THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP

“Sometimes in the winds of change we find our true direction.” – Unknown

Change is not easy, but it is simple. Things will always change. We don’t have a choice about that, but we do have a choice on how we react to change; and as a leader whether or not we choose to create change. The choice really boils down to this ... either we manage change, or it will manage us.

God loves and desires change; change in the way we think, behave, speak, and generally live. He tells us that we should be pliable enough to allow Him to mold and shape us in all the ways necessary to make us successful in achieving our destinies. Often, that means relinquishing our dreams and plans to follow, without question, God’s plan for us and that brings us to the challenge of leadership.

MAN INTERRUPTED:

“Almost every call to leadership constitutes a detour from the life-path we plan and project for ourselves. It is an interjection, a rude disruption of a well-scripted narrative. We hear God’s call as we hear a heckler, and respond to Him accordingly: we just want Him to shut up and let us go on.”  Noah Manyika

A study of God’s great leaders reveals that few of them ever planned for the greatness they achieved. Very few became successful as a result of a well-scripted, step-by-step plan for their lives. Instead, they allowed themselves to be interrupted. They heard God’s call, which almost always comes from left field. They responded even when the call took them away from the course they had charted for themselves. Most were not always willing to detour, learning willingness and obedience as they went along. Greatness came when they set aside their own plans to follow God’s. Noah turned away from everything to build an ark; Joseph became a great leader in Egypt because he stayed the course of a detour that began with him being sold by his brothers. Their greatness came not out of the execution of their personal plans, but because they allowed themselves to be diverted by God.

Our path to destiny often begins with a collision with the river of God’s purpose. That encounter is usually quite unpleasant. Human nature demands that we build a bridge over the river so we can continue walking on the ground of our own plans, but the call of God always directs us to step in and be swept away. Choosing the faith road is never easy. Our way often seems more responsible than God’s. In the end we settle on being “good” and “responsible” Christians who are proficient at doing the mundane instead of allowing ourselves to be empowered to destroy the enemy and live victoriously.

God interrupts our lives to bring us into the stream of His power, and to line us up with His purpose. Proverbs 19:21 tells us that the plans in a man’s heart are many, but ultimately it’s the Lord’s purpose that will prevail. He interrupts our lives to invite us to what He is committed to, and when we accept the invitation and walk in His will, He prospers our way. We miss the blessing of His purpose when we dismiss the worth of the detour because of the rudeness of the invitation. The important thing is not how He calls us, but that we respond.
CAN GOD CHANGE YOUR PLANS?

When you see God’s signposts on the road of your life, do you pay attention to them? Are you able to see and willing to obey God’s flashing detour signs?

For discussion:

1. Distinguishing between God’s redirection and the enemy’s disruption of our lives
2. Obeying the call without all the details of the plan.
3. Walking purposefully in unfamiliar territory.
4. Staying the course of God’s detour
5. What personal circumstances would make it challenging for you to radically change course?
6. Obedience often takes us into unfamiliar territory. How does your faith help you deal with being in an unfamiliar place?
7. Does God always require us to abandon our plans to follow His, or is it acceptable to try and find common ground between our plans and His?

“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the ways of death.” Prov. 14:12

Exodus 3:1-12 (Moses encounter with God and the burning bush)

Matthew 19:20-30 (Jesus reply to the rich young ruler to sell and follow him)

Judges 6:11-24 (Gideon commissioned by God to fight the Midianites)

Proverbs 19:21 (Many plans are in a man’s mind, but it is the Lord’s purpose for him that will stand. [Job 23:13; Ps. 33:10, 11; Isa. 14:26, 27; 46:10; Acts 5:39; Heb. 6:17.]

Acts 9:1-9 (Saul on the road to Damascus)

LEARNING TO RIDE FROM THE SADDLE

As God interrupts our plans and introduces change we often delay the process by looking at our qualifications for the call and/or position that lies ahead for us. We seek to find ways to train and educate ourselves for the task at hand. God, however, will call us to unfamiliar tasks and hand us the reigns and tell us to “learn to ride from the saddle.”

Instead of taking us through theoretical coursework, God will often compel us to assume the position of a rider, to straddle the bicycle of our assignments in order to learn. To do so, we will have to overcome our fears. Gideon had to overcome his fears to become judge of Israel, just as Moses had to overcome his to lead the nation of Israel out of captivity. Joseph went from the prison cell to the palace and had to learn the lessons of national leadership from the throne. One of the biggest problems with learning from the saddle is that learners rarely look good on the saddle. Unfortunately, those who are unwilling to endure the humiliation of learning never become the people God wants them to be. We can often over-invest in preparation and end up simply delaying the fulfillment of God’s purpose for our lives. Not
every task requires us to have a PhD to accomplish it. Pressuring the David’s of today to be graduates of West Point before attempting to confront Goliath will only serve to delay Israel’s victory and to prolong her agony.

In Matthew 10, Jesus called together His disciples and sent them out to preach, to heal the sick, to cleanse the lepers, to raise the dead, and to cast out devils. They had never done it before. They were not men of letters armed with credentials in theology from a four-year seminary.

Many people are too terrified to move into their callings because like Moses, they underestimate the worth of what they already have. Acts 7:22 tells us that Moses was “…learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” According to the Living Bible version of that same Scripture, Pharaoh’s daughter had taught Moses “all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he became a mighty prince and orator.” Yet when the Lord told Moses to go and speak to Pharaoh and deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, all of a sudden the great orator could not speak! The problem was not the “speech impediment” but the memory of a forty-year-old mistake. Some of our mistakes and failures are so old that it takes an unbelievable amount of pride to think that anyone remembers them, or that it makes any difference if they do. Unfading memories of past failures and mistakes can be a serious hindrance to learning. If little children were to dwell on the number of times they fall as they transition from crawling to waling, they would never walk!

We must draw our confidence from the fact that God has enough confidence to sit us on the saddle. We must also see the saddle as the potter’s wheel where He spins His clay into the shape that He desires for His glory. God’s leaders are made in motion. He sets us on the saddle to fashion us through the dynamic motion of the calls and the molding of His hands. We must believe the words of Psalm 121: 3-8:

“He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold He that keepeth Israel shall not slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even forever more.”

We can only learn in motion when we trust Him to uphold us.

The challenges we will meet will force us to apply ourselves much harder at those things that God wants us to learn. After the disciples had failed to minister deliverance to a young man who was possessed of demons in Matthew 17, they asked Jesus why they had failed. After our practical lessons have shone the light on those areas where we fall short, God’s expectation is that we do something to make up for our shortcomings. When we work on those things God shows us we lack, not only are we going to be able to accomplish the things we desire to accomplish, but we position ourselves for Him to see us and to invite us to further fellowship with Him.
Do you trust the coach?

Not only do you have the preeminent instructor in God, you have the ultimate keeper, protector and upholder. He is an ever present help in the trouble of your learning experience, not only making sure that you don’t fall off and hurt yourself, but also that you acquire the skills necessary to do the job.

For discussion:

1. How does learning from the saddle help us to know how to make critical judgments on the fly?
2. How are kingdom leaders “made in motion?”
3. How does our ability to endure the humiliation of learning help us to become what God wants us to be?
4. How do we draw confidence from God’s confidence in us?
5. How do we deal with obstacles on the way?

Luke 9:1-6 (Jesus sent the disciples out to heal, etc.)

Luke 10:1-17 (Jesus commissioned 70 more to go forth to heal and cast out demons)

THE CHALLENGE OF TROUBLE - We must see in trouble the opportunity to begin:

“While leaders may be called from their mothers’ wombs, they are molded in the furnace of affliction.”

– Noah Manyika

If anything good can be said about trouble, it is that nothing imposes clarity of vision and compels efficiency of action quite like it. In addition, it wakes us up to the importance of leadership and heightens our sense of social responsibility.

We must see in our trouble the opportunity and the call to begin. When we allow trouble to victimize us, we become unable to take hold of our destiny. Joseph’s dream would never have been fulfilled without his day of trouble. Had he chosen to be too messed up to interpret the dreams of the jailed servants of Pharaoh, his gift would never have been brought to the attention of Egypt’s ruler, and Joseph would never have risen to the exalted position which was his destiny.

We can rise to the challenge of leadership from bankruptcy or from Davidic, Clintonesque or Nixonian moral failure. We must see in trouble a testing ground for our faith and gifts, and discover our responsibility to others in the pain of our loss.

What the devil intends to do through trouble is to cripple us through fear. To accomplish that, he gives trouble a soundtrack and a megaphone. The prophet Zephaniah calls the day of trouble “a day of the trumpet (Zephaniah 1:15-16). Indeed sound is trouble’s outstretched hand, extending its reach beyond ground zero, and widening the field in which its consequences are felt. The sound of this trumpet achieves in those that are fearful the same results as the actual experience of trouble. In 2nd Samuel 4:1, we read about the effect of the news of Abner’s demise in Hebron on the son of Saul in Israel:
“And when Saul’s son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled.”

In Joshua 2:11, Rahab tells the Hebrews of the impact of the news of their advancing towards Jericho:

“And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you.”

By itself, the voice of trouble is a deadly blow to the fearful. To make sure that we are out for the count, the enemy catches us off guard with the suddenness of the blow. Proverbs 3:25 tells us that those who have confidence in God cannot be afraid of “sudden trouble.” The faith response cannot just be reserved for the trouble we anticipate, but must be evident even when things go wrong suddenly.

The God in whom we believe is not shaken by the suddenness with which bad things happen to us. We must remain confident that He will keep our foot from being taken even when we face the “sudden fear that troubleth” referred to in Job 22:10. The choice between succumbing to fear of “the spoiler that shall suddenly come” (Jeremiah 6:26) and having confidence in the Lord would be easy if we were always able to allow our knowledge of God’s faithfulness to inform our responses. It is imperative that we train ourselves to respond in faith to the suddenness of trouble, lest when the Lord’s day shall come suddenly, we too shall be overtaken by it like the children of disobedience (I Thessalonians 5:1-3/Luke 21:25-26).

Fear ensures that we do not respond to trouble as God wants us to. We must hear in the sound and suddenness of trouble an urgent call to duty, and respond with a clear vision of what must be done.

For discussion:

When we respond appropriately to trouble, visions are birthed, movements are launched, heroes are made. We must see in trouble the opportunity to begin.

1. How does trouble rearrange the menu of your priorities?
2. What compromises your ability to respond to trouble the way the Lord wants you to respond?
3. How do you discover God’s purpose for your life in your day of trouble?
4. How do you deal with the challenge of finding guidance from God’s word to help you through trouble?
5. David encouraged himself in his day of trouble; can you do the same?
6. How do you respond to sudden trouble in faith?

We must not allow the devil to convince us that the Lord’s outstretched hand of redemption is unreachable from the depth of the pits we dig ourselves.

The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee. – Psalms 20:1
Romans 8:27-28

7 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Psalm 139:8-10 (KJV)

8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; 10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

Psalm 20:1-2 (KJV)
The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; 2 Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion;

(Lesson paraphrased and excerpted from The Challenge of Leadership by Noah Manyika)