

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## Leading: What are the benefits of leadership?



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

How would you answer the question this session is asking?



### Understanding the information (20 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Before reflecting on the positive effects good leadership can bring, it's worth thinking about what happens when it is absent:

There will be some form of leadership – but it will be assumed under a different name. In any group setting, it is inevitable that some will influence more than others.

People will more easily lose sight of their connectedness to the whole, and thus decisions may be made with less reference to the impact on others.

People will find themselves in roles of responsibility, but without the recognised authority and support in carrying them out.

There may be a drift towards the status quo. One of the purposes of servant-leadership is to create a secure environment in which the appropriate aspirations and visions of individuals can be expressed and accommodated within the wider community.



What are the benefits of leadership?

Helping people make sense and meaning. Leaders throughout Scripture help people to remember and be rooted in their main purposes, to recognise themselves within the bigger story of God's kingdom, and to see where their own work fits in to that purpose.

Bringing life by enabling and inspiring. Servant-leaders create an environment in which those gifts can flourish because people have appropriate and legitimate oversight, and have acknowledged permission to exercise their roles.

They also embody the vision in their own life, so that people are motivated by seeing something of it in them.

**Bringing cohesion to vision and action.** The best football teams are not the ones with the greatest number of individuals who are skilled, but those who play in a coordinated manner. (This is why one of the main roles of a bishop is to be a focus of unity.) Good servant-leadership will be able to articulate common vision and purpose in a clear and compelling way, enabling each individual see how their gifts and purposes can both be nurtured by, and contribute to, the common vision.

**Dealing well with issues.** Any organization or group moving beyond the status quo will inevitably encounter difficulties or issues. Inspiring hope. Yet at the end of the day good servant-leadership will bring the gift of hope – the leader being a “dealer in hope” who is able to help people move towards a new horizon where they would never have gone themselves.

Discuss: Which of these benefits most matters to you and why?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read 1 Samuel 8: 1-22 which describes a situation of bad leadership and longing for good leadership.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:  
What does this passage teach me about God?  
What does this passage teach me about people?  
How does this passage call me to obey God?  
What might I do in response to this this week?



## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/sWj6oPZsGII>

What struck you as important in the video?



## Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

There can be objections to the idea of leadership, particularly in church. Here are a few common doubts we might have, and some responses to them:

Leadership is a power-relationship which can manipulate other people.

Power and authority are definitely involved in leadership, and being surrounded by images and stories in which individuals use violence to remove threats, it can be easy for us to associate power with control and manipulation. But this is a viewpoint from secularised culture. Scripture, in contrast, portrays true power not as imposing your will on someone, but as a gift from God to enable human flourishing.

The servant-leadership relationship between leaders and followers is not competition, but one in which leadership can be **facilitating**, enabling a wide variety of parties to be utilised. Power and authority everywhere and are unavoidable. “Taking up legitimate power as a leader is very different from using it abusively. Not to take up properly designated power may itself be a denial of responsibility and may result in more harmful consequences for those for whom we should have a concern.” (Parkinson) For Jesus submission and self-sacrifice do not preclude the exercise of appropriate authority. Christ always uses power to elevate others. Jesus’ answer to social need is to provide benevolent leaders. We need to separate out in our thinking and practice the use of power for the benefit of others, which we embrace, and seeking to benefit from any privilege or status that may be attached to such power.

Leadership creates different classes of people and deskills the vast majority.

Most of the leaders we idolise in culture tend to arise from moments of crisis in which a necessary commanding style is needed (e.g. Winston Churchill). While commanding leadership is sometimes necessary (in, for example, stopping a toddler running in front of a car), servant-leadership does not celebrate the individual leader over the potential contribution of the group. When servant-leadership loses sight of being a social process of collaboration, in which all are equipped, we can create an uneasy division between leader and followers. For example, ordained ministers can run the risk of reserving so much leadership activity in themselves that the fruit of ministry is disempowered and passive community. Collaborative and dispersed leadership cultures are only able to only come into being through good foundations –good servant-leadership is about enabling this to happen. So the choice is not between commanding leadership or leaderless leadership. The choice is between leaders who empower and those who retain power for themselves.

Leadership is a “secular” concept which the church has imported, and which comes out of contexts and organisational structures entirely different from the church.

It is true that borrowing uncritically from our culture’s definitions may draw us into mindsets that are not kingdom focused. For example, business models might be focused on growth and productivity, instead of Christlike formation. An understanding of **common grace** – that God’s wisdom can be sometimes discerned in the wider creation – may help us learn from organizations that, for example, seek to work out how to make the most of everyone’s gifts. The New Testament is full of the idea that growth matters to God, but as a church we can slide from being a missionary movement into institutionalism. It is possible that learning from business contexts in which the focus is firmly on future growth may at the least shock us into new ways of seeking God’s kingdom.

The language of leadership is not Christian language. The Bible focusses much more on ministry than leadership.

Leadership language has not been prominent until recent decades (CS Lewis was sceptical of it). Some are more comfortable with the language of ministry, or using historic titles of bishop, priest, deacon (within church context). There are plenty of leadership motifs throughout Scripture, with an emphasis on animating the whole, equipping God’s people. Servant-leadership is about mobilising the ministry of others.

In addition, even a vision of ministry is never about providing services for benefit of others to create a society of passive recipients. Rather than having to be in opposition to the role of priest or minister, servant-leadership could add to it for these reasons:

The more comes back to an ordained or authorized minister, the less animated the church becomes and impoverished in its mission and ministry. The role of the “pastor” is a decisive element in the growth, or otherwise, of the church.

While most of our historic paradigms for ministry came from the Christendom era which emphasised the correct formation of those assumed to be already in the faith, this model is not enough to meet the challenges of mission and ministry in a post-Christendom era.

We live in an adaptive context in which we need to engage in mission rather than maintain an inherited order, and to renew the apostolic calling of the church.

If we fail to embrace intentional leadership, we may be found to be exercising an implicit leadership but in an unreflective, ill-considered fashion.

Discuss: Which of these thoughts helps you most? Why?

## Responding to God’s leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, “What might God be showing me and how might I respond?” They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, “Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?”



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

Father God,

Your Word reminds us that apart from you, we can do nothing.

You are the source of all that we need.

Father, forgive our misplaced attempts to run at life without stopping, when we fill our days with good works and leave no space to be with you.

Help us all to slow down to your pace, to remain rooted in you, to become aware of your constant presence.

Help us to develop rhythms that centre our lives on Jesus, deeply connect us to people, bring joy and most of all bring glory to you.

Leading your Church is demanding. Demanding on time and on energy.

We pray that our leaders will follow the example of Jesus. That they will make time to stop. To be with you. To be refreshed and replenished in your presence. To receive vision and guidance, courage and strength.

To allow the transforming work of your Holy Spirit to take place.

May they be led more by Jesus,

To live and lead more like Jesus

So that others will be led to Jesus.

AMEN



From the Salvation Army



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People will find themselves in roles of responsibility, but **without the recognised authority and support in carrying them out.**

There may be **a drift towards the status quo.** One of the purposes of servant-leadership is to create a secure environment in which the appropriate aspirations and visions of individuals can be expressed and accommodated within the wider community.

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## Additional notes:

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