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## A SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

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*A Sermon Preached in the Chapel of APNTS on February 2002*

*“No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them” (Joshua 1:5-6).*

If God appeared to me now and asked, “My son, when do you think was the most difficult time in your life so far?” without hesitation I would answer His question, “Lord, it was when I first studied in a second language, at Bethany Nazarene College (now, Southern Nazarene University) in America. If God also asked me, “Until now, when did you feel most deeply that I was closely with you?” I would reply, “My Lord, it was also the time when I first studied at Bethany a long time ago.”

To be frank with you, it was very h-a-r-d and even h-a-r-s-h for me at first to study with a foreign language in a foreign country. I took 16 hours in the first semester at Bethany, so I was surrounded by many powerful enemies such as the endless assignments, many class presentations, lots of reports, and ongoing quizzes and exams. I had to fight with them day and night, week by week, month after month. There was no time to sleep, no time to exercise, no time to watch TV, no time to play, and no time to have fun at all. Furthermore, frustrating cultural shock, ongoing financial burden, and deepening homesickness were the constant sources of my anxiety and despair. In my days at Bethany Nazarene College (BNC), I was physically sleepless, mentally restless, emotionally rootless, financially helpless, culturally homeless, socially

friendless, and linguistically powerless. I am not stretching it at all. As for me, BNC means: B is bitter, N is notorious, C is crying.

Under these circumstances, I had to fight not merely to study but also to live and survive. To be or not to be, that was my ongoing problem in the first period of American life. My heart was so depressed, my soul so tired, and my body so exhausted that I could not continue my everyday life without desperately seeking God's help.

There is a small chapel next to the building of the Religion Department at Bethany. I used to go there after school and pray. At that time, my prayer was not just prayer; rather, it was literally crying, crying, crying! "Oh, Lord, please help me. I am too tired and too exhausted. As you know, I came to the U.S. to serve you and your people better in the world. I didn't come to this country in order to get just a Ph.D. degree and be an intelligent, influential clergy who could pastor a big church in the future. The only, only reason here is to prepare better for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ all over the world. Please, give me strength to endure and overcome my current hardship."

After much prayer, in tears and anguish, I walked to the back corner of the chapel. There was always a notebook on the lamp stand. People often wrote their prayers, problems, and pain on that notebook. So, I jotted down in it all my burdensome, troublesome feelings. Later on, one day I walked to the corner of the chapel to write my feelings on the notebook after prayer. I happened to open the page on which I wrote my difficult feeling several weeks before. As I looked at the page, I noticed that someone had written some words under my writing. I was so surprised at reading those words for me. I didn't know who wrote the words but I knew what they meant, especially that they were for me. The following words were written: "*Mr. Chun, Be Strong and Courageous! GOD IS WITH YOU.*"

Indeed, at the very moment when I read those words, they deeply touched my heart, strongly moved my mind, and powerfully awakened my spirit. My whole being was melting into those words of God as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the

thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). The words written in the notebook wholly encouraged me in the midst of discouragement, really empowered me in the state of powerlessness, and truly liberated me from the bondage of depression. They enabled me to keep moving forward toward my goal without losing my heart, without losing my direction, without losing my aspiration.

Let us take a close look at the context of today’s scripture. The great leader Moses, who had led the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land, had died. They had lost their leader before entering the land of Canaan, before realizing their dream. In order to get into the land, they had to face and overcome a many difficulties. When Moses passed away, however, they didn’t know what to do, how to do it, and even why to do it in the wilderness. Under these situations, Joshua assumed Moses’ leadership. Yet, he was so much afraid of leading his people to the Canaan land. Knowing the disheartened heart of Joshua, God appeared and clearly said to him, “Joshua, be strong and courageous. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

My dear Christian brothers and sisters! You have been trained to become leaders like Moses and Joshua for ministry someday, somewhere. Do you know why Joshua at that time was so afraid, so anxious, and so discouraged? If we know the source of his disappointment and discouragement, we can learn the crucial elements of Christian leadership. Let me tell you the most important aspects of becoming and being a leader in the perspective of Jesus Christ. Once he mentioned the most important truth of what leadership is all about by saying: “The blind man cannot lead the blind man.” What he meant here, implicitly or explicitly speaking, is: a leader is not to be blind. In other words, *a leader must be a reader. Leadership depends on readership.* In the first place, a leader must read himself/herself. Know yourself first! Read yourself before leading others. There is no genuine leadership without knowing yourself as leader. No yourself, no leadership. Know yourself, know leadership. In the second place, a leader must read the people whom he/she leads. Read the mind of people before leading them. Effective leadership

always comes from an affective readership of others. In the third place, a leader must read the context of the world to which his/her people belong. Great leadership usually comes with great readership of the world. In the fourth place, a leader must read God. Read the mind of God before exercising your leadership. Without reading the will of God, it is quite impossible to lead the people of God. Therefore, successful leadership generally hinges on successful readership of oneself, people, the world, and God. The key to failure in leadership is not trying to read these four areas.

By the way, which of these areas is the most important? It is, needless to say, the fourth area—to read the mind of God. Why? Without reading the mind of God, and if we only read heavily ourselves within us, we may often fall into discouragement. Without reading the mind of God, and if we only read overly the mind of people behind us, we may easily follow their will. Without reading the mind of God, and if we only read mainly the situation around us, we may be always overwhelmed or dominated by the force of the world. Without reading the mind of God, and if we only merely read ourselves, people, and situations, we may frequently turn from the will of God to the right or the left. That's the reason God told Joshua: "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this book of the Law depart from your mouth; mediate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it"(Joshua1:7-8).

Strong and courageous leadership has its source in the readership of God in terms of how well one reads the will of God. When the heart and mind of a leader are full of God, he/she can be full of confidence and courage. But if the heart and mind of a leader lacks God, he/she can be full of fear and anxiety. That's why Joshua at that time was so afraid, so anxious, so discouraged, and also why God repeatedly told the same words to Joshua: "Be strong and courageous"(vv. 6, 7, 9). He seemed to be too much concerned about only himself, too much concerned about the Israelites people around him, too much concerned about the situation over him. But he seemed to be little concerned about God with him, less concerned about God with his people, and not

concerned about God with their situation. The way we read God determines the way we read ourselves, people, situations.

Let us remember. The more we look at ourselves, the more we become discouraged. The more we look at people around us, the more we are dismayed. The more we look at situations over us, the more we are disappointed. Indeed, the more we look at other than God, the bigger our problems grow, the longer our worries last, and the smaller God looks. Thus, the spiritual leader must read the very mind of God for himself, must read the very heart of God for his people, and must read the very will of God for their situation. In other words, we spiritual leaders must realize the very reality of God with us, no matter what kind of realities we are facing right now. We also must identify the very identity of God with us, even though our identity as spiritual leaders may be critically shaken because of so many problems. And we must personify the very personality of God with us, even when our personality becomes denounced, demoralized, and deactivated under the depersonalized attacks from others.

Let's keep the truth of spiritual leadership in mind. Spiritual leadership does not depend on what kind of positions or titles we hold—hierarchically. It does not depend on what kind of church we belong to—denominationally. It does not depend on how much we know—intellectually. It does not depend on how much we are strong—mentally. Furthermore, it does not depend on what skin color we are—racially. It does not depend on where we were born—nationally. It does not depend on how old we are or what gender we have—physically. It does not depend on how rich or poor we are—economically.

Biblically speaking, true spiritual leadership depends totally on how much we are keenly and fully aware of *God-with-us*, where there is no hope at all. It really depends on how much we are deeply and continually conscious of *God-with-us*, when everything is in a great mess. It truly depends on how much we depend on *God-with-us*, where and when God seems dead. It entirely depends on how much we believe and trust in *God-with-us*, with all our hearts, all our minds, all our strength, all our

souls, all our passion. A spiritual leadership absolutely depends on a readership of *God-with-us*.

The apostle Paul, one of the great leaders in Christian history, boldly proclaimed: “If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom.10:31-39). The driving force of Paul’s leadership rests exclusively upon his readership of *God-with-us*. A Wesleyan minister, John Maxwell said:

If you want to be distressed—look within.

If you want to be defeated—look back.

If you want to be distracted—look around.

If you want to be dismayed—look ahead.

If you want to be delivered—look up!

Dear Christian leaders and APNTS students becoming leaders! Whenever you are in stress, wherever you are in trouble, whatever you are in crisis, please remember once more what God said to Joshua as well as to you: “Be strong and courageous. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.”