

Models for Ministry: What is fundamental? Servanthood or Leadership?

Introduction:

World events seem to be accelerating towards a climax. Over the last few years, we have seen increased economical tensions, climate change, Covid pandemic, the new Cold War and even the real war. In the midst of this, we have to ask the question, “Where is the church going?” The answer is “where she is led”. The church has always prospered most when it has been blessed with strong, spiritual leaders. As we look at the church around the world, both in the majority world and the minority world, there is a desperate cry for leadership.

Interestingly, whichever church we go to throughout the world today, there is the obvious emphasis on leadership and leadership training. Sadly, the focus has been mostly on leadership skills, knowledge, competencies and readiness with task and relations, and less on the development of character.

Many writers have discussed the place of servant leadership in Christian ministry. However, there are two dangers. Firstly, many begin with leadership and then speak of servanthood as one of its key elements. Servanthood is thus seen through the lens of leadership and rarely seen in terms of its full Christian meaning. Secondly, some focus mostly on servanthood. There is thus a danger of losing sight of the particular function and calling that is given to the leader, in providing diligent and effective leadership (Rom. 12:8).

In this paper, we attempt to address the question, “Model for Ministry: What is fundamental? Servanthood or Leadership?” We shall see from the Biblical emphasis and Jesus’ life, teaching and example that servanthood is fundamental in our call to ministry. We shall also look at the marks of worldly and godly leadership.

1. Servanthood is Fundamental

The word, “fundamental” can mean forming a necessary base or core (foundational, underlying, essential) or of central importance (priority, key, chief, critical). In both sense of the word, as far as the model of ministry is concerned, I think my answer is Servanthood. The main reasons for my answer are below:

A. Identification as Servants

In the Old Testament, individuals such as Moses and King David are called servant of the Lord or servant of God. Israel and the exiles called themselves ‘servants of the God of heaven and earth.’ The prophets are also called servants of God. In the Servant passages in Isaiah, the identity of the servant is also applied to the coming messiah.

In the New Testament, the apostles regarded themselves as servants of God (2 Cor. 6:4), servants of Christ (1 Cor. 4:1), and servants of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:1). The believers are also called to be servants of God (1 Peter 2:16, Rom. 6:22, 1 Cor. 7:22, Eph. 6:6).

B. Use of words for 'servant' and 'leader'

The apostles all used the humble word '**doulos**' (slave or bondservants) rather than just 'diakonos' (a servant who carries out duties of a household and other common tasks).

The NT is sparing in its use of word for leadership in the church. According to Hwa Yung in his book, "Leadership or Servanthood?", four Greek words used for leading or governing in the NT, are used a total of **ten** times to describe the function of the church. In contrast, the two words for "servant" (doulos and diakonos), together with their cognate verbs (diakoneo and douleuo), are used about **fifty** times in the NT for service to God and to the church.

C. Leadership Images from the NT

In his book, 'Leadership Images from the NT', David Bennett did an extensive survey on 87 images used in the NT on leadership, and came to the following conclusion. There are basically two clusters of images used by Jesus and throughout the rest of the NT: those that describe them as followers of Jesus Christ and as members of a spiritual family, and those that picture them as servants (of the Lord and of one another).

D. Notable absence on 'leadership' in Scriptures

On the one hand, all believers are called to be servants of God. On the other hand, even though leadership is listed as one of the spiritual gifts in Romans 12:8, there is no general call for everyone to be a leader. Moreover, one could not find a single verse in the Bible telling us to train leaders for God's work. Neither can we find encouragement to seek after church leadership and 'run for office.'

E. Jesus's life, teaching, and example

In the early Christological hymn quoted in Philippians 2:6-11, Paul described Christ as one, "who though he as in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of **a servant**." (vv6,7). This was how Jesus lived, what He taught, and the example He has left for the disciples.

1) Through his life as a servant:

- a) His identity – as the Son of God in whom God was well pleased (Luke 3:22; 9:35).
- b) His calling – He knew that He was the chosen servant of the Lord (Luke 4:17-21, Isaiah 61:1, 2).
- c) His motivation – It was His love for the people of the world. (John 13:1 cf. John 3:16)
- d) His submission to Father's will – His food is 'to do the will of Him who sent Him and to finish His work' (John 4:34, 6:38).
- e) His vision – It is about "my Father's business" (Lk 2:49) and His house, and to bring "glory to God" (John 17:4).
- f) His dependence on God – through His prayer life, His application of God's Word in His own life, the anointing and leading of the Holy Spirit.
- g) His sacrifice – He willingly embraced and accepted the path of suffering, even death on the cross (Mark 8:31-32, 9:31, 10:32-34).

h) His focus – to build up and equip the disciples. His concern is for their spiritual well-being, and for their future ministry in God’s kingdom.

2) Through his teaching on servanthood: (Matt 20:20-28, 23:1-2; Mark 9:33-37; John 12:24-26, 13:12-17)

- a. Leadership is not sought but granted
- b. Leadership is not to lord it over
- c. The first must be the last and be servant of all; the greatest among you will be your servant; greatness comes from servanthood
- d. Servanthood means followership after Jesus
- e. Servanthood involves humility
- f. Servanthood involves suffering
- g. No servant is greater than the master
- h. God will honour those who serve

3) Through His example as a servant

Two symbols of Christianity are the towel and the cross. The towel symbolises service, the cross obedience. Both examples are marks of Christian leadership because they stand for Jesus’ leadership style.

a. The towel – John 13:1-17

It is an example of love, humility and service.

“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have **set you an example** that you should do as I have done for you.”
V14,15

b. The cross –1 Peter 2:21, Mark 10:45,

Christ has given us an example of submission and obedience to the Father’s will as well as humility, servanthood and selfless sacrifice. In 1 Peter 2:21, Peter said, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.”

In summary, as Christ’s disciples, we are all called to service. We are to serve the living God and serve one another with the gifts He has given us (1 Peter 4:10).

2. Marks of Servant/Servanthood Leadership

John Mott expressed the essential ideas of true spiritual leadership in these words: “I have in mind the use of the word **‘leadership’** which our Lord doubtless had in mind when he said, “He who would be greatest among you shall be the **servant of all.**”

J O Sanders also highlighted the importance of the spirit of servanthood over mere services. “*Jesus* did not have in mind mere acts of service, for those can be performed from very dubious motives. He meant **the spirit of servanthood.**”

A. Marks of Spurious Leadership

- 1) When the leader's selection is based on wrong criteria
- 2) When one seeks a leadership position with the wrong motive/unworthy ambition
- 3) When the overwhelming focus is on 'self'
- 4) When there is an obsession with the benefits of the position or office
- 5) When the leadership style is modelled after patterns of the world or cultural influence
- 6) When a leader misuse or abuse his positional power or personal influence
- 7) When there is overemphasis on being a 'professional' leader
- 8) When a leader refuses to share the leadership with others, work within a team or submit to accountability.

B. Marks of Servant Leadership

- 1) Paying attention to one's character - God is more interested in who we are before Him than in what we do for Him.
- 2) The call must be affirmed by God and others - When people announced their leadership, they need to prove that claim.
- 3) Serving with one passion - Like Jesus, the leader must be about God's business.
- 4) Leading by following Jesus - True Christian leadership, that is, leadership for Jesus, is only possible on the basis of leading with Jesus.
- 5) Leading with God's authority - The leaders' authority is not found in his position or office, or personal/moral influence, but in spiritual authority.
- 6) Serving with vulnerability - A servant leader leads from a position of weakness.
- 7) Serving with others in mind - A servant leader always has in mind the welfare of those he serves more than his own well-being.
- 8) Leading with humility - Humility speaks of our acknowledgment of our true position before God, and our total dependence on God for everything. Humility is also shown in our attitude towards others.
- 9) Willing to give accountability - First of all, we are accountable to God. Secondly, we are accountable to each other.
- 10) Leading by example which impacts life - all true spiritual leadership comes down to being and setting a godly example.

Nehemiah is an exemplary example of an inspiring, true servant leader. In an amazing way, through his servant leadership and the collaboration of the people, they completed the

impossible task of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem in 52 days (Neh. 6:15). They also experienced one of the greatest revival in history. How did it happen? The people followed Nehemiah and the successful outcome because of the kind of leadership that Nehemiah provided. A careful study of the book of Nehemiah will show him to be a true 'servant leader'. Nehemiah leads by serving and serves by leading.

Conclusion

Leadership is a process of influence. Even though Jesus did not use the words 'leader' or 'leadership', He called His disciples into a development process. But Jesus' primary focus was not to help them to master the skills often associated with leadership. Instead Jesus showed his disciples who they are to follow and how to follow. In all, the words "**follow me**" occur 13x times in the gospels. Jesus also taught them about how to obey, how to respond to the authority and call of God. He knew that an effective leader must first learn how to be a faithful follower.

Jesus also knew how destructive the attitudes of pride and ambition could be within the community of disciples. Therefore he taught them attitudes of humility and self-sacrifice, using the image of the servant and reminded them of their equal standing before God as brothers. Jesus wanted his disciples to think of themselves as 'among one another', as brothers, and 'under one another', as a servant, more than 'over one another' as those of authority.

Leaders are those who have no difference in status or position than others; they simply lead because they serve. Hwa Yung in his book, "Leadership or Servanthood?" summarized it well, "Leadership is the result of practicing genuine servanthood whatever we are and whatever position we are called to by Christ. By living and ministering as servants, our loving and humble service will impact those around us as great leadership."