

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 3: PUBLIC LIFE OF A SPIRITUAL LEADER

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Leadership Lifestyle. The lessons examine the practical and spiritual requirements for those in Christian leadership. Being a leader is so much more than standing up in front of a group of people asking them to follow you! To be a great leader, one must maintain high standards in both public and private life. While every one of us struggles in many ways, a leader faces unique challenges. This module identifies some of these struggles and how to combat them, with practical advice from men and women who have experienced the trials and joys of following God's calling in leadership. Each lesson concludes with a Leader to Leader page. It features quotes from historical Christians, current Christian leaders, and people (not in leadership) who share their perspective on the topic.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God. The lessons will be especially helpful to those who are pastors, church leaders, mentors or teachers, but also anyone wishing to grow in their relationship with God.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 3: PUBLIC LIFE OF A SPIRITUAL LEADER

PURPOSE

This lesson looks at the struggles those in spiritual leadership face in public life, including how to manage criticism and conflict, how to serve the public and meet expectations.

LEADER'S NOTE

If you are a leader in any capacity, you are going to be judged by people. The decisions you make, the way you dress, your speech, the way you raise your family, the vehicle you drive and where you go all fall under public scrutiny. Many pastors have had their careers destroyed because of unwise decisions, but just as many have suffered because of untrue rumours that circulated about them. These are things all leaders should be aware of, and be prepared for.

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ Do you know of anyone whose career ended because of rumours about them? How do rumours damage the public image of celebrities, politicians, athletes and those in spiritual leadership?
- ❖ What kind of life do you expect a pastor or someone in leadership to live? Do you have different expectations of them than people not in ministry? Why or why not?
- ❖ What might a pastor or leader do to make you choose not to follow them or support them any longer?
- ❖ How do you respond when people disagree with you or are critical of a decision you have made? How does your response affect such a confrontation?
- ❖ What is your primary concern about your public image? How do you want people to see you?



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH:

- ❖ **All Eyes are On You:** Anytime you are in a position of leadership, you should expect to be treated differently. It is natural for those you lead to be critical, and this is often one of the greatest struggles of leadership. If you are preaching on a Sunday, all eyes are on you. Listening to the words you say, some people will wonder if you practise the things you preach. If you are a counsellor, your client may choose to criticize you rather than accept your advice.
 - Leaders of all kinds set themselves up to be judged. When they preach, teach, or give advice, they must hold themselves accountable to the same standard and apply the same advice to their own lives first. Otherwise, who will listen to them?
 - How you behave in public when everyone is watching is very important, but who you are when no one sees you is more critical. We have a tendency to portray a better version of ourselves in public. If our private and public lives don't match up, people will notice eventually (Proverbs 10:9).
 - The Bible outlines some expectations for how spiritual leaders should behave. We have a right to require leaders to live their lives with high moral standards. What are these verses saying?
 - 1 Timothy 3:1-13
 - 1 Peter 5: 2-4
 - Titus 1: 5-9
 - Exodus 18:21-22
 - Acts 6:1-6

ASK:

- *In addition to the Biblical expectations of Christian leaders, what expectations do people in your church community or culture have of their*
 - *Pastors?*
 - *Elders?*
 - *School teachers?*
 - *Elected officials/Rulers?*
 - *Military leaders?*
- *Are the standards in the Church harder to live up to than those for secular leaders? Should they be?*
- *Is it possible for a leader to live up to these standards? What happens when they don't?*

**TEACH:**

- ❖ **Leading Like Jesus:** Once Jesus began His public ministry, He faced constant criticism and scrutiny, so Jesus knows what we are going through! The only difference is that He was without sin, and the religious leaders could not find any fault in Him (even though they accused Him of many things).
 - **Criticism of Jesus:** The religious leaders of Jesus' day found fault with most of what He did. This criticism was *destructive* and full of lies.
 - **Criticism of His Good Works:** Jesus was criticised for healing people (how, when, and by what power). People were always watching Him and many did not approve of all He did!
 - **Criticism of His Character:** They attacked not only His actions but also His character, which was displayed by His actions. Jesus was criticised for eating with and keeping company with sinners.
 - **Criticism of His Teachings:** Jesus taught the true meaning of the Old Testament, but the religious leaders were critical of His teachings and His redefinition of righteousness!
 - **Jesus accepted truth and dismissed falsehood:** We must understand that Jesus was perfect and sinless in His actions, yet He was still criticised! Should we not expect criticism as imperfect people? Sometimes the criticisms brought before Jesus were true (such as Him keeping company with sinners). In these cases, He explained Himself. However, when the criticism was not justified, He corrected their false accusations. This is a good rule for us as well – to evaluate the criticism first before reacting to it.

TASK:

Divide participants into three groups. Have each group read one of the portions of Scripture below in which Jesus faced criticism. Have each group discuss the scenario and answer the questions about it. They can then report to the others in the class.

1. Matthew 9:1-82. Matthew 12:1-83. Mark 7:1-23

- Who criticized Jesus?
- What was the criticism? Was the criticism true or false?
- How did Jesus respond to the criticism?
- What can we learn from this example?

TEACH:

- **Jesus Responded in Love and Truth:** Even though His critics wanted to trap Him, find fault with Him or stop His ministry, they couldn't.. Out of love, Jesus brought people to the knowledge of the truth and corrected their false beliefs (Matthew 22:23-33).
- **Jesus Sometimes Chose to be Silent:** Jesus did not always answer His accusers. An example is when the only fault they could find in Him was that He claimed to be the King of the Jews (Matthew 27:11). He affirmed that He was, but would not respond to



other criticisms (Matthew 27:12-14). He knew it was His time to die and there was no benefit to correcting accusations. There are times we as leaders have to accept criticism and accusations, choosing to be silent rather than engaging in self-defence or arguments.

- ❖ **Criticism in Public Life:** As leaders, we must accept the fact that we may receive public criticism at some point in our lives. If Jesus faced opposition, persecution, doubt from His followers, and challenges to His authority, how much more will we?
 - **Many forms:** Opposition and criticism come in many forms.
 - Rumours
 - Untrue accusations
 - Critiques of our teaching or methods
 - Opposition to change
 - Lack of support
 - People stirring up dissent
 - Formal complaints
 - Withholding charitable giving
 - People leaving the church/ministry
 - **Assessing Criticism:** First, identify if there is truth in what the person has said. If so – accept it, use it to become better at what you do, and be honest. If it is untrue, learn to dismiss it, or ask God for wisdom to correct the falsehood.
 - **Constructive Criticism:** It is intended to help you become a better leader, and may come from peers, supervisors, those you serve, or those who care about you. Constructive criticism should help you improve your work.
 - **Destructive Criticism:** It is not helpful for growth, is usually untrue, and comes as a personal attack on you without any evidence. Sometimes the people you lead would prefer to criticize you, the messenger, rather than accepting the message.
- ❖ **Managing Criticism as a Spiritual Leader:** Since criticism is inevitable, we should learn how to manage it within our role as a leader, and how to manage ourselves so that our ministry is uninterrupted. The following steps are vital in order to survive in a position of leadership.
 - **Conduct Yourself with Integrity:** Make sure you are doing what you tell others to do – this is integrity. The validity of your ministry and your testimony rely on your integrity. We should aim to be people who keep our word and who do what we say we will, not only because of people but because it is right before God.
 - 1 Peter 3:16
 - Matthew 23:2-4
 - 2 Corinthians 8:21



- **Make Choices with Your Followers in Mind:** Once you are in a position of leadership and responsibility, you have to consider others in every choice you make. Who is watching you? What if they follow your example? How will your decisions impact the example you are setting or the authority you have been entrusted with? It is a falsehood that what we do on our own time or in our private life has no bearing on our leadership.
 - o [Luke 16:10](#)
 - o [1 Corinthians 11:1](#)
 - o [Philippians 3:17](#)
 - o [Titus 2:7](#)

- **Deal with Your Own Sins:** Every leader has personal problems, temptations and struggles which can be a hindrance to leadership. It is important to know your own weaknesses, deal with them, and get help when necessary. Everyone has a dark side. Be willing to admit shortcomings. Remember that through faith we have been redeemed by Jesus, and are in the process of becoming sanctified. Some problems that plague leaders specifically are:

- o Anger
- o Pleasing people
- o Putting their image first
- o Too much confidence in self
- o Insecurity
- o Manipulating others
- o Immorality
- o Pride

Every person in ministry should expect some criticism because we all have weaknesses that cannot be entirely covered up. In fact, listening to critics can actually be part of God's process of sanctification in us. We should follow the instruction of 1 John 1:9 by regularly confessing our sin and accepting God's gracious forgiveness. We are all proud, and heeding correction helps us become humble.

- **Expect and Invite Criticism:** If you never hear any criticism, you might not be listening! Good leaders are humble, willing to accept correction, and make changes when necessary. Surround yourself with wise people and invite them to give honest feedback and suggestions. This does not have to diminish your position of authority! If you are open to people giving feedback on your leadership, they are more likely to address the issues with you face to face, even rumours and false accusations.

- o [Proverbs 15:31-32](#)

- **Don't Take it Personally:** It is of utmost importance as a leader to put your identity in what God says about you, not what people say about you! Leaders are often criticised not just for how they do their job, but also for *who they are*, which can cause harm. Remember that who you are is not what you do. God identifies who we are:

- o We are His children ([John 1:12](#)).
- o We are accepted ([Romans 15:7](#)).
- o We are made in His image ([Genesis 1:27](#)).



- o We are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- o We are a part of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27).
- o We are chosen and holy (1 Peter 2:9).
- o We are loved (Ephesians 2:4-9).
- o We are of great worth (Matthew 10:31).

We must limit the impact that personal attacks have on us. We need to constantly remind ourselves of who we are in Christ (listed above). We will not always be in agreement with one another, but different perspectives enrich the body of Christ. Do not let criticism stop you from doing what God has called you to do.

- **Don't Take Revenge:** We must exercise caution to not criticise others when they criticise us. When we are patient with others, we demonstrate the love of God. A leader should aspire to forgive, be merciful and patient rather than responding with vengeance and anger. When we learn to pray for those who torment us, we are becoming more like Christ!

- o Romans 12:17-21
- o 1 Peter 3:9
- o Leviticus 19:18

- ❖ **Conclusion:** Even though you as spiritual leaders experience stress and criticism, God will bless you as you are faithful to Him. You have the opportunity to share truth, to be an example to those who are watching you, and to serve God. If you are tired of the world hating you, or coming up against obstacles as you do the will of God, take heart. Jesus faced conflict, and He said that we would face the same: "Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12), and "even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled..." (1 Peter 3:14). Criticism and correction do not have to end your ministry; rather they can be part of God's process in refining you.

TASK:

At the conclusion of this lesson are several scenarios which demonstrate struggles spiritual leaders may face. Each story is accompanied by possible actions that one could take in response. Divide participants into small groups, and give one scenario to each group. They should discuss the story using the following questions as a guide:

- *What would they be naturally inclined to do?*
- *What should a spiritual leader do?*
- *What solution to this problem would be most successful in your community?*
- *Can you think of other potential responses to this problem?*



DISCUSSION

- ❖ Have you ever criticised or challenged someone who was in leadership? What was the criticism, was it valid, and how did you challenge them?
- ❖ Why is it important that leaders make choices that do not tarnish their reputation? What scenario can you think of where it is critical *not* to lead others astray by your own actions?
- ❖ What particular sins and struggles do you think are prevalent amongst leaders? What help can leaders get to deal with these?

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that participants would trust God and faithfully follow Him regardless of the cost. Pray that they would live a holy life and not lead others astray. Pray that they would honour God in their private as well as public lives. Pray that they would not try to hide any secret sins, but that they would live honestly before God and people. Pray that they would be gracious to their enemies, pray for those who spread lies about them, and live at peace with those around them as far as it is possible.



Leadership Scenarios

What Would You Do?

Scenario 1

You are a Bible teacher with a small group of students. They come to your house each week to learn, and you have carefully prepared material to help them grow in their knowledge of God and His Word. After several months, your numbers begin to decrease. Your students have not told you why, they have simply stopped coming. You hear from your wife who has talked with other women in the community that some have left because the material is too difficult and confusing for them. What do you do?

- a) Stop holding Bible studies and find new students – these students are not worth your time.
- b) Meet with the few students you have left and ask them to assess the material you have been covering. Then you can choose topics of interest and prepare material at their level.
- c) Choose a new, simplified topic of Bible study. Ask your wife to pass on the message that your group has changed, hoping to bring back the students you lost.
- d) Go to the house of a man who stopped attending the study group and ask why he stopped coming. Do not leave until he gives you a straight answer. Defend yourself and your decisions.
- e) Spread rumours about those who have stopped attending, saying that they are faithless and weak.

Scenario 2

You are a new pastor of a small church. Not long after you begin, a church member comes to visit you, criticizing the new changes you have made to the Sunday worship service. They liked things the way they were before with the previous pastor. They proceed to criticize the way you dress on Sunday and how your voice sounds. After they leave, you are discouraged. What do you do?

- a) Change the order of service to the way things were before so no one is upset, and refrain from trying anything new in case it is not well received.
- b) Thank them for their input, but decide to change nothing. You shake it off – knowing you can't please everyone all the time. You do your best to make wise choices, but you know that somebody will be critical about something. You decide this is simply a matter of opinion.
- c) Invite the person who complained to sit on a worship committee where they can give input in a constructive manner, and alongside others.
- d) Tell them they are no longer welcome to attend your church if they are not going to be supportive of leadership. Criticize them for their lack of faith in you and God.
- e) Pray about the matter with the elders of the church and ask their advice. Realize that in this congregation, changes may need to come slowly. Decide to introduce changes gradually.



Scenario 3

The elders of the Church have a meeting with you and tell you they are terminating you from your position as teaching pastor. They claim their reasons are due to 'character flaws'. You are understandably upset. As you press further for information about these flaws, they mention that they cannot have a pastor who has been unfaithful to his wife. You are shocked to hear this, as you have done nothing to bring about this accusation – you are innocent! What do you do?

- a) Offer to step down temporarily until the matter can be examined, but ask that everything be kept quiet for the sake of your reputation. Insist that the matter be examined until your name is cleared of this offence.
- b) Become enraged at them and tell them they have no right to make such accusations. Accuse each of them of sinful behaviors before God, and threaten to tell the church they have done evil and are spreading lies.
- c) Ask that you be told who is spreading these rumours. When you find out who it is, meet with them and discuss their reasoning and concerns. When you learn it was a misunderstanding on their part, thank them for their honesty and ask them to speak with the elders so the truth is revealed. Forgive those who had spread the rumours and lies.
- d) Leave the church quickly and find another place to serve, hoping your falsely-smearred reputation won't follow you somewhere else.

Scenario 4

As a youth and children's teacher, you often have parents to answer to about what you teach and the programs you run for young people. Several families decide to speak to the lead pastor and suggest you are no longer the right person for the job. The families are concerned that there is too much emphasis on fun and not enough on Scripture memory. You have been doing this work a few years, and feel called to share the Gospel with young people and reach out to those in the community. However, criticism by the parents is sometimes the worst part of the job. The lead pastor comes to you and suggests you 'fix things' with these concerned parents, or the church will have to replace you. What do you do?

- a) Quit – even though you feel called to this work and have done good things for the kids. You are unappreciated, so you decide not to waste your time in ministry any longer.
- b) Offer to meet with the parents yourself. When you hear things from their point of view, you can see that they are speaking from wisdom and experience, and you can learn from their criticisms. Ask to have another chance to implement their ideas and change the direction of your program.
- c) Offer to meet with the parents. Defend yourself and explain why fun programs are essential for bringing new children and youth to church. Insist that you understand what is needed in a youth program more than they do, and ask them to respect you and back off.
- d) Invite several parents to volunteer in your program and advise you. Ask them to make suggestions and help you implement them. Put a parent who is especially passionate about Bible memory in charge of that portion of the program. Support them in what they do.
- e) Offer to step down and seek further training in this field of ministry. Find a successful youth and children's worker at another church and ask if you can study under them. Take some youth education classes. Find another position as a youth minister in the future.



LEADER TO LEADER

QUOTATIONS FROM LEADERS PAST AND PRESENT ON THE TOPIC OF PUBLIC LIFE AND CRITICISM

"Because there are many eyes upon you, therefore there will be many observers of your falls. If other men may sin without observation, so cannot you. And you should thankfully consider how great a mercy this is, that you have so many eyes to watch over you, and so many ready to tell you of your faults, and so have greater helps than others, at least for the restraining of your sin. Though they may do it with a malicious mind, yet you have the advantage by it."
- Richard Baxter, Puritan Pastor (1614-1691)

"One of my greatest weaknesses is being defensive. But I tried to have an open ear and listen to the complaints (often about music!), and then gently engage the person or persons in dialogue if at all possible. I had sought to minister in music to a broad spectrum rather than a target group, including both contemporary and traditional music. Often people wanted one or the other and had strong opinions about that. There will always be criticism and people who have alternate opinions as to how things should be done. Sometimes these are well-founded, but many times they are based on personal preference – rather than on ministry to the body of Christ."
- David, Worship Pastor

"When I face criticism and fail to meet the expectations of those I lead, I usually feel bad. There is so much stress in leading others – we can make decisions that affect people's lives! I don't want to be an instrument of hurt but I make mistakes and it happens. I also carry the stress of feeling like what I do has to be perfect. God doesn't require this – my job is to let Him do the work through me. When criticisms come I try to evaluate if there is truth in what is being said or not. If there is, I accept it. If the criticism is justified then I have to be humble and learn from the mistake. It is always best to face my mistake rather than making it worse and denying it. At the end of the day I must focus on the things I did do correctly – the 1000 details I did manage not the one or two I missed."
- Shawna, Christian Ministry Worker

"When I realize I have disappointed someone, I remind myself that I am working for the Lord and in doing so may not be able to please that person. Then, I give thought to the details that brought about the criticism or disappointment to determine if I should ask that person's forgiveness for an actual failure, or if I owe an apology for disappointing them. And of course, if I see that I do, I make a plan and follow it so that I actually do it! But I know I cannot always please everyone and even though I am employed by the church, I do not answer to them – I answer to God. I work for God and must chiefly be concerned with His opinion of me!"
- Mike, Pastor

"There was a time in my life when I was sure I was doing everything right in ministry. I read all the right books, and spent hours in studying. I was, however, failing in my relationships with others. My supervising leader met with me regularly to mentor me and help me to learn the ropes of serving at the church. It became clear that I was not as well equipped to do the job as I had thought, and was asked to step down. It was one of the most difficult times in my life. I felt attacked and betrayed. But the truth was, God used this time to humble me and teach me many things. It took a while to learn and heal – but I am serving God again in a position I am much better suited to, with a much better attitude!"
-Adele, Christian Ministry Worker