

# Follow the Leader

What does it mean to lead? Through the Gospel of John, we meet Jesus as teacher, leader, servant and friend: what can we learn about leadership by following the servant king?

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Live light

Scripture taken from *The Holy Bible: ESV*

| Day | Readings   | Reference    | Reflection/Question  | Prayer  |
|-----|--|--------------|--|---|
| 1   | The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. | John 1:9-13  | <p>From politics to workplaces, from church life to family life: the question keeps being asked about what leadership is, and how does a leader lead well?</p> <p>In this series of studies, we are thinking about the topic of leadership by following the greatest leader, the Servant King Jesus Christ in the gospel of John.</p> <p><b>What gives Jesus the right to be the leader of the children of God?</b></p>  | <p>Dear Father, you sent your son into our world as the true light, who enlightens everyone. Enlighten us, help us to receive him, help us to follow him, not as people of the flesh, but as children of you, our heavenly Father. Amen.</p>                      |
| 2   | The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?”   | John 1:35-38 | <p>John, another leader, identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God”, as in the lamb of Isaiah 53:6-7—“like a lamb that is led to the slaughter”. Already we have a clue that Jesus’ leadership will not be as a heroic warrior-king, but will involve sacrifice for the sake of others. However, in Isaiah, that sacrifice is not a needless martyrdom but because “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all”. Already we have a clue that here is a leader that leads us not out of political infighting but to a greater victory.</p> <p><b>Why do the disciples follow Jesus?</b></p> | <p>Dear Father, as Jesus is the lamb who takes away the sins of the world, help us to find our rest, our freedom and our salvation in your love. In your gracious, complete love, let us rest our anxieties and worries, for you alone can set us free. Amen.</p> |

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| 3   | Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”   | John 1:49-51 | <p>In John, there is a tension between people who think Jesus is a leader who will bring what <i>they</i> want, and people who realise that Jesus will lead them into what they truly <i>need</i>. We see both here: Nathanael identifies Jesus as the promised king of Israel, the Messiah or Christ. But Jesus, in an enigmatic reference to Jacob (Gen 28), tells him that a greater thing is coming: Jesus will be the one for whom the “heavens opened”, when the glory of God is revealed in him.</p> <p><b>What do you expect from Jesus as you follow him?</b></p>          | Dear Father, help us see Jesus for all of who he is, for everything that he brings to us. Help us see Jesus as he is, and not just as we want him to be. And help us follow that Jesus today. Amen.   |
| 4   | Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” | John 3:5-8   | <p>Here, the leadership of Jesus is tested by Nicodemus, himself a “ruler of the Jews”. However, Jesus shows the stark difference between Nicodemus’ understanding of his leadership by the image of being “born again”. Jesus leads his people—those who have been born again—into the kingdom of God. Without being born you “cannot enter the kingdom of God”. This is the one and only true test of whether you follow Jesus: have you been born again?</p> <p><b>What ways are you tempted to test other people and other Christians by? What test does Jesus give us?</b></p> | Dear Father, help us to be born again. Help us live as if we were born again: not as if we are able to earn salvation, to live life by our own merit, or to become righteous by what we bring to your table. Help us to be born of the Spirit: and be born again. Amen. |
| 5   | He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.   | John 3:31-32 | <p>Here, again, as John the Baptist speaks of Jesus, he describes the difference between “he who comes from heaven” and he who “belongs to the earth”. The difference is that that which is from heaven is true and from God and yet ... “no one receives his testimony”. Popularity is not the true test of the leader. But holding to the truth, even in unpopularity, is what it is to lead like Jesus.</p> <p><b>What are we truly afraid of when we are afraid of speaking the truth?</b></p>  | Dear Father, help us to love the truth. Help us to know the truth. And help us to live out the truth. Amen.   |

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| 6   | Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.” | John 4:13-15 | <p>Here, Jesus is speaking to the woman at the well. Even the act of speech was counter-cultural: for a Jew to speak to a Samaritan, to eat or drink with a Samaritan woman was considered taboo (4:9b). However, Jesus does not consider such things limiting, instead abounding in the freedom of the gospel: “a spring of water welling up to eternal life”. There is an echo here that Jesus is fulfilling prophecies such as Isaiah 55, and 12:3: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation”.</p> <p><b>What limits do you place on yourself, and the way you deal with other people? What difference does Jesus’ offer of eternal life make?</b></p>                            | Dear Father, forgive us for those times that we thirst for the waters of this world that drive us to thirst again and again. Help us see Jesus, and to come to him, drinking deep from the water of salvation. Amen. |
| 7   | “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”   | John 5:39-40 | <p>It is a sad truth that there are many around the world who study the Bible and study theology, and “yet refuse to come to me that you may have life”. It is good to search the Scriptures, however the Scriptures alone never bring life, for life is not available without following the servant King. In the same way, we can go to Bible study, attend church, read books and go to prayer meetings, but all of it is worthless without coming to Jesus.</p> <p><b>When did you last come before the Lord Jesus Christ?</b></p>   | Father, you know me inside and out. You know all that I have done wrong. Forgive me for my brokenness and shame, and give me grace upon grace because of the Lord Jesus. Amen.                                       |
| 8   | “This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”   | John 6:50-51 | <p>Here, as Jesus talks amidst the festival about feeding the people with true food, Jesus is linked to that other great Israelite leader, Moses, and his miracle of feeding the people (6:32). However, here Jesus is the bread, for he is the sacrifice. It is his life that he will give for the world. In response, the Jews “disputed among themselves”, just as the Israelites grumbled about the provision of Moses in the desert. When we doubt the origin of Jesus, it becomes difficult to believe in his divine leadership. But when we see that Jesus is from God, we can see that he lays down his life <i>for us</i>.</p> <p><b>What is the measure of Jesus’ sacrifice for us?</b></p> | Father, help us to measure what cannot be measured, in the extent of Jesus’ death for us. Help us to give you all that you have given us to attempt to respond Jesus’ death for us. Amen.                            |

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| 9   | <p>After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”</p>   | John 6:66-68 | <p>In this turning point in John’s gospel, we see that some who followed Jesus, choose to follow him no longer. However, Jesus’ question to the twelve then, is not a moment of doubt, but a moment for them to clarify their resolve. The result? Even at this time of turmoil, Peter speaks about why he follows Jesus: “you have the words of eternal life”.</p> <p><b>What could make you stop following Jesus?</b></p>  | <p>Father, help us to resolve to follow Jesus this day, and the next. Help us see the other things in this world that we might follow as shallow and false. Help us to say with Peter, “To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” And imprint those words on our heart, until the day we see you face to face. Amen.</p> |
| 10  | <p>Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”</p> <p>So the Pharisees said to him, “You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” Jesus answered, “Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.”</p> | John 8:12-14 | <p>Jesus’s saying “I am the light of the world” is continually startling. He says this amidst a festival that involved ceremonial lighting of torches, and also ties back into the John’s introduction that “a light has come into the world”. And it is also an image of spiritual life, as opposed to darkness and spiritual death, a claim that Jesus makes despite the opposition of the Pharisees. If Jesus is the light, then it is only by him that we can find our way out of the darkness.</p> <p><b>What does it mean to be in darkness? What does it mean to be in the light?</b></p> | <p>Dear Father, help us to have the light of life: to see things clearly because Jesus has shown us the way; to know things clearly because Jesus has shown us the truth; to live truly because Jesus has shown us the life. Amen.</p>   |

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| 11  | So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. | John 10:7-9   | When Jesus calls himself the door for the sheep, it may refer back to passages like Psalm 118:20: “This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter”. It also refers negatively to the leaders of Israel who are more like “thieves and robbers”. If Jesus is the door, then it leaves no alternative for other ways of coming to God, or being saved. You come to Christ, or you remain outside the fold.<br><br><b>How do we find God?</b>           | Dear Father, Jesus is our shepherd, help us not to want. Help us to remain in your comfort, in your stillness. Restore our soul, and help us fear no evil, for you are with us. Amen.                                 |
| 12  | I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.   | John 10:14-15 | Again we are reminded that Jesus is both leader and servant, both shepherd and sacrifice. He “lays down his life for the sheep”. As Jesus leads, he also dies. And we cannot follow him, without dying and rising with him, for where he is, there we are. But the good news is that he knows the Father, eternally and perfectly, and where he is, there we will be.<br><br><b>How does your life reflect the life of Jesus?</b>  | Dear Father, as we die with Christ, we are raised with him. And as we are raised with him, we come into your presence. Help us to live now, reflecting your eternal glory. Amen.                                      |
| 13  | Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”   | John 11:35-37 | In this moment, we see Jesus’ depth of humanity. Though he was God, he was not above feeling emotion, he did not shy away from tears or love for his friend. In his leadership, he did not ignore the reality of friendship and relationship, but loved those that God put around him, and entered into their brokenness, so that he might also make them whole.<br><br><b>What do we see when we see Jesus weep for his friend?</b>                                     | Dear Father, help us to mourn when others mourn. Help us to be joyful when others are joyful. Help us to love others as they need to be loved, disregarding our selfishness and self-concern, for your sake. Amen.    |
| 14  | “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”  | John 15:12-14 | In these brief words, we see an encapsulation of what it is for Jesus to lead. Jesus leads by setting an example of love, by laying down his life, and by dying, that we might live. In other words, his leadership is centered on the profound nature of grace: that salvation is given to us who could not earn it. And here we see that we are to do the same: “love one another as I have loved you”.<br><br><b>What will it mean for you to lay down your life?</b> | Dear Father, help us to love in the way that you have called us to live. Help us to lay down our lives, for Jesus has laid down his life for us. Help us to rest in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ forever. Amen. |