

Subject: Sermon Recap: Servant Leadership Matters — 1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Dear Friends,

What a privilege it was to gather together this week around the Word of God. The passage we explored cuts to the heart of what it means to follow Christ and to be led by those He has appointed — and it calls each of us to honest self-examination. To access related discipleship material go [\[HERE\]](#).

Summary: The sermon explored Paul's concluding argument in a long section of 1 Corinthians that began in chapter 1, verse 10, where he first addressed the dangerous division creeping into the Corinthian church. At its core, that division was not merely a personality conflict — it was a rejection of the gospel itself. Through 1 Corinthians 4:6-21, we were presented with a powerful and convicting portrait of Biblical Spiritual Leadership, also called Servant Leadership, defined as leading others the way Christ led — by serving them, stewarding what God has entrusted, and laying down privilege and status rather than using authority to be served. The contrast between the prideful, self-appointed kings of Corinth and the suffering, self-sacrificing apostles challenges every one of us to ask: whose example are we actually following?

Takeaways:

1. Humility is not optional for the follower of Christ. Every gift, every ability, every position we hold has been given to us by God, not earned by us. James 1:17 reminds us that every good gift comes from above, and Paul's rhetorical questions in verse 7 press that truth home. We have nothing to boast in. The proper response to what God has given us is grateful stewardship, not pride.
2. True Servant Leadership looks nothing like the world's version of leadership. Paul's list in verses 9 through 13 — willingness to be last, to endure hardship, to bless persecutors, to respond gently to slander — stands in stark contrast to the Corinthians' kingly posturing. Isaiah 53:2-3 reminds us that even our Lord Himself bore no outward marks of worldly greatness. If we are honest, we must ask ourselves whether we more closely resemble the apostles or the Corinthians.
3. The call to Servant Leadership belongs to every disciple, not just pastors or church officers. Paul's words were not written for a select few. Every follower of Christ is called to make disciple-making disciples, to hold a high view of Scripture, to grow in courage and integrity, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit — the ultimate source of the Godly wisdom that no seminary degree or life experience alone can produce.

As you go into this week, carry these questions with you: To whose spiritual leadership are you submitting? And in your own sphere of influence, are you leading others toward

Christ and His purposes — or toward some other king? May God grant us the grace to look more like the apostles and less like the kings of Corinth.

In His Service,

Pastor Jim

1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Servant Leadership Matters

I. Introduction: Biblical Spiritual Leadership AKA Servant Leadership

II. 1 Corinthians 4:6-8: Psshah, Who is Paul When We Are Kings?

- Every good thing we have is a gift from God.
- The difference between Godly people is because of God and not man.
- While hinting at others, these verses present 4 marks of servant leadership, including:

Additional Scripture References: Ja 1:17; Jn 3:27; 1 Co 12:4-11; Eph 2:8-10; 2 Co 3:5-6; Ro 12:3-8; Col 2:29

III. 1 Corinthians 4:9-13: A Dramatic Contrast With Great Implications

- These verses present an additional dozen marks of servant leadership, including:

Additional Scripture References: Is 53:2b-3

IV. 1 Corinthians 4:14-21: Warning With Counsel

- These verses present an additional seven marks of servant leadership, including:

V. Closing: Two Final Marks of Servant Leadership

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1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Servant Leadership Matters

I. Introduction: Biblical Spiritual Leadership AKA Servant Leadership

1. Today, we come to the end of a long winding road that begin in chapter 1, verse 10 of 1 Corinthians. *It was there that Paul first addressed division in the Corinthian church as a result of their seeking man-wisdom over God-wisdom.*
2. While some Corinthian influencers have dunked on Paul in favor of other ministers of the gospel, he is not fighting for his reputation per se. *As passage after passage has chronicled Paul's journey in coming to and walking with Christ, it is quite clear that his focus is not on himself, but on Jesus and the gospel of grace.*

The battle Paul is fighting is much more insidious and damaging; *the Corinthians have allowed another gospel to creep into their fellowship.* The result being that their rejection of Paul and his message is a rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ. *So the stakes are high.*

3. In today's passage, we are offered a powerful portrait of Biblical Spiritual Leadership. *Some of the many dangers of following wrong leadership along with the blessings of following God-anointed-God-honoring spiritual leadership are in also view.* As we travel through these verses, we are confronted with the same choices as the Corinthians...*really, the same choices every person makes...to whose spiritual leadership will we submit and will we grow into the leaders God intends?* [Grateful]

4. Biblical Spiritual Leadership AKA **Servant Leadership** is leading others the way Christ led — *by serving them*, stewarding what God has entrusted him-or-her, *laying down privilege and status*, even to the point of self-sacrifice, *rather than using authority to be served*, in leading them toward Christ and His purposes. Mk 10:42-45; Jn 13:1-17; Phil 2:5-8

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II. 1 Corinthians 4:6-8: Psshah, Who is Paul When We are Kings

1. We get a sense from the text that some in the Corinthian church had developed an attitude of, “I know who—or what—is best...and Paul isn’t it.” While Paul could have easily fallen into the trap of defending himself, his spiritual discernment - an important mark of **Servant Leadership** in evidence throughout today’s passage - allows him to see beyond the criticism. Though he has become the lightning rod for their attacks, he recognizes the greater threat is their inflated view of their own spirituality.

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2. There is a lot going on here in verse 6:

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- A. First, we see God’s grace (the 2nd mark of **Servant Leadership** in our passage) on display. Despite their attacks, Paul keeps the main thing the main thing. His unapologetic focus is getting their eyes off themselves and back onto their Lord. He refuses to take the bait by attacking Apollos, other ministers of the gospel, or even those who are criticizing him. Instead, he wisely uses himself and Apollos as examples to reinforce the truths he has been teaching them since chapter 1.

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- B. Then, right in the middle of v6, we have the 3rd in a long-list of biblical spiritual leadership marks – the **Servant Leader** must have a high-view of Scripture. The **Servant Leader** presents God’s word as-is without adding, subtracting, or otherwise adjusting the word of God as they disciple others through their teaching and preaching of the word. Those with a high-view of Scripture will rightly divide the word of God so the authors’ original meaning can be grasped and applied.
 - i. Paul’s words here remind us that we are always being disciplined by someone – maybe by someone at work or in our interest group, perhaps by our social media feed, or, if we are blessed, maybe by a Godly person in our church. By definition, whether good or bad, a disciple becomes

increasingly like their teacher as they adopt and embed the worldview he teaches and models.

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C. Finally, at the end of v6, with verses 7-8 offering additional emphasis, Paul presents humility as another of the important marks of **Servant Leadership**. Let's look at these verses in light of what God's word teaches in book after book -specifically that IF there is a difference between Godly people (e.g., gifting), that difference is because of God and NOT because of man. In:

- i. **James 1:17** tells us every good gift comes from heaven.
- ii. **John 3:27** says "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven."
- iii. **1 Corinthians 12:4-11**: states that spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit of God, who gives as He wills.
- iv. **Ephesians 2:8-10** says God even prepared our good works beforehand.
- v. **2 Corinthians 3:5-6** states that our sufficiency comes from God.
- vi. **Romans 12:3-8** notes that God gives us our faith and our gifts.
- vii. In **Colossians 1:29**, Paul say he labors according to Christ's power and not his own.

D. Now, we return to the end of v6. It's here that Paul says the Corinthians need to stop being "puffed up", "arrogant", or "prideful". In v7, he goes on to ask a series of rhetorical questions whose answers indicated the reality that God deserves the glory for what they have and the position they are in AND NOT themselves.

- i. They are not superior to their brothers and sisters. All they have was given to them...not so they could lord it over others, but so they could bring God glory by testifying of Him and not themselves. Christ-follower, it's not about you, its about Jesus.

E. Then, in v8, Paul moves to seal the deal. **Corinthians you have been given much, but it has gone to your head.** You should be thankful servants and NOT prideful kings. **You should be grateful and not lacking in grace towards others.**

Yes, the central idea Paul is presenting applies to all Christians, but how much more so God's anointed Biblical Spiritual Leaders? ¹ **Servant Leaders** are to have growing humility evidenced in our sacrificially serving others as God wills for His glory, and not for our own. Rather than becoming unbearable - the fruit of the Spirit, the beatitudes, the spiritual disciplines, and other expressions of Godliness should have been in clear evidence in the Corinthian church...as with ours.

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III. 1 Corinthians 4:9-13: A Dramatic Contrast With Great Implications

1. There is a singular focus in Paul's heart at this point...**a focus that, if we are honest, we may well not want to hear, much less consider.**

In great contrast to the kingly Corinthians, the example of Paul and the other apostles offer several marks of **Servant Leadership**, including:

- Are willing to be last (v9)
- **Are willing to suffer as fools for Christ; meaning as those unapologetically sold out and living their lives for Him (vs9-10)**
- Endure hunger and thirst (v11)
- **Accept hardship and inconvenience (v11)**
- Work with their own hands (v12)
- **Do not retaliate when mistreated (v12)**
- Bless those who persecute them (v12)
- **Endure persecution (v12)**
- Respond gently to slander (v13)
- **Accept being treated as the refuse of the world (v13)**

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¹ Adapted from Spiritual Leadership, J. Oswald Sanders, p69.

The difference catalogued here between the Corinthians and the apostles is astounding.

- Paul and other apostles are laying up treasure in heaven because of their faithfulness and obedience.
- In their kingliness, *the Corinthians are experiencing dishonoring division as they import a different gospel – a gospel wanting the crowns without the cross!*

2. Let's change directions for a few moments...

A. In the book of **Matthew**, specifically in **chapter 26:48-49**, we read that Judas needed to identify Jesus by a kiss for the Jewish guard to know who to arrest...*from this, it's clear He did NOT have some kingly bearing setting Him apart from others.*

B. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to **Isaiah 53:2b-3, ESV** where we read a description of our Messiah:

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he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. - Isaiah 53:2b–3, ESV

- i. As we consider these descriptions of the apostles looking decidedly more like Jesus than the Corinthians, we are confronted with an uncomfortable question...*Are we, am I, more like the Corinthians or more like the apostles?*
- ii. Likewise, because we also note that, in His character, Jesus looked NOTHING like the world...*which is why the temple guard had come to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane*...I can't help but wonder if we should just stand on the opposite of whatever is the world's position.

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3. There are two additional marks of **Servant Leadership** that are glimpsed across our entire passage today which are highlighted in these verses. They include (1) Growing Courage and (2) Integrity & Sincerity². Missionary and author J. Oswald Sanders describes these as:

A. Growing Courage. Leaders require courage of the highest order. *Courage to face the enemy, the hardships of life, the complaints and controversies, the fears and insecurities, and human inertia and opposition in doing God's bidding.*

B. Integrity and Sincerity. The faithful leader is one who (with integrity) is authentically transparent in Godly character while being sincere in duty, loyalty, honesty, and promises across all parts of their lives.

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IV. 1 Corinthians 4:14-21: Warning With Counsel

1. This last section is broken into two distinct but overlapping audiences. *The first, found in vs14-17, is for the entire church in Corinth.* The final 4 verses then zero in on the rebel leaders and influencers.
2. Paul is not mincing any words here – they are to reject the false gospel they are peddling and return to their first love. *It seems clear the rotten Corinthian leadership had been emboldened in thinking Paul would not return to Corinth.*
 - A. I can almost hear Paul's attitude towards them in His words... *'Some of you are big talkers (arrogant) because I am not present. When I do get there, would you prefer I bring the power of God's corrective rod or the power of His grace and mercy?'* In what is a GREAT lesson, Paul had no intention of fighting this battle on their or Satan's terms...they could have their words, opinions, and preferences, BUT he was bringing the power of God through God's word.

² Adapted from Spiritual Leadership, J. Oswald Sanders, p71-72, 74-75

3. After reestablishing himself as Christ's ambassador with all the authority this implies, he has some hard and pointed things to say along with some wise counsel to offer. *These, in turn, reveal several additional marks of a **Servant Leader**, including:*

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A. As part of stewarding God's church, a **Servant Leader** will gracefully, mercifully, and lovingly *{themselves marks of **Servant Leadership**} (1) make decisions based on sound Biblical precepts and not on the whims and preferences of man influence, (2) correct and direct the church and (3) be a Godly role model.*

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B. In v17, we read of another mark of a **Servant Leader**. *He or she will make disciple-making disciples.*

C. There is one final mark of **Servant Leadership** that seems good to note here. *J. Oswald Sanders describes it as a growing spiritual maturity, which is revealed in a magnanimous spirit and broad vision fueled by the hope of Christ even in the midst of the hardest of things.*³

V. Closing: Two Final Marks of Servant Leadership

In stepping back and seeing Paul's words to this point in 1 Corinthians as a whole, we see two additional marks of Biblical Spiritual Leadership AKA, **Servant Leadership**, including:

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1. The first is Possessing and Exercising Godly Wisdom. *Godly wisdom goes beyond knowing of God into knowing God and the subtleties of the human heart.* What's more, wisdom navigates the complexities of human reasoning, motivations, and relationships in moral and spiritual matters toward God. *Godly wisdom does not come through seminary and other advanced studies nor by living more life.* Godly wisdom comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit!

³ Adapted from Spiritual Leadership, J. Oswald Sanders, p51, 66

2. And what is the last of our marks of **Servant Leadership**. A **Servant Leader** is filled with the Holy Spirit. Thank you Jesus!
3. Three final points...
 - A. First, God's call to servant leadership is NOT to an office (e.g., pastor or apostle), but for every disciple of Christ;
 - B. Second, Paul's teaching to the Corinthians was for every generation of the church; and
 - C. Third, these marks of **Servant Leadership** serve at least three purposes including:
 - (1) reminding us that consequential leadership matters;
 - (2) offering us a target rich environment as we ask God to shape and mold us increasingly into His image; and
 - (3) helping mature our spiritual discernment for self-examination and for the growing darkness as we hurtle toward Christ's return.

[Prayer]

5-Day Devotional

1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Servant Leadership Matters

Day 1: The Grace to Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

Reading: 1 Co 4:6-7; Phil 2:5-8

Devotional: It is remarkably easy to become distracted by criticism, comparison, and competition. Paul, though under fierce personal attack from those in Corinth, refused to take the bait. Grace kept his eyes fixed on Christ and the gospel rather than on his own reputation. Philippians 2:5-8 reminds us that Christ Himself set aside privilege and status for the sake of others. Grace is not passive — it is the active, daily choice to redirect our focus back to Jesus when the noise of the world pulls us toward self-defense and self-promotion.

Reflection: Where in your life are you allowing criticism or comparison to steal your focus from Christ?

Practical Application: Identify one situation this week where you can choose grace over self-defense and intentionally redirect your energy toward serving someone else rather than protecting your own reputation.

Day 2: Humility — Recognizing the Source of Every Good Thing

Reading: Jam 1:17; Jn 3:27; 1 Co 12:4-11; Eph 2:8-10

Devotional: The Corinthians had received much from God, but they had made a fatal error — they began to believe their gifting, status, and spiritual insight originated within themselves. Every passage in today's reading points to the same liberating truth: everything good in your life is a gift from above. Your talents, your faith, your spiritual gifts, your very capacity to do good works — none of it was manufactured by you. This reality does not diminish you; it frees you. When God alone receives the glory for what He has placed in your hands, the burden of self-promotion evaporates entirely.

Reflection: In what areas of your life — spiritual, professional, relational — are you most tempted to take credit that belongs to God?

Practical Application: Spend five minutes in prayer today specifically naming gifts, abilities, and opportunities God has given you. For each one, verbally surrender the credit back to Him and ask how He wants you to steward it for His glory rather than your own.

Day 3: The Upside-Down Kingdom — Strength Through Weakness

Reading: 1 Co 4:9-13; Isa 53:2-3; Mt 5:3-12

Devotional: The list Paul provides in verses 9 through 13 is jarring by any standard. The apostles were hungry, mistreated, slandered, and treated as refuse. Yet Paul presents this catalog of suffering not as a complaint but as a portrait of faithfulness. Isaiah 53:2-3 reminds us that Jesus Himself bore no outward marks of worldly greatness. He was despised and rejected. The Beatitudes in Matthew 5 confirm that God's kingdom operates on an entirely different economy than the world's. Those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek — these are the ones God calls blessed. The cross always precedes the crown.

Reflection: Are you more comfortable with a version of faith that promises comfort and status, or are you genuinely prepared to follow Christ into the places of difficulty and sacrifice?

Practical Application: This week, choose one act of service that costs you something — time, comfort, or convenience — and do it without announcing it to anyone. Let it be an offering between you and God alone.

Day 4: Integrity, Courage, and the Authenticity of a Life Well-Lived Reading: 1 Cor 4:14-17; 2 Co 3:5-6; Ro 12:3-8

Devotional: Paul's courage in writing to the Corinthians is remarkable. He does not flatter them, soften the hard truths, or adjust his message to win their approval. At the same time, he is clear that his correction flows from love, not arrogance. This is the narrow road of integrity — speaking truth with genuine care for the one receiving it. Romans 12:3-8 calls every believer to an honest, sober assessment of themselves before God. Our sufficiency, as 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 declares, comes entirely from Him. Authentic spiritual leadership — and authentic discipleship — requires the courage to be exactly who God made you to be, nothing more and nothing less.

Reflection: Is there an area of your life where you are performing a version of faith rather than living it authentically? What would it look like to bring that area into honest alignment before God?

Practical Application: Identify one relationship in your life where you have been withholding a hard but loving truth. Pray specifically for both the courage to speak and the grace to do so in a way that serves the other person rather than simply relieving your own discomfort.

Day 5: The Holy Spirit — The Source of All True Servant Leadership Reading: 1 Co 4:18-21; Col 1:29; Gal 5:22-23; Acts 1:8

Devotional: Paul closes this passage with a pointed contrast between empty words and genuine spiritual power. The arrogant leaders in Corinth were full of talk but devoid of the transforming power of God. Colossians 1:29 makes clear that Paul's own labor was not driven by personal ambition or natural ability but by the power of Christ working within him. Galatians 5:22-23 reminds us that the evidence of the Spirit's filling is not impressive speech or outward status — it is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. True servant leadership, and true discipleship, begins and ends with the Holy Spirit. Without Him, we are merely performing.

Reflection: Honestly assess your daily dependence on the Holy Spirit. Are you attempting to live the Christian life through discipline and effort alone, or are you actively and consistently inviting the Spirit to lead, correct, and empower you?

Practical Application: Beginning today, establish a simple daily practice of surrendering your agenda to the Holy Spirit before your feet hit the floor each morning. Ask Him specifically to fill you, lead you, and produce His fruit through you — and then watch how He answers that prayer throughout the ordinary moments of your day.

Small Group Study Guide

1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Servant Leadership Matters

Opening Prayer: Pray that the Lord would open your eyes to see and understand His word as you discuss the sermon.

Key Takeaways: Query the group for takeaways first...you may stay with one or more of those.

1. The Stakes Are High The Corinthians' rejection of Paul and his message was not merely a personality conflict or a preference dispute. It was a rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ itself. Wrong leadership, followed uncritically, can quietly introduce a different gospel into a fellowship.
2. Servant Leadership Is for Every Disciple God's call to servant leadership is not limited to pastors or church officers. Every follower of Christ is called to lead the way Christ led — by serving, by stewarding what God has entrusted to them, and by pointing others toward Christ rather than themselves.
3. Everything We Have Comes From God Spiritual gifts, faith, good works, and sufficiency all originate with God. There is no room for pride or a sense of superiority among believers. Humility is not optional for the servant leader — it is foundational.
4. The Servant Leadership Model Looks Nothing Like the World. Paul's list of Servant Leadership marks; willingness to suffer, to be last, to bless persecutors, to endure slander gently; stands in sharp contrast to both the Corinthian church and to the values the surrounding culture celebrates. Christ Himself looked nothing like a king by the world's standards.
5. Godly Wisdom and the Filling of the Holy Spirit Are Essential Servant leadership cannot be manufactured through education, experience, or effort alone. It flows from knowing God intimately and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Discussion Questions: Did the Holy Spirit prompt any questions with you? Start with those.

1. When you hear the phrase "servant leadership," what image or person comes to mind first? How does that image compare to what the sermon described?
2. The sermon defined Biblical Servant Leadership as leading others the way Christ led — by serving them, stewarding what God has entrusted, and laying down

privilege and status rather than using authority to be served. Does that definition challenge or confirm what you have previously understood servant leadership to be? Explain.

3. Paul refused to take the bait and attack those who were criticizing him. Instead, he kept redirecting attention back to Christ and the gospel. How difficult do you find it to stay focused on what matters most when you feel personally attacked or dismissed?
4. The sermon noted that we are always being disciplined by someone — a coworker, a social media feed, a mentor, or a Godly person in our church. Who or what is most actively shaping your worldview right now? How do you evaluate whether that influence is moving you toward or away from Christ?
5. The sermon walked through several passages — including James 1:17, John 3:27, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, and Ephesians 2:8-10 — all pointing to the same truth: everything we have comes from God. Where in your life are you most tempted to take personal credit for what God has given or done?
6. The Corinthians wanted the crown without the cross. In what ways does that temptation show up in the modern church? In your own life?
7. The sermon said that humility should be evidenced in how we sacrificially serve others for God's glory and not our own. What does that look like practically in your daily relationships — at home, at work, and in your church?
8. Read back through the list of Servant Leadership marks from 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 — willing to be last, to suffer as fools for Christ, to bless persecutors, to respond gently to slander, to be treated as refuse of the world. Be honest: which of these is hardest for you personally? Why?
9. The sermon referenced Isaiah 53:2-3 and noted that Jesus looked decidedly more like the suffering apostles than like a celebrated king. The sermon then asked a pointed question: are we more like the Corinthians or more like the apostles? How would you answer that for yourself?
10. The sermon suggested that because Christ's character looked nothing like the world, perhaps a useful guide is to observe the position the world is taking and stand on the opposite. Do you agree with that idea? What are the opportunities and dangers in applying it?
11. J. Oswald Sanders described growing courage as the willingness to face the enemy, hardships, complaints, controversies, fears, and human opposition in

doing God's bidding. Where in your life right now does following Christ require that kind of courage from you?

12. Integrity and sincerity were described as being authentically transparent in Godly character while being sincere in duty, loyalty, honesty, and promises across all areas of life. Is there a gap between who you are publicly and who you are privately? What would it take to close that gap?
13. The sermon described a servant leader as someone who will gracefully, mercifully, and lovingly make decisions based on sound Biblical precepts, correct and direct the church, and be a Godly role model. Think of someone in your life who has corrected you in that spirit. What made their correction different from criticism that simply stings?
14. The call to make disciple-making disciples means we are not just meant to grow personally — we are meant to reproduce that growth in others. Who are you intentionally investing in right now? Who is investing in you?
15. The sermon drew a clear distinction between knowing about God and actually knowing God. In your own honest assessment, which best describes where you are right now?
16. Godly wisdom was described as coming from the filling of the Holy Spirit — not from seminary, advanced study, or more life experience. What does it look like in your daily life to pursue that kind of filling rather than relying on your own understanding?

Practical Applications: Query the group for applications first...you may explore one or more of those.

1. **Audit Your Discipleship Influences-** This week, make a list of the top five voices shaping how you think and live. Evaluate each one honestly against Scripture. Are they pointing you toward Christ or away from Him? Bring your reflections back to the group.
2. **Practice One Servant Leadership Mark-** Pick one mark from the Servant Leadership list in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 that challenges you most. Intentionally look for one opportunity this week to live it out. Journal what happens and share it with the group.
3. **Identify Someone to Invest-** In If you are not currently making a disciple-making disciple, prayerfully identify one person this week you could begin investing in intentionally. Take one concrete step toward beginning that relationship.

4. **Replace Pride With Gratitude-** Identify one area where you have been taking personal credit for something God has done in or through you. Spend time this week in prayer, specifically thanking God for that gift, and look for one opportunity to redirect the glory to Him in conversation with others.
5. **Pursue the Filling of the Holy Spirit-** Set aside intentional time this week — beyond your normal routine — to be still before God. Ask Him specifically to fill you with His Spirit and to give you the Godly wisdom only He can provide.

Closing Prayer Points:

- Thank God for the example of Christ as the ultimate servant leader
- Ask God to reveal where pride or a desire for the crown without the cross has crept into your life
- Ask for the filling of the Holy Spirit and the Godly wisdom that only He can give
- Pray for your church's leaders — that they would embody the marks of servant leadership described in this passage
- Ask God to make each member of your group a servant leader in their home, workplace, and community

Discussion Questions

1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Servant Leadership Matters

1. Paul refused to defend his personal reputation and instead kept the focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ — in what areas of your own life do you find it most difficult to set aside your ego for the sake of a greater spiritual purpose?
2. The sermon describes how the Corinthians wanted 'the crowns without the cross' — in what ways might modern Christians, or even you personally, be tempted to embrace a version of faith that seeks blessing and status while avoiding sacrifice and suffering?
3. Paul uses himself and Apollos as examples to reinforce that every gift, ability, and position we hold comes from God and not from ourselves — how does genuinely believing this truth change the way you relate to others who seem more or less gifted than you?
4. The sermon warns that we are always being disciplined by someone, whether a godly mentor, a coworker, or a social media feed — who or what is most actively shaping your worldview right now, and how does that align with a high view of Scripture?
5. Isaiah 53:2-3 describes a Messiah with no outward majesty or beauty that would draw people to Him, looking far more like a suffering servant than a celebrated king — what does this reveal about the kind of leadership and influence God values, and how does it challenge your own ambitions?
6. The marks of servant leadership described in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 — including accepting hardship, blessing persecutors, and responding gently to slander — are radically countercultural; which of these marks do you find most convicting or most difficult to live out, and why?
7. The sermon emphasizes that God's call to servant leadership is not limited to pastors or church offices but extends to every disciple of Christ — how does recognizing this calling reshape the way you approach your relationships, your workplace, and your community?
8. The sermon emphasizes that God's call to servant leadership is not limited to pastors or church offices but extends to every disciple of Christ — how does recognizing this calling reshape the way you approach your relationships, your workplace, and your community?

9. The sermon identifies growing courage as an essential mark of servant leadership, describing it as the courage to face enemies, hardships, controversy, and human opposition in doing God's bidding — in what specific situation in your life right now is God calling you to exercise that kind of courage?
10. Godly wisdom, as described in the sermon, comes not through education or life experience alone but through the filling of the Holy Spirit — what does your current pursuit of wisdom look like, and what would it mean for you to rely more fully on the Spirit's leading in your daily decisions?

Dinner Conversation Starters

1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Servant Leadership Matters

1. Who Are We Letting Lead Us?

Paul warned the Corinthians that they were being shaped by the wrong voices. Conversation starter: Who or what influences our family the most right now—God’s Word, friends, social media, school, work, or something else? How can we make sure Jesus is our greatest influence?

2. Pride or Gratitude?

Paul reminded the Corinthians that everything they had was a gift from God. Conversation starter: What is one gift, ability, opportunity, or blessing God has given each of us? How can we use those gifts to serve others instead of becoming prideful?

3. What Does Servant Leadership Look Like at Home?

Servant leadership means leading like Jesus—by serving, sacrificing, and pointing others toward God. Conversation starter: What is one way each person in our family can practice servant leadership this week at home, school, work, or church?

4. Following Jesus When It Costs Something

Paul described true spiritual leaders as willing to suffer, be mistreated, and still respond with grace. Conversation starter: When is it hard to do the right thing or follow Jesus? How can we encourage one another to stay faithful even when it is uncomfortable?

5. Correction with Love

Paul corrected the Corinthians not to shame them, but because he loved them and wanted them to return to Christ. Conversation starter: Why is loving correction important in a family? How can we correct or receive correction in a way that is humble, kind, and God-honoring?

Family Conversation Guide for Children & Early Teens

1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Servant Leadership Matters

AGES 5-7: SIMPLIFYING THE MESSAGE APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Choose Kindness When You Want to Be First:** Servant leadership means leading like Jesus by serving others, not trying to be the most important. Your child wants to be first in line, first to pick the game, or first to get attention. Practice saying, “You can go first,” or “I’ll help,” as a way to follow Jesus.

Discussion Questions:

- a. When is it hard to let someone else go first?
 - b. How did Jesus show love by serving others?
 - c. What is one way you can serve someone in our family this week?
2. **Remember That Your Gifts Come from God:** Paul reminded the Corinthians that everything they had was given by God, so they should not be prideful. Your child is good at a sport, school subject, art, or game and may be tempted to brag. Teach them to say, “Thank You, God, for helping me,” and use their gift to encourage others.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What is something God has helped you do well?
 - b. How can you use that gift to help someone else?
 - c. What is the difference between being thankful and bragging?
3. **Use Gentle Words When Others Are Mean:** Paul described servant leaders as people who do not retaliate when mistreated and respond gently. A friend says something unkind, excludes them, or takes a toy. Help your child practice simple responses like, “That hurt my feelings,” “Please stop,” or “I’m going to ask an adult for help.”

Discussion Questions:

- a. What can you do when someone is mean to you?
- b. Why does Jesus want us to use gentle words?
- c. Who can you talk to when you need help?

AGES 8-12: BUILDING UNDERSTANDING APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Lead by Serving in Your Friend Group:** Biblical leadership is not about status; it is about serving others and pointing them toward what is right. Friends argue about what to play, who belongs, or who gets left out. Encourage your child to be the one who includes others, helps solve conflict, and refuses to join in exclusion.

Discussion Questions:

- a. When have you seen someone get left out?
 - b. What could you do if your friends are excluding someone?
 - c. How can being kind make you a leader, even if you are not “in charge”?
2. **Don’t Let Popularity Decide What Is Right:** Paul warned the Corinthians not to follow human wisdom over God’s wisdom. A group at school thinks something is funny, cool, or acceptable even though it is unkind or wrong. Teach your child to ask, “What does God say is right?” rather than, “What will make people like me?”

Discussion Questions:

- a. Have you ever felt pressure to laugh at something that was wrong?
 - b. Why is it hard to disagree with your friends?
 - c. What can help you choose God’s way when others do not?
3. **Practice Humility Online and Offline:** Paul challenged the Corinthians for being “puffed up” and acting superior. Your child may compare grades, sports skills, clothes, gaming abilities, or social media attention. Help them celebrate others without needing to prove they are better.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What are kids your age tempted to brag about?
- b. How does comparison make us feel?
- c. What would humility look like when you win, succeed, or get praised?

AGES 11-15: DEEPENING THE CONNECTION APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Evaluate Who Is Discipling You:** Paul warned that we are shaped by the voices we follow. Teens are influenced by friends, influencers, music, YouTube, TikTok, gaming communities, and online personalities. Encourage teens to regularly ask, “Is this person leading me closer to Jesus or further away?”

Discussion Questions:

- a. Who are the loudest voices in your life right now?
- b. What values are they teaching you?
- c. Are those values consistent with Scripture?
- d. Is there anyone you need to follow less—or unfollow completely?

2. **Use Influence as Stewardship, Not Status**: Servant leadership means stewarding what God has entrusted to us for His glory, not our own. Teens may have influence through friend groups, sports teams, clubs, social media, or younger siblings. Help them see influence as a responsibility to serve, encourage, protect, and point people toward what is good.

Discussion Questions:

- a. Where do you have influence right now?
 - b. Do you tend to use your influence to help others or to gain attention?
 - c. How could you use your words, posts, or choices to honor Christ this week?
3. Reject the “Crown Without the Cross” Mindset: The Corinthians wanted honor and status without humility, sacrifice, and obedience. Teens may want popularity, success, attention, or comfort without responsibility, sacrifice, or faithfulness. Talk honestly about how following Jesus may cost comfort, approval, or popularity.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What are some ways people your age chase status?
- b. When might following Jesus make you look “uncool”?
- c. What is one area where obedience to Christ may require sacrifice?

Tips for Parents

- Be patient and listen: Give your child time to think and respond.
- Relate to everyday life: Use real-life examples and stories familiar to your child to make abstract concepts more tangible.
- Encourage questions: Let your son or daughter know it’s okay to ask questions, even if things don’t make sense right away.
- Share personal insights: Tell a personal story about a time you experienced these themes, adapting as needed for age appropriateness.

Family Conversation Guide for Gen Z

1 Corinthians 4:6-21

Servant Leadership Matters

1. Let Scripture Shape You More Than the Algorithm

Bible References:

- 1 Corinthians 4:6
- Romans 12:2
- Psalm 119:105

Application: Do not let your feed, favorite influencer, friend group, or culture become your main source of truth. A servant-hearted follower of Jesus learns “not to go beyond what is written” and allows Scripture to correct opinions, desires, and choices.

Scenario: You see a viral video about identity, relationships, money, sexuality, politics, or success. Everyone in the comments agrees, and it sounds convincing. Before reposting or adopting the viewpoint, you compare it with Scripture and ask, “Is this leading me toward Christ or away from Him?”

Discussion: What voices are currently shaping your worldview the most, and how can you make God’s Word louder than those voices?

2. Use Influence to Serve, Not to Build Your Image

Bible References:

- Mark 10:42–45
- Philippians 2:3–8
- 1 Corinthians 4:7

Application: Jesus defines leadership as service, not status. Whether you have influence in a friend group, team, club, workplace, youth group, or online platform, use it to lift others up rather than draw attention to yourself.

Scenario: You are part of a group chat where people usually follow your lead. You could use that influence to make jokes at someone’s expense, push your opinion, or control the group. Instead, you choose to encourage someone, stop gossip, or include a person who is usually ignored.

Discussion: Where do you have influence right now, and are you using it more for service or for self-promotion?

3. Fight Pride by Remembering Everything Is a Gift

Bible References:

- 1 Corinthians 4:7–8
- James 1:17
- Romans 12:3

Application: Your talents, looks, intelligence, opportunities, platform, relationships, athletic ability, creativity, and spiritual gifts are from God. Humility grows when you remember that what you have was given to you so you can glorify God and serve others.

Scenario: You get praised for your grades, appearance, music, sports performance, content, or leadership. Instead of subtly bragging, fishing for compliments, or comparing yourself to others, you thank God and look for a way to encourage someone else.

Discussion: What is one gift God has given you that could easily become a source of pride if you forget where it came from?

4. Do Not Chase the “Crown Without the Cross”

Bible References:

- 1 Corinthians 4:8–13
- Luke 9:23
- Galatians 2:20

Application: Following Jesus is not mainly about comfort, popularity, or being admired. Paul reminds the Corinthians that true spiritual maturity often involves sacrifice, humility, rejection, and faithfulness when it costs something.

Scenario: You want the benefits of Christianity—peace, purpose, community, heaven—but you are tempted to hide your faith when it could cost you social approval. In a conversation where people mock biblical beliefs, you choose not to be rude, but you also do not pretend you disagree with Jesus.

Discussion: Where are you most tempted to want the rewards of following Jesus without the sacrifice of obeying Him?

These points aim to empower Gen Z to live out their faith genuinely and courageously in various aspects of their daily lives, reflecting Biblical integrity, compassion, and steadfastness.