

ACCEPTANCE

In our continued look at the servant leader I would like you as the reader to take a look at Luke 19:1-10. It is the story of Zacchaeus. He was a person who was despised by the people and linked to that he was a corrupt public servant. Yet it must also be said that in spite of how we look at people even a tax collector is not exempt from hearing about Jesus.

One could preach a series of sermons regarding the attempt of this man trying to meet Jesus and the extent to which he was prepared to go just to have a look at Jesus. We could even preach about the foreknowledge of God in that Jesus knew Zacchaeus' name whilst he was up in the tree and before they even met.

The servant leader tries to help others grow, not by attempting to straighten them out but by establishing a relationship based on love and acceptance. Only as the leader shows acceptance is there any means of rescuing the despised, rejected, and hopeless people of the world

The Need to Belong

All of us have a need to belong. Those, whose needs have not been met in a family or a group setting, will suffer a sense of abandonment. Abandonment in its turn produces shame, and shame-based people are driven by their shame to find a place of safety. It is sad to see that shame sets people up to fail in their attempts to find safety. Youths from dysfunctional families join gangs where they find a measure of acceptance as long as they remain dependant on the gang.

It is also true that our personalities play a major role and it should be noted that the introvert would try to isolate himself from others so as to prevent any continued hurt. On the other hand extroverts become aggressive and obnoxious in an endeavour to cover up their feelings of rejection. Zacchaeus was such an extrovert who was the most despised person in Jericho and gloried in his position as chief tax collector. His identity was in his position and as a person he had nothing. Position and power were props in his life and he used them to extort and to steal. He kept making the wrong decisions and this moulded him into a person with a bad character.

In all probability the people who knew Zacchaeus felt a combination of fear and hate. Yet it was Jesus who called him by name, not to rebuke or correct but to have a meal with him. Jesus singles out all of us who are weak in character and filled with shame. Jesus saw the potential for good and not the sinfulness of Zacchaeus. This should serve as our motivation as leaders.

The Leader with no Congregation

The key to helping the hopeless is to embrace them with acceptance. As a pastor in Hillbrow I realised that to reach the prostitutes, drug addicts, homosexuals and Satanists I

had to become “shockproof” and as I accepted the people I was able to minister to them and see God perform a miracle of deliverance. Jesus saw through the shell of Zacchaeus’ outer behaviour and saw what he could be. As servant leaders we need to accept the person regardless of sinful behaviour.

Tolerance or Acceptance?

The difference between these two attitudes is compassion. Compassion can be defined as feeling pain jointly. It is a deep desire to identify with others in order to be a compassionate channel of healing to them. Biblical acceptance means that we must get involved with others.

Tolerance is an outward show to cover up an inward lack of concern. Jesus has said that many are called but few are chosen, and in the same way it can be said that many are tolerated but few are accepted. Many of us attack the causes of HIV / AIDS but how many of us have volunteered our time to help the terminally ill, feed them and change their bed linen? Servant leaders have no option but to be like Jesus and take on the nature of a servant (Phillip. 2:7) and get involved in peoples lives.

If we are leaders then we need to identify with the people in need. Let us find those people who are hurting and minister healing to their lives.

“THE TRAGEDY OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IS THAT MANY WHO ARE IN GREAT NEED, MANY WHO SEEK AN ATTENTIVE EAR, A FIRM HAND, A WORD OF SUPPORT, A TENDER SMILE OR EVEN A STUTTERING CONFESSION OF INABILITY TO DO MORE, OFTEN FIND THEIR MINISTERS DISTANT MEN WHO DO NOT WANT TO BURN THEIR FINGERS” – Henry Nouwen - *The Wounded Healer*