

SUPPORTING PASTORAL LEADERSHIP IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC

Reference Scripture Exodus 4:12, 30-31, MT.6:33, REV.3:10

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INTRODUCTION: Having the subject referenced above, I begin my saying I wish to deviate slightly from an implied meaning that I am speaking to the followers and not the leaders. No, I wish to encourage the leaders in key areas of faithfulness so that the group may move from fear to faith. You see every Christian who desires to become a leader must first know how to follow. They need faith in the leader but that comes from the leader demonstrating his faithfulness in his calling. You see a faithful leader is known by his faith and being a servant. The problem however in this era of pandemic servant leadership is that we have leaders who know how to lead but what are they leading? Look a hearse knows how to lead. The hearse and all the cars following operate around a common purpose, and that is honor the deceased. They have a common destination and that is the burial site. The hearse moves at the right speed and sometimes even has assistance from motorcycle officers. The hearse and the funeral directors are there to perform servant leadership. Sad to say but they are serving in the time of crisis and providing leadership. Hence we find the term “**servant leader.**” In uncertain times I have always listened to Paul declare” Be thou steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know your labor is not in vain. When the Leader can exhibit those characteristics, the team will or should follow. The question is where is this hearse leadership leading them to?

Our scripture reference in Exodus shows a leader initially timid and afraid during a period of uncertainty. When he became rooted, creative, innovative, and determined the people not only followed but rejoiced. This leader named Moses, learned how to hear and then adhere to his God. In essence he set free the real power of god's leadership by surrendering his weakness to HIS power. Who are you listening to in this pandemic?

For the benefit of this short discourse we elected to pull data from the DNA of Leadership by Judith Glazer, The Empowered Leader by Calvin Miller, and Transforming Christian Leadership by Jerry Wofford. We landed on 3 key strategies during the pandemic that will allow the team to follow the leader.

The leader must...

- (1) **COMMUNICATE**,
- (2) **DIFFERENTIATE**, and finally
- (3) **INNOVATE** personally as well as create a climate that does this for all.

These are key concepts for leadership in this 21st century of **panic**, **peril**, and **pandemic**. *After all true servant leadership ministers to others by meeting their true needs.* In fact, true needs are often distinct from a person’s felt and even expressed needs.

You see the DNA that creates stability in a time of flux is one where Leadership is the story of social evolution at work in transforming leaders for the times. This state then that *leaders in the 21st century must have extraordinary personal self-awareness. They become transforming Christian leaders who get ordinary people in unordinary times to accomplish extraordinary things!* In this light they build in their communities and themselves four competencies:

1. Speak with **CLARITY**: or deeper ways to know self, others, and the ministry;
2. Visible **COURAGE**: by operating in wiser ways to engage with others and create synergies;
3. Create **CREATIVITY**: or allow more creative ways to innovate, operate, and excel;
4. While insisting on **COLLABORATION**: a higher integrity means to mobilize resources and take actions.

We adopt the slogan” *We are all in this together.*” This all is **founded on Communication**. The communication helps the team to envision a shared destiny, it inspires and builds others, lifts the heart in crisis, by caring for the soul of the member, which stimulates the mind, and allows the leader to lead as a servant. His is a transforming leadership that again stems from communication in crisis.

PART A: COMMUNICATE

One key point that is needed in any crisis is a strong communication culture. Through communications you foster a dynamic corporate/church culture that is granted “*buy-in*” from all. Leadership with fellowship is a constant exercise in building and maintaining relationships. These kinds of relationships rely on freedom of expression and the presence of trust, respect, and some investment. Folk become excited and motivated because the conversation is inspiring and allows one to reach for greatness. Some vital conversation areas become...

- (a) **Define the mission of the organization with clear objectives and targets.**
- (b) **Communicate effectively through making it meaningful to all**, *allowing all to play a part, exposing problems, while stating what the need is to succeed.* This is a conversation of communicated truths.
- (c) **Create a thriving environment that is self-sustaining.**
- (d) **Foster innovation** which we will discuss later and
- (e) **Develop people not policy.**

Never forget the “*ability of organizations to reach their next level of greatness is determined by the atmosphere.*” The atmosphere is determined by the *quality of the relationships.* The quality is determined by *the quality of the conversations and behaviors.* The leader has in their grasp the ability to create and shape this environment. It cannot be an atmosphere **where “fear of losing power” exists.**

Now take a self-assessment break on the culture you are communicating or participating in. Pages 32-37 holds assessments ranging from inclusion to appreciation.

Now *the team must understand the value in sharing vs withholding.* For the church to survive, let alone thrive, **people must work together to deliver what is needed.** So, we expand the boundaries of ministries and allow room for creative talent to grow and develop. In essence we

examine intentions and relate to impact. Never forget “**reinvention is an ongoing process that requires an incredible amount of ongoing communication!**”

PART B: DIFFERENTIATE

One strong strategy in this area is *learning how to capitalize on change instead of being blindsided or forced to take a hit as a result of it*. This writer says one must lead “*inside the change*.” You have to lead through embracing the change and growing excitement about the opportunity. You *become a transformational leader*. These leaders are *masters of new conversations and builders of inclusive networks*. These foster reflection through dialogue that produces a rethinking. The leader then adopts a coaching style that allows the leader to direct while supervising tasks accomplishments, but also explain or communicating decisions, soliciting ideas and supporting progress in the midst of crisis. *The real leader in crisis serves in four ways:*

- 1) *Divide life into manageable segments,*
- 2) *Create new beginnings,*
- 3) *Authenticate a strong sense of self,*
- 4) *Weld the team into a lifelong participation with God and meaningful living.*

My team does this.

The co-creating leader understands that *fear of exclusion triggers territorial issues/behaviors*. I wish to diminish fear in all areas through direct and clear messages. We differ from others by having followers less fearful, know where they stand, and less intimidated by what surrounds them. Thus I *strive to engage not disengage*. I do that in three steps...

- (1) *I listen to everyone,*
- (2) *I adjust my management style in crisis as I learn,*
- (3) *I delegate and re-delegate continually as new data arrives.*

The *team inspires inclusion that promotes engagement* with others. *They value diversity of thought and essence. They listen to include and not exclude*. Finally, *they ask others to take the lead and trust they will succeed*. Henrik Ibsen said “**A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.**” This *leads to some efforts of replication but not duplication*. I must have all coach one another for personal growth and creating the future we wish. We move from allowing the pandemic to create a stagnant environment to a collaborative, growing one. The team must then identify the behaviors needed to act and support more innovative contributions from all.

In essence **we must build trust within**. I *drop my ego and develop an environment where others comingle, collaborate, and develop interdependencies*. This allows all to envision an ideal future that gives direction to the ministry.

We do not succumb to the pandemic but challenge this status quo and forge ahead with new paths of creative change. ***The foundation for this and subsequent innovation is a dependence on God for direction in these times.***

PART C: INNOVATION

Understand for innovation to work one must stimulate growth by focusing on how to create environments that break from the past and allow connectivity to flow and new possibilities to emerge. In essence, *creativity is the generation of new ideas*, and *innovation is putting them into practice*. **A changing, crisis filled world Christian creativity and innovation are essential.** One must always *abandon unnecessary rigidity*, for *God can only direct the flexible*. In this we seek to create an Aspiring culture characterized by a higher level of learning, taking one step at a time and seizing opportunities as they arise. We have a heightened awareness of our environment and focus on the future. These need courage to simply put one foot at a time out. I must remove fear. I cannot have a community that fears change. This becomes obvious when one reacts to new possibilities by retreating to previous patterns of personal success. This restricts the ability of others to capitalize on the change. We want to *look past the pandemic and see the opportunities that lie ahead*. Secondary fears that must be removed are *fears of disappointing the leader, failure, competition among peers, and the future*. We focus on opportunities. We draw out values from the crisis by: **Listening for whatever idea may hold a sliver of promise**. In this light we must be grounded while creating a mood of ambition.

I need the team so that we never operate in a vacuum. I *cannot fear losing power, territory, or status but create a decision sharing culture*. This culture values teaching and sees ways to learn. In essence we *encourage cross-pollination of people and ideas*. To do this we again open boundaries, open exchange of information, acknowledge the value or respect for individuals and implementing what Henry Ford said:” **Coming together is a beginning; staying together is progress, and working together is success.**” That is how we move to innovation. **In times of the pandemic the Christian leader must have Inward substance, Outward daring, and Magnetic motivation!**

With all of the above let it rest on one thing, *sustained success is tied to never forgetting purpose!* We seek to *remove fear, doubt, even compliance and go towards connection to a higher purpose with group passion*. So let’s close by getting the team to follow a **FOURFOLD PRACTICE**:

- (1) Show up and choose to be present as in the way of a warrior,**
- (2) Pay attention to what your heart tells you, the way of the healer,**
- (3) Tell the truth without blame or judgement which is the way of the visionary,**
- (4) Be open to outcome, not attached to it, follow the way of the teacher!**