

A LEGACY OF A "WORTHY" LEADER
EPHESIANS 4:1-3
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November 2009

Introduction

The mandate for theological education is to shape Christian servant leaders to make a difference for Christ and His Kingdom in the 21st century. Let me state the mandate in the form of a question. Approximately fifty years from now, when nothing but death is before you, and nothing but memories behind you, what will you need to see in order to say, "*My life was a success!*"

Early in our ministry, we need to reflect on

- the values on which we stand;
- the qualities that characterize our life;
- the reputation by which we are remembered;
- the convictions by which we live and die;
- the legacy we will leave behind.

Remember: "The legacy you leave is the legacy you live." It is imperative today for each of us, in this graduation service, to ask some fundamental questions about our lives, our influence, and our legacy.

Ephesians 4:1 urges us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received. Am I now living a worthy life? How will people remember me? Do my present values, character qualities, reputation, and convictions reflect a "worthy" leader? A legacy is

something you leave behind after you leave a local church, your place of employment, or moved from your neighborhood.

Be assured that all of us will leave a legacy. Our legacy will probably be summarized in one sentence of less than 10 words. Positively or negatively. For example, summarize for me your parents. Your favorite teacher. Your mentor. A boss or a person who has influenced you greatly. Most likely, your summary of these people could be in one sentence, in ten words or less.

My challenge to the Seminary graduates is to prepare now to live a legacy of a "worthy" leader who is a Christian, a Servant, and a Spirit-filled Leader. Let me be more specific.

I. A "Worthy" Leader is a Christian Leader.

Listen carefully to Ephesians 4:2-3. Verses 2-3 focus on "living" the truth in Jesus' name in the setting or context wherein God places us. A poem was given to me by a student when Anne, Stephen, and I completed our work at European Nazarene Bible College.

What mark will I leave behind?

How will anyone ever know that I have been here?

What sign will tell the future traveler that I've existed?

Shall I carve it on the door? "I am here! Today, I exist."

I believe the deepest impression is made

In those moments when I can say, "I care, I love."

-- Leonard Nimoy

The calling to live as one who has accepted Christ is not just a calling for the Christian on Sundays. The challenge of the Ephesians passage and the poem is to live this "worthy" life throughout the week, in our home in the evenings, in the board meetings, and in our free time.

The chorus to a song written by J. Randall Dennis and John Mohr includes these words:

To love the Lord our God is the heartbeat of our mission,

The spring from which our service overflows,

Across the street or around the world, the mission's still the same

Proclaim and live the truth in Jesus' name.

Determine now to leave a legacy of being distinctively Christian...in your church and in your home, regardless of your leadership assignment. A "worthy" leader is a Christian leader.

II. A Worthy Leader is Servant Leader

Ephesians 5:19-21 reminds us that our words should provide encouragement, our attitude should express gratitude, our spirit should reflect mutual submission.

Our words should reflect encouragement (v. 19). Let your conversation--your words--reflect your Christian faith and values. Verse 19 tells us about our words, and verse 20 tells us about our attitudes.

Our attitude should reflect gratitude. Why is it that the world is full of bitter and critical people...

...who always complain;

...who always see the negative;

...who always believe the only way to build themselves up
is to tear others down;

...who are ungrateful, always reminding you of what
they don't have instead of focusing on what has been given
to them.

Bitter and critical people are found in various assignments, positions, our homes. They remain small with their thinking. We have so much...and remain so small in our thinking in contrast to others who have so little and yet are profoundly grateful.

One of the most moving spiritual moments I have ever experienced was in Manila, The Philippines, in July 1989. The occasion was a 4,000-strong Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. Delegates from 192 countries attended, including many Christians from third world countries like the Philippines where the annual per capital income is approximately \$700 per year.

Throughout the conference we would join hands and sing the chorus that is one of my favorites, *Give Thanks*.

Give thanks with a grateful heart,

Give thanks to the holy One,

Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son; (repeat)

And now let the weak say I am strong,

Let the poor say I am rich

Because of what the Lord has done for us.

Give thanks. We give thanks.

Determine now to be a grateful person wherever God places you to lead and for whatever He provides for you. The Ephesians 5 passage talks not only about our words and our attitude, but commands that our spirit should reflect mutual submission (v. 21). Our roles and responsibilities are different. I am an educational administrator; you are a pastor, faculty member or Christian layperson. Different roles, different responsibilities, different assignments, yet, the spirit with which we fulfill our unique roles, responsibilities, or assignments must reflect a spirit of mutual respect.

We relate to each other--regardless of the attitude of the other person--believing that the person with whom we speak and work is God's own creation. A person for whom Christ died. A person on whom we could have profound influence for Christ.

Living out these biblical principles of encouragement, gratitude, and mutual submission is not easy. But for the Christian servant leader, there is no option. The late Dr. Harold Reed, former president of Olivet Nazarene University, captured the spirit of servanthood in our leadership roles when he wrote, "Leadership is known by the personalities it enriches, not by those it dominates or captivates.... The evidence of leading is in the qualitative growth of the led."

- I. A "worthy" leader is a Christian leader.
- II. A "worthy" leader is a servant leader.
- III. A "Worthy" Leader is a Spirit-filled Leader

Read Ephesians 5:17-18 tells us to know what the will of the Lord is... *Be filled with the Spirit.*

In broad New Testament perspective, a Spirit-filled leader is a maturing Christlike and Christ-led leader. Being filled with God's Spirit means that we have entered into a vital, dynamic trust-relationship with God--in which the Spirit of Christ indwells within us--takes up residence and comes to live...in us. With this vital, dynamic trust-relationship, there is a singleness of purpose and a purity of motive.

Our plans, priorities, values, and leadership assignments are now viewed from God's perspective. They are lived out in light of His presence, anointing, and blessing in our homes where we live, in the offices where we work, and in the churches where we serve. The only way we can be truly Christian leaders and servant leaders is to be Spirit-filled leaders who possess and are led by the Spirit of Christ within us. A "worthy" leader is a Spirit-filled leader.

Conclusion

Each of us must wrestle with this question: "What will it mean for me to be a 'worthy' leader as a pastor, faculty member, spouse or parent?" When misunderstandings are frequent. Where expectations are intense. Where rejection is obvious. Where the mature and the immature, the Christian and the non-Christian, the saint and the hypocrite may work or study along side each other. And we have the responsibility for leading them, caring for them, listening to them, praying with them.

Are there risks? Yes! Hurts? Yes! Pain? Yes! Disappointment? Yes! But with this theology and style of emerging leadership come also God's blessing, anointing, presence, and wisdom. And there will also be friends in your lives--at home, on this

campus, or in your local church who will question if you really have what it takes to be a leader, the kind of leader about which I have spoken in this service.

Let me conclude by returning to the questions I asked you at the beginning of this sermon: What do you want written about you when your life on earth is finished? Five or fifty years from now, what will you need to see to believe your life has been a success? What one sentence will describe your legacy? This is my deeply felt challenge everyone in this auditorium. Depart from this graduation service with a passion to live a legacy of an Ephesians 4:1 "worthy" leader. A "worthy" leader...

- who is a Christian,
- a servant,
- and Spirit-filled.

A legacy like this will live on long after you or I have departed this life, regardless of the number of years, few or many, God gives us to live.

May it be so, Lord. Amen.