

Weekly Blogs on Leadership

by Dr. Jay Zinn • 6/06/2016

Week 14

Discouragement's Test

Leaders are visionaries. They see what others do not. They speak of what others do not about what lays ahead. Passion for what they see resides in their hearts and they cannot rest until they see it to the end. To do so requires the buy-in of others. Leaders need human and financial resources to accomplish their vision. So they must learn “through the process” how to overcome the relentless, assailing waves that crash against their seawall of faith.

Discouragement naturally comes with the mantle of leadership. Since we live in a fallen world, obstacles to our vision abound. There isn't a leader on the planet who doesn't experience it. Thankfully there are days of mountain-top experiences when the vision's end is so close the world looks bright. But mostly there are ordinary days; comprised of the usual, unexciting, bland tasks to get to the next mountaintop of good news. The difficult days, however, come in the valley of the shadows, trudging through times of discouragement, doubt, confusion, depression, and sometimes despair—all generated by unfulfilled expectations, disappointments, failures and losses. During these valleys the effort to encourage ourselves—and those who follow—requires emotional energy that can sap our strength. We long and pray for the next break through the clouds up to the mountain's peak,

Leaders are in good company in this test. David addressed his discouragement repeatedly in the Psalms. Before he had taken the throne God had promised him, his own army spoke of stoning him when they lost their homes and families. In their grief, they blamed David for it, though he had suffered the same loss. But he encouraged himself in God and sought the Lord for the next step. Job, too, suffered the loss of his family and wealth at the hands of Satan. His friends blamed him for it; believing there could be no other explanation for such an enormity of suffering than some secret sin in Job's life that had caused it. Moses was handed the responsibility of bringing millions of God's people out of Egypt to lead them to the promised land. The burden became so overwhelming he asked God to just kill him. Jeremiah, the prophet, was so depressed over the spiritual state and condition of Judah that he wrote a whole book of lamentations. Coming off a great victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah's life was threatened by Jezebel and fled for his life. He slept a lot, didn't want to eat, and became so depressed he wanted to die. Jesus, too, in the garden of Gethsemane, began to show such distress of mind that he said to his disciples, “My soul is very sad and deeply grieved, so that I am almost dying of sorrow.”

Every leader faces times of discouragement. It isn't a sin to be discouraged. It isn't a lack of faith. It simply comes with the role of being an imperfect leader, in a fallen world, leading imperfect people. A leader must learn, therefore, how to get through these times. In the Biblical illustrations above, they were honest with God and others about how they felt. Some wrote it down. They journaled their discouragement. They came to God with complaints and for strength. God comforted them, reminded them of his promises, and that no matter how bad things were looking, what they had perceived to be fact, was either exaggerated or not true at all. He gave them truth, hope, and a peek into his transcendental purposes—still in place—beyond any *temporal* setbacks. In times of discouragement, God says to all his leaders, “Get up, eat, do the *next* thing I show you today, and tomorrow will take care of itself.”