

Servant-Leadership¹

What constitutes “good pastoral ministry?” What are the qualities of a servant-leader? How does Paul define the role of the pastor?

I. The Character of the Servant-leader

A. The servant-leader has consistent integrity both in his grasp of the faith and the conduct of his life.

1 Tim. 3:1-7, “Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. [2] Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, [3] not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. [4] He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. [5] (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) [6] He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. [7] He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.”

Titus 1:5-9, “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. [6] An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe² and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. [7] Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. [8] Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. [9] He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

Many of these virtues are remarkable for being unremarkable: “Should not get drunk; have a good reputation.” These qualities are elsewhere demanded of all believers. Criteria raised today such as superior intelligence, a dynamic, upbeat personality, an established administrator, an effective counselor, an outstanding chair of committees, and so forth receive no emphasis in Scripture.

B. The servant-leader’s depth of character and spiritual maturity, rather than natural ability, is Paul’s burden for Timothy.

1 Tim. 5:20-22, “Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. [21] I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. [22] Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.”

1 Tim. 6:11-12 “But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. [12] Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

2 Tim. 2:23-26, “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. [23] Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. [24] And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. [25] Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, [26] and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

Without question the servant-leader requires “people skills.” But, these skills must be the outflow of the fruit of the Spirit, not merely the result of techniques learned in popular seminars or books.

C. The servant-leader sets an example for others by the quality of his life, not by the office he holds.

1 Pet. 5:1-4, “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: [2] Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; [3] not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

The requirement to live a life worthy of following is not optional; it is a major part of the servant-leader's job.

II. The Priorities of the Servant-leader

A. Ministry of the Word

1. Teaching: a distinctive characteristic

a) Three elements:

(1) Knowledge of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15)

(2) Clear articulation of God's Word (Acts 17:2-3; 20:27)

(3) Transparent modeling of God's Word

(a) Paul frequently urged others to follow his example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-9).

(b) Paul encouraged Timothy and Titus that they were to live as examples (1 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 2:7-8).

B. Prayer

1. Regular, sustained periods of praise and intercession on behalf of those whom God calls you to serve.

2. Authentic intercession presupposes that the servant-leader has his finger on the spiritual pulse of the church and is not constantly being diverted by the “tyranny of the urgent.”

The servant-leader must count everything else in the Church as secondary or tertiary to the ministry of the Word and prayer. Sadly, in some churches administration, counseling, youth programs, etc. could all be running smoothly and the Spirit could walk out and no one would even notice. These ministries are all excellent activities in the God's kingdom, but any servant-leader who has allowed the administration of these activities to eclipse the pre-eminence of God's Word and prayer has forsaken his calling!

III. The Desire of the Servant-leader

A. The initial impetus of the servant-leader comes from within (1 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 5:2).

1. Although the qualifications Paul lists could exclude someone from pastoral ministry, one could meet all the qualifications but have no desire to serve in this way. In other words, the qualifications are only the first hurdle.

- a) Whatever we call this personal desire, it must look like a whole-hearted devotion to serve Jesus Christ and his Church through the ministry of the Word and prayer.
- b) Very few serve in large, thriving churches. The overwhelming majority serve in small, unprepossessing churches and do what no amount of money or prestige could ever reimburse them for. Examples include:
 - (1) Officiating the funeral of the town drunk.
 - (2) Consoling a single mother who just lost her child to cancer
 - (3) Presiding over a broken church of angry members who show no signs of grace and forbearance
 - (4) Looking back over the years and finding that it was his fellow brothers and sisters who gave him the greatest pain in ministry.

B. The servant-leader's desire is sustained by his commitment to:

- 1. A dependence upon Jesus to effect any lasting change (Jn. 15:5)**
- 2. A passion for the lost (Rom. 9:1-3)**
- 3. A confidence that the cross is sufficiently powerful to save and to sanctify**
- 4. A burning compulsion to grow closer to Jesus (Philippians 3:10)**
- 5. A settled conviction that God's Word *really* makes a difference in life (Is. 55:11)**

¹ The majority of this material is taken from *Letters Along the Way*, D. A. Carson, and John Woodbridge. Crossway Books: 1993.

² "The NIV translation is unfortunate. The Greek should be rendered "whose children are faithful" or, more literally, "having faithful children" *τέκνα ἔχων πιστά*. That is, children are not to be "wild and disobedient." The servant-leader must demonstrate he is capable of ordering the church by having parental control in his home. If Titus 1:6 were understood to stipulate that children be believers, one might ask, "From what age?" Moreover, children of believing parents are not guaranteed salvation, which is the work of God's sovereignty and grace alone (cf., Rom. 9:15). Finally, this corrected reading of Titus 1:6 fits well with instructions to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:4).