

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND MEET NEEDS WITHOUT BEING ASKED

Leaders are Learners: Student Edition

Hi, this is Doug Fields and this is a student leadership training that I call Leaders Are Learners. Thanks for learning and for leading—leading and learning go together. So, way to go for pursuing both! Whether you are listening in your car, or at home, or running on a treadmill, I know that you are taking your faith seriously by being open to training. It is crucial that you continue to learn if you plan on being an effective student leader.

During this recording, I'm going to talk about how student leadership and servanthood go together.

This is probably one of the most difficult trainings for some leaders to grasp because most students want to become leaders because they want the spotlight, they want to be noticed, they want to be the one who is upfront and seen and heard. While those may be signs of secular leadership, Christian leadership is very different.

For many students, once they find out that biblical leadership involves serving—they want to sign up for something else—anything else. I hope that attitude doesn't describe you and I also hope that you're ready for the challenge of serving that biblical leadership requires.

Being a servant leader is a different model of leadership to follow. If you want easy leadership, follow the world's way that tells you to make yourself number one. That's easy! Anyone can do that because we're so used to thinking about ourselves. Self-centered leadership comes naturally—it doesn't require much effort. While servant leadership is very different because it flies in the face of both the world's view of leadership and what comes naturally to us. I like to think about myself—that's easy! It's much more difficult to think about you and others.

As a follower of Jesus Christ, you're called to go against the messages of the world. You've heard them before: "Look out for #1!" "2nd place is for losers." "If you're not first, get out of the way." "It's all about you." Those are worldly slogans that reinforce the "me first" attitude that most leaders possess.

For Christians, thankfully, Jesus gave us a different attitude to adopt. Jesus said some very different words: In Mark chapter 10 he said, ⁴²"You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. ⁴³ But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many."

Here's the summary: Jesus is saying, if you want to lead, you've got to serve. Now, maybe if you're hearing those words for the first time it would be understandable if you want to stop listening to this training. Maybe your idea of being a student leader is to have others respond to your commands. I would understand if you had those feelings—that's the image of leadership that you see all over the world. I'll admit it; Jesus' words are quite shocking.

But, if you want to follow the lead of Jesus, you'll need to eventually develop the primary attitude that says, "Leadership is not about me. Leadership is about serving others."

By the way, this is something very interesting to think about—Jesus doesn't ask Christian leaders to do something that he never did. Jesus didn't just talk about servant leadership, he modeled it! He served. He served when he walked on the earth and he served when he hung on the cross to pay for my sins and for yours.

Think about that for a moment. Jesus—God-in-the-flesh, all-powerful, all-knowing, all God, and yet, all servant. He served the down and out, the sinner, the outcast, the loner, the rulers, the religious leaders, and the poor. Leader? Yes. Servant? Absolutely!

Given Jesus' actions while he walked the earth, a definition of leadership would have to include two key words: serve and influence. Jesus did both. Through his serving he influenced others. That's leadership!

If you want to be a leader, not just a student leader, but a Christian leader, you must learn to lead like Jesus and serve others. When you serve others, you'll have the opportunity not only to influence, but also to change the image of leadership in your church, in your student ministry, in your family, and in your school.

Anyone can stand on a stage and bark orders and tell others what to do and where to go. But, that's not biblical leadership. The sign of a Christian leader is one who has a humble heart and a servant's attitude. So instead of viewing your leadership role as a chance to exert power and voice your opinions, view leadership as an opportunity to serve. When you do, you'll succeed at leadership, and, at the same time, God will use your service to grow you to be more like Jesus. You've probably heard it said before—but it's worth repeating—you're never more like Jesus than when you serve.

Here's a problem with many student ministries, and if this describes yours, a servant leader will look to change it. Some student ministries fall short when they equate leadership with personality type and look for the outgoing, cute, and fun student. That type of leadership is nothing more than a popularity contest. When a church does this, they fail to see the Christ-like qualities of those who are actually doing the work of the ministry by serving others. You can change this!

How do you get started? The most important first step is to get a mental understanding of what's important and expected of you. We've already talked about Jesus' definition of leadership. Now, the step is to develop that type of servant attitude. The Apostle Paul said it like this in Philippians 2:5-8: ⁵ *Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had.* ⁶ *Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God.* ⁷ *He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form.* ⁸ *And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross.*

Once again, you truly are never more like Jesus than when you serve.

So, are you now thinking, "Great, Doug! Show me to the supply closet for my mop and toilet brush, I'm ready to serve the church!" Although that would be appreciated, especially after a 6th grade lock-in, serving is bigger than just cleaning up spills and doing the stereotypical janitor tasks. That's part of it, but serving includes putting others' needs before your own.

Let me rattle off a few ideas of how this might happen:

How about giving a kind word of encouragement to someone who you know needs it?

How about baby-sitting for your youth pastor—free of charge—so he or she can go on a date with his/her spouse? Did you hear the “free” part? Yeah, serving asks for nothing in return.

How about when you’re walking out to the parking lot and you see someone with their car trunk propped open, carrying supplies into the church? You stop your personal agenda and help them. That’s serving.

Any time you’re helping meet a need and you’re doing it through serving, that’s leadership.

Let me tell you about Taylor. Taylor is a junior in the high school ministry and he began serving in our sound booth while he was a middle school student. He’s been serving this way for several years. Every weekend he makes sure that all the microphones work, and the music cables are plugged-in and the power to all the visual aides are working. Basically, he’d be known as our sound guy. Few people ever see him and even fewer know him, but I consider him one of our student leaders because he loves God and he shows it through serving to meet a need. One of the things I love about Taylor is that he does all kinds of things without having to be asked. In my opinion, that’s advanced leadership. A lot of students can serve and meet needs when I point them out, but, Taylor does it without being asked. For example, he took initiative—without ever being told—and wrote a script for how he thought the service should flow together. It was really good and we all said, “Perfect, let’s use Taylor’s idea.” He goes above and beyond the average sound guy. I must admit, I’m a little spoiled by students like Taylor who get it. They understand that leaders serve, and serve without being asked.

I’ve also come to love Taylor’s humble heart and willing attitude Taylor understands his role isn’t to stand on stage and sound good. His role is behind the scenes making me and others who are on stage sound good. It’s a great example of servanthood and leadership. Our youth ministry is stronger because of Taylor.

Where are some areas within your youth ministry where you can begin serving immediately? What’s being overlooked that you can notice on your own and fix? Where is there a person in your student ministry right now who needs a friend? Don’t wait for your youth pastor to point that person out, make it happen on your own. That’s initiative, that’s servanthood, that’s leadership. Who can you pray with this week who is hurting? Who needs a phone call of encouragement?

I want you to understand that big leadership happens through relatively small actions. I’m not asking you to go build new church buildings; I’m asking you to notice someone who isn’t connected. I’m asking you to meet needs that aren’t being met—and you don’t meet those needs and blow your horn and say, “Did you notice that I met that need? Did you see me?” Instead, meet the need. Serve. Then allow God to reward your servanthood.

Let me add one more comment before I finish. I’ve given several examples of leadership that are behind-the-scenes. There’s also leadership in front of people, in front of the curtain, on stage type leadership. If that’s how you’re wired, that’s great! There’s nothing wrong with being in front. But, you’re still called to be a servant leader. You’re just a servant leader who leads in front of people. Some lead on stage, some lead off stage, but the one thing they have in common is that they serve. Because biblical leadership is serving.

My closing challenge is to put this recording in a place where you can listen to it again. Maybe several months from now. I know my voice may be painful to hear, so give it some time, but listen to it again. The reason I want you to listen again is because if you don't get this servant-leadership principle, you're really missing the backbone of being a Christian student leader. I really want you to get this or your other acts of leadership won't have the power that's required from Christian leaders. When you do re-listen, grade yourself on your current status as a servant leader and know that as a leader you'll continue to improve, to learn—even learn new ways that you can be of service to God.

It takes courage to be a servant leader. Others may look at you and think you're trying to draw attention to yourself or even make negative comments about you—"There's Alyssa, always trying to kiss up by cleaning up the youth room." If that's the case, just remember that you serve a great God who sees everything and knows the motives of your heart and will reward your acts of serving.

Thank you so much for caring enough about your life and growing as a leader. My prayers go with you as you continue your life of leadership through service.