Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Study Guide

LEADERSHIP LIFESTYLE

LESSON 2: PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE AND WORSHIP

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.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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LESSON 2: PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE AND WORSHIP

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson continues the discussion about spiritual disciplines for the leader, specifically a consistent personal devotional life.

JUST SO YOU KNOW…

All Christian leaders face specific risks. One of these is that their public spiritual duties leave little or no room for private devotion to God. They can be involved in many spiritual activities and be admired by their followers, but inside they may feel empty as they neglect their own spiritual health. This lesson is meant to be a warning and encouragement to leaders and pastors; they must persevere in maintaining personal time with God. Consider being accountable to someone for this particular discipline. If you have struggled in this area, be assured that there is hope and recovery – and the answer lies in turning to God and finding comfort in Him rather than adding more to your schedule!

GETTING STARTED

1. How do you know someone truly loves God? What do you see them doing or not doing? Can you tell from the outside? Can this be faked?

2. As a leader, have you ever felt like you were 'dried up spiritually', lacking love, energy, patience, and knowledge? Have you lost your connection to God and feel unable to continue in His work? What causes this? What can prevent it?

STUDY

- **A VERY CHALLENGING CALLING:** Whether you are a pastor, small group leader, youth mentor, missionary, children's pastor, or part of a pastoral team at a large church, there are great challenges and even risks involved in leading others!

  - **We Are Held to a High Standard:** We are held to a high standard by God and those who follow us! If we lead people with an attitude of superiority or with false motives, we will be found out. If we neglect to serve with love, people will know. We are accountable not only for what we do, but how we live, and we need God's help every day.

    What do the following verses tell you about the standard we are held to?

1 Timothy 4:12	
Titus 1:5-9	
James 3:1	

  - **We Are Responsible for Others:** Any position of Christian leadership assumes some level of responsibility for others (what we teach them, how we care for them, the example we set, etc.).

    What do the following verses tell you about our responsibility for others?

Proverbs 27:23	
Hebrews 13:17	
1 Peter 5:2	

  - From your experience, what unique struggles do pastors and other leaders face?

- **We face Unique Struggles:** Christian leaders face unique challenges. We may struggle with any of these problems:
  - **Pride:** We may be tempted to think more highly of ourselves than we should.
  - **Loss of Identity:** We confuse who we are (a Christian) with what we do (our work), and can neglect the duties of loving God first and devoting ourselves to Him.
  - **Stress:** When dealing with the problems of others, we often have no time to deal with our own struggles or share them with someone. We can get weighed down with the stresses of other people.
  - **Attack:** Christian leaders are especially susceptible to attacks from Satan. The enemy wants to destroy the good work we are doing, and may attack us, tempt us, or frustrate our families.
  - **Conflict:** If we make decisions, we will find someone who disagrees with us. Our work will be met with criticism and conflict, which can be taken personally.
  - **Boundaries and Priorities:** We enjoy the work we do – but it can be difficult to set personal boundaries, like setting aside time for ourselves and our family. This can lead to burnout, depression, and ministry fatigue.

❖ **OUR FIRST LOVE:** Sometimes in the business of serving God, we lose sight of our first priority (which is to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength). After all, that is the *greatest* commandment Jesus gave us!

- What two commands does Matthew 22:36-40 give us? Which command is the FIRST command, and why do you think it is first?

The commandment to love others as ourselves is important, but it is secondary. If we don't love God FIRST, then the struggles mentioned above will only compound. We must not put the needs of others before our relationship with God.

- Forsaking our First Love: We serve God because we love Him. And even though we love Him deeply, it is often easier to respond to the never ending needs of others than to set aside time alone with Him.
  - Consider what God said to the Ephesian church in Revelations 2:1-7. Read that passage. What good deeds are listed? What was the problem with this church?

- God said to this church that what they were doing was admirable, but it was useless without love! Does it startle you that they could do all the right things, even with the right motives, but still not please God?

➢ Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Consider, if we don't love others, what does this passage say about us?

➢ What value to God are we if we don't love? Can a person look like an excellent leader on the outside but not have genuine love for God and others on the inside?

❖ **ABIDING IN GOD:** We have a high calling as leaders, and if we stumble in our faithfulness to God we could negatively affect those who follow us. Letting anything or anyone come between us and God (even if it is a day filled with serving others with our good works), can lead us away from God who is our source of life.

➢ **Remain in Me:** God commands us to remain in Him, or to *abide* in Him (John 15:4). We are given the picture of a vine that is attached to the stalk or root. Alone, it cannot bear fruit and it has no life. We must remain in an intimate relationship with Jesus our Saviour at all times through daily personal devotions and worship. Even though acts of love or service, preaching sermons, teaching lessons, or managing a ministry are all important, they will not cultivate a close relationship with God. Consider what He tells us about abiding in Him.

➢ Read John 15:1-11 and answer the questions below.

How many times does Jesus say the word 'abide'? What does this tell us about God's desire for us to abide?

What does 'abiding' mean?

What is the 'fruit' that is produced through abiding? What is the consequence of not abiding?

- **PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE:** As a leader, you might spend half your day reading or teaching from God's Word, praying with others, planning ministry events, or serving people – all without really abiding with Christ. When leaders make a priority of spending time alone with God, they are looking to Him to fill their soul. They are saying that He is the source of their life. They are giving God (rather than work for God) first place in their life.

  - **Personal Devotions:** Setting aside a time to meet with God is sometimes called 'personal devotions'. Many leaders choose to do this first thing in the morning before being distracted by other tasks. Usually this time includes some of the following activities:

    - **Prayer:** Prayers of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, intercession, or conversation.
    - **God's Word:** Reading a portion of the Word and thinking about it. Sometimes setting a goal, such as reading 4 or 10 chapters a day, or reading the whole Bible within a year.
    - **Meditation:** It is filling the mind with the very Words of God and considering their application to life.
    - **Journaling:** It is writing down what is being learned from and about God, and what He is saying to you in His Word.
    - **Reading:** Sometimes people will read the writings of other Christians (for example, devotional books) to get a better understanding of the Word. Reading God's Word should always take priority over reading what other people say about it, regardless of how well they write!

  - **Feeding Our Soul:** If you are responsible for teaching and feeding God's Word to others, you must be certain to look after your own spiritual needs first. Are you able to receive teaching of God's Word from other sources? Radio, conferences, internet, books, mentoring, etc. are all means of ensuring that you are receiving spiritual food and being challenged in the way that you live.

  - **Worshiping God:** On a Sunday, if you are the one overseeing a worship service, it might be difficult for you to worship freely. Your concerns are for others. Are you able

to find another place and time to worship God with others? You might be able to visit another gathering of believers occasionally, and participate in worship rather than having to lead it.

- **Daily Life of Worship:** We must maintain an attitude of worship every day and throughout the day. Prayer is vital to maintaining our close relationship with God. Every task should be accomplished with a spirit of worship.

- How have regular personal devotions been beneficial in your life as a leader up until now? What would you like to change, add or do differently?

- **SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES IN THE LIFE OF A LEADER:** Many of the spiritual disciplines discussed in the previous lesson are designed to help us abide with God, not to fill our day with holy rituals. Consider the particular benefit to spiritual leaders that the following disciplines provide:

  - **Sabbath and Rest:** While Sunday might be a 'work day' for you if you are a leader in the Church, try to rest on a different day. Choose to do no work that day, but take quality time with God, work on personal relationships, be creative, and do things that refresh you.

  - **Retreat:** Taking some time away from your regular responsibilities may be very good for your relationship with God, as well as your work as a leader! Meeting with other leaders at a Pastors retreat or leadership conference can provide stimulation, spiritual food and a well needed break.

  - **Silence**: If you have trouble finding time to pray and meet with God throughout the day, build short periods of silence into your work schedule (even for 5 minutes at a time). Set aside outward productivity and abide with God.

- How do the spiritual disciplines discussed help us to follow God's commands to love Him first, and to abide in Him? Why does God give us these commands?

- **CONCLUSIONS:** It is a particular risk when Christian leaders fill their days with the work of God and neglect to be with God. We must be aware of the challenges. Simply doing spiritual work does not necessarily please God if we neglect Him, our 'first love.' Our ministries will suffer and lack the power of the Spirit. Press on to abide more and more with Jesus this week, and be the leader that God has called you to be!

SUMMARY

- The high calling of leader or pastor involves great challenges and even risks!
- Leaders are held to a high standard, and face unique struggles.
- We serve God because we love Him, and we are commanded to love Him first – for our own good! Nothing but God will satisfy us completely.
- Jesus tell us to abide in Him, to stay with him and order our life with Him as the root and the source of everything.
- Setting aside time of personal devotions and worship is refreshing, and essential to exercising true spiritual leadership.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you know Christian leaders who were fervent in their zeal for God, who later seemed to fall away from the faith? What happened?

2. What fruit do you desire to produce in your ministry life? Are you relying on God to produce this fruit through you, or are you trying to produce it in your own strength?

3. What unique struggles do leaders face in your area? Who are some leaders you can pray for and encourage in their ministry?

LEADER TO LEADER

QUOTATIONS FROM LEADERS PAST AND PRESENT ON THE TOPIC OF PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

"Pastors, we are Christians first and ministry leaders only secondarily. One of the biggest struggles of being a pastor is that you spend a lot more time giving out than taking in. [Radio] and online sermons can supplement, but it is a wonderful thing to sit in church and worship Jesus and hear His Word as your people do weekly. Schedule regular intervals to be a church member, and you will be a better leader the rest of the time. You can't teach what you don't know, and you can't lead where you don't go."

- *James MacDonald, Pastor*

"I sometimes suggest to people that when developing a spiritual habit, they may have to first bribe their body to participate willingly. I have a comfy chair waiting for me in the morning with my Bible and my journal waiting beside it. I get out of bed at 4:44, in order to arrive at my meeting place with God by 5:00am. At the top of my journal I write the date, then I read from my Bible. Usually, I read one page of the Old Testament, one page from the New Testament, and one Psalm. I may write down words or phrases that seem particularly relevant or convicting that day, and what God is saying to me in His word. I sometimes read a short devotional from a writer like Charles Spurgeon, and write down any quotes I want to remember. Then I leave my house and go for a walk as I pray about the readings. I also pray for myself, the day ahead, anything that is burdening and me, and for those I have committed to regularly pray for. I arrange my mental prayer list like this – Mondays I pray for members of my family, Tuesday I pray for my Church and my fellow pastors, Wednesdays I pray for the elders of the Church, Thursday I pray for members of the Bible study group I am a part of. Friday I pray for civil leaders. I spend time in prayer and studying the Word throughout the day, but this time in the morning is where I hear God speak just to me"

-Mike, Pastor

"My daily time of devotions is in the evening after work has ended and my children are in bed. I spend time in prayer and reading Scripture, but find I often vary the method of prayer or how I engage with Scripture. Sometimes it is devotional reading, memorization or study. I find that changing the method of engagement with Scripture keeps things fresh and fits my personality. In Ministry I must constantly decide when and where to invest my time, but my time with God is the most valuable. It helps me in my decision making, to be honest with myself, and provides ongoing motivation I need to serve God."

- *Matt – Christian Ministry Worker*

"The man who is wise, therefore, will see his life as more like a reservoir than a canal. The canal simultaneously pours out what it receives; the reservoir retains the water till it is filled, then discharges the overflow without loss to itself ... Today there are many in the Church who act like canals, the reservoirs are far too rare ... You too must learn to await this fullness before pouring out your gifts, do not try to be more generous than God."

- *Bernard of Clarivaux, 1090-1153 AD*