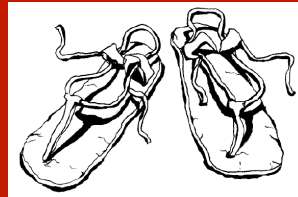


# The Servant-Leader who Listens



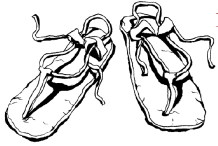
not pretending to be a hero, but serving others in love

## A short course on Servant-Leadership

by Rev. J. Al LaCour, III

This course is dedicated in loving memory to my mentor, Robert F. Singleton. During nine years of almost weekly lunches, Bob encouraged and molded my leadership. Bob's unselfish generosity, servant-leadership, and joyful exuberance continue to inspire me. Even during Bob's last year of life, while he battled a fatal disease, he was a wise advisor. I thank the Lord Jesus Christ who placed Bob in my life at formative times in my life journey.

# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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## Leadership: from Upside Down to Right-side Up

There has never been a more influential leader than Jesus Christ. Few people ever make a significant difference in the world over one life time. But what Jesus accomplished in just over three years changed the world. Jesus did not win fame or influence in the usual ways. Most leaders demand loyalty from their followers. But Jesus claims the minds and hearts of countless millions from every culture and nation - through servant-leadership. This course will examine the leadership of Jesus Christ. Jesus challenges people from all over the world to follow his pattern of leadership.

**Mark 10:42**

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.”

## “Top Down” Leadership

In these verses from Mark, Jesus describes the usual pattern of leadership. Those Jesus calls “rulers of the Gentiles” are leaders from all the nations of the world. Since ancient times, God continued to teach the Hebrew people a special and distinctive pattern of leadership. But they would not listen.

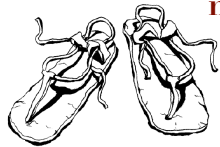
The Hebrews demanded leaders who acted like the rulers from all the other nations in the world. “The people refused to listen ... they said, ‘We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.’” 1 Samuel 8:19-20

Let us first consider the pattern of upside-down, or from “top-to-bottom” leadership:

- Jesus says some are “regarded as rulers.” They are “considered” rulers. What does this suggest?
- Is it possible for a person to “appear to be” or “seem to be” a leader - but not really be a leader?
- Have you ever known a person who had no “official” standing or “political” status to be the leader, but that person was - in fact - the person really leading the group?
- According to Jesus, what are the distinguishing marks of the world’s leaders? Can a person be a tyrant or dictator in the world’s eyes - but not a leader in Jesus’ view?
- If official titles, or being called “boss,” does not make you a leader, what does make you a leader?
- Why do we want a leader? Why do we want a person to “go out before us and fight our battles”? Why do we always want leaders who are “winners” or “heroes,” like everyone else?

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor.”

Max Dupree, Leadership is an Art



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**Mark  
10:43-44**

**“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.”**

### **“Bottom Up” Leadership**

Jesus says to those who followed and learned from him, “Not so with you.” Just as God had said to the Hebrews, Jesus said to his disciples, “You must not define or practice leadership like the world does.” When Jesus speaks of true greatness, he does not start at the top of society, but at the very bottom.

Jesus points to the lowest class of person. Instead of pointing to people considered “winners,” Jesus speaks of those we might consider “losers.” He mentions two kinds of people: a **servant** and a **slave**. This seems totally reversed! Those who “lord it over” other people - the “big and powerful” people - are not the true leaders. But if you look at those with the least power, who must serve everyone else, you will find the place true greatness begins. That is certainly not how “the world works.” But, Jesus says, this is the way that things are in God’s kingdom. How can this be true? First, let us take a closer look at the two types of persons that Jesus mentions.

A **servant** is an attendant, a person who helps others. The servant assists with household chores and serves meals in the home. This word sounds dignified if we translate it as a “minister” or (officially) a “deacon.” But the word’s basic meaning is, “a wait-person,” or the person who “waits on tables.”

And **slave** is a more unexpected term. It means just what it says. A slave is someone “below others,” who is controlled or owned by someone else. Today, everyone agrees that slavery is immoral. To treat someone as a slave is to treat them as beneath-human. Slaves are completely robbed of their dignity.

- What is so great about **serving** others?
- How can you have dignity if you act or are treated like a **slave**?
- What kind of kingdom offers recognition to those who **belong** to other people and **serve** others?

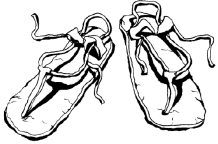
**Mark 10:45**

**“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.”**

### **The Lord who came as Servant**

In God’s sight, the standard of greatness is Jesus Christ. No one is greater in God’s kingdom! Notice how Jesus describes himself. He is **the Son of Man**. This title comes from the great vision of Daniel in the Old Testament. “There before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.” (Daniel 7:13) The One with the most God-given authority-the Son from heaven-came to serve others. Jesus reversed all human ideas of greatness. He came in weakness, he came to sacrifice. Jesus came to serve and redeem others, and not to enrich himself. How can any of us lead like this? That is what we will learn in the weeks ahead!

# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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**First be Attentive ... and then Assertive (first, LISTEN ... then, LEAD)**

If we want to follow the leadership model of Jesus Christ, we must start with *listening*, not by *lording*. Yes, it is true: “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” It is vain to dream of all your employees and subordinates “dropping a knee” at the mention of your name. But that is what will happen when Jesus Christ returns in the glory of God’s kingdom. Only the ultimate Servant-Leader will receive universal honor. But notice this important phrase in Philippians 2: all of this world-wide applause for Jesus Christ will be “to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:11)

What is the significance of these words? God has given Jesus “all authority in heaven and on earth.” (Matthew 28:18) Jesus is the Son who sacrificed the glory and privileges of his equality with God to become our Servant-Savior. If we have this same attitude, or the “mind of Christ” (Philippians 2:5), we will walk in his steps. The principle is this: *God reserves the highest honors for those who become servant-leaders, like Jesus Christ, according to the Father’s will, and for the Father’s glory.* God’s Son had the *honor* of equality with God from eternity past, but he now has received the *highest honors* because he has brought glory to his Father, and did his Father’s will.

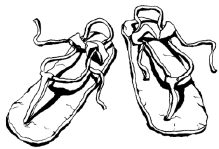
The “Servant-Songs” of Isaiah (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12) describe the coming of Christ, God’s Messiah, the Anointed One. Some of these prophecies are singular, and others are plural. The reason is this: everyone in Israel failed to be the “servants of God”). But the coming One would be the perfect *Servant of the Lord*. There is only one true Hero in the Bible - Jesus Christ. All other Bible characters are failures - more or less. And all of us are imperfect servant-leaders who often fail, sometimes miserably. But we can grow in Christ-like leadership. The most famous Servant-Song is about the *suffering Servant* (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). But there is an earlier song about the *listening Servant*. We must start by *LISTENING* to God and not *lording* it over others.

**Consider this portrait of Jesus Christ:**

**Isaiah  
50:4-11**

<sup>4</sup> The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. <sup>5</sup> The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. <sup>6</sup> I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;

I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. <sup>7</sup> Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. <sup>8</sup> He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! <sup>9</sup> It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up. <sup>10</sup> Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. <sup>11</sup> But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment.



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1. What special qualification did the Servant have?
2. What is an “instructed tongue”? How did Jesus get this ability?
3. What is the relationship between a *listening ear* and a speaking mouth?
4. How will a Christ-like servant-leader use language? How will a servant-leader not use language?
5. How do we use words to justify or “vindicate” ourselves?
6. When we are accused or condemned (as Jesus was), what are we tempted to do?
7. How can one who listens be strong, while one who talks be weak?
8. What is the difference between *walking in the dark* by your own lights, and *trusting in the Lord*?
9. It takes courage to lead when you cannot see clearly what is ahead of you. But what can happen if you try to find your own way in the dark?

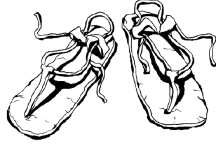
### But who do you listen to?

As the Servant-Song from Isaiah 50 makes clear, a servant-leader does not just listen before speaking. Christ-like servant-leaders also must be careful about **who** they listen to! Do not just listen before you speak. You can seek wise advice. But you must not listen to every voice - whether praise or criticism - that you may hear all around you! **How do these passages make that clear?**

- John 5:41-44: “<sup>41</sup> I do not accept praise from men, <sup>42</sup> but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. <sup>43</sup> I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. <sup>44</sup> How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”
- John 8:29-32: “<sup>29</sup> ‘The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.’ <sup>30</sup> Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. <sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”
- John 12:43: “<sup>43</sup> ... they loved praise from men more than praise from God.”
- Galatians 1:10: “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

An elderly man was traveling with a boy and a donkey. As they walked through a village, the old man led the donkey and the boy walked behind. The townspeople said the old man was a fool for not riding, so to please them he climbed on the animal's back. When they came to the next village, the people said the old man was cruel to make the child walk while he enjoyed the ride. So, to please them, he got off and set the boy on the animal's back and continued on his way. In the third village, people accused the child of being lazy for making the old man walk. The suggestion was made that they both ride. So the man climbed on and they set off again. In the fourth village, the townspeople were mad at the old man's cruelty to the donkey because he was required to carry two people. The old man was last seen carrying the donkey down the road. **Are you carrying a donkey? Why?** Source Unknown

# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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## Your Spiritual Enemies: the World, the Flesh, and the Devil

Servant-leadership that God honors is completely different from the kind of leadership most people recognize and honor. We noted how Jesus makes the contrast: “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over ... Not so with you!” We next learned that a servant-leader must listen to God’s voice. There are so many other voices that can draw us away from godly leadership!

The world measures a leader by the number of his or her followers. By that standard, Jesus failed! Early in Jesus’ career, great multitudes crowded around him to see miracles and to hear his amazing teaching. But when Jesus died, he died alone. One of his followers betrayed him. His most loyal disciples deserted him in the time of trial.

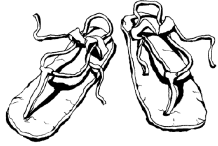
Our human flesh (sinful nature) can either flatter or condemn us. Sin may compel us to conform to a worldly definition of successful leadership. Or sin may crush us with the thought that we will never measure up. Servant-leadership is not selfish ambition. It is not self-condemnation. A servant-leader does not think more or less of himself than he ought. He or she just thinks less of himself or herself - and more of others. Such sober judgment (Romans 12:3) makes you bold, and yet still humble.

The devil manipulates the pressures that the world and the flesh put on us to prove ourselves. Trying to live up to other people’s expectations can make you a slave to public opinion. The evil one can destroy you through your self-promotion or self-hatred. Worldly leadership destroys human dignity. We see this very clearly in the wilderness temptations of Jesus.

Matthew  
4:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” <sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup> “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. <sup>9</sup> “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

1. In what ways was Jesus vulnerable at this time?
2. How does the devil try to get Jesus to meet the expectations of the flesh or the world?
3. Why are self-fulfillment and self-promotion so seductive ... so tempting?
4. Why does Satan say, “If you are the Son of God ...”? What is the devil trying to do?
5. How does Jesus overcome the tempter?



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### Your Gospel Allies: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit

Notice the way that Jesus turns back the devil by quoting the Bible. Does this mean that you should throw Bible verses into the face of temptation? It is certainly wise to fill your mind with God's Word. Take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). That will help you stand up against evil and pressures to conform to the world.

But look closer. Notice that all of Jesus' Bible quotes come from Deuteronomy chapters 6-8. These chapters scribe Israel's experience of testing in the wilderness. Jesus identifies with the Israelites. Out of Egypt, God had called his "son" - Israel as his own people. The Lord guided his people into the desert, "as a man disciplines his son." (Deuteronomy 8:1-5). Every text Jesus quoted focuses on what Israel should have learned in the wilderness.

Jesus not only filled his mind with Old Testament Scripture. He was deeply conscious of his calling - to perfectly succeed where Israel had failed. Jesus won his test over the devil - not just for himself, but for all who become God's people. Jesus remembers the voice of his Father - his calling from God. Jesus remembered "who he was, and whose he was." What had happened just before Jesus testing?

Matthew  
3:13-17

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.  
<sup>14</sup> But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" <sup>15</sup> Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.  
<sup>16</sup> As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

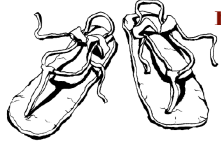
1. Why did Jesus submit to baptism? How does this fulfill all righteousness?
2. How is each Person of the Divine Trinity revealed at the Jordan river?
3. How did remembering his Father's voice enable Jesus face the tempter?
4. The Holy Spirit will lead Jesus into the desert (Matthew 4:1). How does the Spirit prepare Jesus?
5. Because Jesus fulfilled all righteousness for us, how does the Father's voice and the Spirit's power work in the lives of Christians?

Ajith Fernando (in his book ***Jesus-Driven Ministry***) observes about the ministry of Jesus:

- He identified with people.
- He was empowered by the Spirit.
- He was affirmed by God.
- He affirmed the will of God.
- He was saturated in the Word.

How do you see each of these in the two passages that we discussed today?

# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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## Servant-Leaders are first Servant-Followers

Servant-leadership is first modeled, and then imitated. The apostle Paul famously said to people who looked to him as a leader: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1) When Paul says, “follow my example” he speaks as a role model and a follower. A follower copies the words and behavior of a respected leader. Today, we speak of **mentors** (who are good role models) and **protéges** (who learn from them). Paul sets a high standard and example of servant-leadership.

Paul is **bold**. He claims that others can learn about Jesus if they watch what he - Paul - says and does. But Paul is also **humble**. Paul follows the only true and perfect Servant-Leader, the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle expects other people to follow his pattern of life, but only as he also is a follower of Jesus. So the leader must himself be a follower. Paul does not demand, “You must follow me, because I am better than you.” He says, “Follow me when you see the pattern of Jesus’ words and deeds in my life.”

This word that Paul uses, **follow**, is related to the word **imitate**. The world today applauds leaders who **innovate**, not those who **imitate**! We look up to those people who have new approaches, who propose innovative solutions, who push the boundaries of knowledge and achievement. Why follow someone who **copies** the life of someone else? To “imitate” seems to be basic, elementary. It is for a beginner, not a leader. But servant-leaders who lead well are people who learn first to follow well. This week, we consider people who became significant leaders. Let us first look at how they became followers.

Mark 3:13-14  
Luke 6:12-13

Mark 3:13 “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> He appointed twelve - designating them apostles - that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.”

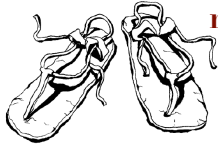
Luke 6:12 “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. <sup>13</sup> When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles...”

1. How did Jesus select his twelve apostles? On what basis did Jesus choose these future leaders?
2. Both Mark and Luke say that Jesus went up on a mountainside. How do they give us different perspectives on the way Jesus chose his followers?
3. What future responsibility does Jesus plan to give to these twelve? What present responsibility does Jesus first give to these twelve followers?
4. What is the difference between a person who is a disciple, and a person who is an apostle? Why must you first “be with Jesus,” before you can be “sent out by Jesus?”

In his classic book on Jesus as trainer, *The Training of the Twelve*, A. B. Bruce observes:

“These Twelve ... were going to be more than traveling companions or lowly servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. But for now, they were to be students of Christian doctrine (teaching) and occasional laborers in doing the work of the kingdom ... from the time they were chosen, the Twelve became apprentices under Jesus. He was preparing them ... In the course of training, they were to learn what they should do, believe, and teach as His witnesses and ambassadors to the world. This was to take place in the privacy of an intimate and daily fellowship with their Master.”





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### Teachers must first be Students

Simon Peter became one of the most gifted and effective communicators among the Twelve apostles. Peter was a fisherman. That was his vocation and family business. By a gradual process, Peter became an effective ambassador in God's kingdom. Peter is a good case study, because we see his mistakes. Peter is talkative, so we can hear how Jesus Christ challenged and taught him through his failings.

For each of the Twelve apostles, there was a growth process. It is the same with us. At first, we may be only curious about Jesus. Over time, we start to believe in who Jesus is, and trust what He is teaching. The Twelve began to spend more time with Jesus. They were chosen from among the many **disciples** to receive more training as **apostles**. We should not describe their training as *informal*. Jesus trained them with very specific goals in mind. The way Jesus trained His future apostles was *non-formal*. Jesus taught in real life situations. Jesus went to where they spent most of their time - in workplaces.

Look at the way Jesus challenged Peter's ideas and beliefs in the following passage. We see Peter start to learn hard, but valuable, "life lessons" - not just about Jesus Christ, but also about himself!

#### Luke 5:1-11

Luke 5:1 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake ... with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, <sup>2</sup> he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon (Peter), and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

<sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

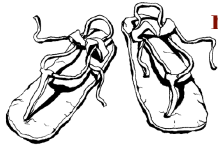
<sup>6</sup> When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. <sup>7</sup> So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

<sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" <sup>9</sup> For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." <sup>11</sup> So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

1. What was Jesus doing? What was Peter doing? How did Jesus get involved in Simon Peter's life?
2. Try to put yourself in Simon Peter's place. What do you suppose Peter might be thinking while he listened to Jesus teach the crowds from his boat?
3. Why do you think Peter reacted the way that he did (verse 5) when Jesus told him to go fishing?
4. After catching the fish, why do you think Peter reacted the way he did (verse 8)?
5. How does verse 5 summarize what it means to be Jesus' disciple, before you can be a leader?

# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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## Three Images of Leadership Training

Jesus Christ began to call His followers and to train them to become servant-leaders in His kingdom. Jesus made use of three vivid pictures, that were familiar and memorable. To learn from Jesus, and to live for God's kingdom and glory, you must "put on" or "take up" each of these three things. Jesus said that one is easy, but the others are hard, personally or socially. These images are not as familiar in our lives as they were in the first century. But the realities described by these images must be our daily experience if we are to become 21st century servant-leaders in God's kingdom. When you enroll in Jesus' school of leadership training, you must accept each of these: the YOKE, the CROSS, and the TOWEL. We first look at the YOKE. Then, we will consider the CROSS and the TOWEL of Jesus.

## Background on the Yoke

In a rural or agricultural places, the yoke is a well-known farm implement. Yokes are frames that join two animals to plow a field or to pull a cart load. For example, you might harness a "yoke of oxen" for heavy work on a farm. The Old Testament warned against trying to plow a field with a donkey yoked to an ox (Deuteronomy 22:10). That would be an "unequal yoke."



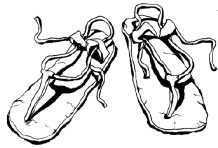
The "yoke" also had symbolic meanings. To be under a dictator's rule is to live "under a heavy yoke." (1 Kings 12). When you are forced into bondage or heavy labor, you come under a "yoke of slavery." The Old Testament reminded the Jews that the Lord set them free from "the yoke of the Egyptians" (Exodus 6:6-7). They were slaves in Egypt, but God saved them. There was a 40-year long journey to the land God promised. The Israelites were sometimes tempted to "go back" to Egypt. To follow the Lord through a wilderness seemed no better than slavery. The New Testament warns Christians about the same temptation. Has Christ set you free from slavery to sin, from the burden of endless laws, and from the rule of the devil? Then remember: "... it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm ... and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

A good marriage is to be "yoked together for life." Such a marriage is a healthy partnership. It is a joy, and not a burden. The New Testament warns us not to be "unequally yoked." Like a donkey yoked to an ox, you can enter into an incompatible relationship, for example with bad teaching (Psalm 106:28). Believers are not to be "unequally yoked" with unbelievers in marriage. (2 Corinthians 6:14).

## The Yoke of Wisdom

By the time of Jesus, the yoke symbolized something more. It was recognized that *everyone lives under some form of yoke!* For example, there are always leaders over you - rulers, employers, parents, etc. But the question is: Are they good rulers or tyrants? Do they bring you freedom and dignity, or slavery and poverty? If you are married, you are "yoked." Is your marriage a good or a bad partnership?

In the centuries before Jesus' coming, "wisdom literature" urged the Jews to submit to God's Laws to get wisdom. The Jews lived under "the yoke of Rome." There was Greek-Western cultural influence. There was the risk of abandoning a Jewish "way of life." During the lifetime of Jesus, some (like the Herodians and Sadducees) found prestige and economic advancement by compromising with Roman ways and rule. Traditional teachers (like the Scribes and Pharisees) warned about this, and urged the Jews to remain under "the yoke of the Law." This is the background to the passage we now examine.



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**Matthew  
11:25-30**

<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. <sup>26</sup> Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

<sup>27</sup> All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

<sup>28</sup> Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

### The "Easy Yoke" of Christ

Based on the cultural and Bible background, let us now examine these famous words of Jesus Christ.

1. According to Jesus, where does true wisdom come from?
2. Look at verses 25-26. What do Jesus' words tell us about God? What do these words tell us about followers (disciples) of Christ? What do these words tell us about traditional wise men?
3. In verse 27, what do Jesus' words tell us about finding true wisdom from God?
4. Traditional Jewish teachers said that wisdom from God (along with life, success, and happiness) was found under the "yoke of God's law." What amazing claim does Jesus imply in verse 28?
5. How does the yoke of Christ compare to obeying all of the other authorities and laws?
6. Verse 28 is one of the most famous of all the sayings of Jesus. What invitation does Jesus give? What promise does Jesus make?

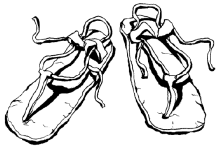
In the mystery of God's plan (the Father's "good pleasure"), the Jews in Jesus' time had turned from God and were blind to wisdom. God's true wisdom was withheld from them - but revealed to others. These others were often despised by traditional teachers and dismissed by wise men as "children." But Jesus Christ reveals true wisdom to his humble followers. Jesus is the greatest of all wise men. Jesus Christ is the only source of all wisdom from God.

### Jesus is God's Wisdom

To enroll in the School of Christ, and to train in servant-leadership, you must be YOKED to Christ. You do not just submit to a holy book of God's laws or teachings. You submit to a Person - Jesus Christ. You do not just ask "what would Jesus do?" in every situation. You must place your whole life under the authority and instruction of Jesus Christ. *Wisdom* is found in the way of *discipleship*: living under the *discipline* of Jesus. But, unlike the rule of laws and tyrants, Christ's YOKE does not bring pressure or friction. As the New Testament teaches, "His commands are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3)

This path to wisdom and servant-leadership looks childish. To be yoked to Christ is to be rejected as foolish. This is especially true when we look at the next picture of discipleship: THE CROSS.

# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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## Background on the Cross

The cross was familiar during Jesus' life and ministry. It was an horrifying image of degradation and punishment. Criminals who were Roman citizens were not executed on a cross. Romans did not die so shamefully. The cross was for convicts and rebellious slaves from provinces of the Roman Empire. The Apostle Paul was beheaded for his faith in Christ, because he was a Roman citizen. By contrast, the Apostle Peter was hung on a cross for his faith. (Scripture notes this in John 21:18-19). Tradition says that Peter asked to be crucified upside-down, because he denied and removed himself from his crucified Savior. The Roman poet Cicero said, "Let the very name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears." (Pro Rabirio 5). Among Jewish people, to be hung on a tree or a cross was to be cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:23).

## The Way of the Cross

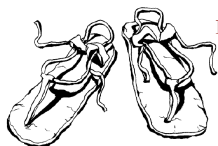
When you are "yoked" to Jesus Christ, you are united to His death. So each of the three images of servant-leadership represents a paradox. Statements which appear contradictory are, in fact, true. The best of the world's wisdom may be blindness. But true wisdom from God may seem childish and foolish. The world considers the cross to be shameful, weak, disgusting and horrible. But, for those who believe in Jesus Christ, the cross becomes the wisdom and power of God.

Every true Christian embraces the cross of Jesus Christ as the basis for SALVATION. Jesus lived the obedient life we should have lived, and He died the death that we each deserve. Though we are sinful, we are forgiven through His blood. A believer is accepted because He was condemned. The stainless, righteous Christ died for the sinner: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" (Galatians 3:13)

We must also embrace the cross for GROWTH in servant-leadership. For example, the Apostle Paul let his mindset and his work be shaped by the way of the cross. Paul writes: "... the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ... it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.'" (1 Corinthians 1:18-19) The cross shows God's strength revealed in human weakness. God's wisdom is revealed in human foolishness. Paul observed, "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called ... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." (1:22-25)

## The Cross of Discipleship

Here is a surprise: the first time that Jesus mentioned a CROSS by name, He did not refer to His coming death for our sins. He referred to our need to die to a self-serving lifestyle. Last week, we noted that one picture of following Christ: the YOKE. Jesus tells us that His yoke is easy. But the other "mark" is the CROSS. And not a silver or gold cross worn occasionally as jewelry. The cross is the way of life for Christ-like servant-leaders. For a follower of Christ, there is a distinctive personal confession to be made. And there is also a definite public cost to be paid.



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**Luke 9:18-26**

<sup>18</sup> Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?” <sup>19</sup> They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

<sup>20</sup> “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” <sup>21</sup> Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. <sup>22</sup> And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

<sup>23</sup> Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. <sup>25</sup> What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? <sup>26</sup> If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

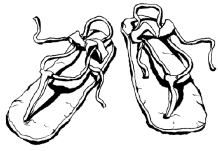
Based on the cultural and Bible background, let us look at these challenging words of Jesus Christ.

1. Describe the scene at the beginning of this passage. What is happening in verse 18?
2. What does Jesus ask His disciples? Why was this an easy question for them to answer?
3. In verse 20, what does Jesus next ask His disciples? Why was this a more challenging question?
4. Peter answers as the representative of the twelve disciples. How is this a distinctive confession? Why must all true Christians confess Christ in the same way?
5. In verse 23, we read that Jesus then “said to them all.” The word “all” does not mean Peter plus the other disciples. “Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’” (Mark 8:34)
6. What does Jesus say to His disciples in front of the crowds? Look closely at verse 23. There are three conditions of disciples (“come after me”). A disciple must “deny himself ... take up his cross daily ... follow me.” What is meaning of each condition?
7. Why is it significant for Jesus to give these “marks of discipleship” in front of the whole crowd? How does the world first recognize Christians? By our distinctive beliefs, or by distinctive lives?
8. Based on what we have learned about the CROSS, why does Jesus raise a question about shame?

“The other gods were strong; but (you were) weak; They rode, but (you did) stumble to a throne; But to our wounds only God’s wounds can speak, And (no other) god has wounds, but (you) alone.” Edward Shillito, ***Jesus of the Scars***.

“Frequently it is when we are crushed and devastated that the cross speaks most powerfully to us. The wounds of Christ then become Christ’s credentials. The world mocks, but we are assured of God’s love by Christ’s wounds.” D. A. Carson, ***How Long, O Lord?***

# The Servant-Leader who Listens



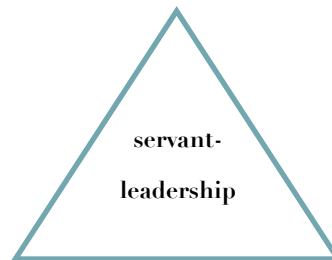
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## Growth in Three Dimensions

We have now looked at two images of leadership training: the YOKE and the CROSS. We can now consider a third image: the TOWEL. It is significant that Jesus introduced this picture of servant-leadership to his disciples at the end of his career. You can only take up the towel of Jesus Christ (to lead like him) after you accept the yoke of Christ (to learn from him) and after you take up your cross (to live for him). A learning and living relationship with Christ is the foundation for Christ-like leadership. We can diagram balanced servant-leadership development as follows:

The **YOKE**: you LEARN from Christ (as a man or woman under authority)



The **CROSS**: you LIVE for Christ (die to self)

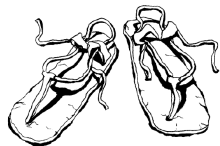
The **TOWEL**: you LEAD like Christ (serve others)

## Working the Angles

As Jesus trained his disciples to be servant-leaders, we see each of these three dimensions at work. For well-rounded growth, each of these three angles must be kept in “balance” with the other two. There must always be a balance between learning, living, and leading:

1. The **Yoke**: You must learn from Jesus Christ, who is our true wisdom. Other teachers can offer only knowledge or worldly wisdom. But true servant-leaders grow in Christian **CONVICTION**. The Lord Jesus invites you to “take his yoke and learn” from him. Jesus is the fulfillment of the “law and the prophets” from God. To grow in servant-leadership, you must grow in Christian **DOCTRINE** (or Christ’s “teaching”) that is found in the Bible, God’s Word.
2. The **Cross**: You must follow Christ who is your life. The world is self-promoting, self-absorbed, and self-indulging. True servant-leaders grow in Christ-like **CHARACTER**. The Lord Jesus teaches you to “come after” him in the way of daily self-denial and self-sacrifice. Jesus is the final priest and sacrifice - he gave himself so that you may live. To grow in servant-leadership, you must grow in Christian **DEVOTION** to the way of the cross.
3. The **Towel**: Jesus demonstrated the way of true leadership. He is God’s true Servant-King of love. Christ-like leaders have a God-given assurance, insight, and purpose. They are gifted by God with **COMPETENCE**. But Christ-like leaders use their God-given gifts and God-given abilities for their God-given **DUTY**: to serve others in Jesus’ Name.

Growing in servant-leadership means following Jesus Christ in **DOCTRINE**, **DEVOTION**, and **DUTY**. We need Christ to provide us with teachers (of Bible doctrine), mentors (models of Christ-like living), and coaches (in how to wisely employ our talents) in God’s kingdom.



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### The Order of the Towel

At the end of Jesus' career on earth, he gathered the Twelve to give them final instructions. It is clear that he is thinking of his legacy. How will Jesus' followers - his apostles - represent God's kingdom? Until this point, God's kingdom had come to earth in him. But now, God's kingdom will spread in all the world through them ... and through those who have been trained by Jesus to bear witness to him. Jesus does not just leave us with his words. Jesus demonstrates servant-leadership in a dramatic way:

**John  
13:3-17**

<sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup> so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup> After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

<sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." <sup>8</sup> "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

<sup>9</sup> "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

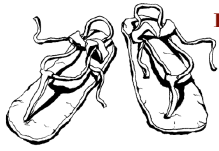
<sup>12</sup> When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup> "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

1. Look closely at verses 3-5. How does Jesus - without using words - sum up his whole career?
2. What characteristics of a true servant-leader are mentioned in verses 3-5?
3. Cultural background: it was customary for a host to offer foot-washing to guests at a meal. But this was not the host's job - but the work of a slave or household servant (like polishing shoes).
4. Once again, Peter's reactions and honest words provide instruction. Why does Peter protest? What does Peter say that he really needs from Jesus?
5. How do verses 12,13 describe the process by which the disciples have come to know Jesus? How do verses 13, 14 describe the way the apostles are to make Jesus known?

"When it comes to status and honor, we are servants. When it comes to function and responsibility, we are parents. Leadership does not have to do with status; it has to do with responsibility." Ajith Fernando, *Jesus-Driven Ministry*



# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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## Leadership is not an “Ownership”

This is one of the greatest dangers for a leader! You come to a place of influence or into a situation where you have the privilege to lead other people. At first, you may correctly realize that you have been *given* your leadership. Both your abilities and your opportunities were *given* to you. But - if you do not take care - you begin to think of your leadership position as something that you have earned, deserved, or something that you “own.”

If you “own” something as a possession, you “take title” to it. So we call this an “entitlement” mindset. You think, “I have achieved this position, I have earned this leadership, and I deserve to be respected.” Whenever you fall into this trap, you are threatened by rivals, and you will fight to protect what you think is rightfully yours. But this is not the way of a true servant-leader, someone who follows the perfect Servant-Leader, Jesus Christ.

## Servant-Leadership is a “Stewardship”

This may be a new word for you. But it is a very important concept. You can be *responsible for things* - or responsible to guide and care for other *people* - *even if you do not own them*. This is the mindset that says: “*I must care for you, lead and guide you, protect you, even though I do not own you.*” In ancient times, a “steward” was a household servant placed in charge of other servants by the owner of the house. So, the steward was person responsible for possessions (or persons) that he did not own.

The basic meaning of steward is: “one who is over a house.” One of the most famous examples in the Old Testament of the Bible is Joseph, who was one of the sons of Israel.

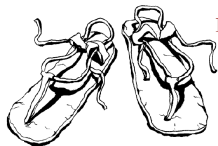
Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers. But in Egypt, he was recognized as a gifted leader. Joseph was made a steward - three times! The first time, he was put in charge of an Egyptian home. The owner’s name was Potiphar. We read in Genesis 39:4-6 that *Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So he left in Joseph’s care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.*

The owner’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, and then falsely accused him. So Joseph was wrongfully charged and thrown into prison. But while in prison, his leadership abilities again became obvious. He again became a steward! Genesis 39:22-23 tells us that *the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.*

By the end of his career, Joseph - who began as a betrayed brother - had become the second most important person in the most powerful world empire, Egypt. The ruler (Pharaoh) of Egypt said to him, *I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt ... I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt.* (Genesis 41:41,44)

Notice two things. First, leadership does not depend on circumstances! Joseph was a proven leader in household management, in prison management, and in governing a whole nation. Second, he was always a *steward* - a manager - accountable to a higher authority (Potiphar, the warden, or Pharaoh).





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### Two other examples

The most famous leader in ancient Israel was Moses. Long before there were any kings in Israel, Moses was the great leader at when the people became a nation. And what do we read about Moses? In the New Testament of the Bible, he is described: *Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house.* (Hebrews 3:5) Even though Moses was leader of all Israel, he was appointed by God and accountable to God. Moses was a steward - to manage and guide God's people. He was a servant-leader.

Other than Jesus, the perfect Servant-Leader, a famous New Testament leader is the Apostle Paul. How did he view his leadership? Paul tells us:

#### 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

<sup>1</sup> So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. <sup>2</sup> Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. <sup>3</sup> I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup> My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. <sup>5</sup> Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

This passage clearly teaches that servant-leadership is a *stewardship and not an ownership*.

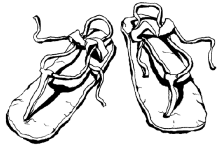
1. Paul says, "regard us ... look at us." How should we view Paul and others like him?
2. What has Paul been appointed to do?
3. What is Paul's "sacred trust"?
4. How is Paul accountable - and to whom?
5. How would you define "steward" from this passage?

#### 1 Peter 4:9-11

<sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1. How does this passage apply the idea of "stewardship" to all kinds of leaders - including you?
2. How does this kind of servant-leadership make responsibility and humility possible?

# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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## Servant-Leaders experience Failure

We often think of leaders as the people who can “do no wrong.” In fact, our world is obsessed with hero-worship. We want to follow people who have a “golden touch,” who can “make things happen.” But that is not the way in God’s kingdom!

The reason is this: there is only one perfect, righteous Hero in God’s kingdom - Jesus Christ. He not only lived the life that we should have lived - but he also leads like we should lead. Everyone else fails - at least some time! When we fail, we must not blame other people or circumstances for our failings. There is only one worthy Victim in God’s kingdom - Jesus Christ. The heart of the good news is this: Jesus lived a righteous life for us, and he died for us, to cover all of our failings.

When you take a close look at all the leaders in the Bible, you may be shocked to discover that the Bible does not “cover up” their many failings. To mention just a few examples:

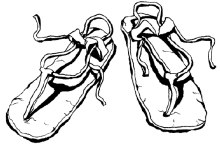
- **Noah** found favor in the sight of the Lord, (Genesis 6:8) but he drank too much (Genesis 9:21)
- **Abraham** received God’s promise of a son, (Genesis 12:7) but he then lied to the king of Egypt, and exposed his wife to possible harm in order to protect himself. (Genesis 12:13). Not a noble act!
- King **David** was known as a “man after God’s own heart,” (1 Samuel 13:14), but he was guilty of adultery and murder. When he was confronted by Nathan the prophet, David confessed: “I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:3-5)

The Bible, God’s Word, reveals the truth about God’s nature and human nature. It does not cover up our sins, or excuse our failings. God transforms us. God does not love us *because* we are holy; God loves us *to make us* holy! Jesus Christ prayed to his Father, “*Sanctify* them by the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17) The gospel, the message of Jesus Christ, first exposes us as *unholy*, and then sets us apart for God’s holy use. That is what *sanctify* means - *to set apart for God’s holy purposes*. The love of Christ *redeems* us from our sins, but refuses to *leave* us in our sins.

**Luke 17:10**  
**Revelation 4:10 -11**

<sup>10</sup> “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

<sup>10</sup> The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: <sup>11</sup> ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.’”



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### The Sinful Simon who became a Servant-Leader

The Apostle Peter over-estimated his loyalty and under-estimated his weaknesses. Peter is an example to us. He boasted, and was broken. Peter was “often wrong, but never in doubt.” The following passage illustrates how Christ allows us to fall on our faces, only to lift us up to servant-leadership.

**Luke  
22:25-34, 54-62**

<sup>24</sup> ... a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. <sup>26</sup> But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. <sup>27</sup> For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. <sup>28</sup> You are those who have stood by me in my trials. <sup>29</sup> And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, <sup>30</sup> so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

<sup>31</sup> “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” <sup>33</sup> But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”

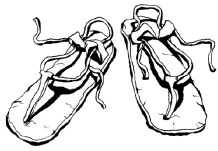
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<sup>54</sup> Then seizing him (Christ) they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. <sup>55</sup> But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. <sup>56</sup> A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.”

<sup>57</sup> But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said. <sup>58</sup> A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” “Man, I am not!” Peter replied. <sup>59</sup> About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.”

<sup>60</sup> Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. <sup>61</sup> The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” <sup>62</sup> And he went outside and wept bitterly.

1. What did the disciples argue about? What kind of leader was Jesus?
2. Why do you think Jesus speaks to Peter as, “Simon, Simon”?
3. How does Peter discover his own unfaithfulness?
4. Who knew Peter better than Peter?
5. Why did Peter’s faith not fail? How did he change from fear and failure to strengthening others?

# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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## The Great Commandments and the Great Commission

Servant-leaders reflect Christ's leadership. He fulfilled God's commands and gave us His commission:

The Great Commands sum up God's Law: Jesus said, "The most important (command) is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31)

After Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's Law, He gave his disciples the Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Leaders are people with followers. Do you want others to follow you, as you follow Jesus Christ? To have the "mind of Christ" is to love God and others. Philippians 2 describes Jesus' servant-leadership: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." But sadly, "everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 2:4, 21) People who look out for the interests of Jesus Christ will pay attention to the interests of other people.

In the Bible, God reminds us that servant-leadership is practiced for God and for others.

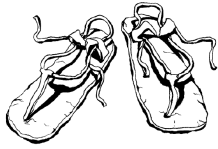
## Servant-Leadership is a gift from God - for the praise of God

We have seen earlier that servant-leadership is not an ownership, but a stewardship. "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) Do you have gifts for leadership? Then God gave you gifts - for others. When God gives gifts, they are for the purpose of service. Ultimately, you are serving God. That is the meaning of worship. Those blessed with gifts must return praise and thanks to the Giver. As King David prayed: "Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand." (1 Chronicles 29:14). In many nations influenced by the Christian gospel, the chief executive is called the Prime Minister - the leader is one who ministers, one who serves.

## Servant-Leadership is exercised in community - for the good of others

The Bible teaches that the best place to discover and use our gifts is in the context of a local community. Servant-leadership is for God and for others. So we will "find ourselves" when we offer ourselves first to God in worship (the vertical or "y axis") and then to others in service (the horizontal or "x-axis").

To worship and serve in a local church is very important. A professor who taught in Korea observed, "The church is the only organization that exists for its non-members: for God and your neighbor." (Harvie Conn). A leader who served in India wrote that the Church can be "fully open to the needs of the world and yet have its eyes fixed always on God." (Lesslie Newbigin). One Asian Christian said: "There is a saying ... that sums up the Chinese way of thinking. We say, 'Take care of sweeping the snow from your own path. Don't worry about the frost on your neighbor's roof.' In other words, don't get involved in other people's business. But I can tell you from my experience that in the church we will first go and help people like widows who have no family. This is something that Christians do." (Interview on National Public Radio, *All Things Considered*, July 28, 2005).



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**Romans  
12:1-21**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. <sup>4</sup> Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup> If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

<sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

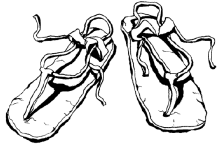
<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1. What are we urged to do? What should motivate a person to do this?
2. How is "spiritual worship" described? What is the result of a "transformed mind"? (verse 2)
3. How do worship - and community - keep you from "thinking too highly" of yourself?
4. What is the difference between living in community and living in conformity?
5. How are the Great Commandments - Love for God and Love for Neighbor - observable?
6. How is the Great Commission ("make disciples of all nations") fulfilled by people like this?

# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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## Additional Perspectives on Servant-Leadership

In the past ten studies, we have focused on the character, heart, mindset, and spiritual commitments of servant-leaders. These are the most important things to remember if you are a follower of Jesus, and if you want to serve others for God's glory.

ALL servant-leaders must hear and obey God's Word. You learn wisdom from your failures. You follow Jesus Christ in the Way of the yoke, the towel, and the cross. These principles of servant-leadership apply to EVERYONE who wants to become a fruitful servant of Jesus Christ.

But there are two additional perspectives. These will be different for each of us: your spiritual GIFTS and your ministry OPPORTUNITIES. Jesus Christ calls us to share the same spiritual commitments, but we must apply these in different situations. We have different gifts and different opportunities. These are God's unique gifts to each of us. Your Spiritual Gifts + your Ministry Opportunities = your individual CALLING from Jesus Christ.

Last week, we discussed Romans 12. It teaches us to discover our gifts in a worshiping community.

First, we offer our lives in worship, thanking God for the mercy that we have received in Jesus Christ. It's significant that Barnabas and Paul (Saul) were called to ministry during a church worship service: "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" (Acts 13:12) First serving the LORD in worship, and then serving other Christians in love, is the best way to discover your own gifts and calling.

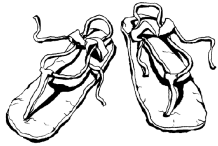
Second, we must "test and approve" God's will. We must not over-estimate our abilities. And we must not under-estimate (devalue) how God may use us in ministry. Rather than evaluate your own life, other Christians will say, "You are effective when you do \_\_\_\_\_. God blesses me when you do \_\_\_\_\_!"

## Discover your personal "Ministry Identity"

The Bible teaches us that WHO WE ARE in Christ must take priority over WHAT WE DO for Christ. In other words, your BEING must come before your DOING. An international scholar once observed, "We are called human beings, and not human doings." If there is no agreement between who you are in Christ, and what you do for Christ, then you will not serve effectively. If what you do corresponds with who you are, then you will be in a good alignment to serve the Lord Jesus in an effective way.

What is the best way to discover your unique "ministry identity?" There is no magic formula. Some Christian churches and organizations have developed "assessment" seminars or written evaluations that can help you. But, especially for younger Christians, the best approach may be trial and error. What do you most enjoy doing? How do Christian friends evaluate the things that you try to do? Over time, prayerfully reflect on the outcomes of your prior ministry experiences. Then complete the following sentence: "God has created, redeemed, gifted, and called me in Christ, to \_\_\_\_\_ (do what)?"

Here is an important caution. No one is exactly like you! In the natural world, no other person is you. Your personal identity includes your unique DNA. And your "ministry identity" will also be unique. Do not think that your gifts, opportunities, or calling from God will be the same as someone else. God did not save you by good works but for good works, prepared just for you. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)



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**John  
21:15-22**

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” [Peter] said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” <sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” [Peter] answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” <sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” [Peter] said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then [Jesus] said to [Peter], “Follow me!”

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved [John] was following them ... <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw [John], he asked, “Lord, what about him?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, “If I want [John] to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You [Peter] must follow me!”

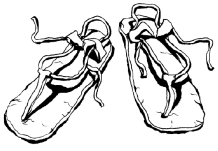
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<sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. <sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

**1 Peter  
4:7-11**

1. John 21:15-17: What question did Jesus keep asking Peter? How did Peter answer each time?
2. John 21:17: Why do you think that “Peter was hurt” when Jesus asked this question three times?
3. How can Peter show how much he loves Jesus? What did Jesus command Peter to do?
4. We have observed that Peter was a strong-willed man. In John 21:18-19, how will this change?
5. John 21:21: What mistake did Peter make? How could you make the same mistake?
6. John 21:21: How did Jesus answer Peter’s question about his friend John? What is the difference between Christ’s plan and Christ’s command for each of our lives?
7. 1 Peter 4:7-11: Peter wrote this letter after his experiences in John 21. What has Peter learned?
8. What should all Christians do? (Compare 1 Peter 4 verses 8-9 with verses 10-11).
9. What are some different gifts and ways to serve? 1 Peter 4:10: What makes each of us different?
10. 1 Peter 4:11: In addition to your “serving others,” what is the goal of all that you do for Jesus?



# The Servant-Leader who Listens



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## The LORD is the Sovereign King over all kinds of Leaders

In both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, the LORD is revealed as the Sovereign King over heaven and earth. As Israel's king David prayed, "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor; for everything in heaven and earth is Yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; You are exalted as head over all." (1 Chronicles 29:11) The LORD and God's Kingdom rule over all nations. Servant-leaders must see themselves as ministers or servants of the LORD. The Lord Jesus Christ teaches, "When you have done everything you were told to do ... say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" (Luke 17:10)

We have learned that we must all grow more Christ-like. Jesus was the only perfect Servant-Leader. In our last study, we learned that God gives each of us unique talents and gifts. We must employ our abilities to faithfully serve Christ and to serve other people in Christ's Name. There is one final aspect of servant-leadership that is unique to each of us. God is sovereign over situations and circumstances. Ultimately, the LORD is the One who gives us mentors and opportunities.

## The LORD Gives Us Mentors

A mentor is different than a teacher, a coach, or a sponsor. Teachers are people who give knowledge. That knowledge becomes the foundation for your future service. Coaches give training in skills, how you should apply your knowledge to specific situations. Sponsors provide us resources - funds or places to serve. Mentors are similar to good parents. They give us inspiration and courage. Mentors are wise and trusted counselors. Mentors are older, more experienced people who care about you. They are often the first people to recognize the unique talents and gifts that God has given to you.

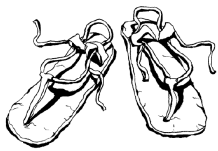
Many companies and universities provide "mentoring programs." Mentoring programs assign veteran professionals as advisers to younger employees and professors. There are also "mentoring seminars." In a group setting, young workers are introduced to the wisdom of older, experienced professionals. But real mentors influence you through a shared personal relationship. You should search for these special relationships. Pray for God to give you mentors. Real mentors are God's gifts. A mentor's influence in your life will outlive and outlast the lifetime of your mentor. When you grow older, wiser, and more experienced, you will also want to become a mentor to younger leaders. Mentors leave a legacy in the lives of younger servant-leaders. Through mentoring relationships, God's kingdom is passed from one generation to the next generation.

## The LORD Opens Doors of Opportunity

Where do you find specific opportunities for work and service? You can participate in vocational guidance programs and placement services. You can "network" with successful people you already know in the marketplace. Your professional contacts - in industry, the university, or ministry - are key resources. It is your responsibility to work through your network of contacts. As we will see, this can be compared to "knocking on doors." What doors of opportunity will open for you?

According to the Bible, the LORD is sovereign over every situation. So, you must exercise personal responsibility. You must make contacts and phone calls. You must write and distribute your resumé. You must ask other people for their recommendations. The people who know you best - teachers, coaches, sponsors and mentors - can recommend you to employers. They can recommend employers to you. But only the LORD opens doors. Opportunities are the LORD's gift to you.





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**Acts  
18:24-28**

<sup>24</sup> ... a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. [Apollos] was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> [Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though [Apollos] knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard [Apollos], they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

<sup>27</sup> When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, [Apollos] was a great help to those who by grace had believed. <sup>28</sup> For [Apollos] vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

1. Background: Priscilla (or, Prisca) and her husband Aquila were leather-workers (tent-makers). The apostle Paul supported his own ministry as a tent-maker. This couple became Paul's "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3). A church later met in their home. (1 Corinthians 16:19)
2. Verses 24-25: How is Apollos described? How was Apollos qualified? What did Apollos not have?
3. Verse 26: What did Priscilla and Aquila observe about Apollos? What did they decide to do? Why do you think Priscilla and Aquila corrected Apollos in the privacy of their own home?
4. Verse 27: What did Apollos want to do? (Achaia was a Roman province. Corinth was its capitol).
5. Verse 28: Describe Apollos' public ministry at Corinth? How did Apollos' private relationship with Priscilla and Aquila make an impact on Apollos' later public teaching career?

**Acts 16:6-10**

<sup>6</sup> Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. <sup>7</sup> When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. <sup>8</sup> So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

<sup>9</sup> During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

1. How did Paul and his ministry team try to spread Christ's good news? How were they blocked?
2. Verses 9-10: How was Paul's ministry team guided to go into Macedonia to proclaim Christ?

**Revelation  
3:7-8**

<sup>7</sup> To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: "These are the words of him [Christ] who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he [Christ] opens no one can shut, and what he [Christ] shuts no one can open. <sup>8</sup> I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

1. Verse 7: How is Jesus Christ described? How is Christ's power described?
2. Verse 8: What does Jesus say to this church and its leaders?