COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 52

The Way of the Servant Leader

STUDY GUIDE 4 OF 5:

The Disciplined Life of a Servant Leader

An overview of building consistency for faithful service.



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 The Heart of a Servant Leader. We saw that responsibility must be carried from a heart governed by humility, love, patience, faithfulness, integrity, courage, wisdom and teachability.

We now turn to another important part of servant leadership: the disciplined life.

Good character must be expressed consistently. A servant leader may sincerely desire to serve Jesus Christ and His people, but good intentions alone do not produce a steady life. Responsibility requires self-control, wise use of time, careful planning, regular prayer, attention to the Word of God and a willingness to continue faithfully when enthusiasm fades or circumstances become difficult.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:27**:

> *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."*

Paul understood that ministry did not remove the need for personal discipline. The person who teaches others must also remain watchful over their own life.

Discipline, however, must not be confused with rigid rule-keeping or an attempt to produce spiritual life through human effort. Jesus Christ is the life of the born-again believer. Discipline concerns the way we willingly order our lives under His authority and according to His Word.

A disciplined servant leader learns to:

- Govern personal impulses;
- Use time responsibly;
- Plan without attempting to control the future;
- Set goals under the authority of Scripture;
- Maintain regular prayer and attention to God's Word;
- Develop habits that strengthen faithful service;
- Remain steady when distraction, pressure or difficulty comes.

These disciplines do not replace dependence upon Jesus Christ. Neither do they make the believer more complete in Him. They help prevent carelessness, inconsistency and wasted opportunity from weakening the responsibility He has entrusted to us.

Discipline therefore serves the life already received in Jesus Christ. It helps us use our time, abilities and opportunities faithfully rather than allowing changing feelings or circumstances to determine whether we remain consistent.

In this Study Guide, we will examine how discipline helps make servant leadership steady, purposeful and dependable. The life of Jesus Christ within gives us spiritual life, while discipline helps us order our daily lives in faithful obedience to Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that discipline helps order daily service under Christ?

Personal Reflection

Which part of your daily life is becoming disorderly or unreliable, even though you want to serve well? What has contributed to this?

Action Step

Select one recurring duty that needs greater care. Arrange a realistic time and manner of doing it so that your service becomes more dependable under Christ.

INTRODUCTION: DISCIPLINE SUSTAINS SERVANT LEADERSHIP

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In the previous Study Guide, we considered the heart of a servant leader. We saw that humility, love, patience, integrity, courage, wisdom and teachability must govern the way responsibility is carried.

We now move from the character of the servant leader to the ordering of the servant leader's daily life. Good character must be lived consistently.

A person may sincerely desire to serve Jesus Christ, understand the importance of faithfulness and possess a genuine concern for others, yet still struggle to use time wisely, follow through on responsibilities, maintain good habits or remain steady when circumstances become difficult. This is where discipline becomes important.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:27**:

> *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."*

Paul's words introduce an important principle. Carrying responsibility for others does not remove the need to govern our own daily life.

Throughout this Study Guide, we will consider what a disciplined life looks like for a servant leader. We will examine:

- Self-control;
- Careful planning;
- Goals that remain under the authority of Jesus Christ;
- The faithful use of time;
- Prayer and attention to the Word of God;
- The development of godly habits;
- The balance between personal growth and service;
- Consistency when pressure or distraction comes.

Discipline must not be confused with rigid religious rule-keeping or an attempt to produce spiritual life through human effort. Jesus Christ is the life of the born-again believer. The disciplined life concerns how we order our daily choices, responsibilities and habits in willing obedience to Him.

A servant leader therefore needs more than good intentions. What is believed in the heart must become visible through steady daily practice.

The question before us in this Study Guide is, How can the servant leader order daily life so that responsibility is carried faithfully, consistently and under the authority of Jesus Christ? That question will guide everything that follows.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that steady leadership requires a life ordered under Christ?

Personal Reflection

Do you rely on good intentions while neglecting to prepare for what others need from you? Identify an example.

Action Step

Before your next responsibility, make a simple plan that names what must be done and whom it will help. Follow through rather than relying on enthusiasm.

DISCIPLINE BEGINS WITH SELF-CONTROL

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The disciplined life begins with self-control. A servant leader may have clear goals, good plans and sincere intentions, but if personal impulses are allowed to govern the life, those intentions can quickly become inconsistent.

Scripture therefore places great importance upon the ability to govern our own conduct.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:27**:

> *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."*

Paul understood that ministry did not remove the need for personal discipline. The person who teaches others must still govern their own life, and the person who gives direction must still bring their own choices under the authority of Jesus Christ.

A servant leader must not expect from others what they refuse to practise themselves.

Self-Control Guards the Life

Solomon gave a striking picture of a person without self-control.

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 25:28**:

> *"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."*

In ancient times, city walls provided protection. A city without walls was exposed and vulnerable.

In the same way, a person who does not govern their own responses becomes vulnerable. Anger, appetite, fear, distraction, personal ambition or the opinions of others may begin to control them.

Self-control helps prevent these things from taking the place that belongs to Jesus Christ and His Word. The servant leader must not allow changing desires or emotions to become the authority governing daily choices.

Self-Control Is Not Self-Sufficiency

There is an important distinction to make. Self-control does not mean that the believer becomes independent of Jesus Christ, nor does it mean that spiritual strength comes from human determination alone.

The born-again believer possesses Jesus Christ within. Paul described temperance as part of the fruit of the Spirit.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:22-23**:

> *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."*

Temperance is self-control. Genuine self-control is therefore not simply a strong personality forcing itself into submission.

The life of Jesus Christ within produces the strength to govern our choices according to His Word. Discipline is not independence from Christ because it is willing obedience to Him.

Discipline Requires Saying No

A disciplined life requires the ability to say no. Not everything we desire should be acted upon, not every opportunity should be accepted and not every thought should be entertained. Neither should every emotional response be expressed immediately.

Paul wrote in **Titus 2:11-12**:

> *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;"*

Grace does not teach carelessness because grace teaches us to deny what is ungodly. The disciplined servant leader therefore learns to refuse sinful desires, selfish ambition, unnecessary distraction, uncontrolled anger, careless speech, unhealthy habits and impulses that weaken faithful service.

Saying no is not always negative. Often, saying no to one thing allows us to say yes to something more important.

Self-control therefore helps us protect what God has entrusted to us. We cannot give every desire, opportunity or distraction equal place in our lives and still expect responsibility to be carried faithfully.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that self-control says no to desires that weaken faithful service?

Personal Reflection

Which appetite, distraction or desire most often draws you away from faithful service? How does it affect others?

Action Step

Place an appropriate limit on one distraction this week. Use the time or attention recovered for a responsibility you have been neglecting.

Self-Control Must Govern Our Responses

Leadership places people in situations where emotional responses can become strong. A decision may be questioned, someone may act unfairly, a plan may fail or a person may refuse correction. Pressure may increase, and frustration may become very real.

In such moments, self-control becomes especially important. The servant leader must not allow a moment of anger, fear or frustration to govern a response that may affect others deeply.

James wrote in **James 1:19-20**:

> *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."*

These verses give practical discipline. We are to be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath.

The instinct may be to answer immediately, but discipline may require waiting. The instinct may be to defend ourselves, but discipline may require listening. The instinct may be to react emotionally, but discipline may require prayer before responding.

Self-control creates space for wisdom to govern the response. It prevents the first emotional reaction from automatically becoming the final decision.

Discipline Also Governs Appetite and Comfort

Self-control applies to more than anger or speech. A servant leader must also learn not to be ruled by appetite, comfort or changing feelings.

If we only serve when we feel energetic, service will become inconsistent. If we only pray when we feel inspired, prayer will become irregular. If we only study Scripture when circumstances are convenient, other demands will continually replace it.

A disciplined life understands that faithfulness cannot depend entirely upon mood. There will be days when motivation is strong, and there will also be days when it is not.

Self-control helps the servant continue doing what is right even when immediate desire is weak. The responsibility remains important even when enthusiasm changes.

This does not mean ignoring legitimate needs for rest or wise limits. It means that comfort must not become the controlling principle by which every responsibility is measured.

Liberty Is Not Self-Indulgence

Christian liberty must never be confused with living without discipline.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:13**:

> *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."*

Liberty in Christ does not mean that every personal desire should be followed. It frees us from bondage so that we can serve.

Discipline is therefore not contrary to Christian liberty. Discipline helps protect liberty from becoming self-indulgence.

The believer is free in Jesus Christ, but that freedom should be used in love and service rather than as an excuse for careless living.

Self-Control Prepares Us to Serve Others

The purpose of self-control is not simply personal improvement because it directly affects our ability to serve others faithfully.

A leader who cannot govern anger may wound people. A leader who cannot manage time may repeatedly fail others, while a leader who cannot control speech may damage trust.

A leader who cannot resist distraction may neglect important responsibilities, and someone governed by comfort may withdraw when service becomes costly. Personal discipline therefore has consequences beyond the individual.

Self-control protects both the servant and the people being served. It helps make responsibility dependable rather than subject to every changing impulse.

Self-Control Flows From Christ Within

The answer is not to create a harsh system of self-discipline through human willpower. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within gives strength to say no to what is wrong and yes to what is right.

His patience governs our reactions, His wisdom governs our choices and His truth exposes unhealthy habits. His love also keeps discipline from becoming self-centred because the purpose is not simply to improve ourselves, but to become more faithful in serving others.

The servant leader therefore learns to bring thoughts, habits, speech, appetites and responses under the authority of Jesus Christ and His Word.

Discipline begins with self-control because faithful leadership requires a life that is not governed by impulse, but willingly ordered under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that freedom in Christ does not mean being ruled by impulse?

Personal Reflection

When upset, do you usually speak too soon, withdraw or listen carefully? What has been the result?

Action Step

Choose a situation where you are likely to react impulsively. Practise listening before responding and consider whether Christ's patience governed your words.

PLANNING AS FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP

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A disciplined servant leader does not simply react to whatever happens each day. Responsibility requires thought, preparation and wise use of what God has entrusted to us.

Planning, however, must be understood correctly. Biblical planning is not an attempt to control the future, nor is it confidence that our own ideas must succeed. Planning is an act of stewardship.

It is the careful use of time, opportunities, abilities and resources while recognising that everything remains under the authority of God.

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 21:5**:

> *"The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want."*

Scripture contrasts diligence with haste. The diligent person thinks carefully before acting, while the hasty person moves without sufficient consideration.

Servant leadership requires diligence because careless decisions can affect more than the person making them. Planning helps us consider our responsibilities carefully before we act.

Planning Helps Us Use What Has Been Entrusted

Time cannot be stored for later use, opportunities may pass and resources can be wasted. The servant leader must therefore consider carefully how what has been entrusted is being used.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 5:15-16**:

> *"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."*

To walk *"circumspectly"* is to walk carefully. The servant leader should therefore consider how time and opportunities are being used.

Planning helps us ask:

- What responsibility needs attention?
- What should be done first?
- What resources will be required?
- Who needs to be involved?

- What can reasonably be completed?
- What should not be allowed to distract us?

These are practical questions, but they are part of faithful stewardship. Planning helps prevent important responsibilities from being neglected simply because less important matters demand immediate attention.

Preparation Should Come Before Action

Scripture recognises the value of preparation.

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 24:27**:

> *"Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house."*

There is an order in this verse. Preparation comes before building.

This principle applies to many areas of responsibility. Before teaching, we should prepare. Before beginning a significant project, we should consider what will be required. Before committing other people to a task, we should understand what we are asking them to do, and before using resources, we should consider whether they are needed and how they should be used.

Preparation does not guarantee that everything will proceed exactly as expected. It means that carelessness is not mistaken for faith.

A servant leader can trust God while still preparing carefully. Faithfulness includes giving proper thought to the responsibility before us.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that careful preparation is part of faithful stewardship?

Personal Reflection

Have you called a lack of preparation 'trusting God' when the responsibility really required careful thought? Explain.

Action Step

Prepare properly for one duty that affects others. Consider the information, time and resources required before beginning, while remaining dependent on God.

Nehemiah: Prayer and Careful Preparation

Nehemiah provides a clear example. When he heard about the condition of Jerusalem, he did not rush immediately into action because he first prayed, sought God and considered what would be required.

Later, when he arrived in Jerusalem, he personally examined the situation.

Nehemiah wrote in **Nehemiah 2:12-13**:

> *"And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire."*

Nehemiah prayed, but he also inspected. He trusted God, but he also gathered information. He had a burden, but he did not act carelessly.

This gives us a balanced picture of servant leadership. Prayer does not remove the need for careful preparation. Careful preparation does not remove dependence upon God.

The two belong together. The servant seeks God while also taking responsibility for understanding the situation before acting.

Joseph: Preparing During Abundance

Joseph also demonstrates the value of planning. God revealed that years of plenty would be followed by years of famine, so Joseph used the season of abundance to prepare for what was coming.

Moses recorded in **Genesis 41:48-49**:

> *"And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same. And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number."*

Joseph did not waste the years of plenty. Preparation during abundance provided for need during famine.

A servant leader should therefore learn to think beyond the immediate moment. Wise stewardship may require preparing today for responsibilities that are reasonably expected tomorrow.

This does not mean that every future circumstance can be predicted. It means that when God has placed knowledge, opportunity and resources within our hands, we should use them responsibly.

Plans Must Remain Subject to God

Planning becomes dangerous when it turns into confidence in ourselves. James gives an important safeguard.

James wrote in **James 4:13-15**:

> *"Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."*

Scripture does not condemn planning here. It condemns presumptuous planning that leaves God out.

The servant leader may plan tomorrow while recognising that tomorrow still belongs to God. Plans may need to change because circumstances may change, new information may become available or another responsibility may become more important.

Scripture may also correct an assumption upon which a plan was built. A disciplined servant leader therefore plans carefully without becoming attached to a plan simply because it was their own.

Planning requires diligence, but humility keeps every plan subject to God.

Planning and Discipline Work Together

A plan without follow-through accomplishes little.

Jesus said in **Luke 14:28**:

> *"For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?"*

Jesus' illustration recognises both preparation and completion. It is not enough to decide what should be done because the servant leader must also consider what will be required to carry the responsibility through.

Planning gives direction, while discipline supplies consistent follow-through. Without planning, effort can become scattered. Without discipline, plans remain unfinished.

A disciplined servant leader therefore considers both the beginning and the completion of a responsibility. Good intentions must be supported by careful preparation and faithful action.

Planning Remains Service

The purpose of planning is not to make the servant leader appear efficient. It is to help us use what God has entrusted to us faithfully.

Careful planning helps time to be used wisely, resources to be protected and responsibilities to be completed. It can also help people to be served more thoughtfully and unnecessary confusion to be reduced.

The servant leader therefore does not plan in order to control everything. They plan because careful stewardship is one way of caring faithfully for what has been placed within their hands.

Jesus Christ remains the Lord of the servant and of every plan. We prepare carefully, act diligently and remain willing to change because our plans are servants of our responsibility; they are never masters over the will of God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that plans must remain servants of God's will?

Personal Reflection

Are you reluctant to change a plan because you have invested time or pride in it? What does this reveal about your priorities?

Action Step

Review one current plan against God's Word and the needs involved. Correct any part that serves your preference more than the responsibility.

SETTING GOALS UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST

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Planning helps us think carefully about what has been entrusted to us. Goals can then help give that planning a clear direction.

A goal identifies something towards which we intend to work. It may concern service, study, personal responsibility, ministry, family, stewardship or another legitimate area of life. Goals themselves are neither spiritual nor unspiritual.

The important questions are, What is motivating the goal? Does it agree with the Word of God? Will pursuing it help us carry our responsibilities faithfully? For the servant leader, every goal must remain beneath the authority of Jesus Christ.

Goals Should Give Direction, Not Become Masters

Paul lived with clear purpose.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 3:13-14**:

> *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

Paul's life was not aimless because he knew the direction in which he was pressing. In the same way, clear goals can help a servant leader focus attention and energy upon responsibilities that matter.

However, a goal must remain a servant. It must never become so important that we ignore Scripture, neglect people or refuse to change direction when correction is needed.

The goal does not become lord over the servant. Jesus Christ remains Lord.

Motive Must Be Examined

Not every goal begins from a healthy motive. The people at Babel had a very clear goal.

Moses recorded their words in **Genesis 11:4**:

> *"And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."*

Their purpose included the words *"let us make us a name."* The problem was not simply that they planned a building project because their ambition revealed the heart behind the goal.

Jesus also told of a wealthy man whose plans were centred entirely upon himself.

Jesus said in **Luke 12:18-19**:

> *"And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."*

The man's planning was extensive, but God was absent from the centre of it. These verses remind us that a clear goal can still be a wrong goal.

A servant leader should therefore ask:

- Is this goal driven by service or self-importance?
- Am I seeking usefulness or recognition?
- Will this strengthen others or simply enlarge my own influence?
- Am I pursuing obedience or protecting personal ambition?

A goal that feeds pride should not be called spiritual simply because it concerns ministry. The purpose and motive must also remain under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that goals need a faithful motive under Christ?

Personal Reflection

What goal are you pursuing mainly for achievement or recognition rather than for faithful service? Be specific.

Action Step

Name one present goal and examine the motive behind it. Change its purpose or approach where necessary so that it serves others under Christ.

Every Goal Must Pass the Test of Scripture

No goal can be right if achieving it requires disobedience to God's Word.

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 16:3**:

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

Our plans and goals must be committed to God. This means more than asking Him to bless something we have already decided to do because it requires willingness to surrender the goal itself if it conflicts with Scripture.

A servant leader may have a strong desire to accomplish something, but desire does not create divine authority. The Word of God remains the plumb line.

Where Scripture speaks clearly, our goals must submit. Where Scripture leaves room for practical judgement, we may plan carefully while recognising that our decision remains human judgement rather than a direct command from God.

This distinction protects servant leadership from turning personal goals into spiritual demands upon other people.

Clear Goals Help Turn Intention Into Action

Vague intentions can be difficult to follow. There is a difference between saying, I should encourage people more, and deciding, This week I will make time to visit or contact someone who needs encouragement.

The second statement gives the intention practical shape. It identifies something that can actually be acted upon.

Paul used the picture of running with purpose.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:26**:

> *"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:"*

His point is not that every believer must create a formal list of goals. It is that Christian life and service should not be directionless.

A useful goal should therefore be clear enough that we understand what responsibility we are trying to fulfil. Clarity helps turn a good intention into practical action.

Large Goals Should Be Broken Into Faithful Steps

Important responsibilities are often completed through smaller actions. A person may recognise a need to improve Bible knowledge, but that may require setting aside regular time to study. A ministry may need a major project completed, but that may require planning several stages.

A leader may need to train others, which may involve teaching, observing, encouraging and gradually entrusting responsibility. The final responsibility may be large, but the work towards it is often carried through smaller faithful steps.

This protects us from becoming overwhelmed by the size of the final task. Faithfulness is normally lived one responsibility at a time.

A servant leader therefore learns to connect larger goals with practical actions. The goal gives direction, while daily faithfulness moves the responsibility forward.

Count the Cost Before Committing

Jesus used the example of someone intending to build.

Jesus said in **Luke 14:28**:

> *"For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?"*

In context, Jesus was teaching about the cost of discipleship. His illustration also makes the point that serious commitment should not be entered carelessly.

Before accepting a significant goal or responsibility, the servant leader should consider:

- How much time will this require?
- What other responsibilities may be affected?

- What resources will be needed?
- Who else may need to be involved?
- What difficulties can reasonably be anticipated?
- Am I prepared to follow through?

This does not mean waiting until every difficulty is removed. It means refusing careless commitments that cannot reasonably be fulfilled.

Counting the cost is part of responsible stewardship. A servant leader should not make commitments lightly when other people may be depending upon them.

Goals Must Remain Flexible Under God

James gives the necessary safeguard.

James wrote in **James 4:15**:

> *"For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."*

A servant leader may establish a goal without pretending to control what lies ahead. Circumstances may change, priorities may change and new responsibilities may arise.

Further understanding from Scripture may also require correction. A wise servant is willing to review and adjust rather than continuing simply because changing direction feels like failure.

Sometimes faithfulness means continuing, while at other times faithfulness means changing the plan. The important issue is not protecting the original goal, but remaining faithful to Jesus Christ.

Goals Should Serve Faithfulness

The purpose of a goal is not to make life impressive or give us something about which to boast. Goals should help us carry responsibilities with greater clarity and consistency.

They should direct energy rather than feed ambition, and they should help us serve rather than become preoccupied with achievement. Above all, they must remain beneath Jesus Christ and His Word.

The servant leader therefore does not ask only, What do I want to accomplish? The deeper question is, What responsibilities has Jesus Christ placed before me, and how can I pursue them faithfully under His authority?

Goals are useful when they help answer that question. They give direction to service, but Jesus Christ must always remain Lord over both the goal and the servant pursuing it.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that goals give direction while remaining open to God's correction?

Personal Reflection

When new information shows that a goal is unwise, do you adapt it or defend it because it was your idea?

Action Step

Choose one goal and assess whether it still agrees with God's Word and genuine responsibilities. Make any needed adjustment without treating change as failure.

REDEEMING THE TIME

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Time is one of the responsibilities entrusted to every believer. Unlike money or possessions, time cannot be stored for later use. Once a day has passed, it cannot be recovered.

For this reason, Scripture teaches us to live carefully and wisely rather than allowing life to pass without thought or purpose.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 5:15-16**:

> *"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."*

Paul's emphasis is upon careful living. The servant leader should therefore recognise that the way time is used affects the way responsibility is carried.

Redeeming the time means refusing careless living and using the opportunities before us wisely.

Our Days Are Limited

Scripture repeatedly reminds us that earthly life is brief.

James wrote in **James 4:14**:

> *"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."*

This truth should not make us anxious because it should make us thoughtful. We do not know how many opportunities will come again.

A conversation may matter more than we realise, while a responsibility neglected today may become more difficult tomorrow. An opportunity to encourage, teach, help or serve someone may not always remain available.

Moses prayed in **Psalm 90:12**:

> *"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."*

To number our days is to remember that they are limited, and the purpose is wisdom. Awareness that time is limited should help us use it carefully rather than waste it thoughtlessly.

Priorities Matter

Not everything that asks for our attention deserves the same amount of time. Some things are urgent but not important, while other responsibilities may not demand immediate attention but are far more important.

A servant leader must therefore learn to distinguish between what is necessary and what is simply demanding.

Solomon wrote in **Ecclesiastes 3:1**:

> *"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:"*

Different responsibilities belong in different places. There is time to work, pray, study, serve and care for family. There is also a legitimate need for rest.

Redeeming the time does not mean filling every available moment with activity. It means using time according to faithful priorities.

A disciplined servant leader must therefore consider not only what can be done, but what should receive attention first. Wise use of time requires recognising that some responsibilities carry greater importance than others.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that limited time calls for wise attention to important duties?

Personal Reflection

Which important responsibility is repeatedly pushed aside by less important activity? What does that cost you or others?

Action Step

Identify the duty that most needs attention. Give it a realistic place in your schedule before optional activities displace it again.

Distraction Can Steal Attention

One of the greatest difficulties in using time wisely is distraction. A person may begin the day intending to complete an important responsibility and discover that hours have been consumed by less important matters.

Some interruptions are necessary because people may genuinely need help and unexpected responsibilities can arise. Not every interruption is a distraction.

The problem is allowing trivial matters continually to displace important responsibilities.

Nehemiah faced deliberate attempts to pull him away from the work entrusted to him.

Nehemiah wrote in **Nehemiah 6:3**:

> *"And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"*

Nehemiah recognised that the invitation would take him away from the responsibility before him, so he refused.

A servant leader must sometimes do the same. This may mean saying no to something that is not wrong in itself because something more important requires attention.

Discipline protects important responsibilities from being continually displaced by lesser things.

Time Must Be Used for People as Well as Tasks

There is also a danger in becoming so focused upon efficiency that people begin to feel like interruptions. Servant leadership must avoid that extreme.

Time is not redeemed simply by completing the greatest number of tasks because some of the most important uses of time cannot be measured by productivity.

Listening to someone who is struggling may take time. Teaching another believer, encouraging someone who is discouraged or helping a person understand truth may also require patience and time.

The servant leader must therefore balance tasks with people. We are not simply managing a schedule. We are serving people.

This means that plans must remain flexible enough to recognise genuine needs when they arise. Discipline protects important responsibilities, but love helps us recognise when a person's need has itself become an important responsibility.

Paul Used His Opportunities Faithfully

Paul understood the importance of using opportunities for service. He reminded the elders at Ephesus of the way he had ministered among them.

Paul said in **Acts 20:20**:

> *"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,"*

Paul's ministry involved deliberate use of time. He taught publicly and from house to house because he invested himself in people.

Even difficult circumstances did not automatically bring his service to an end. His example reminds us that faithful use of time is not always determined by ideal circumstances.

We use what is available and serve where opportunity exists. Faithfulness asks what can be done with the time and circumstances presently before us.

Urgency Must Not Become Haste

Jesus also spoke about the limited opportunity for His earthly work.

Jesus said in **John 9:4**:

> *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."*

There was purpose and urgency in His words, but biblical urgency must not be confused with frantic activity. Haste can lead to poor decisions.

Urgency means recognising that responsibility matters now. It does not mean attempting to do everything immediately.

The disciplined servant leader moves purposefully without becoming careless. There is a difference between refusing unnecessary delay and rushing ahead without wisdom.

Redeeming Time Requires Discipline

Wise use of time rarely happens accidentally. It requires deliberate choices.

A servant leader may need to:

- Identify the most important responsibilities;
- Set aside time for prayer and Scripture;
- Complete difficult tasks rather than continually postponing them;
- Limit unnecessary distractions;
- Make time for people;
- Refuse commitments that cannot be carried faithfully;
- Review whether time is being used wisely.

These are practical disciplines, but they serve a spiritual purpose. They help us become faithful with what Jesus Christ has placed within our hands.

Discipline does not create more hours in the day. It helps us use the hours available according to faithful priorities.

Time Remains Under the Authority of Christ

Redeeming the time is not an exercise in squeezing more activity into each day, nor is it an attempt to prove our worth through constant busyness.

Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within must govern our priorities as well as our actions. His wisdom helps us recognise what matters, while His love reminds us that people are not interruptions.

His faithfulness teaches us to complete what has been entrusted, and His peace keeps urgency from becoming anxiety.

The servant leader therefore asks, How can I use the time before me faithfully under the authority of Jesus Christ? That question brings time, priorities, people and responsibilities beneath His authority.

We cannot recover yesterday, and we do not control tomorrow. We can faithfully use the opportunities and responsibilities Jesus Christ has placed before us today.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that redeeming time means acting faithfully today without haste?

Personal Reflection

Do you sometimes mistake being busy for being faithful? Which relationship or duty needs more thoughtful attention?

Action Step

Choose one opportunity to serve a person today rather than simply add another task. Give them your attention without rushing or creating needless delay.

PRAYER AND THE WORD AS DAILY DISCIPLINES

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A disciplined servant leader must give regular attention to prayer and the Word of God. Responsibilities can easily fill the day as people need help, decisions must be made, work must be completed and unexpected problems arise.

If care is not taken, a leader can become so occupied with serving others that personal prayer and attention to Scripture are continually pushed aside. This is dangerous because no amount of responsibility removes our need to remain attentive to Jesus Christ and His Word.

Prayer and Scripture are therefore not optional extras for quieter seasons. They belong within the disciplined life of the servant leader.

Prayer Keeps the Servant Dependent

Prayer reminds us that responsibility does not make us self-sufficient. A servant leader may gain experience, knowledge and confidence over time, but experience must never replace dependence upon God.

Jesus Himself regularly withdrew to pray.

Luke wrote in **Luke 5:16**:

> *"And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed."*

Prayer was not something Jesus reserved only for moments of crisis because it belonged within His earthly life. For the servant leader, prayer provides opportunity to bring burdens, decisions, concerns and needs before God rather than carrying them as though everything depended upon human ability.

Prayer helps us recognise our dependence upon God, our need for wisdom and the limits of our own understanding. It also brings before God the needs of those we serve, areas where our motives require examination and responsibilities that must remain surrendered to Jesus Christ.

Prayer keeps responsibility from becoming self-reliance. The more responsibility a servant carries, the more important it becomes to remember that human ability is not the source of spiritual life or truth.

Prayer Must Not Become Empty Routine

Discipline does not mean turning prayer into a mechanical religious duty. A person may establish a regular time for prayer and still allow the practice to become empty.

Jesus warned against meaningless repetition.

Jesus said in **Matthew 6:7-8**:

> *"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."*

Regular prayer is valuable, but repetition itself has no spiritual power. The purpose is not to complete a religious requirement. Prayer is genuine communion with God.

Discipline helps us make room for prayer, but it must never reduce prayer to a task completed simply so that we can say it has been done. Regularity should support genuine prayer rather than replace it.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that regular prayer should express real dependence on God?

Personal Reflection

Has prayer become an item to tick off, or a real expression of dependence upon Christ? Explain what needs to change.

Action Step

Make time for one unhurried period of prayer about a genuine responsibility. Speak to Christ honestly rather than measuring the number of minutes.

Daniel: Prayer That Remained Steady

Daniel provides a clear example of disciplined prayer. When prayer became dangerous, he did not suddenly begin praying because of the crisis. He continued what had already been part of his life.

Daniel wrote in **Daniel 6:10**:

> *"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."*

The words *"as he did aforetime"* are important. Daniel's prayer was established before the pressure came.

This teaches an important principle: Discipline developed in ordinary days helps steady us when difficult days arrive. Daniel did not need to create a new practice when the crisis came because prayer was already part of the way he lived.

The same principle applies to servant leadership. Regular attention to God before difficulty comes helps keep the servant steady when pressure increases.

The Word of God Must Remain Central

Prayer must be joined with regular attention to Scripture.

Jesus said in **Matthew 4:4**:

> *"But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."*

Physical food sustains the body, but the believer also needs the Word of God. A servant leader especially needs Scripture because responsibility continually requires judgement.

We need the Word to establish truth, expose error and correct our assumptions. Scripture also guides our decisions, tests our motives, protects against religious tradition and prevents personal preference from becoming doctrine.

The servant leader must never reach the point where teaching others appears to remove the need to keep learning from Scripture personally. Responsibility to teach the Word should increase rather than reduce our care in studying it.

Scripture Is the Plumb Line

Regular Bible study is not simply about gathering more information because the Word of God must be allowed to correct us. A person can read Scripture regularly and still approach it only looking for confirmation of what they already believe.

The disciplined servant leader must come to the Word willing to be changed by what it actually says.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**:

> *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."*

Notice the work Scripture performs. It teaches, reproves, corrects and instructs.

Reading the Bible faithfully therefore requires more than finding encouraging verses. Sometimes the Word will confirm us, while at other times it will correct us.

The servant leader must remain willing to stand where Scripture stands and move when Scripture shows that correction is necessary. The Word remains the authority over the leader as well as over those being taught.

Meditation Requires Attention

The Psalmist describes a person whose relationship with God's Word is more than occasional.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 1:2-3**:

> *"But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."*

Meditation involves allowing the Word to remain before the mind rather than rushing through it simply to complete a reading target. A servant leader should therefore make room not only to read, but also to think carefully about what Scripture says.

We should ask what the context reveals, what the verses actually teach and how they agree with the rest of Scripture. We should also be willing to ask whether the verses expose something in our own life or correct something we have believed.

This kind of attention helps prevent careless interpretation. Discipline is not measured simply by how much Scripture is read, but also by whether we are giving careful attention to what the Word actually says.

Responsibility Must Not Crowd Out Nourishment

One of the dangers of leadership is continually giving while neglecting personal attention to truth. Paul warned Timothy to take heed both to himself and to doctrine.

Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 4:15-16**:

> *"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."*

Timothy was serving others, but Paul still told him, *"Take heed unto thyself."* Responsibility towards others did not remove responsibility for his own life and doctrine.

This remains important for every servant leader. Serving, teaching and caring for others must not become an excuse for neglecting personal attention to prayer and Scripture.

A servant who continually gives without remaining attentive to truth can gradually become careless. Discipline helps protect time for the very things that keep responsibility under the authority of God.

Prayer and Scripture Do Not Produce Christ Within

These disciplines must remain in their proper place. Prayer does not make Jesus Christ dwell within us, Bible reading does not produce the new birth, and neither discipline completes salvation.

The born-again believer already possesses Jesus Christ within. Prayer keeps us consciously dependent upon Him, while Scripture keeps our understanding submitted to truth.

Both help order the life around what God has already given us in Jesus Christ. The disciplined servant leader therefore does not pray and study in order to become spiritually complete.

They pray and attend to Scripture because they belong to Jesus Christ and desire to carry every responsibility faithfully under His authority.

Prayer keeps the servant dependent. The Word keeps the servant anchored in truth. Together they help keep daily service centred upon Jesus Christ rather than upon human strength or personal judgement.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that prayer and Scripture keep service dependent on Christ and grounded in truth?

Personal Reflection

When studying the Bible, are you willing to let it correct you, or do you mainly search for support for what you already think?

Action Step

Before a decision, read a relevant Bible verse in context and pray. Identify one belief or choice that may need correcting and respond to what God's Word establishes.

BUILDING GODLY HABITS

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Much of life is shaped by repeated choices. A single action may seem small, but when the same choice is repeated over time, it can become an established pattern. Those patterns can strengthen faithful service or gradually weaken it.

For this reason, a disciplined servant leader should pay attention not only to major decisions, but also to ordinary habits.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:7-8**:

> *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."*

Paul uses the principle of sowing and reaping. Repeated choices matter because what we continually allow into our lives will eventually affect the direction in which we are moving.

Small Choices Can Become Established Patterns

Habits normally begin with ordinary decisions. We decide whether to pray, whether to make time for Scripture and whether to complete a responsibility or continually postpone it. We also decide how to respond when frustrated and what will receive our attention.

One decision does not establish an entire life, but repeated choices gradually form patterns. This is why small acts of obedience should not be dismissed as unimportant.

Faithfulness is often built through ordinary choices repeated consistently. A servant leader does not need every day to contain something dramatic because much of disciplined service consists of doing necessary things faithfully even when they appear ordinary.

Consistency Matters

Paul understood the importance of continuing discipline.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:27**:

> *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."*

Paul did not assume that carrying responsibility removed the need for ongoing discipline. In the same way, good habits do not normally develop through occasional bursts of motivation.

Prayer becomes established through continued prayer, while Bible study becomes established through continued attention to the Word. Dependability grows through repeatedly keeping commitments, and self-control develops as we repeatedly refuse impulses that would move us away from what is right.

Consistency gives good intentions practical form. What we know should be done must eventually become part of the way we regularly live.

The Word Should Become Part of Daily Life

The Psalmist describes a man whose attention to God's Word is not occasional.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 1:1-3**:

> *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."*

The picture is one of stability. The tree does not become established in one moment because its roots remain where nourishment is available.

In the same way, disciplined attention to Scripture helps keep the servant leader anchored in truth. The goal is not simply to complete a reading schedule because the Word must be read, considered, understood and allowed to correct the life.

Regularity provides opportunity for continued attention to truth. The habit serves the greater purpose of keeping our understanding and daily life under the authority of God's Word.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that small repeated choices can form helpful habits?

Personal Reflection

Which helpful practice have you begun but failed to continue? What usually interrupts it?

Action Step

Choose one modest practice that supports faithful service. Repeat it on several suitable days and notice whether it helps you serve with greater consistency.

Daniel: A Habit That Remained Under Pressure

Daniel provides a clear example of an established godly practice.

Daniel wrote in **Daniel 6:10**:

> *"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."*

The words *"as he did aforetime"* show that Daniel's prayer was already part of his life before the crisis came. The threat did not create the habit because it tested what had already been established.

This demonstrates an important principle: Practices established during ordinary seasons can help steady us during difficult seasons.

A crisis is not the best time to begin developing every discipline we need. Faithfulness in ordinary days helps prepare the servant to remain steady when pressure comes.

Harmful Habits Must Not Be Excused

Habits can also move in the wrong direction. Repeated sinful choices can become increasingly established if they are continually excused.

Paul wrote in **Romans 6:16**:

> *"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"*

Paul's language is about yielding. A servant leader must therefore take harmful patterns seriously rather than excusing them by saying, That is simply the way I am.

If a habit is contrary to Scripture, it should be confronted. This may involve:

- Recognising the pattern honestly;
- Bringing it before God;
- Removing opportunities that continually strengthen it;
- Replacing the wrong practice with something consistent with Scripture;
- Accepting appropriate accountability;
- Continuing in obedience even when change is difficult.

The purpose is not behaviour modification for its own sake. The goal is a life increasingly ordered under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Habits Must Remain Servants

Even good habits must remain in their proper place. A regular prayer time, a Bible-reading routine or a planned daily schedule can all be useful, but a habit must never become an empty religious performance.

The discipline exists to serve faithfulness. We do not pray simply because the clock says it is time; we pray in dependence upon God. Neither do we read Scripture simply to complete a daily requirement; we attend to the Word because it is truth.

The habit serves the purpose; the habit is not the purpose. When the routine itself becomes more important than the reason for which it was established, discipline can become empty form.

Good habits should therefore help us remain attentive, faithful and consistent without becoming another outward religious measure of spirituality.

Christ Within Remains the Source

Godly habits do not create spiritual life. Jesus Christ already dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within is the source of obedience, strength and spiritual fruit.

Discipline helps us arrange daily life so that carelessness and distraction do not continually work against what we know to be right. The habit does not produce Christ's life. It helps us order our choices in obedience to the life already received in Him.

The servant leader should therefore ask, What patterns are my daily choices establishing? Are those patterns helping me carry responsibility faithfully under Jesus Christ? These questions help us examine the direction our repeated choices are taking us.

Small choices matter because they accumulate. Godly habits help make faithful service consistent, while harmful habits must be confronted before they begin to govern the life.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that habits should serve faithfulness without becoming masters?

Personal Reflection

Has a good routine become an empty requirement, or has a harmful habit gained too much control? Explain.

Action Step

Identify a habit that needs correcting. Replace it with a practical choice that agrees with the Bible, without treating the routine as a means of earning salvation.

BALANCING PERSONAL GROWTH AND SERVICE

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Servant leadership requires both personal growth and faithful service to others. If a person continually serves without giving proper attention to prayer, Scripture, rest and personal responsibility, they can become spiritually careless, physically exhausted or increasingly dependent upon their own strength.

On the other hand, if a person concentrates only upon personal growth while rarely serving others, spiritual knowledge can become self-centred. The servant leader therefore needs balance.

Personal growth should strengthen service, and service should give practical expression to what is being learned.

Growth Should Strengthen Service

Paul instructed Timothy to give careful attention both to himself and to the doctrine.

Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 4:15-16**:

> *"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."*

Timothy had responsibilities towards other believers, but Paul still told him, *"Take heed unto thyself."* His own growth, understanding, conduct and continued attention to truth all mattered.

The purpose, however, was not self-absorption. His growth would also affect *"them that hear thee."* What was developing within Timothy would influence the people he served.

This establishes an important principle: The servant leader grows so that they may serve more faithfully. Personal growth should increase our usefulness to others rather than become an end in itself.

Service Should Not Replace Attention to the Word

A leader may become extremely busy helping other people. There may be teaching to prepare, people to visit, problems to resolve and practical work to complete, but activity itself does not guarantee spiritual health.

Jesus said in **Matthew 4:4**:

> *"But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."*

The servant leader cannot continually give attention to everyone else's spiritual needs while neglecting personal attention to Scripture. Responsibility does not remove the need to remain a learner.

The person teaching others still needs the Word, while the person giving counsel still needs correction. The person encouraging others still needs prayer, and the person carrying responsibility still needs time to think carefully before God.

Service must therefore never become an excuse for neglecting the very truth that should govern our service.

Prayer and Service Belong Together

During His earthly life, Jesus sometimes withdrew from the crowds to pray.

Luke wrote in **Luke 5:15-16**:

> *"But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed."*

The needs around Him were real and the multitudes were gathering, yet Jesus withdrew and prayed. These verses help us see that constant activity is not the only evidence of faithfulness.

There are times to serve actively, and there are times when quiet prayer is appropriate. The servant leader must not confuse endless busyness with spiritual usefulness.

Prayer and service belong together. Prayer keeps the servant dependent upon God, while service gives practical expression to the life and love of Jesus Christ within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that personal growth and service should strengthen one another?

Personal Reflection

Are you devoting so much time to serving that you neglect prayer and study, or studying without putting truth into practice?

Action Step

Review how you use your time. Make one balanced adjustment that preserves attention to Christ and creates a real opportunity to serve someone.

Rest Has a Legitimate Place

The body also has limits, and Jesus recognised the physical needs of His disciples.

Mark recorded in **Mark 6:31**:

> *"And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."*

Rest is not laziness. There is a difference between avoiding responsibility and recognising genuine human limitation.

A servant leader who continually ignores physical limits may eventually become less patient, less thoughtful and less able to serve others well. Exhaustion can affect judgement, relationships and the ability to carry responsibility carefully.

Rest should not become self-indulgence, but neither should exhaustion be treated as proof of spirituality. The body is also part of the life God has entrusted to us.

Wise discipline therefore includes appropriate rest. The purpose is not to escape responsibility, but to remain able to carry responsibility faithfully.

Personal Growth Must Not Become Self-Centred

There is another danger. A person may devote large amounts of time to reading, learning and personal development while doing very little for others.

Knowledge can become something collected rather than something used in service.

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

> *"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."*

Growth should expand our usefulness. Greater understanding should help us teach more clearly, while greater wisdom should help us counsel more carefully.

Greater patience should help us deal with people more graciously, and greater knowledge of Scripture should help us strengthen others in truth. What we receive should become useful in the service of others.

If personal growth continually turns us inward rather than outward towards service, something is out of balance. We do not grow simply to possess more knowledge. We grow so that what we receive can strengthen faithful Christian life and service.

Different Seasons Require Different Emphasis

Balance does not mean that every day contains exactly the same amount of prayer, study, work, rest and service. Life contains different seasons, and those seasons may require different emphases.

There may be periods requiring unusual amounts of work, while illness may require additional rest. There may be seasons of concentrated study, and there may be times when another person's urgent need requires us to adjust our schedule.

The goal is not mathematical equality because the goal is faithful stewardship. A disciplined servant leader therefore learns to ask:

- What responsibilities require attention now?
- What part of my own life am I neglecting?
- Am I continually giving without replenishing?
- Am I learning without serving?
- Am I resting appropriately, or avoiding responsibility?
- Have urgent matters pushed important disciplines aside for too long?

These questions help restore proper balance. They allow us to examine whether one area has gradually displaced another responsibility that still requires attention.

Balance therefore requires continuing wisdom rather than a fixed formula. The servant leader must remain attentive to the responsibilities presently before them.

Christ Within Governs Both Growth and Service

Personal growth and service are not competing parts of Christian life. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within governs both.

His truth leads us to learn, while His love moves us to serve. His wisdom teaches us when to work and when to rest, and His faithfulness helps us carry responsibilities steadily.

His life within also keeps personal growth from becoming self-centred and service from becoming dependent upon human strength. Both growth and service must remain under His authority.

The servant leader therefore does not choose between growing and serving. We grow so that we may serve faithfully, and we serve from a life continually governed by Jesus Christ and His Word.

Balance protects both. It keeps growth connected with usefulness and service connected with spiritual health.

A disciplined servant leader gives attention to the whole life so that personal growth, responsibility, rest and service remain ordered under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that rest, growth and service all need to remain under Christ's authority?

Personal Reflection

When life becomes demanding, do you neglect rest, personal responsibilities or service to others? What imbalance needs attention?

Action Step

Make a realistic plan for one demanding day that includes your main duty, care for people and necessary rest. Revise it if genuine needs arise.

DISCIPLINE WHEN PRESSURE AND DISTRACTION COME

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Discipline is easiest to maintain when circumstances are favourable. The greater test comes when pressure increases, enthusiasm fades or distractions begin to compete for our attention.

A servant leader may begin a responsibility with clarity and determination, but difficult seasons reveal whether that commitment is deeply established. Discipline is proved when we continue doing what is right after the excitement of beginning has passed.

Distraction Can Pull Us Away From Responsibility

Nehemiah faced repeated attempts to draw him away from the work God had placed before him.

Nehemiah wrote in **Nehemiah 6:2-3**:

> *"That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"*

Nehemiah recognised that accepting the invitation would take him away from the responsibility before him, so he refused to be distracted. His response shows that discipline sometimes requires saying no in order to protect what has already been entrusted.

This does not mean that every interruption should be ignored because some interruptions involve genuine needs and should receive attention. The issue is discernment.

A servant leader must learn to recognise the difference between a genuine responsibility, an unexpected opportunity to serve and an unnecessary distraction. There may also be things deliberately pulling attention away from what should be done.

Not every request deserves the same priority. Discipline helps the servant leader recognise what requires attention and what must be refused so that important responsibilities are not continually displaced.

Pressure Tests Established Discipline

Daniel's prayer life provides another important example. When prayer became dangerous, Daniel did not abandon the discipline that had already governed his life.

Daniel wrote in **Daniel 6:10**:

> *"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."*

The words *"as he did aforetime"* show that Daniel remained steady under pressure. His practice had already been established before the difficulty came, and pressure tested what was already part of his life.

A disciplined servant leader should therefore not wait until difficulty arrives before developing consistency. Ordinary days help prepare us for difficult days.

The habits established when circumstances are favourable can help steady the servant when pressure increases. What has become part of faithful daily life is less easily abandoned when circumstances suddenly become difficult.

Motivation Will Not Always Be Strong

There will also be times when nothing dramatic is wrong, but motivation simply decreases. The work may become repetitive, progress may seem slow, recognition may be absent or results may take longer than expected.

This is where discipline becomes especially important. The servant leader cannot depend entirely upon emotion because faithful responsibility sometimes means continuing simply because the task still needs to be done.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:9**:

> *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*

Weariness is real, and Paul does not pretend otherwise. His instruction is to continue in well doing.

Discipline does not require us to deny that we are tired or discouraged. It helps us remain faithful when immediate feelings are no longer supplying the motivation that was present at the beginning.

A servant leader therefore learns that faithfulness and enthusiasm are not the same thing. Enthusiasm may rise and fall, but responsibility should continue to be carried faithfully.

Pressure Must Not Move Us From Truth

Pressure can also tempt a servant leader to compromise. Criticism may make silence easier than truth, while opposition may tempt us to soften what Scripture clearly teaches.

Personal pride can work in the opposite direction. A leader may defend a position simply because they do not want to admit that correction is needed.

In both situations, the Word of God must remain the plumb line. Discipline includes remaining steady enough to ask, What does Scripture actually require?

We must not move simply because pressure demands compromise. Neither should we refuse to move when Scripture requires correction.

This balance is important because steadiness is not the same as stubbornness. Faithfulness stands where the Word stands and changes when the Word shows that change is necessary.

Christ Within Keeps Discipline From Becoming Self-Reliance

The answer to pressure is not simply to become more determined. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within must govern the way we respond when pressure, distraction and weariness come.

His life within gives strength to remain faithful when motivation is weak, while His wisdom helps us recognise distraction. His truth keeps us anchored when pressure comes, and His humility enables us to accept correction when necessary.

His faithfulness also keeps the servant from abandoning responsibility simply because circumstances have become difficult. Discipline under pressure is not stubbornness. It is steady obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word when circumstances make that obedience more difficult.

A servant leader therefore remains watchful. Distractions must be recognised, pressure must be endured and weariness must be acknowledged, while truth continues to remain the plumb line.

Faithful discipline continues when circumstances change because the responsibility remains under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that faithful discipline continues even when motivation is weak?

Personal Reflection

When enthusiasm fades, which commitment are you most tempted to leave unfinished? Is the responsibility still yours to carry?

Action Step

Choose one necessary duty and take the next manageable step even if you do not feel eager. Distinguish faithfulness from pushing past sensible physical limits.

CONCLUSION: DISCIPLINE MAKES SERVICE STEADY

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Throughout this Study Guide, we have seen that discipline is not an attempt to produce spiritual life through human effort. Jesus Christ is already the life of the born-again believer. Discipline concerns the way we order our daily choices, habits, responsibilities and priorities under His authority.

A servant leader must therefore learn to live with consistency. We have considered the importance of:

- Self-control;
- Careful planning;
- Goals that remain under the authority of Jesus Christ;
- Redeeming the time;
- Prayer and attention to the Word of God;
- Godly habits;
- Balancing personal growth and service;
- Remaining steady under pressure and distraction.

Each of these areas affects the way responsibility is carried. Self-control guards the life from impulsive choices, while planning helps us use what has been entrusted wisely. Goals give direction while remaining subject to Jesus Christ and His Word, and redeeming the time helps prevent important responsibilities from being continually displaced.

Prayer keeps the servant dependent upon God, while Scripture keeps the servant anchored in truth. Godly habits bring consistency to ordinary days, and balance helps prevent both neglect of personal growth and neglect of service. Discipline under pressure helps the servant remain steady when circumstances become difficult.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:27**:

> *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."*

Paul understood that ministry did not remove the need for personal discipline. The person who preached to others still needed to govern his own life, and the same principle remains important for every servant leader.

Discipline does not make Jesus Christ more complete within us, earn spiritual life or replace dependence upon Him. Discipline helps bring daily life into willing obedience to the One who already dwells within.

The servant leader therefore does not seek discipline simply to become more efficient or productive. The purpose is faithfulness. What we believe in the heart must be carried into daily life with consistency so that the responsibilities entrusted to us are not weakened by carelessness, distraction or changing feelings.

The central truth of this Study Guide is simple: Discipline makes service steady.

In the next Study Guide, we will consider The Faithfulness of a Servant Leader and examine how steadfastness, endurance and continued obedience carry servant leadership through to completion.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important that discipline makes service steady without replacing Christ's life within?

Personal Reflection

Which daily practice helps you serve faithfully, and where have you begun depending upon the routine instead of Christ?

Action Step

Keep one useful routine this week while consciously depending upon Christ within. Explain how the routine serves obedience without becoming the source of spiritual life.

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 a servant leader need discipline under Christ's authority? Explain how self-control makes service more steady without becoming the source of spiritual life.

2. Understanding

How can careful planning and useful goals serve a responsibility while remaining subject to God? Explain what should happen when a plan or goal begins to govern the servant.

3. Personal Reflection

Which daily habit or use of time has this study shown you needs correction? Explain how it affects your attention to Christ and the people you serve.

4. Response to Truth

When busyness, distraction or weariness interferes with prayer and service, how should you decide what needs attention? Explain how to avoid both careless neglect and needless pressure.

5. Action Step

Choose one realistic change to your daily routine that will help you attend to God's Word, pray and carry a responsibility faithfully. When will you begin, and whom will it benefit?

6. Early Response

Have you begun the change identified in Question 5? If so, explain what you did and whether it helped you serve more faithfully. If not, what has prevented you from beginning?

7. Ongoing Practice

What will help you continue prayer, attention to Scripture and faithful service when you are tired or interrupted? Describe how you will keep the habit useful rather than empty.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How do Christ's life within, the fruit of the Spirit and self-control relate to planning and godly habits? Explain why discipline cannot create spiritual life by human effort.

9. Living the Truth

In a real duty this week, how will you use time, preparation and prayer to help another person? Describe a choice that will show faithful service rather than only outward efficiency.

10. Final Response

Bring together self-control, planning, prayer, the Word and steady service. What has changed in your understanding, and what daily choice are you prepared to keep under Christ's authority?