

Leading
with
grace



Space for grace
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**Weekly Thoughts
to inspire your leadership**

Leadership is really difficult. Chances are it may be the costliest thing you will ever do. Leaders in the Bible all seemed to have a pretty hard time too. Leading with grace is a daunting calling.

Leadership is challenging because it's about relationship - other people's behaviour as well as our own. Leading in Christian contexts may be even harder, where many followers have unrealistic expectations of their human leaders. They are shocked and disappointed when a leader's behaviour falls short of perfection. On top of this, leaders are most needed for the tough decisions - when there is no clear answer about the best way ahead. To make such decisions, leaders have to predict what will happen in the future – something that's increasingly difficult in today's accelerating and disrupted environment. People often first blame leaders when things go wrong. As the Malawian proverb observes 'the big head will not dodge the fists'. It's not surprising then that leaders are often lonely and worn out. No wonder the Bible says 'Pray for your leaders' (1 Timothy 2).

To survive and even thrive in this demanding calling we have to cultivate a vibrant relationship with God. We need to be able to say, like Peter, 'Follow me, as I follow Christ'. (1 Cor 11). We believe God calls each of us to be 'stewards of grace' (1 Pet 4). We can only pass on what we have received.

We hope these weekly thoughts will help you cultivate your character and your relationship with God. Not in the comparative safety of Sunday services, but in the messy frustrations of organisational life. Use them how you wish, each day, each week, on your own, in your team, at home, in the office... We pray that these thoughts leave you inspired, supported and challenged to become the leader God wants you to be.

/Space for Grace

WEEK 1

Working from rest

2014 was the hardest and darkest year in my life. Christmas 2013 I was diagnosed with burn-out. I had to stop work completely. This was incredibly difficult. I was so used to being busy, to have my head filled with stuff, to carrying on. I have always done so much in my own strength, relying on my own insight. But this proved unsustainable.

People around me challenged me to rest. The Holy Spirit confirmed this. The passage from Isaiah 30:15 has become very important to me: The holy Lord God of Israel had told all of you, “I will keep you safe if you turn back to me and calm down. I will make you strong if you quietly trust me.” ----- Then you stubbornly said, “No! We will safely escape on speedy horses.”

I have learned so much during this past year as I tried to discover the roots of my unrest. As I came to the place of surrender, refusing

the escape on speedy horses, I realised in a new way that God is there. After all, His name is Immanuel (God is with us, Jesus came to live among us). I know that I do not need to worry about tomorrow's problems as there is a Heavenly Father who takes care of my life. I had thought that the Christian life was about being active, working hard and bearing fruit. I have learned that I can only bear fruit from a place of rest. In rest, God directs. In my busy life my challenge was to start living healthy rhythms of resting and working.

But it is not about resting from work. It is the other way round. It is about working from rest. I can only work effectively from a firm foundation of rest. This has released me and strengthened my relationship with my wife and children.

During the last two months I have also been back to work full-time. As I practice working from rest, it seems I am actually bearing more fruit than before.

This week:

- How will you establish a firm foundation of rest?
- What challenges do you invite God in, to accompany you through this year?

WEEK 2

Restoring Hope

So often recently, over coffee and meals, I have been listening to leaders expressing their disappointments. Many had felt led by God to start new projects, ministries and programmes, but barriers were springing up all over the place. The visions they were trying to be faithful to were not being realised. Instead they felt under attack. Leaders were left perplexed and dismayed. Had they not heard God? Where was God in their struggles?

I felt frustrated on their behalf. But as I read Acts 23, I found myself deeply challenged. I pictured the Apostle Paul sitting in chains in the Jerusalem jail. I wondered whether he was feeling the same perplexity and dismay as these leaders I have been listening to. And then God came to him in that cell... Yet not to rescue him and remove him from the circumstances. No, God just reminded Paul

that he was called to Rome. God came to reiterate His promise and to challenge Paul to place his hope in God's provision, not in his circumstances.

We too are called to spend much of our time and efforts in the space in-between our heart's knowledge of God's promises and the reality on the ground. May we take courage, nurture hope and let God unfold promises in every circumstance.

This week:

- Are there any God-inspired visions or truths about God's provision in your work that you feel you have lost?
- Are there any areas of your life where you could invite God to restore your hope?

WEEK 3

Leading by Letting Go

I remember when I was dean of a department for leadership, management and communication at a seminary in Ethiopia. I had a word of wisdom hanging on my wall. It encapsulates so much of what I believe about leadership:

*Go to people
Start with what they know.
Build on what they have.
When their task is fulfilled
And their work is accomplished,
The people will say
to their leaders:
WE DID IT OURSELVES!*

Training others to lead involves equipping them for service, showing them the way, focusing on core values, such as integrity and honesty, and encouraging them to use their natural and spiritual gifts – and then letting go. That was how Jesus and Paul trained leaders. That is how we have developed.

This week:

- Who can we help to develop as leaders?
How?
- Where do we need to let go more?

WEEK 4

Let me burn out for God!

I have just read 'Man of Vision' the candid and compelling biography of Bob Pierce. He was a truly extraordinary man. He founded World Vision and led Samaritan's Purse. They became two of the largest Christian NGOs in the world. One of his favourite sayings was 'just let me burn out for God'. And he did.

In his relentless 'leadership' activity he destroyed his family. He preferred to travel than be at home. One time his eldest daughter begged him to return from one of his trips, but he refused. She tried to commit suicide and a year later succeeded. After a series of breakdowns, he left his wife. His family fell apart.

Visible success in leadership can be highly destructive if we are not very careful. Henry Nouwen also wrestled with the temptation of

success:

'I came face to face with the simple question, "Did becoming older bring me closer to Jesus?"... Everyone was telling me I was doing well, but something inside me was telling me that my success was putting my own soul in danger... I woke up one day with the realisation that I was living in a very dark place and that the term burn-out was a convenient psychological translation for a spiritual death.'

Jesus gave us the example of resting in God. He withdrew to lonely places to be with God rather than with the adulation and demands of the crowd. He let his spiritual life set the pace for his leadership. Do we?

This week:

- What spiritual rhythms set the pace for your life?

WEEK 5

Reluctant Leadership

Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has excited many people in the UK, both inside and outside of the Anglican Church. He described his interview when he first wanted to become ordained. “I was told by the Bishop, ‘I’ve interviewed over 1000 people for ordination. I can tell you, you don’t come in the top 1000!’” In his final interview the opening question was ‘why do you want to be ordained?’ He replied, “I don’t, but I can’t get away from it”. When asked “what will you do if we turn you down?” he admitted: “I will take my wife out for the best meal we can afford and celebrate!”

A reluctance to lead is no bad thing. At many points in the Bible, God chose leaders who did not want to serve: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jonah, Isaiah, and Gideon to name but a few. Reluctant leaders may be less

easily seduced by power, pride or ambition. Reluctant leaders do not aspire to hold power. In fact, many would count it a blessing to be able to hand leadership over to others.

This week:

- Do you feel you should be taking on more leadership in a certain area, but are reluctant?
- Are there any aspects of your current leadership that you could pass on to others?

WEEK 6

Taking the long view

A colleague and I were talking about the learning group. I was asking if he wanted to become more involved. He said: “But I’m so fed up with church at the moment”. It reminded me how much patience and forgiveness we need in working on change in the church. We have to lay down our own timelines, our own need to feel we are making a difference. It is not about us.

This reminded me of the powerful prayer composed for the assassinated Archbishop Oscar Romero entitled ‘A future not our own’. Here are some excerpts:

In our Organisational Development work with churches:

*It helps, now and then, to step back
and take the long view.*

This is what we are about:

*We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing
that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further
development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
beyond our capabilities.*

*We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in
realizing that.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter
and do the rest.*

*We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the
master builder and the worker.
We are prophets of a future not our own.*

WEEK 7

Sacred Trust

It is a privilege and responsibility to intervene in an organisation – whether as leader, as Organisational Development consultant or as a funder. When we step in we are treading on people's lives – their identity, their sense of self. What we do and say can have a profound and personal impact on them. It can influence their relationships with those around them and even their relationship with God. We have the potential to do good, but we also have the potential to do harm. To intervene in any organisation involves a sacred trust.

Every now and then I wonder, do I really have any inkling of the responsibility I carry? If so, would I not do my work with more effort, more diligence, perhaps even with 'fear and trembling'? It makes me ask myself lots of questions:

This week:

- Do I really try to bring the very best of myself to my work each day ?
- Do I ensure I am mentally, emotionally and spiritually prepared when I intervene in an organisation's life?
- Am I being a steward of grace in my relationship with this organisation?

WEEK 8

Strong or servant leaders

Regularly I hear people calling for ‘strong leaders’ in church and society. In times of uncertainty there is comfort in being led by someone forceful. So what is so wrong with a strong leader?

The strong leader runs the risk of imitating the Old Testament false prophets. The false prophets spoke words that suited the desires of people – and thereby led them astray. Desiring to please the crowd is a dangerous way to lead, as Pontius Pilate showed. In the final analysis the strong leader may become a tyrant or, even worse, an effective leader who leads people in the direction of evil goals.

So instead we need servant leaders who are preoccupied with influencing people in the direction of God’s purposes. Spiritual discernment and the ability to lead people into

collective discernment is a key attribute of a great servant leader.

The strong leader runs the risk of becoming 'Führer'. When this happens, followers see only the office and the power, but not the leader's face. And they may transfer their rights and identity to the leader.

A servant leader shows his or her face to followers. Followers need to see that leaders are human – vulnerable and sometimes weak, just as the disciples saw the face of the suffering servant. The 'power' of a servant leader lies not in office or position but in the willingness to wash the dirty feet within the fellowship.

This week:

- How might you show your face to people this week?
- How might you wash the feet of those in your fellowship?

WEEK 9

Recruiting the right driver

The management guru Jim Collins talks about the importance of getting 'the right people on the bus'. But perhaps even more essential is to recruit the right bus driver. One of the bigger Norwegian mission organisations has dismissed their nominated new General Secretary two weeks before he was to take over the position. A most traumatic situation for the man and for the mission. Something like that has never happened in Norwegian mission circles before. It came down to differences about leadership and communication leading to a breakdown of trust. But why did these differences not emerge earlier? Why did the board do such a poor job of recruitment?

One reason, I think, is that the board was vague when drawing the profile of the new leader. Without a broad consensus about such a profile a board may be taken in when

the headhunter brings along an exciting new candidate. If we do not know beforehand what we want from the new leader, we are likely to get it wrong.

Recruiting new executives is the most important thing a board does. If it fails here, it fails absolutely. Surprisingly this Norwegian example is not an isolated incident. Almost the same thing happened with the American Bible Society. Mistakes like these are costly, very costly. I know the cost only too well. A few years ago I had to temporarily go back to a former leadership position to take over my old job, when my successor was quickly asked to step down by the board.

Recruiting the right people for leadership positions is the top priority for any board. It needs to be done carefully and well with procedures and steps clearly spelt out. Responsibility cannot be just abdicated to a headhunter.

This week:

- How might an organization develop the expertise required for recruiting leaders?

WEEK 10

Email overload

I must confess I love email. It enables me to work from home, yet stay in touch with colleagues all over the world. It fits my task-oriented personality. If I'm being honest it also allows me to escape from draining work relationships and lengthy, unproductive meetings.

But email is a pretty limited form of communication. Most research shows that body language accounts for at least 50-70% of communication. Without body language, emails can so easily be mis-interpreted. They are a blunt tool to send a sensitive message. I have learnt from bitter experience the value of not sending a frustrated email in the afternoon. Much better to leave it in the drafts box overnight, re-read, edit and send it in the morning.

It's so important to actively manage emails rather than become a victim of them. It is essential to set up and use a good filing system for your inbox. Order is a good thing - after all God brought order from chaos. We have to tame our emails - otherwise like an animal they will soon get out of control. So I strive (perhaps rather obsessively) to get my inbox down to what can be seen on one page. This helps me overcome the risk of failing to respond to an important issue.

But I also know emails tempt me. They tempt me as a quick and easy substitute for face-to-face contact. I know how important trust and honesty are in working relationships. Yet emails are no help here. Face-to-face contact is essential to build trust. So I have to curb my enthusiasm for emails.

This week:

- What could you do this week to manage, rather than be managed by, your emails?

WEEK 11

Example is not the main thing... its the only thing

How do we train the next generation of leaders? What courses can we offer? What methodologies can we use for leadership development? I have been grappling with these questions in two different leadership initiatives in Ethiopia and Kenya.

In the action planning, one respondent said: 'I will set more of an example. I will not stay too late at the office. I will not send emails at night and make my staff feel bad.' This reminded me of a favourite quote from Albert Schweitzer: "Example is not the main thing in influencing other people. It's the only thing". It's example, not programmes, that's at the heart of leadership development. Leadership development and discipleship are not very far apart.

What example are we setting at work? If our

child or grandchild followed us around at work today, what would they observe? What patterns would they see? What would they say that we value? What 'gods' would they see that we follow?

If our priority this week was to develop those around us, to invest in young leaders:

- What example would we set?
- What would we do differently?

WEEK 12

Less of everything

The world is now talking of 'less' in almost every new innovation that is coming on the market. We now are seeing paperless offices, tubeless tyres, cordless appliances, wireless phones and many more 'less' innovations. I wonder if the same 'less' can be said of church leadership today. It got me thinking and even daring to question myself. What I all too often see is:

- **Valueless leadership:** Leadership which does not value honesty, integrity, faithfulness and truth is valueless. Leadership without values usually follows the saying 'the end justifies the means' – Where am I tempted to compromise my values?
- **Directionless leadership:** Some leaders have a poor sense of direction. They are

not able to communicate to their followers where they believe they should go. Vision is blurred – How clear is my vision in my leadership?

- Thoughtless leadership: Some “decisive” leaders are prone to speaking before thinking, deciding without consideration and acting impatiently – When did I last act too hastily?
- Spineless leadership: Some leaders do not have a strong moral stand. They shift with the prevailing winds of opinion. As Mark Twain said ‘Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect’ – What principles do I need to relentlessly hold onto in my leadership?
- Headless leadership: Some leaders fail to lead. They abdicate responsibility and refuse to take difficult leadership decisions – Where am I failing to fulfil my leadership responsibilities – at work, at home, in church?

This week:

- Let’s see where our leadership can be ‘more’, not ‘less’.

WEEK 13

Pray through your inbox

This morning I was re-reading the book *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster. I've been putting it off for some months as I have a personal preference for the celebration of comfort. I was really struck by what he said about prayer:

'To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer...'

'Prayer changes things. We are co-labourers with Christ and therefore our prayers can change things. We are working with God to determine the future.'

John Wesley wrote:

'God does nothing but in answer to prayer.'

‘Listening is the first thing, the second thing and the third thing necessary in prayer. We need to discover God’s heart for people and situations.’

Martin Luther once said: “I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer”. We may not be Olympic prayer athletes like Martin Luther, but if it really does change people and situations (even ours) we have a huge responsibility. Perhaps we can do more regular jogging...

As you look at the day and the week ahead, take time now to listen to God about and to pray for:

- All the different jobs on your to-do list; and/or
- All the meetings arranged in your schedule; and/or
- All the emails in your in-box awaiting response.

WEEK 14

Cultivating honest feedback

Recently, I have been disturbed by reading about the life of Saul. Saul entered kingship with a humble spirit. As he became more experienced as a leader, he let his position go to his head. When pride and disobedience replaced his humility, he rejected God and His presence left him. Although Saul clung to his leadership position for another 15 years, he did so in his own strength and faced increasing difficulties.

All of us in any position of leadership face the real danger of pride – particularly when we are surrounded by people who want us to like them. We find it more difficult to see our faults and admit our mistakes. We begin to blame others more and more. Pride grows like a weed. Leading by human inclination alone can never replace leading by the spirit of God. It takes God's wisdom to lead in a Godly manner.

There are practical steps we can take to avoid this. We need to actively seek out people who are honest enough to speak truthfully to us. Feedback, however painful, is a vital way to root out pride.

This week:

- Who do you have at work who will give you honest feedback?
- How can you make sure you hear honest feedback on a regular basis?

WEEK 15

Looking for Leadership

Twenty years ago I read Acts for Today by Michael Green. It profoundly influenced my teaching on Christian leadership. Based on Acts 20:13-36, he highlighted essential questions to ask of any Christian leader.

- Do they walk with God?
- Do they believe in shared ministry?
- Can they inspire others?
- Do they pray?
- Are they humble?
- Are they enablers?
- Do they care about people?
- What do they believe? Do they make Scripture their guide?
- What is their attitude to money?
- Dare they face unpopularity?
- Can they endure hard times and suffering?
- Are they wholehearted?
- Are they truly open to the Holy Spirit?

But as I have grown older, I realise more and more how pertinent the questions are to me. They are a mirror for me to look at myself.

This week:

- Read through the list again – how would you answer them yourself?

WEEK 16

We just can't make it on our own

Why do so many great individual leaders eventually fail? Some become too autocratic, others are tempted by money, sex or power; others burn-out emotionally and physically. I suppose it's because none of us was designed to do it on our own – we were not created to depend on our own efforts. Isaiah 40 highlights our human vulnerability:

These people are nothing but grass, their love fragile as wild flowers. The grass withers, the wildflowers fade...

Princes and rulers don't amount to much. Like seeds barely rooted, just sprouted, they shrivel when God blows on them. Like flecks of chaff they're gone with the wind...

Leadership is a shared and complicated relationship. It is not about unilaterally forging ahead and shouting for others to follow. While

human nature pushes us to try and do it alone,
true leadership is dependent on others.
Leadership is about moving together –
together with our families, together with our
colleagues, together with God...

This week:

- What can you do differently to make this more likely?

WEEK 17

The Leader's Bucket List

If we were told we had a few more years to live, we might create a 'bucket list' of things we wanted to do before we died. Yet many of us live as though our life was endless - an illusion of immortality. We never identify what is on our bucket list and we never get around to doing it.

As I study the scriptures, I believe there are five must-haves on the leaders' bucket list. These define the essence of a leader and the legacy that every leader should leave:

- Positive impact on followers – Jesus Christ declared His bucket list in Luke 4:18. In a nutshell, it was about bringing a lasting positive impact on those He came in touch with.
- Identifying talent – for any organization to survive, it needs to embrace talent. You

cannot exercise talent unless it has been identified. It is also important to create a conducive environment for the talent to be developed and used to its full potential.

- Growth and multiplication– We are not only called to maintain what we have but to grow it. Leaders grow entities and they multiply.
- Succession - God is concerned about His kingdom. His purpose and his will are all reflected in His kingdom. He ensures that His kingdom will continue. Hezekiah cried out “for I have no one to inherit the throne”. Moses needed to develop Joshua. Jesus started with twelve disciples.
- Have fun – A sense of humor is necessary in creating an environment that would help a leader reach out beyond his or her inner circle. People are attracted to laughter and humor. This gives an audience to fulfill the other “must-haves” above.

This week:

- If you were given ten years to live, what would be on your bucket list?

WEEK 18

Finding a critical friend

“Leadership is so hard” I said to myself. I was reading the whiteboard in the meeting room. The last group had obviously been discussing leadership traits. The list went on and on. As I studied the long list of seemingly impossible demands, I wondered which of these traits are necessary and which ones are extras. I realised that perhaps one of the most important traits of a leader was not even on the list...

It is the ability to come to grips with his or her own flaws. It is only through accepting their own limitations that a leader can depend on others. Leaders who understand their limitations will tend to look for the potential of those he or she works with.

We all need people who encourage us and affirm us. We all enjoy positive feedback. But more precious still are people who

will be honest with us about where we are failing. Leaders need people they can trust to give them honest feedback, however uncomfortable. Without such people, leaders will not see their blind spots. They will lose their humility. Their growth will be stunted.

This week:

- Who do you trust to give you honest feedback?
- How aware are you of your limitations? What are you doing about it?

WEEK 19

Turning Leaders' Hearts

“We have decided, in principle, to work together”... The words leaped at me from the email, heralding a new beginning and hope for the future. We had been working closely with a health care institution and a charitable organisation to reach a consensus and work together.

The past few months had been tough. At times it seemed as if there was no way through. The endless series of negotiations, meetings, individual and collective reflections appeared to be going nowhere. It just left hurt egos and on-going frustrations. We gave our best in facilitating the process – we tried to keep the mission and the needs of the beneficiaries at the forefront of people's minds. But in the end we withdrew and hoped and prayed for the best.

We do not always see how God works. It is not always at the time or in the way that we expect. But just as in this case, God does respond to prayer. We believe that God worked through the underlying political influences, emotions, vested interests and individual struggles of those involved. He 'turned' the hearts of the leaders and members of both organisations, pointing to a new direction. As Proverbs 21:1 says: 'The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turns it wherever he will.'

This week:

- Let's look for where God is working in our organisation.
- How has God 'turned' your thoughts or others in unexpected ways?

WEEK 20

Authority from brokenness

Leadership is not a festive journey towards power. It's less about prestige than service; less about reputation than suffering; less about charisma than spiritual authority.

Bishop Festo Kivengere in Uganda had spiritual authority. I have never met anyone like him before or since. During the 1970s I initially knew him as a gifted preacher and then as a gracious friend. But Festo was a strange leader. He rarely did what I expected. In situations where I thought we needed action and decisiveness, he could appear absent-minded and day-dreaming. Administrative routines and grand projects were certainly not his strength. On a personal level he was modest and unassuming. But in the pulpit he was like a pillar of fire. When faced by President Idi Amin (or wayward church leaders) he became like an arrow of God,

confronting them with extraordinary courage.

What was the secret of his spiritual authority? To me it seemed that brokenness was the defining feature of his life. Everything he said and did appeared to grow from this. He made me understand that to have anything worthwhile to say we must first be broken otherwise it's just our own empty words.

To be entrusted with spiritual authority we must first be broken - otherwise we become dangerous and manipulative. Perhaps the reason we experience so few Christian leaders with spiritual authority is because we avoid brokenness at all costs.

This week:

- What areas of your life need breaking?

WEEK 21

What about the women?

moses@burningbush.then

Dear Moses,

Let me take this opportunity to write to you over time and space, hoping to reach you right there at the burning bush. I have often used this burning bush story to talk about leadership. I was so impressed that you realised so clearly that you could not do it on your own. God opened your eyes to your brother Aaron. But allow me to ask one thing:

Did you ever talk about the five brave women who made your leadership possible in the first place? The midwives who risked their own lives with civil disobedience? Your praying mother who put you in the basket? (“In faith” it says, but probably also in much despair I imagine). Did she ever talk about how painful it must have been? What about your sister who

was clever enough to arrange that your mother even got paid for breastfeeding you. Incredible. And even Pharaoh's daughter, did she ever say what made her save you?

It makes me realise the Exodus story started long before the burning bush. There were so many women instrumental in getting you to that place. I sometimes under-estimate the role of women in leadership. Did you?

Kind regards,

Sven-Erik

#laterreflectionsonleadership

WEEK 22

Is leadership worth it?

Who on earth would choose to be a leader? It is such a tough calling. It rarely leads to fame or fortune. Over the years as a leader I've often wondered about the cost and whether it is all worth it.

I've spent much of my leadership time in meetings. Some have been helpful and inspiring but many were frustrating and discouraging. As a leader I feel that I'm expected to do more than is humanly possible. And there is always more to do. People expect me to know everything. I'm meant to be in control. People want to be my friend, but if I do not do what they want, they quickly consider me an enemy.

Yet Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,

for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”. (Matt 11:28 – 29). Admitting our tiredness, weaknesses, limitations and vulnerability before God and others allows God the space to work in us. God promises rest for our bodies and souls. He will also renew our joy and peace and give us the courage in facing the huge tasks ahead. We can lead from a place of rest, not hectic schedules. A place of rest does not mean the absence of meetings, travel, difficult people and hard decisions. It does mean that God promises: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

This week

- What can we do to lay down our leadership burdens?
- What does accepting and relying on God’s grace look like in the office?

WEEK 23

Learning from Miriam

miriam@steeringgroup.desert.then

Dear Miriam,

It is high time for me to be brave enough to send you some lines over time and space – inspired by the stories I read about you in the Bible. You might have seen the leadership issues I shared with your brother Moses some time back. Perhaps I should have copied you into the message as you were a core part of his leadership story.

I'd love to ask you about walking together with him in the desert. I mean, your singing performance when you all left Egypt (in Exodus 15) was tremendous. Yet I still have the impression that your brother's song gets more attention. Perhaps this was the way you wanted it to be. Supporting but not necessarily being seen. Or were you left out because you

are a woman?

Later in the story I find you in the steering group together with Moses and Aaron (Numbers 12). It was brave to criticise Moses, but you paid a high price. It must have been a support that the whole people did not move until you had recovered, but painful nevertheless. What advice would you give to those of us today who have ended up with high leadership responsibilities? How would words like gender balance taste in your mouth?

Kind regards,

Sven-Erik

#privilegedtoleadwithwomen

WEEK 24

Leadership as character

‘Leadership is a position’ according to many cultures. Without such a position, it’s impossible to put into practice what we learn about leadership.

But what if we saw leadership as character? Character is something we practice in our daily lives. Instead of focusing on simple knowledge and skills, what if we looked at leadership development as a way to become a better person, a better family member, a better community member, a better citizen?

Real change is not about acquiring knowledge, it’s about a change of heart. If we want to develop leaders and organisations with character, we have to engage their hearts, and even their spirits. We have to go beyond brute logic to explore what makes people tick, what motivates them and why. This is much

deeper than mere intellect. It's much more transformative too.

This week:

- How can we demonstrate to others leadership as a character?
- How can we engage people's hearts in change?

WEEK 25

Lancing a boil

Indecision is a real problem in leadership, especially churches. But failing to confront issues has led to death of many successful initiatives. History is replete with many examples of how indecision shipwrecked institutions: the sinking of Titanic, Lehman brothers and even the global financial crisis. Leaders want to be popular and hope business can go on as usual. They fail to decide and pay the price.

I remember one time I had a nasty boil on my body (like a cyst). For two days I could hardly sleep. Usually such boils come and go but this stubborn one was refusing. I went to visit the doctor who advised that I should immediately go for surgery. Never in my life had I been told that a boil required surgery. After consulting my family, I decided to ask the doctor for pain killers and antibiotic and postponed the

surgery. However it just got worse and worse. In the end I had to have the surgery anyway, but it cost more and took me longer to recover.

In Malawi we have a proverb that tells the story of a dog sitting on a warm verandah. He hears the sound of a lion roaring in the distance, but it is so comfortable in the sunshine... So he stays put. He keeps hearing the roars get closer and closer, until it is too late to move.

This week:

- What decisions have you been postponing?

WEEK 26

Struggling and losing the plot

I've been working with some leaders recently who are persevering through perennial and seemingly unrelenting loss. Their hearts are asking, "Is the struggle God's calling for my life? Is my job just to persevere?" It's so tough.

Yet I don't think that the struggle is the sum total of God's calling for any life. Yes God does call His people into incredible places of suffering but I also expect God to be good in truth and love. There is a point to ministry whether marked by success or disappointment.

John the Baptist's life illustrates this for me. The ministry of being 'the voice crying in the wilderness,' was not without the struggles of isolation, hostility and even profound disappointment bordering on disbelief. In Matthew 11 John the Baptist is imprisoned and questioning the whole point of his life's

ministry. He asks: “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” A bold and heartbreaking question from John. Can you imagine what pain and doubt he must have been experiencing? But the beautiful thing is he literally took this doubt and disappointment to Jesus.

Jesus did not respond by telling John to “just hang on”. He didn’t diminish John’s suffering and doubt. Instead he pointed to His goodness in the ministry of truth and love. ‘And Jesus answered them, “Go tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them.”’ (Matthew 11:4-5)

When the point of ministry seems to be endless struggle we are in danger of losing God’s plot. Like John, we may need to take it to Jesus and get a glimpse of the bigger picture.

This week;

- How are you disappointed with God?
- Are you willing to let God show you places where ministry is flourishing, even if it’s not yours personally?

WEEK 27

Meeting Jesus in hectic leadership

Marthainthekitchen@Bethany.then

Dear Martha,
Hope this email finds you well and not too busy.

I've recently been talking to some friends about that day when Jesus came to visit you (Luke 10:38-42). Things must have been very hectic indeed - and your sister Mary for one reason or another just decided to sit down to listen to Jesus.

Many of us share your frustration. I think we all have "both a Martha and a Mary in us". The tricky thing is to find the balance. This applies to leadership too I suppose. But when thinking about leadership in hectic times, I worry about the artificial separation we make between the spiritual and worldly.

For me, periods of hectic leadership have sometimes been the most spiritual times in my life. Facing huge challenges forced me to pray like never before. I do understand your frustration about Mary. But I'm also inspired by you as a praying, meditating and reflecting person. The deep conversation you had with Jesus when your brother Lazarus died, as well as your confession that Jesus is the Messiah made me reevaluate my first impressions of you.

So, please, as soon as time allows, let me know what you think about the balance between the spiritual and worldly in our leadership.

Stay blessed,
Sven-Erik

WEEK 28

The Interruptions are your work

I hate being interrupted when I am doing something. I like to be able to focus single-mindedly on the task in hand. But I remember having one of those ‘Ah ha’ moments when I read Henri Nouwen’s book, ‘Turn my mourning into dancing’. He relates:

While visiting the University of Notre Dame, where I had been a teacher for a few years, I met an older experienced professor who had spent most of his life there. And while we strolled over the beautiful campus, he said with a certain melancholy in his voice, “You know . . . my whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work.

When you stop and think about it, many of Jesus’ miracles were interruptions. In Mark

5: 21-34 Jesus was interrupted twice, once by Jairus who needed Jesus to stop what he was doing and come and heal his teenage daughter. And then on his way to see her, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years touched Jesus robe and interrupted him again...

What if we saw interruptions as the real purpose of our lives? What if we saw them as a gift - an opportunity to be open to what God would have us do in that moment?

This week:

- Let's be more ready to be interrupted and approach them in a more positive and creative way.

WEEK 29

Urgent need of mentorship

Nehemiah@buildingupJerusalem.then

Dear Nehemiah,

You have always been an inspiration to me and many others in leadership. Even today I remember an invited speaker taking us through your story. I thought I knew it, but I was reminded afresh by

- How you spent time doing your own analysis of the situation before you gathered the people to work on common goals for your project.
- How because of external threats people had to work with one hand and hold a weapon in the other. Even today so many Christian organisations are distracted from their core focus by external threats.

- How draining the resistance you faced from within your own organization must have been.

But what I had never thought about before was what happened next. I had never really read the last chapters. It seems that when you left everything more or less fell to pieces (13:1 ff). What happened? What did you learn about your leadership from that?

And then it seems you lost it with your people (in my Bible beside verse 13:25 I have notes in bold red pen). You rebuked some people, called curses down on them, beat some of the men and pulled out their hair... What on earth was that about?

It made me realise that even the best leaders, even the most God-inspired are far from perfect. We all desperately need help and support from others. My note to myself in my Bible said: “urgent need of mentorship!!” What would you write?

Kind regards,
Sven-Erik

WEEK 30

Change before you have to

We all put off difficult decisions. It's part of human nature. Churches and Christian organisations and leaders seem particularly prone to this failing. We want to appear loving. We want to be nice. But the consequences of delay may prove disastrous.

I know too many Christian organisations who have gone into crisis because they did not act decisively early on.

I often think of John Adair's advice:

"It is always better to take change by the hand and lead it where you want it to go before it takes you by the throat and drags you off in any direction"

This week:

- What decisions have you been putting off that you need to make?
- What is really stopping you?

WEEK 31

Is caring a weakness in leadership?

I've always wondered what is an effective leader? I think of different Christian leaders I've worked with. Though they all profess the same faith, not one of them practiced leadership in the same way. One saw qualifications as very important - he was seldom satisfied with staff performance. Others seemed obsessed by their position. It was difficult for the staff to share concerns with them because of the perceived gap in their positions. There was another leader who was so competent that she did not give a chance for staff to grow.

But I'll never forget the leader who gave me the confidence to become who I am. A leader who crossed age, gender and racial differences. A leader who appreciated me and was concerned with my development. A leader who was genuinely interested in my personal

and spiritual life as much, if not more, than my professional life.

Most people consider this leadership style as ineffective because it takes too much time to build relationships. Some feel that this type of leadership slows down the organisation. Goals are delayed. They see a leader's caring character as a weakness.

I used to agree with this. But now when I think about it, this leader is the only one I remember with warmth and great joy. The only leader who I thank God for.

As Rick James once wrote, "Effective leadership is not simply about skills, qualifications, titles, positions or even responsibilities, it is actually about who we are and how we relate to God and to other people."

This week:

- Reflect on what kind of leader you are.

WEEK 32

Follow to Lead

We know how important leadership is. Leaders provide role models and establish the level of trust. We have rightly focused on leader development. But leadership is not a person, it's a relationship between people. If we only focus on the leader, we are in danger of underestimating the importance of being a good follower.

We all have plenty of first-hand-experience of being a follower, since we were born and followed our parents. Even top leaders are followers in other areas of their lives. Our role as proactive and responsible followers may be even more life changing and meaningful, than any leadership role we play. By failing to focus on being a good follower we may be missing real opportunities to shape our future and the world. Perhaps we need to invest in much in becoming good followers as much as we do in

developing our leadership?

In the Bible, Peter is a wonderful example of a great, if flawed, follower. I love the story of the disciples in a boat at 4 am in the morning. They were being battered by storms and wind. It was dark and they were very frightened. And Jesus comes out of the darkness walking on the water. While all the others were wondering about this 'ghost', Peter overcame his fear and 'suddenly bold' said to Jesus, 'ask me to come to you'. He knew Jesus to be the source of power. Peter waited until Jesus said 'Come'. He got out of the boat and walked on water – not perfectly, but he did what no one else has done. He was a good follower – and by being a good follower became the rock on which Jesus built his whole church.

This week

- Think about the contexts in which you are a follower.
- What does good followership look like in that situation?
- How can you become a better follower?

WEEK 33

Vision and leader development

Malcolm Webber in his blog, *The 2 Things That Every Leader Must Do*, says there are only two responsibilities that a leader cannot delegate to others:

- Vision development and
- Leader development

Developing the vision

A leader sets the vision. I was working with a new Director of a Christian NGO in Cambodia. The organisation did not have a compelling vision. Yes, they had a written vision statement, but it did not really 'live'. It did not excite or motivate staff. In fact, many did not even understand the vision. Consequently different projects were doing their own thing. To bring alignment, the director focused on establishing a shared vision. It took hard work, but now it's bearing fruit.

Developing leaders

I remember one leader admitting to me, “I would never want to work my way out of the job.” At the time, I was shocked. On reflection perhaps he was just being more honest than most of us dare.

To create forward momentum we constantly need new people to step into greater responsibility. Cultivating leaders is critical. It needs to be part of the organisational culture. This should not be new to us. Jesus modelled this with the disciples. We read about it throughout the Bible, including Eph. 4:11-16 and 2 Tim. 3:10-17.

This week:

- What can you do this week to strengthen or better communicate the vision of your work?
- What can you do to develop the leadership of those you work alongside?

WEEK 34

Dealing with leadership failings

Most of us are probably a bit shocked by the way Paul dealt with leadership ills: ‘When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned....’ (Galatians 2:11-14). Many of us shy away from confrontation, believing in some way that it’s not appropriate Christian behaviour.

But this passage demonstrates a good way to address leadership issues in our churches and Christian organisations. Whether it is a moral lapse, sexual abuse, habitual failings, or simply inadequate leadership skills and closed attitudes, they all need dealing with. Open and honest feedback is a valuable gift. Consequences for misdemeanors are usually appropriate.

Sadly what I have often experienced is that when leaders fail, we:

- Transfer the leader or even promote them.
- Buy-off the victim, bribing them to keep quiet (especially if it's immorality)
- Intimidate the whistle blowers with threats, 'accidents' and seek to destroy the evidence
- Bring in outside speakers to preach about 'He who has not sinned cast the first stone' (or choirs to sing the message 'touch not the anointed of God.....')
- Blame the devil
- Pretend nothing happened

This week:

- What behaviours do you need to oppose directly?
- Which secret failings of your own do you need to address?

WEEK 35

Self-care is never selfish

It is our ethical responsibility to take care of ourselves so we are fully available and able to do the work we have committed to.

Many of us are expected in our work to do more with less. But in reality, we can only do so much. Recognising the limits of our capacity is a vital first step in looking after ourselves.

As Christians we feel we must always sacrifice our personal needs to serve the cause of Christ. We get caught in a trap of continuously giving without replenishing.

We are all familiar with the habit of Jesus who regularly took time away from the crowds. He made time for silence, prayer, rest and relaxation. If Jesus needed this, how much more do we need to listen to the quieter internal demands of our body, emotions and

spirit? As we listen, we will hear our bodies asking us to slow down, retreat, rest, and take care of ourselves.

To overcome the challenge of dedicating time in a busy schedule, I've started with a few basics that work for me: daily meditation; stretching exercises; sleep well; regular walks; breakfast; drinking water; breaks in the office; switch off the smartphone when sleeping; don't read e-mails when taking breaks; weekend breaks; setting boundaries at work in terms of your time, meetings you join and weekend working. I don't always get it right but I'm mindful of developing these new habits of self-care.

Taking care of ourselves is an intentional act of good stewardship. We are the only gift we have to offer other people. Self-care gives others permission to do the same without feeling guilty. The Bible describes our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. We need to look after that temple.

This week:

- What can I do more of to look after myself?
- What should I do less of?

WEEK 36

Four emotional dangers

In Peter Scazzero, ‘The emotionally unhealthy leader’ he highlights four emotional dangers we may need to address:

Low Self-Awareness

Emotionally unhealthy leaders tend to be unaware of what is going on inside them. Self-awareness is our choice, we have free will to ignore messages our bodies may send, whether through stress-related illness or emotions.

We do not make time to reflect on our fears, sadness, or anger, nor consider what God might be trying to communicate through them.

Prioritising work or ministry over marriage or singleness

Whether married or single, few leaders have a vision for their marriage or singleness as the greatest gift they offer to the church and the world. Our real ministry may be cultivating a

great marriage or single life that reveals Jesus' love to the world.

Doing more activity for God than our relationship with God can sustain

Emotionally unhealthy leaders are chronically overextended. They routinely have too much to do in too little time. The notion of a slowed down spirituality or slowed down leadership in which their doing for Jesus flows out of their being with Jesus, is a foreign concept. Feeling depleted and worn-out has become normal.

Lacking a Work/Sabbath rhythm

Emotionally unhealthy leaders do not practice Sabbath protected time to rest and delight in God. Some see Sabbath observance as irrelevant, optional, or outdated legalism. Others make no distinction between the biblical practice of Sabbath and simply a day off, using Sabbath time for the unpaid work of life such as paying bills, shopping and errands.

This week:

- Did you recognize yourself in any of the descriptions?
- Which of these four will you work on?

WEEK 37

Self-awareness is a choice

Leaders who are self-aware make better decisions. As Dotlich and Noel pointed out, ‘Leaders with self-awareness are more likely to move quickly and confidently and in different directions, without needing to be consistently right and in control.’ (1998)

We can probably immediately think of a few leaders we know who are really not very self-aware nor emotionally intelligent. But what about you and me? Are we missing out on becoming even better leaders, consultants, managers because we are OK with where we are at, not bothering to deepen our own self-awareness?

Jess MacCullum in ‘Self-awareness is voluntary’ highlights two important ways in which we can become more self-aware.

- Our own emotions are an incredibly useful

asset. Whenever we feel strong emotions, such as joy, frustration, excitement, annoyance, impatience, Jess suggests “we should stop to consider why we have those feelings, and what it says about us. Coupled with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, these sorts of feelings can lead us to a better understanding of ourselves, our communication, and our leadership.”

- Feedback from others, in the right way, can be an invaluable gift. It is the only way we can overcome our blind spots. While many of us love to give feedback, few of us like to receive it. It takes real humility to hear ‘constructive’ comments about ourselves, or our leadership. It can feel like an attack on our identity and self-worth. As Jess says “If God wants us to hear something hard about ourselves, sometimes He will make it sting to make it stick.”

We can all become more self-aware. The choice is ours.

This week:

- What will you do to listen to your own emotions?
- What will you do to really hear constructive feedback?

WEEK 38

Three vital supporters

When we are making a difference, we are under threat. We need to be on our guard. The Bible describes Satan as a ‘prowling lion’ desperate to find our weak spots (and we all have them). In his practical blog ‘The terrifying danger of falling off my platform’, Matt Rogers suggests that we look for three people to help us out. People who are:

- radically different from me, who are not prone to the same sin as I am. If you struggle with a lust for more, then you need an introverted, contemplative friend. If you are an aggressive leader, then you likely need someone around you who is a faithful, plodding shepherd.
- not impressed with me. I need someone who is bold enough to call me out when they notice me creeping toward the edge

of the cliff. We all need friends who can say, “I don’t know if you’ve noticed it, but you’ve become a total jerk”. You need someone who is willing to risk hard conversations in order to confront you before it’s too late.

- exactly like me but who have lived longer and matured enough to see the evil underbelly of our common personalities. I need someone who’s fallen off my mountain at the same place to warn me of what lies ahead. I need someone who, with tears in their eyes, can testify to the pain that they’ve experienced.

None of us can make it on our own. We need people to support us, just as we are there to support others.

Which of these three people do you already know? Who do you still need to find?

This week:

- Who needs your support?
- What role will you play?

WEEK 39

Who is praying for you?

”God, I pray that mom and dad will have a good time at work”. It was Moses my 7-year old son who prayed for the day, as we try to do at breakfast time every day. A short prayer. I had heard it before. Actually every time he prays, it’s the same one. But that morning, a few days ago, the words came alive somehow. It was like I really understood what they meant. I was so encouraged that he prayed for me and my work. That prayer carried me the whole day and reminded me that having someone to pray for you is such an asset. Something I really need.

That’s why I miss Ingrid. She was an old spinster in our church in her 80’s. Always extremely energetic, although bodily frail. Passionate for God and always with her Bible close to her. For some reason, she had

adopted me as her “prayer child” and she was always keen to hear how my work life was. I particularly remember one Sunday. Ingrid came up to me and said: “Oh, you should know Niklas. Jesus woke me up in the middle of the night and said I should pray for you and your work.” Ingrid is not with me any longer. But she taught me the importance of having people that could accompany me in prayers in challenging work or leadership situations.

This week, take time to reflect on:

- Who is praying for you in your work situation or leadership role?
- Who are you praying for?

WEEK 40

Dear Deborah

judgedeborah@judges4-5.bible.now

CC: womeninthebookofJudges@bible.now

Dear Deborah,

I hope this email over time and space doesn't find you too busy. I am actually impressed by the description that you as a leader used to sit under the palm tree. Most leaders in my context today seem to be always on the move, difficult to find time to talk to.

I am also a bit fascinated when people claim that the texts about your time and your leadership might be some of the oldest texts that we have in the Bible. Hmm, the issue of women in leadership seems to have been there from the very beginning!

Let me focus on the scene when you called Barach to take responsibility. "Only if you go with me", he answered. Was he afraid, aware of having too little strength on his own? Or was he, as some people

would say today, “gender sensitive”, knowing that women and men have to stand side by side?

I guess I'll never know, but I am a bit surprised by your answer to Barach. Was it your frustration that only men were recorded in history which made you respond like that? I wish I could have been there, listening to you and Barach singing together (!), and seeing some people being surprised at the way you emphasized the role of women...

I hope to be back, but let me focus a few final topics:

- Why are women so invisible in leadership structures?
- The stories in the book of Judges is really going downhill, especially about women. From better to really, really worse! And the end of the book finishes in a frustrated “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit”. But - did they really have that faith in new structures as the major solution? I suppose that kingdom hierarchy didn't change much for the women.

Looking forward to hearing your reflections.

Kind regards,
Sven-Erik

WEEK 41

Leading from a place of rest

Most of us will say, our leadership position is a call from God. We are called to this role. We have to do the best we can to respond to it. We are busy because we are responding to the call. But could it be that God is calling you away?

John 4: 4-6 says, 'Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.'

Now imagine Jesus sat by the well. He was tired from the journey. If I was there, I would get a bit tense. There are more baptisms that need to be done. Jesus should be out there gaining more disciples. But here he was, tired and resting.

Have we ever wished to have some time to rest? We become too busy to even realise that this is not the life God intended for us. Most of the time, busyness is a decision that we make. There are pressures imposed upon us by people around us. Sometimes busyness is a result of other people's expectations.

God is calling us away to a place of rest. In the same way as Jesus sat by the well, God is calling us to rest. Let us not be afraid of empty spaces but instead be thankful for those moments of rest.

This week:

- How are you going to lead from a place of rest?
- How will you respond to God who calls you away to rest?

WEEK 42

Dear Gideon

gideon@judges6-8.bible.now

Dear Gideon,

Finally, after reading about you so many times I get this opportunity to send you some lines. I first met you when I was young. The story about a person not being sure about their calling in life challenged me. It also had a taste of this “making things simple and straight” over it – by testing God. “Please God, give me a sign? Should I do this or that?”

I remember instances testing the wool (getting wet or dry), but I must confess that I never really found the method that easy. I have even tested it quite recently in a situation where some people wanted me to pick up a certain leadership position. I didn't want it myself, but it put me in a situation of praying a lot and making the wool test in different

ways. Honestly I couldn't really see any clear indications. Perhaps the conviction that I did right in saying no didn't come until long after. I suppose we live life facing forwards, but we often don't understand it until we are looking backwards.

That struggle I had about my call brought me back to your story. Not only to the wool test, but I discovered the dialogue between you and the angel:

“Brave man” (Judges 6:11)...

What a humorous, even ironic comment when you seem to be trying to hide out of fear. But perhaps it was a way of making you take courage from someone who could see the bigger picture, beyond the obvious. Someone who knew you were needed as a leader at that time.

This reminds me of many of the stories in the Bible. The most common greeting phrase from God, angels or Jesus Christ seems to be: “Don't be afraid!” Maybe this is the most needed encouragements to leaders today?

Kind regards,
Sven-Erik

WEEK 43

Who wants change?

We talk a lot about the need for change – in our churches, in our work, in our countries... We usually see the problem as ‘out there’, with ‘other people’. I came across this cartoon the other day which made me smile:



If we want to see change in our workplaces, in our churches, the only place we can start is with ourselves. Even the secular business world has realised this. Larry Bossidy, Jack Welch's deputy at General Motors, acknowledged:

'I can only change this company as quickly as I can change myself'.

So what does it mean for us this week?

- What are we struggling with in our church, in our work?
- What can we do about that? How do we need to change?

WEEK 44

Change starts from within... yourself

Change is all about planning and action – or so we think. I'm learning that it is much deeper than that. For me it is about repentance – but not the superficial repentance of my youth where I simply confessed, but left sins and patterns unchanged. I am beginning to understand that repentance is a process involving observing, reflecting, discussing, planning, being accountable and acting.

I am now holding on, to ask myself “what is actually going on here?” As I ponder that I also ask the Holy Spirit to speak to me. From there, talking with other people – and what God says through them - is helping me to discover the roots of my challenges. It enables me to make a small plan, be accountable about it to someone and to act upon it. The effects: more peace and rest - fruits of the Spirit. And I'm more effective too, as it is not my own striving, but more about doing what God has already planned for me.

So much of our capacity development is superficial.

We focus on organisational action plans, but in doing so we booby-trap good intentions with human failure. We also need the personal development element that only comes from regular repentance.

This week:

- Where do you see the need for change in your organization or yourself?
- Where does reflective repentance fit in this process?

WEEK 45

Dear Jotham

Jothamathidingplace@ophra.then

Dear Jotham,

Until recently you have been a rather unknown name to me, and from the horrible account in Judges 9 I understand that we could have lost you forever. The only survivor out of 70 murdered (well, 69). What a trauma! Often I have thought that these cruel mass-killings were part of a history long ago –but I'm am sad to say that humanity does not seem to have improved. The forces behind, the struggle for power, come back in new disguises all the time.

Your parable-like speech in Judges 9:7 touches me. I can see why it was dynamite to the ruling king. A prophetic criticism that he must have fully understood. The olive, the fig and the vine, not willing to take up leadership. But the thorn bush volunteered to do it in a threatening way. In the time of the Judges you were striving

for a better “organisation”, but you were also aware that the outward structures do not solve everything. If we fill them with people who have wrong motives to lead, we get the situation that your story describes.

But there is also another angle to your parable that I would like to hear your view about. Why did some of the trees say ‘no’ to becoming leaders? Why do some people whom we consider to be good leaders decline the wishes from others?

I am just about to share your parable with a friend who resigned from being a leader when the structure became too big. As a pastor he was eaten up by meetings, administration and emails – and his distance to the people grew longer. Is that what the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine saw?

But does this also mean that we actually get wrong leaders sometimes? How do we pray for better discernment when choosing leaders?

Any reflections from your side?

Sven-Erik

WEEK 46

Invitation and Challenge

As a leader I often find myself caught between a desire to be caring for those who I am leading and a desire to challenge them. I want to be loving and accepting, yet at the same time push them out of their comfort zone and encourage them to new frontiers.

I have come to realise that my personality, shaped by my past experiences, gives me a natural preference for one. I now know my primary tendency, so I have to put extra intentional effort into the other. I'm also a follower in my organisation. As a follower I also have to be open to receive both invitation and challenge. Again I have a natural preference for invitation, not challenge!

Whether leader or follower, it's all about relationship. We are only open to challenge and invitation from people we trust. I need someone to walk with me; someone to accompany me.

This week consider:

- Who do you care for and challenge at work?
Have you earned their trust?
- Who cares for and challenges you? What
could you do about this?

WEEK 47

85% is about people

Research by Harvard University suggests that 85% of the reason people get a job, keep that job, and move ahead in that job has to do with people skills and knowledge. Only 15% is because of their technical ability.

Human relationships are the most important factor in the performance of any organisation. Organisational change processes stand or fall on the quality of relationships. How does this fact influence how we spend our time? If we are leading or managing people, how much time do we spend listening to them? How does this compare with the time we spend in front of our computers, on emails, policy papers or reports?

The critical success factor for us as leaders or change agents will be our relationships – whether we have earned people's trust. At

times this people-focus is a great joy. At other times it is a real pain. Some relationships are just downright difficult.

Sometimes we need the courage to confront and point people to higher standards of behaviour and performance. At others we need to forgive and let things go. It takes discernment to know the difference. Strengthening relationships requires both the grace of God and a deep reservoir of love for the people we work with. How much do we genuinely care about our work colleagues? Do we see them through God's eyes?

This week:

- Who do you find most difficult to work with?
- What could you do this week to improve that relationship?

WEEK 48

Dear ...?

Jephthah's daughter@judges11-12.bible.now

Dear ...?

Already here I am reminded that I do not know your name. It happens often, not just in the Bible, but through history. Names are forgotten, left out. More women than men...

The story about you and your father Jephthah is to me really a story about you primarily. Believe me, I have tried to understand your father by following his story. He had quite a bad start - looked upon as a bastard, with an unknown prostitute as his mother. He must really have had to fight to be accepted.

Did that struggle make him extra hard and insensitive? When he is finally accepted in society as a leader, I feel as if he is doing his best to prove that he is a tough man. To me, this is what

leads him into a trap – by promising that the first living being meeting him would be sacrificed.

I've found your story difficult to understand - a young girl not knowing the trap she was stepping into. But the reason I am writing to you now is to ask whether you actually knew what you were doing? Did you fear that your father could do a thing like this? Did the rumors reach you? Did you realise that one of the servants would rush to their death just fulfilling their duties?

Did you actually take a decision to make a sacrifice? Did you make that sacrifice, first of all to save someone else from dying? Did you also want to show your father and his society how far they had fallen by losing concern for human life? Did you even have a chance to tell your father to change his mind? Or, wasn't he in a condition to realize that?

Some people would perhaps call this a type of sacrificial leadership, a leadership where you find it more important to make others realise truths, than to save your own life.

So sad. But you are often in my mind.

Sven-Erik

WEEK 49

Avoiding burnout

Despite my best intentions, I often find myself relentlessly busy. The pace of my life seems to be ever-accelerating. Each day I am bombarded with new information. I seem to need to work so hard just to maintain where I am - let alone to get to where I should be.

I can either:

- limit myself to doing a few things well: say 'no' to the unimportant and concentrate my efforts on the most important things in front of me; be disciplined to avoid getting side-tracked; to rigorously examine my motives for prioritising one thing over another; ask myself how valid is my underlying motive?
- look for others to work together with me - something usually needed for good things to multiply.

I am encouraged by reading about Moses in Exodus 18:14-27. He was in a similar situation of potential burnout as he had allowed good work to go too far. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, advised him to select capable men to share the load with him and thereby make it lighter. But I often have to struggle with myself to share the work with others. At times it's easier and simpler to do it myself. Sometimes, I just don't trust others enough. Too often I don't give people the chance to share the load with me.

- As Jesus promised rest to those who are weary and burdened. How can we better live out this promise this week?

WEEK 50

Taking responsibility to change

Change only occurs when someone, somewhere takes responsibility for a situation. Kurt Lewin, the father of organisational change theories, pointed out more than fifty years ago that the first stage in change involved ‘induced anxiety or guilt – a realisation that I am in some way responsible’. Instead of externalising blame onto other people, they realise that they are in some way responsible and that they can do something about it.

Perhaps then I should not be so surprised that the OD exercise that has had the biggest impact on the organisations I work with is simply when I stop and ask people to answer:

- How have I contributed to this situation which I complain about?

I tend to send people away on their own to prayerfully listen to God about how they have contributed to a situation. In dealing with hurt and frustrations it is important to get people out of a 'blamestorming' attitude. It allows God to bring conviction, not people to condemn each other. I have often found that changing people's physical environment helps in this, suggesting they listen to God while going for a walk or sitting outside. The key is to create a safe space to consider the question in a meaningful way.

This week:

- If we look at our own lives, where are we blaming others for a situation?
- Let's stop and ask ourselves: 'How have I contributed to this?'

WEEK 51

If you are too busy, you may be lost

'A busy person is not so much active as lost'

I was taken aback when I read these words by Ruth Haley Barton. After all being busy is a badge of honour in many of our cultures. If we are not busy, then we think we must be wasting our time.

Yet being too busy may not be God's will for our lives. It may indeed reveal that we are lost - not really sure what God wants us to do. So we end up doing too much. We may find it hard to say no when people ask us to do things. We may need to overcome the insidious thought that 'only I can do this well enough'. All of us have human limits. We cannot serve everyone. We cannot increase our time. None of us has super human powers to avoid the need for rest. We all need to make quality time for our relationship with God. A survey

of 20,000 Christians worldwide revealed that 65% rushed from task to task in a way that interferes with their relationship with God.

Even Jesus did not respond to every need. Luke 5:16 describes how he often took himself off on his own to lonely places, even when people were looking for him to heal them.

This week:

- Where do we need to say 'no'?
- How can we make more quality time for God ?

WEEK 52

Finding rest this December

December is a busy month. We are submitting urgent reports, plans and budgets for next year. We are trying to tie up uncooperative loose ends. December can be stressful as we try to pack so many urgent activities in a short time.

But just as God called us to our work, I also believe that God calls us away from it. Amidst the hectic schedule, God calls us away to a place of rest. In John 4, we meet Jesus sitting by Jacob's Well. He was resting as he was tired from the journey. I'm reassured that, like us, Jesus got tired.

Just as Jesus sat by the well, we too need to allow ourselves to rest. We should not fear empty spaces but instead be thankful for those moments of rest. God is calling us to rest in him. We rest in the knowledge that God

is working with us. Our real achievements this past year have not come from our own strength, but only in as much as we have allowed God to work through us.

May God provide rest for our bodies and souls during this busy time. May God renew our joy and give us peace as we prepare for the coming year.

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Space for grace is a network focused on learning about organisational development (OD) with Christian organisations and churches. Members share a commitment to integrating Christian faith with OD practice. For more information and to become a member, please visit www.spaceforgrace.net.

