

BROKENNESS, AND LEADING OTHERS WITH THE MIND OF CHRIST

Luzon District, Philippines Pastors' and Spouses' Conference

The relationship between humility, brokenness, and leadership in the pastoral setting in which we are called to serve often presents conflicting expectations and multiple demands for the leader. In these situations, how do we lead Christianly, consistently and with vision and courage? How can we lead when we feel abused, manipulated, undermined, and ignored? We even ask God, at times, why he has permitted words to be spoken or deeds to be done against us.

It is difficult for us to move from the “why” to the “what” questions. “What do you want to teach me in this humbling moment?” we ask of the Lord. What is the relationship between leadership...in business, education, or ministry and the brokenness of spirit we often experience in these situations?

Listen to John Wesley’s covenant prayer he prayed at the beginning of each new year:

I am no longer my own, but yours.
Rank me with whom you will.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by you or laid aside for you.
Exalted for you or brought low by you.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
You are mine and I am yours.
So be it.
And the covenant, which I have made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

You will soon discover if you haven’t already, that God sometimes uses brokenness of spirit to get our attention, wherever we happen to be in our walk with him. Such was the case with Job and his trials. And it may be with you...in a local church, in graduate school, in your first job, in the home, or in retirement!

Two questions further frame my remarks to you about leading others. I have pursued these questions since 1978 when I moved to a cross-cultural teaching assignment in the European Nazarene College near Schaffhausen, Switzerland:

“How can we live together in a faith community so that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?”

In the midst of conflicting expectations, and often irreconcilable differences, placed upon

the Christian leader, what does it mean – really mean – in these often conflicting situations to lead with the mind of Christ?”

Sometimes things happen that are outside our control. God does not cause the circumstances; however, he allows them to happen. God can use our brokenness to humble us and draw us closer to Himself. God’s process of helping us develop character involves our being broken before him.

In these poignant moments where life lessons regarding leading others can break through, at least six convictions can hold us steady in our leadership assignments:

1. *Watch our words.* Words we speak can bless or “burn” people. What comes out of our mouth reflects what is in our heart. In New Testament perspective, dialog is a sacrament. Our words are to minister grace to others (Ephesians 4:29).

As leaders we either:

- Encourage or discourage,
- Uplift or “putdown,”
- Speak positively or negatively,
- Focus on the other person or focus on self.

I often ask myself: how do others feel when they leave my presence?

- Stronger or weaker?
- Larger or smaller about themselves?
- Confident or “scared”?
- Blessed or “cursed”?

“When the door of the steam bath is continually left open, the heat inside rapidly escapes through it.” (Henri Nouwen)

I have benefited from a “praise to criticism” ratio I discovered in my doctoral program. Sven Walroos, clinical psychologist states: “The praise to criticism ratio should be kept at about 80-90% praise to 10-20% criticism.”

Driving Force #1: “Watch the words.”

2. *Don’t whine—be grateful.* Comparison is the root of inferior feelings. We can feel good about ourselves—our gifts, talents and abilities—until we compare ourselves with others.

Comparison is the root of inferiority. We can believe our co-workers are adequate for the jobs we give to them until we compare their work – creativity, innovation, energy, collegiality – with others. Comparison can eat us alive ... And rob us of joy, relationships, confidence, and peace, sap our energy and drain us of enthusiasm. (Example: house in Bethany)

Comparison can transform us from being a delightful “boss” into a preoccupied, dejected, negative and disgruntled individual others endure.

What is the antidote to comparison? Gratitude! Thankfulness! Appreciation!
We can choose to accept the people and provision God in His wisdom has given to us. We can choose to work to bring out the best in others through seeing the best in them. In every situation, we can choose to be grateful, believing that God is in the midst of all that we are doing.

Gratitude is the “life-giving” antidote to the negative impact of comparison.

3. *Seek first to understand.* Understanding, not agreement, is the key to conflict management. Good and godly people can have honest and intense differences. In fact, they sometimes collide over vision and values. This is why I have come to see that theological vision (what I believe about people, what I “see” in them) must precede organizational vision.

In conflict situations with good and godly people, I have learned to ask two growth producing questions: “What can I learn? How can I change?” Likewise, I have learned at least two growth inhibiting questions: “Why me? What if...?”

If I can’t be a great speaker, I can be a great listener. I can listen for understanding. And listen for what is said. Also, I need to listen for what is not said.

4. *Be proactive in extending forgiveness.* A spirit of forgiveness transforms and empowers people. Extending people does not wait for the others person to request forgiveness. Rather, it frees us from the bondage to the other. Too often, we permit persons who have offended us to control us. Extending forgiveness has everything to do with maintaining a right relationship with a holy God!

One of my profound life lessons is this: forgiveness has little to do with the external environment around me, and everything to do with my “internal” condition!
Remember this: extending forgiveness does not wait for the “other” to request forgiveness.
Example: Jesus on the cross: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

Was Jesus naïve? Did he really believe that those who were killing him did not know what they were doing? No! Did Jesus believe that by extending forgiveness, those who were slandering him and hurting him would cease their activity? No!

Jesus was not going to permit what others said against him or the evil they did against him to create bitterness or resentment within him and thereby rupture the relationship with God His Father. “It’s just not worth it,” Jesus seems to be saying. Father, forgive them, they know not what they do!”

Extending forgiveness frees me from bondage to the other person.
Too often, we permit persons who have offended us to control us.
Remember this: “Great leaders are shaped in the most challenging and difficult times.”

5. *Value people, not power.* The evidence of leadership is seen in the lives of the followers. I often ask myself this question: are the persons with whom I work and those whom I lead stronger in their faith, more confident in themselves and more fulfilled in their lives as a result of working with me? I try to enlarge the vision of the people about the work they are

doing—to see the bigger picture and discover how they, in their particular assignment, contribute to the mission of the school, church or organization they serve.

I often ask myself: Are MVNU employees stronger in their faith, more confident in themselves and more fulfilled in their work as a result of working at MVNU? Are MVNU students stronger in their faith, more confident in themselves and more fulfilled in their lives as a result of studying at MVNU?

I lament the fact that I do not express appropriate or adequate appreciation, thanks and gratitude to MVNU faculty, staff and students. Over the years, I have tried to remember to trust my best moments when making decisions regarding employees.

There is one other conviction for leaders who have been humbled through brokenness in their leadership assignments.

6. *Pray Earnestly*. They know that some issues are only resolved and dissolved through prayer and total dependence on God. They believe that God can work in *us* to become the change we desire to see in others.

Leaders who combine deep humility, clear vision, and intense resolve know that we do not have the power to change others. Change can take place, however, within us! In the midst of experiencing honest and intense differences between good and godly people, the “pray-er” can be changed and transformed!

Conflict situations can produce growth. They can also inhibit growth in the lives of leaders. Before God in prayer, we seek answers from Him to these two questions: what can *I* learn; how can *I* change?

In so asking and seeking God’s answers to these two questions for *our* lives as leaders, *we* are changed! Increasingly, we become the change, by God’s grace, we desire to see in others. Others around us may or may not be impacted by what happen within us. But, what happens to *us* is transformative!

We grow. We change. We mature. We increasingly exemplify the change we desire to see in others! And, in the process, we experience the peace of God which transcends understanding. In the process, we are “freed” from insisting on change within others.

Through earnest prayer, caring leaders asks the right questions, and trust God with the results...even as we are changed in the process!

These driving forces in a Christian leader *characterize* us at our best and *convict* us at our worst.

Life together in Christian families, local congregations, small groups, governing boards, Christian organizations, Nazarene colleges, universities, and seminaries include lessons, planned and unplanned, on brokenness, humbleness, gentleness, patience and compassion for others (Ephesians 4:2). The parishioners, staff or faculty, or school alumni who allow themselves to go through the breaking process will emerge as leaders who can be trusted...at home or around the world.

Conclusion:

Remember that brokenness, humility, and leadership. Growth producing for the leader.

1. *Watch our words..* Our words are to minister grace to others (Ephesians 4:29).
2. *Don't whine—be grateful.* Gratitude is the “life-giving” antidote to the negative impact of comparison.
3. *Seek first to understand.* Understanding, not agreement, is the key to conflict management.
4. *Be proactive in extending forgiveness.* A spirit of forgiveness transforms and empowers people. It frees us from the bondage to the other.
5. *Value people, not power.* The evidence of leadership is seen in the lives of the followers.
6. *Pray earnestly.* Become the change you desire to see in others.

These driving forces in a Christian leader *characterize* us at our best and *convict* us at our worst.

Closing illustration: 2007

These driving forces within me characterize me at my best and convict me at my worst. It has been through wrestling with these questions that I have learned (and am still learning) about the six leadership values about leading others in a faith community.

Which of these six driving forces relate to you and your present leadership assignment?

Closing Song

March, 2012

