

# STUDY 6

## A Family of Disciples

### A. For further thought and discussion

1. **In what way was the leadership of Jesus unique and different from leaders today? In what ways is it similar?**

There are many possible responses. Here are a few:

**Unique and different.** As the Son of God, the King and Messiah, He had a unique ministry. He had unique authority and power. The Old Testament scriptures pointed to Him. He was a model and pattern for all other leaders. He did not make mistakes.

**Similar.** He was also doing the will of His father in Heaven. He was also a servant-leader. He also needed to trust in God's help. Satan opposed His ministry as he still does. He experienced criticism as leaders do today. Leaders today often make mistakes. Leaders today ought to be subject to some degree of accountability even if it is mutual (New Testament churches had elders - plural). The apostle Peter had to be corrected by Paul in Galatia.

2. **Should we follow leaders who are not following the pattern of Jesus?**

We need to distinguish issues of character and matters of competence. When we are talking about the *pattern of Jesus*, we are thinking about issues of character and values rather than particular decisions.

If a leader is *guilty of something particularly serious* which affects other people such as a sexual sin or financial irregularity with church funds, then it would be appropriate for that leader to stand-down of his or her own initiative or as a result of a disciplinary action. If a leader is misusing his position for personal gain, then it would be best to find another leader. Leaders also need to respect the bounds of their authority and not interfere in matters beyond. Loyalty is a good thing but blind loyalty is not.

However, when we think about issues of competence and decision making, we need to remember that Jesus was the only perfect leader and when we follow leaders today we are following people who sometimes get things wrong. That doesn't mean we should reject their leadership. It is also true that leaders have to take into account a broad picture when making decisions and will not always be understood by their followers, who may see just the part of the picture that affects their own interest. It's not wrong to ask respectful questions when we don't understand. Leaders need to be trusted. At the same time good leaders will explain their decisions and not take that trust for granted. A leader who apologises is far better than a leader who can never admit to being wrong. And we need to remember that some things are a balance of judgement rather than simple right or wrong.

Scripture encourages us to pray for our leaders and honour them. Leadership is not easy. It is good to express appreciation when we have received help. Leaders need encouragement just as much as anyone else.

3. **Imagine you meet someone who had tragically killed a child in a motor accident. For many years he had been troubled that he had committed the unforgivable sin. What**

### **would you say to help him?**

There are most likely two aspects to this. Firstly, such a person is probably carrying a heavy burden of guilt for this tragic event. Secondly, this is being made worse by the belief that they have committed a sin so serious that God cannot or will not forgive.

Firstly, it would be helpful to clear-up the misunderstanding about the unforgivable sin. This is explained in Michael Eaton's exposition of *Mark 3:28-30*. The sin that is unforgivable is the sin of rejecting God's means of forgiveness. So if this person has repented and asked for forgiveness they have not committed the unforgivable sin.

If they are having difficulty receiving assurance of forgiveness because this was such a serious matter, you could ask them which is more powerful - the blood of Jesus or their capacity to sin. This person should be encouraged to look at the cross of Christ and to see what God has done to make forgiveness possible.

Sometimes people are so full of self condemnation they find it difficult to forgive themselves. In this case you could help them to see that it is not necessary to hold on to something that God has forgiven. If God has forgiven you, should you not forgive yourself? Helpful scriptures to meditate on are *Psalms 103:12* and *Hebrews 8:12*.

#### **4. What do you think makes a successful leader?**

This might be a good opportunity to visit or revisit the introduction to the workbook which has some relevant comments on this. It is very important not to think as the world thinks - numbers, titles and outward trappings. Faithfulness to the will of God is at the heart of Christian success. In relation to leadership, a person is only a leader if others are *following*. Leaders equip others for works of service.

#### **5. If the primary qualification for leadership is a Godly character, what does this say about the time it takes to train and develop leaders?**

Character takes time to develop. The fruits of the spirit are cultivated and nurtured over months and years. So Godly leaders take time to emerge. In Romans, Paul talks about being transformed by the renewing of the mind. This takes time, perseverance and diligence. The character of a leader needs to be proved.

- How does this person handle pressure?
- How does this person handle temptation?
- How do they respond to criticism?
- Are they accountable, and do they seek and take advice from others?
- How does this person make decisions - cautiously and prayerfully or impulsively?

A person may be gifted. A person may have an engaging manner, an attractive personality and be a great talker. But unless these things are directed and channelled by Godly character, they will inevitably run into difficulties.