



I was standing in line to board a plane with a friend recently. According to protocol, the first class, priority seating and platinum card members went first. My friend was in one of those groups and left me with a smile. My boarding pass was group 3. Translated that meant – last to board. So spiritually speaking a good place for me – the last shall be first – right? And for my friend, platinum was a good place to avoid the cattle rush of the economy class!

At a recent global YWAM gathering, I was allocated special seats, received a special invitation to a reception and given the opportunity of dialoguing important issues with other global leaders. We even had some special hospitality given to enable us to continue chatting over the meal times. It's biblical to honour leaders – right?

I am sure you can think of some situations where you have been the recipient of receiving honour as well as missing out on being given any special treatment at all. Of course there doesn't have to be an issue of status in these examples, it all depends on our heart attitude.

What do I feel when I'm left standing at the gate and board last? What about when I get to board first? How do I respond being honoured at a YWAM gathering or being chosen for a special task? Perhaps the issue is more – How do I respond when certain honour isn't given to me, and when it is given to others? What about when I'm out of the loop of communication or when there are no perks and it's just 'little old me'?

As I return home, any hats or titles that I have had are taken off at the door, as they don't mean a thing inside the house. I'm loved because of 'me' not who I represent. Family have a way of ridding us of titles and status even if we like wearing them! There is a difference between rolling out the red carpet for someone because you want to honour them or rolling it out because you have to, or because it's expected or it becomes part of the protocol.

As I leave the house to continue with my ministry and calling, I can choose to function with a servant heart or live out of a heart attitude that enjoys the title and status of leadership. This is the constant temptation that comes to leaders daily. I have to remind myself of my calling to – serve and not be served – as Jesus taught us.

Status is that position that others give to you or you take for yourself, that is suppose to place greater worth in who you are. So if you have leadership status you are just that little bit superior to others, or so you feel. 1 Corinthians 12:13 doesn't really agree with this kind of thinking. "Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit." Or Galatians 3:28, "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all

one in Christ Jesus.” In Christ we are all valuable and all on the level. Leadership in that sense is simply a function we fulfill but it doesn't make us more important.

There are many phrases and statements used in our every day language that speak of status but often we use them without as a second thought. Here are some of them:

- *Pecking order* – levels of authority within a group
- *Class system* – levels of economy in society. In the UK there is an upper, middle and lower class, each of which have certain values in spending the money they own
- *Caste* – social status or position conferred by a system based on class
- *The rank and file* – general membership of an organisation distinct from the leaders
- *Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth* – born to wealth and high station
- *Blueblood* – an aristocrat or noble, a thoroughbred
- *Above the salt* – among the distinguished guests at a dinner. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the salt was placed in the middle of the table and those above the salt were the most important guests
- *Brown bagger* – person of inferior status, carrying their lunch in a brown bag (USA) or non resident student at university carrying his books in a brown attaché case.(Britain)
- *Low man on the totem pole* – the lowest in rank, the least important or experienced person
- *Salt of the earth* – a person or group epitomizing the best and most admirable elements of society. It was praise of the highest order when Jesus called his disciples the ‘salt of the earth’ at the sermon on the mount!

Jesus therefore raises our status up to that of the salt of the earth, to sons of God, to saints and to citizens of a higher Kingdom. However, when our followers want to exalt us, we need to step down from the pedestal that they seek to place us on. Jesus stepped down from his heavenly role to an earthly one. *“Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.”* Philippians 2:7-8. Jesus came to serve and not be served.

When people try to put us on a higher level and give us status, we have a choice. A. We can raise them up to a higher place: Sometimes we can raise them up by asking them questions and inviting their involvement and voice into decision making and planning. We can give attention to their ideas and input and add value and importance to them in the process. We can make sure we give honour and glory to those to whom it is due and identify ways that we can continue to serve our followers and pour our lives out for them.

B. Or we can step down to their level, to be one of the crowd, to have an equal

footing and recognise again that we are simply another member of the body but with a leadership function.

Cultures vary in their power-distance. Cultures that endorse low power-distance expect and accept power relationships that are more consultative or democratic. Cultures that endorse high power-distance expect and accept power relationships that are more authoritative and direct. So there is more status connected to a culture with a higher power-distance.

For instance in the Power-Distance Index by Geert Hofstede, Russia scores 93, S. Korea 60, UK 35 and New Zealand 22. In high power-distance cultures, there is a great respect given to leaders and elders. This is very positive and a quality that low power-distant cultures often miss, but we need to draw a line between giving honour to a leader and treating that leader as if they can do no wrong. Respect has gone too far when there is no longer an opportunity to have honest conversation. Our Father God doesn't mind us asking honest questions and challenges us to reason together with him! In a YWAM context in a high power-distance culture, we have the opportunity to create a sub-culture that perhaps aligns more to a Kingdom culture, where the individual can speak honestly with a leader and where a leader is able to listen and receive input from a follower. (Here is a great article by Roger Sapp on 'honouring the truth teller')

[http://www.enterhisrest.org/ichabod/truth\\_teller.pdf](http://www.enterhisrest.org/ichabod/truth_teller.pdf)

As leaders we can protect ourselves from getting too big for our shoes by developing shared leadership teams, involving others with different perspective and gifts and choosing not to use power based titles.

*Jesus instructed the disciples in Matthew 23:6-10 And they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the seats of honor in the synagogues. They love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi.' "Don't let anyone call you 'Rabbi,' for you have only one teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters. And don't address anyone here on earth as 'Father,' for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father. And don't let anyone call you 'Teacher,' for you have only one teacher, the Messiah.*

In different cultures and throughout time, status symbols have changed dramatically. These days technological products, designer wear, body modifications, education and titles are among the symbols we look for. Is it any different in the body of Christ? Perhaps in YWAM it could include how many countries you have travelled to, how many languages you can communicate in, how many DTS's you have led or how many times you have moved!

Some questions to ask yourself, to check out the possibility of some status present:

1. Do people sometimes ask – what do you guys do in your leadership meetings? Sitting on a leadership team for the ministry in Scotland years ago we were asked that question and we realised that there was a sense of importance being on “the team.” Where there's mystery, there is usually status.

2. Do you enjoy slipping out your business card with your credentials shining nicely or perhaps you keep your title fairly quiet but are kind of glad when someone finds out and pops it out in conversation or as they introduce you in the meeting?
3. Do you enjoy some of the perks that come with a leadership role? I hear you saying – yeah the constant jetlag, hours of travel time, constantly going the extra mile in leadership meetings and feeling tired all the time! No I'm thinking of special meals, special rooms, special treatment, special budgets, special freedom....? Perhaps you don't get it but think you should! That's probably more like it.
4. Do you purposely join the back of lines instead of going first? Do you jump up to serve, or hang back and be served?
5. Do you give the same welcome, attention and value to a staff person compared to someone of reputation?
6. What practical ways have you stepped down from the pedestal that people put you on?

Let's take hold of Jesus' words to his disciples and deal status a death blow.

*Luke 9:46-48 Then his disciples began arguing about which of them was the greatest. But Jesus knew their thoughts, so he brought a little child to his side. Then he said to them, "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me also welcomes my Father who sent me. Whoever is the least among you is the greatest."*

Until next month

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