

Leading In Times of Crisis

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Crises are a part of the body life of every local church. They vary in form from critical doctrinal issues that need to be resolved to moral problems in prominent members. These are crucial moments, defining points, in which often hostile forces are in a tense state of disposition.

For men who lead crisis management is a necessary skill; and some are better at it than others. Every leader in the Bible faced crisis, most of them more than once, from Moses to Malachi and from Jesus to John. Literally, their crises were, and ours are, as varied as the colors on Joseph's coat (cf. Jas 1:2).

Critical moments are important to our spiritual development. James declared that the testing of our faith produces the endurance necessary to spiritual maturity (Jas. 1:3-4). In addition, it is in times of crisis that the righteousness of righteous people are brought to light (1 Cor. 11:19; cf. Phil. 1:9-10; Matt. 5:10-12). Nothing reveals one's character, either good or bad, like the crucible of controversy.

All of this brings us to the question: How does one who is in a position of leadership in a local church conduct himself in crisis? What does he do to effectively deal with whatever issue is at hand and lead people through these pivotal moments with faith intact and even strengthened?

The best of all crisis management begins before a crisis arises. Most problems are more effectively handled if the proper shepherd/flock environment exists before the crisis develops. For example, if the elders are known for good communication and have developed a trusting relationship and high confidence level among the members, problems are more easily resolved. Being accessible (cf. Exo. 18:13-36) and approachable (cf. Jas. 3:17) during critical times is important.

Preparation is another key issue. It is important that elders be prepared, as much as possible, for problems when they arise. It is a good idea to spend a little time mentally going through the procedure you would follow if a particular problem occurred. For example: "How would you react if Hymenaeus takes to the pulpit with venom in his words, teaching destructive, false doctrine?" or, "What am I going to do or say if someone comes forward confessing the sin that he/she has committed fornication with another member (naming the individual)?" Talking through these situations with others will help you learn to respond properly.

So, what does a leader or group of leaders do when confronted with a crisis? Here are just a few ideas to help get you started.

1. Identify and define the problem. Identify the people who are involved. Ask the hard, specific, questions. Keep in mind that it is not uncommon for people to initially tell you only a small portion of what they know or how they feel. Be careful of believing the first edition of any story (Prov. 18:17). Remember, sometimes the problem is not the real problem.

2. Always ask the question: What does the Bible have to say about this problem? Take the time to study and reflect upon what the Bible teaches (2 Tim 2:15). Pray

fervently for wisdom, a must for problem-solving (Jas 1:2-5). Do not be afraid to exercise the virtue of patience, a necessity in times of trial and difficulty.

3. Don't be afraid to deal with the problem (2 Tim. 1:7). The only responsibility we have in any crisis is to do God's will. Remember that God's word will produce God's purposes.

4. Recognize that different problems demand different solution methods. Some sins are private in nature and must be dealt with accordingly (Matt. 18:15-20). Some sins are public in nature and must be dealt with differently (Gal 2:11-14; 1 Cor 5:3-5). Further, some problem people have to be treated differently (Jude 22-23; 1 Thess 5:14; Gal. 6:1).

5. Talk to the right people (Matt. 18:15). It is always much easier to talk about people than it is to talk to them, but very few things are more destructive and counter-productive to your goals. Confronting problem people is hard to do but it is much like what my father-in-law, J. Wiley Adams, once said about the bridge crossing Lake Pontchartrain, "Anticipating the bridge is much harder than actually crossing it."

6. Resolve to solve the problem as quickly as possible. Problems allowed to "fester" only grow worse. Consider the apostles' prompt action in Acts 5:1-4 and Acts 15:1-4.

7. Possess a soul-first mentality. Maintain a Christ-like attitude at all times (Phil. 2:2-8) asking, "How would Jesus help this person?" Keep in mind that your first responsibility is to save a soul (Heb. 13:17).

One final thought. After the crisis is over, don't be afraid to evaluate yourself and your crisis management process. Ask yourself, "What can I do to keep this problem from recurring?" There may not be anything you can do. It is quite possible, however, that in the process of equipping you might be able to fortify yourself against another problem.

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