

## **FROM THE SERVANT GENERAL**

### **ON SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

#### **(Part 5)**

### **THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM**

The apostles, all called to be servants of the Master, argued among themselves on who was the greatest (Mk 9:33-34; Mt 18:1; Lk 9:46). Jesus said to them, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.” (Mk 9:35). Then Jesus took a child and gave them their lesson. “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 18:3-4).

What is it about a child that Jesus wants to teach us about servant leadership? What is it about a child wherein unless we become like one we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven?

Once again, Jesus turns our world topsy-turvy. To be first is to be last. To be the leader is to be the servant. To be great is to be like a child. While the world expects us to grow up, Jesus expects us to become like little children. While the world urges us to become somebody important, Jesus directs us to become a nobody (children were on the low end of the social ladder during those times).

What is Jesus pointing out about servant leadership?

First, servant leadership demands purity of heart.

Little children, though some of them can be real brats, are basically pure of heart. They are not yet prone to the wickedness and evil that adults manifest. They do not know how to insult, malign, be intolerant, plot against others, seek revenge, or the like.

On the other hand, relationships in the world are characterized by lying, cheating, cover-ups, hidden agendas, taking advantage of others, and the like. Even leaders in the church are not immune from such, leading to much conflict and strife.

But servant leaders, in their personal conduct and service, are called to be pure of heart and intention. They must not be out for power, position or privilege. They must not look to build turf. They should not have any personal agenda or ulterior motives. They should simply want to serve.

Second, servant leadership demands total dependence on God our Father.

Little children on their own are basically helpless. They need their parents to feed, clothe and protect them. This too is our basic relationship with God. We are nothing without God, and apart from Jesus we can do nothing (Jn 15:5). The good news is that we simply need to ask our Father for what we need, and we are assured He will provide us all good things (Mt 7:7-11).

The world abhors dependence on anyone other than self. The great leader is the independent, self-made man. But for servant leaders, it is precisely their dependence on

God that enables them to become His instruments. It is precisely their weakness that enables His strength and power to be experienced in their lives.

Third, servant leadership demands humility.

Little children have nothing to brag about. They have no accomplishments, no money, no developed talents, no family influence, no extended circle of admirers. Their opinion, advice or counsel is not sought.

Now Jesus teaches, “The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Mt 23:11-12).

Greatness in the world is accompanied by pride. Pride in human achievement, pride in accomplishing something out of one’s own strength, pride in besting everyone else. But the servant leader recognizes that all achievements are due to the blessing of God. Paul puts it this way: “Who confers distinction upon you? What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor 4:7).

It is humbling to be totally dependent. But this dependence of ours on God is actually such a great privilege. And it is the acknowledgment of this dependence, resulting in humility, that is the key to even more of God’s favor and power. As Jesus says, “for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Lk 18:14b). Therefore our response should be that as directed by Peter: “And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for: ‘God opposes the proud but bestows favor on the humble.’ So humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” (1 Pt 5:5b-6).

Fourth, servant leadership demands obedience.

Little children are simply told what to do and are expected to follow and obey.

Now Jesus teaches that “whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 5:19b).

Christians call Jesus their Lord. But many Christians do not live their lives with Jesus as actually Lord. A requirement of the lordship of Jesus in our lives is obedience to his commands. Many Christians need to seriously consider and answer Jesus’ question, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ but not do what I command?” (Lk 6:46). We will need to come to terms with and be sobered by Jesus’ warning: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” (Mt 7:21).

Servant leaders call Jesus their Master. They should act only in accordance with the directions of Jesus. They are to obey without reservation. They are to give their all without holding back in any way.

God does want us to be great. God does want us to perform great works for the kingdom. But God has His own standards.

Not the first but the last.

Not to be served but to serve.

Not pride but humility.

Not independence but total dependence on God.

Not being a lord but the servant of all.

Not doing it our way but God's way.  
Not indulging self but embracing the cross.

Do you want to be first? Then be the last.  
Do you want to be great? Then be the servant of all.

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