



Three Things that Last Forever

International Leadership
Institute

PDF #7
2010

CHAPTER SIX: The determination to serve

Initially Knut and Gudrun had the idea that once they fully understand their calling to the ministry, they would become the anointed, blessed kind of beings on whom God has placed special favor, in a different (and probably more pleasant) way from those they were going to serve. But under the persistent influence of the Alpha course, which is a practical introduction to the Christian faith developed by Holy Trinity Brompton Church in London, England, and led by Rev. Nicky Gumbel, as well as from examples of Alpha leaders at both Markham Woods Presbyterian Church (MWPC) in Lake Mary, Florida, and Christ the Redeemer Church (CRC) in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, the Petersons gradually came to understand that Jesus Christ was calling them to the rather mundane role of being “the doormat” of other people.



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St. George's Basilica in Hradcany, Prague

After all, the city of Prague (in Czech, PRAHA) to which God had given them their marching orders, derives its name from the Czech word for the threshold of a doorway. This pun appealed to their sense of humor, although the concept of being walked over, or trodden upon, as a matter of daily experience was not especially attractive to Knut and Gudrun. They had to live through a number of highly-uncomfortable and downright unpleasant, even tough, years; during

this time, the notion that God's favor was always manifested in success, wealth, health and safety from everyday hazards (a rather non-biblical belief, by the way, to judge from Jesus' life and His comments to His apostles and his rich would-be followers), was found to be inadequate and misleading.

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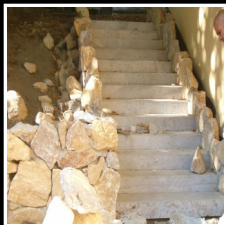
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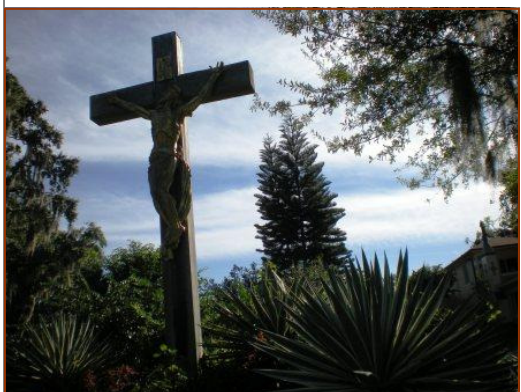
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ALPHA: Knut and Gudrun took part in the Alpha course eight times, first as participants and then as leaders or helpers. Each time the Petersons went through an Alpha course, their understanding of the Christian faith deepened and broadened, and they received new insights into how to talk to people about Christ. Each of Alpha's thirteen sessions and the weekend retreat consist of sharing a meal, watching a DVD presentation by Nicky Gumbel on one aspect of the Christian faith, and discussing the topic presented in a small group with other Alpha participants.

The Alpha leadership at MWPC (Pastor Joe Wendorph and Adult Ministries Director Chris Leinenkugel) were particularly helpful as role models for Knut and Gudrun in becoming effective spiritual leaders. Joe and Chris use a style that puts them on the same level as those seekers of Christ whom they lead. Alpha leaders



At Polasek Gardens in Winter Park, Florida

are question-askers, not question-answerers; the idea of an Alpha group is that the members of the group talk until they arrive at their own conclusions. "Doing Alpha" requires quite a bit of faith and trust that God is working through this process; the tendency to wrestle the conversation away from the group and make it go in a "correct" direction is hard to over-

come. Yet Knut and Gudrun did, after leading and helping with Alpha groups for several years, learn to "let go and let God."

In addition to Alpha, the Petersons prayed daily for people (Christians and non-Christians alike) with physical, emotional, financial, and spiritual needs. Knut and Gudrun had personally experienced healings of many types. They knew that God is the Great Physician, the mighty Jehovah Rapha, and that the Bible urges us to pray for ourselves and others in all things.



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Gudrun and Knut were becoming ever more conscious of the fact that, as long as there is even one human being left on the planet who does not know Christ, and has never had the chance to come to Christ for salvation and eternal life, the Petersons were in bondage to that person, serving him or her until the moment that they could share the Gospel. By being “bond-slaves to Christ,” as Paul called himself in Romans 1:1, Christians are actually servants of all. And the most important act of service that a human can perform for another is to be sure that each person has the opportunity to know and follow Christ.

In their business, the International Leadership Institute, the Petersons had discovered that devotion to the people one serves can be a painful experience. Their clients, for whom Gudrun and Knut sacrificed their own financial security and their health, were oddly indifferent to this sacrifice. In fact, the ingratitude that the Petersons felt from some of their clients not only surprised them, but also left them crushed and broken. Even their dog Comenius was not capable of showing such ingratitude.

No doubt the Petersons had wildly inflated expectations for how their executive education programs would be received by their Central European clients (much like the inflated expectations that the American military expressed when they entered Iraq in 2003, believing that the Iraqis would welcome them with great gladness and joy); no doubt cultural differences exacerbated the differing understanding between the Petersons and their clients of what their programs could and could not provide. Nevertheless, Knut and Gudrun learned a valuable lesson that has shaped their lives: if their motive is the love of Jesus Christ, and if they remain devoted to serve Him, no ingratitude or impertinent behavior can hinder them from serving those God has called them to serve. Becoming a “doormat” is an act to love directed toward God, and is rewarded by God, in spite of what humans may do or say.



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The Petersons began to deliberately identify themselves with Jesus Christ's interests in other people. As followers of Christ, they knew they could not allow themselves be guided by their own personal affinities. Their new knowledge, gained at a price, was in strong contrast with the popular American Protestant idea of God's favor, which combines positive thinking and the prosperity gospel.

God's favor, they found, was far more likely to be expressed in inner peace during outer storms than in outer peace during outer calm. After a few years of struggling with feelings of guilt ("why is God punishing us?") and despair ("will we survive this chastening by the Lord?"), brought on by seemingly-intractable problems in their business and in their family's lives, Knut and Gudrun finally accepted that God's favor is given in God's way, not man's way.

Having no ability to see into the future, or to understand the impact of events as they are occurring, man is a fool if he thinks he can recognize God's favor by its outward manifestation. Surely the saints and martyrs of the Christian faith could have told Gudrun and Knut that the 20th-century "gospel of wealth" was so much foolishness. Money is a tool, not a possession to be sought after or hoarded. It is only of eternal worth when used to further God's kingdom. Wealth, taken as an end to itself, blinds a man to his dependency on God.

Knut and Gudrun knew this intellectually, but, like anyone else, they held the hope that their business would prosper and God would give them all kinds of resources to do His work. They had to learn the hard way that the only resource they need is God Himself. Once they knew this in their hearts, they were fit to serve. Most importantly, by this time they realized that faith is not intelligent understanding of God's character and precepts—it is, rather, a deliberate commitment of the will to walking with Jesus, their Lord and Savior, in every circumstance, even where there is clearly no way to walk: God shows a way where there is no way.



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Knut and Gudrun began to feel the liberating joy of following Christ with reckless abandon, stepping confidently into a future they could not see at all. They could not rationally explain this wonderful feeling of freedom and peace to their families or friends, but allowed themselves to be seen as “fools for Christ.”

“If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise”—1 Cor. 3:18

No longer did the Petersons wait until they could see how to do God’s will in their own minds. Instead they thanked God daily for calling them to be part of the advancement of His kingdom on earth; they pressed on through the hindrances and blockages of mortal life, moving forward with the call that God had placed on their lives. They obeyed God’s commands to go where He wanted them to go and to do what He wanted them to do. God went ahead of the Petersons to open the right doors.; that certainty enabled them to follow with willingness, and to use all the gifts and resources in their possession to serve God.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Who is a servant leader?

Leadership is a topic that invites lofty definitions and philosophical ruminations. Knut and Gudrun, over the years, have had innumerable conversations about the qualities of leadership, and how they could be fostered through International Leadership Institute programs, services and publications, including the 3000+ daily journal entries that Knut’s been writing for over 10 years. One thing they agreed on was that the model of servant leadership is only one of many, and is, unfortunately, the one least likely to be admired and imitated by people who don’t follow Christ.



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In 2007, Knut and Gudrun watched a PBS broadcast, a question-and-answer session between a panel of the eight declared candidates for the Democratic nomination in the 2008 Presidential race and the audience at Howard University, a historically-Black university in Washington DC. PBS commentator Tavis Smiley introduced the session with two

“You can’t lead if you don’t love; you can’t save if you don’t serve”

—Dr. Cornell West

“Anyone can lead because anyone can serve” —Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.

in-quotes:

After the show, Gudrun and Knut discussed what they’d observed and learned. They both found it interesting that the African-American community defines leadership by service; this community appears to have adopted the “helping-others”-centered model of Christ, rather than the “me-and-my-family-first” approach to following Christ demonstrated by other ethnic groups.

One could speculate on the social and historical roots of such a definition, in such as community. Or one could simply note the wisdom of Smiley’s approach and credit that wisdom to God, Who gave us the perfect example of a servant leader in His Son, Jesus Christ.



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CHAPTER SEVEN: Who is a servant leader?



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Worldly Leadership

As they continued their discussion, Knut and Gudrun tried to define servant leadership in contrast with the leadership style most often held up as a model in non-spiritual contexts, “worldly leadership.” It may be authoritarian or democratic, harsh or benevolent, strict or laissez-faire; the point is that it isn’t servant leadership.

Julius Caesar exemplifies the worldly style of leadership. When he began his ascent to the heights of Roman power (just half a century before the birth of Jesus in a Roman province), he justified his aggrandizement of military might and looted wealth with the statement that he had a vision for Rome: he wanted to restore Rome to its mythical former grandeur. In his public addresses, Caesar called upon his personal heritage as a member of the Julian family, the descendants of the gods, to lend him the mantle of authority. He used the funeral of his first wife as a platform to launch his first political campaign, leading to his appointment as Consul of Rome.

Caesar’s personal ambition, which was a factor in his assassination when he became too powerful and thus unrestrainable, was realized through military models of leadership. The rhetoric of restoring Rome was used to conceal his own ambition, providing a quasi-spiritual rationale for his actions, which were in reality those of a dictator. Too often the world views leadership according to a “caesarian” model: the effective leader must be personally ambitious. He gains power by cloaking his ambition in platitudes of honor and glory for the organization or country he wishes to lead. The worldly leader uses every opportunity to extend his influence. He gains wealth and power to further his goals, but manages to conceal his lust for control, and gain the support of his followers, by appealing to their need for vengeance (to right a “wrong”), their pride in their history (to restore the past), or their simple greed.

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The downfall of leaders

The worldly idea of a leader is one who successfully imposes his will on others. He may pretend to do so out of love for those he leads (and indeed may actually believe he is acting out of love), but in fact he is acting out of his own ideas about what is best for those he leads, no matter how benevolent he may appear.

The problem with his leadership is that the worldly leader has no supernatural wisdom or insight to guide him. If his power is great, he has no restraining hand to prevent him from error. Even the non-Christian Greeks (living centuries before the birth of Jesus) knew well the tragedy that awaits those who put their human will above that of the gods: hamartia (the tragic flaw) and hubris (grotesquely exaggerated pride) bring down these heroes every time.

Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Hussein—the 20th century rogue’s gallery provides more than enough examples of men whose leadership became so vast that their megalomaniacal ideas went unchecked, resulting in the ruin and deaths of millions, including the people they had pledged to lead. Yet this brutal model of leadership survives. It’s quite implausible that humans continue to follow these leaders who are doomed to failure. But any history book gives the details of dozens of leaders whose ambition and greed led them to spectacular deeds of waste, destruction and contempt for human life. Any newspaper gives the details of such leaders in operation today. Humans seem to fall for the same lies, deceit and propaganda, again and again.

How can a servant lead?

It seems paradoxical to even speak of “a servant who leads.” The two concepts don’t mesh: servants follow orders, while leaders give orders. Within this paradox lies the secret of servant leadership:

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Every being in God's Kingdom serves God, and God alone. By definition, every creation of God that has restored its broken relationship with God is automatically a servant of God; all Christians are servants of God, through Christ (though some are more obedient servants than others!). All of His followers, as they act as obedient servants, are then leaders. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they all have the potential to lead others to God through Christ. These new members of God's kingdom will then serve Him, too, by leading the lost.

Knut and Gudrun concluded their discussion of servant leadership with a definition they could both accept. Servant leadership in God's kingdom is very simple. It has nothing to do with personal ambition. It does not spring from greed or lust. The servant leader obeys God with love; he manifests God's will on earth with obedience; he leads others to God's kingdom with service.

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