

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

Baccalaureate Sermon
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Congratulations to the class of 1995!

If I could talk with each of you individually, I would want to ask you this question: 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!*"

There is a problem with this question. We are not sure we will have fifty years to think about what we want written on our tombstone.

Four years ago, in the freshman year of many of the seniors tonight, four MVNC students died in a 12-month period; Ron Holmes, Darren Brooks, Susan Farmer, and Tim Bayes. MVNC senior, Clayton Meyer, died on April 5 this year of a hereditary heart problem. Think of the children and young adults who died recently in the Oklahoma City tragedy.

These are "wake up" calls to remind us of the imperative to begin now reflecting 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, and the legacy we will leave behind.

Recently a Lecture-artist guest, a western folk singer, sang a song I could not ignore. The chorus of this song goes like this:

Roll on cowboy, roll on. Roll on cowboy, roll on.

We'll sing of your deeds in a thousand songs,

Roll on cowboy, roll on.

I asked myself a question that night. Are there deeds I have done about which songs will be sung? It is imperative tonight for each of us, young and old, 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" legacy? A legacy is Something you leave behind after you leave company, a school, or after you have died.

Be assured that all of us will leave a legacy And our legacy will probably be summarized in one sentence of less than 10 words. Positive or negative. For example: my father. Summarize your boss, your favorite teacher, your mentor, a person who has influenced you greatly. I have a hunch your summary of these people could be in one sentence, in ten words or less.

My challenge to MVNC graduates tonight is to prepare now to leave a legacy of a "worthy" leader:

A "Worthy" Leader is a Christian Leader.

A "Worthy" Leader is a Servant Leader.

A "Worthy" leader is a Spirit-filled Leader. Let me be more specific.

A "Worthy" Leader is a Christian Leader

Listen to Ephesians 4:2-3. Verses 2-3 focus on "living" the truth in Jesus' name. Verses 7-12 instruct us to live the truth in the setting or context wherein God places us, using the gifts and talents he has given us. Verses 12-14 tell us why we are to live the truth in Jesus' name--to nurture, build up, and encourage those who watch us in the Christian faith.

A poem was given to be 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 in the workplace on Mondays, and in our home in the evenings.

The chorus to a song written by J. Randall Dennis and John Mohr is familiar to many of us:

*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, in your home, and on the job, regardless of your leadership assignment. Make St. Francis of Assisi's prayer your goal in the workplace.

*Make me an instrument of Thy peace.
Where there is hatred let me sow love;
Where there is injury pardon;
Where there is doubt faith;
Where there is despair hope;
Where there is darkness light;
Where there is sadness joy.....
O Divine Master,*

*Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love,
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pard'ning that we are pardoned, It is
in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

A "worthy" leader is a Christian leader.

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 assignment as Christian leaders is greater and more demanding than communicating facts, figures, dates; or, evaluating persons to see if they have performed according to their job descriptions; or sold the number of "wiglets" established as their goal; or coordinating events or preparing facilities for programs.

Our responsibility as Christian leaders includes a servant leadership lifestyle which motivates, challenges, equips, and enables those with whom we lead to serve others with whom they work.

Our words should reflect encouragement (v. 19). Let your conversation--your words--reflect your Christian faith and values.

In Pauline perspective, our words should communicate grace. Our words should focus on upbuilding others -- not tearing them down; focus on encouragement -- not discouragement; focus on support -- not undermining; focus on healing -- not hurting; focus on caring -- not indifference; and focus on others in our conversation -- not upon ourselves.

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 "little people"...little people who always complain;...little people who always see the negative;...little people who always believe the only way to build themselves up is to tear others down;...little people who are ungrateful, always reminding you of what they don't have instead of focusing on what has been given to them.

Little people are found in very important assignments and positions, but remain little with their thinking. We have so much...and remain so little 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 every 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 included in your Commencement booklet, *Give Thanks*, Would you join me in singing the chorus.

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.

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 in the workplace. I am an MVNC administrator; you are an MVNC student or faculty member. 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, and 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 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 proof of leading is in the qualitative growth of the led."

A "worthy" leader is a Christian leader.

A "worthy" leader is a servant leader.

A "Worthy" Leader is a Spirit-filled Leader

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

Some of you may remember my testimony several weeks ago when I spoke in chapel on the subject of the Spirit-filled life. In my testimony, I didn't, however, tell you

about my closest friend in high school who was the senior class president. When I returned to high school for my senior year following my conversion experience during the summer, I told him about my new-found faith.

He and I remained friends during my senior year, but we parted ways on issues of Christian faith and Christian conduct. In my yearbook Burt reflected on our friendship and then concluded with the words I will never forget, "But as for your future, I just don't know."

Something happened in my sophomore year at Trevecca Nazarene College. The date was January 17, 1962. We were in the middle of revival services on campus. I remember the speaker. I remember the singer...a good friend of mine even today. In some way the revival services touched me. I remember going to my dorm following the evening service. I made an altar out of a box. I really believe I was filled with God's Spirit that night. I came to the point of saying to God, "If I am going to be a Christian, I want to be the best Christian I can. I don't want to play games. I don't want to go halfway. Here I am. Here's my life."

In broad New Testament perspective, a Spirit-filled leader is a 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, and lived out in light of His presence, anointing, and blessing in our homes where we live and in the offices where we work.

When we lead under the tutelage and guidance of the Spirit of Christ within us can we embrace the Paradoxical Commandments of Leadership, sent to me several years ago by Coach Keith Veale.

1. *People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway.*
2. *If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.*
3. *The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.*
4. *Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.*
5. *The biggest men with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.*
6. *What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.*
7. *People really need help, but may attack you if you do help them. Help them anyway.*
8. *Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway.*

When we lead under the tutelage and guidance of the Spirit of Christ within us can we see people in the workplace through God's eyes. 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

1. Each of us must wrestle with this question:

"What does it mean for me to be a 'worthy' leader where I am employed...
...when misunderstandings are frequent,
...where expectations are intense,
...where rejection is obvious,

...where the mature and the
immature, the Christian, the non-
Christian, the saint, and the
hypocrite work alongside each
other...
and I/you have the responsibility for leading them?

Are there Risks? Yes! Hurts? Yes! Pain? Yes! Disappointment? Yes! But with this theology and style of leadership comes also God's blessing, anointing, presence, and wisdom. And there will also be friends--some "friends" in your lives who will question if you really have what it takes to be a leader.

Nevertheless, we continually grow in our understanding of the profoundness of these questions and the workforce realities, and with our responses and our answers. Slowly, but with inner confidence in the Spirit of Christ who dwells within us, we develop a deep conviction to serve the people with whom we work with biblical integrity.

Let me conclude by returning to the questions I asked you at the beginning of this sermon:

What do you want written about you on your tombstone?

Five or fifty years from now, what will you need to see to believe your life has been a success?

What "songs" will be sung for the deeds you have done?

What one sentence will describe your legacy?

My deeply felt challenge to the Class of 1995:

Depart from MVNC with a passion to leave 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!