

DRIVING FORCES IN THE CHRISTIAN LEADER
Matthew 20:20-28
CHAPEL MESSAGE
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INTRODUCTION

1. Last fall, I was asked to make a presentation in January of this year to “Leadership Knox,” a program for emerging leaders in Knox County. My assignment was to speak on the subject of: “My Top Five Lessons Learned About Leading Others.”

2. As I prepared the presentation, I reminded myself of MVNU’s vision statement: “Mount Vernon Nazarene University: an academic community of faith shaping Christ-like Leaders for lifelong service.” Since my presentation in January, I have pondered the relationship between what I said to Knox County leaders and MVNU students as emerging leaders in their vocation following graduation. The five *driving forces* within me – principles I shared with the Leadership Knox group – characterize me at my best, and convict me at my worst. These principles summarize the top five lessons I have learned over the years about Christ-like leadership.

3. By the way, my definition of Christian Leadership is as follows:

“Christian 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 and to understand, accept and fulfill their vocation (calling) in life, their ministry to each other and their mission in the world.”

4. Three questions further frame my remarks to you about leading others. I have pursued these questions since 1978 when I moved to a cross-cultural teaching assignment in the European Nazarene College near Schaffhausen, Switzerland:
 - “How can we live together in a faith community so that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ?”

- If “In Christ, all things are made new,” then how does our relationship with Christ convert or transform the way we lead, especially within a faith community?
 - In the midst of conflicting expectations, and often irreconcilable differences, placed upon the Christian leader, what does it mean – really mean – in these often conflicting situations to lead with the mind of Christ?
5. It has been through wrestling with these questions that I have learned (and am still learning) the following five lessons, that have become convictions within me, about leading others in a faith community. Ask yourself if these five *driving forces* relate to you and your present or future leadership assignment.

Driving Force # 1: “Watch the words.”

Principle: Words we speak can bless or curse people.

- What comes out of my mouth reflects what is in my heart, Jesus said. In New Testament perspective, dialog is a sacrament. Our words are to minister grace to others (Eph. 4:29).
- As leaders we either:
 - Encourage or discourage,
 - Uplift or “putdown,”
 - Speak positively or negatively,
 - Focus on the other person, or focus on self.
- I often ask myself: how do others feel when they leave my presence?
 - Stronger or weaker?
 - Larger or smaller about themselves?
 - Confident or “scared”?
 - Blessed or “cursed”?
- “*When the door of the steam bath is continually left open, the heat inside rapidly escapes through it.*” (Henri Nouwen)

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

Driving Force #1: **“Watch the words.”**

Driving Force # 2: **“Don’t whine -- be grateful.”**

Principle: **Comparison is the root of inferiority.**

- Comparison is so pervasive in our society – the workforce, the family, in our communities and within ourselves.
- We can feel good about ourselves – our gifts, talents and abilities – until we compare ourselves with the gifts, talents and abilities of other people.
- We can believe our co-workers are adequate for the jobs we give to them until we compare their work – creativity, innovation, energy, collegiality – with others.
- Comparison can eat us alive ... And rob us of joy, relationships, confidence and peace, sap our energy and drain us of enthusiasm. (Example: house in Bethany)
- Comparison can transform us from being a delightful “boss” into a preoccupied, dejected, negative and disgruntled individual others endure.
- What is the antidote to comparison?
 - *Gratitude!*
 - *Thankfulness!*
 - *Appreciation!*
- We can choose to accept the people and provision God in His wisdom has given to us.
- We can choose to work to bring out the best in others through seeing the best in them.
- In every situation, we can choose to be grateful, believing that God is in the midst of all that we are doing.
- Gratitude is the “life-giving” antidote to the negative impact of comparison.

Driving Forces #1 & 2: **“Watch the words.”**
 “Don’t whine – be grateful.”

Driving Force # 3: **“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.
- I can tell you, after 25 years in higher education administration, that *good and godly people sometimes collide over vision and values.*
- This is why I have come to see that theological vision (what I believe about people / what I “see” in them) must precede organizational vision.
- In conflict situations with good and godly people, I have learned to ask two growth producing questions:
 - “What can I learn? How can I change?”
- Likewise, I have learned at least two growth inhibiting questions:
 - “Why me? What if...?”

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

Driving Forces #1, 2, 3: **“Watch the words.”**
 “Don’t whine – be grateful.”
 “Seek first to understand.”

Driving Force # 4: **“Be Proactive in extending forgiveness.”**

Principle: **A spirit of forgiveness transforms and empowers leaders.**

- One of my profound life lessons is this: forgiveness has little to do with the external environment around me, and everything to do with my “internal” condition!
- **Remember this:** extending forgiveness does not wait for the “other” to request forgiveness.
 - Example: Jesus on the cross: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”
 - Was Jesus naïve? Did he really believe that those who were killing him did not know what they were doing? No!
 - Did Jesus believe that by extending forgiveness, those who were slandering him and hurting him would cease their activity? No!
 - Jesus was not going to permit what others said against him or the evil they did against him to create bitterness or resentment within him and thereby rupture the relationship with God His Father. “It’s just not worth it,” Jesus seems to be saying.
 - “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do!”
- Extending forgiveness frees me from bondage to the other person.
- Too often, we permit persons who have offended us to control us.
- Remember this: *“Great leaders are shaped in the most challenging and difficult times.”*

Remember the first four driving forces:

“Watch the words.”

“Don’t whine – be grateful.”

“Seek first to understand.”

“Be Proactive in extending forgiveness.”

Driving Force # 5:

“Value people, not power.”

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.

- I often ask myself: Are MVNU employees stronger in their faith, more confident in themselves and more fulfilled in their work as a result of working at MVNU?
- Are MVNU students stronger in their faith, more confident in themselves and more fulfilled in their lives as a result of studying at MVNU?
- I lament the fact that I do not express appropriate or adequate appreciation, thanks and gratitude to MVNU faculty, staff and students.
- Over the years, I have tried to remember to trust my best moments when making decisions regarding employees.
- As leaders we must be passionate about communicating our personal and professional or institutional vision, mission and values to those with whom we work or for whom we are responsible.
 - We need to share often about our “overarching priorities.”
 - And systematically, we need to collectively focus on our core values. Refer to Core Mission booklet of the Church of the Nazarene and to MVNU’s values document, For This We Stand.
- This is my bottom line: I try to enlarge the vision of my people about the work they are doing – to see the big picture and to discover how they, in their particular assignment, fit into the grand scheme and purpose of the educational institution. I want faculty, staff and students to feel good about working at MVNU! I truly seek to value people, not power.

IN CONCLUSION:

- A. Let me summarize these *driving forces* that convict me at my worst and characterize me at my best.
1. I really want my words to be grace-giving, life-generating and inspiring to others and not discouraging, depressing and draining utterances.
 2. I really 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 really want to understand the people with whom I work and for them to understand me – even if we do not agree with each other.
4. I really 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 really 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.

B. I urge every one of you to yearn to be a Christian leader wherever God directs you, whatever work assignment He gives to you. Discover your own answers – inspired by God's word and His Holy Spirit– to the probing question, "If 'In Christ all things are made new,' then how does our relationship with Christ transform and convert the way we lead – in the university, in the office or school classroom, in the home or in the community?"

C. I believe that, whatever else you discover, you will find these *driving forces* in Christian Leaders:

1. Watch the words.
2. Don't whine, be grateful.
3. Seek first to understand.
4. Be proactive in extending forgiveness.
5. Value people, not power.

D. At the heart of these driving forces is a song in our hymnal. I ask you to stand and sing this song as we close the service. The song is entitled "The Servant Song" and is found on page 679. Please stand and sing this song convictionally. Think of a person or a group to which you need to sing this 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 night time 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 through.

When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony
Born of all we've know together
Of Christ's love and agony.

Sister, 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.