

Leadership Begins Here

Written by Bill Perkins

When we speak of becoming servant leaders we're striving for something we'll never quite grasp this side of heaven--like trying to grab a soap bubble as it floats away. Once in a while a bubble may momentarily land on our palm. In that moment we'll experience the miracle of Jesus working in us, enabling us to serve.

If we smile and become proud of ourselves then the wonder will be gone because our self-satisfaction will reveal that we served so we could see ourselves serving--like fans at a sporting event who realize they're on television and so they wave vigorously so they can watch themselves waving on the jumbotron.

Our aim is to put others first because we genuinely care for them--not because we want to be seen as caring for them. Jesus can awaken such servant leadership in us. But we must follow his example.

Compassion Preceded the Miracle

One day when two blind men cried out to Jesus the crowd saw them as intruders who needed to be silenced--irritants that needed to be brushed away like flies. Jesus saw them differently. Matthew tells us "Jesus had compassion on them." It's important to note that an internal response preceded his actions. First Jesus felt compassion and then he healed the men.

A Man With Leprosy

On another occasion a man with leprosy approached Jesus, fell on his knees, and begged to be healed. Everything about that event violated the cultural norms of the day. Leprosy destroys the nervous system so that a man with the disease loses all sense of touch. If a diseased hand is cut the man won't feel pain.

Unaware of the injury he won't protect the wound and infection may set in resulting in the eventual loss of the hand. In its advanced stages the disease could have covered a man with puss-filled wounds, white shining spots and caused the loss of a hand, arm, or leg.

A man with leprosy lived with the pain of constant rejection. Not only was he disgusting to see, he was a social and religious outcast. Unlike Aids patients who can conceal their disease for many years, a man with leprosy can't.

A leper had to make his illness known. According to ceremonial law he had to wear "torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!'" (Leviticus 13:45). Anybody touched by a leper was immediately defiled. As long as the man had leprosy he had to live alone outside the city.

He Saw a Lonely Soul

Instead of keeping his distance from Jesus, or warning that he was unclean, the leprous man fell on his knees directly in front of him. Mark tells us Jesus felt "compassion," for the man. Again, Jesus' internal response preceded the miracle. Jesus identified with the man's heartache. He didn't see someone who could defile him . . . someone he should keep at arms-length. Jesus saw a lonely suffering soul.

He Touched Him First

Prompted by compassion Jesus did the unthinkable. He touched the leper and then healed him. I would have performed the miracle first and then touched the man. But Jesus realized the leper had not felt the warmth of a human touch in decades. He had not known the strength of an embrace in more years than he could remember. The man needed love more than he needed healing--he needed acceptance more than cleansing.

The act of service flowed from a heart of compassion. Jesus calls us to follow his lead and cultivate compassion for those under our charge. This is the beginning of leadership.