

THE MEASURE OF GREATNESS  
Nazarene Higher Education Consortium of Swaziland  
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In early March of last year, I was in Manila, Philippines. I sat in a coffee shop with two Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary graduate students from another region of the world.

During the conversation that evening, the enjoyable discussion shifted to the rather serious probing of caring for others. Julie was a Social Work major at SNU; Brian majored in Theology. Both were resident directors during the last two years of university life. They were leaders on this campus. They are leaders in their present assignments. They will continue to be leaders in their vocations in the years to come. Just like many of you!

In the midst of the seemingly heavy Saturday evening conversation, the comment was made, “caring for others is the measure of greatness.” Not brilliance in the classroom, money in the bank, status nor position. But, “caring for others... is the measure of greatness.”

I’ve been thinking about the discussion in Manila with Brian and Julie. What does “caring for others” look like in the real world and everyday realities in which you *presently and in the future* will live, work and *lead*?

I read of a former professional sports star who said, speaking of his university basketball coach, “My development as a person was as important to him as my development as a player.”

What a compliment to a coach or parent, friend or employer, employee or pastor, faculty member or college administrator. The priority concerns of these individuals are persons to be developed and not a “things” or “its” to be manipulated. It is greatness, indeed, when we focus more on the *person* around us than on our *power or position*.

Three questions have captivated me during my years in Christian higher education:

Question #1. How can we live together as Christians so that our relationships are *redemptive* and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?

Question #2. If, “in Christ, all things are made new,” then how does our relationship with Christ *transform* the way we lead?

Question #3. In conflict situations, especially when *seemingly irreconcilable expectations* are placed on the leader, how can we lead in those situations, really lead, with “the mind of Christ”?

These are leadership questions. Our responses to them will, I believe, determine **our** measure of greatness. Good and godly people will differ and often collide with us over vision and values. In these moments, *great* leaders choose to “care deeply.”

## **CARING LEADERS:**

**#1. Speak Gracefully. They watch the words they use. Words spoken can bless or “destroy” people.**

According to Eph. 4:25, God uses the words spoken to others within the Body of Christ to extend His grace through us to them. What a powerful and probing thought! Paul encourages members of the Body to use their speech for the help and benefit of others.

For Paul, dialog is a sacrament. We are to converse with each other in such a way that our words become a channel of the very grace of God. Our conversation is to “minister grace” to the hearer. There is no empty room for empty chatter or degrading remarks. In Colossians 4:6 he admonishes, “Let your conversation be always full of grace.” Our words are to be seasoned with salt.

In biblical anthropology, the mouth is representative of the whole heart. It reveals the whole person. Jesus said, “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). St. Paul emphasized that our speech reveals the quality of our relationship with Christ.

Paul is not talking about a technique, but a fundamental attitude toward the other person. Desire deeply to “bless” people with your words.

Caring Leaders speak gracefully. They also:

**#2. Live Gratefully. In the good days and the not so good days, they don't whine or cry. They *chose* to be grateful.**

Christians can feel good about themselves—gifts, talents, and abilities—until we compare ourselves with the gifts, talents, and abilities of *other* people. Comparison can eat us alive. It feeds the sense of inferiority many of us have experienced.

What is the antidote to comparison? Three profound biblical qualities:

Gratitude!

Thankfulness!

Appreciation!

In every situation, choose to be grateful (1 Thess. 5:18).

Caring Leaders speak *gracefully* and live *gratefully*. They also:

**#3. Listen Intently. They seek first to understand. Understanding, not agreement, is the key to conflict management.**

Believe that good and godly people *can* have honest and intense differences. Yes. Good and godly people sometimes *collide* over vision and values. You may have testimonies to this reality!

This is why servant leaders must possess a *theological* vision. We want to see people through God's eyes. Theological vision precedes *organizational* vision (what we want for the church, college, regional assignment, or workplace). God can give us “eyes” to really see the people with whom we live and work and “ears” to really hear what they want and need to say to us.

In the book, "The Leadership Challenge" the authors conclude, "Leadership is an affair of the heart, not of the head."

**#4. Forgive Freely. Caring leaders are proactive in extending forgiveness. A spirit of forgiveness transforms and empowers leaders.**

Remember the words of Jesus on the Cross: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34, KJV). Was Jesus naïve? No. Jesus was not going to permit what others *said* against Him or the evil they *did* against Him to create a bitterness or resentment *within* Him and thereby create a rupture in the relationship with God.

Caring Leaders speak gracefully, live gratefully, listen intently and forgive freely. They also:

**5. Lead Humbly. Leaders must be decisive and avoid paralysis. They seldom enjoy the luxury of having all the information they need before making necessary decisions. Arrogance does not characterize caring leaders. Rather, they lead with grace and humility.**

Leaders move between two competing needs: the need for long-range and strategic planning for our assignments and the need for the daily routine of budget balancing, personnel development, facility maintenance, and the management of the myriad of interpersonal conflicts. *Caring* leaders balance these twin and sometimes conflicting responsibilities with great grace and much humility. They lead from their knees.

Affirm, respect, care and pray for others, especially those with whom you differ—even collide. This is at the heart of what it means to “lead with the mind of Christ.”

To lead decisively with *grace and humility* demands that you and I continue to develop and nurture leadership skills> We desire to lead with Christian maturity.

Learn to ask good question. Then, *listen* to the responses given.

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

1. Honor *their* time.

2. Value *their* work.
3. Build *their* confidence.
4. Increase *their* competence.
5. Support *their* decisions.
6. Hear *their* words.
7. Network *their* ideas.
8. Affirm *their* dreams.
9. Simplify *their* assignments.
10. Strengthen *their* faith.

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

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

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

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

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

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

To summarize: outstanding leaders are usually known for their decisiveness and fierce resolve. For great *Christian* leaders, you will also find that they:

1. Speak Gracefully. They watch the words they speak.
2. Live Gratefully. They don't whine or cry but are grateful.
3. Listen Intently. They seek first to understand.
4. Forgive Freely. They are proactive in extending forgiveness.
5. Lead Humbly. They harness the power of community life and make decisions with much grace and deep humility.
6. Pray Earnestly. They believe that God can work in *them* to become the change they desire to see in others.

Caring Christians...**Care Deeply**. They value people, not power.

## CONCLUSION

Back to Manila. Near the end of March of last year I took the two students on a Saturday evening to a good restaurant in Manila.

Interestingly, with us that evening was a Japanese man, a fellow student at APNTS, whose wife and son had recently returned to Tokyo for a few weeks in order for the son to enroll in a Japanese university. Brian and Julie were concerned that this Japanese student, and their best friend on campus and a former missionary to Taiwan. He was lonely without his family and not eating properly as he studied many hours to complete his semester assignments.

In and of itself, treating a Japanese friend to his first ever full slab of ribs is not necessarily a sign of caring...or of greatness. But when you place this seemingly small evening event along with numerous other unrelated events and expressions of kindness, to this Japanese student and to other students as well, it begins to speak of a pattern of caring for others...and of greatness. Many simple, unrelated and random acts of kindness begin to make a big, very big statement. They care for others.

To each member in the class of 2009, be known as one who goes around doing good. Not just at home but in this city, your local congregation, and especially in your ministry throughout this beautiful country of Swaziland. Let your gentleness be known to all, especially those who differ with you over vision and values.

Happy are those who dream big God-inspired dreams ...of caring for others, especially those with whom you live and work. Determine to make this care and concern for others – this gentleness and kindness-- *your* measure of greatness! Amen.

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