

# Learning to Lead

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## Study Guide

Internationally renowned novelist Jack Higgins was once asked, “What is one thing that you have learned now that you wish you would have known as a young man?”

He responded, “That when you get to the top there is nothing there.”

**Discussion Question: If you could script the ultimate destination of your life, how would it read? What would the pinnacle look like?**

Teaching: It is a safe bet that if we could write the script for our own life, it would read nothing like the life of Jesus. Consider the things that marked his life:

- There were questions surrounding his conception
- He never wrote a book, held public office or owned his own home.
- After three years of public life he was abandoned by his friends and executed by his enemies.

By all standard accounting practices, it would seem a stretch to conclude that His life was a success. And yet, here we are, twenty centuries after his time on earth came to an end, looking to Him as the model for ultimate manhood.

British historian William Lecky, described as a dedicated opponent of organized religion said of Jesus that He is “capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments and conditions; has been not only the highest pattern of virtue, but the strongest incentive to its practice.” He went on to say:

“The simple record of these three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists.”

It is apparent that the route to great influence is not as narrow or clear-cut as we have been led to believe. In fact, if we take as true the statement of Lecky, we would conclude that the greatest influence comes, not by dominating people, but by following the model of Jesus.

## **Point #1 – Serving Others is the Route to Godly Leadership**

It has been estimated that during the rule of the Russian dictator Joseph Stalin, over 35 million of his own people died unnatural deaths which can be directly attributed to his brutal activities. On one occasion he illustrated his purpose behind the domination and devastation of his own people:

He called for a live chicken and...forcefully clutching the chicken in one hand, with the other he began to systematically pluck out its feathers. As the chicken struggled in vain to escape, he continued with the painful denuding until the bird was completely stripped. "Now you watch," Stalin said as he placed the chicken on the floor and walked away with some bread crumbs in his hand. Incredibly, the fear-crazed chicken hobbled toward him and clung to the legs of his trousers. Stalin threw hand-full of grain to the bird, and it began to follow him around the room, he turned to his dumbfounded colleagues and quietly said, "People are like that chicken. If you inflict inordinate pain on them they will follow you for food for the rest of their lives."<sup>1</sup>

Compare Stalin's leadership style to that taught by Jesus in the text from the most recent sermon in our men's series:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." **Mt 20:25-28**

**Discussion Question: From a practical point of view, how is servant leadership superior to leadership through the domination of others?**

**Read Philippians 2:5-10 and comment on or answer the following bullet points.**

- For Jesus, serving others was not the means to an end but it was the destination.
- What rights are possessed by a bondservant?
- What important lesson can we draw out of what we read in verse 9?

Teaching: Regardless of whether or not you aspire to a place of leadership or influence, God will always resist the proud. In James 4:6 we read, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." While He resists the proud, He will extend His favor to those who humble themselves and take on

the form of a servant.

The question then to answer is this: Can you reach your personal, family and professional goals apart from the favor of God? Will you make it if His hand is against you?

**Discussion Question: Who is it that is most highly regarded by his peers: the arrogant leader or the servant leader? Who do people more willingly follow, the one who leads by example or the one who imposes his authority by his position?**

**Point #2 – Godly leaders seek to be a blessing with the blessings they have received.**

Teaching: When John the Baptist called people to repentance, he called on them to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Mt 3:8). He was expressing that the works of the people should begin to demonstrate that their repentance was sincere.

In Matthew 22:37-39 we find what should be produced by those who follow Jesus:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and the great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Contrast this with the trademark of our world which is self-love, use of others and love of things. The call of Jesus is that we would use things to love others to the same degree that we love ourselves.

Think for a moment about what it means to be a leader. Many aspire for the position that entitles one to lead. But how much greater to be a leader without a position! That is real influence.

**Discussion question: In what way can one lead simply by following the call of Jesus to love others.**

Someone has said, “To know if you are a leader, look behind to see if anyone is following.” The definition of a leader is one who does something in such a way that others follow. For that you need neither a position or a title. You can lead your church in generosity without being a board member or a pastor. You can set an example in honesty at work that others can follow and yet never be the boss.

**Discussion question: What are some other areas where you may be able to lead though you may not have a title? What could you exhibit that others could follow in such areas? Answer:** You could be a leader in your home or in your school. You can model a devotional life to your family or exhibit courage to your classmates.

### **Point #3 – Godly leaders are birthed out of a relationship with God.**

**Read Psalm 139:13-16.**

Teaching: There are few things in life more remarkable than the formation of a brand new human being. Over the course of the 38 weeks necessary for the development of a child, the original, unique cell formed at the moment of conception will divide countless times to the point that a fully developed baby will possess an estimated 3-4 trillion cells.

Science has monkeyed with much of the process, but two things remain unchanged, the secret place of the womb remains the only place where development will occur and the process of development still requires approximately nine months.

#### ***The Womb of Development***

Read Matthew 6:5-6...

“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

The process of maturing into a godly leader will happen only within the womb of a close relationship with God. There is no other method. Jesus said, “He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). If you want to be a godly leader, it will come only by finding a secret place where you can get alone with God.

**Discussion question: What are the benefits of getting alone with God for Bible reading and prayer?** Answer: Less distraction and no one to impress or be intimidated by.

#### ***No Short Cuts***

**Read Luke 4:5-7 and Psalm 2:7-8.**

In tempting Jesus, Satan offered the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship. What is interesting is that the Father had already promised His Son everything Satan now offered, if only the Son would ask. What Satan did presume to offer was an apparent shortcut to the promise.

**Read and discuss Hebrews 12:2. What did Satan’s shortcut bypass?** Answer: The cross

Satan will offer a path that requires no self-control, no self-denial and no investment in prayer. He will suggest that he can get us to his destination and bypass the cross. As we have noted previously

however, there is always a price to pay. Either we pay the price on the front end in the form of self-control and self-denial or we pay it on the back end in the form of unforeseen consequences and regret.

Just as there is no short-cut from the point of conception to the moment the full-term birth of a baby, there is no short-cut to becoming a godly leader. It will happen only by time spent in relationship with God.

A closing thought...

There are two things which men will produce, the fruit of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the flesh comes naturally. It requires no humility, courage or sacrifice to be developed. It is fed by self-love and will without fail be that which is modeled by the world.

Jesus presents to men something far different: The opportunity to be the ultimate man. This is the opportunity to live free, to express passion, to sacrifice for a woman and for children and the chance to live for something beyond yourself.

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<sup>1</sup> Zacharias, Ravi, *Can Man Live Without God*. Dallas: Word, 1994, 26-27.