

**MENTORING
& MODELING**
Leadership Character

Edward LeBron Fairbanks

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MENTORING & MODELING

Leadership Character

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You have developed an essential resource to leaders who are passionate about nurturing and modeling leadership character. It is a very much needed resource in a world that is increasingly negligent of honesty and integrity; it is critical to rekindle the truth that character counts! These monographs provide a valuable blueprint for leaders worldwide (cross-culturally, cross-continental, to the church and other industries).

I am immensely thankful for this resource because I have seen you live it out. It is a practical resource that represents what you have modeled and passed on to young leaders like me. I count it an honor that I had the privilege to serve with and learn from you in various assignments and settings.

Margaret Britt, D.B.A.

Professor of Human Resource Management, Retired
Mount Vernon Nazarene University

This book relates real life practical applications of how to model excellent leadership traits along with the mentorship of people. Dr. Fairbanks is the best person whom I know to discuss these concepts since he has served for over thirty years in senior level executive positions in higher education.

As a former manager for a Fortune 30 Corporation, I highly recommend this book since it is realistic and an easy read concerning the proper way to mentor and model leadership character traits for anyone who wants to improve their management skills!

Edna Murugan, PhD

Online Faculty Manager, West Coast University
Ordained Elder, Church of the Nazarene

Modeling and mentoring leadership character is not a choice; it is a requirement for our own success and that of the institutions we represent. Dr. Fairbanks did a fabulous job of making this very clear in his book. It is filled with best practices for ethical leadership to help you represent Christ and your institution for best possible outcomes. I highly recommend this book to you with great confidence that it will inspire you and increase your desire to mentor and model your leadership character.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to the students in my fall semester, 2017 class, “Spiritual Formation of Ministers” at the Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines. The draft copy of this book was used in this class as a resource for the students. They read the book, critiqued and prepared personal and group discussion questions for the chapters. They are my friends and invaluable colleagues in ministry.

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Dr. Edna Murugan and I were on a Zoom conference call when the discussion turned to leadership character. I mentioned to her the draft copy of a book I developed for a class in Manila, Philippines. Upon reading the material, she enthusiastically encouraged me to publish the book. She provided editorial support and critique of the content.

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questions located at the end of each chapter in the book.

Dr. Margaret Britt, a retired Mount Vernon Nazarene University Human Resource Management professor, read and edited the text several times! Her writing acumen and human resource management expertise helped me to process the way I wrote a particular sentence and to evaluate the content of the material.

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The very gifted, committed, and professional World Mission Communications Asia-Pacific team (WMC-AP) in Manila, Philippines, led by Grace Tia, assisted me in the internal layout and cover design of the book.

I remain profoundly grateful for the higher education leaders and board chairs with whom I have worked closely over the past thirty years who mentored me in leadership character. In the midst of their work, these leaders modeled before me that a maturing Christian is one who is “being transformed into the likeness of Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Finally, Anne! What a blessing and source of encouragement to me. Without her patience with me, her belief in me and her enduring love for me, I would not have persisted in this project. Anne is example #1 of a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led Christian, as described in Galatians 5:22-23a, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*”

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Preface

Two personal vignettes frame the issues addressed in this book.

Following my retirement from Mount Vernon Nazarene University, I received a very personal letter from an MVNU alumnus. After a warm greeting, he said, “Having entered the university as an atheist, I found you to be far and away one of the most interesting people I had the opportunity to hear in chapel. You believed, more fully than I believed anything in my life, every word you said, especially when it came to your love for the students of MVNU.” His life was transformed by the grace of God and the MVNU experience.

The alumnus talked about his family and his present work as a leader in a technology company. He then asked me a leadership question: “How do I build up the trust of the people with whom I work?”

How do leaders nurture the trust of those we lead? How can we develop a reputation of trustworthiness? Is there a trust gap in our work with others?

Kouzes and Posner, in their book, *Credibility*, (1993), identified four questions to help us answer these questions:

1. Is my behavior predictable or erratic?
2. Do I communicate clearly or carelessly?
3. Do I treat promises seriously or lightly?
4. Am I forthright or dishonest?

Intentionally addressing these four questions will go a long way in enhancing our reputation as someone trustworthy. “*Many people claim to be loyal, but it is hard to find a trustworthy person*” (Proverbs 20:6, NCV).

The second vignette took place in 2019. Near the conclusion of a Myanmar Evangelical Alliance day-long seminar in Yangon, Myanmar, an older Myanmar leader, working near the dangerous Myanmar/India border asked to speak. He

stated, “I came to this seminar because of the subject, ‘Christian Leadership.’ I was immediately impressed by the theme of the seminar session: ‘Nurturing the Trust of Those We Lead.’”

He continued, “This is the first leadership seminar I have attended that addressed this subject. I had never considered the impact of my words and actions on the people led. “I discovered,” he concluded, that “leading others begins with leading myself.”

What is involved in “first, leading ourselves?”

The Myanmar conference focused on the themes of:

Consistency and Integrity;
Communication and Transparency;
Confidentiality and Courageous Conversations;
Competence and Humility; and
Caring Relationships, Discipline, and a “non-anxious” presence.

These are leadership character issues! They also nurture the trust of those we lead!

Character has powerful implications for Christian leaders. As leaders, we have a responsibility to be role models, to help nurture character and trust. If what we do in ministry and mission does not flow from who we are in Christ, then a huge disconnect will be felt in the lives of those we seek to lead.

God wants to develop Christian character qualities in the lives of the mentor and the person being mentored, so that we can participate with Him in His great mission in the world. Amazingly, we participate with God in His mission of reconciliation by living godly lives before others, and faithful lives before Him.

Modeling is the primary process by which leaders pass on the fundamental character qualities and values needed in future leaders. These qualities in our lives as leaders, or lack of them, will either confirm or deny to others what it is we want to teach them about ministry and mission.

May this book challenge us to first, lead ourselves as we also seek to mentor and model leadership character in those with whom we live and lead.



Introduction

Dr. Jon Wallace, the late president emeritus of Azusa Pacific University and a friend of mine, asked his board chair emeritus, Dr. Ted Engstrom, a noted author on leadership, some questions (Wallace, personal communication, 2020).

The president had just asked his retired board leader, now approaching death, **“What do you want on your tombstone and how do you want the first line of your obituary to read?”** Without hesitation and with evident joy dancing in his eyes, the elderly board leader replied, “I simply want my tombstone to say, ‘Here lies a man of integrity.’” He continued, “... that’s because the greatest hallmark for a Christian is to be known as a person of integrity ... a consistency between our personal and public lives” (Wallace, 2006).

Integrity has been defined as honesty, consistency, and coherence (*Cambridge English Dictionary*). Engstrom stresses that integrity is not only the way one thinks but even more the way one acts. Integrity is doing what you said you would do; keeping your promises; and being the same on the inside as on the outside (Engstrom, 1997). Schantes quotes Warren Buffett who believes that it is the #1 trait people want in leaders (Schantes, 2020).

Dr. James Couchenour quotes a business associate with a plaque prominently displayed in the lobby of his office: “In the long run, only integrity matters. In fact, without integrity, there will be no long run” (Fairbanks, 2012).

In addition to integrity, scripture speaks to us regarding our character. Character is “the aggregate of qualities that distinguish one person from another” (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 2020). Character “refers to the sum of the characteristics possessed by a person ... especially to moral qualities, ethical standards, principles ...” (*Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 2020).

According to Dr. Richard Leslie Parrott (2002), a person of leadership character has “a quality or pattern of behavior that distinguishes them from people who are not leaders.” He continued, “Leaders display patterns of relating and responding that influence the action of others.” He concluded, “Leadership character is the habit or pattern of behavior that provides good leadership.”

LEADERSHIP CHARACTER refers to the qualities that shape the leaders’ motivations, responses, and moral actions in the home, on the job, and in cultural and faith communities, especially as expressed through communication, relationships, decision-making, and development of trust.

Where does a college, seminary or university student, ministry organization leader, or lay and clergy minister in training begin pursuing truthfulness and honesty? When in one’s life does the individual begin to express his or her basic faith with the Christian character qualities listed in 2 Peter 1: 5-7? *“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.”* St. Peter continues, *“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:8). He admonishes us to nurture a lifelong pursuit of Christian character and integrity.

Character counts. Character qualities drive your life! Living truthful, honest, consistent, and coherent lives on campus and off, in the classrooms or resident halls, in your homes or on your jobs, alone or with other people, will characterize you at your best, and convict you at your worst. There is no integrity or character exemption for leaders ... or followers.

Increasingly as the Mount Vernon Nazarene University president and later as the educational commissioner and administrator of the International Board of Education, Church of the Nazarene, I became more passionate and intentional about nurturing leadership character. The chapters in this book represent a more systematic presentation of the way I prayerfully mentored and modeled leadership character before those with whom I lived and led.

In retirement, I now reflect often on how I pursued a key mentoring verse:

***“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses
entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others”***

(2 Timothy 2:2).

In fulfilling my pastoral calling in higher education administration for approximately 35 years in Europe, Asia, and the United States, I often spoke to emerging leaders with a passion to fulfill St. Paul’s imperative to young Timothy. Chapters in this book attempt to capture my intense desire to pass on to others what has been entrusted to me.

Mentoring individuals and modeling before them the character of a leader does not take place solely with one address, class, presentation or sermon. Perhaps now, in a collection of various addresses, I can again attempt to entrust or pass on to a younger generation of leaders what has been so bountifully given to me through education, ministry assignments, relationships, reading, and life experiences.

The chapters reflect my attempt in various settings and circumstances to mentor younger leaders and model before them in such a way that they, in turn, will mentor others. The monographs were presented originally in chapel services, commencement addresses, graduation sermons, regional and national conferences and as a revised section of a chapter in another book. They begin to answer some desired outcomes in the lives of the mentored ... and in the person who is mentoring and modeling leadership character.

It was and continues to be my passion to lead as a decisive and faithful leader with Christian character, integrity and grace as my testimony of holiness of heart and life continually transforms the way I guide a faith community. The chapters focus on:

Asking the Right Questions;

Pursuing Character Formation;

Mentoring and Modeling Leadership Character;

Moving from Vision to Action to Results;

Cultivating the Character Quality of Acceptance;
Watching the Words We Speak;
Dealing with a Sense of Betrayal;
Intentionally Nurturing the Christian Life;
Maturing Spiritually in a Diverse Christian Community;
Embracing Contentment;
Creating Space and Making Room;
Staying with It: The “Grace Gift” of Tenacity.

The draft copy of this book was prepared for use with students enrolled in the course, “The Christian Formation of Ministers” during the first semester of the 2017-18 academic year at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines. The students engaged each chapter and strengthened the book.

Each chapter concludes with questions for personal and/or group reflection.

The people we serve should witness in us a transformed and transformative spirit reflected in the occasions of our disagreements, and in the ways we plan and process important issues. The way we preach on Sunday, live in the home, work in the community, lead a board meeting on Tuesday evening or speak in a commencement address on Saturday should give evidence to an increasing conformity to “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16b).

Those whom we lead should see:

no separation between the sacred and secular in our lives;
no great divide between the message we preach and the way we lead;
no inconsistency;
no manipulation;

no disrespect;

no abuse;

no significant gap between our words and our deeds.

We are learning, little by little, what it means to “imitate God ... and live a life of love” (Ephesians 5:1-2), even as we lead in our homes, congregations, workplaces, and communities.

This life-long pursuit of answering the key questions decisive and faithful leaders need to ask (Chapter One) is a journey of maturing faith and painful encounters that takes a lifetime to fully understand and embrace. However, the manner by which we live and lead should increasingly reflect our transformed spiritual DNA and be profoundly evidenced in us to those who know us best. It is our passion to connect the faith we profess and proclaim to the way we live and lead.

God is not finished with me yet. I am still on the journey. God continues to unfold His plan and will for my life with blessings and surprises I could have never anticipated. I am still maturing in my Christian faith and developing in Christian character.

I want my life to be marked by integrity, honesty, kindness, gentleness, compassion, and as a peacemaker. Gandhi (1913) challenged us to be the change we wish to see in the world. His words compel me to be the change I seek to produce in others. That’s how I want to be remembered!

Don’t forget that this life-long growth process begins with radical trust in the Triune God who desires to cleanse our motives through and through. Increasingly, as we nurture and cultivate this “purity of heart,” we become a person of intense Christian faith and character. You and I can be individuals marked by integrity who seek consistency between our personal and public lives. This is really Kingdom Ethics!

I deeply desire for each of you and for me that these words will increasingly be a reality, a conviction, an anchor, and the frame of reference in our lives.

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. The distinguished board chair believed integrity is “the greatest hallmark for a Christian.” What is another great hallmark for a Christian, and why does it matter?
2. How intentionally and how well are you entrusting to others what you have learned?



Theme One: The Need for Leadership Character

- *“How can we live together within this diverse Christian community in such a way that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?” (c. 1)*
- *“How does my testimony of holiness of heart and life transform the way I both mentor others in the Christian faith and model before them a vibrant, maturing Christian life?” (c. 1)*
- *“God is more interested in our character than He is in our accomplishments, our comfort ... or our reputation. Character Counts. Really counts!” (c. 2)*
- *“Leadership is humble service to others ... for the purpose of enabling them, through teaching and example, to live their lives under the Lordship of Christ, to understand, accept, and fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission to the world.” (c. 3)*
- *“Modeling is a primary method or process by which leaders “pass on” the fundamental character qualities and values needed in future leaders.” (c. 3)*



Chapter One

Asking the Right Questions

Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines

The APNTS 30th anniversary “Leadership” seminar focuses on the subject, “Questions ‘Decisive’ Leaders Should Ask Themselves.” The presentation is built on this basic assumption: the followers whom we as Christians lead have a right to expect in their leaders something more in the relationship, something greater than the leadership provided by individuals with whom they live and work who do not profess faith in Christ.

In other words, as much as leaders want to be known as decisive, with our decision making marked by firmness, and our action by certainty and conclusiveness, even more critical in leading others is a distinctively Christian quality of caring and depth of communication. Caring for others is the mark of greatness, more so than decisiveness.

Our testimony of faith in Jesus Christ must increasingly inform and transform the way we live in and lead a faith community, as that community is expressed in the home, Sunday school class, youth group, church board, local congregation or seminary. As we lead a faith community, we must guard and wisely choose what shapes us. Will it be the latest relevant leadership text, or the timeless truths from biblical texts like the Sermon on the Mount?

I wrote a question thirty-five years ago, early in my ministry at the European Nazarene Bible College that remains with me to this day. The question is:

How can we live together within this diverse Christian community in such a way that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?

Students at ENBC lived in a small multi-cultural campus community on the Swiss-German border while studying Bible and theology in English as a second language. Their first languages were different, cultural traditions varied regarding ways of meeting and greeting each other, and food options provided for them by the dining hall staff were often unfamiliar. Expectations, instruction preferences, and course material became the focus of numerous discussions. I asked my question often.

Living together as a Christian family in a diverse Christian community in Europe prepared me for a later cross-cultural assignment in Asia. Following Dr. Don Owens, founding president of the Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, I found myself challenged with leading this very culturally diverse graduate-level theological seminary of the Church of the Nazarene. Again, on this campus, I continued to ask my previous question.

In the midst of working with graduate students at APNTS from both economically strong and weak countries, another question arose.

If, “in Christ, the new creation has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17), then how does our relationship to Christ convert the way we live and lead in a Christian community of faith?

What phenomenal lessons I learned at APNTS about life together in Christian communities! And, at APNTS, I crystalized my understanding of Christian leadership.

Christian leadership begins with humble service to others to enable them, through teaching and example, to live their lives under the Lordship of Christ, to fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission in the world.

During my 18 years at Mount Vernon Nazarene University, I probed another life-together question:

In conflict situations, when good and godly people differ and sometimes collide over vision, values, traditions, policies and programs, how can I lead in these situations, really lead (and serve) with the mind and spirit of Christ?

Along the journey, I began to realize the questions I was asking myself and seeking to answer related not just to cross-cultural education and organization institutions, but also to local congregations and even individual Christian families. What I was asking was a fundamental question for Christians maturing in their faith:

How does my testimony of holiness of heart and life transform the way I both mentor others in the Christian faith and model before them a vibrant, maturing Christian life?

This is a life question for us. It is also a leadership question! Amid conflicting expectations, multiple constituents, differing denominational backgrounds, various levels of maturity, and multi-cultural perspectives, how can we live together and lead with the mind and spirit of Christ? How is our testimony of faith reflected in our family relationships and in our leadership lifestyle?

In the context of our life situations and leadership assignments, especially in our families and local churches, we are often placed in close Christian community. We quickly become aware of others' strengths and weaknesses. Our own personality differences soon become obvious. Our specific life and leadership location becomes a dynamic laboratory for learning how to live together as God's family.

In these situations, how do we respond to conflict under pressure? Where is the "something more" or "greater than" in our leadership and followship roles and responsibilities?

THE ANSWERS TO OUR PROBING QUESTIONS are equally profound. They are: 1) deeply spiritual in nature, 2) intensely relational, 3) strategic in planning and implementation, and 4) profoundly impacting on others.

"Whatever happens," St. Paul admonishes us, *"conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ"* (Philippians 1:27). This challenge is also given in Ephesians 4:1 when he urges the believers to *"... live a life worthy of the calling you have received."* These two passages from Paul's prison epistles challenge me when I am confronted with good and godly people who differ with me — even collide with me — over the vision and values in my ministry assignments. And, I continue to learn what it means to "walk worthy ..."

Indeed, the entire fourth chapter of Ephesians speaks directly to the questions asked above. Spend time reading the six chapters of this prison epistle. Then, focus in on Ephesians 4:1-3, 7-11, 15-16, 25-32, as well as 5:1-2, and 5:15-21.

Whatever happens, we are to be “*imitators of God ... and live a life of love*” (5:1-2) in leading and living together as “*the people of God*” (1 Peter 2:10b). When we do not live like this, regardless of our position in the home, local church, district, university, or seminary, we grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30a). The Spirit of God is deeply concerned about the speech of His people.

Relationships within a faith community are intensely theological. God Himself inspires and empowers this holiness lifestyle within us, calling us and enabling us to walk worthy of our calling (5:15-21). We must not only hear and read His words. We must respond and obey them, even if we disrupt our culture, family tradition, or natural inclinations. There is a Christ-culture to which we must aspire and deeply embrace.

Ephesians 4:25-32 instructs us in how we are to live and lead with the mind and spirit of Christ. We are co-laborers together in the body of Christ (v25). The people with whom we work are God’s own creation. Because of this fundamental Christian conviction, we are called to be honest with the believers (v25); immediate in dealing with conflict (vs26-27); up-building with our words (v29); and forgiving, even when others do not forgive us (v32).

Words spoken and deeds done to us by others must never be permitted to create bitterness and resentment within us. Our words are to be channels of God’s grace to others (4:29). Dialogue, for Paul, is sacramental. God’s forgiveness frees us to take the initiative in forgiving those who hurt us (Chapter Six).

When we ignore our family relationship within the faith community and treat those with whom we live and work as a means to an end or persons to be manipulated for our purposes, Satan gains a foothold into the fellowship. The enemy of our soul laughs at unresolved conflict and divides the “community of the king.” It is a travesty when believers see in their leaders such attitudes and actions that are no different from behavior exhibited by their supervisors on the jobs and elected officials in the neighborhood who do not profess faith in Jesus.

The people we lead and those we mentor can and should witness in us a way of living and leading greater than or qualitatively different from the way they are guided by leaders who do not identify themselves as followers of Christ. The mind and spirit of Christ in the life of the leader are what the people we lead, and others who watch the way we lead, expect to see in a Christian who seeks to lead decisively and faithfully!

And, they will support and follow us as we consistently, intentionally, and aggressively model and mentor them with:

Clear Vision, including strategic planning;

Deep Humility, including intense listening; and

Intense Resolve, including persistent praying.

Vision refers to seeing things at a great distance. A vision is a consuming, passionate, and compelling inner picture (*Cambridge English Dictionary*). An important function of leadership is creating a vision of the organization's preferred future. The leader, by divine inspiration, can see the invisible. Vibrant and motivating personal and organizational vision statements are expressions of optimism and hope. They are big dreams of what we would like ourselves, the church, seminary, or ministry organization to be and do.

Having a clear vision as a leader is essential, but it is not enough. Thomas Edison, the consummate inventor, is quoted as saying, "Vision without execution is hallucination" (Stolle, 2014). Leadership is the **transference** of vision. We live and lead within a community of faith.

It is essential, then, for theological vision to precede organizational vision. We envision or see the people we serve in the church as God's own creation, worthy of dignity and respect, before outlining what action is desired of them for the organization. Ownership of the vision cannot be solely that of the leader. It must be embraced and owned by the group who is asked to accept the vision and share in its implementation.

Humility demands intense listening by the person who leads others. Listening is so much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for an opportunity to respond. Nouwen (1997) states it beautifully: “The beauty of listening is that those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously ... Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends ...” We listen to what is said, and for what is not said. We observe body language. We listen for insights from brothers and sisters in Christ who help us revise a vision or plan or program and make it better. Again, the vision must be owned by the group who is asked to embrace it, and its implementation must be shared.

We lead from our knees during this important process. Good and godly people often differ and sometimes collide with the leader. There is no place for arrogance; the only regret is that some may not embrace the majority decision. Vigorous discussions take place in board meetings or at other appropriate forums. However, when an official decision is made to move forward, the leader leads decisively even as she/he regrets that some within the fellowship may not agree with the majority decision. The leader refuses to be paralyzed when not everyone agrees with the recommendation. Instead, she/he moves ahead aggressively, though with deep humility. In these situations, we lead with some pain and disappointment even as we move ahead with confidence.

Resolve insists that we do not give up. We persevere. We stay with it. We endure. This does not mean that we go it alone – just the opposite. Leaders work tirelessly to bring the group along and motivate them to implement and execute the plan and program as approved. Leaders dream great, God-inspired dreams, and are willing to pay the price – in time, energy, and patience – to see those dreams come true.

And, we pray earnestly and persistently. We know that some issues are only resolved and dissolved through prayer and total dependence on God. We believe that God can work in us to become the change we desire to see in others.

Leaders 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 either produce growth or inhibit growth in the lives of leaders. Before God in prayer and others whom we mentor, both leaders and followers 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 leadership questions for our lives, we are changed! Increasingly, by God's grace, we become the change we desire to see in others. Others around us may or may not be impacted by what happens within us, but what happens to us is transformative!

We grow. We change. We mature. And, in the process, we experience the peace of God, which transcends understanding. We are freed from insisting on change within others. Through earnest prayer, caring leaders ask the right questions, and trust God with the results, even as we are changed in the process!

Perhaps decisiveness about ourselves as Christian leaders is the most significant evidence of Christian leadership. Who am I in Christ, and what difference does this affirmation make in the home, on the job, in the congregation or board meeting? How important is the faith community I lead in shaping me as a Christian leader in deed as well as in word, title, or position? The people we mentor watch the way we wrestle with these questions.

Christian leaders often look at those who oppose us as being our enemies. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:43-47), Jesus instructs us to pray for those who oppose us, disagree with us and say critical things about us. These words can challenge us. But we must obey His words if we remain a faithful follower of Jesus. Those we lead are watching us and often follow our example as we respond to others, good or bad.

As we work in our organizations with the tension of holding to our vision for the future while holding just as firmly to the present realities, we model leadership behaviors that communicate:

1. Good and godly people often see things differently from the leader.
2. Many issues over which we experience conflict are simply culturally, ethnically, local community, or family-based and not a violation of scripture.
3. Differences that divide us have the potential to alienate members of the body of Christ and to impact the work of God in our communities negatively.
4. Caring for our brothers and sisters in Christ who differ with us is to love, respect, and honor them, as God loves them.
5. Acceptance of others implies that we can learn from them.
6. Strong boards empower missional and visionary pastors; strong pastors embrace passionate and engaged boards.

We can serve as decisive and faithful leaders with integrity and grace as our testimony of holiness of heart and life continually transforms the way we live in and lead a faith community.

In so walking and leading in the spirit of continuing transformation into Christlikeness, we can believe that the Master teacher and leader, Jesus the Christ, will say to us at the end of our days, “*well done, good and faithful servant*” (Matthew 25:21). Well done.

When we come to the end of our journey, may it be said of us that we led decisively by providing “something better” and “greater than ...” because we were prayerful, intentional and committed disciples of Jesus and mentors to His disciples! We modeled clear vision, deep humility, and intense resolve. We guided those whom we led to answer the questions asked above. Both leader and led increasingly connected the faith we profess and proclaim to the way we live and lead. What a legacy to leave behind. What a legacy!

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. In your present context, how well are the relationships in your Christian community characterized as redemptive and a positive witness to unbelievers? How visibly have these relationships been made new in Christ?
2. Have you experienced a time when Satan “gained a foothold” within a Christian community? How did it happen? What was the impact on the community? What are intentional safeguards you implement (or should implement) to keep it from happening in your Christian community?
3. In your current context, how intentionally are you mentoring and modeling others with clear vision, deep humility, and intense resolve? What fruit is being shown as a result of doing these well? In which of these ways do you need to grow intentionally?



Chapter Two

Pursuing Character Formation Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, Kenya

If I take care of my character, my reputation will take care of itself (Moody, 2015).

Character is different from reputation. Reputation is what you are supposed to be; character is what you are.

Character is what you are when nobody is around. Character is who you are in the pressure times of our lives.

Character springs from the core values by which we build our lives. Character provides the moral compass by which we live our lives. Character captures what we most want to model and mentor with whom we live and for whom we lead. Character is always the wellspring and foundation of our outward actions.

Character counts! Really counts!

In this commencement address to the Africa Nazarene University graduates, I challenge each of you to make a covenant with God — a covenant to be passionate about your Christian character formation and the character development in those with whom you live and work.

In his second epistle (2 Peter 3:11-12), St. Peter asks the character question, “*What kind of people ought you to be?*” He is quick to give his answer: “*You ought to live holy and godly lives.*” Peter knew that God is more interested in our character than He is in our comfort, accomplishments and reputation.

Character counts. Really counts!

Peter makes three assertions regarding Christian character.

1. Character qualities must be intensely pursued.
2. Character formation is a life-changing process.
3. Character development has a profound purpose.

I. Character qualities must be intensely pursued.

Often, I ponder this question: Do people around us see in us the character qualities identified by Peter? I'm afraid they may see or hear just the opposite, like a cynical tongue, a negative attitude, a judgmental spirit, or a condescending demeanor.

If we do not guard our thoughts and spirit, these negative attitudes will result in destructive behaviors. Perhaps we, on our jobs, in our homes or churches, or even on our campuses, have not escaped the temptation to cynicism, negativism, and condescension. God forgive us!

The Bible identifies very different character qualities to be intensely pursued if we are to become men and women of good and godly character.

Peter (2 Peter 1:5-7) mentions the qualities of goodness, knowledge (or discernment), self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love.

Paul's list in Ephesians 4:2 includes humility, gentleness, patience, and love. The Old Testament prophet Micah asked, *"And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:8b)

A friend said to me several years ago, "Life is too short not to live together kindly, compassionately, and forgivingly." I was immediately reminded of Ephesians 4:32, *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

As Christians, we want these character qualities to characterize us at our best and convict us at our worst. From God's perspective, Christian character qualities are absolutely essential and must be intensely pursued.

II. Peter doesn't just identify essential character qualities; he insists that character formation is a life-changing process.

In other words, the character qualities identified by Peter flow from a life that has been saved by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ, who calls us to a life of holy living. Yet these very qualities of the holy life must be nurtured, cultivated, and developed throughout our lives if we truly are to be Christlike.

Christian character formation takes place over a lifetime and is shaped both through our response to scriptural imperatives and through a process of brokenness, prayer, silence, and confession.

I have discovered a painful yet fascinating relationship between brokenness and character development. I must continually ask the question in the conflict situations of life: what is God wanting to teach me through this situation, this circumstance, or through this encounter ... where I work, where I live, or even where I study?

The issue isn't who is right or wrong. The issue is my response to and attitude toward the person, situation, circumstance, or encounter — not why and what if; but, what can I learn, and how can I change.

James 1:2-4 challenges us to *"consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."* Perseverance, James states, must *"finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."*

In Psalm 66:10-12, David prays, *"For you, God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You ... laid burdens on our backs. You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance."* God's process of helping us develop character involves being broken by Him. According to Psalm 51:17, *"broken and contrite spirits are sacrifices we bring to God."*

We can respond with resentment to the brokenness in our lives by resenting the situation, person, circumstance, or God ... and thus grow bitter, become angry, and withdraw. But a transforming response to brokenness drives us to our knees. In these moments, we ask God in prayer what He wants to teach us through this “dark night of the soul.”

What really hurts is that God often uses people who are different from us — teachers, employers, family, or students — often people with whom we may have problems, to teach us these lessons we need to know about ourselves. As strong as we think we are, we recognize how weak we really are, and how much we need our heavenly Father if we are to grow in holiness of life. And, again, we are driven to our knees.

Christian character formation begins with brokenness, which leads to prayer, and then we listen in silence. Psalm 39:1 states, “*I will ... keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth.*” In commenting on this verse, Henri Nouwen (1991) makes a profound statement, “When the door of the steam bath is continually left open, the heat inside rapidly escapes through it.”

How often we open our mouths and speak or write in social media posts about events of the world, or about people, or circumstances; and how seldom we close our mouths and listen to God. It is when we are on our knees, during the times of brokenness, honesty, and confession, that our dependence on Him is strongest.

And in these moments, we cry out in confession how really weak we are in our own strength. Remember the chorus: “*His strength is perfect when our strength is gone, He’ll carry us when we can’t carry on; Raised in His power, the weak become strong; His strength is perfect, His strength is perfect*” (Chapman, 1988).

Remember, **Christian character formation is a life-changing and lifelong process, that is both nurtured primarily by the spiritual disciplines of confession, silence, prayer, the trials and testing of our faith and made effective in our lives by His grace and His strength alone!**

Character counts. Really Counts!

III. Finally, Peter drives home the point that character development has a profound purpose.

In the book, *Becoming a Person of Influence*, the authors (Maxwell & Dorman, 1997) state, “many succeed momentarily by what they know, some succeed temporarily by what they do, but few succeed permanently by who they are.” Leading decisively and faithfully is really about who we are, not what we do.

Being a man or woman of good and godly character produces profound results. If we have the character qualities identified in 2 Peter 1:5-8 increasingly in our lives, we will be both effective in reflecting Christlikeness in our lives and productive in the ministry of reconciliation with others.

God wants to develop these Christian character qualities in the lives of the mentor and the person being mentored, so that we can participate with Him in His great mission in the world. Amazingly, we participate with God in His mission of reconciliation through living godly lives before others and faithful lives before Him. What a humbling thought!

Five questions have helped me in my ministry of reconciliation and my pursuit of Christlikeness. Perhaps they will help you and those with whom you live and lead.

Will this action I am considering strengthen me spiritually?

Would I want my son, my wife, or my best friend to copy this action of mine?

Does this action violate a biblical principle?

Does this action strengthen the body of Christ?

Would an unbelieving friend be attracted to Christ and the Christian faith by my behavior?

Character Counts. Really counts!

God is more interested in our character than He is in our accomplishments, our comfort ... or our reputation. He wants to shape you and me for Kingdom priorities. He desires for us to participate with Him in reconciling the world unto Himself!

I ask you to consider this question as I conclude: when you come to the end of your life, how do you want to be remembered – for your character or for your reputation? Peter comes down squarely on the side of character.

He admonishes disciples in the mentoring relationship, men and women of good and godly character, to model lives characterized by goodness, discernment, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love so that both the mentor and mentee will be effective and productive in the things that count for eternity.

Remember, character counts. Really counts!

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. Which character quality, or qualities, are you intensely pursuing? How are you intentionally pursuing this quality and why?
2. “Brokenness, prayer, silence, and confession” were identified as parts of the lifelong process of character formation. What other components of this process have meaningfully advanced your own character formation, and how have they done so?
3. The profound purpose of character development is to shape us for Kingdom priorities. How well do you intentionally prioritize character development over accomplishment, comfort, and reputation?



Chapter Three

Mentoring and Modeling Leadership Character

National Association of Christian College Admissions Personnel (NACCAP)
Seattle, Washington, Plenary Address

Author's Note: This chapter, at first glance, may not appear to relate to you and your specific leadership assignment. The address was given as a plenary address to the National Association of Christian College Admissions Personnel. I encourage you to take the thesis of the chapter, "You can become, for the students you recruit, leadership role models who exemplify, in word and deed, the very character qualities and values you most admire in others" and reword the thesis for your profession. As you read the manuscript, ask yourself how the article's stated thesis may transfer to you and those you lead.

I come to you today to encourage you in your leadership role of Christian character formation in students you recruit and service on campus.

Several questions will be asked. A thesis stated. Some assumptions made. However, exploring three vocational vision implications or affirmations in these questions, thesis, and assumptions for you and your primary leadership role on campus will consume most of my time. I welcome your responses to my hunches regarding Christian College Admission Personnel.

First, the questions. Who are your leadership role models? What are the character qualities and values you admire most in these individuals? How did these heroes exemplify ethical behavior for you? I'm passionate about my thesis. It is this:

For the students you recruit, you can become leadership role models who exemplify, in word and deed, the very character qualities and values you most admire in others.

Stated differently, I strongly believe that you can become leadership heroes for students like your role models were for you.

This thesis is built on several assumptions:

- 1. You are committed to recruiting “graduates to be.”**
- 2. You are committed to nurturing these recruits as “leaders to be.”**
- 3. You are committed to much more than meeting your recruiting goals.**

Your big picture for student recruits is their lifelong service to Christ and His Kingdom. In other words, enrollment-driven as you and the institution you serve may be, you are more driven by the development of Christian character and values in these “graduates and leaders to be.”

This passion, grounded in these assumptions, sets you apart from most of your counterparts in other institutions or organizations. For Christian college admissions personnel, these driving forces embedded in a vocational vision hold you steady when enrollment pressures mount and institutional expectations rise. Because of this passion and perspective, you belong at the leadership table alongside administrators and faculty when student development and leadership character issues are discussed.

I’m convinced that this emerging vocational vision will impact you profoundly as you seek to increase your leadership effectiveness with students. The motivation for reaching enrollment goals will be deeply theological as you recruit and retain “graduates and leaders to be” for lifelong service to Christ and His Kingdom.

And, in the process, these students with whom you work will pass on to others what has been modeled before them! In turn, they will become leadership role models for others, as you were to them, and as others were to you!

This is what you “see” theologically when you work with students whom you recruit and seek to retain on campus.

For this to happen, in the context of the minutiae of your work, what vocational affirmations must you embrace, or theological vision must you

“see” regarding the students with whom you work? I think there are at least three:

The EVIDENCE of leading ... is in the qualitative growth of the led – as individuals and as group members.

The PURPOSE of leading ... is to nurture good and godly character in the “graduates and leaders to be.”

The PROCESS of leading ... is in modeling before our recruits what we seek to pass on to them.

I want to explore with you more fully these affirmations.

Affirmation #1: The Evidence of Leading ... is in the qualitative growth of the led – as individuals and as group members. In his excellent book, *The Dynamics of Leadership*, the late Dr. Harold Reed (1982) stated, “Leadership is known by the personalities it enriches, not by those it dominates or captivates. Leadership is not a process of exploitation of others for extraneous ends. It is a process of helping others to discover themselves in the achieving of aims that have become intrinsic to them. The evidence of leading is in the qualitative growth of the led as individuals and as group members.”

Your care for others is your measure of greatness. What a profound concept!

Remember again your leadership heroes. I surmise that these individuals enriched you. You felt better when you left their presence. Stronger. More confident. Assured you could do what was asked of you.

Why is it that we feel very small when we leave the presence of some persons; and very big when we leave the presence of others? I want to lead and interact with others so that the latter characterizes me.

The late Robert Greenleaf (1977), in his classic text, *Servant Leadership*, asks the difficult question: “do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?”

Greenleaf and Reed prod us to explore the rich relationship between the leader and the led. Particularly, these men were passionate about values, goals, and attitudes necessary for a leader to model in order to bring out the best in those served and to equip them to grow as persons who become servants. The question for those of us who work with students is this: **How can we lead and work with students in such a way that they grow in this process?**

My understanding of leadership, as stated earlier, affirms that:

Leadership begins with humble service to others to enable them, through teaching and example, to live their lives under the Lordship of Christ, to understand, accept, and fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission to the world.

Kouzes and Posner (1995) believe that “Leadership is an affair of the heart, not of the head.” They continue, “We suspect the best kept secret of successful leaders is love: being in love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations produce, and with those who honor the organizations by using its work. Leadership is an affair of the heart, not of the head” (1995).

Over the years, the late Roman Catholic theologian, Henri Nouwen (1975), has influenced me in my understanding of leadership. He opened my eyes to the rich practice of hospitality as a way of life fundamental to Christian tradition for seventeen hundred years of the Christian church. It is a concept that has the potential of transforming relationships with those with whom we live and work.

I often wrestle with the biblical and historical understanding of hospitality in the Christian tradition including its pain, limitations and leadership implications.

Hospitality primarily means the creation of free space – making room where the strange and the stranger can enter and become a friend (Pohl, 1999). It is being to others with whom you live and work, a living witness of the risen Christ. The gift of hospitality is the opportunity we provide for the guest, the stranger, the friend or co-worker to find his or her own way, even in the context of differences of thought or behavior that may exist.

With this perspective, the attitude of hospitality helps us to make room or create space for those with whom we live and work. It often provides the opportunity for those individuals to enter into deeper contact with themselves, with others, and with God. The result is often a healing relationship and the creation of a community of workers. As we cultivate the leadership art of hospitality, biblically and theologically understood, we often serve angels of God without even knowing it (Hebrews 13:2). It is an art we need to nurture.

Former pro basketball star James Worthy stated, regarding his University of North Carolina basketball coach, Dean Smith, “He is the greatest man I’ve ever known” (Worthy, 2015). Coach Smith believed that Worthy’s development as a person was as important to him as his development as a player (Worthy, 2015). Again, Reed (1982) reminded us, “Leadership is known by the personalities it enriches, not by those it dominates or captivates.” The evidence of leading is reflected in the qualitative growth of the led – individually and as group members.

Affirmation #2: The Purpose of Leading ... is to nurture good and godly character in the “graduates and leaders to be.”

In the New Testament, St. Peter asks a character question: “*What sort of people ought you to be?*” (2 Peter 3:11-12) He is quick to give his answer: “*You ought to live holy and godly lives.*” Paraphrasing D. L. Moody, “If I take care of my values, my character will take care of itself” (Moody, date unknown).

Character does count! Character is who we are when no one else is around and who we are in the pressure times of our lives. Character is the sum of our values, priorities, commitments and decisions. **Character springs from the core values by which we build our lives.** Character captures what it is we most want our children to inherit from us. Character is always the wellspring and foundation of our outward actions (Engstrom, 1997).

Peter identifies the character qualities he believes are necessary for us to be effective in our work and to become leaders of good and godly character. He mentions the qualities of “*faith, goodness, knowledge (or discernment), self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love*” (2 Peter 1:5-7).

This list parallels another list in Ephesians 4:2 – We are to “[b]e *completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*”

The Old Testament prophet Micah (6:8b) asked, “*And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*”

People around us too often see or hear the opposite of the character qualities mentioned above. I am convicted when my colleagues hear or see from me a cynical tongue, a judgmental spirit, a negative attitude, a condescending demeanor, manipulation, lying, cheating, or immorality. If we do not guard against them, these negative attitudes and behaviors can eat us – and our co-workers – alive!

In a Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) presidents’ annual conference I attended, Dr. Frances Hesselbein (January 1999), president and CEO of the Francis Hesselbein Leadership Forum, stated, “Leadership is about **who** you are, not **what** you do.”

What are the core **values** of the organization you serve? Have you identified your personal foundational **values** by which you desire to live your lives?

The second of three foundational values for Mount Vernon Nazarene University affirms: **We respect others**. Therefore, **we value and stand for** 1) A Magnanimous Spirit; 2) A Servant Mentality; 3) A Trustworthy Character; 4) A Positive Influence; 5) A Courteous Response; 6) A Giving Motivation, and 7) An Appreciative Attitude (MVNU, 1994).

These are leadership character qualities that characterize us at our best. They express core values to grow personally and professionally and to help our colleagues to grow. Character springs from the core values by which we build our lives and nurture others. At our best and when we are truest to our leadership purpose, **leadership character development** in those around us is the heart and soul – the driving force and passion – of leading.

Affirmation #3: The Process of Leading ... is in modeling before our recruits what we seek to “pass on” to them.

With this affirmation, we are confronted with communicating a lifestyle that is self-giving to the core. But how do you communicate a lifestyle to future leaders? How do you teach commitments, priorities, values, and disciplines? How do you pass on a leadership lifestyle that reflects a passion for the qualitative growth of the led and a pursuit for character development in both the leaders and the led? How do you teach a lifestyle?

Whatever else it means, it demands we take seriously the principle of imitation, or modeling before the led what we seek to pass on to them. We can show by example the change we desire to produce in people.

What about ourselves as leaders do we want our colleagues and co-workers to catch from us? Servant leaders are passionate to pass on to them a servant spirit. And it is more caught than taught!

Modeling or “exemplifying” is related to mentoring. Mentoring, according to Bobb Biehl (1996) in his book, *Mentoring*, “is a lifelong relationship in which a mentor helps his protégé reach her or his God-given potential.” A mentor communicates in word and deed that character is more important than comfort. Mentors communicate, more by example than by words, “Those around me need me to be available to them, not to prove how valuable I am to them.” We can be known as individuals who go around doing good (Acts 10:28).

These are five basic mentoring questions I like to ask individuals and groups with whom I work:

What kind of future do you envision for your church or ministry assignment?

What are your dreams for yourself or for the group for which you are responsible?

How are you doing, personally?

How are you progressing in your ministry assignment?

How can I help you?

In the mentoring relationship, the frequently discussed mistakes of a leader are: inconsistency, indecision, duplicity (saying one thing and doing another), lying, lack of staying power, talking too much, and disloyalty. Some necessary alternatives to the above mistakes are: consistency, decisiveness, integrity (what you say is what you do), honesty, tenacity, listening before speaking, and loyalty.

Questions I asked periodically to the leadership team at MVNU (to whom I felt a keen mentoring and modeling responsibility) were:

1. **Has your faith been strengthened or weakened as a result of your work at MVNU?**
2. **In what ways do your spiritual gifts match the responsibilities assigned to you?**
3. **With which of the MVNU core values do you agree with most? Least? Which one needs to be strengthened or eliminated?**
4. **What questions do you have for me?**

Mentoring agendas differ vastly according to need, purpose, time, money, and personnel. Be proactive; not reactive. Modeling is a primary method or process by which leaders pass on the fundamental character qualities and values needed in future leaders.

I conclude by restating my thesis:

For the students you recruit, you can become leadership role models who exemplify, in word and deed, the very character qualities and values you most admire in others.

Enrollment-driven as you and the institution you serve may be, you are more driven by the **development of Christian character and values** in these “graduates and leaders to be.”

This passion sets you apart from your counterparts in secular institutions. Your vocational vision contains the driving forces within you that hold you steady when the enrollment pressure mounts and when discussions take place

regarding student development and leadership character.

Three theological affirmations were explored with you:

1. The EVIDENCE of leading ... is in the qualitative growth of the led — individually and as group members.
2. The PURPOSE of leading ... is to nurture good and godly character in the “graduates and leaders to be.”
3. The PROCESS of leading ... is in modeling before our recruits what we seek to “pass on” to them.

As leaders, these leverage-producing concepts and driving forces within us will characterize us at our best and convict us at our worst.

In the midst of your weariness, never forget that your motivation for reaching enrollment goals must be deeply theological. You are recruiting and retaining “graduates and leaders to be,” for lifelong service to Christ and His Kingdom.

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. Can the thesis of this address be easily transferrable to other vocations and responsibilities? Whatever your vocation, as a follower of Christ, how can this principle be applied to you? How would a theological vision of your work set you apart from your peers?
2. Who are your leadership heroes? What specifically did your hero model that helped shape your character?
3. Is modeling, even mentoring, truly possible without being physically present? If so, how does one span that distance to model and mentor effectively?



Theme Two: The Challenges to Leadership Character

- *“It is in holding, intentionally, to both vision and reality that the possibility exists for leaders to move from vision to action to results. And with this intentionality comes both joy and pain for the leader.” (c. 4)*
- *“To intentionally accept and serve others is to love them ... This grace-filled acceptance of others is a core Christian leadership quality that must be cultivated.” (c. 5)*
- *“Whatever else “Mentoring and Modeling Leadership Character” means, it must be expressed in and through the grid of a grace-filled communication filter that values and respects people as individuals created by God and worthy to be viewed as His children.” (c. 6)*
- *“Where and how do we start to deal with a sense of betrayal?” (c. 7)*



Chapter Four

Moving from Vision to Action to Results

Africa Regional Leadership Conference, Nairobi, Kenya

In mentoring church leaders, we often focus on the joy of leadership. It is true that individuals in leadership positions large or small have the potential to influence change and impact people. This is rewarding, and we are energized. We experience joy! A vision captures us. Growth and expansion will result. Surely it is right. Everyone will agree! We will move ahead. The world will be changed. And we are grateful!

It has happened to many of us this week. A new vision has come to us for the people we serve. A renewed passion for growth and effectiveness in our ministry has gripped us. And we are energized and committed to making it happen! We are happy and a smile is on our face!

We don't talk as much about the pain in leadership. This pain can be illustrated by me standing with outstretched arms. In one hand, I hold tenaciously to the vision I believe God has given me for my assignment and responsibility. I believe it is the right action to take, policy to adopt, direction to pursue, or goal to embrace.

However, pain comes when the other extended arm holds firmly to "reality" –the situation or context in which I work. Our reality may include the circumstances such as finances or facilities which seem to dictate what can and cannot be done. Our "reality" is often the people or followers who must embrace the vision if what is dreamed is to move from vision to action to results. Most of these brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we work are not at this conference! And we are stunned when those with whom we work reject the vision that is cast or challenge the vision as it is presented. And we are SAD.

The tension in holding on to our vision of the future and the reality of the present situation often produces pain. If we relax one arm and let go of the vision, we drift along with no direction. If we hold to the vision and let go of the people, we are known as leaders without followers ... and nothing happens.

In holding, intentionally, to both vision and reality the possibility exists for leaders to move from vision to action to results. And with this intentionality comes both joy and pain for the leader.

Why? Sooner rather than later, Christian leaders are jolted when we experience this reality: good and godly people, including a younger generation of leaders in the church, often differ on how to reach mutually desired goals. Sometimes, these good and godly people COLLIDE ... and a faith community is divided, the kingdom of God suffers and we “... give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27) in our communities of faith.

When this happens, the pain in leadership is even more intense.

I have come to see that these collisions occur, not necessarily because of good or bad ideas, noble or sinful goals, or right or wrong solutions. Rather, good and godly people most often collide over vision and values, programs and plans, worship and witness of the faith community. We are caught in the middle of a divided group of Christians over where we should be going (vision), and how we are going to get there (values).

And in the midst of these painful situations we ask ourselves, as leaders, these probing questions (asked in Chapter One):

- Is it possible, in these situations, to live and work together as Christians so that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?
- If “in Christ, all things are made new,” then how does our relationship with Christ inform and guide us in the way we lead in these painful encounters?
- In the midst of these conflicting situations and seemingly irreconcilable expectations placed on us, what does it mean, really mean, to lead a divided faith community with “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16b)?

- How does our testimony of holiness of heart and life transform the way we both mentor others in the Christian faith and model before them a vibrant, maturing Christian life?

These questions frame my remarks to you about leading others and moving a faith community from vision to action to results. Through answering these questions, I began to cultivate the spirit of holiness needed to guide a faith community, particularly in challenging times. I have grown in my understanding of what it means to live and lead with “the mind of Christ.” And with this passion, I continue to learn about the movement from a vision of the leader to action and results by the entire faith community, particularly in times of conflict and collision.

In light of the realities we face, I want to share with you seven anchors to hold us steady as faithful Christian servant leaders (Fairbanks, 2016). These anchors provide balance for us as we grasp firmly to our vision of the future and, at the same time, seek to move the church, district, field or region to action and desired results.

Anchor #1: SPEAK GRACEFULLY

Issue: Watch the words we speak.

Principle: Words we speak can bless or “destroy” people.

“For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of,” Jesus states in Matthew 12:34b. The words we use as leaders impact those with whom we work as we either: encourage or discourage them; lift them up or put them down; speak positively or negatively about them; reflect cultural sensitivity or cultural “blindness” to them; focus on “them” or focus on self.

I often ask myself: how do others feel when they leave my presence? Stronger or weaker? Larger or smaller? Confident or scared? Understood or misunderstood? Affirmed or manipulated? Blessed or destroyed?

Remember, the words we speak to those with whom we work, especially those who differ and even collide with us, can bless them or destroy them. Choose to bless them!

Anchor #2: LIVE GRATEFULLY

Issue: Comparison is the root of inferiority.

Principle: “Don’t cry – be grateful.”

Comparison is pervasive in our society – in the workforce, the family, the local church or region, in our communities and particularly within ourselves. We can feel good about ourselves – our gifts, talents and abilities – until we compare ourselves with the other people’s gifts, talents and abilities. 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 rob us of joy, relationships, confidence and peace. In the process, it saps our energy and drains our enthusiasm. Comparison can transform us from being a delightful leader or local church pastor into a preoccupied, dejected, negative and disgruntled individual that other people only endure. What is the antidote to comparison? Three profound biblical qualities:

Gratitude! Thankfulness! Appreciation!

We can choose to accept the people and provisions God in His wisdom has given to us. We can choose to work to bring out the best in others by seeing the best in them. In every situation, we can choose to be grateful, believing that God is in the midst of all we are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Gratitude is the life-giving antidote to the negative impact of comparison. Remember: Don’t cry over what you don’t have; be grateful – in all things – for what God has provided. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.

Anchor #3: LISTEN INTENSELY

Issue: Seek first to understand.

Principle: Understanding, not agreement, is the key to conflict management.

Believe that good and godly people can have honest and intense differences. After 30 plus years in higher education administration, I can tell you that good and godly people sometimes collide over vision and values. And you have similar testimonies!

This is why I have come to see that theological vision (what I believe about people/what I “see” in them) precedes organizational vision (what I want for the church, district, field or region). We pray for spiritual eyesight to really “see” the people with whom we work.

In conflict situations with good and godly people, I have learned to listen for two growth-inhibiting questions: Why me? What if ...?

As a leader, I may be a good administrator. However, I must 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. Listening to the people with whom I work values them. They deserve to be heard. They may have the spiritual gifts needed to move the vision to action.

Remember, understanding, not agreement, is the key to conflict management.

Anchor #4: FORGIVE FREELY

Issue: Be proactive in extending forgiveness.

Principle: A spirit of forgiveness transforms and empowers leaders.

One of my profound life lessons in leadership is this: forgiveness has little to do with the external environment around me, and everything to do with my internal condition! Extending forgiveness does not wait for the other to request forgiveness. Remember the example of Jesus on the cross: “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34).

Was Jesus naive? 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 create a rupture in the relationship with God His Father. It simply was not worth it! *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34).

Extending forgiveness frees me from bondage to the other person. Too often, we permit persons who have offended us to control us. Remember, a spirit of forgiveness transforms and empowers leaders.

Anchor #5: LEAD DECISIVELY

Issue: Christian leaders combine deep humility with intense resolve.

Principle: Our Christian testimony is reflected in and through the way we make and implement decisions.

It is in the tension within a faith community between our preferred future and the present reality that our decision making as leaders most often takes place. It is in this context that we live, work, and lead. If holiness of heart does not reflect itself in these situations where good and godly people differ over vision and values, our holiness testimony is only doctrine and not a Life within us!

The Spirit of God within us and among us empowers us to take the “next steps” necessary to make decisions and to achieve the preferred results desired by the Body of Christ.

By now, you have heard me speak of the critical importance of RESPECT for our brothers and sisters with whom we labor as we pursue the biblical mandate to *“go ... and make disciples ...”* (Matthew 28:19). You have heard me discuss respect for our co-workers through:

The words we speak;

The life of gratitude expressed for them;

Listening intensely to them and valuing their perspective; and

Forgiving them freely even as we desire for them to forgive us when our actions are not Christlike.

Respecting our brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those who differ – even collide with us – is at the heart of what it means to lead with “the mind of Christ.” In these times of conflict over vision and values, decisions will need to be made – even when continuing differences exist. And, in these times, we will lead – lead decisively – but from our knees and often with a weeping heart! Again, at some point in our leadership responsibilities, decisions have to be made. Decisions made after prolonged individual and collective prayer. Decisions made with fierce resolve and deep humility.

Pastors are the catalyst for evangelism, discipleship, change, and action in the local congregation. If leaders are to move from the preferred vision to achieved results, careful attention must be given to the leadership roles of:

- Dreaming and planning;
- Organizing and administering;
- Motivating and encouraging;
- Evaluating and reviewing.

Let’s focus for a few moments only on the critical leadership function of dreaming and planning. Christian leaders, by God’s grace, plan for things to happen. These leaders:

- are deciders rather than drifters;
- know where they are going, and how they are going to get there;
- are results-oriented and not just activity-oriented;
- are among the 3% who write down their growth goals;
- pursue goal setting in the context of a broader planning strategy;
- develop a mission statement;
- dream great dreams;

are constantly involved in an ongoing analysis of their constituents;
are mission driven;
work hard at detailing programs and plans;
continually review and revise the planning strategy for growth; and
expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.

These “movers from vision to results” establish mission-driven and vision-driven growth goals and find ways to transfer these dreams to their people. They understand that the acid test of **leadership is the transference of vision**. For them, personal and professional growth goals are prayerfully considered and thoughtfully written out.

“Leading for change is not the same as the exercise of power” (George McGreagor Burns, 1978). If I put a loaded gun to your head, I can get you to do things you might not otherwise do. However, I have not practiced leadership; I have exercised power. True leadership only exists if people follow when they have the freedom not to.

Especially in times of conflict over vision, leaders must lead. Decisions will need to be made – even when continuing differences exist! And, in these times, we will lead – lead decisively – but from our knees and with a humble heart!

We must avoid paralysis – waiting until everyone agrees with us – when decisions need and must be made. We seldom enjoy the luxury of having all the information we need before making necessary decisions. Sometimes, perhaps often, we must move ahead without everyone within the community agreeing with the vision or direction to be taken.

To lead decisively with Christian humility demands that we continue to nurture and develop:

Listening and communicating skills;

Timing and processing skills;

Affirming and encouraging skills;
Asking and inquiring skills; and
“Gift” discernment and delegation skills.

The more I know about Christian leadership, the more I realize there is to know and learn. I am a committed lifelong learner and student of what it means to lead decisively with “the mind of Christ.”

Remember, the BIG question for Christian leaders: how can my ministry of Christian leadership enable others to fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission in the world?

Anchor #6: LOVE DEEPLY

Issue: Value people, not power (or position).

Principle: The evidence of leadership is seen in the lives of the followers.

As leaders, you and I must keep remembering the many things we have in common with our colleagues and the values we have in common. Focus on the things that unite us, not divide us.

I often asked myself if I expressed appropriate appreciation, thanks and gratitude to MVNU faculty, staff and students? Are the missionaries, district leaders, and pastors with whom I work growing in the Christian faith as a result of my involvement with them?

This was my bottom line: I tried to enlarge my people’s vision about the work they were doing. I wanted them to see the big picture. I wanted to assist them in discovering how they, in their particular assignments, fit into the grand scheme and purpose of the institution or region. I wanted faculty, staff, and students to feel valued in their work at the university. I truly sought to value people and progress, not power and position. I wanted to be an encourager of “Joshuas” - the people with whom I worked and lived.

The book, *Encouraging The Heart* (2003), by James Kouzes and Barry Posner tells us how to encourage the hearts of our co-workers:

#1. Set Clear Standards (or Expectations).

#2. Expect the Best.

#3. Pay Attention.

#4. Personalize Recognition.

#5. Tell the Story.

#6. Celebrate Together.

#7. Set the Example.

Remember: the evidence of Christian leadership is seen in the lives of the followers.

Anchor #7: PRAY EARNESTLY

Issue: Some issues are only resolved through intense prayer.

Principle: Become the change you desire to see in others.

Prayer-saturated goals and plans, written out and communicated often with passion, challenge the very best in results-oriented Christian leaders. They open up the doors to success in our seemingly impossible ministry assignment and mission calling. A goal is a dream with a deadline!

Especially in times of conflict over vision, leaders must lead. Decisions will need to be made – even when continuing differences exist! And, in these times, we will lead – lead decisively – but from our knees and with a humble heart!

How do we move ahead, decisively, in these painful situations while, at the same time, show Christian respect to those who differ with us? We move ahead – decisively – through:

Prayer, with them, for them, and for “me” as leader;

Collaboration, involving them when and where we can in the process; and

Gratitude, thanking God, and “them” for their gifts, talents, abilities and testimony of faith in Jesus as Lord.

In this spirit of humility and brokenness, we move ahead: confidently believing that God is working in the midst of this difficult situation and decisively leading not with paralysis or uncertainty, but with the conviction that God has spoken His word of vision and direction. A conviction that He will continue to lead His people to action even though the circumstances or attitudes may not give evidence of His work at the present time. This is leading with “the mind of Christ” – leading decisively in the midst of complex and difficult situations.

Praying leaders know that we do not have the power to change others. Change can take place, however, with us! In the midst of experiencing honest and intense differences between good and godly people, the “pray-er” can be changed and transformed.

Let me summarize these leadership “anchors” that hold me steady as I seek to move the group for which I am responsible from a vision of the future to action and the preferred results.

1. I want my words to be grace-giving, life-generating and inspiring to others and not discouraging, depressing and draining utterances.
2. I want to be known as a person who is forever grateful, regardless of the situation, believing that God is in the midst of everything I do and is working to bring good in every situation.
3. I want to listen to and respect the people with whom I work, to understand them – and for them to understand me – even if we do not agree with each other.
4. I want to initiate forgiveness when I have been offended because I don't have the energy or strength to carry the heavy burden and guilt of an unforgiving spirit.
5. I want to lead decisively with deep humility even as I experience the pain of holding tenaciously to the vision while acknowledging the realities of my situation.

6. I want my relationship with others to energize them, to have a positive impact on their lives and to enable them, in some small way, to grow – become stronger – in their faith, their confidence in themselves and their competence at work as a result of our interaction in the home and on the job and with me as their leader.
7. I want to pray earnestly so that in the midst of conflict between the leader and led, what happens to both of us is transformative!

And, I urge every one of you to increasingly be a Christian servant leader in whatever work assignment He gives to you. Discover your own answers – inspired by God’s word and His Holy Spirit to this probing question, “If *‘In Christ the new creation has come,’* (2 Corinthians 5:17), then how does my relationship with Christ transform the way I lead?”

Jim Collins (2001), in his book, *Good to Great*, talks about the critical characteristics of leaders. He speaks of humility and fierce resolve as essential for Level 5 or top leaders. I believe that whatever else you discover in Christian servant leaders you will find that they:

Speak Gracefully. They watch the words they speak.

Live Gratefully. They don’t cry, they are grateful.

Listen Intently. They seek first to understand, then to be understood.

Forgive Freely. They are proactive in extending forgiveness.

Lead Decisively. They combine clear vision and deep humility with fierce resolve.

Love Deeply. They value people, not power or position.

Pray Earnestly. They become the change they want to see in those they lead (Fairbanks, 2016).

I leave you with these questions: which one of these anchors do you need most right now in your leadership assignment? As you experience the tension between the vision God has given you and the reality of your present situation, in which of these areas do you most need God to hold you steady? As you move from vision to results, what is your greatest need:

Speaking Gracefully?

Living Gratefully?

Listening Intently?

Forgiving Freely?

Leading Decisively?

Loving Deeply?

Praying Earnestly?

Be specific. Be personal. Be honest.

Another question. Which of these seven anchors is your greatest strength? Be honest with yourself and God. It's vitally important for us to affirm our strength even as we acknowledge our need. Build on your strength. Work on your need. Pray for that specific anchor you need and give thanks for the strength He has given to you as you lead your people from vision to action to results.

One more (really big) question. What new vision, big goal, or renewed passion has God given to you recently for yourself, your family, your work, your local church, your district, your country, or the region you serve?

For you to move from this new vision and renewed passion to appropriate action and desired results, anticipate the joy and the pain that will come as you return to your ministry and begin to implement your big plan. Are you ready?

Remember Philippians 1:27. “*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.*” This is the spirit of holiness. And remember this thought: live and lead with “the mind of Christ”!

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. Which anchor is your greatest need? Which anchor is your greatest strength?
2. When meeting resistance to the casting of a new vision, what can you do, short of loosening your grip on vision, to help reduce the tension with reality? In what areas of that tension must you accept that degree of tension and still move forward with decisions?
3. What vision is currently causing you the most tension? What vision is currently being accepted and pursued?



Chapter Five

Cultivating the Character Quality of Acceptance

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I read the following statement several years ago from the late United States military leader, General Norman Schwarzkopf: “Leadership is a potent combination of character and strategy. But if you must be without one, be without strategy” (Schwarzkopf, 2012).

Character counts. Really counts! Because it is so basic to Christian leaders, I want to discuss with you the vitally important character-shaping biblical value of ‘acceptance’ in leadership development.

The question to be addressed is this: What is the role of education in shaping the Christian character value of acceptance in the leader and the led? I welcome your responses.

At the Madrid, Spain, 2006 Ibero-American conference for Latino leaders in the Church of the Nazarene, I spoke to leaders on “The Joy and Pain of Leadership.”

I discussed the “pain” we experience when leaders hold tightly to a vision of the future while accepting the realities of the present, especially good and godly people who do not embrace the vision we have for our ministry assignment. This leadership position often produces pain for the leaders.

Seven anchors were discussed (Chapter Four) to hold us steady in these times of conflict or collision:

 speak gracefully;

 live gratefully;

listen intently;
forgive freely;
lead decisively;
care deeply;
and pray earnestly.

These anchors were suggested for leaders to hold us steady in the midst of pain (or storms) while leading others within the faith community for which we are responsible. I now see more clearly that some basic attitudes are required in order for the leader to use the anchors referenced above.

In this session, I want to focus on one distinctively Christian attitude that leaders must cultivate if we are to be worthy of our identity as Christlike leaders. I speak of a core conviction of ACCEPTANCE.

The author of the book, *Cross Cultural Connections* (Elmer, 2002), stated that **“what John 3:16 is to the unbeliever, Romans 15:7 is to the believer.”** Romans 15:7 reads: *“Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”* Increasingly the embracing of acceptance and its transforming impact must identify and define us as biblical servant leaders. It is the heart of all we are.

Acceptance is the ability to communicate value, regard, worth and respect to others. It is the ability to make people feel significant, honored and esteemed (Elmer, 2002). This is leading with *“the mind of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 2:16b). To intentionally accept and serve others is to love them.

Acceptance of others, as defined, does not imply acceptance of their ideas or behavior. We may differ with gusto on theological issues, for instance. However, if we desire to witness the miracle of dialogue, then listening attentively to them and accepting them as persons created by God and thus worthy of our regard and respect are critical first steps toward a transformative encounter.

Acceptance is a profound biblical principle for Christian leaders, especially when good and godly people collide over vision and values in a community of faith.

What is the opposite of acceptance? Is it not rejection? How does the rejection by others make you feel? How do you think the rejection of others makes them feel? How does the rejection of others within a community of faith affect your relationship with God?

I believe this grace-filled acceptance of others is a core Christian leadership quality that must be cultivated. And, I am convinced that an ATTITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE is shaped and nurtured by three compelling convictions about:

who we are as “*the people of God*” (1 Peter 2:10b);

what we are to do in the work of God; and

how we live together as the family of God.

These convictions become driving forces within us as we live and lead with an *acceptance* of those with whom we live and work. Let’s explore these three convictions.

Conviction #1: An Acceptance of Others is rooted in A VISION FOR MINISTRY.

A vision is a consuming, fervent and compelling inner picture. It is seeing what others do not see. At the very heart of servant leadership is a theological vision of our identity within the Christian fellowship. Notice the biblical imagery that defines our relationship with other Christians. We are:

“Brothers and sisters in Christ” (Colossians 1:2 NTL);

“Members together of Christ’s body” (Ephesians 3:6);

“A fellowship of God’s people” (Acts 2:42);

“A microcosm of the Kingdom of God on earth” (Revelation 1:6-9);

“A community of faith” (Galatians 6:10);

“A sacramental community in and through which the grace of God flows”
(2 Corinthians 9:8; see also Fairbanks, 2008).

Never lose the vision that we are the graced, blessed, called and gifted “people of God”!

Effective Christlike leadership is grounded in these biblical perspectives of the Christian community and not just in organizational skills. Of course, skills are needed. However, **sharp skills without Christian motives easily lead to manipulation.** The primary orientation and motivation of our actions as servant leaders must be deeply theological.

“The people of God” are called and Spirit-empowered to incarnate His healing, guiding, sustaining and reconciling work in the lives of those with whom we work and live. All Christians are called to this ministry of serving others in Jesus’ name!

You and I may be specifically called and gifted as a pastor, teacher, evangelist, musician, or missionary, but we are on a leadership journey to use our gifts and graces in developing the equally specific gifts of others — “the people of God” whom we lead.

This leadership call and command to accept, serve, and equip “the people of God” must increasingly define and shape our vision for ministry. What a vision! We accept and embrace all who profess Jesus as Lord because they are the graced, blessed, called, and gifted “people of God” with a ministry to each other and mission to the world! What a vision!

Conviction #2: An Acceptance of Others is rooted in A PASSION FOR FORMATION.

Christian leadership begins with humble service to others to enable them, through teaching and example, to live their lives under the Lordship of Christ, and to understand, accept, and fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission to the world.

According to the late Dr. Harold Reed (1982), leadership “is known by the personalities it enriches, not by those it dominates or captivates.”

This perspective on leadership will force some probing questions: How can my ministry of servant leadership enable others to fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission in the world? Are the people being served growing as Christians? Are they themselves becoming servants?

These are crucial concerns for leadership in the community of faith. All Christians — even those who sometimes make life so difficult — are called and gifted for the ministry of Christ. Tempting as it may be, Christian leaders ought not ignore even the most challenging people. They remain our responsibility — demanding keen insight, deep caring and Spirit-empowered understanding. Are we up to the challenge?

St. Paul does not so much talk about administrative techniques but Christian attitudes and values underlying our actions and activities. We passionately desire our faith community to mature in their faith and participate with God in the reconciling of a lost world to Himself! With Paul, we remain intense and focused on equipping our people to walk worthy of their calling.

Ephesians 4:1b challenges us to walk worthy of our calling as Christians. The characteristics of the person walking worthy follow that challenge. We are instructed to “[b]e completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (v2) through “speaking the truth in love” (4:15a).

Ephesians 4:25-32 provides more specific direction on how Christians are to “speak the truth in love” even when others do not forgive us. Words and deeds done by others to us must never be permitted to create bitterness and resentment within us.

When we ignore our family relationship with Christ and treat those with whom we work as a means to an end, persons to be manipulated for our purposes, Satan maneuvers into the Christian community. The enemy of our soul laughs at unresolved conflict, which divides the fellowship of the faithful. Dialogue, for Paul, is for grace-giving and grace-receiving! Our words are to be channels of God’s grace to others (Ephesians 4:29). God’s forgiveness frees us to take the initiative in forgiving those who hurt us.

When we do not live together by these guidelines as a Christian community, God's Spirit is grieved (Ephesians 4:30a). In reviewing Ephesians 4:25-32, we as leaders see more clearly how to "maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace," and, in so doing, walk (and lead) worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1-3).

This, I believe, is what it means in practical terms to relate our holiness testimony to a holiness lifestyle of leading. The opening verses of the following chapter (Ephesians 5:1-2) challenge us: "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

How we can live and lead with "a life of love, just as Christ loved us" is identified a few verses later (Ephesians 5:18b-21). "... be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs of the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

What are we to do in the work of God? We are passionate about shaping and forming Christlike disciples and leaders for their ministry to each other and their mission in the world.

Again, an Attitude of Acceptance is rooted in a PASSION FOR FORMATION.

Conviction #3: An Acceptance of Others is rooted in AN OBSESSION FOR COMMUNITY.

Let me probe more deeply. As you think of your leadership environment – home, community, district, church, region, or denomination, whom do you have the most difficulty accepting? As you view yourself as a leader of leaders, what kind of person is the hardest for you to accept?

Why do you think this is so?

How do you think this makes God feel?

How do you think God sees that person – or those persons?

How does your response affect your own relationship to God?

The overarching question is this: How can we increasingly reflect a **conviction of acceptance of others** within the community of faith we serve? Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1954) in *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* lists seven expressions of ministry by which a Christian community must be judged and characterized.

1. The Ministry of Holding One's Tongue

"Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless." James 1:26 tells us. *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths ..."* is an admonishment from Ephesians 4:29. When this passage characterizes us, we will be able to cease from constantly criticizing, judging, condemning, and putting the other person in his or her particular place. We can allow the other to exist as a completely free person.

2. The Ministry of Meekness

This means caring more for others than for self. *"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,"* Paul tells us in Romans 12:3. He who serves must learn to think first of others.

3. The Ministry of Listening

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening. Listening can be a greater service to people than speaking.

4. The Ministry of Active Helpfulness

Simply assist others within the Christian community in external matters, big and small.

5. The Ministry of Bearing (Supporting)

"Carry each other's burdens" is the challenge of Galatians 6:2. Bearing means forbearing and sustaining one another in love. Ephesians 4:2 commands us to be *"humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."*

6. The Ministry of Proclaiming

This is the ministry of the word of God. Bonhoeffer does not mean the Scripture's message proclaimed in a formal setting such as in the worship service. He is referring to the free communication of the word of God from person to person. He is referring to that unique situation in which one person becomes a witness in human words to another, with Christian consolation.

7. The Ministry of Authority (Leadership)

Jesus states in Mark 10:43b-44, *"... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."* This is the paradox of ministry. Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service.

For Bonhoeffer, these practical expressions of Christian ministry provide the context that our specific ministries must function within. This is particularly true as it relates to the specific ministry of leadership.

Three **practical lessons on accepting others** within and outside our community of faith guide us as we each work with the tension of holding to our vision for the future while holding just as firmly to the realities of the present.

1. Acceptance of our brothers and sisters in Christ who differ with us is to love, respect and honor them as God loves them.
2. Acceptance of others implies that we can learn from them.
3. We must find ways to communicate acceptance to those who have not yet bowed to the Lordship of Christ.

A community compulsion is a must for the servant leader; an imperative, even in the throes of conflict. Because relationships are so important, we care enough to confront others with a Christlike spirit. Caring too much about the relationship to ignore destructive behavior, we speak the truth in love. It also means allowing others to speak truthfully to us.

Again, an attitude of acceptance is rooted in an obsession for community where expressions of “I love you, I accept you, I respect you, I need you, I trust you, I serve you, and I forgive you” are increasingly given and received. Paul’s instructions are not psychological in nature. They are deeply theological. They are the foundations for servant-leaders who are serious about leading in a Christian manner.

The Role of Teaching

Learning to communicate and teach a lifestyle within the community that is distinctly Christian – and self-giving at the core – is a daunting challenge! We affirm wholeheartedly the four “Cs” of Content, Character, Competency and Context in the teaching-learning encounter (Church of the Nazarene Ministerial Course of Study, 2020). However, transformatively teaching the biblical imperatives, theological foundations, faith community priorities, core Christian values and spiritual disciplines depends to a significant degree on how well you and I live that lifestyle and lead from essential scriptural principles.

Jesus challenges in Luke 6:40, “*The student ... who is fully trained will be like their teacher.*” Ministry is always incarnated, is always lived out in mission and ministry to others! What do you want your community – parishioners – to catch? It should be a servant spirit, committed to motivating, equipping and enabling others to also serve in Jesus’ name.

The principle of imitation is both demanded and demanding. In his book, *Pastoral Care, Its Roots and Renewal* (1979), Herbert Mayer reminds us that this principle was a key in Christian leadership for eighteen centuries. It is the Christian leader’s responsibility to recapture it. Paul humbly instructed church leaders under his care to imitate him as he imitated Christ. The principle of imitation is the only way to effectively transfer vision, passion and obsession within the Christian fellowship. It must possess our thinking.

Again, Paul's instructions are not psychological in nature. They are deeply theological. They are the foundations for servant leaders who are serious about leading in a Christian manner. You will ask yourself: "What does it mean to be a servant to those I must direct in the role of authority?" In other words, "What does it mean to be a servant in the midst of leadership expectations and functions?"

Is not an obsession with community risky? Yes! Will there be misunderstandings, abuses, betrayals or pain? Absolutely! Is it worth it? The answer: Of course. We really don't have any choice! If we are to model the leadership model of Christ, we must accept the risks – and serve people with humility, gentleness, patience and encouragement.

We will be challenged. People will not see us as finished products. Instead, they will discover that you and I are in the center of an ongoing process of transformation into Christlikeness (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Our challenge is to lead from a reconciled and transformed heart. Captured by a vision for ministry, motivated by a passion for ministry formation, and characterized by an obsession for a Christlike leadership lifestyle within the community, the faith community for which we are responsible – regardless of its size – will be life-giving, growth-producing, and distinctly Christian. Increasingly, this will empower our responsibility groups to reach out and serve others in Jesus' name.

How can leaders increasingly and consistently cultivate a Christlike attitude of ACCEPTANCE even in the conflict situations wherein we are called to lead? By nurturing three compelling convictions within the faith community about:

who we are as "the people of God" (we are the graced, blessed, called and gifted "people of God" with a ministry to each other and a mission to the world);

what we are called to do in the work of God (we are to "walk worthy" of our calling to participate with God in the reconciling of the world to Himself); and

how we are to live together as the family of God (we are to live together as a community of faith nurturing and supporting each other in ministry and mission).

These convictions cultivate and shape an attitude of acceptance within us deeply and powerfully through:

**A VISION ... FOR MINISTRY;
A PASSION ... FOR FORMATION; and
AN OBSESSION ... FOR COMMUNITY!**

The late Dr. Edwin Friedman (2007) stated in his book, *Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix: A Failure of Nerves*,

**The most important attribute of a leader is not knowledge or technique
but what the leader brings in his/her presence.
And, the presence he/she needs is a NON-ANXIOUS PRESENCE.**

This is leadership character. It is both caught and taught – modeled and mentored! The biblical servant leader who brings a non-anxious presence is nurtured by a grace-given acceptance of others with whom we live and work.

Do we always live by the values we embrace and affirm? Unfortunately, not always. They will characterize us at our best and convict us at our worst. Yet, for the Spirit-filled Christian, these values flowing from a life wholly committed to living a holy life, by the grace of God, will increasingly shape us. We are being transformed to the image of Christ by the Spirit of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The mandate and invitation to live a holy life is summed up in the scriptural commands to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27; see also Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:30-31). The one thing Spirit-filled Christians will do is summed up in the holistic command and commitment to love God and love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Holiness is a way of life, a grace empowered lifestyle. Our words, actions and behavior will reflect the holiness testimony we profess. In reality, this means that throughout our ever-growing and deepening relationship with Christ, we will continue to mature in the Christian faith and in our walk with the Lord.

A final question. In difficult situations, when you encounter the reality of good and godly people differing and colliding with you, where do you place yourself on the following scale?

ACCEPTANCE 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 REJECTION

Remember, what John 3:16 is to the unbeliever, Romans 15:7 is to the believer.

“Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Let this biblical character quality of ACCEPTANCE increasingly identify you and me in our leadership assignments — on this campus, in your local congregations or ministry assignments, near or far away!

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. How important has Romans 15:7 been to you as a believer? After reading this chapter, how can this verse impact your regard and interactions with other believers with whom your views may not always align?
2. A Christlike attitude of acceptance will significantly impact one's Vision for Ministry, Passion for Formation, and Obsession with Community. To date, what have been the major forces impacting your vision, passion and obsession? Can you think of a specific way a Christlike attitude of acceptance can make a positive change in your current vision, passion, and obsession?
3. Dr. Friedman's quote stated that "the most important attribute of a leader is ... presence." Would you describe your presence as non-anxious? Would those you lead describe your presence as non-anxious? How does a Christlike attitude of acceptance cultivate a non-anxious presence?

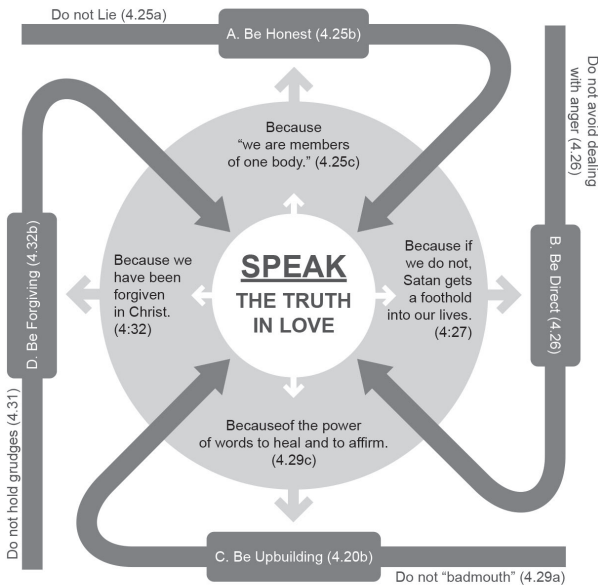


Chapter Six

Watching the Words We Speak

Authors Note: *The material in this chapter is taken from my book, Leading Decisively! Leading Faithfully! Reflections and Markers (2016), Chapter Two, "Speaking To, Not Past, Each Other."*

"[S]peaking the truth in love ..." (Ephesians 4:15a) is a powerful tool and biblical concept of St. Paul for leaders of Christian communities who daily seek to live the reconciled and transformed life. "Truth-telling in love" is an enabling principle for Christians to embrace and their leaders to model. However, the skill of making contact is not automatically developed when we are filled with God's Spirit.



A communication model for leading decisively. © E.L. Fairbanks

The model above provides a biblical perspective for thinking about the powerful and grace-enabled impact of pastoral conversation in the communities of faith where I have served. The visual also suggests the components for doing the hard and necessary work of Spirit-empowered communication within Christian homes and ministry organizations.

I am captive to the relational convictions in the communication imperatives in Ephesians 4, especially verses 1-3, 15-16, and 25-32. Whatever else “Mentoring and Modeling Leadership Character” means, it must be expressed in and through the grid of a grace-filled communication filter that values and respects people as individuals created by God and worthy to be viewed as His children. The Triune God grieves when His people relate to others no differently than non-believers relate to one another.

We are to “[f]ollow God’s example ... and walk in the way of love” (Ephesians 5:1-2) in leading others and living together as “the people of God” (1 Peter 2:10b). The leadership imperative is to model a Christlike lifestyle (4:25-5:2) and mentor emerging leaders within this theological and biblical context.

The following poem by the late family therapist Virginia Satir (1976) expresses the essence of what it means to speak the truth in love:

GOALS FOR ME

*I want to love you without clutching, appreciate you without judging,
join you without invading, invite you without demanding, leave you without guilt,
criticize you without blaming, and help you without insulting. If I can have the
same from you, then we can truly meet and enrich each other.*

Conflict situations do arise in faith communities. What a difference it makes, however, when we affirm that the person on the other side of the table from us with whom we conflict, based on his/her testimony of faith, is a brother or sister in Christ, and a member of the body of Christ!

With this perspective in mind, review Ephesians 4:25-32 to identify reasons for speaking the truth in love as we live and lead by mentoring younger leaders and modeling before them leadership character.

1. We speak the truth in love because “we are all members of one body” (Ephesians 4:25).

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he has much to say to us about our conversations with others. Because of our faith conviction to speak the truth in love, we should “*put off falsehood*” (Ephesians 4:25). We should not lie. Paul was speaking to Christians. This verse applies to us particularly in areas of emotional dishonesty – not being honest with others regarding my negative feelings toward them when barriers between us have been created.

Paul encourages us to be honest. With the awareness that we are accepted comes the freedom to be honest. The New Testament injunction to “speak the truth one to another,” implies far more than an absence of lies. It implies the kind of honesty that allows others to know us as we are, secure in our acceptance by God and by them, based on the affirming experience of love. Satir (1976) calls this emotional honesty **congruence**. She stated, “Being emotionally honest is the heart of making contact.”

John deals with the issue of honesty in his first epistle. In insisting that we “walk in the light,” he first points us to the necessity of being honest with ourselves (and others) about our sins and failings (1 John 1:1-9). Freedom to know God’s progressive cleansing comes only with honesty about our sins and confession of them. **Congruence** in the fellowship of believers is imperative both where believers can be honest with one another, take on one another, and where forgiveness can be requested and freely given.

Why is this so important? Paul refers to followers of Christ as members of one body (v. 25). Read the following passages, as you have the opportunity, that also describe our relationship to one another: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; 1 Peter 3:8-9, 13-17; Romans 12:3-8 and Ephesians 4:1-6.

2. We speak the truth in love because “delaying permits Satan to gain a foothold in our lives” (Ephesians 4:26-27).

“Do not delay” is Paul’s advice when dealing with conflict that divides us. “Respond in a Christian manner,” he counsels (“*In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger*” Ephesians 4:26). The issue of conflict is real within the Christian community and must be addressed.

In conflict management, the key issue is understanding, not agreement!

The goal is not conflict resolution, but conflict management in a Christianly manner. Conflict exists in relationships in the local church, a Christian university, and the Christian home. We need to talk about it. Too often we use avoidance tactics in conflict situations.

Using avoidance tactics in conflict management is denying the issue by not talking about the situation or by talking around or past the person instead of dealing with the given circumstances. This approach or avoidance tactic continually puts off the real issue until tomorrow or the next meeting, believing that it will eventually go away. We often make the unscriptural assumption that ‘peace-loving’ Christians should get along and not have serious conflicts. We all know this isn’t true, but we still avoid the issue.

We deny our real feelings, harbor resentment and allow the bitterness to intensify. We lack the knowledge of how to deal creatively in conflict situations. We’re afraid to share our honest feelings for fear of rejection, disapproval, frustration, or hurt. We want to protect our image of being nice, kind, understanding, and loving.

Conflict is what develops between individuals when they differ. In his book, *Caring Enough to Confront* (1974), David Augsburger stated, “When your thrust as a person runs counter to mine, to deny my own thrust is to be untrue to the push and the pull of God within me. For me to ignore and do violence to your thrust as a person is to violate your becoming a son of God.”

Augsburger (1974) continued, “Conflict is natural, normal and neutral. Conflict is neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. Conflict simply is. The question is not will conflict arise? The question is how do we deal with it? To a large extent, how we view, approach and work through our differences determines our whole life pattern.”

Virginia Satir, in her book, *Peoplemaking* (1972), believed that “Communication is the greatest single factor affecting one’s personal health and his relationship to others.” She concluded from her research and studies that approximately 96% of troubled families communicate within the home in one of four inappropriate ways:

1. **Placate** (give in). She says, “I told you not to say anything to others.” He says, “You’re right, I’m wrong. You are the leader.”
2. **Blame**. “Those other workers took you away from your office, so you were not there when I needed you.”
3. **Withdraw**. He says, “What do you talk about when you get together for the afternoon break?” She leaves without saying anything. She says, “Why are you not available by phone when we need you?” He leaves without a response.
4. **Distract**. She says, “We need to work on the finances; they are out of balance.” He says, “You were out with that group again, weren’t you?”

Although Satir (1972) addressed inappropriate communication patterns in dysfunctional families, one could also apply her findings to troubled church families who relate to each other within the fellowship of faith in similar dysfunctional and ineffective ways. The parallels are painfully obvious.

In faith communities, including family units, local congregations, colleges, universities, and ministry organizations, inappropriate communication sometimes raises its ugly head. In these moments we, as decisive leaders who are faithful Christians, affirm that **grace-enabled communication with God and others in a faith community is perhaps the greatest single factor affecting one’s personal health, her and his relationship with others, and the pursuit of Christlikeness.**

The result of using the four inappropriate ways is that the problem remains, tension mounts, and the relationship is edgy.

Augsburger (1974) refers to a fifth option he calls “care-fronting,” or “caring enough to confront” (p. 11). Satir’s (1972) description is “leveling with integrity.” For Paul, it is “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15a).

Care-fronting or leveling leads to the biblical principle of “speaking the truth in love.” This option brings healing, enables growth, and produces change. There are two arms of a genuine relationship — confrontation with truth and affirmation of love.

So how can I begin to manage conflict in a caring and confronting way?

First, eliminate a win/lose mentality (I'm right, you're wrong). There are three methods of the win/lose mentality: I win, you lose; you win, I lose; no win.

Reaching out is two-sided based on others' needs and our own needs. With the left hand reaching out – I do care; I want to respect you; I want your respect; and with the right hand reaching out – I want you to know how I feel; I want to tell you where I am; I have this goal for our relationship. This caring and confronting approach ends the blaming game and gets to healing questions – in simple, clear, direct language.

You must ask yourself: Where do we start? What is the loving, responsible, truly respectful thing to do? Where do we go from here?

Second, practice active listening. This practice involves hearing with an inner ear the feelings, hurt, anger, and demands of the other person. An active listener truly hears what another person says, how it is said, and what feelings are conveyed.

Third, use “I” messages instead of “You” messages. “I” messages reflect my feelings without placing blame. “You” messages are often attacks, criticisms, finding faults in the other person, labels, and ways of fixing blame. There is a significant difference between an honest confessional (“I” message) and distorted rejection (“You” message).

Fourth, eliminate “why” questions. “Why” questions are an effective way of manipulating others – similar to “You” messages: Why are you always late for committee meetings? Why don't you follow through on your commitments? Why don't you show a little interest in others? Why can't I get a little cooperation? We use why questions to give hidden messages of anger that we are unwilling to own honestly. These questions are like a hit and run.

Fifth, give clear “yes” or “no” signals. “Yes” signals come easy; however, “No” signals come very hard, especially face-to-face. Often, we hesitate to state our feelings clearly – for fear of rejection or disapproval of others. Jesus said, “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’” (Matthew 5:37a).

Sixth, initiate discussion if you have a complaint. Accept anger as a normal, natural human emotion. Clear statements of anger are something different than feelings and demands. Clear statements are a positive emotion, a self-affirming emotion that responds to the heart of rejection and devastation.

Speaking the truth in love, caring enough to confront, and truthing it with integrity are the Christlike responses to conflict.

These responses describe a lifestyle for Christians who care enough to confront where conflicts arise. Read again Ephesians 4:15-32. When differences between people are dealt with openly, conflict can be a positive experience because it can lead to personal growth. However, when differences are concealed and individuals are prevented from expressing themselves, personal growth will not occur.

Personal conflict is a part of growing up and trying out new capabilities. Learn the value of expressing differences openly and kindly. Listen to the other person's response. Seek understanding. This character quality is more caught or mentored than taught.

3. We speak the truth in love because “the power of words can heal and affirm” (Ephesians 4:29).

Speak “... *only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*” (Ephesians 4:29). Paul encourages members of the Body to use their speech for helping others, for their upbuilding as the occasion may offer.

Our speech is to be used to benefit those who are linked with us in the body of Christ. Dialogue can acquire a sacrament quality. We are to converse with each other within the fellowship in such a way that our words become a vehicle and demonstration of the very grace of God. In all conversation, the choice of language and subject matter has to be such that the affirmation and edification are ministering grace to the hearer. For Paul, there is no room for empty chatter or remarks that serve no other purpose than to degrade another person.

Colossians 4:6 reads, “*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*” In biblical anthropology, the mouth is representative of the whole body and reveals the whole man. In Matthew 12:34b, Jesus said, “*For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.*”

Paul emphasized that one’s speech reveals the quality of his relationship with Christ. Paul is not talking about a technique but attitudes of the heart toward the other person, such as: I need you – you have gifts and strengths I don’t have. I love you – you are my brother/sister in Christ. I accept you – Christ is changing you, as I am being changed. I trust you – you desire to serve the same Christ I serve. I respect you – you are different; yet, we are one in Christ. I serve you – I want to minister grace to you.

Nouwen (1991) reminded us, “When the door of the steam bath is continually left open, the heat inside escapes through it.” How often we open our mouths and speak about events of the world, about people, circumstances, and how seldom we close our mouths to listen to God and to others! Psalm 39:1 reminds us, “*I will ... keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth.*”

It is a matter of focusing our words so they communicate “*only what is helpful for building others up, according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*” (Ephesians 4:29b). There must be a focus on the building up of others rather than ourselves and self-serving comments.

The words we use in leading others raise some very personal and practical questions to consider as we measure our words. Consider these questions regarding the use of our words within the community of faith:

1. Does what I say build up or tear down the other person?
2. Would I say what I am saying directly to the person involved?
3. Do I know all the facts, or am I responding based on half-truths or partial facts?
4. Is my response triggered more by emotion than by reason?
5. Is the issue really deserving of the action and energy that I am giving it?
6. Can the situation be seen from a different perspective?

7. Have I tried to accept the other person's feelings and understand why the person feels the ways she/he does?

All who have influence have the power to bless or withhold blessings, to cause others to grow or wither, to help or hinder, to heal or hurt. The person who can speak the sincere word of forgiveness and acceptance is a healer of the highest order.

Paul is concerned with the role of words exchanged between individuals within the body. In the midst of everyday dialog, God's grace and power should flow through the words we use.

4. We speak the truth in love because “we have been forgiven in Christ” (Ephesians 4:31-32).

The command is clear, we are to be forgiving just as Christ forgave us. Ephesians 4:32 implies that through love, the barriers to fellowship can be set aside.

An attitude of realized forgiveness should describe the climate in the faith community. But what if it does not? We must take the initiative in forgiving regardless of the response of the other person. Realized forgiveness creates a growing desire to build up the other in love. We must forgive others, for God in Christ has forgiven us.

The issue is not so much the response from others to our efforts to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. Our efforts may not always be received in the spirit they were given. Withholding forgiveness creates bitterness; anger increases; resentment manifests itself; and the enemy of our soul wins.

Our calling is to be Christlike, even in the uncomfortable situations in which we sometimes find ourselves. God will provide blessing and joy within us, regardless of the apparent rejection of others. Remember, as believers, we forgive – not to change people – but because God, in Christ, forgave us. And we were so undeserving. Sometimes we have been hurt so deeply that we cannot reach out with integrity in forgiveness to others. “Father ... forgive them ...” The words of Jesus were words of a prayer!

Paul reminds us, “God’s grace is sufficient for us in our weakness, and His power is made perfect in our weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9a).

I remember receiving numerous emails from the campus community where I served as president for 18 years. Accusations were made against other university personnel and me. The words hurt. I had a choice. I could brew over the stinging emails, or I could genuinely seek forgiveness, asking God to teach me through the painful situations.

God grieves. Ephesians 4:25-32 describes a lifestyle by which believers are to live together as the people of God. What happens when they do not? God grieves.

Does the reference in Ephesians 4:30 regarding “grieving God” refer to verse 29 or 31? The answer is both. **The Spirit of God is greatly concerned about the speech of His people.** The words we speak as we communicate with others are profoundly theological. Anything that tends to destroy fellowship grieves the Spirit who seeks to build it up. The sin of offending a brother by a false word or act especially grieves God. The Holy Spirit either rejoices or grieves with the words expressed in the fellowship. Relationships within a faith community are an intensely theological issue. Watch the words we speak!

The power for this lifestyle can only be maintained, developed, and strengthened as we are continuously being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). The Spirit of Christ within us empowers us to live, lead and mentor as servant leaders!

As we model this communication lifestyle before others in the power of the Spirit with a passion for “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16b), the faith community is gradually transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). So are we!

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. How well do those in your church, including yourself, live out the communication model (p.71) and the biblical expectation for us to “speak the truth in love”? Which of the four imperatives lettered A, B, C, and D on the communication model is most fulfilled? Which is the least fulfilled?
2. There is a list of seven questions to consider “regarding the use of our words within the community of faith.” Are any of these new to your consideration? Which do you most often use to help guard and filter your words within the community of faith?
3. The verses explored in this chapter from the end of Ephesians chapter 4 regarding “speak[ing] the truth in love” are immediately followed by the call to be “imitators of God ... and live a life of love.” What are biblical examples of God speaking truth in love? What are personal examples of God speaking truth in love?



Chapter Seven

Dealing with a Sense of Betrayal South America and Mesoamerica Educators' Conference

Author's Note: This article, which appeared in print as the September 14, 2011 blog on the BoardServe.org website, was first shared at a combined South America and Mesoamerica (Caribbean) region gathering of educational leaders in a 2008 retreat in Costa Rica. I changed my fourth devotional message to the group of educators after listening to them for several days share the pain of betrayal from some colleagues with whom they worked.

I want to address in this session the question: **Where and how do we start to deal with a sense of betrayal?** These thoughts are both personal and painful to me.

A senior administrator at a school where I was serving was an outstanding leader and administrator. I was mentoring him and believed that he would eventually move to a president's position in another Christian institution. In fact, I had just recommended him to a "headhunter" looking for candidates for university presidents.

Then, while I was out of town one day attending a district assembly on our zone, I received a call from our VP for Finance and Management. Also, on the line was our legal counsel. The evidence for financial malfeasance was presented. The individual had to be confronted. And, appropriately, quick action was taken.

It was painful. It was shocking. I believed in this person. I trusted him. And, I was betrayed.

Some of you have similar stories involving a companion, a co-worker, a supervisor, a family member or relative, perhaps another Christian, or even

another member of a congregation. You hurt and the experience is still vivid in your mind.

Soon after this painful experience for me, I was speaking in Costa Rica at a weeklong gathering of regional educators in the Church of the Nazarene. After the third morning devotional, the education leaders of our institutions in the South American and the Caribbean regions began to share their stories, burdens and pain regarding betrayals in their lives and in their schools. They asked these and other questions:

How do we cope with the sense of being manipulated, abused, or betrayed?

In these times, how do we lead with “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16b)?

How can we make a difference in the conflict situations where even manipulation and betrayal exist?

I returned to my room to reflect on my own experience. I changed my devotional for the next morning. I felt compelled to speak to their experiences of betrayal by people they loved and in whom they believed.

My new devotional for the next morning was on the theme of “Betrayal,” and I spoke to the group from Matthew 26 and the story of Jesus and Judas.

In Matthew 26:46-50 (The Message), we read of the last hours on earth of Jesus ... and Judas.

“My time is up, the Son of Man is about to be handed over to the hands of sinners. Get up! Let’s get going! My betrayer is here.” The words were barely out of his mouth when Judas (the one from the Twelve) showed up, and with him a gang from the high priests and religious leaders brandishing swords and clubs. The betrayer had worked out a sign with them: “The one I kiss, that’s the one – seize him.” He went straight to Jesus, greeted him, “How are you, Rabbi?” and kissed him. Jesus said, “Friend, why this charade?”

What are some insights regarding betrayal from this story of Jesus and Judas?

Insight #1: Stay on Your Knees (Matthew 26:30). Jesus had been praying before this encounter. Jesus often withdrew to pray, so also should we. Some conflict situations appear overwhelming. These are moments when we increasingly learn what it means to live and lead “from our knees.”

Insight #2: Stay Focused on Jesus (Matthew 26:15). Judas talked to the high priests about “thirty pieces of silver.” Jesus stayed focused on the mission. Around Jesus, neither the distractors nor the difficult people could preoccupy his attention or drain him of his energy. So must we stay focused on our Lord.

Insight #3: Find a Support Team (Matthew 26:6). Jesus had his inner circle of support. Just prior to the conversation with Judas, Jesus was with friends in Bethany. We also need a support team, an accountability team, a group of wise friends.

Insight #4: Believe in your Distractors (Matthew 26:21). Judas was invited to attend the Last Supper! “*One of you will betray me,*” Jesus said to the twelve. Don’t isolate those who seek to “undermine” you. This is tough. Stay close to them in ways that are possible and appropriate. Believe in them even when you sense betrayal.

Insight #5: Speak Truthfully in Love (Matthew 26: 25, 50). It appeared Judas was manipulating Jesus with a question, “*Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?*” Jesus responded with kindness and grace. “*You have said so.*” He also said later in Gethsemane, “*Do what you came for, friend.*”

Remember, **we witness to our faith in Jesus by our actions and reactions.** Jesus did not lash out to Judas or to the guards who took him away. Jesus avoided resentment and a disruptive judgmental attitude.

Insight #6: Stay in the Bible (Matthew 26:31, 56). Reflect on the numerous passages in the New Testament from the Old Testament. “*But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.*” Read and re-read the Scriptures for guidance and encouragement. Return to the Sermon on the Mount, the Gospels, Paul’s Letters to Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians –

The Prison Epistles! And others!

Insight #7: Trust God with the Results (Matthew 27:5). Don't become the problem by deciding the issue in an inappropriate way. Give the person time to repent and show remorse. Sometimes they do. Sometimes they don't. Judas hung himself. Trust God with the results.

There is another key insight regarding betrayal from Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:3-4 is very descriptive in the NIV version:

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?”

Ouch! We often fail to remember that we, too, hurt people. We don't always see the situation or issue clearly over which the conflict has arisen. Sometimes we are wrong and don't realize it when we feel so strongly that we are right.

Jesus has profound advice for us. First, He says, *“take the plank out of your own eye, and THEN you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eyes”* (7:5). For those who ignore his counsel, he calls them *“hypocrites”* (7:5).

He does not say to ignore the issue. Only to look inward in the process of looking outward at the situation. Only then ... are we able to see more clearly (and accurately) the wrong in the other!

One final insight is from the life and words of Jesus on the cross:

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”
(Luke 23:34).

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! Extending forgiveness does not wait for the other person to request forgiveness. Remember the example of Jesus: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

Was Jesus naive? 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 to him to create bitterness or resentment within him and thereby create a rupture in the relationship with God His Father. Others were not going to control Him. It simply was not worth it! *“Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing!”*

Guard Your Heart ... when dealing with the sense of betrayal!

You may be in a transition in the college you lead or the church you pastor. Some of you may be in other transitions in your family, on your job, or within yourself personally. In these days, guard your heart.

If recently or in years gone by you have been hurt by the betrayal of others in the midst of these transitions, guard your heart!

Remember the example of Jesus with Judas. Don't forget His closing words in the Sermon on the Mount about the “plank in your own eye” (Matthew 7:5).

Don't skip over the command of Jesus in Matthew 7:1-2: *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

Our responsibility is to forgive; it is God's responsibility to judge. To others who betray you, respond in ways that are fundamentally different from their response to you.

Back to my colleague whom I had to confront with his betrayal. I embraced him when he acknowledged the sin and his horrible mistake. All I could say to him was, “I trusted you. I am so sorry.”

He met the requirements I outlined for restitution. Subsequently, he and his wife moved to another city. I have tried numerous times to make contact with him. In a new way, I came to see that I couldn't change the other person. I am

not responsible for his behavior.

I am, however, responsible for my own actions and reactions. I can pray that God can work the change in me that I desire to see in those who hurt me. I can learn and change in areas of personal need even though I may or may not see change in others.

A closing question: How is your heart the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23)? Are you guarding it, especially in times of conflict with others, even with those who have betrayed you? The question also is one to ask in the mentoring relationship.

With whom are you most in conflict at this time? What has spoken to you this morning that you most needed to hear? Be specific. Think across the auditorium or across the years.

When you sense betrayal and are tempted to respond to the betrayer in “like-kind”, guard your heart! Remember that Jesus had his Judas. Be aware of your own behavior – “Remember the plank.” Ask God to enable you to forgive them and leave the results to Him. And, ask yourself, **“What can I learn? How can I change?”**

As we close the session, why not spend some time in prayer for yourself and the other person. *“Above all else, guard your heart”* (Proverbs 4:23) when you sense betrayal.

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. While experiencing the hurt of betrayal, the pain can eclipse your awareness that you are still a model to those around you, especially those closest to you who are aware of your pain. Which of the seven insights can best help you to remember you are not only being watched but also are being a model to others regarding how to respond in a Christlike way to the pain of betrayal and the betrayer(s)?
2. In a mentoring relationship, it is easy to focus exclusively on the practices of the lessons you have learned that you want to pass along. How can your pain from betrayal be redeemed to help those you mentor who may not yet have experienced such pain?
3. In addition to the seven insights shared in this chapter, is there another insight that you personally learned from a painful experience?



Theme Three: The Facets of Leadership Character

- *“How do we intentionally nurture the spiritual life within us and within others in the midst of our family, our work, and our many other commitments?” (c. 8)*
- *“Is it possible – really possible – to live in ‘unity and peace?’”(c. 9)*
- *“Modeling biblical contentment in the midst of your ministry challenges will either confirm or disconfirm the Gospel you preach in the lives of both those with whom you live and those you lead.” (c. 10)*
- *“Think about the relationship of spiritual hospitality to Christian leadership. We must model biblical hospitality before we mentor others in its practice.” (c. 11)*
- *“Never give up on a God-given assignment until He releases you from the responsibility.” (c. 12)*



Chapter Eight

Intentionally Nurturing the Christian Life

Tampa, Florida First Church of the Nazarene

Author's Note: Serving as interim pastor at the Tampa First Church of the Nazarene during the congregation's 90th anniversary year was a privilege and delight for Anne and me. This sermon was preached in a yearlong series on "Guarding your Heart" (Proverbs 4:23).

How do we intentionally nurture the spiritual life within us and within others in the midst of our family, our work, and our many other commitments?

In Exodus, Chapters 3 and 4, God instructs Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. When Moses hesitates and asks God to send someone else, God reassures Moses, saying that He would be with Moses. He also told Moses, "It is I – the great 'I am' – who calls, empowers, keeps and carries you" (Exodus 3:1-15). First and foremost, God reassured Moses that he would have God's power and guidance to live, speak, and lead.

Are those we mentor challenged as Christians to embrace the discipline of thinking and leading with "the mind of Christ"? Do they see in us an intentional pursuit of "the mind of Christ" as we think, speak, and function in the midst of the many seemingly random events of our work?

The book, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (1989), captures an address by Henri Nouwen in 1989. The book is built around the temptations of Jesus in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11) and the story of St. Peter's call to be a shepherd (John 21:15-19).

Nouwen's reflections help us as we think about current leadership temptations.

I. Three Temptations of Jesus

Matthew 4:1-11 address three contemporary temptations of Christian leaders – to be **relevant**, to be **spectacular**, and to be **powerful**.

The first temptation: Matthew 4: 1-3

The passage reminded us that Jesus' first temptation was to be relevant: to turn stones to bread. In this temptation, the message is clear: Do what is desired to satisfy the immediate cravings of those around you. The temptation is to look for the approval of people by what you do for them.

What is needed to counter this temptation? We must find our deep sense of belonging, our identity in Christ. We find our relevance in the permanent, intimate relationship with the incarnate Word, Jesus, and His words, advice, and guidance. Believe that in serving others, we serve Jesus Christ.

The second temptation: Matthew 4:5-7

This passage tells of the temptation to do something spectacular, something that would bring the applause of people. "Throw yourself from the parapet of the temple and let the angels catch you and carry you in their arms," the enemy told Jesus.

What is needed to counter this temptation to be popular and do something spectacular – this temptation to individual heroism? The answer to this temptation is frequent confession and constantly seeking forgiveness.

Nouwen is talking about followers of Jesus who are willing to confess their brokenness and to ask forgiveness from those with whom they live, work and worship. Making humble connections through confession and forgiveness to those with whom we live and lead enables us to overcome the temptation of individual heroism.

In the faith communities, we are accountable to each other. We need their affection and support and are called to touch and be touched by those in the community.

The third temptation: Matthew 4:8-11

This passage speaks to the temptation of power. “I will give you all the Kingdoms of this world in their splendor,” Satan told Jesus. Is this an irresistible temptation? The passage reminds us that perceived power provides a substitute for “the hard task of love, submission of our will to His will, to mutual accountability” and for healthy, intimate relationships with the faith community.

What is needed to counter this temptation? The answer to this temptation is found in John 21:18, especially the words, “*Someone else will ... lead you where you do not want to go.*” Followers of Jesus intentionally choose to let go of personal power and follow the humble way of Jesus. The ability and willingness to be led where you would rather not go are crucial.

Do those with whom we work in leadership assignments witness in us an intentionality or resolve to deal in a Christian manner with the leadership temptations we often encounter? Do others see in us growth and a maturing faith in the great ‘I am’ reflected in the way we make decisions in the home, on the job or in the church? Do we talk with others, as teachable moments, regarding these temptations and their relationship to an intentional growth in Christian leadership?

II. Three Disciplines for Followers of Jesus

Back to the initial question: How do we intentionally nurture the spiritual life within us and within others? Nouwen (1991) takes us back to the ministry of Abba Arsenius, a well-educated Roman tutor in a royal household in the fourth century in Rome. Arsenius asked the Lord, “**What shall I do to save my soul?**”

The Lord responded twice to Arsenius, “**Flee, be silent, and pray always.**” Arsenius and other monks went into the Egyptian desert to escape the spiritual pollution, as they saw it, of the culture and society of which they were a part. These desert fathers, especially Arsenius, have something very timely for us today as we seek to nurture the spiritual life within and among us intentionally.

DISCIPLINE #1: FLEE. The Lord said to Arsenius, “Flee,” or **embrace solitude.** Arsenius took God’s word to mean that he was to embrace solitude, which meant going to the desert. Solitude is a time of inner stillness and aloneness before God. Solitude is a quality of the heart or an inner disposition, not always a physical place. Such profound stillness is not always easy for us to find, and for most of us it does not include retreating to a desert. In the midst of much noise and many people, we need to find a place of quiet within ourselves – a place where we can be quiet before God.

This quiet time is imperative for disciples. Solitude is a means to facilitate inner stillness and aloneness before God. During a 1999 semester-long sabbatical at the Yale University Divinity School Nouwen Special Collection archives, I was convicted by God about the “busyness” of my schedule, and how little time I scheduled to withdraw in solitude before Him. God seemed to say, “If you plan the meeting time and dates for your senior administrative team a year in advance, why not plan just as diligently for solitude with me?”

DISCIPLINE #2: SILENCE. The Lord said to Arsenius, “**Be silent.**” How often we open our mouths and speak about events of the world, about people, or circumstances, and how seldom we close our mouths and listen to God and to others within the body of Christ! I am often reminded of Psalm 39:1, which states, “*I will put a muzzle on my mouth ...*”

We need silence for spiritual reading, starting with the Bible. In a particular quiet time before the Lord, I was especially drawn during my sabbatical to several New Testament books, especially 1 and 2 Corinthians. I read and re-read 1 and 2 Thessalonians. I was challenged anew with the Christology of Colossians. The Gospel of John served to remind me of the life and teachings of Jesus.

We also need silence for spiritual writing or journaling. Again, the question for me is “How can I grow in faithfulness and obedience?” We must be committed to a new level of consistency with daily prayer. We must intentionally focus on spiritual alternatives to the TV, internet, and social media, instead choosing to read devotional classics and books, to embrace mutual accountability and foster healthy attitudes that nurture and strengthen our daily walk with Christ. Pray, “Speak to me, Lord, regarding my need for silence before You.”

DISCIPLINE #3: PRAYER. The Lord said to Arsenius, “**Pray always.**” How can we follow the biblical injunctions to pray constantly, pray unceasingly, and pray always? Different characteristics of prayer help us to achieve this goal.

There are **speaking prayers**, both intercessory and prayers of praise and thanksgiving. You can use a prayer journal for your ministry of intercessory prayer. Wonderful examples of prayers of praise and thanksgiving can be found by reading aloud the *Psalms*. Prayer books are also very helpful, such as John Ballie’s *A Diary of Private Prayer* (1949).

There are **listening prayers**. The prophet Samuel prayed, “*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening*” (1 Samuel 3:9). And so should we!

There are **thinking prayers**. Nouwen (1991) says, “To pray, I think, ... means to think and live in the presence of God.” He continues, “What I mean is that we convert our unceasing thinking into unceasing prayer when we move from self-centered monologue to a God-centered dialogue.”

Regarding our vocation of prayer, Nouwen (1991) states, “When I speak of prayer, I refer less to saying prayers than to living a prayerful life in which eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, working and praying are all done to the honor and glory of God.” He goes on to quote a Russian Orthodox monk, who defined prayer as “**standing in the presence of God with our mind in our heart.**”

Three temptations – temptations to relevance, to the spectacular, and to power. These temptations, if embraced, lead to shallowness, weariness, and discouragement.

Three disciplines – solitude, silence, and prayer. These three disciplines, if embraced, nurture the spiritual life within and among us.

Jesus said, “... seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). The pursuit of Christlikeness enables us to speak the truth in love more clearly and consistently with “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16b), as we communicate with one another within faith communities.

What message do we model in our responses to the leadership temptations and disciplines to those with whom we live and lead? Those whom we mentor and before whom we model our character are watching!

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. Which temptation allures you most? Be honest with yourself. When and how is this temptation most revealed in you?
2. Which discipline is most needed to be “practiced” by you? Don’t make excuses. Be ruthless in focusing on the Spiritual discipline most needed as you intentionally seek to nurture the spiritual life within you and others you mentor.
3. What are you going to do about it? Only you can answer this question. Limit your response to one sentence. Be as specific, personal and definitive as possible.



Chapter Nine
*Maturing Spiritually in a Diverse
Christian Community*
Mount Vernon Nazarene University Chapel

Periodically I am asked the question: “What keeps you awake at night?” I usually respond that it isn’t tight finances at MVNU – although we are always “pushing the envelope” for new programs, personnel and facilities.

And it is not the enrollment – even though we want and need to break through the 400 first-time freshmen barrier. Rather, the gut-wrenching questions that drain me of energy by day and sleep at nights are these: “Are students growing in their Christian faith while studying at MVNU? Are faculty and staff maturing in Christlikeness as a result of working at this institution?” When I cannot sleep at night, I am usually pondering the painfully conflicting and often irreconcilable expectations I feel from MVNU’s multiple constituencies: students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, pastors, and the Board of Trustees.

And in the midst of these painfully conflicting and often irreconcilable expectations, expressed through emails, letters, phone calls, and personal conversations, I asked myself the question, “Is it possible – really possible – to live in unity and peace at MVNU?”

The unity and peace referred to is in Ephesians 4:3, “*make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*” St. Paul is speaking to Christians. He is talking about Christians living together in Christian community. His words are for us.

In the midst of our incredibly rich, yet potentially explosive diversity, is our vision of MVNU as “an academic community of faith, shaping Christlike leaders for lifelong service and global impact” (MVNU Vision statement, 2005, November 3). Is this vision a fantasy of our imagination, a delusion of

grandeur or a God-inspired conviction for which we humbly, yet firmly, stake our lives to the glory of God?

It did not take me long in 1989 at MVNU to discover the rich diversity, various theological traditions, levels of emotional and spiritual security, and the conflicting expectations associated with this campus.

Soon, very soon, I began to ask the question again, “How can we live together on this campus in such a way that our relationships are redemptive, not destructive, and a witness to unbelievers, especially within our campus community, of the reconciling work of God in Christ?” On the one hand, we ought to expect (even affirm) differences of opinions and ideas within a Christian community. After all, we firmly believe that every person is uniquely created in God’s image and gifted by His spirit. Remember, we are the graced, blessed, gifted children of God!

MVNU is sponsored by the Church of the Nazarene, yet aggressively pursues students from other denominations – forty-four different denominations are represented on campus this year from thirty states and eight countries. Even if all of the students from the sponsoring denomination and the forty-plus other denominations are Christians, there are genuine differences about the meaning and lifestyle of our Christian faith.

In addition, not all students on campus profess faith in Jesus Christ. Some have not grown up in the church and, for various reasons, have rejected the claims of the gospel, rebelled, or turned their back on Christianity. Still others are being exposed significantly to the Christian beliefs and lifestyles for the first time. Christian faith and local church involvement are really new for these students.

To complicate the issue even more, we are seeking to attract students from beyond our region of Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky; to bring international students to our campus; and to improve ways of recruiting and retaining minority students.

Back to my question: In the midst of conflicting expectations, differences of opinion, conflict of ideas, degrees of maturity/immaturity, varieties of traditions, and the uniqueness of cultures and numerous expressions of

subcultures on campus, is it possible to live, study and worship together in such a way that our relationships are supportive and a witness to the reconciling work of God in Christ?

My answer is a resounding YES! I stake my tenure at MVNU on this convictional affirmation. It is very definitely possible if we reaffirm three fundamental convictions – convictions that will shape us at our best.

Conviction #1. We need to reaffirm, often, **who we are** as a Christian institution. We are a Christian, academic community of faith. Never lose this vision of ourselves. MVNU faculty and staff have heard me repeatedly speak of some of the implications of our identity as a Christian, academic community of faith.

We believe that every student can make a difference for Christ, regardless of her/his vocational choice. Whether students are accepted into MVNU's honors program or as at-risk students; regardless of the economic condition of their families; and notwithstanding the urban or rural environment of their high school community, we believe, really believe, that one person can make a difference in this world. We affirm to every student, "You are that person."

We believe that every student should come to the point of viewing herself/himself as a world Christian with a global vision. The world – the whole world – is the arena of God's activity. God's love for us does not depend on the color of our skin or the nation of our birth!

And, we believe that every student, following graduation, can live a Holy Spirit-led life that brings praise to God, regardless of where her or his vocational assignment takes her/him: to Mount Vernon or Manila; to Columbus or Calcutta; to Fredericktown or Frankfort. What we are, we are becoming. This means that we must now cultivate and develop a lifestyle of praise, worship, gratitude, devotion, respect, spiritual formation, and faithfulness.

These three critical beliefs are the distinctive differences of an MVNU education.

How can we live together as Christians in such a way that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ? First of all, reaffirming, often, who we are. We are a Christian community of faith.

Conviction #2. We need to reaffirm, often, **why we exist** as a Christian community. We exist to nurture, shape, and model the life of faith. Our vision of MVNU continues:

We are an academic community of faith,
shaping Christlike leaders ...

We exist to communicate and nurture the life of Christian faith in the context of a quality liberal arts education setting. A Christian university is the church at work in higher education. We should expect, and even desire, to see an increasing number of unbelievers on campus.

Jesus said, *"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners"* (Mark 2:17). Non-Christians in our institution provide an opportunity for Christian witness and proclamation of the Christian faith.

The Christian's lifestyle may be witnessed as an alternative to the unbeliever's lifestyle through examples, testimonies, attitudes, chapel services, classroom experiences, or informal discussions. The task is not only to communicate the faith; our responsibility is to nurture the life of faith in every student regardless of where they are on their spiritual journey.

Courses are taught from a Christian perspective. Bible studies are formed for small groups to explore the Bible. Contemporary issues are addressed in forums from a Christian perspective. Chapel services are intended to inspire students to worship and instruct them in the faith.

Conviction #3: We also need to reaffirm, often, **how we are to live** in a community of faith. We are to live as a Christlike community maturing in faith (individually and collectively).

We are an academic community of faith,
shaping Christlike leaders
for lifelong service and global impact.

Faith communities like MVNU are dynamic laboratories wherein we learn how to live together as the graced, blessed, and gifted children of God. We view our ministry to each other – faculty, staff, and students – in the context of a dynamic laboratory of learning how to live together as graced, blessed, and gifted children of God. A dynamic laboratory ...! Therefore, we must be characterized as a confessing, forgiving, affirming, praying, discipling, worshiping, supportive, and maturing community of faith.

Remember the “praise to criticism” ratio. Clinical psychologist, Sven Wahlroos, in his book, *Family Communication* (1974), encourages the reader to make our communication as realistically positive as possible. He recommends a “praise to criticism” ratio of 80- 90% praise to 10-20% criticism. Often the opposite is true of our interaction with others in the family of God.

Sometimes being emotionally honest necessitates criticism of another in an appropriate manner. However, 80-90% praise is needed and empowering. **Thank you. I appreciate you. You were helpful. You affirmed me. I am grateful for you.** Our praise cannot be superficial. Look for the positive. We can find it!

We are talking about a life-long learning and growing process. We must understand that we live together as a Christlike community day-by-day, month-by-month, year-by-year maturing in our faith.

You may ask, so what? How specifically do the three fundamental convictions relate to me practically and personally on this campus? What are the personal day-to-day implications for me, for you, for us?

Ephesians 4:25-32 spells out very specific implications for living together in an academic community of faith (Chapter One). We are members of one body (family). Therefore, we are to be honest and not lie to one another. In the process of being honest and not lying, remember the person about whom you are speaking or writing. She/he is my sister or brother in Christ.

Satan loves dissension within the body of the Christian community. *“In your anger do not sin”* (4:26a). We stay focused on principles and do not cross the line by attacking persons, persons like yourself, for whom Christ died. Satan laughs when Christians attack one another and create division within the body.

Conflict management absorbs much of my time. It is expected within this diverse community. But be careful in attacking motives and ascribing judgments to others. Stay focused on principles and policies. *“In your anger, do not sin”* (Ephesians 4:26a).

We watch our words (4:29) and choose upbuilding, not downgrading words when speaking to and about others. In New Testament terms, dialogue is sacramental.

We practice forgiveness (often)! *“Be kind and compassionate”* (4:31-32), and don’t harbor malice or resentment. You and I were forgiven when we didn’t deserve it! The result of this kind of living is a Christlike lifestyle (5:1-2), the life to which we are called to live as Christians.

Are you stronger in your faith since coming to MVNU? Why or why not? I want to hear your responses. Are you praying for others and assisting them in their growth in faith?

How can we, as an institution, change our ways to be both a strong academic institution and a strong faith community? Is there someone – faculty, staff, student, parent, or friend to whom you need to speak or write, regarding some un-Christlike words spoken or deeds done to the individual?

Yes, it is possible to live in peace, *shalom* – completeness – wholeness, in a diverse Christian community. As we remember **who** we are as a Christian institution; we are a Christian community of faith. We remember **why** we exist as a Christian community; we exist to nurture, shape, and mentor the life of faith. And we remember **how** we are to live in a community of faith; we are to live as a Christian community maturing in faith.

These convictions will characterize and shape us. They will also convict us. "God help us! We stand in need of Your mercy, grace, forgiveness and wisdom." Amen!

The Servant Song

Brother, let me be your servant, Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey; We are brothers on the road.
We are here to help each other Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you; In the nighttime of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you, Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping; When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow Till we've seen this journey thro'.

When we sing to God in heaven, We shall find such harmony,
Born of all we've known together Of Christ's love and agony.
(Gillard, 1976)

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. In “Conviction #1,” a communicated affirmation of “who” was “that every student can make a difference for Christ.” Do you hold that conviction regarding those under your current leadership? How is that conviction communicated to them?
2. In “Conviction #2,” a communicated affirmation of “why” was “to nurture, shape and model the life of faith.” Do you hold that conviction regarding the purpose of your current assignment? How is that conviction communicated to those you lead?
3. In “Conviction #3,” a communicated affirmation of “how” was “to live as a Christlike community maturing in faith.” Does that describe the understanding of how your faith community lives out its purpose? How is that conviction communicated and evidenced in those you lead?



Chapter Ten

Embracing Contentment

Seminary of the Americas, (SENDAS), San Jose, Costa Rica

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” Philippians 4:12

Posted in the kitchen in our home are challenging words regarding contentment. “If we are not content with what we have, we will never be content with what we want” (Ascribed to Socrates. Philosiblog, 2013).

But what does it mean to be content? And what is the nature of contentment? Does biblical contentment mean that Christian pastors must be passive? Are we required to accept whatever comes our way?

How does sanctified ambition relate to contentment? Should pastors cast a vision that pushes the congregation out of their comfort zones? What about God-inspired goals for the future? How do these goals relate to biblical contentment?

To this graduating class, I choose to speak on the subject of “The Leadership Gift of Biblical Contentment.” Modeling biblical contentment in the midst of your ministry challenges will either confirm or disconfirm the Gospel you preach in the lives of both those with whom you live and those you lead.

This critical Pauline theme of contentment transforms our pastoral ministry. Biblical contentment is similar to the Hebrew word *shalom*. This great Hebrew word means living in peace with God, ourselves and others around us. It will hold us steady when we are tempted to run away from our ministry assignment! Being at peace with God and ourselves can easily slip from us in our consuming and sometimes draining efforts to care for others.

As you continue your ministry, I pray that you will experience the grace and blessing of *shalom*. Living and leading in peace and contentment with God, others, and ourselves. It is often elusive and challenging. There is the irony of contentment. And, there are barriers to contentment. Moreover, there is the reality of biblical contentment and *shalom* that you can understand and experience. Let me explain.

I. The Irony of Contentment

The irony is this: We tend to think that we know what is best for our lives, and we ask **God** for it (and if God grants our prayers, we will be content)! The text reminds us that God can give us inward peace in whatever situation He places us!

St. Paul wrote the passage on contentment in Philippians 4:10-20 while under house arrest. In the previous two years, he had been in prison near Jerusalem, insulted by the Roman governor of the area, shipwrecked on his way to Rome, without food for fourteen days, and then placed in jail when he arrived in Rome!

But did Paul moan? Complain? Whine? Blame others for his predicament? Engage in a pity party?

This is fascinating. In Rome, while in prison, Paul did not focus on what he could do if he had more resources; pastored in another location; worked for a different boss; or had more Christian co-workers. He did not focus on: “Why?”; “Why me?”; or “What if?” Instead, while in chains in Rome, Paul wrote letters. Letters we know as the Prison Epistles – Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon! He bloomed where he was planted! And, according to Philippians 4:7, God gave to Paul contentment and inner peace.

You may not work at the place you prefer, earn the money you desire to earn, have the boss and co-workers you believe you need. In these very situations, however, as difficult, unfair, and challenging as they may seem and be, you can experience a contentment that defies understanding!

The irony of Biblical contentment is this: God’s ways are not our ways. And we so often want our ways!

This leadership gift of *shalom*, peace with God, others and ourselves, is elusive and challenging because of:

II. The Barriers to Contentment

One of the greatest barriers to biblical contentment is comparison – comparing the gifts God has given to me with the gifts He has given to others.

Comparison is the enemy of contentment. Comparison is pervasive – in our education institutions, positions at work, the money we earn, the places we live, even the cars we drive. We can be grateful and thankful for the gifts God has given to us ... until we compare our gifts from God to His gifts to others!

Paul starts at a different point: “*I know what is to be in need, and ... to have plenty ... well fed or hungry*” (Philippians 4:12). And he challenges us to find similarities in our lives.

Comparison is at the root of our feelings of inferiority. I can feel good about myself until I compare myself to another.

In addition to comparison, another barrier to contentment is our circumstances.

Paul could have said, “Why am I in prison? Why didn’t I listen to friends?” His friends in Tyre and Caesarea begged Paul not to continue his journey to Jerusalem, knowing that he would face persecution and prison.

You and I have these continual temptations: If I had just listened to ...; Life is greener ... If I were there, I could ...; If I had this or that ...!

Paul’s response to his friends in Acts 21:14, who begged Paul not to continue to Jerusalem, was clear: “*The Lord’s will be done.*” And Paul proceeded to Jerusalem and he was at peace.

A third barrier to contentment can be people.

I have come to see that in any situation, there will be people! With the people we work will come problems and possibilities. Will we focus on the problems?

Or will we focus on the possibilities and potential?

In the situation where Paul found himself, he witnessed to many in jail! He wrote letters to the young churches at Philippi, Ephesus, and Colossae and to Philemon. Paul encourages us to focus on the possibilities of our circumstances; not on our problems with the people with whom we live, worship, and work. Remember: “If we are not content with what we have, we will never be content with what we want.”

Again, this leadership gift of *shalom*, peace with God, self, and ourselves, is elusive and challenging because of the irony of contentment and the barriers to contentment. Now, let me share with you the foundation for biblical contentment!

III. The Reality of Contentment

Biblical contentment is slippery, and we can miss it. However, it is not impossible to understand and experience. In fact, it is a blessing and gift for every Christian leader who wants to serve God for his or her entire life.

The secret of contentment is grounded neither in the people who disappoint us, the circumstances that distract us, nor even the problems that overwhelm us. The secret of biblical contentment is grounded in gratitude. Contentment is rooted in a focus on God and His mercy and grace, not in a preoccupation with people and problems.

The foremost quality of a contented person is gratefulness.

Listen to Philippians 4:5-6. “*Let your gentleness be evident to all ... Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*”

What is the result? “*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:7).

Gratitude – thanksgiving – arises out of our acceptance that all of life is grace. All that we are and all that we have are grace gifts from the Father’s hand. A life of biblical contentment is holiness of heart lived out daily in the

life of a Christian leader.

This God-centered character of gratitude is anchored in an unshakeable trust that there is a God who is sovereign and whose providential care guides His people. **Contentment does not make us grateful; rather, it is gratitude that makes us contented.**

Things go wrong. People disappoint us. Congregations and friends will misunderstand us. At times there will be seemingly irreconcilable differences within the faith community between good and godly people. In all of these times, we can choose to believe in the sovereignty of God. We can trust Him with our lives and with the situations before us. In the midst of unrest within the congregation, we can choose to believe in His watchful care over our lives in the midst of every doubt, question, conflict, and even persecution. He is God, and I choose to trust God supremely. He is enough! God is big enough to handle any situation we encounter.

In the sometimes humanly miserable situations we encounter, we can choose to believe that God does just what He says, in His time. We can choose to believe that God will make a way, in His time, when there seems to be no way!

This convictional affirmation is grounded in a radical trust in a Sovereign God. When emotions and circumstances do not suggest this affirmation of faith, we can choose to believe in the Holy God of grace and mercy to see us through.

Paul teaches us that gratitude is not grounded in murmuring, grumbling, faultfinding, or complaining. Rather he challenges us to give thanks with a grateful heart.

In conclusion, I want to remind you to be thankful in the midst of stress, pressure, and perhaps misunderstanding. God is teaching you and me things about ourselves, others, life, faith and trust, that we would not – could not – have learned without these experiences! Contentment is grounded in a heart filled with gratitude. Even in prison, the Triune God still spoke assurance and direction to Paul's life. This is Christian faith modeled and expressed in the everyday experiences of the Christian leader.

Remember, contentment does not make us grateful. Rather, it is gratitude that makes us contented, as we experience peace with God, ourselves, and others wherever and to whomever God chooses to send us. Teach me – teach us – O God, to find our contentment in You.

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. Regarding the “irony of contentment,” like Paul in prison, where have you experienced contentment in places generally deemed undesirable?
2. Regarding the “barriers to contentment,” which of the three listed barriers: comparison, circumstances, and people most often obstruct your contentment? Are there other barriers that obstructed your contentment in the past or are doing so in the present?
3. Regarding the “secret of contentment,” would others characterize you as someone who expresses more gratitude than complaint? What can you intentionally do now to gratefully remember God’s past faithfulness and grace during future trying times?



Chapter Eleven

Creating Space and Making Room

Mount Vernon Nazarene University Commencement Address

During one Christmas season while Anne and I served at Mount Vernon Nazarene University, we spent a fascinating evening in Columbus with two MVNU alumni. We walked to a nearby restaurant to purchase some Chinese food. We ate the meal by candlelight while sitting on the floor in a circle.

The meal was great. The two-to three-hour discussion was phenomenal. And, what a great blessing to Anne and me as well as to the other couple! Sharing our meal. Sharing our time. Sharing our journey. During the evening, Anne and I experienced what the Bible refers to as hospitality.

I spent a sabbatical semester at Yale University Divinity School in 1999 working through the personal library/collection of the late Roman Catholic theologian, Henri Nouwen. His writings challenged me to increasingly think about the relationship of spiritual hospitality to Christian leadership. We must model biblical hospitality before we mentor others in its practice.

How do we **create space and make room** (practice ‘hospitality’) on the job or in our home, especially when we experience conflict and even collision between good and godly people over our vision and values?

This practice of hospitality was a way of life fundamental to Christian identity for seventeen hundred years of the Christian church. Christine Pohl convincingly documents this practice in her book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality in Christian Tradition* (1999). In this 2009 commencement service, I want to challenge you to embrace the rich concept of spiritual hospitality in your leadership responsibilities. It has the potential of transforming relationships with those individuals with whom you live and work.

Biblically and theologically, the term hospitality is not limited to receiving a stranger into our homes – although it surely includes this dimension. Fundamentally, it is a core attitude toward others, which can be expressed by a great variety of behaviors. **Hospitality, biblically understood, challenges us to relate to others as if we were relating to Christ Himself.**

Hospitality primarily means the creation of free space – making room, to use Pohl’s words, in the midst of differences of thought or behaviors that may exist. With this perspective, the attitude of hospitality helps us to make room or create space for those with whom we live and work. The strange and the stranger can enter and become a friend. It is being to others with whom you live and work a living witness of the risen Christ.

The gift of Christian hospitality is the opportunity we provide for the colleague, coworker, guest, stranger, family member or friend to find her or his own way. It enables us to consider an alternative way of thinking from those who may be very different from us. This gift to others invites them to contribute insights derived from these unique gifts and abilities, even in the context of differences of thought and behavior. As leaders practicing hospitality, we often serve as angels of God without even knowing it. It is an art that more Christians need to cultivate.

Let me share two insights into this fascinating relationship between “spiritual hospitality” and Christian leadership.

I. The gift of spiritual hospitality is a love gift to Christ. Colossians 3:17, 23-24 reminds us that our service to others is service to the Lord Christ. In our efforts we can be hurt, misunderstood and rejected, or we can be appreciated, affirmed and accepted. The response, however, does not dictate our action. We serve others because He first loved us.

Let me share a very personal illustration. Following my retirement from MVNU, I received a letter from an alumnus. After a warm greeting, he said, “I want you to know I appreciate the profound impact you had on my life while I was at MVNU. Having entered the university as an atheist, I found you to be far and away one of the most interesting people I had the opportunity to hear in chapel ... You believed, more fully than I believed anything in my life, every word you said, especially when it came to your love for the students of

MVNU. You and your wife were so kind to me. I still remember fondly the meals my friends and I had with you and your wife in your home and the days you would sit among us in the dining commons for lunch. These are some of my fondest memories.”

The alumnus goes on to talk about his family and his present work as a leader in a technology company. He then asked me a leadership question, “How do I build up the trust of the people with whom I work?”

I remember intensely wanting to create space and make room for the strange and the strangers within the student body. In so doing, I was not only serving students; I was serving Christ. However, the truth is that I do not remember this student.

The mystery of spiritual hospitality is in how often our small tasks are translated by grace into God’s great work. Service to others through making room and creating space is service to Christ. Remember the concluding words from Matthew 25:40, “*The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’*”

Our gifts of hospitality to others are not selective spiritual gifts given by God to only a few for use in the kingdom. Rather, our gifts of care and concern to others are practical expressions on the job and in the home of our love for Christ.

For sure, a commitment to a leadership lifestyle of spiritual hospitality requires some tough answers to the question: How will my bias for spiritual hospitality impact the way I live, learn, work, and lead? This is a huge leadership question. Spiritual hospitality in the real world in which we live and work takes time, patience, and understanding.

Remember, in practicing spiritual hospitality, we serve Christ. Through making room and creating space for the strange and the strangers, the potential is created that they will grow and mature in Christ.

Inasmuch as the gift of spiritual hospitality is a love gift to Christ ...

II. The gift of spiritual hospitality is also a love gift from Christ.

The miracle of miracles is that we are blessed when we reach out to others. Christ turns our gifts of hospitality to others into gifts from Him to us. We find our Lord in the midst of our service to others. How often we experience God's abiding presence in the midst of our very ordinary expressions of making room and creating space for those with whom we live and work!

Compassionate action to students, family members, or co-workers is being to others a living witness of the risen Christ (Acts 1:22). A blessing to others, perhaps. A God-given "yes," for sure, to us! Something happens to us and in us as we reach out to others with gifts of hospitality. What a miracle of God's mercy! His grace flows to us and through us when we work, play, and lead with "*the mind of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 2:16b)!

To embrace this conviction to lead by making room and creating space requires us to ask the question: "What will it mean for me to be a Christian leader as a public-school teacher, businessman or businesswoman, faculty member, spouse or parent?" When misunderstandings are frequent, expectations are intense, and rejection is obvious.

The mature and the immature, the Christian and the non-Christian, the saint and the hypocrite may work or study alongside each other. And we have the responsibility to lead them, teach them, care for them, listen to them, and pray with them! There may also be friends in your lives – at home, on the job, or in your local church – who will question if you really have what it takes to be a leader, the kind of holy leader about which I have spoken in this service.

Are there risks? Yes! Hurts? Yes! Pain? Yes! Disappointment? Yes!

Yet, with this theology of holiness and passion for servant leadership also comes God's blessing, anointing, presence, and wisdom! God has a way of using our availability and our efforts toward others in ways we could never imagine. In the process, He blesses us in ways we never dreamed possible!

In leading with a bias toward people, not power, you and I increasingly communicate to others that we care deeply for them as we:

Honor their time.
Value their work.
Build their confidence.
Increase their competence.
Support their decisions.
Hear their words.
Network their ideas.
Affirm their dreams.
Simplify their assignments.
Strengthen their faith.

The evidence of leadership is seen in the lives of the followers.

In so leading, 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 happens within us. But what happens to us is transformative!

We grow. We change. We mature. 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.

Again, the gift of hospitality – this gift of creating space and making room for others, by grace alone, becomes a love gift from Christ to us. We grow and mature in our faith as we increasingly practice hospitality.

Remember, the miracle of miracles is that we are blessed when we reach out to others in Jesus' name.

In conclusion, let me remind you that fundamentally, the relationship between spiritual hospitality and Christian leadership is much more than being nice, feeding friends, or enduring hard to get along with co-workers, colleagues, family members, or friends.

It is a way of life for leaders who are passionately Christian and dictates how we approach those with whom we live, work, and serve. For the strange and the strangers, the disenfranchised and lonely, our family members and friends, creating space and making room for them is the essence of hospitality, biblically understood.

We experience the surprises of God in our lives in the process of enabling others to grow and mature. Through providing space and making room for others to change, we are given space by God to grow and mature in Christlikeness.

Spiritual hospitality is nothing less than God's amazing grace working in and through us as Christian leaders! I challenge you to pursue this nearly forgotten practice in the Christian tradition.

Join me in seeking to discover the rich implications of spiritual hospitality, especially as it relates to those with whom we work (or will work). By God's grace, determine to create space and make room on Monday for the strange and the strangers with whom you work. In so doing you will increasingly practice spiritual hospitality and live out the MVNU motto, "To seek to learn is to seek to serve."

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. Think of someone who has shown expressions of hospitality to you. How has that hospitality impacted you? How has it motivated and shaped your own expressions of hospitality to others?
2. Think of those to whom you have shown hospitality. Why did you make the effort to do so? How could your expressions of hospitality be enhanced by the remembrance that such expressions of hospitality are to Christ?
3. Think of when you have shown hospitality to others. In making space for them, how were you enhanced by the experience? How could your expressions of hospitality be enhanced by the remembrance that such expressions of hospitality are from Christ? To whom would Christ have you show greater hospitality?



Chapter Twelve

Staying with it: The “Grace Gift” of Tenacity

Commencement Address, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, England

A Salvation Army officer graduated several years ago from Mount Vernon Nazarene University with a Master of Ministry degree. She wrote to me following a class I taught in the program. Among other comments, she stated, “I cannot get away from the discussion of St. Paul’s admonition to Archippus in Colossians 4:17, *‘Do not walk away from the assignment God has given you.’*”

The officer continued, “The hardest orders I have received ... have been those to stay in my assignment and continue God’s work for me there.” She concluded, “Staying orders were a lot harder to swallow than marching orders.”

Who is this Archippus to whom Paul admonishes? There are only two references to him in the New Testament: Colossians 4:17 and Philemon 2. The Colossian passage tells Archippus, his friend, to complete the work God has given him to do. Philemon 2 implies that he is a leader in a house church; possibly the pastor of the church of Laodicea.

The message from Paul to Archippus is clear: “Don’t walk away from the leadership assignment God has given to you.”

Paul’s message to this rather unknown Christian leader is my final word to you before you graduate from the Nazarene Theological College, Manchester. Never give up on a God-given assignment until He releases you from the responsibility.

Don’t fall apart with the first round of disappointments or problems, when your co-workers are grouchy, or the boss expects too much. Don’t quit when the pressure is on, when others are encouraging you to jump ship or change

churches, and when other opportunities seem so inviting. Don't give up!

If God has given you an assignment, led you to a job, or called you to be a faithful pastor or lay leader in a local congregation – be tenacious in that assignment or responsibility until God releases you.

For years, I had this poem hidden in my office so only I saw it:

Don't Quit

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh.
 When care is pressing you down a bit,
 Rest if you must but don't you quit.
Life is strange with its twists and turns
As everyone of us sometimes learns,
 And many a failure turns about
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up though the pace seems slow –
 You may succeed with another blow.
 Success is failure turned inside out –
 The silver tint of the cloud of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
 It may be near when it seems so far;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit –
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.
 (John Greenleaf Whittier, date unknown)

Why not quit? Because in these assignments, it is the Lord Christ whom you are serving, not people! As love and faith go together, so does service and perseverance!

As Nazarene Theological College graduates, be tenacious in pursuing God's will and way in your home, on the job, with those in need, and with your local church. Never, never, never, never give up!

Remember the admonition of the Apostle Paul to Archippus, *Do not walk away from your work until God releases you from it.*

Recently I've been thinking about tenacity. It is always needed, often painful, and a gracious gift. Permit me to elaborate for a few moments on these thoughts.

1. The Need for Tenacity

Audacious tenacity – God-inspired and God-empowered tenacity – spiritual tenacity, if you will – is needed in the home, on the job, with others in need, in the local congregation, and at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester. We don't know why Paul was compelled to speak these words to Archippus. However, Paul's words to his friend cause us to question why we are so often tempted to give up on a project, an assignment, a responsibility, or a calling before genuine release comes from the Lord.

Why are we tempted to give up as Christian workers? For certain, the enemy of our soul wants to defeat the Christian worker. *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Ephesians 6:12).

Another reason we give up is that the problems facing us at times seem insurmountable or impossible to solve. In the book, *Mastering Ministry* (1992), Ortland and Ortland talk about the three time periods all problems have.

Zone A is called “Desire to Achieve” and is characterized by idealism, perhaps naiveté, and maybe apprehension.

Zone B is called “Desire to Quit” and is characterized by confusion and conflict when problems arise. This is the danger zone: problems need to be separated, spelled out and tackled one by one.

Zone B will end in one of two ways: we will quit and abort the project, or we will persevere with “bulldog” tenacity, resisting the temptation to drop out.

We can choose to believe that the God who has promised never to leave us or forsake us is present, even in a seemingly impossible situation. We can choose to believe that, by the grace of God, there is a way through, over, under, or around the confusing situation.

This leads us to Zone C. Zone C is called “Achievement and Growth” and is characterized by faith and personal satisfaction, a sense of realism, maturity, and expectation.

We also give up because of misconceptions regarding the Christian life, work and ministry. These misconceptions encourage us to give up before the job is done. Have you heard of them?

Some people believe that progress is only being made when things are running smoothly or that moving to another assignment will make things better. Others think that bigger is better, or that a difficult problem cannot be solved. Some believe that success is gaining everyone’s approval, or that suffering cannot be of God. Still others feel that failure is final or that I don’t count. One of the greatest misconceptions is that good and godly people do not differ or make mistakes.

Graduates, as you pray and believe for God’s leadership in the next phase of your life, be known as one who has spiritual tenacity – God-given tenacity – in your graduate studies, on the job, in Christian service, and in your local church. Do not jump from job to job or from church to church. **The real test of a person’s character is what it takes to stop her or him.**

Let the characteristic of “stick-to-itiveness” infect you and hold you steady. The Need for Tenacity Is Great!

2. The Pain of Tenacity

The tendency, I believe, is to move on when pressure builds, we do not get our way, or the recognition we receive isn’t what we desire. To stay in the situation in the midst of conflict, uncomfortableness, misunderstanding, power struggles, conflicting situations and inappropriate expectations until God releases us from these assignments is painful, very painful.

Enduring hardship through extraordinary times and situations requires a resolute faith in the God who has placed us in these assignments. And in these painful experiences, we must intensely believe that we remain where God has placed us until He releases us, because we serve Him in these painful times, not the people who sometimes inflict the pain.

Paul's journeys, as outlined in the latter half of the book of Acts, were filled with similar experiences! Listen again to Acts 27:25, “[K]eep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.”

After being in jail for two years, Paul and others were on their way to Rome. Paul's admonition to the men on board the ship was spoken in the middle of a typhoon, a shipwreck, and no food for 14 days. But God had earlier told Paul “you must also testify in Rome” (Acts 23:11).

In the midst of the pain of getting to Rome, the jail experience, typhoon, shipwreck, and no food, Paul stated emphatically, “... keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.”

For sure, there is often pain in staying with the call of God until He releases us from the assignment He has given to us.

There is a need for tenacity, even in the midst of often great pain in tenacity. Now let me testify to:

3. The Gift of Tenacity

This gift of “stick-to-itiveness” – endurance or perseverance – (*Cambridge English Dictionary*) is not a gift we give to other people. By no means. Rather, the gift of tenacity is a grace gift from God to us for the spiritual growth, Christian maturity, and personal development we experience in the midst of staying with it until God releases us!

On many occasions while leading Mount Vernon Nazarene University, I stated, “leading the university is the greatest journey of faith I have ever experienced.” In exercising tenacity – staying power, I became the greatest beneficiary. In choosing to believe that God was in the midst of a process, problem or confrontation, I grew spiritually. I matured in Christ significantly.

Why? Because I had to lead from my knees in dependency upon the One who had called me to the assignment, believing He would complete in me and my work exactly what He had designed! I prayed many times during the 18 years I served the university, not just that the Lord would be with me and give me wisdom for my work, but that He would carry me through the difficult times.

Remember Moses and his excuses before God? God said to Moses, *“I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt”* (Exodus 3:10). Moses said, *“Who am I that I should go ...”* (Exodus 3:11b). He continued, *“Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue”* (Exodus 4:10). God’s response to Moses was, *“I will be with you!”* (Exodus 3:12).

He says to us, *“It is I – the great ‘I am’ who calls, empowers, keeps and carries you.”* We are the blessed, graced, gifted and called children of God! God reminds us through Paul, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9a).

Remember these prison words of Paul, *“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through Him who gives me strength”* (Philippians 4:12b-13).

4. Tenacity, with contentment! What a profound gift from God to us and in us!

God enables us to “stay the course” until He releases us from an assignment! And who benefits the most? Only God knows. But, for sure, we who endure by God’s grace are blessed. Tenacity is a grace gift from God to us!

He can work in us to become the change we may desire to see in others. Though we do not have the power to change others, change can take place within us! In the midst of experiencing honest and intense differences between some good and godly people with whom we work, the leader, by God’s amazing grace, can be changed and transformed! What a gift of grace to us who endure in the assignments we believe God has given to us.

I close this commencement address with a reminder of Paul's words to Archippus: Do not walk away from the assignment God gives you!

Remember this thought:

“When the valley is deep
When the mountain is steep
When the body is weary
When we stumble or fall

When the choices are hard
When we're battered and scarred
When we've spent our resources
When we've given all –
In Jesus' name, we press on.
In Jesus' name, we press on.” (Burgess, 2001)

Again, I congratulate the graduates. You have completed your program of studies at Nazarene Theological College. There will be other seemingly impossible situations in your work of ministry. In those times that will most certainly come to you in the months and years ahead, as they will for each one of us in this service, press on, and be transformed by the grace of God.

Questions for personal and/or group reflection:

1. How can you discern between a God-ordained release from a responsibility and the Zone B “Desire to Quit”?
2. What phrase(s) of the “Don’t Quit” poem most resonates with you when reflecting on a time when you tenaciously held on? What phrase most speaks to you if you are experiencing a time when it is difficult to hold on?
3. How can you intentionally stress the importance of tenacity for those you are modeling and mentoring in leadership character?

Epilogue

During my tenure as the Mount Vernon Nazarene University president, I was invited to participate with other leaders in a conference at Ashland Theological Seminary on the occasion of the dedication of the new Sandburg Leadership Center. I was given the subject of “Leadership Character Makes a Difference in my Work” (Parrott, 2002).

Toward the beginning of my presentation, I shared the passage of scripture from Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: *“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up ... two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”*

I shared with the conference participants that a few months earlier, I had the privilege of speaking to a group of educators in Johannesburg, South Africa. The setting was the first Consultation on Global Faculty Development for the Church of the Nazarene. The educators, particularly from the two-thirds world, spent a week together probing the possibilities of an Academy for International Education. My part in the conference program was to lead two sessions on the subject of institutional collaboration.

Something happened to me while I was there. My purpose was to assist other educators. Instead, I found myself asking some hard questions about both my leadership character at MVNU and the degree to which I model the partnership and collaboration I emphasize at the institution I serve. These were probing questions about my personal integrity. As I was speaking to them, I found that I was speaking to myself as the MVNU President.

I returned to the MVNU campus determined to share with the faculty and staff my moment of truth, to outline some specific steps for us to take together, and to request for the campus community to hold me accountable to my word. If trust is the foundation of effective leadership, then I had to model the change I sought to produce in the MVNU faculty and staff before institutional collaboration would become a way of life on our campus.

I sincerely wanted to increase the level of involvement and trust between the administration and the campus community of employees. The power of three (or more) as affirmed in the Ecclesiastes passage is a powerful image and necessary concept for an institution seeking to embrace collaboration as strategy.

We were in the midst of a three-year, Teagle Foundation funded grant for intentionally increasing institutional collaboration on campus. Indeed, shaping institutional collaboration as institutional strategy was the focus of the three-year initiative.

This was my passion. But it would not happen simply by the university president making pronouncements. It could happen if we within the academic community passionately believed with Helen Keller that “alone we can do so little, together we can do so much” (Lash, 1980).

More specifically, I shared with the campus community that night the following commitments in detail (although below reflects only the outline):

- I want to affirm to you that I am your brother in Christ with whom you can work as together we fulfill our mutual vocation or calling at MVNU.
- With this affirmation will come a renewed emphasis on intentional staff and faculty development.
- I will work closely with a task force specifically and with the campus community generally to streamline the administrative and decision-making structures. “None of us is as smart as all of us.”
- I want each of you to review and comment on the draft revised vision statement before a final revision is prepared for the Board of Trustees to approve.
- In light of enrollment growth projections for the next twenty years and the recent land acquisitions, I ask each of you to review the task force draft scenarios to revise the MVNU master campus development plan before the recommendations are forwarded to the Board of Trustees for consideration.

- I want to find ways to appropriately involve and update the campus community regarding progress made in developing an annual operating budget proposal for the Board of Trustees to consider.

I concluded my remarks to the faculty and staff by stating, “In a new and profound way since my Johannesburg experience, to a degree I don’t think has characterized me in the past, I want to understand, embrace and lead this academic faith community from the perspective reflected in the commitments outlined above.”

Why would I put myself in such a vulnerable position of accountability regarding these commitments? I could easily have kept them to myself and allowed them to guide and to shape my leadership moving forward without such a public display.

Effective ministry is always incarnated and enfleshed; lived out in front of those with whom we live and lead! The words of Jesus in Luke 6:40 challenged me continually during my years in higher education leadership: “... *everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher*” (or their school president, college professor, pastor, or ‘discipling’ mentor)!

What is it about us that we want our family, friends, faith community, and new followers of Christ to catch from us? What did I want the university faculty and staff to witness in me as their leader? How do we communicate a lifestyle within the faith communities we lead that is distinctly Christian and self-giving at the core?

How do we pass on to others what has been so bountifully passed to us ... and in such a way that they are qualified to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2)?

This book was designed to address these questions.

We want those who know us to catch from us a Christlike servant spirit, committed to motivating, equipping, reconciling, and enabling others to also serve in Jesus’ name. We want emerging Christian leaders to catch our passion and commitment to model and mentor Christian character, integrity, and grace as our testimonies of holiness of heart and life continually transform the way we live and lead.

Whatever else it means, communicating a lifestyle demands taking the principle of imitation, modeling, or exemplifying seriously. This principle was key in Christian leadership for eighteen centuries. We must recapture this principle if we take the biblical mandate seriously to be mentors and models to younger Christians in the faith. Recall the words of St. Paul:

- “Follow my example as I follow ... Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).
- “You ought to follow our example” (2 Thessalonians 3:7).
- “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice” (Philippians 4:9a).
- “We did this ... in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate” (2 Thessalonians 3:9).

Paul gave these instructions with humility to the Christians under his care. We must do the same for those with whom we live and for whom we are responsible.

The broad principle of imitation must possess us if we are to effectively pass on to others within the Christian fellowship. This principle is developed and made specific in Ephesians 4:25-32. The passage outlines a modeling and mentoring leadership lifestyle within the Christian community (Chapter Six).

Paul, in these verses, is not so much talking about administrative techniques, but Christian attitudes and values underlying our actions and activities within the community. We are co-laborers together in the body of Christ (v25). We relate with others in the fellowship out of an “I-Thou” frame of reference, as Martin Buber stated in *I and Thou* (1970).

The people with whom we live and work are God’s own creation to be treated with respect, dignity, and grace. The opposite, according to Buber (1970), is to relate to others within our sphere of influence in an “I-It” relationship, as individuals to be manipulated by us for our benefit and “things” to be used for our purposes.

Because of the fundamental Christian imperatives in Ephesians 4, we are to be **honest** with the believers, **immediate** in dealing with conflict among us, **upbuilding** with our words, and **forgiving**, even when others do not forgive us.

We express gentleness, humility, patience, and supportiveness through words and deeds that consistently communicate these leadership character imperatives: I love you; I accept you; I respect you; I need you; I trust you; I serve you; I forgive you; and I accept your forgiveness.

With intention and grace, we must never permit the painful words and deeds of others to create bitterness and resentment within us.

Paul's instructions are not psychological in nature; they are deeply theological. **The Spirit of God is deeply concerned with the speech and character of His people** (Ephesians 4:30a; see also Chapter One).

Life together in Christian community is not an option for the modeling and mentoring leader. It is an imperative, even in conflictual situations. Because relationships are so important to us, we “care enough to confront” our brother or sister in Christ. We care too much about the relationship to ignore destructive behavior. We speak the truth in love, and we also care enough to allow our brother or sister in Christ to speak truthfully to us.

In the midst of conflicting expectations and seemingly irreconcilable differences for the Christian leader in a local congregation, mission organization, Christian college, a church governing board, or in a host of other communities, the challenge is to lead in these often conflicting situations with “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16b; see also Chapter One).

I am often challenged by the words of “The Servant Song” (Gillard, 1976), printed at the end of Chapter Nine. The song leads me in my thinking to Philippians 2:5-8: “*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!*”

Each time I sing the hymn or read this passage, I am haunted by a question. Is it really possible to be a servant – a modeling and mentoring servant leader – in the real world of the contemporary Christian community with all of the conflicting demands and seemingly irreconcilable expectations and pressures on the leader?

My contention is that, regardless of where God places us as leaders and with whom He places us within the Christian fellowship, we must have at the core of our being at least three compelling convictions (Chapter Nine):

- A **vision** of who we are as “*the people of God*” (1 Peter 2:10b) (we are the graced, blessed, called, and gifted “*people of God*” with a ministry to each other and a mission to the world);
- A **passion** for what we are called to do in the work of God (we are to walk worthy of our calling to participate with God in the reconciling of the world to Himself); and
- An **obsession** for how we live together as the family of God (we are to live together as a community of faith, nurturing and supporting each other in ministry and mission).

These convictions are the heart and soul of the modeling and mentoring servant leader. They comprise the essence of the “The Servant Song” and capture the self-giving passage in Philippians 2. I am coming to understand that if leaders in the homes, churches or universities are to effectively **communicate a lifestyle** to think and act in a Christlike manner, we must wholeheartedly embrace these three leadership convictions.

While these character imperatives may not be found in the latest secular textbooks on leadership, they are foundational for Christian servant leaders who both take the principle of imitation seriously and want the members of their faith communities to catch a Christlike serving spirit from them.

A passion continues to burn within me to mentor emerging Christian leaders and model before them Christian character, integrity, and grace as my testimony of holiness of heart and life continually transforms the way I live and lead.

I continue to think about: integrity, character, vulnerability, community, courage, conviction, gratitude, hope, and trust. These words shape the leader who seeks to lead from a Christian value foundation. This issue is not so much a “checklist” of accomplishments. Far more fundamental is the growth of the leader both in competence and character and in the growth of the led!

I also reflect often about the broader theme of leadership character, particularly as the imperative relates to modeling and mentoring within our communities, including our homes and churches and universities. In the midst of diverse personalities, conflicting expectations, differing faith traditions, distinct assignments, and various levels of maturity, leadership character becomes the issue for the leader.

Character counts, really counts!

If the chapters in this book ignite a passion within you and assist you in “passing on to others what has been passed to you,” please let me know. I want to communicate with you. Contact me at: lfairbanks@boardserve.org or www.boardserve.org.

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Dr. Fairbanks authored the book, *Leading Decisively! Leading Faithfully! Reflections and Markers*. The book has been translated into seven languages. He co-authored the 2008 leadership text, *Learning to be Last: Leadership for Congregational Transformation* and co-authored in 2012, *Best Practices for Effective Boards*. He created the teaching video, “Building Better Boards: A Conversation”, produced in 2012, now available in English, Spanish and Burmese. In addition, he has written numerous books and articles, including the ministerial course of study text, *Leading the People of God: Servant Leadership for a Servant Community*.

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