

An Authentic Leader's Response to Chaotic Struggles

Being a leader is never an exemption from trouble.

Leaders in every field are challenged. There is COVID-19 and the variants, shutdowns, slowdowns and then personal crisis.

Our family recently faced our first actual crisis – the loss of a child.

When I received the text, it felt as if I was dreaming. I was standing in a checkout line at Hobby Lobby. The checker saw my face and said, “Are you OK?” I said, “No, my son just lost their baby.” I felt kicked in the gut. As a pastor and a believer, I had this false belief that I was under a force field – a protective shield from the enemy’s access. I was wrong.

My mind went blank and my heart ran immediately to my son and daughter-in-law. I felt their pain and started to feel my own. My thoughts shifted to King David and Bathsheba, who lost a child at birth. What did David do? He got up and worshipped.

“Then David got up from the floor, washed, put lotions on, and changed his clothes. Then he went into the Lord’s house to worship. After that, he went home and asked for something to eat. His servants gave him some food, and he ate” (2 Sam. 12:20, NCV).

If it was good enough for David, it’s good enough for my family and me. I walked to the car and began to pray. The one thing I know is God can be trusted and His track record is perfect with me. We have often faced hard times but this was the most difficult to date.

But God.

I know that God is faithful; He has seen us through many hardships and this would be no exception.

Trust the Lord

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5-6, NIV).

There was no way I could lean on my own understanding; I did not have any.

How could I understand why this would happen?

I once heard you must trust God even when you cannot trace Him. I certainly could not trace His hand on this one.

Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher, said, “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.”

I had a sense that we would all come out stronger once we get through this pain.

The greatest miracles did not come through “believing” but through “trusting.” Yes, there have been times I said, “I know what God is doing,” but in the greatest tests, I could only say, “I will trust God.”

Gratitude Kills Grief

Gratitude re-frames circumstances and giving thanks is a hack against pain. The first Thanksgiving holiday was extremely painful for the Pilgrims and over 50% of the Pilgrims died in the first winter here in America. However, the Pilgrims re-framed grief with gratitude.

Mark Batterson said, “Trials are opportunities to prove yourself. You cannot spell testimony without the word test. When you pass the test, you graduate to the next level. Plus, you’ll be stronger on the other side.”

The attitude of being thankful (internal) and expressing thanks (external) are never equal. The adage that an "attitude of gratitude" is enough is only partially true and gratitude does its best work in the open.

Melody Beattie said, "Gratitude turns what we have into enough and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity, it makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

Expressed gratitude is better than silent appreciation. When we fail to express our gratitude, we are equal to those without gratitude.

William George Jordan says, "Ingratitude is a crime more despicable than revenge, which is only returning evil for evil, while ingratitude returns evil for good."

I am not sure that ingratitude is evil but it is not God's best. God's Word has direct instruction about gratefulness.

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (I Thess. 5:16–18, NKJV).

Like many of the Bible, it's easy to read and hard to live. I cannot say that "rejoice always" is easy for me. I fail that command most of the time and yes, it is a command.

Fact is this portion of scripture is challenging. But in the challenge, God directs us to live a life of gratitude and praise.

Like someone said, "Many want joy but few choose to rejoice."

God knows a life of "giving thanks" is the best way for the believer to live. And God has given us the power to "give thanks" in the hard times.

God says to pray without ceasing because hard times are here

to stay; so is gratitude!

This post first appeared here. {eoa}

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