

SHAPING SERVANT LEADERS AT MVNC
Mark 10:35-45
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Introduction

1. Recently, I asked a student what I should preach for my first sermon in the new school year.
2. To my surprise, he responded, “Talk to us about your goals and aspirations for MVNC.” What an open door! I am goal-oriented and “live” in the world of the next three to five years. Those who know me know that I have significant goals for MVNC.
3. The more I reflected on his comment, however, the more I returned to the theme of my inaugural address soon after I came to MVNC in 1989: “...The business of MVNC is not primarily to grant degrees; rather our responsibility is to shape leaders who serve from a rich theological and philosophical foundation. In short, to shape servant leaders who will make a difference in the 21st century.” This remains my overarching goal.
4. Each word or phrase in this statement has profound implications for all of us here today -- students, faculty, staff, and administrators. I can only focus on the middle word in the phrase: MVNC shapes **servant** leaders. Read text: Mark 10:35-45.

Let me share just two observations about my overarching goal and this text.

- I. Servant leadership is distinctively Christian leadership (read Mark 10:42-44)
 - A. The call to servant leadership is the call to every Christian who aspires to be a leader.
 1. “A servant is one who finds out what his master wants him to do, and then he does it.”
 2. “Christian leadership is humble service to others ... for the purpose of enabling them, through teaching and example, to understand, accept, and fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission in the world.”
(ELF)
 - B. The servant leader is captive to Christian convictions and biblical priorities.
 1. A servant leader tries to see people the way God sees them -- with potential and possibilities, and not so much in the “present” with all their problems.
 - a. This is why “coaching,” “mentoring,” “guiding” and “spiritual directing” are key words or phrases for the servant leader.
 - b. This kind of leader is firm, yet kind; demanding, yet flexible; trusting, yet verifying.
 2. Promise Keepers 1996, a weekend gathering of 50,000 men in Pittsburgh’s Three Rivers Stadium, was a great experience for me. One of the songs we sang has these words:

*Unshakable, immovable, faithful and true;
full of wisdom, strength, and beauty;
These things are true of you.
Fearless, courageous, righteous shines thru in all you do;
You’re so humble; You laid down your life; these things are true of you.
Patient, compassionate, love flows through you;
You never give up on the hopeless ones; these things are true of You.*

*Holy and blameless; You stand up for justice and truth;
Yet you love mercy and forgiveness; these things are true of You.*

Chorus:

*And as I turn my face to you, oh Lord,
I ask and pray; by the power of Your love and grace,
Make these things true of me, too.
Make these things true of me, too.*

3. The first verse of the song titled *The Servant Song*, reads:

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

 - a. For sure, the servant leader understands the twin emphasis of scripture -- the reality of sin and the optimism of grace (God's grace!)
 - b. She/He recognizes that because of sin, people can use and abuse the Christian who seeks to lead as a servant.
 - c. The servant leader, however, believes that even in these moments, God's grace is at work and can take what "some meant for wrong, and uses it for good."

4. Servant leaders are involved in local churches, in Christian growth experiences, in spiritual development opportunities, in service projects, and in studying and applying the scriptures. By the way, have you read the scripture passage for today in the daily Bible reading schedule prepared by Dr. Gary Sivewright. Great passage from Matthew 6. You can get these daily Bible reading suggestions each Friday following chapel.
 - Another Promise Keepers song -- "Man of the Spirit, Man of the Word"

*Jesus, make a man of me with Your integrity,
A man of the Spirit, a man of the Word.
A servant of the Lord, an offering outpoured;
A man of the Spirit, a man of the Word.
A man of mercy, fire, and light,
A man who loves the truth,
Who runs to win the crown of life and lives to honor You.*

*Jesus, make a man of me to bring glory unto Thee,
Faithful to the end, a father and a friend,
A man of the Spirit, a man of the Word.
A man of mercy, fire, and light,
A man who loves the truth,
Who runs to win the crown of life and lives to honor You.*

*Jesus, make a man of me with Your integrity,
A man of the Spirit, a man of the Word.
A man of the Spirit, a man of the Word.*

OBSERVATION #1: SERVANT LEADERSHIP IS DISTINCTIVELY CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP.

- II. Observation #2: Servant leadership must be consistently modeled by present Christian leaders. (Read 10:35-38, 41-43)
- A. Negatively, although James and John were followers of Jesus, their understanding of leadership, control, and power was thoroughly secular. “The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over you...and they exercise authority over (you).”
- B. Stated positively for us at MVNC, the present leadership on campus must model servant leadership before we can expect students to become servant leaders.

1. By “present leadership” I mean the current faculty, staff, and administration. Position at whatever level does not automatically imply that someone is a leader.
2. “Modeling” (or exempling) is the primary method of Christian education for transformation --
 - a. in classrooms,
 - b. in offices,
 - c. on good days,
 - d. and on the “not so good” days!
3. Another song we sang at the Promise Keepers weekend in Pittsburgh:

*Lord, as we enter in,
 We pledge to live as godly men.
 Lord, help us to turn from sin
 And begin again as godly men.*

*And tho' we know we sometimes stumble,
 May the promise we strive to keep
 Be to honor you with all our hearts,
 And to worship at your feet.*

*Lord, as we enter in,
 We pledge to live as godly men.
 Lord, help us to turn from sin
 And begin again as godly men.*

*As we enter in this covenant
 We seek Your holy face.
 To become men of integrity,
 Perfected by Your grace.*

*Lord, as we enter in,
 We pledge to live as godly men,
 Lord, help us to turn from sin,
 And begin again as godly men.*

- a. Godly men and godly women become servant leaders

b. And we must model this “quest” before students on campus before we can expect them to become servant leaders.

- 1) Are there risks involved? Yes, definitely; but also rewards, profound rewards.
- 2) Are there misunderstandings, abuses, and betrayals of our trust and motives? Yes, definitely, but lifelong friends and many students are grateful for a Christian leadership example.
- 3) And let’s not forget the blessing of God on us and the peace of God within us when we lead as godly men and women.

B. We are not talking about technique, but attitudes, values, and principles.

1. Attitudes of the heart that manifest themselves as you interact with people:

- I love you.
- I care for you.
- I respect you.
- I can learn from you.
- I need you.
- I believe in you.
- I want to serve you.
- I forgive you.

2. Recently, I shared 10 specific and personal goals for me in relation to mid-level managers on campus: (I hope these goals reflect an attitude of a leader -- imperfect as I am -- toward those with whom I work.)

- I want to find ways to **honor** your **time**.
- ... ways to **value** your **work**.
- ... ways to **build** your **confidence**.

- ... ways to **increase** your **competence**.
- ... ways to **support** your **decisions**.
- ... ways to **hear** your **words**.
- ... ways to **network** your **ideas**.
- ... ways to **affirm** your **dreams**.
- ... ways to **simplify** your **assignment**.
- ... ways to **strengthen** your **faith**.

ATTITUDES OF THE HEART!

- C. I stake my job at MVNC on the belief that it is possible to live together as a distinctively Christian faith community in the midst of diversity, traditions, levels of maturity, and the varying degrees of commitment to the Christian faith.
1. But it has to start with present leadership shaping present students -- not “ideal” students -- because we are not “perfect” leaders. But our hearts are right, and we reach out with servant hearts to those around us.
 2. I shared recently with the faculty and staff an illustration Pastor Morrison used this summer at the Lakeholm Church of the Nazarene. I cannot give the full illustration. At the heart of it was a misunderstanding in a church office between a man who was counting the morning offering and a single mom who was preparing for the evening youth program.

In the midst of the conflict, she burst out of the office stating, “You care more about money than you do people.” By God’s providence, a

wise leader in the church happened to be walking by the office when the lady burst out of the office with those words. The leader listened to her, and then asked -- three times -- for her forgiveness.

At a communion service at the church the following week, the lady youth worker and the money counter embraced and asked each other's forgiveness.

3. The words of the lady continue to haunt me, and I wonder, at the beginning of a school term, if we, as MVNC leaders, are more concerned
about money,
about syllabi,
about procedures,
about policies,
about buildings,
about numerous other things,
than we are about people.
4. For sure, from our perspective, there are reasons and rationale for "these" necessities. But, if you perceive us in the process as not having concern about you as a person -- forgive us -- forgive me.

OBSERVATION #2: SERVANT LEADERSHIP MUST BE CONSISTENTLY MODELED BY PRESENT CHRISTIAN LEADERS.

Let me conclude with these thoughts:

- A. At home or far away, in public or in private, costly in terms of time and money or at little cost, servant leadership inevitably makes a difference.

1. The “size” of the gift of service is not the issue. Large or small -- all are equally important.
 - A beautiful gift of service was given to my wife recently. (I could give you numerous examples of love given to Anne during this time of illness. Thank you all!)
 - 1) Following Anne’s first treatment of chemotherapy, she experienced the side effects she was told about -- nausea, fatigue, and the loss of her hair.
 - 2) By the time of her second treatment (approximately 3 weeks after her first treatment), she had lost all of her hair, and wore a wig when she was with people other than her family.
 - a) The wig was very uncomfortable.
 - b) As Anne was receiving her second treatment, the nurse brought in several turbans, and asked Anne to choose one. She did, and she placed the turban on her head in place of the wig. The soft texture of the turban felt so good compared to the wig. The nurse told Anne the turban was a gift from a group of ladies, unknown to us, who make these turbans for cancer patients. Between my tears, I said to myself, “What a gift! What a service! What a ministry!”
 - c) And we still don’t know the names of the people who perceived a need, and quietly set out to help those in need.

- d) In my mind, they are Mount Vernon's version of Mother Teresa and her "sisters of charity."
- c. The size of the group or project isn't the issue for these people -- faithfulness is.
 - 1) Show me a person who is faithful in small things, and I will show you a person who will be faithful in big things.
 - 2) The servant leader is faithful in the little things God asks of her or him.
2. And, the location of the gift of service is not the issue.
 - a. MVNC students have worked in this community, this state, this region, this nation, and literally around the world.
 - 1) Each gift of service is important in God's eyes.
 - 2) Kind words and deeds, done in the name of Jesus, at home or far away, are all important in God's kingdom.
 - b. This summer, we had MVNC students in Swaziland, India, Venezuela, Mexico, Brazil, Hungary, The Netherlands, Canada, as well as in compassionate ministry centers throughout the United States, from San Francisco to the Appalachian area of our region.
 - 1) Important, yes. Very important.
 - 2) But let me tell you of another experience just as important in God's eyes.
 - a) On returning from a ministry experience overseas, an MVNC student felt compelled to call Rev. Joe Foster, an

MVNC graduate and director of a compassionate ministry center in inner-city Columbus. The student was wanting to give up to two weeks to Joe and his ministry in the inner city of Columbus.

- b) Because Joe had recently undergone surgery, Joe said to the student, “What I really need is for someone to cut the grass and trim the brush on a piece of property someone gave the ministry. Because of my illness, I haven’t been able to work in the yard. Recently, the city of Columbus gave me a citation because of the tall grass and brush around the property.”
 - c) The MVNC student took another MVNC student to Columbus and in one day did something very special -- and needed -- for Joe Foster.
 - d) And there are numerous other examples just as important as this one.
 - e) The location of the gift of service is not the issue.
3. And, the response of the recipients of our gifts is not the issue.
- a. Sometimes recipients aren’t even aware of our involvement with them.
 - b. And if they do know, they may not know our motives in giving.
 - 1) We don’t “give” for the “approval” or “pats on the head.”
 - 2) We give because there is a need, and God is pleased. That is what is important.

- 3) We do what is right, because it is right. Period! Positive response from the recipient are not the reason we serve.
 - c. Gifts of service, large or small, at home or far away, with positive or not so positive responses, will always make a difference!
- B. Even in difficult situations on campus, servant leadership will make a difference.

I remember a student with an ACT score of 27 who was suspended for one semester by the Academic Student Life Committee after two semesters of probation. The student appealed to me. After reviewing the facts, I upheld the one semester suspension. I stayed in touch with the student during his suspension. I encouraged him to reapply to MVNC the next semester. He did. He emerged a student leader, a contributor to the literary magazine *Windows Within*, and a star sportsman. Upon graduation, he told me, "My suspension was the best thing that ever happened to me."

- C. Remember:
- The size of the gift of service is not the issue.
 - The location of the gift of service is not the issue.
 - The response of the recipient of our gift of service is not the issue.
 - *What is important is that in serving others -- at whatever leadership level -- we are serving the Lord Jesus...and servant leadership always makes a difference.*
- D. My goals, my aspirations for MVNC? They are many. But my overarching goal is that...
1. In the context of this college thoroughly equipping students for leadership roles in their careers and/or in graduate studies, I desire

deeply that these same students be shaped as servant leaders who will make a difference for Christ in the 21st century.

2. *Brother/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.

3. May it be so, Lord. Amen.