrating compassion and offering emotional and spiritual help to those experiencing difficult times
- 1 Corinthians 12:27–31
 1. *Apostles*—people gifted with a passion to win souls and plant churches among those who have not received an adequate witness. Miracles often accompany their ministry.
 2. *Prophets*—people who have been given supernatural ability to proclaim God’s truth. They do not always predict the future, but they bring relevant pronouncements from the heart of God concerning situations, needs, problems, and challenges. A true prophet’s message always lines up with the revealed truth of God’s written Word.
 3. *Teachers*—people who have the God-given ability to make biblical truth clear so all can understand it
 4. *Workers of miracles*—people enabled to perform supernatural signs and wonders which confirm the proclamation of the Gospel
 5. *Those having gifts of healing*—people gifted by God to bring supernatural healing to others.
 6. *Those able to help others*—people who feel a burden to assist others in difficult situations and find ways to help meet their needs
 7. *Those with gifts of administration*—people who are gifted to organize and manage the many details of doing God’s work. This might include managing people, finances, and/or material.
 8. *Those speaking in different kinds of tongues*—people who use the gift of tongues for worship, intercession, or bringing a message (when interpreted) to the body of Christ.

- Ephesians 4:11–13
 1. *Apostles*—see definition above
 2. *Prophets*—see definition above
 3. *Evangelists*—people who are called and gifted with special ability to proclaim salvation to the lost and win them to Christ
 4. *Pastors*—people who are called and enabled to lead churches, preach the Word, and protect the flock of God
 5. *Teachers*—see definition above

As you can see, there is some overlapping in the lists. The main point in this section is that you should seek to know how God has gifted you, so you will be able to use your gift with confidence. When you serve with the assurance of whom God created you to be, you will be neither afraid to assume leadership nor will you be jealous of the positions of others. As you function in harmony with others, God will bless your endeavors.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE

Psalm 37:4

Mark 10:43–44

1 Peter 3:15

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

- The essential first step to becoming a leader in Christ's kingdom is to*
 - ambitiously desire to be a leader.*
 - be a faithful follower of Christ.*
 - learn the skills of leadership.*
- The most common definition of leadership is*
 - partnering.*
 - hierarchy.*
 - influence.*
- An effective leader is one who*
 - directs and commands others.*
 - learns to bring his or her power and authority under control.*
 - is more concerned about success rather than character.*
- Which of the following statements is false?*
 - Skillful leaders will not have any conflict in their organizations.*
 - A true leader shares the credit with others.*
 - Servant leaders show genuine concern for others.*
- Jesus said that those who desire to be leaders should first be*
 - servants.*
 - smart.*
 - organized.*
- A biblical servant leader who experienced loneliness was*
 - Pharaoh.*
 - Judas Iscariot.*
 - Moses.*
- Which of the following is not a skill belonging to a servant leader?*
 - Learner*
 - Tyrant*
 - Communicator*

8. *In the Bible, Pharaoh's leadership illustrates the need for leaders to be*
 - a) *flexible.*
 - b) *humble.*
 - c) *hospitable.*
9. *According to Romans 12, we all have*
 - a) *the same gifts and abilities.*
 - b) *the ability to teach.*
 - c) *different gifts.*
10. *A helpful clue in determining your gift is knowing what*
 - a) *you enjoy doing.*
 - b) *requires the most effort.*
 - c) *brings you the most praise from others.*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *b* (8.1)
2. *c* (8.1)
3. *b* (8.2)
4. *a* (8.2)
5. *a* (8.3)
6. *c* (8.3)
7. *b* (8.3)
8. *a* (8.4)
9. *c* (8.5)
10. *a* (8.5)

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