

Real Life Group Leaders

Biblical Leadership

Facilitator Notes

Notes: These notes are taken from “*Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*” by Bill Donahue and the Willow Creek Small Groups Team. All Scripture used here is from the New International Version unless noted otherwise.

The Call to Servanthood

John 13:34-35 – “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

What does John 13:34-35 tell us about the example of leadership that Jesus gave us?

In Scripture, *ministry* and *service* are the words that characterize leadership. The one who is not willing to serve is not fit to lead. Jesus set the standard when He said, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45).

Often even Christian leadership is patterned after business or political models which emphasize an organizational aspect of leadership.

Leaders Shepherd Others

John 10:14 – I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me

How does the “shepherd” model of leadership that Jesus gave us help small group leaders?

Regardless of their gift mix, all small group leaders function as shepherds. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd—one who is concerned about the health of the flock. Jesus was willing to lay down His life for the sake of His charges. Likewise, we too should be willing to set aside our own agendas in the best interest of our constituents when this becomes necessary. We’ll delve deeper into this concept in a later session.

Leaders Work Together

Mark 3:14 – He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach

What does Mark 3:14 tell us about God’s plan for how He wants His children to conduct ministry?

Delegate... Jesus called His followers into a community in order to develop them as leaders and He sent them out in pairs (Luke 10:1). When needs were prevalent in the early community, teams and groups were appointed to provide gift-based servant leadership (Acts 6). As you trace the development of the church, the leadership structure was always to include a plurality of leaders.

Small group leaders should model such leadership by working with one or more apprentices, serving together in community. By doing so, we share leadership and avoid the temptation to become the only one with a leadership role.

Leaders Are Lovers

John 13:1 – It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

What does John 13:1 tell us about how leaders should conduct themselves?

You will never earn the right to fully lead those whom you do not love. Caring, trusting relationships form the foundation for every vibrant community. Love for God, the church, for the small group, and for the lost are trademarks of growing leaders. People tend to receive truth more readily—including correction or rebuke when you genuinely care for them.

How may we as group leaders better express love to those in our groups?

Gary Chapman lists these five areas of focus in the book, *The Five Love Languages*:

- Words of Affirmation
- Appropriate Touch
- Giving Gifts
- Acts of Service
- Time Spent Together

Get to know your people and genuinely express bold love to them. In most cases, they will eagerly follow your leadership.

Small Group Leader Qualifications

Who is fit to lead a small group?

Those who view the small group as an all encompassing disciple-making machine want it to be led by someone like the Apostle Paul or church leader Priscilla. On the other extreme are people who think anyone with a pulse and a testimony can lead a little flock.

We have identified seven areas to be considered when taking on the leadership challenge or developing potential leaders. These qualifications should be viewed as something to be aspired to, asking potential leaders if they are willing to grow in each one.

Connect with Christ

1 Corinthians 11:1 – Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

What does 1 Corinthians 11:1 tell us about how we should approach leadership?

Every believer needs to connect daily with Christ, but this is especially true with group leaders. From Christ we draw strength and hope, confidence and cleansing. You lead best from an inner life that is growing and developing intimacy with Christ. In so doing, you can call your group toward the same commitment.

Pursue Your Calling

Jeremiah 20:9 – But if I say, "I will not mention Him or speak any more in His name," His Word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

What does Jeremiah 20:9 tell us about the attitude we should have about teaching God's Word to our groups?

Jeremiah had a mission to accomplish even when he was tired or unsure of the results. God had chosen him to speak His message, and Jeremiah could not hold back.

Small group leadership will not likely call you to the same ministry of Jeremiah, but it still demands a sense of calling—that God is in this, and He will sustain you through times of struggle and difficulty. Your calling will bring you a confidence and conviction that you are doing the right work.

Guard Your Character

Proverbs 4:23 – Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

What does Proverbs 4:23 tell us about a leader's character?

Leaders must pay attention to the heart, to their integrity. The Apostle Matthew put it this way:

Matthew 12:35 – The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

Being truthful and trustworthy contributes to a leader's character; when trust is broken, it is difficult to restore. Leadership is impossible apart from trust. Paul encouraged a young leader, Timothy, to "*set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity*" (1 Tim 4:12).

What can we do to guard our heart?

We must actively seek to purge from our lives thoughts, actions, and attitudes that will corrupt or harden our heart. Become willing to engage in self-examination and peer examination. Ask people where you have character weakness and strengths; evaluate your own heart before God and with Scripture.

Honor Your Compatibility

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 – There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

What does 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 tell us about how leaders should approach their ministry?

Each Christ-follower has a mix of gifts for building up the body of Christ. Their gift mix will help them flourish in some ministry areas but be stunted in others. It is important for every leader to know the kind of small group ministry that best aligns with how God made them.

Take time to assess whether you would fit best with adults or children, working at a task or providing care to the hurting, leading a study group or a mission project. Each of these is accomplished in community and needs gifted leaders to bring their best to the effort.

Develop Your Competence

2 Timothy 2:15 – Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

What does 2 Timothy 2:15 tell us about the obligation leaders have for self-development?

There are core competencies required for every kind of work. Small group leaders need relational and shepherding abilities or it will be difficult to guide a small community. Being good at your ministry really counts. To become

competent means pursuing personal development and skill training for the ministry in which you serve.

Maintain Your Commitment

Luke 9:62 – Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

What does Luke 9:62 tell us about the commitment leaders should have to their ministry?

Those were hard words about full devotion to an audience that did not understand the cost of following Christ and the level of commitment He desires. Leaders prove their love for Christ by their commitment to His followers, "feed My sheep" (John 21:15-19).

It is easy to have group meetings-it is harder to make disciples. Small group leaders serve in a spirit of commitment, not convenience. It takes courage, resolve, and perseverance when you are disappointed or weary. Leaders need to remain committed to the cause, to Christ, to the church, and to the people in their group.

Increase Your Capacity

1 Timothy 4:16 – Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

What does 1 Timothy 4:16 tell us about the leader's capacity for ministry?

Burnout wipes out many well-intentioned leaders. We need leaders who have energy to carry out the ministry. Good leaders pay close attention to themselves, they watch their lives. Good leaders need to care for themselves emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

Never sacrifice your life and family on the altar of ministry. God does not want you frazzled and exhausted while you seek to serve others. Sure, there are seasons of hardship and difficulty, but you cannot sustain a fruitful ministry amidst frequent exhaustion and constant pressure.

How may we avoid leader burnout in our ministries?

First, set *boundaries* around your time and priorities. Learn to say "No" regardless of the disappointment you might cause others. Second, create some *margin* in your life. Plan some space into your schedule, three to four unscheduled blocks of time for fun, friends, rest, and responding to the inevitable crisis. Third, replenish your *reserve*. Practice solitude and take time for celebration. Fill your tank with joy, rest, and extended community with God.

Leadership Assessment

It is a good practice to take a "leadership inventory" of the seven leader qualifications from time to time. Identify areas of strength and celebrate them. Take note of areas for improvement as well. Use the ratings below as a guide to determine where you might need some focus or help:

- 1= needs significant improvement
- 2 = needs some improvement
- 3 = maintaining my present status
- 4 = making some progress in this area
- 5 = making significant progress in this area

Action Step: Based on the above assessment, where is God asking you to focus some energy in the next season of ministry? In what areas should you celebrate progress?

Motives for Leadership

What do the following verses have to say about the appropriate motives for leadership?

Serve Christ

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23-24).

Bear fruit in your life

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:8).

Keep watch over (shepherd) others

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Be an example to the body

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Use your gifts to serve others

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Communicate the message of reconciliation

"...that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"
(2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

What do the following verses have to say about wrong motives for leadership?

Self-exaltation

"Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips." (Proverbs 27:2)

To feel important or gain prestige

"We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed-God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else" (1 Thessalonians 2:4-6).

Because someone pressured you

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be" (1 Peter 5:2).

To spread biblical error or false teaching

"For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Why is having a short fuse or exhibiting outbursts of anger bad characteristics for leaders?

James tells us that human anger does not achieve the righteousness of God (James 1:19-20). God's work is accomplished by one who listens attentively, speaks only when necessary, and is slow to anger. Leaders manage their anger or channel anger appropriately. Anger is to be put aside or properly managed (Gal. 5:20; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8).

Why is unconfessed sin bad for leaders?

We are commanded to confess our sins. John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Any sin that has control of us (Rom. 6:16) must be confessed and brought under the lordship of Christ (Acts 2:38). If there is any outstanding sin in the life of a leader and it is not dealt with appropriately, this could disqualify a leader.

Leaders are called and gifted of God to build into others, facilitate their growth and lead by example in obedience and character. The quality of ministry is directly proportional to the quality of leadership.