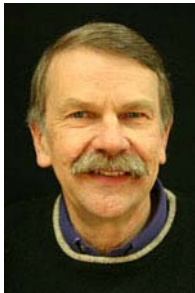


April 2004, *Equipping*

Leadership and Fear



“Never let them see you sweat,” says the advertisement, especially leaders and pastors who need to be confident and above fear, which so many of us have been shaped to believe.

But as pastors and leaders, we could all tell stories of white-knuckle events that we have survived; for example, the congregational meeting, when we are asked to leave the room while the membership decides our future. Or the time we knocked on the door of the home in which a child has just been killed in an accident. Or that special effect in the pit of your stomach that comes on right after supper on Saturday night, which signals the fear that the sermon you have prepared for tomorrow might well be the homiletic version of a scrambled egg.

Jesus routinely led his disciples into situations that were overwhelming, even terrifying, such as when the storm threatened to swamp their boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus would not have had to say “fear not” at that time and at so many other times if his disciples had not had frequent and overwhelming fears. For seasoned fear-battlers the disciples’ fearfulness is somewhat comforting. It makes us feel normal.

So what are we to do when we find ourselves facing people or situations that overwhelm us and turn our knuckles white?

When the fear hits, take a long enough break in your routine, away from your work place, to allow your heart rate to slow to normal. Have a favourite treat. Take a walk. Face up to your fear. Fear that is unacknowledged is more likely to cause problems. Take enough time to begin to have some perspective on what has happened, whose responsibility is involved, and what, if any, is your part to play.

If the situation is complex and overwhelming, ask, “Who can help me with this problem?” Then make a plan to talk to them. If you can not talk to anyone because of the need for confidentiality, ask someone who knows you well to pray for you. They do not have to know the details.

Make a list of the steps you need to take in dealing with the challenge. Getting your plans on paper somehow helps to gain a sense of control. Do not try to do them all at once. Do not rush. Make time your ally. **Take one step at a time.**

Pray. That is what Jesus did when he faced major crises. Take some time away to pray, or if you really need to be on task, pray as you drive, as you wade into the fray. Proceed with the confidence that not only is God with you, but that God is already involved with the people whom you are about to comfort, confront and minister to. Jesus’ “fear not” was not to deny the disciples’ and your fear, but to release it in the presence of God who is both strong and loving.

Finally, examine your knuckles. They are no longer white.

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