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GRACE-DRIVEN MINISTRY: A PARADIGM FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY IN ASIA AND BEYOND

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Key Thought: Experiencing God's grace is essential to ensure effectiveness in our ministry.

The encounter between the rich young ruler and Jesus, recorded in Matt 19:16-22 and Mark 10:17-22, is a meaningful experience that helps us as we reflect on the theme of this Forum. Let us revisit the narrative and rediscover the primacy of experiencing God's grace in the practice of ministry.

Employers are very particular with the qualifications of their employees. When they hire workers, they require them to submit to interviews and present transcripts of academic records in order to ensure that the applicants are qualified for the job. Now this rich, young ruler came to Jesus for an interview. His motives seemingly revealed that he wanted to become one of Jesus' ministers. Perhaps everybody assumed and expected that this rich, young ruler would pass the interview. After all, to all appearances, it seemed that he was certainly qualified to be one of Jesus' disciples. But to our surprise and disappointment, he flunked the qualification test.

Definitely, the young Christian organization could have used the services of this very qualified young man. It was difficult to accept that the rich, young ruler could not qualify for the ministry. Imagine! Rich, young, and a ruler at that! Such a combination of wealth, good health, and power can certainly propel someone to "get ahead" in ministry. Hence, we are forced to question, "Why was this young man disqualified?" To do so, let us take a close look and examine the qualifications of this "would-have-been" disciple of Jesus. Besides being rich, young, and a ruler, he had several other outstanding qualifications.

1. **Earnestness.** This young man was very earnest in his desire to follow Jesus. In Mark's account, he "ran up to" Jesus (10:17). This is quite a picture!

Imagine running to Jesus! How happy we would be if our ministers were full of vigor and enthusiasm in doing the Lord's work. We admire ministers who are full of energy and always on the go, being conscious not to waste time or opportunity. We appreciate such workers. But to Jesus, earnestness in doing the Lord's work is one quality, but it is not enough.

2. Courage. This young man must have been very courageous. Others were reluctant to be associated with Jesus. Although he admired Jesus, Nicodemus came to see Him by night because he did not want to be identified with the great Rabbi. But this young man came to Jesus in broad daylight. Today, we need ministers who are assertive and courageous. We need ministers who are not afraid to be identified with Jesus. But to Jesus, courage alone is not enough.

3. Humility. This young man must have been very humble because when he finally caught up with Jesus, he knelt down before Him (Mark 10:11). What a picture of humility! Here was a ruler kneeling before a lowly peasant, Jesus. We certainly admire ministers who are humble, while we may not have the same admiration for those who are proud. Ellen White wrote that if we humble ourselves, souls will be converted by the hundreds instead of by the few.¹ Humility is one quality necessary when we are engaged in the Lord's work. But to Jesus, being humble is not enough.

4. Good judgment and sharp intellect. This young man must have been in possession of these admirable assets. While the leaders of his day despised Jesus and considered Him as of the devil, this young man readily acknowledged Jesus as a good master. He also recognized Jesus as divine. But merely recognizing Jesus as divine is not enough. In fact, the devils also recognized Jesus as divine. They even trembled in His presence. We admire ministers who are intelligent, having their transcripts full of A's, and generally being described as "bright." But to Jesus, good judgment and sharp intellect are not enough.

5. Sterling religious life. This young man was religious. He came to Jesus seeking eternal life asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17).² Multitudes followed Jesus for several reasons. Some flocked to Him because they wanted to be healed. Others came to Jesus because they wanted to eat. But this young man came to Jesus not to ask for material blessings, but rather to inquire about the salvation of his soul. He came to Jesus seeking eternal life. This young man must have been very religious. But to Jesus, appearing to be religious is not enough.

6. Faithfulness in keeping the Ten Commandments. When Jesus told him to keep the commandments, he boastfully said, "All these I have kept since I was a boy" (Mark 10:20). But to Jesus, keeping the commandments faithfully is not enough.

¹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:189.

²Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the NIV.

7. **Sincerity.** Although sincere, this young man acknowledged that he still lacked something. In Matthew's account, he asked, "What do I still lack?" (19:20). Mark 10:21 declares, "Jesus looked at him and loved him." Commenting on this Ellen White says that such an expression came from Jesus as He saw the sincerity of the young man.³ Many ministers are very sincere. But to Jesus, sincerity is not enough.

These were the qualifications of this rich young ruler. Were they not enough to qualify him to be one of Jesus' ministers? From our human point of view, this young man was more than qualified. In fact, it would appear that he had *all* the qualifications. He deserved, at the least, a chance to be a minister for God. Why was he disqualified?

The simple answer is that the young man disqualified himself because he failed to recognize that effective ministry comes essentially by responding to God's amazing grace. Ministry is a gift from God. God calls those who should minister for Him. Ministry, to be effective, should be driven by a response of love to God's call; a response of love because of God's grace. I can almost hear the reaction of the disciples upon seeing that the young man walked away. They must have reacted adversely, perceiving from the interview only the good qualities, the external competencies of the rich, young ruler. They forgot the goodness and the grace of Jesus Christ. The disciples failed to recognize that one could not earn the right and privileges of ministry through one's own "goodness" and abilities. God called us into the ministry, not on the basis of our goodness. We were called into the ministry on the basis of God's mercy, grace, and love.

Neither being rich nor young disqualified the young ruler. It is true that the love of money is the root of all evil, but at least, we may say, Jesus must have realized that the church needs money to uproot evil. Being young was not the ground for his disqualification either. Age has nothing to do with commitment.

The problems of that young man were not found in the external qualities he so richly possessed. The young man lacked the qualities that could only be measured in the heart. Ellen G. White's comment is insightful,

Christ read the ruler's heart. Only one thing he lacked, but that was a vital principle. He needed the love of God in the soul. This lack, unless supplied, would prove fatal to him; his whole nature would become corrupted.⁴

Talking about fatality, this was real heart failure. He failed to respond positively to God's love and grace.

³Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages: The Conflict of the Ages Illustrated in the Life of Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 519.

⁴*Ibid.*

Let me end this devotional with a short story that illustrates the concept of grace-driven ministry. In 1993, I was invited by the graduating class of Mountain View College to be the consecration speaker for their weekend graduation ceremonies. When I received the printed program, I was surprised to notice that the then vice-president of the Philippines, Salvador Laurel, was the commencement speaker. Although my speaking assignment was scheduled for Friday evening, I decided to stay on campus until Sunday evening to listen to this great statesman. In his speech, Vice-President Laurel exhorted the graduates to serve humanity and the country in the truest sense of the word. He illustrated the concept with the story about an incident which happened to his father, Speaker Jose P. Laurel.

Speaker Jose P. Laurel was appointed by the Japanese as the Head of the Provisional Government of the Philippines during the Japanese occupation in the second World War. Many patriotic Filipinos felt that by cooperating with the Japanese, Speaker Jose P. Laurel was a traitor. One day, while Speaker Laurel was playing golf, a gunman ambushed him. Fortunately, he was not fatally wounded. While recuperating in the hospital, the military police presented the assassin to the Speaker. The police told him that they would be executing the assassin in a few hours on the grounds of attempted murder. The Speaker told them that he had forgiven his would-be assassin. By virtue of his being president of the provisional government, he was setting the man free.

According to the Vice-President, when the would-be assassin heard this expression of undeserved grace, he knelt down before the Speaker and promised that he would give his service and his life for him in return for this new lease of life.

According to the story, that would-be assassin became the closest security officer of the Speaker for the rest of his life. In fact, his family served the Laurel family for many years. The service, the ministry, rendered by that would-be assassin is definitely grace-driven. Grace-driven ministry will surely be effective. It will not fail.

It pays to have good qualifications. But qualifications are not enough. Today, our loving Master, Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, reminds us that if we are to become successful and effective in our ministries, it is not because of our abilities, but because of our availability. It is only by His grace that we will succeed. We are in the ministry because of God's grace. We will be successful in the ministry when we are driven by that experienced, indwelling, sustaining grace of Christ. Amen!