

Lead Strong

FIND STRENGTH
TO SUSTAIN YOUR LEADERSHIP

BY LORI WILHITE AND
THE LEADING AND LOVING IT TEAM

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One ridiculously early summer morning my family headed to the airport so we could jet off on a little vacation. Being the gracious parents we are, we decided to wait until the last moment to pull our kiddos out of bed and throw them into the car. They could eat breakfast at some fine quality airport fast food restaurant once we were through security. See. Gracious, I tell ya.

After checking our luggage, we headed up the escalator to security. We were met with nine million other Monday morning travelers, long winding security lines, and a malfunctioning air conditioner. Seriously?!

So, we started waiting. And waiting. And w-a-i-t-i-n-g.

My son began to complain: It's hot. I'm sweating. I don't feel very good.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We are all hot, sweaty and not feeling good. Suck it up, buddy.

Then he started to lean over and even kneel down. I turned and got a good look at him. He did look a little pale and felt a little clammy. I grabbed our boarding passes and started fanning the back of his neck and whispering that we'd be through the line soon.

Just as we handed our boarding passes and IDs to the TSA agents, my son passed out. Fainted. Blacked out. Crumpled into a heap at my feet! Everything clicked into slow-mo as I watched his big body hit the ground.

I got to my knees, in my white jeans on the filthy airport floor, and turned his face to see if his eyes would open. I could hear TSA calling for medics. I could hear my husband asking if Ethan was okay. And I could hear a few gasps from the people around us.

Once the two Fire EMT guys and the two paramedics arrived, they determined a visit to the nearest hospital was called for. Good-bye early morning flight. Good-bye routine travel day. Good-bye family trip.

One ambulance ride, two blood sugar tests, one IV, one EKG, a protein bar and two glasses of apple juice later, we had a diagnosis: A combination of low blood sugar (thanks for the delayed breakfast plan, mom) and the fact that apparently whacky teenage bodies are still adjusting to how much blood they need to pump up their fast growing bodies to reach their brains (hello, 6'1" 13 year old boy). What in the world?!

Once Ethan started feeling better, his first words were, “Maybe next time you’ll believe me when I say I’m not feeling very good.” *cue mommy guilt*

There are times in life and leadership when we can feel suddenly zapped of all our strength. No, we may not crumple to the ground, but we feel crumpled in spirit. We may feel weak and wonder if we can keep on going, keep on leading.

Sometimes we flat-out need an infusion of strength.

You won’t need blood sugar tests or IVs to tap into that strength. The best place I can think of to gain strength for our leadership is to turn directly to the wisdom laid out in the pages of the Bible. Nothing can sustain us as leaders like the lessons found in the Word of God.

Together, let’s learn to Lead Strong.

Lori Wilhite and the Leading and Loving It Team

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Leaders Don't Boast

Genesis 37:1-11

Children are master braggarts. A little of the thumbs in the ears, wiggling of the fingers, a tiny shake of the booty and a melodious “nanny-nanny-boo-boo!” Yes. Bragging masters.

As adults, we’ve more finely tuned our boasting. We’ve traded in those wiggly fingers for well-timed social media posts, and refined the little song and dance to a simple #humblebrag. Maybe we are even better master braggarts now than when we were younger.

All of us, every leader, no matter how great, will be tempted to be boastful. Every. Single. One.

Joseph, with his fabulous coat and his dreams of ruling over his family, was no different. Genesis 37:8 says his brothers “hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them.” It wasn’t just the runway worthy jacket, the fact he was clearly his father’s favorite, or those vivid dreams of his, it was the way Joseph talked about them that really got on his brothers’ last nerves. Maybe he did throw in a little “nanny-nanny-boo-boo” after all.

The way in which we talk matters too. There is often the thinnest of very thin lines between celebrating and boasting. How can we, as leaders, keep ourselves from boasting?

First, do a heart check. Ask yourself: Why am I sharing this? Sometimes we need to take a moment and get gut-level honest with ourselves about our motives before we speak, share or hit send. Am I posting for encouragement? Do I share for celebration? Am I seeking to make myself look better?

Second, do a filter check. Ask yourself: Is there a better way to be sharing this? Even with the right motivations, we can still miss the delivery. I should take a second look at that photo before it invades Instagram. Reread that comment before it is shot out through my text messages. And think twice about that story before my lips get ahead of my brain.

People don't want to follow a boastful leader. In fact, just like Joseph's brothers, that bragging may lead to nothing but the building up of resentment in their hearts. Let's be leaders willing to consistently check our hearts and filters to ensure we don't boast.

By Lori Wilhite

Leaders are Kingdom-Minded

Genesis 45:1-8

Joseph stood across an empty room locking eyes with his brothers. The brothers who had been consumed by jealousy and hatred. The brothers who threw him into a hole in the ground. The brothers who sold him into slavery years before.

Now, these same brothers of his showed up in the midst of a famine and needed something from little brother. You know what a lot of us would have done in that situation? Yell for someone to dig a hole, throw our brothers in and ask them how it feels. #revenge

Our human nature often wants the other party to feel the same pain, experience a similar hurt in order to feel what we think will be relief to us. But we all know that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth leaves us starving and empty. While he could easily have gotten his revenge, I love the example Joseph sets to stay kingdom-minded.

Joseph lived a kingdom-minded life. Even though his brothers caused him great pain because they separated him from his father and forced him to enter an unknown world, his desire was still to allow them to see they were serving the same God.

The God who Genesis 45:7 says “sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” Joseph isn’t saying God sent me ahead for me, he is reminding them “God sent *me* ahead for *us*.”

In my life, a relationship with a dear friend has unraveled. It’s been hard. Worse than hard. Some days the loneliness aches deep in my soul. Other days being alone is comforting because if I am alone, I can’t be disappointed by anyone.

Lately, I’ve felt the Holy Spirit tug at my heart reminding me, regardless of my pain, God loves that other person as much as He loves me. He wants to bless them as much as He wants to bless me. He wants to bestow His goodness and mercy on them the same way He wants to shower it on me.

Let’s remain kingdom-minded. Remembering we serve the same Lord whose purposes are greater than me and even us; they are for Him.

By Brandi Wilson

Leaders are Strong

Joshua 1:1-18

We were quietly going about our business. Me doing some writing while bingeing my backed-up DVR. My husband grabbing something out of the laundry room. My son crashed on the couch watching anime, and my daughter just pulling in the driveway from voice lessons.

BOOM! A violent sound reverberated through the house. We all ran from our various places to the garage.

In the unrelenting Vegas July heat, a can of black spray paint tucked away in a storage bin exploded, blowing the lid off the bin, and raining paint down onto my car. We quickly pulled the car out into the driveway and started scrubbing. And scrubbing. And scrubbing. In 109 degree temperatures.

For the next two hours, inch by inch, we exercised some serious elbow grease trying to get that paint off my car. I was absolutely zapped of all strength. I started to think the droplets of paint looked fantastic. Maybe they added character. Maybe they could just stay forever. My arms were noodles. I just wasn't strong enough to keep going. I quit.

The next morning, with renewed energy and commitment to saving that car, we resumed our scrubbing for another two hours. Sweat dripping off our noses, we gave it everything we had and stayed committed to the cause. And we had our victory!

Sometimes we just flat out have to summon up some serious strength. When God called Joshua to lead the people of Israel, what must have felt like a nearly impossible task, He says three times, “Be strong and courageous!” Leadership requires strength, the strength to keep going, the strength to give it our all, the strength to stay committed to our calling no matter what.

In Joshua 1, the Message translation says, “Strength! Courage! You are going to lead this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors. Give it everything you have, heart and soul. Make sure you carry out The Revelation that Moses commanded you, every bit of it. Don’t get off track, either left or right, so as to make sure you get to where you’re going. ... Then you’ll get where you’re going; then you’ll succeed. Haven’t I commanded you? Strength! Courage!”

Give it everything you have. Everything. When you feel zapped of all strength and when your arms feel like noodles, keep giving it everything you have.

Inch by inch, person by person, small group by small group, student by student and weekend by weekend, put your heart and soul into serving Jesus and leading His people.

Stay committed to the calling. Don't let distractions cause you to veer to the left. Don't let hurt make you veer to the right. Stay on track - committed to introducing people to Jesus and helping them follow Him. Then you'll get where you're going. You'll succeed. You'll have victory!

Strength! Courage!

By Lori Wilhite

Leaders Have Faith

Joshua 3:7-17

I'm an amazing cook. I put just the right amount of mayo in a can of tuna. My peanut butter and jelly sandwiches have the perfect proportions of peanut butter and jelly. And I can add the ideal amount of milk to mac and cheese so it is nice and creamy. Yep. I'm a great cook.

And I'm a pretty okay leader. Oh what I wouldn't give to be great leader. If God showed up and told me "Today I will begin to make you a great leader,"(vs 7) like He did Joshua, I would have been 100 percent in. 100.

Just as the Israelites were preparing to make their way into the promised land, God is ready to begin to make Joshua into a great leader. That greatness wouldn't come from anything Joshua might do. Nope. The greatness would come due to what the Lord was going to do. Joshua just had to have faith.

Joshua needed faith God would drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Prizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites ahead of them. That's a lot of 'ites, y'all. Joshua needed faith as they approached the overflowing Jordan River. He needed faith as they carried the ark into the flood stage river.

He needed faith that God would follow through on His promise that they would cross the river on dry ground. And Joshua needed faith as the priest's feet touched the water's edge.

God came through. He didn't just show up at the last moment. Oh no. God was actually working upstream. Before the Israelites gathered their things to move toward the promised land, before the priests picked up the ark, before they dipped their toes in the water's edge, the water "began backing up a great distance away at a town called Adam, which is near Zarethan." Adam was a little town 20 miles upstream from where the Israelites were crossing the Jordan River. God, working ahead of His people, began piling the water 20 miles up river so that at the moment the priests' feet touched the edge of the river, the water dried up so they could walk on dry ground.

Want to be a great leader? Thankfully it isn't dependent on what we do, but dependent on our great God. Great leadership is having faith that God will drive out the enemy. Great leadership is having faith as we approach overflowing and overwhelming circumstance. Great leadership is having faith God follows through on His promises.

Great leadership is having faith that God is working upstream. Great leadership hinges on our faith that God is moving, working, and doing what only He can do.

By Lori Wilhite

Leaders are Worshipers

Job 2:9-10

Leadership is hard. We bump up against each other, hurtful words are flung, our pride gets in the way, and decisions are made we don't understand. The list goes on.

When life is hard, what do we do next? Throw a pity party? Stomp our feet? Mumble a curse word under our breaths? Post a nasty message on Facebook? Give the silent treatment? Throw a fist in the air at God?

Job's response to the madness of life amazes me. In the midst of extreme pain, Job immediately worships God. Repeatedly we read, "not once through all this did Job sin; not once did he blame God." (Job 2:10)

In my own painful moments, worshipping God hasn't always been my go-to next step. Too often I recognize the bad and stay there, rather than recognizing the bad and choosing to worship God in the midst of it.

I think if I were to begin worshipping God rather than stomping my feet angrily because life didn't unpack how I dreamed and planned, something miraculous would happen in my story. Something miraculous would happen in me.

Job's decision to worship God was rooted in his trust in God. If we really believe God is a good, good Father, what stops us from running straight to His arms when our hearts have been bruised?

God knows us. He sees us. He knows our stories and our pain. He loves us more than we'll ever really understand. He invites us to come running into His arms recognizing the ugly that's swirling around us, looking up saying, "Daddy, I don't get this. I'm hurting, but I trust You because You are good. I know You're a good, good Father."

Will we always get an answer or resolution? No. But we will experience incredible peace by trusting in our good God.

When questioned by his wife about his unshakeable faith in Job 2:10, Job responded in a way we can all embrace when the rainy days crash in on us: "We take the good days from God—why not also the bad days?"

When life is hard, what we do next defines the rest of our story. The decision is up to us. We can choose to forfeit our faith in anger, stomping away from the One who made us, or we can worship Him. What will we choose?

By Emily Cummins

Leaders Are Full of Integrity

Job 27:3-6

Days before Easter, I stood at the edge of our platform at church chatting with our staff. As one person turned to leave, I took one small step backward. Big mistake. My heel went off the edge of the stage, and I started to fall backward. Realizing that falling backward off a 4-foot platform would be all kinds of terrible, I attempted to spin around and fall forward instead. That little plummet off of the stage cost me a fractured radius, a chipped wrist, some tendon damage, and an injured shoulder.

Now, I didn't wake up that morning and think: Today is a great day to throw myself off the stage and sideline myself for the next three months. It was just a single, tiny step in the wrong direction. One moment making the smallest wrong decision.

Likewise, no one hops out of bed one day and thinks to themselves: Today is a wonderful day to wreck my marriage. I think I'll blow up my ministry today. What a super day to sideline myself in leadership!

Nope. But if we are not careful, we can take tiny steps lacking in integrity that can lead to complete disaster in our leadership. Job 27:3-6 in the Message says, “But for as long as I draw breath, and for as long as God breathes life into me, I refuse to say one word that isn’t true. I refuse to confess to any charge that’s false. There is no way I’ll ever agree to your accusations. I’ll not deny my integrity even if it costs me my life. I’m holding fast to my integrity and not loosening my grip - and, believe me, I’ll never regret it.”

As leaders, it is critical to hold fast to our integrity, not ever loosening our grip on it. And that means every tiny step and small decision matters. Telling the truth when no one knows otherwise is important. Doing the right thing when no one’s watching is vital. Keeping ourselves above reproach is paramount. Because even though integrity is a private, unseen matter, God sees.

Integrity matters. Let’s keep a white-knuckled, iron-fisted, death grip on our integrity.

By Lori Wilhite

Leaders are Owners

Genesis 3:1-13

We will all make mistakes. It's inevitable. Regardless of how hard we try, we are going to fail. In fact, here's a short list of mistakes I've made recently:

I refused to show gratitude to someone who had shown me kindness.

I gossiped to one staff member about another staff member because I wanted them to know the other person had hurt my feelings.

I lost my temper with my kids because they spilled an entire pitcher of sweet tea on my newly mopped kitchen floor. There's a chance I might not have been honest when asked about leading a committee at my kids' school so I wouldn't have to lead one more thing.

I have a friend who says, "Sometimes life is going to be trial and error, so you just have to learn from your trial and learn from your error." Isn't that the truth? We don't always have all the answers. We have good intentions, yet still give into temptation. We hear God speaking to us and sometimes ignore what He is asking.

And we aren't the only ones.

Eve was a gal well acquainted with failure and mistakes. She allowed the serpent to convince her to break God's command. Mistake.

She grabbed that fruit and took a big, juicy bite. Mistake. She handed the fruit off to Adam and encouraged him to join in on the rule breaking. Mistake.

In the midst of failure, how do we own our mistakes?

First, admit faults. This is so hard. Typing my mistake list above was so hard for me. All those mistakes I've made recently make me wonder if someone might judge me while reading them. But I've come to learn the mistake, regardless of how innocent or unintentional, matters to the one we have offended or hurt. Eve, in all of her poor decision making, was able to admit her mistakes and acknowledge her failure. She might have made the first mistake by eating the fruit after clearly being told not to, but she admitted in Genesis 3:13, "And I ate it." Plain and simple. She admitted her fault.

Second, accept responsibility. Confession and the simple words "I'm sorry" carry a lot of power. However, often when it comes to accepting responsibility and apologizing, we feel we need to build a case, defend ourselves and our actions, or explain our side of things.

What we really need to focus on is building a bridge between ourselves and the offended. When we offer a simple, no-excuse apology to someone we've hurt, it goes a long way.

We aren't perfect. Leading well through our mistakes is what will be remembered and talked about, not the mistake itself.

By Brandi Wilson

Leaders Delegate

Exodus 18:13-27

I have control issues. I pretend I'm super laid back. But I'm not. It's much cooler to be laid back than to have opinion domination issues. But that's where I'm at. When it comes to delegation, I know all the right things to do, but actually doing them is a different challenge.

What holds me back from delegating? Brace yourself for a truckload of hard-to-admit-truth.

First, I know how I want things done; I'm picky. I wonder if people can do the job as well as me. Secondly, I don't have time to involve others. It takes time to delegate tasks. Finding time to teach, instruct, and explain feels daunting. Third, I hate delegating what I consider busy work. I stink at administrative stuff so I struggle handing off administrative responsibilities thinking everyone despises those jobs just like I do. And lastly, I don't like delegating to already busy people. Rather than ask my swamped buddies to add one more thing to their long To-Do Lists, I'll just jump in and take care of it.

So why do I push myself to delegate anyway?

No matter if you're leading 60 people, 600, 6,000 or the some 600,000 people Moses led, you can't do everything for everyone all by yourself. Why? Because you'll burn out, and you'll be alone. I don't want to burn out. I certainly don't want to do ministry and life alone. I want to have the strength to carry out whatever God commands me. I love how simply Moses' father-in-law states burn out to Moses: "This is not good! You're going to wear yourself out—and the people, too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself." (Exodus 18:14)

How do I delegate?

First of all, things may not get done exactly like I have them planned in my head. But *gasp* they might get done better! I need to remove myself as the ceiling over certain ministry areas because my team can outperform me given the opportunity. I have to get out of the way so they can flourish.

Next, I've got to set aside time to delegate so I can save time on the back end. So much more can be accomplished when you have additional hands doing the work. Thirdly, delegation blesses people with the opportunity to serve and grow. Thankfully the Lord has given us all different gifts. I've got to learn to do what only I can do and release others to do what only they can do.

And finally, I have to stop saying “no” for people and trust they will say “no” for themselves if needed. It’s so important to extend the opportunity to serve. We’re on this journey together for a reason and sharing ministry with others is a gift.

Leaders delegate because ministry is too much to handle all by ourselves. Allow others to come alongside you so you can do the job together.

By Lori Wilhite

Leaders Walk With God

Genesis 6:9-22

When I was in 4th grade, I attended a church fellowship meeting in another town with my parents who were pastors. We arrived early, and I was thrilled to find a playground onsite. I met a sweet, blonde girl at the swings about my age and immediately struck up a conversation. We soon found that we had many common interests: Cabbage Patch dolls, sticker collections, Michael Jackson. (I'm dating myself here.) We shared some laughs, swinging away as a friendship budded.

It wasn't long before a group of three other girls approached us. They immediately began poking fun at my new friend. I soon learned they knew each other, and it became obvious this wasn't the first episode of its kind. It was brief, but the words were harsh. It was very awkward for my eight-year-old comprehension. Sadly, I didn't know how to react. After they left, there was a long, silent pause before my new friend looked at me, teary-eyed, and quietly asked, "Are you still going to be my friend?"

In Genesis 6 God gives Noah very specific instructions on building the ark. Instructions that save Noah and his family's lives.

But before God delivers his blueprint to Noah, we learn “Noah walked faithfully with God.” (Genesis 6:9) When I think about the relationship between God and Noah, it reminds me of friendship. Tried and true trust in one another knowing you walked the journey together and will continue into the future as companions. Noah walked faithfully with God. Noah and God were friends in the truest sense of the word. It is why God trusted Noah with the building of the ark and collection of the animals.

Throughout my life, I’ve found that moment on the swing set when I was eight years old to resemble my walk with God. There have been many times when I’ve sensed Christ asking me amidst difficult circumstances, “Are you still going to be my friend?” As believers, it’s easy to walk with God when times are fresh and fun, but it can be downright difficult when you sense the flood rains are coming.

When I feel He is leading me to what I see as a daunting task, God asks: *Are you still going to be my friend?*
When I pray in persistence and His answer remains ‘No,’ God asks: *Are you still going to be my friend?*
When others poke fun at me for my faith in Him, God asks: *Are you still going to be my friend?*

We are walking with God when we put faith before sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We are walking with God when we are obedient to Him, despite our lack of understanding. We are walking with God when we are trusting in His lead, even if those around us ridicule our stance. Our walk with God may not always lead us where we thought we were going, but it will always lead us where He wants us to be.

By Tammy Sabourin

Leaders are Encouragers

Judges 4:4-16

Have you ever felt like you were not good enough to do what God was calling you to do? Stepping out to face a challenge often brings out our old fears and insecurities. We worry, we fret, and we hold back because of fear. That's when we need an encourager. An encourager is not just someone who says you are good enough, smart enough, and (doggonit) people like you! No, an encourager comes alongside you, speaks truth, and turns your attention to God and His promises.

When Deborah, Israel's judge and prophetess, told Barak he had been chosen to lead God's people against their enemies, Barak just couldn't see it. What he saw instead was Israel's limited army, his own lack of military experience and the vast power of Sisera's troops. He was afraid to go alone, so Deborah came alongside him to face the enemy. When the enemy gathered their 900 chariots in the valley below, Deborah didn't stand next to Barak and tell him what a great warrior he was or shout "You can do it!" from the sidelines. Deborah spoke truth that turned Barak's attention away from his own fears and toward God's power.

She said, “Get ready! This is the day the Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you.” (Judges 4:7)

Isn't that what the Holy Spirit does for us? He comes alongside us, reminding us of God's power at work within our lives to fulfill His whole purpose for us. What an encouragement! As leaders God often gives us insight into the potential and purpose of those around us. We often have the opportunity to come alongside someone and see God do amazing things. Our job is not to swoop in and build their self-esteem, nor is it to stand back and shout platitudes. Our job is to infuse our people with courage by turning their attention away from their fears and insecurities and toward God's power and promises. When we let the Holy Spirit use us to speak truth and life into someone, that's when we as leaders truly become encouragers!

With Deborah's encouragement Barak faced an overwhelming enemy with courage and saw God win the victory!

By Stephanie Shouse

Leaders are Bold

Acts 7:51-60

I haven't always been the boldest leader. I held back when I should have asserted myself because I didn't want to deal with the potential opposition I might have faced. Instead of walking in my position with confidence from God, I allowed fear and timidity to cripple me. People I should have corrected, but didn't, caused even greater problems over time. Things I should have addressed, but ignored, caused bigger issues later on. Over the years I have become more comfortable in my leadership role, but being completely confident in who God has called me to be is something I still strive toward on a regular basis.

The life of Stephen inspires me to lead with greater boldness. Stephen was a man who was elevated to leadership in the early church. When he got promoted, others came against him. They debated him, lied about him, mistreated him and eventually killed him. Yet Stephen never wavered, even as he took his final breath.

Stephen's life shows us four things that will help us become bold.

First, Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and God's grace and power. The Holy Spirit lives in us! He is our comforter, our guide, the revealer of truth. When we invite Him into our lives on a daily basis, He fills us with God's grace and power.

Knowing we have God's ability in us gives us the confidence to lead well when others don't approve of or appreciate our leadership.

Second of all, Stephen spoke the truth even if it meant angering others. Valuing our responsibility to fulfill God's calling on our lives above our need for the approval of others allows us to speak the truth regardless of the outcome.

Thirdly, Stephen kept his eyes fixed on Jesus. There will always be haters, critics, and naysayers, but if we learn to fix our eyes firmly on Jesus, we won't even notice when they speak. We must learn to tune out negative voices and look to Heaven to find our worth. I love how Stephen states, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!" (v. 56)

Finally, Stephen was quick to forgive those who were hurting him. Hurt is never an easy thing to walk through. If

we can learn to say “forgive them” about those who hurt us instead of holding bitterness and unforgiveness in our hearts, it will set us free to be who God has called us to be.

By Liz Sarno

Leaders Don't Worship False Gods

1 Kings 16:29-34

When you hear the names Ahab and Jezebel your first thought is probably not, “I wonder what great leadership lesson I can learn from their lives?” They were best known for being wicked rulers, and they do show us a lot of what not to do.

When Ahab became king over Israel, he immediately built a temple and set up an idol for the worship of the false god Baal. He married Jezebel, an evil foreigner, whose number one goal was to stop the worship of God in Israel and to introduce the worship of false gods into the land. Of all the horrible things these two did, the worst was they violated the first of God’s commandments, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” As a result, Ahab “did more to provoke the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than any of the other kings of Israel before him.” (1 Kings 16:33)

I doubt any of us are setting up idols in our backyard and offering sacrifices, so we may think we are safe from committing this particular offense. How often do we put other things before God?

It's important to recognize if we aren't putting God first, to Him it is the same as putting Him last. He wants to be first in our lives, but it can be easy to let other things creep in and take His place without even recognizing it. It may be allowing busyness to sneak in so we are so consumed with our schedules and tasks we forget to be consumed with Him. It may be working so hard in ministry we no longer spend time with the One who called us into ministry in the first place. It may be allowing worry to cloud our minds when God has told us to cast our cares upon Him.

Inviting God into our lives on a daily basis is a great way to ensure we keep Him first. When we start to get busy, we can stop and invite Him into our schedules. When we want to worry, we can invite Him into the situation to handle it. Staying conscious of God's presence in every moment, keeps us from putting anything before Him and makes Him first in our lives.

By Liz Sarno

Leaders Trust God

2 Kings 18:1-7

When the time comes for us to leave this earth, what will be said of us? For me, many things could be said depending on which person is talking. Some might call me religious or a good girl. Others might say I'm friendly while some may think I'm too direct. But those who know us well, what will they say?

2 Kings 18:5 says, "Hezekiah trusted the Lord, the God of Israel." Wow, what a phrase! To be remembered that you trusted the Lord. And then it goes on to say, "there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, before or after his time." Can you imagine having that written in your eulogy?

That is how I want to be remembered. I want people to say, "Cindy trusted the Lord." Not because I had it all down and didn't make frequent errors in judgment, and not because I never wavered and wondered if God would really come through in life. And certainly not because I want to be patted on the back. Hello? I'll be in Heaven. It won't matter. But while I'm here on earth, I want to know that one day I'll be remembered for trusting God.

Because I did make mistakes, doubt God and desire a few “atta girl” comments in my life. Despite those shortcomings, I do trust God. Even when I can’t see ahead or don’t understand or want another outcome. Even when I think God is tarrying too long or doesn’t heal quickly enough.

A leader trusts God by not leaning on his or her own understanding as Proverbs 3:5 says. Sure, as leaders we are to exhibit wisdom from God, but even in times when we are tempted to trust in human reasoning, we must listen for that still, small voice that compels us to follow Him. We must trust in Someone greater. We must really believe He is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do. We can confidently believe His plans, ways, thoughts and ideas are superior to ours.

By Cindy Beall

Leaders Are Humble

1 Samuel 10:9-27

Have you ever noticed God is in the grand business of taking what the world would define as “nobodies” and transforming them into “somebodies”? In fact Romans 9 in the Message declares, “I’ll call nobodies and make them somebodies; I’ll call the unloved and make them beloved.” Why does God do this throughout Scripture over and over? To remind us that leadership is a privilege, and it’s not about us.

Interestingly at a pivotal point in Israel’s history, God appointed the guy who, according to 1 Samuel 10:22, was hiding in the “pile of baggage” to be Israel’s King. Saul’s leadership journey was birthed from humble beginnings, yet as we continue to read his story throughout 1 Samuel, we quickly discover that Saul abandoned humility in search of honor.

God doesn’t appoint leaders for man-made honor. He appoints leaders to glorify Him. Saul lost sight of that. We have a front row seat witnessing just how quickly Saul forgot his skill set, charm, good looks, and accomplishments were not the criteria that crowned him King.

Rather the only criteria crowning him King was the hand of favor and blessing of God.

How often do we lose sight of that in our own lives?

How often do we fall into our own mindset traps rationalizing our gifts and abilities are the very things that have named us the leaders we are? While we should celebrate accomplishments, wins and victories, the game changing distinction in leadership lies in who we give the credit and honor to. Are we patting ourselves on the back with an 'atta girl' and gold star? Or are we looking up, humbly thanking the God who placed us in our leadership role in the first place?

As a pastor's kid, I grew up hearing my Daddy share a statement that has forever marked my view on ministry and leadership: If God doesn't show up, it's game over, lights out. Life change, partnering with people to discover that we have hope in Christ, isn't based on us. It's based solely on God.

We lead because God appointed us to be leaders. We lead humbly because it's all about Him, and in doing so we can walk confidently in who God made us to be while pointing people directly to the hope we have in Him.

Humility isn't a sign of weakness; humility is the mark of strength.

By Emily Cummins

Leaders Are Patient

1 Samuel 13:1-15

Saul was panicked and anxious as he waited at Gilgal knowing the Philistine army was close to attacking. After serving 42 years as King, he was facing the battle of his life. He focused on the chaos surrounding him and lost sight of the God who was leading him. Instead of trusting the Lord who had delivered him time after time, he decided to make things happen himself. Hastily, Saul took things into his own hands, offered burnt offerings, and made a choice to move ahead. God was not pleased, and Saul lost his position.

This account of Saul reminds me that patience gives us staying power. Patience keeps us from jumping too quickly into situations that could be potentially harmful. Patience allows us time to step back, evaluate situations and make decisions rationally and without wavering.

I've heard it said that patience is a virtue. Although Paul tells us in Galatians 5 that patience is one of the nine fruits of the spirit, it has not always been an easy quality for me to display along my leadership journey. Maybe, you can relate.

However, as we grow in our leadership roles, we should realize that if we're to lead for the duration, we need to understand the value of patience and how it will protect us from potential hazards for which we are not yet prepared.

Patience is an attribute we learn as we lead. We experience patience in those moments when we want to get ahead of ourselves, try to put the horse in front of the cart, and it's just not working out. Patience happens during the times we want to be over "there" yet God wants us to stay right "here".

We have to rest in the fact that even though we cannot always envision what lies ahead for us, God can. God has placed us in leadership to believe in and implement His vision while trusting in His timing. While we know it's not possible for us to get ahead of God, we can still have moments when our anxious hearts feel the need to make things happen. In those moments we need to remember God's plan is always good and always with our best interest in mind.

God assures us we are running together with Him in this leadership marathon, and we're not in a chaotic sprint all alone.

If we allow God to lead us and continue to stay patient, in His perfect timing, He will provide the way and lead us in the best direction each and every time.

By Linda Seidler

Leaders Are Courageous

Esther 4: 12-17

“**N**o. I can't do that.”

“I'm not qualified.”

“My husband is the pastor, not me.”

“I thought he was going to become a lawyer, but now we're serving in full-time ministry.”

These were my typical responses in the early years of ministry. I wasn't really sure I was leadership material. Yet, there I was at the age of 21, stepping into new challenges as a newlywed, pastor's wife, and by default, a leader. I was hesitant to serve and much more comfortable just being my husband's biggest cheerleader.

I can imagine Queen Esther was hesitant to take on the responsibility of saving the entire Jewish community, yet she made the courageous choice to risk her very life for her people. We may not be at risk of losing our lives, but we risk being hurt or rejected by those we have been called to serve. The reality is that leaders must be courageous because there will always be a chance we'll lose something.

There are two lessons in courage I've learned from Esther:

First, I recognize the leadership role I have been put in is exactly where God intended me to be. Mordecai shared with Esther that even if she didn't do something to help her people, deliverance would come for the Jews. Perhaps she was where she was for "such a time as this." (Esther 4:14) We can follow God with bravery because if God leads you He will also equip you. I never want to be so afraid that I miss an opportunity to be used by God.

Second, I had to identify my Amen Corner, a special group of people who willingly support me by covering me in prayer and offering encouraging words.

After Esther decided to summon up the bravery to go to the king unannounced, she made the request that all Jews and her maids join her in fasting for three days. Knowing she was covered in prayer and support gave Queen Esther the courage she needed to approach the king.

God is looking for us to be courageous for Him. As leaders, we must be willing to move and trust God will handle the rest!

By Evelyn Kay

Leaders Seek the Approval of God

Galatians 1:10

Approval addiction. Most of us, whether mildly or severely, deal with the need for approval. It's just part of our nature. We want others to love us, love what we do, love our ministries and love our ideas. It's just how we are wired. It can empower us and can motivate us to continue on.

But what happens if they don't love us or what we do or our ministries or our ideas?

Do we fall apart?

Do we stop?

Early in church planting, my husband and I realized if we were to lead well, we had to listen well. Not to people, but to God. It was easy to get distracted by the opinions of people and the need for their approval. We learned, over time, that staying faithful to God's vision meant only seeking God's approval.

Maybe that's your struggle today. The approval or disapproval from people has been the measure for your success.

I want to remind you of this: The same people who praised Jesus and lavished Him with palms one week were the ones who cried out to crucify Him the next! People's opinions can change and so can their approval. But God's truth and vision will not change.

Paul tells us in Galatians 1:10, "I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant." This scripture clearly reminds us of God's truth in the midst of so many daily distractions we receive from those around us.

We have to constantly be reminded our calling and mission is not based on our popularity with people. It is founded solely in our purpose from God.

So, take a minute, ponder these statements and be encouraged. God alone gave me my purpose, and God alone will approve my path. If I am to lead according to God's plan, I need to listen closely to God's voice.

I won't rise from the approval from people, and I won't fall from the lack of it. It is necessary for me to separate people's opinions from God's truth.

I will ask myself regularly, “Am I seeking the applause of people or the approval of God?” Leading with authenticity means letting God’s voice be my authority.

By Linda Seidler

Leaders Repent

Galatians 1:11-24

I have a confession. I can be a little stubborn. Okay, I can be a lot stubborn, especially when I think I'm right about something. (Please don't tell my husband I admitted that!) I prefer to think that I'm tenacious in my beliefs. If it weren't for the fact that I happen to have a little bit of a hard head, I might have quit ministry a time or twenty. While my stubbornness might be beneficial in some ways, it can also get me into trouble if I'm not humble enough to admit when I'm wrong.

The Apostle Paul is a great example of tenacity. Before he traveled the globe teaching, preaching and writing most of the New Testament, he was Saul... an enemy of the Christian church. He wouldn't rest until he had destroyed all who preached the Gospel, that is until he met the Lord face to face on the road to Damascus. In a single encounter with Jesus, his life purpose shifted and the persecutor became a preacher. Paul let go of the beliefs he held so dear for all of his life until that moment. His repentance paved the way for many generations to know God.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells the story of his incredible conversion saying these words, “Even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace.” (Galatians 1:15)

If God’s marvelous grace was the driving force behind Paul’s repentance, it stands to reason that His grace is there for me when I need to repent. My favorite definition of grace is: *God’s ability in me which allows me to do what I cannot do on my own; The power to change.* True repentance doesn’t mean just saying “I’m sorry”. It means feeling such regret about my actions or words that I choose to change my life for the better. It means I am willing to lay aside my opinions and ideas and adjust my thinking when needed. It means I am not hard-headed or stubborn, and I have enough humility to ask for forgiveness. True repentance means allowing God’s grace to soften my heart and transform me into the leader He has called me to be.

By Liz Sarno

Leaders Take Risks

Matthew 4:18-20

I've never been described as a risk-taker. Taking risks has always seemed scary, irresponsible and, well...risky! I've always felt that a good leader counts the cost, prepares well, makes a list and sticks to the plan. While the Bible does talk about counting the cost and being prepared, the example of leadership both Peter and Jesus gives us is one that takes risks.

When Jesus called Peter to come follow Him, Peter dropped his nets, left everything behind and followed Jesus. Peter didn't hesitate or wring his hands wondering what the future held. Jesus called him, and he simply obeyed. In fact Matthew 4:20 says, "And they left their nets at once and followed Him." We see the same thing happen later in Peter's relationship with Jesus. Peter and the disciples found themselves in a boat struggling against a strong wind when Peter saw something I'm sure he will never forget: Jesus walking toward them on the water! Naturally they were frightened thinking this was some sort of ghost, but Peter boldly called out in Matthew 14:28, "If it's really You, call me to come out on the water with You!"

Seriously? My non-risk-taking self might have offered Jesus a place next to me in the safety of the boat, but Peter knew he was better off out on the water with Jesus than in the safety of the boat without Him.

I wonder how many times I've missed out on something amazing simply because I was afraid of the risk. Being a good leader involves taking risks. It's risky to try something new, to step out on that limb, or to make tough decisions. It's even risky to follow Christ! We often stop and count the cost of the risk God is calling us to take. But what will it cost us to not take those risks? It's risky to forgive that person who hurt you, to love your enemies, and to leave everything you know to be obedient to God's call. Risking everything for the sake of Christ is called living by faith and is worth any cost. A life of faith will not be easy, but we're better off risking it all with Jesus than staying in the safety of our comfort zone.

By Stephanie Shouse

Leaders Are Wise

James 3

January 1st is the day each year I join the masses in a desperate attempt to get my curvy, menopausal “temple” in shape. The problem is I don’t love exercising, and I’d rather chat than workout. So, I discovered talking on my phone while walking was a great solution. The problem is the faster I talk the less I walk, because I can’t breathe. The faster I walk, the less I can talk.

The same holds true in our busy lives of doing things for Christ. We are going through the motions at hyper speed and don’t always recognize the importance of what we are saying to others in the process. Exercising wisdom in our words has as much of an impact on others, if not more, than the things we accomplish as leaders.

James 3:3-5 in the Message says it like this, “A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything – or destroy it!”

We are surrounded and bombarded by signs and billboards everywhere we go. Social media now dominates as the leading way to connect. Our communication and words affect everyone with whom we come in contact. You are a billboard for what you believe and who you are! With great liberty comes even greater responsibility. There is life and death in the tongue and our relationships can quickly become ruptured by a careless post.

Here are three simple ingredients to help us use wisdom when we speak:

First, contemplate before you communicate. Prov. 16:23 says, “intelligent (wise) people think before they speak, what they say is then more persuasive.”

Second, frankness is better than false flattery. We must speak the truth in love. Sometimes it’s tempting to avoid conflict and use a form of false flattery to bring peace. As wise leaders we can be truth-tellers if we season our words and make sure they don’t destroy or flatter, but instead build up and challenge.

Finally, care before you share. Wise words can mend hurt and calm emotions. Our ultimate goal is to channel the incredible, amazing grace that God demonstrates to us each day.

By Kimberly Scott

Leaders Are Tested

James 1:2-12

When I was in college, my least favorite words to hear from my professor were, “You’ll be having a test next week!” Yet, each semester, whether I liked it or not, I was required to take many tests. Every time I heard those words, I cringed. I knew I had been given all the information; but now it was time to show I had learned it. Ugh.

In our leadership walk with God, we also go through a testing process.

Is it meant to scare us? No, it’s meant to strengthen us! You see, God already knows what’s coming, the tough decisions we’ll have to make, the obstacles we’ll be facing, the challenges in our marriages and with our children. He needs for us to be prepared, aware and ready.

Testing is just an indication of what we know and how we apply it. Each time we go through the test, we advance to the next chapter to learn more content to eventually take another test, and advance to the next chapter, and so on. Testing shows what we’ve learned so that we can continue moving ahead.

However, the concept of being tested by God can sound like such a frightening thing. Maybe we're scared we won't know it all. Maybe we're apprehensive about passing. Maybe we don't want to disappoint God. Maybe we're afraid of the discomfort that testing brings.

A.W. Tozer said, "God never uses anyone greatly until He tests them deeply."

God doesn't want us to be fear-filled; He wants us to be peace-filled. James 1:12 tells us, "God blesses those who patiently endure testing." So let's not be afraid of God's testing *of* us, but be content in God's purpose *for* us.

If we could always audibly hear God's voice, I believe our tests would come in the form of questions such as, "Would you let go of that offense and forgive her?" or "Did you step out in faith when I asked?" or "Are you continuing to lead with love and compassion?" or "Would you just trust me next time?"

You see, God tests to see if we're ready, not to see if we're worthy. Rest in that today.

By Linda Seidler

Leaders Elevate Jesus

John 3:22-36

From the moment of his conception, John the Baptist was special. Even though he drew quite a following as he preached about turning to God and baptized those who repented, he knew his role. His purpose on Earth was to prepare the way for the Messiah. He cared about one thing--elevating Jesus: "He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less." (John 3:30)

How did he do it? People came from all over to see him and confess their sins to him. Seriously! I would have wanted some kind of sign or name badge saying how important I was. But that's my flesh talking, sadly. I have made some strides to feed my spirit all the while starving my flesh, but sometimes my flesh still gets its way. The best way to beat the flesh is to focus on our spirit and feed it. Not the other way around.

So, how do we elevate Jesus in a world that wants to elevate us?

First, elevate publicly. A synonym for *elevate* is the word *hoist*. It simply means to lift up. So, let's lift up the name

of Jesus to those around us. Receiving compliments and encouragement from others is not a bad thing; what we do with it and how we let it affect us can be. A simple “thank you” to the person is all that’s necessary. We don’t have to throw in “Oh, it’s all Jesus, not me” and reject that person’s attempt to encourage us. When someone compliments me, I thank them and ask, “How did God speak to you?” This response accepts their encouragement and also indirectly points the conversation back to Jesus.

Second, elevate privately. We are to walk in humility which means we don’t think we are better than others. But in our leadership roles, there will be people who might think we are better or have more to offer. We cannot change their viewpoint, but we can make sure we don’t allow their thoughts or words to seep into our minds. In moments when someone is trying to elevate me, I take a few minutes alone and just have a conversation with God. I let Him know that I can do nothing without His Spirit guiding me. Then I thank Him for allowing me the privilege of ministering for His kingdom.

My daily prayer is “Keep my eyes on you, Jesus.” What brings fulfillment to my role in ministry is elevating Jesus, not elevating myself or allowing others to do so.

Let's be leaders like John the Baptist, declaring Jesus in every word, action and deed.

By Cindy Beall

Leaders Are Committed

Ruth 1:6-18

Let's be honest. There are tough times in our lives as leaders when we really struggle with commitment. Someone says something negative to us or about us. Our best plans fall apart. We are up against a deadline we feel like we'll never meet, and we're stressed. We feel guilty because our leadership role takes too much time away from our families. We want to crawl in a hole and give up. We've all been there.

We can learn so much about commitment from Ruth. She had little reason to stay committed to her mother-in-law, Naomi, after her husband died. She could have just said, "I'm sorry for your loss, Naomi, but it's time for me to go back to my own home. I wish you luck." But she didn't. Even when Naomi practically demanded Ruth leave, she stayed. Even when Naomi's other daughter-in-law chose to leave, Ruth was committed to Naomi and to whatever the future would bring -- good or bad. This declaration of loyalty in Ruth 1:16 gives me goosebumps, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God."

So, how do we stay committed as leaders when it's tough? Here are two things to help:

First, look ahead, not around. Fix your eyes on Jesus and the calling on your life. Don't let anyone's words or actions cause you to leave the role you're in. Allow God to show you when your season is up, not another person.

Secondly, own your feelings; don't let them own you. One of the things that causes us to not stay committed is our feelings. Feelings are a wonderful things, but so often they just flat out mislead us. You've heard a married person say about his/her spouse, "I'm just not in love with you anymore" shortly before walking out. Just because we feel something doesn't mean it's from God.

When tough times hit us, let's be committed like Ruth. Even when it's difficult and uncomfortable. Even when it hurts and makes us angry. In a world where commitment seems to be tossed out the proverbial window on any occasion, let's be leaders who are true to our God. Just because it's a difficult journey does not mean it isn't also a good one.

By Janet Findley

Leaders Are Made New

Genesis 35:9-15

Jacob sure was something alright. He swiped the birth-right and blessing from his older brother. Yes, his mother, Rebekah, participated in the scheming, but Jacob knew what he was doing. Soon after, Jacob fled so his brother would not kill him. Later on in the Jacob and Esau saga, there was reconciliation. Jacob could have let his past define him, but he did not. I'm sure he had years of regret for what he did to his twin brother.

I can somewhat identify with Jacob. I didn't steal a birth-right from my brothers or anything like that. When I was in college, I had difficulty shaking the labels that had been placed on me in my school years. I was just average. Nothing special. Extremely tall. Just an ordinary gal. So, to learn God wanted to use me for His kingdom and to make His name known, I was surprised. Special people are used by God, not me. Great influencers impact God's kingdom, not me.

When God appeared to Jacob in Genesis 35: 10 and blessed him saying, "Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer.

From now on your name will be Israel.” God renamed Jacob. He helped shake an identity that had followed Jacob for years. He was reminding Jacob of His power and His forgiveness.

Maybe you, like Jacob, have made choices in your past that still travel with you today. Even as a leader, you still may allow your prior, poor choices to define you. Let Jesus define you. He uses leaders who are broken and repentant in huge ways. Why? Because they know the valley of the shadow of death and are able to help others walk through it.

You are not your past. You are not your mistakes. You are not just average. You are not the labels other people put on you. Instead, you are a child of God who has been bought with the blood of Jesus. His sacrifice was valuable so that makes you valuable. We need to absorb and live by the truth in 2 Corinthians 5:17: In Christ, “the old life is gone; a new life has begun.”

No matter what you’ve walked through in your life, God will make you new. Just like He gave Jacob a new name, He will give you one, too. His love for you is abundant, and His mercies are new every day.

By Cindy Beall

Leaders Have Hard Conversations

2 Samuel 12:1-12

A while back, I was having lunch with a friend. We were having a good time catching up when suddenly, the conversation slipped into something that felt really uncomfortable. Other people's names came up and the conversation started feeling ugly. I was getting information I didn't know about and definitely didn't need to know about.

I do love the juicy tidbits of random stories. But in this situation, it went beyond that. It actually went into a bit of character assassination. I didn't say anything; I didn't know what to say.

The conversation ate at me for the rest of the day and into the next. The Holy Spirit was urging me to confront my friend about our lunchtime gossip session.

So I called.

I apologized for my part in listening and allowing extra information to be shared. Then, I asked this person not to share things with me that would change my view or thoughts of others anymore.

My friend, fortunately, extended a lot of grace and also apologized for the words that were shared from her end. It could have gone south. I could have lost a friend over this hard conversation.

We all want friends and to be liked and loved. But when we look at the life of the prophet Nathan, it is obvious he chose holiness and obedience to God over being liked by people. The life of a prophet must have been incredibly isolating. No one would ever like what you have to say because most of the time you were rebuking and correcting because humankind was busy making a mess of things. No one wants to hear about their dumb mistakes, but God's prophets dove directly into tough conversations.

2 Samuel peels back the curtain on one of these hard conversations. Nathan shows up to confront David about killing Uriah the Hittite and taking Uriah's wife as his own. Yeah, nothing fun about that little chat. Nathan rolls out a parable of a poor man and the little lamb he owned and cuddled "like a baby daughter." One day a guest arrived and killed the poor man's sheep instead of an animal from his own herd. What?! Ridiculous. After hearing the parable David is enraged and vows such a man should die! Then Nathan drops a bomb and tells King David "You are that man!" (2 Samuel 12: 7)

Delivering truth and having that hard conversation with the king couldn't have been easy. But Nathan was called to confront sin.

As leaders, we shouldn't shy away from hard confrontations! When we choose to have honest, hard conversations in humility, grace, love and kindness, hearts can be changed. We need to be willing to have hard conversations instead of hiding from them for the sake of having people "like" us.

By Jenni Clayville

Leaders Are Not Impulsive

Judges 14

Even before conception, Samson was ordained to do God's work. If an angel comes to your mom and dad to predict your birth and life, you're kind of a big deal. Samson could have lived the most humble life, and God would have made him great forever. But Samson let his God-given greatness breed a boastful attitude.

As humans, God has given all of us specific gifts to bring Him glory. It took me about 25 years to really figure out what mine were and to begin refining them. I finally know what strengths are in my "wheelhouse". I am also aware of my weaknesses. Sometimes when I'm overwhelmed or have been sitting in my weaknesses for too long, I over-compensate outside of my gifting's and react impulsively.

In the midst of unhealthy life moments, I reach for any bit of control I can find. I treat every smoldering ember as if it's a bonfire. I react to every two cent problem with a \$2,000,000 response. I micromanage projects I have no business even being in. I'm a giant pain in the rear end, to say it kindly.

Samson's life is full of impulsive choices. From demanding his parents get the Philistine woman for him, to ripping apart a lion, to the ultimate impulsive decision of killing 30 men. An angel announced Samson's birth, and God had chosen him to be a judge. Samson's life was obviously blessed, however his impulsive choices brought pain and hurt to many around him.

I may not have killed 30 men because they manipulated an answer to a riddle as Samson did, but I have lashed out at friends and family members with sharp words or made hasty decisions without taking time to think due to panic and choosing to stay in an unhealthy place instead of seeking wisdom.

James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

As leaders, we are called to be the different. When we are impulsive, we are telling God we don't truly believe He will take care of us. We must stop, pray, seek wisdom from those wiser than us, and wait to have the full picture in mind.

By Jenni Clayville

Leaders Are Brave

1 Samuel 17:32-54

As leaders we regularly face situations bigger than us. People close to us try to discourage us. We hear naysayers tell us all the reasons we can't succeed. We might even face an enemy who laughs in our faces. The story of David and Goliath, found in 1 Samuel 17, is one with which we leaders can identify.

The short version is David, a young, shepherd boy went to visit his brothers who were fighting in a battle. A huge giant was terrorizing the soldiers and no one had the courage to stand up to him. When David saw this, he stepped up and volunteered to fight Goliath. His brothers told him to leave and stay out of it. Before he walked onto the battlefield to face the giant, the king tried to talk David out of it. He said: You're too small. He's too big. You aren't experienced. Goliath is a trained fighter. You have no weapons, and he has a giant sword. He is probably going to kill you.

But David was determined. He told King Saul: "I am a shepherd and many times bears or lions have tried to eat my sheep, but I've always been able to kill them. Now I'm going to kill this giant and the same God who saved me before is going to go with me and make me victorious."

This brave boy refused to wear any armor or take any weapons with him. He brought only his slingshot and some stones he picked up along the way. The giant saw him and laughed, but David threw a rock, hit Goliath between the eyes, knocked him out and cut off his head with his own sword. Everyone else might have been surprised, but David wasn't. He expected to win because God was with him.

In the midst of the greatest obstacles, David gives us the key to being able to be brave, to walk into every battle with our heads held high. David had complete trust in the Lord. He wasn't brave because of his own ability. He knew God was with him so he could not lose. Throughout the Old Testament account of David's life, we see that theme repeated. The Lord was with David and gave him victory wherever he went.

The same God that was with David also promises to always be with you and me. Being brave is easy when we know God is by our side. Trusting God to have our backs gives us the ability to be brave no matter the circumstances. We can't be brave in our own ability, but when we believe God has our backs, we can face the biggest giants and know they don't stand a chance against us.

By Liz Sarno

Leaders Are Loyal

Hosea 6:6

Everyone craves a leader who is loyal. Someone who can be trusted. Someone who is faithful. Someone who is committed. A leader who has our very best interest at heart. That's the definition of true loyalty.

While they might not even realize it, the ones who you and I lead are actually looking to us to create that environment of loyalty in our churches and ministries. Because honestly, if we don't do it, then who will?

In your attempt to exemplify loyalty, you may begin to entertain these questions, "How can I be loyal to those who have the potential to leave at a moment's notice? Or to people who have hurt me so deeply? Or to the ones who aren't as loyal to me as I am to them?"

These questions are tough to answer if you haven't solidified a foundation of loyalty within yourself. The things you want to surround you, should be first displayed within you.

Why? Because you're the leader (ouch!). Your response and your actions will set the tone for what you would like to see from those you lead.

If we expect loyalty from our teams, our leaders, our staff, then we have to show what real loyalty looks like. No matter how hurt we've been, no matter how tough the situation. We don't always get back what we expect from others, but we should always give out what we expect from others.

Now, our road map of loyalty always leads back to the One who was most loyal, Jesus. And His loyalty to others was an outpouring of the loyalty He had toward God. He was loyal to the will of His Father in heaven no matter the circumstance. Even when Peter questioned Him; when Judas betrayed Him, when Thomas doubted Him, when people crucified Him. While He could not control the actions of those who surrounded Him, He could remain loyal to the Father who commissioned Him.

In order for us to be loyal leaders, our first loyalty is not to those who we are leading. Our first loyalty is to the One who was first loyal to us. God, our father in heaven, is who we honor and are faithful to above all others. Then, we can effectively show that honor and faithfulness to the ones we lead.

Ask yourself these questions: "Am I fully loyal to God's authority? Have I remained loyal to His expectations of me? Am I loyal and willing to do whatever it takes to fulfill His vision?"

Have I been loyal in displaying the qualities He requires of me as a follower? Am I living in unforgiveness, bitterness, anger, jealousy, offense, feeling taken advantage of, or overwhelmed? Or am I submitting to God's desire for me to forgive, stay joyful, let go of the offense and keep my heart soft?

You see, you will lead from where you live.

God makes it clear to us in Hosea 6:6, "I want your loyalty, not your sacrifices. I want you to know me, not to give me burnt offerings."

Our loyalty to God is shown in our faithfulness and our commitment to a lasting relationship with Him. He shows us what He expects from us, then we show the same thing to those who we lead.

So, the essence of loyal leadership is this, to experience and show others how to be a loyal, committed follower to the One who has shown unconditional loyalty to us. A loyal leader is always a loyal follower.

By Linda Seidler