

Lessons on Life and Leadership

Lesson 8...Focus on Contribution, Not Position

In every society there are people who jockey for the prominent positions. Every company, church, and organization assigns titles and responsibilities to individuals. It's interesting to observe how people handle their positions. But it's even more telling to watch them after they leave that position.

Sometimes, when people exercise authority, their egos start to swell. Before long their identities get wrapped up in their positions. They get possessive about "their" power and "their" people and "their" promotions. Perhaps that's because, in the world system, getting ahead and being promoted is often the result of maneuvering and grasping for position. Of course, there is nothing dishonorable about promotion and nothing wrong with ambition and achievement, unless our motivation is for self-acclaim.

Other people exercise their responsibilities humbly, filling their positions and making their contributions on behalf of others. They constantly ask, "What can I contribute?"—not "What can I gain?" When we are motivated by contribution:

- Our identity remains in Christ, not in position
- Our position remains in perspective as a place of service, not perks
- We can leave our position with freedom and joy

Let me illustrate with three military generals. I heard one four-star general speak about his responsibility. He constantly said, "My people . . . I have . . . my command . . ." It was all about him, with no recognition that he was a temporary holder of that high responsibility. His ego was repulsive!

Another four-star general was asked how it felt to retire. He replied, "One moment I commanded thousands of soldiers, had incredible power and influence. The next moment my only command was the steering wheel of my car—and my wife told me where to turn it!" Not surprisingly, he died within two years.

Then there was Lieutenant General William K. Harrison—known as "the Christian general." On active duty he led each of his military aides to Christ. He never received the field command he longed for. But General Douglas MacArthur chose him to be the first peace negotiator after the Korean War. When Harrison retired, he didn't have a moment's regret. He taught Scripture, wrote a book on eschatology, and helped many people grow spiritually. I remember him sitting in our home interacting with young Air Force cadets—passionately giving himself to that which mattered deeply. What an inspiration!

Jesus' disciples asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" A mother asked, "Will you promote my sons?" Jesus taught, ". . . the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you . . . whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave" (Matthew 20:25-27). In the world and the kingdom, we reap what we sow as leaders: sowing to position reaps emptiness, but sowing to contribution reaps personal fulfillment.

Let's be people who focus on meaningful contribution rather than mere position. If we do, we'll never be retired, unwanted or unemployed in His kingdom!