

# The Price of Serving Leadership

Release Position  
Release Power  
Release Prestige

By Jon Byler

The following is a compilation of a biweekly email newsletter series about the price of serving leadership. These “Reflections for Serving Leaders” were written for serving leaders around the world to learn what it means to lead like Jesus. The issue number and date used are the dates for the original publication.

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# The Price of Serving Leadership: Release Position

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In our exploration of serving leadership, we typically focus on the benefits and rewards of serving others and indeed there are many. But there is also a high price to serving leadership—a price that many are not willing to pay. Serving leadership requires releasing things that many leaders value greatly. In this series we'll look at three of these costs by reflecting on a teaching of Jesus to His disciples.

<sup>24</sup>A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. <sup>26</sup>But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves (Luke 22:24-26, NIV).

The disciples are having a dispute about leadership and who would be in the top position. Jesus used the debate to provide insight into the type of leadership He was expecting from His followers. It would be radically different than their struggle for positions and different from what they had seen modeled by others. He states bluntly, "You are not to be like that!" He goes on to describe what it would look like to be "the one who serves."

The disciple's desire for position is the first area Jesus calls serving leaders to release.

## ***Serving leaders release position as a right.***

The disciples started their argument with the assumption that one of them would be in the top position, the only debate was *who* it would be. They all wanted to be on the top of the organizational chart and they likely each stated their case for why they would be the greatest. They felt like they had earned the right to that position. Some leaders focus their energy on climbing to the highest position and see others as competitors for that role. They delight in telling others how they worked for their position or earned a promotion. But serving leaders surrender this right, they don't compete with others to get top positions and are equally able to make an impact when they are "like the youngest."

## ***Serving leaders reject position as a measure.***

The disciples were concerned with who would be the most important person on their team. They assumed that the one who was the highest would be the "greatest." Leaders often use their position as a measure of their value. If they have a "high" position, they believe they have more value as a person.

Some leaders see their position as an indication of their greatness and delight in telling others their title and role as an indication of their value to the world. They are eager to mention the numbers of people serving them in the organization, how much income the company is earning, and how things have improved since they are in charge. But serving

leaders surrender measuring their value by their position. They seek to be like “the one who serves.”

### ***Serving leaders receive position as stewards.***

Jesus didn't say that it is wrong to *have* a position but He rebuked their *striving for* positions. As we have observed many leaders see their position as a right and an affirmation of their worth. But serving leaders release their right to a position. Then they receive a position as a steward. They see their position simply as a place from which they can serve others and the organization. The higher the position; the more opportunities they see to serve.

#### ***For further reflection and discussion:***

What is my heart's attitude towards the position I currently hold? Do I feel entitled to this position because of my hard work? Do I feel the position is beneath what is rightfully mine? Do I long for a higher position? How does my leadership reflect this attitude of my heart?

What do I use to measure my value as a leader? Is it related to my position or my impact? How would I view my worth today if my position was stripped away from me and I no longer had a title? How do the words of Jesus challenge me in this area and what can I do to see my value properly?

If my position is a gift from God to be used for Him, what difference will that make in how I lead others today?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll look at how serving leaders pay the price of giving up power.

# The Price of Serving Leadership: Release Power

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Serving leadership produces thriving in people, organizations, communities and nations. But serving leadership is costly! Leaders who seek to serve consciously and consistently need to release things that are difficult to give up. Jesus talked about the “kings of the Gentiles” as typical leaders but called His disciples to a radically different form of leadership which we call serving leadership. In the previous issue we focused on how the disciples, like most leaders, were looking for positions. Jesus called His disciples to release that to serve. Power is the second area Jesus calls His disciples to release.

*<sup>24</sup>A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. <sup>26</sup>But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves (Luke 22:24-26, NIV).*

Jesus’ observation that the Gentile leaders “lord it over them” and “exercise authority over them” highlights their desire for power and authority.

## ***Serving leaders release power as a right.***

All leadership roles come with power and authority. The Gentile leaders assumed they had every right to this power. They had likely worked hard to get into the position they occupied and so were not hesitant to use their power for their own advantage. As leaders they were “over them.” They expected people to instantly obey their every command and were ready to remind everyone of the power they possessed. So they lorded it over those they led and exercised authority over them. Power was their right. To this leadership approach Jesus tells His disciples, “You are not to be like that.” Jesus was not telling the disciples that they would not have power, in fact He strategically gave them power and authority (see Matthew 28:19-20). But He was calling them to release their right to have power. They were not called to “lord it over” but to serve. Some leaders see power as their right but serving leaders see power as a gift to serve others.

## ***Serving leaders reject power as a measure.***

Typical leaders see their level of power as a measure of their success. The more they have, the better they feel. They are quick to ask others, “Did you see how people moved when I told them....?” But Jesus says, “the one who rules” should be like “the one who serves.” Serving leaders reject power as a measure of their success or worth. Instead, they measure how well they are serving those they lead.

### ***Serving leaders receive power as stewards.***

The Gentile leaders saw their power as something to be exercised for their own advantage, it was their right. They had worked for their power and would now use it to further their own objectives. But serving leaders see power as a gift given to them for a greater purpose, to serve the organization, their teams, their customers and others. Their role is to properly steward the power entrusted to them. They do not focus on power *over* others but power *for others*. Paul is a great example of this attitude when he writes in 2 Corinthians 10:8, “the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down...” As a steward of the power received from the Lord, he focused on using that power to build others.

#### ***For further reflection and discussion:***

What power do I have in my current role? (Reflect on the power your role carries with it and how your power is different than those under your leadership.)

What is my heart attitude towards my power? Do I see it as something I have earned or as a gift? Am I ever tempted to let others know the power I hold by asking, “Don’t you know I am the boss?” How has this impacted my ability to influence others?

If I view my power as a gift entrusted to me to serve others, how will that be reflected in the way I lead this week? How will it be reflected when I face opposition to my leadership?

As a serving leader am I ever tempted to not use power because I’m afraid I might misuse it? What might Jesus say to me about that?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we’ll examine how serving leaders pay the price of giving up prestige.

# The Price of Serving Leadership: Release Prestige

Issue #381, September 4, 2024

The tremendous impact of serving leadership comes at a high price. Jesus used the occasion of an argument among the disciples to teach them the cost of serving leadership.

<sup>24</sup>A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. <sup>26</sup>But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves (Luke 22:24-26, NIV).

We have already examined Jesus’ call for His disciples to release their love of positions and their desire for power. The example of leaders eager to be called “benefactors” reveals the final area Jesus calls His disciples to release—prestige. Benefactors are persons who give money or assistance to a person or cause. That sounds like a good thing! But notice that Jesus says these leaders are not called benefactors by others, but they “call themselves Benefactors.” They want the prestige that comes with being a leader who gives. But they don’t have the heart of a giving leader. They are not serving others, they are serving themselves! They are consumed with prestige.

We can think of prestige as all the honor, privileges, and “perks” that come with leadership. Prestige may include the best seat at the table, the best parking spot, the biggest office, a good vehicle, a special place at the front of the line (or no line at all!), special titles, membership in the exclusive club, special attire, etc.

## ***Serving leaders release prestige as a right.***

The Gentile rulers called themselves nice names and expected everyone to give them honor and prestige because of their position. It was their right. They were quickly offended when they were not addressed with the proper title or protocol. Again Jesus calls for a radically different way. “You are not to be like that.” Serving leaders release prestige as a right. They let go of their ego to serve the organization and the people around them. They are not quickly offended when others do not respect them properly. Serving leaders should be the most honored leaders alive because they are the best! They deserve prestige more than dictators and ego-driven leaders. But they release this right to serve others.

## ***Serving leaders reject prestige as a measure.***

The leaders Jesus described used prestige as a measure of their value and success. They loved to be recognized as benefactors and made a big show of their importance. But serving leaders reject prestige as a measure of their value or success. They are not concerned with their titles and they are not impressed with the perks that come with their role. They are not afraid to mingle with ordinary people because they are not flaunting their accomplishments. Serving leaders measure their success by their ability to serve others. They see themselves as successful when others around them succeed.

### ***Serving leaders receive prestige as stewards.***

Some leaders seek perks and prestige but serving leaders seek to serve. When they receive prestige and honor, serving leaders receive them as gifts with which they are entrusted. They look for ways to bless others with the prestige given to them. They look at and affirm the contributions of others. They consciously seek to bring others into the circle of honor rather than trying to keep them out. Serving leaders don't refuse prestige but they use it to more effectively serve others.

Serving leaders are called to release the most coveted symbols of leadership: position, power and prestige. But as they release these things, they also release to their world the impact of leadership that truly transforms, inspires, and energizes those who follow.

#### ***For further reflection and discussion:***

In my context what are the most common indicators of prestige for leaders? (List at least 5 of them.) Which of these is the most important to me?

Are there ways I am tempted to measure my worth by the perks of my role? Do I like to remind others of those special privileges I have?

How concerned am I about my titles? When people don't use my title or make a mistake about my title, what does it do in my heart? How do I respond? How does that impact my ability to lead as a servant?

In what ways can I use the honor and privileges I enjoy to serve others this week?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler