

Leadership #1: Servant Leadership

Biblical Use of the Term Leader

The Greek equivalent of the word “leader” is used in the New Testament eight times. Even the idea of leadership can be extended to many more passages. A study of the use of the term in the Scripture will give us a deeper understanding of what it means to be a leader within the context of the church.

1. Etymology

- Leadership = proistemi (προϊστημι)
 - proistemi = to set before; to set over, appoint with authority; to preside, govern, superintend, to undertake resolutely, to practice diligently.

2. New Testament References to the Word Leader

- Romans 12:8... he who **leads**, with diligence.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:12: Respect those who labor among you and **are over** (*proistemi*) you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.
- 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12: He must **manage** (*proistemi*) his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to **manage** (*proistemi*) his own household, how will he care for God's church?
- 1 Timothy 5:17: The elders who **rule** (*proistemi*) well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.
- Titus 3:8: This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that you affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to **lead** (*proistemi*) good works.

3. Implications of Bible References

- Leadership requires diligence (Romans 12:8)
 - Strong Dictionary defines diligence as “move quickly, speed on” – swiftness to show zealous diligence, i.e. one's best (full effort by making haste).
- Leadership requires hard work (1 Thessalonians 5:12)
 - The word used for labor here entails the idea of wearisome effort. It means to grow weary, to toil with burdens or grief.
- Leaders have to say the tough things (1 Thessalonians 5:12)
 - To admonish means to warn or exhort.
- Leaders lead their homes with seriousness (1 Timothy 3:4)
 - The need of leading first at home is present in each one of the ministry requirements listed in the Pastoral Epistles.
- Leaders lead in good works (Titus 3:8)
 - They take the initiative in doing what is right. They lead by example of good *works*, not just good *words*.

4. Motivation for Leadership

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking....” (Mark 10:35-38)

- **False Ambition**

James and John thought they were asking for leadership, but Jesus said that they didn't know what they were asking for. What did they ask for?

- Position
- Glory
- Authority

- **Godly Leadership Desire**

“You know that, among the Gentiles, those who claim to bear rule lord it over them, and those who are great among them make the most of the power they have. With you it must be otherwise; whoever has a mind to be great among you, must be your servant, and whoever has a mind to be first among you, must be your slave. So it is that the Son of Man did not come to have service done him; he came to serve others, and to give his life as a ransom for the lives of many.” (Mark 10:42-45)

- Jesus didn’t rebuke them for desiring leadership, but corrects their understanding of it.
- The kind of leadership aspiration that Jesus stimulates is the desire to serve in order to meet a need.
- Many great leaders, both in the Scripture and in history, never felt any particular “divine” calling or gifting, but rather saw a need, met it, and therefore took the lead.

5. What is Real Leadership?

- **Leadership is influence, not position.**

- Great leaders can lead with or without a title or position. Even before David became king, he was recognized as a leader of Israel.

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’” And David knew that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel. (2 Samuel 5:1,2,12)

- **Leadership is service, not glory.**

- Though nobody wants to be a *slave* or *servant*, Jesus used these words to describe leadership. Leadership is not about power or personal gain. Leaders are called to serve and put others before themselves.

“...But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45)

- **Leadership is guidance, not authority.**

- Shepherds lead their flock from the front. In the same way, good leaders don't lead by force, but set the example for those under their care.

... shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2-3)

- **Leadership is relationships, not rules.**

- Just as discipleship is relationship, leadership is also about relationship. Great leaders are not rule enforcers—they lead through relational influence. The Apostle Paul appealed to those he was leading on the basis of his relationship.

*Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing **mother** taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. ⁹For you remember, **brothers**, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a **father** with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2:6-12)*

SUMMARY

The world's understanding of leadership is different from what the Bible says about it. Leadership is not about our position, title, how many people are under our authority, or what rules we are enforcing. The Bible redefines leadership as influence, service, guidance, and relationships. Jesus is our example of leadership.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the Bible's definition of leadership differ from your understanding of it?
2. Who would you voluntarily follow? Why?

HOMEWORK:

Spend some time meditating on the four principles of leadership. Think about the people you influence and where and whom you have the opportunities to serve. Then fill out the following table.

	How are you going to apply this principle?
Influence	
Service	
Guidance	
Relationship	