

MODULE 3: RELATIONSHIPS

SESSION 5: UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO AUTHORITY

Key Ideas for This Session:

- The Bible contains sound instruction for both those who are leaders and those under the leader's care. We all play important roles.
- The same person can be both a leader and a follower in different contexts. Living in humility is a key to either role.
- No matter which earthly 'master' we are called to serve, we ultimately serve God and God alone.
- We are all called to live in peace—both as peacekeepers and peacemakers.
- Key verse: Ephesians 6:7
Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people.

How Are We Expected to Submit to One Another?

Relationships of authority are everywhere and a necessary part of being human and living in community. From birth to school to family life to employment, we are subject to some form of authority. This will impact us for good or for evil depending on both the character and integrity of the one in charge and the one to whom instruction is being given.

Think about a good relationship of authority that you have been a part of. What made it good?

What makes a relationship of authority bad?

Throughout your life you may be both a leader and a follower depending on the context. For example, as a parent you have authority over your children. At the same time, if you are working, you will be under the authority of your boss. In the workplace, you also may have someone reporting to you while you are reporting to someone else. Yet at the top of the pile (so to speak), the Bible teaches that we are all subject to God. Based on that, no matter which role you play, a key quality of both good leadership and healthy obedience is humility.

Humility

A common definition for humility is: Genuine gratitude and freedom from pride or arrogance. Humility is the quality of a humble person. Rick Warren, the author of *A Purpose Driven Life* describes it as “not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”

Why might humility seem weak or “lesser” on the surface? Why might it be challenging for some leaders to practice humility?

Philippians 2:3

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.

Why does this Scripture guide us to put others first and how does it say we are to do this?

Can you think of practical ways you could put others first in the spirit of humility?

The Economist magazine describes humility as the secret ingredient for strong leadership: “A humble boss understands that there are things he doesn’t know. He listens: not only to the other bigwigs, but also to the kind of people who don’t get invited, such as his customers.”

Biblical humility reflects the very character of Christ.

Philippians 2:6-8 says, *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage;⁷ rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Humility speaks to our faith in God and not our trust in ourselves—no matter how much authority we have. In 1 Peter 5:5 it says that, “*God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.*” This drives us to seek Him through prayer, understanding, and listening to what Godly people are telling us and what the Scriptures say.

Colossians 3:12

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Why do you think this verse combines humility with the principles of gentleness, patience, and kindness?

Read Matthew 8:5-13.

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, asking for help. ⁶ “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.” ⁷ Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?” ⁸ The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have You come under my roof. But just say the

word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." ¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, He was amazed and said to those following Him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹ I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment.

Does the centurion brag about having lots of authority?

Whose authority is he under?

Read Ephesians 6:5-8.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

According to these verses, who do we really work for?

What does verse 6 mean?

The idea is to please God and not to be a “people-pleaser” What does it mean to be a people-pleaser?

If we understand that our work is really a matter of service and worship to God, then we give our best even when no one is watching us.

Read Matthew 25:14-29.

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ ²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ²² “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’ ²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²⁴ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸ ““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.

What happens when we are faithful in our responsibilities and work?

Read Psalm 75:6-7.

No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt themselves. ⁷ It is God who judges: He brings one down, He exalts another.

God will exalt us when we are faithful with what He has given us. We honour our bosses at work simply because of their position of authority. We might also honour them because they are good people who are fair, reasonable, and treat us with respect. When we work hard and do a good job, it is a witness to our boss that we respect him/her and take our responsibilities seriously even when we are given a task that we don't particularly like doing.

Most people who get fired from a job, get fired not because they cannot do the work, but because they either "slack off" on the job or because they don't get along with their coworkers or customers. A person who disrespects others causes tension in the workplace. If our work reflects our spiritual principles, we will end up being productive and contributing to a harmonious workplace.

Write out these verses in your own words:

Proverbs 10:4

Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.

Proverbs 12:24

Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in forced labour.

Read Romans 13:1-7.

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist

have been established by God. ² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴ For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.

This Scripture talks about people in authority like government.

Who establishes the government's authority?

Whose authority do officials like police officers represent?

What are the kinds of things we might owe to those in authority?

Read John 19:10-11.

"Do You refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't You realize I have power either to free You or to crucify You?" ¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

Pontius Pilate was a government official. He was in a position of authority. Pilate and Jesus exchanged these words just after Jesus was publicly

humiliated and tortured by those who had arrested Him for crimes He did not commit. Notice how Jesus responds. He does not argue or fight back or tell Pilate, “No! You don’t have any power over me!”

What did Jesus say?

Explain how Jesus honoured the principle we just looked at in Romans 13:1-7.

Read James 3:1.
Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Why do you think those in positions of authority will be judged more strictly by God?

Peacemakers and Peacekeepers:

The Bible contains many verses on the importance of peace and the promise of peace for those who believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ and in His ministry. Peace is something that both leaders and those who are being cared for, should strive after and pray for.

Read Matthew 5:9.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

How does a peacemaker differ from a peacekeeper?

Read Romans 12:18.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Read Romans 14:19.

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

These two verses encourage us to promote peace. How can you promote peace informally as a leader with friends or acquaintances?

How can you promote peace in a formal position with staff?

Colossians 3:15

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

What does the phrase “since as members of one body you were called to peace” mean to you?

Break into small groups and discuss the following if there is time, or consider these topics this week:

- *An important way of leading others is by example. What are some concrete ways you can positively direct others through your actions?*
- *Why do you think an all-powerful creator God would value humility and peace so much? What other values would you associate with God?*
- *Consider Romans 13:7 and describe how this attitude promotes peace.*