

3. A Servant Who Leads by Building Relationships

In Mark 10:42-45, Christ said, ““You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”” In these verses, we see that greatness is found in service. We see that we become first by becoming the bondsman of all. Many people think that they cannot be a servant who leads. However, Christ demonstrated exactly how to become a servant who leads.

When Christ first began His public ministry, He immediately began inviting people to spend time with Him. In John 1:38-39, we read, “Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, ‘What do you seek?’ They said to Him, ‘Rabbi’ (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), ‘where are You staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).” Then, in John 3:1-2, we read, “There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’” In both of these passages, we see that Christ invited individuals to come and spend time with Him where He was staying.

In addition, throughout the four Gospels, we see Christ spending time in the homes of others. In Luke 5:28-29, we see that Matthew (Levi) invited Christ, and all of his tax collector friends, to dinner, “So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them.” Mark 2:15 shows the impact of this event, when it says, “Now it happened, as He was dining in *Levi’s* house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.” The last four words of this verse say, “and they followed Him.” The disciples and the tax collectors chose to follow Christ, because He demonstrated the attitude of a servant.

Christ was able to lead these people, because He took time to build relationships with them where they lived, worked, and spent their free time. Christ built relationships both with those who followed Him and with those who chose not to follow Him. In fact, Christ chose to spend a lot of time with sinners. Luke 15:1-2 says, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’” In Luke 19:5-7, we read, “And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.’ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw *it*, they all complained, saying, ‘He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.’”

These accounts, of Christ eating with people who were called “sinners”, are a very significant action when we consider a verse like Hebrews 7:26, “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.” The

fact that Hebrews says Christ was separate from sinners does not mean that He did not eat with them. Instead, it means He did not commit the sins they committed. However, He spent plenty of time building relationships with them.

In John 8:10-11, we see Christ talking to the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. Those verses tell us, “When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’” Christ became a servant who leads, to this woman, because He told her how she could have her sins forgiven, instead of condemning her.

Today, many people are like this woman. They feel that they are so bad they can never be forgiven. We become a servant to them when we tell them how they can receive forgiveness of sins. If we are going to build relationships with people who feel they are too bad to be forgiven, we usually have to build those relationships in their homes or in some neutral place. They are not likely to come to us. Christ gave us the example of leading as a servant by going to such individuals where they were. We follow His example and go to people where they live, work, and spend their free time. That will give us opportunities to tell them how they can have forgiveness of sins.

However, we also become a servant who leads by building relationships with Christians. Christ was a servant to His followers, as well as to those enslaved to sin. Of course, Christ’s best-known example of being a servant to His disciples occurred at the Last Supper, when He washed the feet of His disciples. John 13:3-5 says, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded.” Rather than talking about being a servant to one another, Christ modeled servant leadership by washing the feet of the disciples.

Then, in John 13:12-17, Christ explained His actions. “So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.’”

In these verses, we see that Christ says we will be blessed as we become a servant who leads. In our last topic, we talked about becoming a servant who leads by our example of godly character. Here, we see that we become servants who lead by our actions. The Greek style of teaching was to tell people what to do. In contrast, the Hebrew style of teaching was to show people how to do things by example. Today, much of the world has adopted the Greek style of teaching. Most churches have followed the example of the world and think that telling is teaching.

A servant who leads recognizes that he has no authority over others. Instead, a servant who leads realizes the power of example. Paul talked about the impact of example when he said, in 1 Corinthians 4:15-16, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do* not *have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” Paul had taken time to build relationships with the Christians at Corinth. Now, he encouraged them to follow his example. Then, in 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul told why he could say follow my example, “Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.” Paul could encourage them to follow his example, because he was following the example of Christ.

A servant who leads can only lead as he or she demonstrates godly character and builds relationships with people so that they have a desire to follow his or her example. That is why a servant who leads has such a powerful impact. All who follow such a leader do so because they have made that choice. In John 6:66-69, we read, “From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” The twelve, or at least the eleven, followed Christ because of who He was and what He represented. They had made the choice to follow and were later willing to die for Christ, because they had seen His example of dying for them.

A servant who leads is a leader who will have a life-changing impact on all those who choose to follow him. We need to regularly ask ourselves the question, “Is my commitment to serve others because my commitment is to be a bondservant of Christ? May the Lord give your life a growing impact, as you continue to grow in your understanding of what it means to be a bondservant of Christ. That will happen as you have a commitment to building relationships with others so that you can have the privilege of serving them. Then, they can follow your example and become more like Christ.