

7. A Servant Who Leads Focuses on the People Being Led

In our last topic, we focused on the fact that a servant who leads will focus on developing people. In this topic, we will focus on the fact that a servant who leads focuses on the people being led. Christ spent three years developing the people who would carry on His ministry when He returned to heaven. As Christ approached the end of that period of time, He shared some very important lessons with the disciples.

In John 15:12-15, Christ said, ““This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”” In these verses, we see that:

- ◆ Christ focused on the fact that the disciples were to love one another
- ◆ Christ focused on the fact that they were to lay down their lives for one another
- ◆ Christ focused on obedience to the Word of God
- ◆ Christ focused on sharing His plans

Although Christ knew He was going to die the next day, He spent His time with the disciples and ministered to their needs, rather than focusing on His needs. He knew that when He went away, the disciples would need to love one another in the same way He had loved them over the previous three years. A servant who leads will make it the focus of His ministry to help others build the kind of relationships between one another that will result in them loving one another as Christ has loved them. That kind of love will make it possible for them to be willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of one another.

Christ also focused on obedience to His commandments. Earlier in the evening, Christ had given them the new commandment, recorded in John 13:34-35. That new commandment was to love one another as Christ had loved them. As we see in John 15:12, Christ repeated this commandment. The disciples also remembered other commandments Christ had given them. Those commandments are recorded in the New Testament, so we also have those same commandments.

Then, Christ focused on His changed relationship with the disciples. Christ described that change as a change from servants to friends. As the disciples followed Christ earlier, they had not understood His plans for the future. Christ told them that, because they were His friends, He was now revealing His plans to them. Later, in John 20:17, Christ called them His brethren.

In the same way, a servant who leads helps others become partners with him in ministry. They learn to seek the will of the Lord together, so they can carry out the will of the Lord as partners in ministry. This is illustrated in Acts 13:1-3, where we read: “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work

to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.”

As we think through the ministry of Christ, we can think of other ways how Christ showed the disciples to become friends:

- Christ chose the disciples to be with Him
- Christ took the disciples with Him to various places
- Christ answered the questions of the disciples
- Christ encouraged the disciples when they failed
- Christ shared His plans with the disciples
- Christ showed the disciples how to love one another
- Christ commanded the disciples to love one another

As we think about the things Christ did to help the disciples change from servants to brethren, we have a beautiful example of what it means to be a servant who leads. In John 20:17, we read, “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.”’” In this verse, we see that:

- ♦ Christ called the disciples brethren
- ♦ Christ sent messages to His brethren

The word “brethren” is used more than three hundred times in the New Testament. Most times it is used to refer to Christian brothers rather than physical brothers. Christ changed the status of Christians from servants to brethren, because He was helping them to become partners in ministry.

A master-servant relationship is defined in Ephesians 6:5-6, where we read: “Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” A friendship relationship is defined in John 15:15, where we read: “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” A spiritual brethren relationship is defined in 1 John 3:16 and 4:11, where we read: “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren... Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Although Christ was going to die in just a few hours, He wanted the disciples to focus on their relationship with one another. He wanted them to learn to treat one another in the same way He had treated them. In fact, as we just saw in 1 John 3:16, Christ calls us to lay down our lives for one another. A servant who leads focuses on some of the ways he can lay down his life for other Christians. There are many ways that we focus on the people being led as we lay down our lives for one another. We will focus on just four of them.

First, we lay down our lives for one another by helping one another grow to spiritual maturity. Scripture talks about various levels of spiritual maturity. We lay down our lives for other Christians by helping them grow, from their present level of spiritual life, to spiritual maturity.

Notice some of the levels of spiritual growth that are mentioned in the New Testament:

- ♦ Spiritual new born babes - 1 Peter 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12
- ♦ Spiritual toddlers - 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 13:11; Ephesians 4:14; Hebrews 5:11-14
- ♦ Spiritual children - 1 John 2:12-14
- ♦ Spiritual young men - 1 John 2:12-14
- ♦ Spiritual parents - 1 Corinthians 4:14-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12; 1 John 2:12-14
- ♦ Spiritual Timothys - Acts 16:1-3; 1 Corinthians 4:14-17

Second, we lay down our lives for one another by praying for one another. In John 17:1-26, we have the prayer of Christ the night before He was crucified. Instead of praying to escape His coming death, in John 17:1-5, Christ talked with the Father about His obedience to the Father. Then, Christ spent the rest of the chapter praying for the men the Father had given Him. Included in that prayer was a small section where Christ prayed for us (those who would believe as a result of the ministry of the disciples - John 17:20-23). In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, and Ephesians 3:14-21, we have two of the many prayers Paul prayed for other Christians.

Third, we lay down our lives for one another by sharing the Word of God with one another. In Luke 24:27-48, we see some of the things Christ did to help the disciples understand the Word after His resurrection. Luke 24:45 says, “And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” In Acts 18:26, we see that Aquila and Priscilla did the same thing with Apollos, “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” Instead of rebuking him for his incomplete teaching, they privately helped him to understand the Word of God more completely.

Fourth, we lay down our lives for one another by showing one another how to minister. Notice the four reasons Christ chose the twelve, in Mark 3:13-15. “And He went up on the mountain and called to *Him* those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.” We see that Paul did the same thing in Acts 20:4, 20-21, “And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. ...²⁰‘how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.’”

A servant who leads does not focus on himself. Instead, his focus is on the people being led and their development. May the Lord richly bless you, as you continue to grow as a servant who leads by focusing on the people the Lord gives you the opportunity to lead.