

SESSION 1: HUMILITY AND LOVE

BIBLE REFERENCES

QUESTIONS

1. What does being a servant leader mean to you?
2. Does the idea of a leader looking first to serve rather than lead (or direct/instruct/command) seem contrary to the idea of what leaders are supposed to do?
3. Consider the most influential leaders in your life or, less personally, in your lifetime. Were they servant leaders? What made them effective?
4. What do we have to be willing to surrender in order to serve others?
5. How do we become committed to serving?
6. What is the significance of each of the words that Jesus used to describe serving? (The first word, *diakonos*, captures the idea of serving in humbleness for the benefit of others, as Jesus displayed with the foot washing, and the second word, *doulos*, expresses service grounded in obedience and self-denial.)
7. Jesus did not ask more of His disciples than what He did of Himself. What does that say about Jesus as a servant leader?

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SESSION 2: CONTINUING THROUGH ADVERSITY

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

John 1:11, John 6:66, John 7:5, John 14:5-10, John 14:31 ESV, John 16:33, John 18:2, 5, 17, 25, 27, Matthew 23:37-39, Matthew 12:9-13, Mark 3:15, Luke 6:6-10, Mark 14:50, Acts 5:41, Matthew 8:20, Luke 9:58

QUESTIONS

1. Why does God allow adversity in our lives?
2. What is an adversity that you are facing this week? How has it affected your journey of faith?
3. How can we draw strength from Jesus to continue, even during adversity, like He did?
4. Describe a challenge that you have faced as a believer of Jesus. How were you able to overcome that challenge and how has it changed you?
5. How does your servant leadership express what type of relationship you have with God?
6. When we are obedient to God and are willing to serve others no matter their situation in life, those around us may criticize or be surprised by our efforts. How could these criticisms diminish our joy and affect how we see people? How can we drown out the negative and focus on Jesus?
7. Why do you think that sometimes we have unrealistic beliefs about what it means to be a Christian? Why do we think it should be easy?

8. From observing others, as well as considering your own life, do you feel adversity draws people closer to God or causes them to lose confidence and trust in Him?
9. David was another great leader in the Bible who suffered adversity. His response was often worship. How could worshiping through adversity help?

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SESSION 3: PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Luke 23:34, 46, Mark 11:25-26, Mark 15:39, Matthew 10:22, Matthew 24:9-13, Matthew 27:46

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think practicing what you preach is so important?
2. Do you think that people use a leader's not practicing what he/she preaches as justification for not following the preaching themselves?
3. Jesus always did the will of His Father. How do we know what God's will is so we can follow in Jesus' example?
4. All who believe in Jesus Christ have experienced forgiveness. Why then is it so difficult for us to forgive others at times?
5. Why is it important to have faith and trust in God's purpose for us?
6. Jesus taught another lesson in servant leadership: the importance of fulfilling what you are called to do. Why is this an important aspect of servant leadership? What do you feel called by God to do? What might prevent you from fulfilling that calling?
7. How can we make the lessons that Jesus taught us on the cross a part of our life?
8. What are other examples, besides the ones in the video, of Jesus demonstrating what He taught?
9. When He said, "but he who endures to the end shall be saved," Jesus indicated there would be some hard times ahead for His disciples. What do you feel people understand "enduring to the end" to mean in this age?

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: HUMILITY AND LOVE

We will examine the events of Holy Week through the perspective of servant leadership. To be a servant leader is to be a servant first. We see this clearly in the leadership of Jesus, and as we look to Jesus as the prime example of a servant leader, the event of Jesus washing the disciples' feet takes on a special importance.

In John 13 we read, *"Jesus...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..."* (v.3-5).

Foot washing was usually the task of a slave in ancient times. In washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus shows us an amazing picture of God: that He was willing to leave His exalted position in order to serve, even serving the one who would betray Him. A servant leader humbles himself and looks first to the well-being of those he is leading, without prejudice or hesitation.

Jesus' teachings on serving were translated into Greek, using two words for serving – *diakonos* and *doulos*. The first word, *diakonos*, captures the idea of serving in humbleness for the benefit of others, as Jesus displayed with the foot washing, and the second word, *doulos*, expresses service grounded in obedience and self-denial. Not only does Jesus ask us to humble ourselves, but He also calls us to be willing to surrender our own ideas and align ourselves to the mission of God. Jesus explained this aspect of servant leadership to His disciples after washing their feet, saying, *"...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"* (v.16-17). Jesus did not ask more of His disciples than what He did Himself. He was sent by His Father and submitted to His will by sacrificing Himself on the cross. We are sent by Jesus. Can we sacrifice our own will and devote our lives to following His lead?

Jesus' leadership was not about Him; it was always about His Father and accomplishing His Father's will. Jesus could lead because He was led. He constantly sought the guidance and will of His Father through prayer, and most importantly, Jesus accepted this

will with humility, as so clearly shown when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, *"...not My will, but Yours, be done"* (Luke 22:42). How close is our connection to God? Do we recognize the direction in which He is leading us? Are we willing to go there?

Furthermore, Jesus' servant leadership was also characterized by His dedication to building up His disciples. He emptied Himself into others. Often our natural response, when in a leadership role, is to hold onto power and authority and not share it. Jesus constantly empowered others, trusted them with leadership, allowed them to stumble and fall, only to build them up again, and shared all He had with them. Leadership that is shared generally results in growth in the individual person and in the congregation as a whole. As you serve and lead, who are you empowering and building up?

As we come to the close of Jesus' meal with the disciples, He gives them one more lesson in servant leadership, which we can read in verses 34 and 35: *"...love one another; as I have loved you...by this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* Servant leadership is established in the love that Jesus has for us. Grounded in His love and example, we are equipped to serve first and, thereby, become leaders in the mission of God.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 2: CONTINUING THROUGH ADVERSITY

We will continue our discussion on servant leadership by exploring how servant leaders handle adversity.

Although He loves us, our Heavenly Father permits us to experience some very unpleasant things in life. He does not spare us from suffering, adversity, criticism, or disappointment.

If Jesus, the Father's only begotten Son, was not spared adversity, then we can hardly expect to be spared from it. Because of His love for us, God allows adversity in our lives. God is not punishing us with struggle and disappointment. Rather, in His omnipotence, God sees the whole picture and wants to bring us to the end goal.

Jesus understood this and even weaved this into His teachings. Through the many things He did on earth, Jesus showed us how to deal with suffering, adversity, and disappointment. But He also pointed to the end goal, saying, *"In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

Jesus was True God and True Man. He had feelings and emotions, just as we do. It is an understatement to say that during His ministry, and especially during Passion Week, He encountered unparalleled suffering and adversity. We often focus on the horrible events of Good Friday, but let us also remember that Jesus dealt with criticism and disappointment almost every day. Here are some examples:

- Jesus' own brothers didn't believe in Him as the Messiah. (John 7:5, John 1:11, Matthew 23:37-39)
- While teaching and doing good in the community, Jesus was often misunderstood, tested, and criticized. (Matthew 12:9-13, Mark 3:15, Luke 6:6-10)
- Many disciples left Him because they could not accept His teaching. Even those who stayed didn't fully understand who He was and ended up abandoning Him. (John 6:66, Mark 14:50, John 18:17, 25, 27, John 14:5-10)
- One of His closest friends and followers betrayed Him. (John 18:2, 5)

How discouraging is it when your own family doesn't believe in you? How hard is it to "stay the course" when just by changing your views you could keep people "on your side"? How much does it hurt when people you've loved sell you out? How frustrating is it when you teach and do, repeatedly, but people don't get it? These are just a few of the difficult experiences God let Jesus live through. His ministry was filled with suffering, adversity, rejection, and disappointment. If faced with constant challenges, as Jesus was, would we be able to continue?

Jesus never let adversity keep Him from fulfilling His mission. If He was surprised by adversity, He didn't let on. In fact, He seemed to expect it when He said that foxes have holes and birds have nests, *"but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."* Through all adversity, Jesus kept marching on the path to victory. His servant leadership was evident throughout His ministry. By dealing with adversity as He did, He also taught and prepared the apostles for the adversity they would face when establishing His Church and proclaiming His gospel.

Perhaps the reason for Jesus' unwillingness to be broken or deterred by adversity is found in this statement: *"...I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here"* (John 14:31 ESV).

With this statement, Jesus explained what kept Him going through adversity. He loved His Father, and because of that love, He did exactly what His Father charged Him to do. He would keep on doing it until He could say to His Father while on the cross, "It is finished."

What about us? What is our relationship with the Triune God? Do we expect Him to answer every prayer according to our will? How deep is our resolve to be a true servant leader, loving the Lord and doing what He charges us to do, come what may? Do we expect to be kept from evil, injustice, hatred, and grief? Do we expect discipleship in Christ to be easy and without sacrifice? Do we expect that when we do "the right thing," everything will turn out as we wish?

What do we do when we experience adversity, criticism, suffering, and disappointment as we strive to live according to the gospel? Do we pull away from the Lord, lose confidence in Him, and doubt His love? Or do we say, *"Rise, let us go from here"*? Let us take an honest look inside and speak the truth to ourselves in love: even when we fail, our Teacher does not give up on us. Jesus will continue to help us and give us His strength to endure.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 3: PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

We have explored how Jesus is the perfect example of a servant leader. His entire ministry was based on doing His Father's will, which was to serve others. Jesus served mankind to the point of making the ultimate sacrifice and creating the path to salvation for us. Jesus not only served those He led, but He taught and then demonstrated how people can serve one another. A true, sincere leader lives the things that he or she teaches. Today we will focus on Jesus' example of true servant leadership in the most crucial moment of His ministry: when He was on the cross.

As Jesus and the two malefactors hung on the cross, He called out to His Father, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"* (Luke 23:34). Though it is difficult for us to imagine doing the same, Jesus pleaded with His Father to forgive the very people that were torturing and mocking Him. Jesus taught the importance of having a forgiving nature, but also knew how difficult it would be for man to develop it. However, He understood that this demonstration of forgiveness would emphasize His teaching to the disciples, given shortly before His crucifixion.

A few days prior to that, Jesus had said to His disciples, *"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses"* (Mark 11:25-26). Here, Jesus had taught that forgiveness offered to those who have wronged you is necessary for your own sins to be forgiven. On the cross, Jesus paid the sin debt of all people, past, present, and future, including those who were mocking and torturing Him. In that moment, Jesus made a point of praying aloud for them to be forgiven by His Father to demonstrate the importance of a forgiving nature.

We can look at two other moments on the cross when Jesus demonstrated what He taught. In His agony, He cried out two statements, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* and *"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit"* (Matthew 27:46, Luke 23:46). Even while suffering under the burden of mankind's sin, Jesus remained faithful to His Father. Looking again at the two-fold nature of Jesus, we see the struggle of True Man and True God. In His human nature, Jesus cried out to His Father under the weight of

sin, the horrible pain, and the feeling of being alone. Because Jesus was True God, we know that at any point He could have given up on the mission and climbed down from the cross. But as the perfect servant leader, Jesus' desire to fulfill His mission and His Father's will was greater than His human nature. For Jesus, no matter what pain He had to suffer, He was willing to give Himself over completely to His Father. And He did it out of love. He didn't curse His Father as He bore mankind's sin. Instead He used the endearing terms "Father" and "My God." Even in pain, Jesus had faith in His relationship with His Father. We can learn from this the necessity and power that faith and trust in God have in one's life. When we put our faith in the right place, not in earthly things, but in our God, we can accomplish many great things that will further His work.

In His final words on the cross, Jesus taught another lesson in servant leadership: the importance of fulfilling what you are called to do. His last words on the cross were, *"It is finished,"* meaning He had completed the mission His Father had sent Him to do, despite all obstacles. Just days earlier, Jesus had reminded His disciples of the value of enduring to the end, for He knew the hard times they would encounter. He said to them, *"...they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake...but he who endures to the end shall be saved"* (Matthew 24:9, 13).

Even on the cross, Jesus was the perfect servant leader; He served the needs of everyone around Him and taught by His example. Through offering forgiveness and grace, He served those that crucified Him and the malefactor beside Him, and by placing Mary into the care of Apostle John, He served His mother, and representatively, the Church. Christ's teaching through example had an immediate effect on the Roman Centurion, who had witnessed the events of the cross. Upon Jesus' death, this Centurion was moved to say, *"Surely this man was the Son of God!"* (Mark 15:39).

As servant leaders today, we strive to follow the example of Christ in serving God as our Master and our neighbors as those we lead on His mission. To effectively do this, we must be sincere and credible. This means that when we say something, we do it, just as Christ did.