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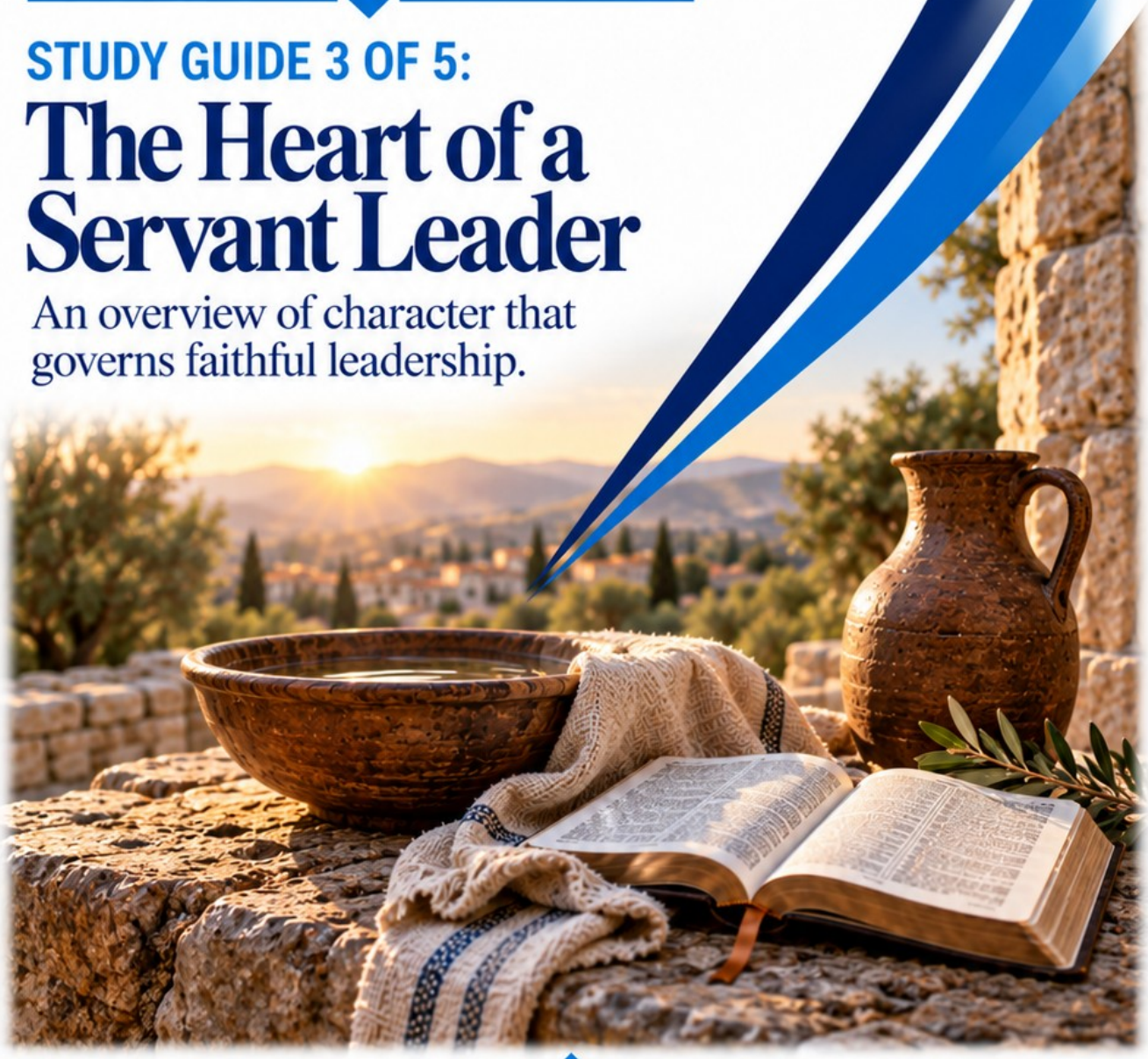
STUDY GUIDE 51

The Way *of the* Servant Leader

STUDY GUIDE 3 OF 5:

The Heart of a Servant Leader

An overview of character that governs faithful leadership.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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In the previous Study Guide, we considered how leadership in the Kingdom of God must remain rooted in service. Responsibility does not place a believer above others, nor does it remove the calling to serve. Those entrusted with leadership remain servants under the authority of Jesus Christ.

We now move from the responsibility of leadership to something even more personal: the heart from which that responsibility is carried.

A person may possess natural ability, confidence, knowledge, organisational skill or influence, but none of these can replace godly character. Scripture consistently places great importance upon the inward life of those who carry responsibility among God's people.

Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 3:2**:

> *"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;"*

Notice that Paul does not begin by describing public ability or personal charisma. He begins with character, conduct and the manner of life. This is important because leadership will eventually reveal what is governing the heart.

Responsibility can expose:

- Pride or humility;
- Selfish ambition or genuine love;
- Impatience or longsuffering;
- Dishonesty or integrity;
- Fear or courage;
- Stubbornness or teachability.

The heart matters because outward service is not enough. A person may perform the right action while being governed inwardly by the wrong motive. Servant leadership therefore requires more than learning the correct actions because the character behind those actions also matters.

Christian character, however, is not produced by attempting to copy Jesus Christ from the outside. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within must govern the heart from which we serve.

His love within produces genuine care, while His humility removes the need for self-exaltation. His wisdom directs our decisions, and His faithfulness teaches us to remain steady. His life within gives us strength to forgive, endure and continue serving when circumstances are difficult.

In this Study Guide, we will consider the qualities that must govern the heart of a servant leader: humility, meekness, love, mercy, compassion, patience, forgiveness, faithfulness, integrity, courage, obedience, wisdom and teachability.

The controlling truth is simple: The quality of leadership is determined not only by what a person does, but by the heart from which they serve.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that the heart shapes the way a leader serves?

Personal Reflection

When you carry responsibility, what motive is most likely to remain hidden from other people? Why does it need honest examination?

Action Step

Before one act of service, name the motive driving you. Reject any desire for praise or control and choose a response governed by Christ's love.

INTRODUCTION: THE HEART BEFORE THE RESPONSIBILITY

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Before God entrusts a person with greater responsibility, Scripture repeatedly directs attention towards the inward life. Ability has value, experience can be useful and knowledge is necessary, but none of these can safely replace character.

Paul made this clear when describing those who would carry oversight among God's people.

Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 3:1-2**:

> *"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;"*

Notice the order. Paul does not begin with public influence, natural confidence or organisational ability. He begins with the life of the person.

The heart matters because responsibility places pressure upon character. Greater responsibility may bring greater opportunity, but it may also expose pride, impatience, fear, selfish ambition or the desire for recognition.

For this reason, Scripture does not measure leadership simply by what a person can accomplish. God is concerned with the heart from which the service flows.

Samuel learned this principle when God sent him to anoint one of Jesse's sons.

The LORD said in **1 Samuel 16:7**:

> *"But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."*

People naturally notice what is outward. We notice confidence, intelligence, ability, communication skills and visible achievement, but God sees more deeply.

He sees motive, integrity, humility, love, obedience and faithfulness. This does not mean that ability is unimportant because Scripture recognises different gifts, responsibilities and abilities within the body. However, ability must be governed by the right heart.

A gifted person without humility can become proud, while a courageous person without love can become harsh. A knowledgeable person without teachability can become difficult to correct, and a strong leader without compassion can begin using people rather than serving them.

This is why character must come before ability. What a person can do matters, but the heart governing that ability will shape the way it is used.

The qualities we will study are not produced by human determination alone. The Christian life is not an external effort to reproduce the character of Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer.

His life within must govern the heart. His love produces care, His humility removes self-exaltation, His patience enables us to endure, His faithfulness keeps us steady, and His wisdom directs us through difficult decisions.

The central question of this Study Guide is therefore not simply, What can a servant leader do? We must also ask, What must govern the heart of the person who carries responsibility?

These questions bring us beyond ability and position to the character from which leadership operates. In the Kingdom of God, the condition of the heart will eventually shape the way responsibility is exercised.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that character matters before a person receives responsibility?

Personal Reflection

Have you judged someone's suitability to lead mainly by confidence, knowledge or personality? What else should you consider?

Action Step

Examine a present responsibility using the Bible's emphasis on humility, honesty and care. Identify one character quality you must allow to govern your conduct.

CHARACTER BEFORE ABILITY

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The world often measures leadership by visible ability. A person may be admired because they speak well, organise effectively, make quick decisions, attract attention or influence large numbers of people.

Scripture places the emphasis somewhere deeper. Before ability can be trusted, character must be examined.

Paul's instructions concerning those entrusted with oversight make this unmistakably clear.

Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 3:2-7**:

> *"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."*

Most of these qualifications are not descriptions of talent. They concern conduct, self-control, patience, relationships, responsibility, reputation, humility and freedom from greed.

Only one expression directly refers to a particular ministry ability: *"apt to teach."* The ability to teach matters, but it appears within a much larger description of the person's life.

Scripture does not allow gifting to replace character. Ability has value, but it must operate within a life governed by godly character.

Ability Can Be Impressive Without Being Safe

Natural ability can attract attention very quickly. A person may be confident, persuasive, highly organised or able to speak before large groups and lead people effectively.

Yet ability by itself does not tell us what is happening in the heart. A gifted person may still be proud, a persuasive person may manipulate others, and a knowledgeable person may refuse correction. A strong personality may intimidate weaker people, while an organised person may become controlling.

The ability itself is not necessarily wrong. The danger appears when ability is not governed by spiritual character.

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 4:23**:

> *"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."*

The heart eventually affects everything else. Our words, motives, responses under pressure and the way we treat people all reveal something about what is governing us.

For this reason, servant leadership must never be assessed simply by visible results. What a person can accomplish does not by itself establish whether that person can safely carry responsibility for others.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that visible ability does not prove that a person is safe to lead?

Personal Reflection

Are you ever impressed by results while overlooking the way people are treated? What does this reveal about your standard?

Action Step

In one decision, make honesty and care for people more important than looking successful. Explain the practical change this requires of you.

Outward Success Can Hide Inward Problems

It is possible for something to appear successful while unhealthy motives remain beneath the surface. Numbers may increase, people may praise the leader, projects may be completed and the work may become widely known.

Yet none of those things, by themselves, prove that the heart is right. Jesus repeatedly warned against outward religion that looked impressive while the inward condition was wrong.

Jesus said in **Matthew 23:27-28**:

> *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."*

Jesus' words show that outward appearance can be very different from inward reality. This principle is serious for anyone carrying responsibility.

The servant leader must not become satisfied simply because others think well of them. The greater question remains: What does God see in the heart?

Public approval cannot replace inward integrity. Visible success cannot make an unhealthy heart safe.

Character Governs the Use of Ability

Ability is not the enemy. Ability becomes useful when it is governed by the right heart.

Knowledge governed by humility becomes helpful, while courage governed by love becomes protective. Authority governed by servanthood becomes strengthening, wisdom governed by integrity becomes trustworthy, and influence governed by faithfulness can build others rather than build self.

The problem is therefore not that a person has ability. The question is what governs that ability.

Paul warned against pride when speaking about someone newly entrusted with responsibility. He wrote in **1 Timothy 3:6**:

> *"Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil."*

Pride can corrupt responsibility very quickly. A person may begin by serving others and later become impressed with their own importance. They may begin teaching truth and later become more concerned with protecting their reputation, or begin carrying responsibility faithfully and later become unwilling to receive correction.

Character must therefore remain central even after responsibility has been given. Greater responsibility does not reduce the need for humility, integrity and teachability because it makes those qualities even more important.

The Heart Will Eventually Be Seen

A person's heart may not be immediately obvious, but time and circumstances often reveal what is governing it. Pressure, correction, disappointment, success and failure can all expose attitudes that were not previously visible.

The way a person responds when they are not recognised can reveal whether they were serving Christ or seeking approval. Their response when challenged can reveal whether they are teachable, while the way they treat weaker people can reveal whether love truly governs them.

Greater responsibility can also reveal the heart. A person who appeared humble while carrying little responsibility may respond differently when given influence, authority or recognition.

Character is not proven by one public moment. It is revealed through consistent life. This is why proven faithfulness matters before greater responsibility is entrusted.

Character Flows From Christ Within

This must never become a lesson in human self-improvement. The Christian life is not an attempt to manufacture a respectable personality or externally imitate Jesus Christ.

The born-again believer possesses Jesus Christ within. His life within is the source from which true spiritual character flows.

As we yield to His Word, His life within governs our attitudes, motives and responses. Love is not simply a leadership technique, humility is not an image we create, patience is not a public performance, and integrity is not reputation management.

These qualities must arise from a heart governed by Jesus Christ. The servant leader therefore does not first ask only, What abilities do I possess? The deeper question is, Is my heart governed by the life of Jesus Christ within me?

Ability can make a person visible, but character determines whether that ability can be trusted in the service of God's people.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that Christ within forms the character that should govern ability?

Personal Reflection

Which natural ability could become harmful if pride or impatience governed it? How can Christ's life within direct its use?

Action Step

Choose an ability you regularly use. Before using it again, consider whom it serves and deliberately respond with humility and dependence upon Christ.

HUMILITY AND MEEKNESS

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Humility and meekness are essential qualities in anyone entrusted with responsibility among God's people. A person may possess knowledge, confidence and natural leadership ability, but without humility those strengths can easily become centred upon self.

Scripture repeatedly warns against pride because pride changes the way responsibility is carried. It causes a person to think too highly of themselves, resist correction, seek recognition and become less sensitive to the needs of others.

James wrote in **James 4:6**:

> *"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."*

These words are serious. God resists the proud. Pride is not simply an unattractive personality trait because it places the person in opposition to the character God desires in His servants.

Humility creates a very different heart. It removes self from the controlling place and allows responsibility to be exercised for the good of others.

Humility Does Not Make Self the Centre

Paul described humility when writing to the Philippians.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:3-4**:

> *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."*

Humility moves attention away from self. The humble servant does not continually ask whether they are being recognised, receiving enough respect, protecting their position or receiving the credit they believe they deserve.

Instead, humility asks:

- What do others need?
- How can I strengthen them?
- How can I serve faithfully?
- What responsibility has God placed before me?

- How can Jesus Christ be honoured?

This does not mean that a humble person believes they have no value or pretends to be useless. Humility recognises that whatever ability, responsibility or opportunity we possess must remain under the authority of Jesus Christ and be used for the good of others.

Meekness Is Not Weakness

Humility and meekness are closely connected, but meekness must never be confused with weakness. Moses carried enormous responsibility, yet Scripture described him in a remarkable way.

Moses wrote in **Numbers 12:3**:

> *"(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)"*

Moses was meek, but he was not weak. He confronted Pharaoh, led Israel, judged difficult matters, corrected rebellion, interceded for the people and carried responsibilities that required courage and firmness.

His meekness did not remove strength. It governed the way strength was used.

This distinction is important for servant leadership. A meek leader may still need to correct error, make difficult decisions, protect people, confront wrongdoing, stand firmly upon Scripture and refuse compromise.

Meekness does not mean avoiding responsibility. A meek leader may still act with courage and firmness while remaining humble, restrained and under the authority of God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that meekness uses strength under God's authority?

Personal Reflection

Do you confuse meekness with avoiding difficult conversations, or firmness with harshness? Explain your usual response.

Action Step

Identify a concern that should be addressed. Prepare to speak truthfully and calmly, refusing both avoidance and an angry response.

Humility Listens

One clear evidence of humility is the willingness to listen. Pride assumes that it already knows, while humility remains teachable.

A proud leader may hear correction as a threat. A humble leader is willing to examine what has been said and test it against the Word of God.

This does not mean accepting every criticism as correct. Some criticism may be unfair, some counsel may be unwise and some opinions may contradict Scripture. Humility does not require surrendering truth to satisfy other people.

It means being willing to ask, Could I be wrong? A servant leader who can no longer ask that question has become spiritually vulnerable.

The Word of God remains the plumb line, not the leader's reputation or personal opinion. Humility keeps the servant willing to listen while Scripture remains the final authority.

Humility Does Not Seek Elevation

Jesus repeatedly warned against the desire for personal elevation.

Jesus said in **Matthew 23:11-12**:

> *"But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."*

Jesus places greatness and servanthood together. The servant does not need to manufacture importance, seek a religious title for elevation, compete with others or protect a position as though personal worth depends upon it.

Their responsibility is to serve faithfully. This gives the servant leader freedom to rejoice when another person succeeds, encourage someone else to carry responsibility and acknowledge when another person understands something better.

They can also admit a mistake and step aside when appropriate without feeling that their identity has been destroyed. Humility is not threatened by the growth of others.

Pride Can Enter Through Success

Humility must remain even when responsibility increases. It is sometimes easier to appear humble when nobody notices us, but success can test the heart in another way.

When people begin to listen, praise, recognise or depend upon a leader, pride can quietly enter. The leader may begin to think that the work depends upon them, that the people need them in a unique way or that their position gives them special importance.

They may also begin to believe that their understanding is greater than that of others and that they should no longer be questioned. What began as service can gradually become centred upon self.

This is why leadership must remain under the authority of Jesus Christ. The people do not belong to the leader, the work does not belong to the leader, and the truth does not originate from the leader.

Jesus Christ remains the Head. Remembering this protects responsibility from becoming a source of personal elevation.

Humility Flows From Christ Within

True humility cannot be maintained simply by outward behaviour. A person may speak softly and still be proud, or deliberately avoid recognition while inwardly hoping that someone notices their humility.

External appearance cannot produce the heart God desires. The answer is not to copy the humility of Jesus Christ from the outside because Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer.

His servant life within must govern the heart. As we yield to His Word, pride is challenged, self-exaltation loses its attraction, the need for recognition becomes less important and the needs of others become more visible.

Humility therefore becomes more than behaviour. It becomes the inward attitude from which service flows.

A servant leader does not seek to appear humble. They seek to remain surrendered to Jesus Christ so that His life within governs the way responsibility is carried.

Humility keeps self from the centre. Meekness keeps strength under control. Together they help the servant leader carry responsibility without allowing responsibility to become self-exaltation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that humility and meekness protect responsibility from self-exaltation?

Personal Reflection

How do you react when a less-experienced person corrects you or receives praise? What does that reveal about humility?

Action Step

Listen carefully to someone whose view differs from yours. Test what they say fairly and acknowledge any correction that the Bible supports.

LOVE, MERCY AND COMPASSION

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Humility keeps self from becoming the centre, but servant leadership must also be governed by genuine love for people. A person may be faithful, organised, knowledgeable and courageous, yet still become harsh or uncaring if love does not govern the way those qualities are exercised.

Paul made the importance of love unmistakably clear.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 13:1-3**:

> *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."*

These words reach directly into the heart of servant leadership. A person may possess remarkable gifts, understand great truths, demonstrate strong faith and even make costly sacrifices. Yet Paul says that without charity, *"I am nothing."*

Love is therefore not an optional addition to leadership. Love must govern the heart from which leadership operates.

Love Changes the Way We See People

A leader can begin to see people mainly in terms of responsibilities, problems or results. One person becomes someone who needs correction, another becomes someone who failed to complete a task, while someone else becomes difficult to work with or an obstacle to progress.

Love causes us to remember that we are dealing with people rather than problems. Every person has weaknesses, and every person may carry burdens that are not immediately visible. People need truth, but that truth must be spoken with genuine concern for their spiritual good.

The servant leader therefore asks more than, What must be corrected? They also ask, How can I help this person?

Correction without love can humiliate, authority without love can become controlling, and truth without love can be used as a weapon rather than as something intended to strengthen and restore. Love does not remove truth because love governs the way truth is carried.

Mercy and Kindness Belong to the Servant Heart

Paul described the inward qualities that should mark God's people.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 3:12-13**:

> *"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."*

Notice the qualities Paul places together: mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance and forgiveness. These qualities belong together because they describe the way a heart governed by Jesus Christ responds to other people.

Mercy does not look for every opportunity to condemn, and kindness does not treat weakness with contempt. Compassion does not ignore suffering simply because attending to it may be inconvenient.

A servant leader must therefore be able to see beyond the task and recognise the person. Responsibility is carried faithfully when people remain important.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that love and mercy keep people more important than tasks?

Personal Reflection

When tasks are pressing, do you treat another person's need as an interruption rather than as a person to care for?

Action Step

In one busy situation, listen carefully to the person involved. Adjust your response so that genuine concern, not simply finishing the task, governs you.

Compassion Moves Towards Need

Compassion is more than feeling sorry for someone because compassion moves towards need. Jesus demonstrated this repeatedly during His earthly ministry.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 9:36**:

> *"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd."*

Jesus saw the condition of the people. He did not simply see a crowd because He saw people who were weary and scattered.

This is important for anyone who carries responsibility. A servant leader must not become so focused upon programmes, organisation and duties that people themselves become secondary.

Plans, order, teaching and responsibility all matter, but people matter. Leadership exists for the good of people, not people for the advancement of leadership.

Barnabas: A Man Who Strengthened Others

Barnabas provides a clear example of a servant whose character strengthened other believers.

Luke wrote in **Acts 11:22-24**:

> *"Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord."*

Barnabas was known for encouragement. When he saw the grace of God working among the believers, *"he was glad."* That response reveals something important about his heart because he could rejoice in what God was doing in others.

A person governed by insecurity may feel threatened when others grow, while someone seeking recognition may struggle when another person receives attention. Barnabas responded differently because he encouraged the believers to continue with the Lord.

His ministry strengthened people rather than drawing attention towards himself. Luke describes him simply as *"a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith."*

His influence flowed from the inward life. What was within him shaped the way he responded to what God was doing in others.

Love Is Not Softness Towards Error

Compassion must never be confused with compromise. A servant leader may genuinely love someone and still need to correct them.

Mercy does not make false teaching true, kindness does not require agreement with sinful behaviour, and love does not mean avoiding difficult conversations.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:15**:

> *"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:"*

Both elements matter. Truth without love can become harsh, while love without truth can become compromise.

Biblical servant leadership refuses both extremes. Truth must be spoken, but it must be carried with genuine concern for the person receiving it.

The purpose is to help people grow *"into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."* Correction therefore serves the same purpose as every other part of servant leadership: helping people become more firmly established in Jesus Christ.

Love Flows From Christ Within

Christian love is not simply a leadership technique. We cannot manufacture genuine compassion by learning the correct outward behaviour.

Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His love within must govern the way we see and respond to people. His life within produces mercy rather than hardness, while His kindness changes the tone with which truth is spoken.

His compassion moves us towards people who are hurting, weak or overlooked, and His love enables us to serve when nothing is returned to us.

Jesus said in **John 13:34**:

> *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."*

The servant leader therefore does not ask only, What must I accomplish? They must also ask, How is the life and love of Jesus Christ within me being expressed towards the people He has entrusted to my care?

Love gives servant leadership its motive. Mercy softens the heart towards weakness. Compassion moves us towards need. Together they keep responsibility centred upon people rather than upon self.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that compassion can address wrong without losing care for the person?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever used a correct statement in a way that wounded someone unnecessarily? What was missing in your manner?

Action Step

Think of one conversation requiring truth and compassion. Choose words and a manner that address the concern without humiliating the person.

PATIENCE, FORBEARANCE AND FORGIVENESS

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Servant leadership will eventually bring us into difficult relationships. People may misunderstand or disappoint us, while others may respond slowly, resist correction, repeat mistakes or carry weaknesses that require patience.

For this reason, a servant leader must possess more than knowledge and ability. The heart must be able to endure with people.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:2**:

> *"With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;"*

These qualities belong together. Humility keeps self from demanding its own way, meekness keeps strength under control, longsuffering enables us to endure, and forbearance teaches us to remain steady with people whose weaknesses may test us.

Servant leadership must be patient because people are not projects to be completed quickly.

Patience Is Necessary When People Grow Slowly

Growth does not always happen at the speed we would like. A person may understand one truth quickly and struggle with another, while someone else may need repeated instruction or require time before correction is fully understood.

A servant leader who becomes impatient can begin treating people as burdens. That attitude is dangerous because the responsibility of leadership is not simply to communicate information, but to help people become established in truth.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 4:2**:

> *"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."*

Notice that correction and instruction are joined with *"all longsuffering."* Truth must be taught clearly and error must be corrected, but the servant leader must also understand that spiritual growth often requires patience.

Patience does not weaken the truth being taught. It governs the way we continue working with people while they learn and grow.

Forbearance Does Not Mean Ignoring Wrong

Forbearance must not be confused with pretending that everything is acceptable. Paul did not teach believers to ignore sin, false teaching or harmful behaviour.

Forbearance means that we do not become harsh, bitter or impatient simply because another person still has weaknesses.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 3:12-13**:

> *"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."*

These verses do not remove truth because it governs the heart from which truth is applied. A servant leader may need to address wrong conduct while still showing mercy, correct someone while refusing resentment or establish necessary boundaries without developing hatred.

Forbearance keeps correction from becoming personal hostility. The wrong may still need to be addressed, but the person must not become the object of bitterness.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that forbearance corrects wrong without turning to bitterness?

Personal Reflection

When someone disappoints you repeatedly, do you become bitter, avoid the issue or respond with patient truth? Explain.

Action Step

Consider one unresolved concern. Choose a fair, calm way to address it without resentment, while retaining any necessary boundaries.

Offence Can Reveal the Heart

It is often easy to appear patient when nothing is testing us. Pressure reveals whether patience is genuine.

We should therefore consider how we respond when someone:

- Disagrees with us;
- Questions a decision;
- Fails to appreciate our service;
- Speaks unfairly about us;
- Disappoints us repeatedly;
- Receives credit for something we helped accomplish.

These situations can reveal what is governing the heart. A servant leader must be particularly careful because responsibility can create the temptation to treat disagreement as rebellion against ourselves.

Not every disagreement is rebellion, not every question is disrespect and not every failure is deliberate disobedience. Humility and patience help us judge situations more carefully rather than reacting from personal offence.

Leadership must remain centred upon the good of the person and the truth of God's Word, not upon protecting the leader's feelings or position.

Forgiveness Protects the Heart

When hurt is not dealt with properly, bitterness can begin to govern leadership. A leader may continue serving outwardly while inwardly becoming suspicious, angry or resentful.

That bitterness can then affect decisions. Correction can become harsher, trust can become more difficult and old offences can begin shaping present responses.

Scripture does not allow us to carry bitterness as though it were harmless.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:31-32**:

> *"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."*

Forgiveness does not mean pretending that wrong never happened. Neither does it mean that trust is always restored immediately or that harmful behaviour should be ignored.

Forgiveness means that bitterness is not allowed to become the governing force of the heart. The servant leader refuses to allow yesterday's offence to control today's response.

Stephen: Forgiving Under Extreme Pressure

Stephen provides one of Scripture's strongest examples of forgiveness under suffering. As he was being stoned, he did not respond with hatred.

Luke recorded in **Acts 7:60**:

> *"And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."*

Stephen's response is remarkable because the wrong being done to him was severe. He was not forgiving a minor inconvenience because he was being killed.

Yet bitterness did not govern his final words. His response shows that forgiveness is not dependent upon receiving an apology first because it flows from a heart that refuses to allow hatred to take control.

Stephen's circumstances were extreme, but the principle applies wherever believers face offence. The wrong may be real, but bitterness must not be allowed to become the answer.

Patience Must Not Become Passivity

A servant leader must maintain an important balance. Patience does not mean refusing to act, forbearance does not mean accepting destructive behaviour indefinitely, and forgiveness does not remove responsibility or accountability.

There may be times when correction must be given, false teaching must be confronted or harmful behaviour must be stopped. Responsibilities may need to be changed, and trust may need to be rebuilt slowly.

The heart, however, must remain free from revenge, bitterness and personal hostility. We can be firm without becoming bitter.

This balance is important in servant leadership. Love and patience do not remove responsibility because they govern the spirit in which responsibility is exercised.

These Qualities Flow From Christ Within

Patience, forbearance and forgiveness cannot be sustained through personality alone. Some people are naturally calmer than others, but biblical longsuffering goes deeper than temperament.

Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer. His life within gives us strength to remain steady when people are difficult, while His mercy prevents correction from becoming cruelty.

His forgiveness within keeps bitterness from taking control, and His love enables us to continue serving when relationships become costly.

The servant leader therefore does not simply ask, How much more can I tolerate? The deeper question is, Is the life of Jesus Christ within me governing the way I respond to people when I am tested?

Patience keeps service steady, forbearance helps us remain with people through weakness, and forgiveness protects the heart from bitterness. A servant leader must be able to carry responsibility without allowing the failures, offences or weaknesses of others to destroy the servant heart within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that patience and forgiveness keep service steady when people fail?

Personal Reflection

Whose slow progress has tested your patience? How might you help without excusing wrong or becoming harsh?

Action Step

Encourage or assist a person who is still learning. Respond to a difficulty with patience and truth rather than impatience or personal offence.

FAITHFULNESS AND INTEGRITY

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Faithfulness and integrity are essential qualities in anyone entrusted with responsibility among God's people. A servant leader may possess knowledge, ability and courage, but if they cannot be trusted, those strengths become difficult to rely upon. Leadership requires consistency because people must be able to depend upon the person carrying responsibility.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 4:1-2**:

> *"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."*

Paul describes himself and other ministers as *"stewards."* A steward does not own what has been entrusted to them because they are responsible for caring faithfully for something that belongs to another.

This is an important picture of servant leadership. The truth belongs to God, the Church belongs to Jesus Christ, and the responsibility has been entrusted to the servant. Therefore, *"it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."*

Faithfulness Is Proved Over Time

Faithfulness is not demonstrated by one impressive moment because it is revealed through consistency.

Jesus taught this principle when speaking about small responsibilities.

Jesus said in **Luke 16:10**:

> *"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."*

What we do with small responsibilities matters. A person may desire greater opportunities while neglecting what is already in their hands, yet Scripture directs our attention towards faithfulness in what may appear small or unnoticed.

Faithfulness includes keeping commitments, completing responsibilities, being dependable and speaking truthfully. It also means caring for what has been entrusted, remaining steady when recognition is absent and continuing to serve when the work becomes difficult.

The servant leader does not become faithful only when responsibility becomes important. Faithfulness should already be present before greater responsibility arrives.

Integrity Means Wholeness of Character

Faithfulness concerns dependability, while integrity concerns consistency between what we profess and how we actually live.

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 11:3**:

> *"The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them."*

Integrity means that our public teaching and private conduct do not belong to two different lives. A servant leader should not teach honesty while practising deception, or teach humility while secretly pursuing recognition.

Neither should they speak about faithfulness while repeatedly neglecting their own responsibilities or demand accountability from others while refusing accountability themselves. Integrity means that the truth we teach is also allowed to govern us.

This does not mean that a servant leader never makes mistakes. Scripture does not require an artificial appearance of perfection. When failure occurs, integrity is willing to acknowledge it.

Integrity does not hide wrong simply to protect reputation, manipulate facts or unnecessarily shift blame. It is willing to receive correction and put matters right.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that integrity receives correction and puts wrong right?

Personal Reflection

When you make a mistake, are you tempted to defend your reputation or acknowledge what happened? Give an example.

Action Step

Identify a mistake or neglected responsibility that needs attention. Admit it honestly, put right what you reasonably can and accept appropriate correction.

Character Is Tested When Doing Right Costs Something

Integrity is easiest to speak about when there is no cost attached. The real test often comes when honesty is inconvenient.

We should therefore ask whether we will still tell the truth when it may embarrass us, admit a mistake when doing so may affect how others see us, or keep a commitment when fulfilling it becomes difficult. Will we remain faithful when nobody appears to notice, and will we do what is right when doing what is wrong would be easier?

These situations reveal whether integrity is deeply rooted or simply part of a public image. A servant leader must never allow reputation to become more important than truth.

It is better to acknowledge a failure honestly than to protect an appearance dishonestly. Integrity values truth above the preservation of personal image.

Joseph: Integrity Under Pressure

Joseph provides a powerful biblical example of faithfulness and integrity. He served faithfully in Potiphar's house, yet he was falsely accused and imprisoned. His circumstances became deeply unjust, but the injustice did not cause him to abandon faithful conduct.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 39:21-23**:

> *"But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper."*

Joseph had every human reason to become bitter. He had been betrayed by his brothers, sold as a slave, falsely accused and imprisoned, yet he continued to carry responsibility faithfully.

His circumstances changed, but his integrity remained. This teaches an important principle for servant leadership: Our faithfulness must not depend entirely upon whether other people treat us fairly.

Unfair circumstances may test character, but they do not remove the responsibility to remain faithful. Joseph continued to care for what was placed within his hands even when his circumstances were not what he would have chosen.

Integrity Protects Trust

Leadership involves trust. People may entrust a servant leader with personal information, spiritual concerns, responsibilities, resources, decisions and opportunities to influence others.

That trust must be treated seriously. A leader who repeatedly breaks confidence, changes the truth to protect themselves or uses private information carelessly damages the very trust necessary for service.

This is why integrity is not simply a private virtue because it affects other people. Trust takes time to build and can be damaged quickly.

A servant leader should therefore ask:

- Can people rely upon my word?
- Do I fulfil what I say I will do?
- Am I honest when mistakes occur?
- Do I handle confidential matters carefully?
- Is my private conduct consistent with what I teach publicly?

These questions help expose areas where character may need attention. Responsibility must be carried in a way that protects rather than abuses the trust others have placed in us.

Faithfulness Continues When Service Is Unseen

Much Christian service happens without public recognition. Some responsibilities are noticed immediately, while others may be carried faithfully for years with very little acknowledgement.

The servant leader must not allow recognition to determine faithfulness. Paul did not say that a steward must be found impressive because he said, *"it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."*

Faithfulness before God matters even when people do not see what has been done. This protects the heart from serving simply for praise and keeps the servant focused upon the responsibility itself.

A faithful servant continues because the responsibility has been entrusted, not because the work is visible. Recognition may come or it may not, but faithfulness remains.

Faithfulness Flows From Christ Within

Faithfulness and integrity are not produced by creating a respectable outward image. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within must govern both public and private conduct.

His truth within calls us to honesty, while His faithfulness keeps us steady. His life within challenges divided motives and hidden compromise so that the servant does not simply appear trustworthy before others.

The servant leader yields to Jesus Christ so that truth governs the whole life. What is taught publicly and what is lived privately must come under the same authority.

Faithfulness makes a servant dependable. Integrity makes that faithfulness genuine. Together they enable responsibility to be carried with a heart that can be trusted before God and before His people.

COURAGE AND OBEDIENCE

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Servant leadership requires courage, but biblical courage must always remain joined to obedience. A leader may face opposition, criticism, difficult decisions or pressure to compromise. In those moments, courage is necessary, but courage by itself is not enough because a person can be bold and still be wrong.

For this reason, courage must remain under the authority of God's Word. Biblical courage is the strength to obey God faithfully when obedience becomes difficult.

Courage Is Not Confidence in Self

The world often associates courage with a strong personality, natural confidence or the ability to dominate a difficult situation. Scripture presents something different.

When Joshua was preparing to carry enormous responsibility, God did not direct him towards confidence in himself.

The LORD said in **Joshua 1:9**:

> *"Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."*

Joshua's courage rested upon God. He was not told to believe in himself because the foundation of his courage was *"the LORD thy God is with thee."*

That distinction is important. A servant leader does not need to pretend that every situation is easy because there may be genuine pressure, opposition, uncertainty or personal cost.

Courage does not mean that difficulty disappears. It means that difficulty does not move us away from obedience.

Courage Is Needed to Stand With Truth

There are times when doing what is right will not be popular. A servant leader may need to correct error, refuse compromise, make an unpopular decision or speak truth when silence would be easier. They may also need to protect people from harmful teaching or remain faithful when others disagree.

These situations require courage. However, the servant leader must be careful that personal stubbornness is not mistaken for spiritual courage.

A person can strongly defend an opinion simply because they dislike being challenged. That is not courage because the Word of God must remain the plumb line.

The important question is not, Am I strong enough to defend my position? The important question is, Does my position stand upon the Word of God?

If Scripture shows that we are wrong, courage should not make us harder to correct. True courage includes the willingness to change when God's Word corrects us.

Obedience Begins With Jesus Christ

The servant belongs first to the Master.

Jesus said in **John 14:15**:

> *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."*

Jesus connects love with obedience. Obedience is therefore not simply following rules because we fear punishment. It flows from our relationship with Jesus Christ.

The servant leader cannot claim to love Christ while deliberately refusing His Word. Neither can leadership responsibility place a person above obedience.

The greater the responsibility, the greater the need to remain subject to Jesus Christ. A leader may give direction to others, but they themselves remain under authority.

No Christian leader becomes independent of the Master. Leadership must remain submitted to Jesus Christ and His Word.

Obedience Must Come Before Personal Preference

Leadership often requires choices. Some choices may be simple, while others may place personal preference against what Scripture requires.

The servant leader must learn to recognise that difference. We may have strong opinions about how something should be organised, how quickly something should happen, what method should be used, who should carry a responsibility or how a problem should be handled.

Personal judgement has a legitimate place in many practical matters, but personal preference must never be elevated to the authority of Scripture. Where God's Word speaks clearly, the servant must obey.

Where Scripture leaves room for judgement, the leader must not present personal preference as though God had commanded it. This is part of integrity before the Word.

A servant leader must know the difference between what Scripture requires and what the leader prefers. Confusing the two can place unnecessary burdens upon the people being served.

Courage Without Obedience Can Become Self-Will

A determined personality may appear courageous, but determination is not automatically spiritual. Someone may continue along a particular path because they refuse to admit they were wrong.

A person may resist counsel because they believe changing direction would appear weak, or defend an established practice simply because it has always been done that way. None of these things prove courage.

Courage that refuses the Word of God becomes self-will. The servant leader must therefore remain both courageous and teachable.

Courage says, I will stand where the Word of God stands. Teachability says, If the Word shows me that I am wrong, I will move.

Both are necessary. Courage without teachability can become stubbornness, while teachability without courage can become an unwillingness to stand when truth is challenged.

Obedience May Require Courage

There will also be times when obedience itself becomes costly. Doing what Scripture teaches may bring misunderstanding, while standing against religious tradition may bring criticism.

Refusing to soften a clear biblical truth may make others uncomfortable. Following the Word may also require us to change a long-established practice or acknowledge that something we previously believed was wrong.

In such situations, obedience requires courage. This is especially important for servant leaders because other people may be affected by the decision.

Fear of people's reaction must never become greater than faithfulness to Jesus Christ. At the same time, courage must never become harshness because truth should still be spoken with humility and love.

The purpose is not to prove that we are strong. The purpose is to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and His Word even when faithfulness carries a cost.

Courage and Obedience Flow From Christ Within

Christian courage is not manufactured by trying to make ourselves fearless, and Christian obedience is not produced by external religious pressure. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within must govern both.

His life within gives strength when obedience becomes costly, while His truth keeps courage from becoming stubbornness. His humility enables us to admit when correction is needed, and His love keeps firmness from becoming harshness.

The servant leader therefore does not seek courage simply to become stronger because the purpose is to remain faithful. Neither does the servant obey simply because others expect compliance because the servant belongs to Jesus Christ.

Courage gives us strength to stand when truth is opposed. Obedience keeps that courage submitted to Jesus Christ and His Word. Together they enable the servant leader to remain firm without becoming self-willed, and obedient without becoming controlled by human opinion.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that courage must remain joined to obedience to Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you mistaken stubborn defence of your opinion for courage? How can you tell the difference?

Action Step

Examine one strongly held view or decision by God's Word. Stand by what the Bible establishes, but change what it shows to be wrong.

WISDOM AND TEACHABILITY

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Servant leadership requires wisdom because responsibility often involves decisions that affect other people. Knowledge is valuable, but knowledge alone does not guarantee wise judgement. A person may know many facts and still make poor decisions if they lack discernment, humility or the willingness to listen.

James wrote in **James 1:5**:

> *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."*

This verse establishes an important principle: True wisdom comes from God. A servant leader must never become so confident in personal experience that they stop seeking God's direction.

Wisdom Is More Than Knowledge

Knowledge tells us what is true, while wisdom helps us understand how that truth should be applied. Leadership often involves situations where the answer is not simply a matter of quoting one verse.

A servant leader may need to decide:

- When to speak and when to remain silent;
- When to correct and when to wait;
- When to act quickly and when to be patient;
- How to respond to disagreement;
- How much responsibility another person is ready to carry;
- How to protect truth without becoming harsh;
- How to care for people without compromising what is right.

These situations require more than information because they require discernment. Wisdom considers the Word of God, the circumstances, the needs of the people involved and the consequences of a decision.

Biblical wisdom applies truth faithfully and carefully. It does not change the truth, but helps us understand how to act according to that truth in the circumstances before us.

Wisdom Remains Under the Word of God

A servant leader must never confuse personal judgement with divine authority. Experience can be helpful, past lessons can be valuable and counsel can be useful, but none of these can replace Scripture.

The Word of God remains the plumb line. Where Scripture speaks clearly, wisdom does not search for a way around it. Where Scripture does not give a direct command, wisdom helps us make careful decisions without pretending that our preference carries the same authority as God's Word.

This distinction is very important. A servant leader must be able to say, This is what Scripture teaches. They must also be able to say, This is my judgement about how we should apply it in this situation.

Confusing those two things can lead to controlling leadership. Personal judgement should never be presented as though it carries the same authority as the Word of God.

Wise Leaders Listen

Wisdom is closely connected with teachability. A person who refuses to listen will eventually limit their own understanding.

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 12:15**:

> *"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise."*

The contrast is clear. The fool assumes that personal judgement is automatically right, while the wise person listens.

This does not mean accepting every opinion because counsel must still be tested. People can give poor advice, and some advice may contradict Scripture.

However, a servant leader should not reject counsel simply because it challenges their own thinking. Listening carefully is not weakness. It is part of wisdom.

The willingness to listen does not remove responsibility from the leader. It helps the leader carry that responsibility with greater understanding.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that wise leaders listen while remaining governed by God's Word?

Personal Reflection

When facing a difficult decision, do you genuinely consider other people's counsel, or have you already decided to reject it?

Action Step

Before one decision, ask an appropriate person for their view. Listen carefully and weigh their counsel by the Bible rather than pride.

Teachability Continues Throughout Life

A servant leader must remain a learner.

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 9:9**:

> *"Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning."*

Notice that the wise person can still become wiser, and the just person can still increase in learning. Responsibility does not remove the need for growth.

Years of service do not place a person beyond correction. Knowledge of Scripture does not make someone incapable of misunderstanding Scripture, and experience does not make every decision automatically right.

A servant leader who stops learning becomes vulnerable to pride. Greater responsibility should therefore deepen rather than remove the willingness to learn.

Correction Reveals the Heart

One of the clearest tests of teachability is the way we respond to correction. Correction can be uncomfortable because it may expose something we had not noticed, reveal that a decision was wrong or show that our understanding was incomplete.

Pride quickly becomes defensive. It may ask who has the right to correct us, whether they understand how much experience we possess or what others will think if we admit that we were wrong.

Teachability asks a different question: Is what has been said true?

That is the question that matters. The servant leader should be willing to examine correction honestly against Scripture.

If the correction is wrong, it can be rejected without anger. If the correction is right, it should be received regardless of who brought it.

Truth does not become less true because it comes from someone with less responsibility. Humility allows the servant leader to receive truth without first asking whether the person speaking holds an important position.

Teachability Does Not Mean Instability

A teachable person is not someone who changes direction every time another opinion is expressed. That would not be wisdom because servant leaders must still be able to stand firmly upon truth.

Teachability means being willing to listen, examine and test.

Paul wrote in **1 Thessalonians 5:21**:

> *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."*

Both parts matter. We must *"prove all things"* by examining carefully, listening, testing and comparing with Scripture. Having done that, we must *"hold fast that which is good."*

Teachability does not produce uncertainty about everything. It produces a willingness to let truth correct us while remaining firmly established in what Scripture has shown to be right.

A servant leader must therefore avoid both stubbornness and instability. Wisdom listens carefully, tests faithfully and then stands upon truth.

Wisdom Seeks Peace Without Compromising Truth

James gives us an important description of wisdom.

James wrote in **James 3:17**:

> *"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."*

Notice that wisdom is first *"pure."* Truth is not sacrificed for peace. However, wisdom is also described as peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

This is a powerful description of the heart needed in servant leadership. Wisdom is not harsh, stubborn or proud, and it does not use knowledge to dominate others.

Biblical wisdom holds truth and the manner in which truth is applied together. It remains pure while also being peaceable and gentle.

Wisdom and Teachability Flow From Christ Within

The servant leader does not become wise simply through age or experience. Neither does teachability come from pretending that we know nothing.

Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within must govern the way we learn, decide and respond. His wisdom keeps us dependent upon truth rather than self-confidence, while His humility enables us to receive correction.

His patience helps us listen before reacting, and His life within keeps knowledge from becoming pride. The servant leader therefore continues to ask:

- What does the Word of God say?
- What can I learn?
- Have I listened carefully?
- Am I willing to be corrected?
- Am I applying truth wisely?

Wisdom enables the servant leader to make sound decisions, while teachability keeps that wisdom growing. A servant leader must be strong enough to stand upon truth and humble enough to be corrected when they have misunderstood it.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that teachability and wisdom belong together?

Personal Reflection

Which correction have you found difficult to receive because it came from someone you did not expect? What matters most?

Action Step

Return to one piece of correction you have received. Test it fairly against God's Word and act on any part that is right.

THE HEART REVEALED UNDER PRESSURE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Character is often easiest to speak about when circumstances are calm. Pressure reveals whether the qualities we have considered are truly governing the heart.

Responsibility will eventually bring difficult moments. There may be misunderstanding, opposition, disappointment, criticism, failure or circumstances that cannot be controlled. In those moments, what is within begins to show.

James wrote in **James 1:2-4**:

> *"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."*

Testing does not always create character instantly. Often it reveals what is already governing us and provides opportunity for spiritual maturity to develop.

Pressure Reveals What Governs the Heart

A person may appear humble while everything is going well, but correction can reveal whether that humility is genuine. A person may appear patient until someone repeatedly disappoints them, or loving until they are treated unfairly.

Faithfulness is tested when obedience becomes costly, while courage is tested when standing for truth brings opposition. These moments reveal what is governing the heart.

This is why servant leadership cannot be measured only during successful or comfortable seasons. Character must remain steady when circumstances become difficult.

The test is not simply how a person serves when the work is appreciated and circumstances are favourable. The deeper test is what continues to govern them when responsibility becomes costly.

Joseph: Integrity Under Injustice

Joseph's character was tested severely. He was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused and imprisoned, yet he continued to carry responsibility faithfully.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 39:21**:

> *"But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison."*

Joseph's circumstances changed dramatically, but his integrity did not disappear. Injustice did not become an excuse for unfaithfulness.

His life shows that servant character is not dependent upon being treated fairly. The actions of other people may create difficult circumstances, but they do not remove our responsibility to remain faithful before God.

Moses: Meekness Under Responsibility

Moses carried the burdens of an entire nation. He faced complaining, rebellion and repeated disappointment, yet Scripture describes him as *"very meek."*

Pressure did not remove the need for humility. The weight of responsibility did not give Moses permission to make self the centre.

A servant leader may face difficult people and still remain meek. Firm decisions may be necessary, correction may need to be given and responsibility may require decisive action, but personal frustration must not become the controlling force.

Meekness is especially important under pressure because difficult circumstances can tempt a leader to use strength according to personal irritation rather than for the good of those being served.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that pressure reveals whether the heart is governed by Christ?

Personal Reflection

What has a recent stressful situation revealed about your patience, humility or desire for control? Be specific.

Action Step

Choose one recurring pressure point. Before responding, examine your attitude and deliberately give room for Christ's patience and wisdom to govern you.

Barnabas: Encouragement Rather Than Competition

Barnabas provides another kind of test. His strength was not domination but encouragement because he rejoiced when others were growing and helped strengthen believers.

This raises important questions for the servant heart. Can we rejoice when someone else succeeds? Can we encourage another person when their ability begins to receive attention, and can we help someone grow without feeling threatened by their progress?

A servant heart does not compete for importance. It rejoices when others become stronger in Jesus Christ.

The growth of another believer should not be treated as a threat to our own place. Servant leadership desires to see others strengthened because the purpose is the good of the body rather than the elevation of the leader.

Stephen: Forgiveness in Suffering

Stephen faced one of the most extreme tests recorded in Scripture. Even while being stoned, bitterness did not govern his response.

Luke recorded in **Acts 7:60**:

> *"And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."*

Stephen was facing severe injustice and suffering, yet hatred did not govern his final words. His response shows how deeply forgiveness must govern the servant heart.

Pressure can expose bitterness that may remain hidden in easier circumstances. Stephen's example shows that even severe mistreatment does not have to become the controlling force within the heart.

Pressure Must Not Move Us From the Word

Difficult circumstances can also tempt leaders to compromise. Fear may suggest that truth should be softened, while criticism may tempt us to change direction simply to keep people satisfied.

Pressure can also work in the opposite direction. Personal pride may cause us to defend a position even after Scripture has shown it to be wrong.

The Word of God must remain the plumb line through all of these pressures. A servant leader must be willing to stand when Scripture is clear and equally willing to change when Scripture corrects them.

Pressure must not determine truth. Neither fear, criticism nor personal pride should be allowed to take the place that belongs to the Word of God.

Christ Within Governs the Response

The goal is not to train ourselves simply to appear calm under pressure. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within must govern our responses when we are tested.

His humility keeps pride from taking control, while His love keeps people from becoming enemies. His patience keeps frustration from ruling us, His faithfulness keeps us steady and His wisdom directs us through difficult decisions.

His forgiveness also keeps bitterness from taking root. The pressure may be real, but the life of Jesus Christ within must remain greater than the circumstances pressing upon us.

Pressure therefore becomes an important test of servant leadership. The heart of a servant leader is revealed not only by how they serve when everything is going well, but by what continues to govern them when service becomes difficult.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that Christ's Word must continue to govern a leader under pressure?

Personal Reflection

When pressure increases, are you more likely to compromise the truth or defend your own preference too strongly?

Action Step

Take one difficult response before Christ in prayer and compare it with the Bible. Correct either fear or self-will before you act.

CONCLUSION: THE HEART GOVERNS THE SERVICE

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Throughout this Study Guide, we have seen that servant leadership is not determined first by ability, influence or position. It is determined by the heart from which responsibility is carried.

Scripture has shown us that the servant leader must be governed by:

- Humility and meekness;
- Love, mercy and compassion;
- Patience, forbearance and forgiveness;
- Faithfulness and integrity;
- Courage and obedience;
- Wisdom and teachability.

These qualities affect every part of leadership. Humility keeps self from becoming the centre, while love keeps people from becoming tools used to accomplish a task. Patience helps us remain steady with those who are still growing, and forgiveness protects the heart from bitterness.

Integrity keeps public teaching and private conduct together. Courage enables us to stand when obedience becomes difficult, while wisdom helps us apply truth carefully and teachability keeps us open to correction.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 4:2**:

> *"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."*

A servant leader is a steward. The people belong to Jesus Christ, the truth belongs to Him, and the responsibility has been entrusted by Him. For this reason, the heart of the servant must remain under His authority.

Pressure will eventually reveal what is governing that heart. Success may reveal pride, opposition may reveal fear, correction may reveal whether we are teachable, and disappointment may reveal whether patience and forgiveness are genuine.

The answer is not to create the appearance of good character. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within must govern the way we think, respond, decide, correct, forgive and serve.

The qualities we have studied are therefore not leadership techniques. They are expressions of a life yielded to Jesus Christ. What is within will eventually shape the way responsibility is carried.

The central truth of this Study Guide is simple: The heart governs the service.

In the next Study Guide, we will consider The Disciplined Life of a Servant Leader and examine how self-control, consistency, spiritual discipline and endurance help sustain faithful service over time.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that the heart governs the quality of service?

Personal Reflection

Of the qualities studied—humility, mercy, integrity and teachability—which most needs greater expression in your service? Why?

Action Step

Identify one responsibility where that quality is needed. Make a specific change in how you respond to people, relying on Christ within rather than an outward appearance.

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

Why does the heart of a servant leader matter as much as visible ability? Explain how character affects whether a person can safely use responsibility for others.

2. Understanding

How can humility, meekness, love and truth guide a leader at the same time? Explain why care for a person does not require ignoring wrong conduct.

3. Personal Reflection

Which teaching about humility, patience, forgiveness, integrity or teachability has exposed an attitude in your own heart that needs correction? Explain honestly.

4. Response to Truth

Think of a recent difficult interaction. How could you respond with both truth and genuine concern for the person, rather than pride or personal offence?

5. Action Step

Choose one conversation in which you need to listen more carefully, accept correction or show compassion. What change will you make in your approach, and when will you begin?

6. Early Response

Have you begun the conversation identified in Question 5? If so, explain how you responded and what you noticed in your motives. If not, what has prevented you from beginning?

7. Ongoing Practice

What will help you keep listening, receiving correction and acting with integrity when pressure returns? Explain how Christ's Word will guide you.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

Why must courage remain joined to obedience, and wisdom to teachability? Explain how Christ within can keep a leader firm in truth without becoming self-willed.

9. Living the Truth

Think of a difficult responsibility. How will you show both firmness and mercy to the people involved? Describe one choice that would make your care visible.

10. Final Response

Bring together character, humility, love, integrity and teachability. What has Christ's example shown you about your heart, and how will that truth govern your service?