

Servant's Love

The foundation for working with the Body of Christ

—Greg H. Parsons

We hear stories of CEOs in secular companies and their ability to make tough decisions and be ruthless when necessary. While some of those stories may now be revealing their “other” side in the corporate financial scandals of our day, we believers often admire them—openly or secretly. People with similar gifting may lead our churches or ministries.

Of central importance to us is to think through what we appreciate in these people and why. We don’t want to “throw out the baby with the bath water” and say we cannot learn from them at all, or fail to grapple with how these issues translate within the Body of Christ.

Last Sunday morning I was reminded of the men who gathered to get their Kingdom assignments in the upper room—or so they thought. They came with all the expectation you can imagine. Jesus had entered the city just a few days before to the praise and cheers of the people. He had cleansed the Temple and then inhabited it by teaching there for two straight days. Things were looking good to the Twelve.

As they came into that borrowed upper room, there was no servant there with a low enough rank to wash their feet during that particularly muddy time of year.

But they reclined with their feet away from the table thinking, perhaps, that someone else should do that. They, after all, were going to be on Jesus’ right or left—or as

close as possible. Perhaps the order around the table that night would give a clue as to what Jesus was thinking since He hadn’t answered them directly when they asked Him. John, that bold “son of thunder” (the CEO stereotype?), was right next to Jesus.

How often do we see examples of leaders demonstrating loving servanthood in the Church? What would happen if we founded our relationships upon an active, loving servanthood?

Apparently Peter was late enough not to get on the other side. Probably Judas was there actually.

Of course, that sets the scene for Jesus washing their feet—the thing no ruler over one of the 12 thrones would do—but the King himself did.

After Jesus finished, and sat down, He said, “Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’ and do so correctly, for that is what I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet...” (John 13:12b-14a)

How would the average CEO or President finish that sentence?

How would you? We might expect, “you wash My feet.”

Stop for a second. Have you thought about how much we might go through to be able to wash Jesus’ feet? We would stand in long lines. We would wait for days perhaps (maybe even longer than for the Rose Parade or for concert or play-off game tickets!).

But Jesus tells us something much more difficult, “...you too ought to wash one another’s feet.”

Many commentators believe that Jesus is demonstrating the new commandment of love—which He will teach about later in the evening.

So the question of us is: how do we who claim to follow Him apply it? How often do we see examples of leaders demonstrating loving servanthood in the church?

While we can learn from various patterns in our culture and around the globe, the secular model is not our standard here. When we see the church in the West blindly following a secular pattern, a good missionary might ask, “Does that model necessarily work well for spreading the church in other lands and from different backgrounds?”

The core character issue of a

loving, servant’s action is central for the Christian and especially for the missionary. One of the biggest applications for us is not necessarily in the missions, churches, or ministries we lead but in our homes and in the small circle of believers we serve with day-to-day. As this issue of *MF* points out, many of the biggest problems for field missionaries is related to the dirty feet of our co-workers (read: interpersonal relationships). What would happen if we founded those relationships upon an active, loving servanthood? How much would non-believers see Christ in us through our service and love for each other?

At the same time, Paul often refers to himself as a servant of Christ—a role we have, too. We can serve each other to the extreme that we don’t know why we are serving. We don’t see where it is all leading.

But for some, it is far easier to hide behind “serving Christ,” partly because we can use our personal sense of calling or using our “gifting.” In reality, that calling may be our own idea (not God’s) and that “gift” is really a way of masking a character flaw that the Lord really would like changed. ☉



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