

Behold My Servant

Thoughts on Isaiah 42:1-4

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Every now and then I feel dry spiritually. It's not burn-out or as serious as spiritual depression. It just feels as if I'm running on empty. At times like that I have a routine:

1. I tell the Lord how I am feeling.

Invariably my spiritual fatigue and mild discouragement can be traced back to the fact that I have my focus on myself or my circumstances rather than on Christ.

Right now, my attention has gone to things like—my ministry, my role in the church, my health, my relational problems. Get the picture? I'm clearly self-absorbed.

2. I ask God to give me a fresh vision of himself.

Then I watch and wait for an answer. It's uncanny how often God speaks to me through a book I read. This time it was a line from Robert Greenleaf's classic book: *Servant Leadership*. He says, "Leadership can be taken from us, never servanthood." That grabbed my attention. I began searching for references to servanthood in the Bible¹ and the passage that impacted me more than others at this stage of my journey was Isaiah 42:1-4.

Here's my reflective commentary:

This is one of the "Servant Songs" in Isaiah's prophecy, the most well known of which is Isaiah 52:1-53:12. Usually these songs start with "Behold" (the NIV translates it *here is*) or look earnestly at my Servant. It's as if God the Father is pointing at his Son and asking us to gaze on him. No doubt Isaiah has God's disobedient servant Israel in mind as he writes, but it's clear from the New Testament that our passage—Isaiah 42:1-4 also refers to Jesus (read Matthew 12:15-21).

¹ Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Here is (or behold) my Servant

Yahweh's call is for us to focus on Christ, to look intently on him. My tendency like Peter when he was walking on the water towards Jesus², is to look at the surroundings (in his case the waves). Jesus must be the primary focus of our lives.

whom I uphold...I will put my Spirit on him

These words imply that Jesus was dependent on his Father—the Son was upheld by him. That fits with John 5:19-20—...*the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing...for the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does...* Several times in the gospel story, it says that Jesus was led by the Spirit. He

¹ There are a mere handful of references to *leader* or *leaders* and in excess of 800 references to *servant* or *servants*.

² Matthew 14:22-36

depended on his Father, and he was guided by the Holy Spirit. I need to ask myself, “Am I boxing on in my own strength, or am I being upheld by the Father and prompted by the Spirit.?” Too often I’m moving under my own steam.

² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.

In the parallel passage in Matthew 12, Jesus had healed lots of sick people and his popularity was soaring. Instead of building on that, he warned them (strong words) not to tell who he was. When you compare that with another phrase in Isaiah 42:1—“*my chosen One in whom I delight*,” it seems that Jesus was listening for heaven’s approval not the applause of people. As someone put it, he was living before an Audience of One. That’s a true servant! No marketing agency, no image makers, just living for his Father’s “Well done!”. And he was clearly not showing off.

³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

When Jesus saw people who were *bruised reeds* (probably a metaphor for badly wounded, inadequate folk) or *smoldering wicks* (individuals whose flame had almost been snuffed out) he didn’t trample on them or blow out their flame. Instead he treated broken people with great gentleness.

This is where we find out who are the real servant leaders versus the celebrity-type leaders. Celebrities move with the movers. Christlike servants humbly and faithfully serve the sick and downtrodden even when no-one knows and no-one cares.

⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.

Several times in my life I’ve been so discouraged I’ve almost quit. Here Jesus stayed with the task his Father had assigned to him—to *establish justice on the earth*. Jesus was in every way the faithful servant. He endured the cross and the shame. The cause of his Father was everything to him.

Have you:

then adopt these 5 habits:

Become self-absorbed?

FOCUS ON CHRIST NOT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

Become disconnected from God?

DEPEND ON GOD NOT YOURSELF

Become a people-pleaser?

LISTEN FOR HEAVEN’S APPROVAL NOT EARTH’S APPLAUSE.

Become harsh in your relationships?

TREAT BROKEN PEOPLE WITH GREAT GENTLENESS

Become disillusioned, or ready to quit?

STAY WITH THE TASK GOD HAS ASSIGNED TO YOU—DON’T RUN AWAY.