

LeaderLesson 3: Courage / Risk-taking

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January 21, 2013

How much of what we do is done to be safe, not to rock the boat or cause a stir, but to maintain the status quo? What do we miss of what God wants of us if we avoid a challenge and try to be as comfortable as possible?

Leaders are leaders because they recognize the needs and opportunities before them and help those they lead to trust and obey God, moving forward with boldness and courage. We need courage to face each day that comes, regardless of the leadership roles we have. Life is a challenge. Ministry is a challenge. Jesus, the perfect leader, knew what He was saying when He told His disciples: "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me."¹ To follow Jesus takes courage. To lead God's people to follow Jesus takes courage.

After Moses died, Joshua stepped into the role of leader for God's people, and he needed courage to make the tough decisions. God knew of his need, and gave him guidance that would strengthen him. This story is recorded in Joshua 1:1-9. First, God reminded Joshua of His faithfulness to keep all of His promises (verses 3-6). Second, He commanded Joshua to meditate on His Word (verses 7-8). Third, God promised to be personally present with Joshua (verse 9). No matter how intimidating the enemy or how rebellious the people, God would always be with Joshua – he would not be alone.² The same source of courage available to Joshua is there today for any leader who will believe. Three times in verses 6-9, we hear God's command to leaders: "Be strong and courageous."

We can be strong and courageous because of who God is to us and for us. He has promised to never leave us or forsake us, to bless us as we follow Him. Hebrews 6:13-20 gives two reasons why we can depend on God's promises: (1) the consistent nature of His will and (2) the fact that He cannot break His covenant of love. So, the only stable basis we have for hope is in the unchanging character of God and the promises that flow out of His character.

But, because we live in a fallen world, courage is required to take a risk on the promises of God. He is our hope, like "a sure and firm anchor of the soul – that enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain."³ Believe this wonderful truth – this is why the Word directly links faith to hope by describing faith as the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.⁴

So, what does this mean for us today? Since God is our Source of courage as we lead, what kind of risks does He expect us to take? Over and over again, the Scripture calls us to obedience, to obey what God has commanded. The list is too long to recall here, but pause to think about the commands you remember from God's Word. He means for us to obey them, not just be aware of them. Because of what we know, and who we are, the church is being called to obedience.

Is there anything you know that you must do as a follower of Jesus that you have not done because of fear or neglect? Is there anything you know you must do as a pastor or leader of the church that you have not done because of fear or neglect? If we answer "yes" to either of these questions, we must trust God for courage to do as He commands, or else we face discipline for our disobedience. It takes courage to obey God as He leads us by His Word. So, now may be the time when we issue to the church a call to repentance, starting with ourselves, turning from our way, from our fears, from our comforts, from ourselves to follow, trust, and obey the Lord.

Consider this statement: "The need of the hour is a prophet's call to repentance and a return to God. Certainly the church needs to remember that our Lord's last recorded message to the saints is not the Great Commission but His call to repentance to five churches out of seven in Revelation." These words

were spoken and written by Vance Havner in 1943, seventy years ago.⁵ How much more relevant are they today?

To present a prophet's call to repentance is risky, it takes courage. But it may be exactly what you are called to do in these days. I personally have sensed an increased burden to share this message in recent days, calling the churches of our association and region to repentance and obedience, focused daily on the Lord Jesus.

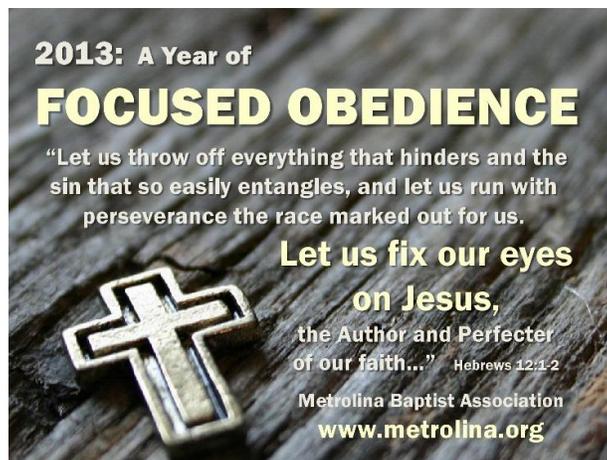
Are we willing to take the risk of obedience as God leads us? Will we trust Him to provide the courage and strength we need? God is looking for those who will take the risk required and trust Him completely. The hymn, "Lord, Here Am I," by Fanny Crosby has called me often to courage and yieldedness in following and serving God. Consider what these words say to you, and decide if you are willing to take the risk of obedience.

Master, Thou callest, I gladly obey; only direct me, and I'll find Thy way.
Teach me the mission appointed for me, what is my labor and where it shall be.

Willing, my Savior, to take up the cross; willing to suffer reproaches and loss.
Willing to follow, if Thou wilt but lead; only support me with grace in my need.

Living or dying, I still would be Thine; yet I am mortal while Thou art divine.
Pardon whenever I turn from the right; pity, and bring me again to the light.

Master, Thou callest, and this I reply, "Ready and willing, Lord, here am I."⁶



¹ Luke 9:23.

² *Handbook to Leadership: Leadership in the Image of God*, Kenneth Boa, Sid Buzzell, Bill Perkins. Page 37. (This yearlong study is using this text as a primary source. Anyone who would like to go deeper on this journey in 2013 is encouraged to get a copy of this excellent resource. It is also available on Kindle.)

³ Hebrews 6:19

⁴ Hebrews 11:1

⁵ *It Is Time*, Vance Havner, 1943. page 34.

⁶ *Lord, Here Am I*, Fanny J. Crosby. Copyright 1984, Beckenhorst Press.