

WHAT IS A SERVANT LEADER?

“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And men from among yourselves will rise up with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears. And now I commit you to God and to the message of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands have provided for my needs, and for those who were with me. In every way I've shown you that by laboring like this, it is necessary to help the weak and to keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, for He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' After he said this, he knelt down and prayed with all of them. There was a great deal of weeping by everyone. And embracing Paul, they kissed him, grieving most of all over his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they escorted him to the ship.”

(Acts 20:29-38)

God has always mediated His rule on earth through specially chosen and qualified leaders. In the Old Testament He used patriarchs, judges, prophets, priests and kings. In the New Testament He mediates His rule in the church through evangelists and pastors, as well as through the indwelling Holy Spirit who guides each believer. God's intention is that these men and women be servant leaders.

God ruled directly in the beginning. Human relationships were perfect under His divine authority. There was no disorder, no discord, and no need for human rule because there was no unruliness.

When man fell, the chaos of sin disrupted human relationships. Conflicts broke out immediately and God responded by instituting a new, three-fold, direct order of rules. He placed this new order of rules over:

- The family.
- The church.
- The state.

In all three areas God has designed that there be leaders and followers: authority and submission. In Acts 20:17-38 Paul gives valuable information to church leaders, which also includes servant leaders in the church.

The World's Standards For Leadership

- Visionary.
- Action-oriented.
- Courageous.
- Energetic.
- Objective-oriented.
- Indispensable.

These refer to super motivated people who verbally motivate others with dramatics, energy, and actions.

God's Standard For Leadership

God's standard refers to servant leadership. The Biblical qualifications are spiritual and internal, rather than physical and external. Rather than leading by precept and power, God's servant leaders lead by precept and example. *(Refer to 1 Peter 5:3; Philipians 3:17, 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7 & 9; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7)*

Leadership is a tremendous responsibility. It means personal accountability to God (*Hebrews 13:7*), and greater condemnation for failure (*James 3:1*), but it can also be blessedly rewarding. The church cannot be any more successful than its leaders. *"...Like people, like priests..." (Hosea 4:9)*

1. A servant leader is a teacher.

“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2)

The first priority of a servant leader is to impart truth. All leaders must be firmly grounded in the truth and be able to impart it to someone else, so that they can transmit it to someone else, and so on and so on.

Servant leaders are diligent students of the Biblical message, and are able to articulate its teachings.

- They are loyal and faithful to that message.
- They are actively engaged in the equipping and training of additional workers.

2. A servant leader is a soldier.

“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 2:3)

A leader has to be willing to share the hardship involved in the responsibility of leadership. The hardship may not always be present, but when it is, the leader must bear it. The servant leader must have a personal loyalty to Jesus Christ, and be willing to maintain that loyalty at any cost.

In 2 Timothy 2:4 it says, ***“No soldier entangles himself in the affairs of life.”*** It is not possible to be a part-time soldier in war. Soldiers are not double-minded; they are totally committed to wanting to please the Commander-In-Chief. The greatest desire of godly leaders is to please the One who has chosen them, even if it means self-sacrifice, even unto death.

Servant leaders have heard the Lord’s call, and have joined the battle. They are willing to accept the suffering and hardship involved in the ministry.

They separate from the world and its web of activities and interests, so that even though they may have to earn a living, as most of us do, they have a single-minded focus. They are concerned totally with gaining Christ’s approval of their service.

3. A servant leader is an athlete.

“Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” (2 Timothy 2:5)

As servant leaders we are wholly absorbed in one pursuit - to fulfill our area of responsibility. It is not necessarily the greatest natural ability that makes a great athlete; it is the greatest level of dedication. A major secret of success is hard work and dedicated preparation to do what needs to be done.

Servant leaders are people with strong self-discipline, who are willing and able to conform their lives to God’s rules, who want to win, and who are motivated by future rewards, not present pleasures.

4. A servant leader is a farmer.

“It is the hardworking farmer who ought to be the first to get a share of the crops.” (2 Timothy 2:6)

A farmer works tirelessly until he almost drops of exhaustion. The only thing that keeps him going is the knowledge that he will get something back for himself in terms of a harvest.

“Don’t be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows he will also reap, because the one who sows to his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So we must not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don’t give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, we must work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.” (Gal. 6:7-10)

A servant leader produces spiritual crops through studying, teaching and leading. By this their soul is being fed, and therefore, they can carry on by ministering out of the overflow.

- They are willing to work hard.
- They recognize the need to feed and nurture their own soul.
- They have the patience to wait for results.

5. A servant leader is a workman.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth. But avoid irreverent, empty speech, for this will produce an even greater measure of godlessness.” (2 Timothy 2:15-16)

Almost everyone likes to talk but few people like to work. The only way to rightly divide the word is to quit talking, and begin working and studying. The stress here is on the diligence of the worker so that God will approve of them. Leaders are assembled to God for the inspection and approval of their work.

- They are desirous of never being ashamed of anything they do, as they always do their best.
- They are careful to handle God’s Word without error or distortion.
- They are committed to less talk and doing more.

6. A servant leader is a vessel.

“Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver bowls, but also those of wood and earthenware, some for special use, some for ordinary.” (2 Timothy 2:20)

The issue is not the function; the issue is that some are honored and some are not. The “great house” is the church, and the vessels of gold and silver are servant leaders in the church. The point is the servant leader is pure, available, and ready.

7. A servant leader is a slave.

“The Lord’s slave must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient...” (2 Timothy 2:24)

As we will discuss later, this does not mean being a slave to people, but to Christ. The slave must not be quarrelsome, but of a sweet, gentle spirit; a habitually kind person, and patient when wronged. In other words, they are humble.

Qualities Of A Servant Leader

- A servant leader is loved by those to whom they minister. It does not mean everyone loves them all the time, but it does mean that they are an honored and beloved person. If a servant leader is not loved, it is an indication that they are not being led by the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit generates love.
- They never give up.
- They use good judgment. A servant leader makes practical, wise decisions.
- They speak with authority. There is a confidence that only the Word of God brings.
- They strengthen others. They lead people because they are confident in knowing where they are going.
- They operate on unwavering faith.
- They lead by example.

A servant leader knows the balance between God's promises and their own responsibilities. They know God is going to fulfill His will, and yet they are practical and wise, balancing sovereignty and practical effort.

Seven Principles For Doing The Lord's Work The Lord's Way

1. A vision for the future.

Those who are deeply committed to the Lord's work always see needs not yet touched, and are constantly planning ways to meet them. They are never satisfied with what is being done; they can only see what isn't being done. They plot, plan, and are always strategizing future plans of attack.

“I will come to you after I pass through Macedonia —for I will be traveling through Macedonia — and perhaps I will remain with you, or even spend the winter, that you may send me on my way wherever I go.” (1 Corinthians 16:5-6)

“Now some are inflated with pride, as though I were not coming to you.” (1 Corinthians 4:18)

“For I do hope to see you when I pass through, and to be sent on my way there by you, once I have first enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am traveling to Jerusalem to serve the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they were pleased, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to Jews in material needs. So when I have finished this and safely delivered the funds to them, I will go by way of you to Spain.” (Romans 15:24-28)

It is important in thinking of the future to determine what needs to be done and to plan a course of action, in order to be ready when God presents opportunity.



One reason some people never truly understand ministry and they continue looking and waiting, is due to the fact that they have never done anything to plan for it, or to prove they are worthy of carrying it out.

Training for service is not just a matter of learning a few Bible facts and waiting to be plopped down in the middle of a perfect situation. It is a matter of being faithful in the present, of working hard, of being involved in the Lord’s work in the present, and of planning in order to be ready to when the door is opened.

Those who just “drift,” waiting for God to give them something to do, never get it!

2. A sense of flexibility.

The future rarely comes together as anticipated. Those who are doing the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way will not be too firm; they will be ready to adapt if God should choose to change things midstream.

“...and perhaps I will remain with you, or even spend the winter, that you may send me on my way wherever I go. I don’t want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord allows.” (1 Corinthians 16:6-7)

“In this confidence, I planned to come to you first, so you could have a double benefit, and to go on to Macedonia with your help, then come to you again from Macedonia and be given a start by you on my journey to Judea. So when I planned this, was I irresponsible? Or what I plan, do I plan in a purely human way so that I say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” [simultaneously]?” (2 Corinthians 1:15-17)

“They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia and were prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message in the province of Asia. When they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.” (Acts 16:6-7)

God is after a willing, prepared heart with a vision that has flexibility to go where the Spirit directs. When He finds such a heart, He may launch it into a direction that they never dreamed of. That is what can be called the “Adventure of Ministry.”

3. A commitment to thoroughness.

Paul was committed to thoroughness and he had no desire for superficiality in his ministry. It is impossible to teach someone to “observe all things” without a life’s investment in him.

Paul was thorough, (*Colossians 1:28; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; Ephesians 4:13; Acts 20:27*) and so was Jesus. (*John 17:4*) Anyone who is unwilling to make a commitment to thoroughness in the ministry is going to short-circuit their effectiveness.

The Lord’s work should be done:

- With thoroughness.
- With excellence.
- To the limits of one’s capability.

4. A commitment to present service.

The one who is doing the Lord’s work the Lord’s way must be a doer and not just a planner. They will know that if God is going to use them in the future, they must be “doing it” in the present. They recognize that now is the “paving ground,”

and that God wants people who have been proven effective. Strategic ministries are not given to novices.

There is a balance here between the plan for the future and the commitment to the present. It can be difficult to maintain, but it is critical to do so. This is because bailing out of the present means forfeiting the testing ground, and if that happens, it's all over.

Paul was not only committed to the future, he was “doing it” in the present (*1 Corinthians 16:6-9*), and his greatest plans had to be deferred for a while because he had work to do.

It is faithfulness at the current level of responsibility that permits one to be used at a different level in the future. (*Luke 12:41*) Paul was never discontent about his area of service, and he never used one thing as a stepping-stone to something else. He was always committed to the current open door. (*Acts 14:27; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3*)

Some people are so picky about the door they choose to go through that they miss the entire opportunity. They wait around for something wonderful to happen and it never does because they have never shown a willingness to go through any of the doors God has left open for them. Perhaps one of the things that can turn a Philadelphia-type church (*Revelation 3:7-13*) into a Laodicean type church (*Revelation 3:14-19*) is a constant failure to go through the open doors the Lord has put in front of us.

We must never become content or apathetic. There is a responsibility to find the open door, and go through it. When God has opened a door, someone must go in; it must not be ignored.

The one who is doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way has plans for the future, but they pour their life into the present because they recognize they may not be in the future. The “now” may be all there is!

5. An attitude that accepts opposition as a challenge.

G. Campbell Morgan said, “*If you have no opposition in the place you serve, you're serving in the wrong place.*” Someone who is doing the Lord's work in the

Lord's way will be where God can really use him. In tough situations, trust in self goes out the window. In desperation we lean on God. And that is when the power begins to flow, and the enemies begin to drop. That is the excitement of the ministry. Take the challenge! Find a hard place!

6. A team spirit.

God has no superstars who live unto themselves. Paul was very dependent on others, and very loving toward them. (*1 Corinthians 16:10-11; Romans 16*) Paul's ambition was for God, not himself.

It is impossible to minister for God in isolation. The ones who do the Lord's work in the Lord's way realize they are part of the fellowship, and that it is their job to help build and encourage others.

7. Sensitivity to the Spirit's leading in others.

Here is a good example of this: Paul wanted Apollos to go Corinth, apparently seeing his visit as the perfect way to end the problems found in 1 Corinthians 1:10-12, but Apollos chose not to go. Paul did not pressure him. (*1 Corinthians 16:12*) He recognized that it is not possible to "cram" someone into the work of the Lord; that one must wait for the working of the Spirit. Paul had that kind of patience.

One who does the Lord's work in the Lord's way does not dominate over others, but is sensitive, and lets the spirit of God properly generate His Kingdom's work.

We are not to rank one person over another. It is clear in the New Testament that the church has the right to judge false teachers (*Romans 16:17*) and the obligation to discipline members living in sin (*1 Timothy 5:20*), but where men are equal in doctrine and purity of life, there is no basis to rank or evaluate them. Therefore, every ministry is equally important to God and His Kingdom's work.

Four Major Features Of The Ministry

“A person should consider us in this way: as servants of Christ and managers of God's mysteries. In this regard, it is expected of managers that each one be found faithful. It is of little importance that I should be evaluated by you or by a human court. In fact, I don't even evaluate myself. For I am not conscious of anything against myself, but I am not justified by this. The One who evaluates me is the Lord. Therefore don't judge anything prematurely, before the Lord comes, who will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the hearts. And then praise will come to each one from God.” (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

1. Identity. “Slaves of Christ.”

Note that the service is to Christ; not to the people. When they serve Christ they will best serve the people, but if they serve the people they may not best serve Christ.

The position is the position of a low-level galley slave. Paul says to consider yourselves slaves for Christ.

A servant simply obeys others and the order is, *“Take the Word of God and give it out.” (Luke 1:2)* Not only is a minister a “slave to Christ,” they are also stewards. All Christians are God's stewards (*1 Peter 4:10*), but the servant leader is a particularly sacred stewardship (*Titus 1:7*), and that is what Paul is talking about in this passage. God's servant leaders are stewards of the mysteries of God.

The Word of God is to be given out as God intended, and not twisted around to meet personal whims and opinions. We are to rightly divide the Word of God. (*2 Timothy 2:15*)

2. Requirement. “Faithful.”

When the Lord returns He wants to find His servants faithful, not simply faithful to our tasks, but to His. God does not use the most brilliant, the most educated, the wealthiest, or the most popular; He uses faithful people. To be faithful is to be obedient or trustworthy.

3. Attitude.

The focus of the servant leader is not on themselves, but on Christ. We have to play to an audience of one! Only God can really evaluate our ministry and our lives.

4. Evaluation.

God will judge the servant leader, not so much on what they did, as on why they did it – their motives. Did they do what they did to receive fame, money, satisfaction (ego), popularity and prestige, or to give God glory? (*1 Corinthians 10:31*)