

Holy Leadership

by Colonel Raymond Finger

I do not think the intention of the Brengle Institute is to turn any of us into spiritual giants, but rather, through the weakness of our humanity, to help us simply live and experience the life of God more meaningfully.

I think, essentially, we all want to capture whatever it is that God might have for us. The reality is that, in your life and mine, we become so distracted by the daily demands and grind of ministry, we do to God, what we do to our family and ourselves. We do not give Him the attention sufficient to gain from Him the life He wants us to experience and live.

It ought to come as no surprise then, as a result, many Officers live without life. Many work so hard at trying to please people, the program and the Army, that we burn ourselves out and become lost in the maze, or is it haze, of Officership.

Ancient Roman legend tells of Quo Vadis, the great Roman hero who, upon entering Rome, hailed a hero after a mighty battle, rode in his chariot along the boulevard lined with thousands of cheering Romans.

Quo Vadis had instructed the servant who rode standing behind him, to hold the laurel above his head and to keep repeating, 'Remember thou art only a man'.

Colleague Officers, allow me to say this in the generic sense:
Remember, thou art only a man.

Would the apostle Paul have considered himself a spiritual giant? I don't think so because, when I read Romans, despite the interpretation of the scholars, I see a man, like you and I, who struggled with daily temptation and the spiritual tensions that come because we are redeemed, but fallen creatures.

In speaking to the subject of 'Holy Leadership', it is not my intention to suggest that any one of us needs to become a spiritual giant, but rather, my hope is that the Brengle Institute might help you live again, if you are not already doing so.

In saying that, let me now say to you today, plainly and simply, that Spirit-filled leaders become the target for spiritual hits. You know that to be true, and so do I, because every one of us in this room has been an Officer for many years, and each of us is a victim of that kind of attack.

I have been influenced in my thinking today by Henri J.M. Nouwen's reflections on Christian Leadership.

I'm thinking that, perhaps the only difference between us and some of those who are no longer part of the fraternity that is Officership is we have managed to miraculously survive those horrible times of deep trial and temptation throughout our ministry.

We all have a story to tell and throughout the precious time spent in this sacred retreat, some of you will tell your story and, despite the pain, sadness and loss that might be

expressed, let me remind you that you are still serving the Lord. You are still an Officer, you are still in ministry. I hear you say, 'but I am only holding on by my fingernails.' It is amazing how long we can hold on by our fingernails when the floor boards have dropped away beneath our feet – it's called the sustaining grace of God. My story is this: when I have, at times, reached the very limits of who I am and what I've got to give, when the floor has dropped out and I have felt like I was in free-fall, God always showed up. God will always show up; it is the nature of His commitment to you and me, it is the covenant of His love. It is the nature of God to always, always show up. Jesus promised:

'I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.' Matthew 28:20

Can I tell you, that you are, by far, more resilient than you give yourself credit for. Make no mistake; we do not work in a world of concrete and steel, income and expenditure, even if that is what our hands are found to do in the daily occupation of our time.

We are servants of the Most High and Holy God. At heart, you are engaged in spiritual ministry because it is your spiritual calling to do so, and your faith has saved you. God has made it clear.

'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'

Ephesians 6:12

But I need you to hear more of the narrative from Ephesians 6, this time from the Message Bible.

Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet.

Truth, righteousness, peace, faith and salvation are more than words.

Learn how to apply them throughout your life. God's word is an indispensable weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. vv.13-17

I want to say to you that Holy Leadership becomes grounded, resolved and is forged by the confrontation of trial and tribulation.

When we are confronted with the reality of our sinfulness, limitations, weaknesses, prejudices, basic humanness and when we come to the very end of ourselves, we begin to see God much more clearly.

It is difficult to see God when your eyes have become veiled by flattery, self-importance or vanity. Neither is it easy to see God in the maze and haze of the daily grind.

Let's look together at Luke 4:1-13 and see how holy leadership is challenged and therefore get a sense as to what holy leadership might look like.

v.1 'Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit' - and so are you!

Remember, Jesus had just walked out of the waters of baptism after the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove when God declared:

'This is my Son, whom I love.'

Jesus was then immediately led away by the Spirit into the wilderness.

Now, whilst the Scripture is silent on the subject, I am not convinced that Jesus chose the wilderness, despite His being led by the Spirit.

You see the ministry journey will often lead us to places where we might not necessarily choose to go or, worse still, to places where we do not want to go, or to places that are away from the familiar and comfortable that we have come to love and do not want to leave.

And isn't it true to say that none of us would voluntarily choose the wilderness, but, it has been the place where we have been led by a variety of reasons or experiences at different times throughout our Officership.

You don't need me to tell you that the wilderness can be a place of loneliness, abandonment, isolation and disappointment. It can be a desolate, merciless and, at times, hostile place.

It can be an unforgiving and empty place and we don't even have to get into our car and drive to it because, more often than not, it comes to us!

It can be tiredness that takes us there, disappointment, hurt, a deal that's gone wrong, a relationship that's getting to us, a congregation that seems recalcitrant and unresponsive to the Spirit of God or, perhaps, the seemingly unrealistic expectations of others. The pressures, demands, endless drain on our energy and struggle to balance life. Any number of things can take us there. I don't know - but what I do know is this.

IT IS A PLACE OF VULNERABILITY

As I follow the journey of Jesus into the wilderness, I see His vulnerability, I see His Spirit-filled life provoked, challenged, threatened and tested by the enemy of Christian faith, and the sheer reality of His circumstances.

And I tell you this today, because it is where the church is being disassembled, brick by holy brick, and where its integrity is being trashed, particularly throughout the western world.

It is, therefore, where the holiness of God's Leaders is being hindered by the four most beguiling, insidious and destructive temptations common to each of us. We know them well.

THE FLESH - THE WORLD - THE DEVIL - OURSELVES

THE FLESH Luke 4:2-3

“For forty days, He was tempted by the devil. (be under no misapprehension as to where temptation comes from, it is not from God, The Salvation Army, some person, but it is from the devil. The devil is always the architect of temptation) He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them He was hungry. 3 The devil said to Him, ‘tell this stone to become bread.’

So, here is the first of the temptations and challenge to the Holy Leader.

INDULGE YOURSELF

The word ‘flesh’ is often used to describe the obsessive desires of the body. Within every one of us there is a motor that drives us, wants, desires, cravings, demands, all of which are fueled by a compulsive passion to indulge ourselves.

Jesus might have thought, ‘well, it’s only bread: one small bun, one pathetic slice, what does it matter, where is the harm and, what’s more, I’ve earned it. I’ve been out here for forty days, I’ve been obedient, and I’ve done all that has been asked of me, I think it’s my turn so, why not?’

In the maze and haze of Officership, it is so easy to lose sight of God and what is right, righteous and holy, when you are in that place.

Those who have either served in the Personnel department, or been a member of the Officer Review Board, have heard this sad story too many times as a justification for behavior that was not right, righteous or holy.

It was only bread, it was only ever going to be a few dollars, it was a difficult time and I work hard, long hours and we get precious little to show for it.

You and I both know the Church is littered with people who have chosen to indulge themselves; the ministry has been scandalized by clergy who have chosen to indulge themselves. From time to time there is a need to speak with Officers and staff over inappropriate internet use. Good people who lose sight of God and what is right, righteous and holy and who get caught in the web of pornography; bread that feeds the insatiable appetite of sexual indulgence.

Jesus’ story moves to another place as does ours.

THE WORLD

I want to read Luke 4:5-6 and here is an opportunity for power, authority and splendor.

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to Him, I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours.

This surely is the place for personal opportunism, of unnatural and accelerated gain and greed, the place to:

GRATIFY YOURSELF

This is one of those moments when you want to just step right into the story, take Jesus by the shoulders and say.

It's not his to give; it's not his to give!

Sadly, for some, there are times when, lost in the maze and haze, they find themselves taken to a place where the humility of ministry becomes obscured by an obsession for lofty, elevated places. And some of us know colleagues who live bitter lives, resentful because of appointments they were never given that they believed should have rightfully been theirs.

Appointments are not his to give: position, power, authority and splendor are not his to give. And, because they are not his to give, the truth is, you will never get what he promises, unless it comes through devious means. But that will not stop him from using the notion of them to destabilize us, which is always his plan – distraction and destabilization.

What you might get, through whatever scheme used, is something that may look like what you want but, if obtained by ill-gotten means, you will never get what God gives to the worthy. What you will get is a poor imitation of the blessing and you will go on living in discontent.

Interestingly enough, there are people in business doing crooked deals every day, and it's not theirs to deal. The company directors of HIH have, to this day, still not showed any remorse for deals done which were not theirs to do. Not surprisingly, the e-news *Lawyers Weekly* makes this observation regarding corporate fraud, for example.

'Gambling has emerged as the most common motive for fraud. Almost half, (44%) of the total value of fraud was attributed to gambling, a two-fold increase over the 2006 survey.'

The article went on to say these acts are, 'typically motivated by greed.'

Greed, is simply wanting what might not be ours to take. Kingdoms of the world, and it can all be yours because it is mine to give - It is a lie!

Just because the Army is not a corporation, doesn't mean we are immune from fraud because it takes places on varying scales.

What I am saying is simply this, the temptation that came to Jesus, in that moment when He was transported by the devil to a high place, was to gratify Himself. Flattered by the very idea of personal grandeur, authority and splendor, it sounds wonderful and alluring, but it is a lie, because it is not his to give and therefore it is not ours to take.

It is the same temptation that seeks to rob leaders of what is right, righteous and holy. Subtle, suggestive but offered at a time of vulnerability when, all that Jesus had were the clothes upon his back and living in the poverty of an isolated, barren and obscure location in the back-blocks of nowhere in particular.

Into His wilderness world came the temptations from the devil.

Firstly, there was the temptation of the FLESH with an invitation for Him to INDULGE HIMSELF. It was only bread so, what of it, who cares, so what? Next, came the temptation of the WORLD with an invitation for Him to GRATIFY HIMSELF. Where He was taken to a high place so as to get a glimpse of what it could be like, what it would feel like, to have authority and splendor.

But isn't it true that we are our own worst enemy? Each of the temptations focuses the attention on us, me, myself, mine. Now the truth is, the devil did not take Jesus to a high place, or the city of Jerusalem, He was transported in his own mind.

He was in the wilderness and what I am saying is that, when you are in a vulnerable place, you are subject to temptation and bizarre thinking that is not normal for you. The wilderness is not always a location, but more a state of mind or a space we can be in at any time.

In the third temptation, Jesus pictured Himself in Jerusalem and taken to the highest point of the temple, when the devil said 'jump'. Fascinating, you know some may be inclined to read this in an entirely different way when speaking about personal vulnerability.

Isn't it true that there are people who go to high places believing that they can fly, that they are a bird, they can fly and no harm will come to them? Some might say, this is what happens when a person is at their worst or suffers deprivation, no food, exposure to the elements, lost or alone in a 'wilderness'?

OUSELVES Luke 4:9-11

Luke 4:9-11

The devil led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written, 'He will command his angel's concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone'.'

Here is the temptation to;

BE SPECTACULAR

Do you know what I am talking about here, is it possible that what drives us at times might have little to do with, 'may Your Kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' And more to do with another kingdom?

It is entirely possible to become so enamoured by the likes of Brian Houston, Robert Schuller, Ric Warren, Bill Hybells and Tim Costello.

With their 5000 or 10,000 seat auditoriums and influential ministries that place them on the top 10 speakers most in demand around the Christian world.

Friends, here is the question, am I living close to Jesus, am I in a close relationship with God, do I spend time with the Word of God and in prayer? If the answer is, 'not really,' then you might actually be in a wilderness even though you show up for work every day while your heart, mind and spirit might be in another space?

The temptation to be spectacular can seem so innocuous because, we can be convinced that, all I am doing is for the Master, when that may very well mask a deeper agenda.

Finally, the most shocking of all the temptations - the last - was that of the DEVIL himself, with an invitation for Jesus to SELL HIS SOUL.

THE DEVIL

Look at Luke 4:7

v.7 'so if you worship me, it will all be yours.'

Now, there's the catch, there always is. To get what you want means you have to compromise something else, to give something, trade something or even sell something.

Does this imply that we would knowingly, intentionally compromise what is right, righteous and holy in order to get what we want? That is exactly what is invited; to knowingly do what is wrong, corrupt and unholy.

It is obvious that the devil was not deterred by the reality that Jesus was not only the Son of God, but the Incarnate God. Still, his bold assault was to invite apostasy.

And you can be very sure that, if he tried it on the Son of God, there is nothing that stands in his way of trying it on you.

In our weakness, vulnerability and isolation he comes and, what sits behind the scheming of what you want, is the cost of your soul.

The alluring offers of the world, whatever they might be, will come at the cost of your soul.

The Bible says:

‘What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul.’ Matthew 16:26

The temptation is to sell yourself to get what you want.

This incident in the wilderness was not the first time the devil had made this kind of assault. The mirror story is told in Genesis chapter 2 when it was told to Adam and Eve that, if they ate from the tree of knowledge, their ‘eyes would be open and they would be like God.’
Genesis 3:5

The notion sounded attractive. The devil asked, ‘did God really say that you should not eat from the that particular tree?’ He went on to say that it would be alright for them to touch the forbidden fruit. He told them they would not die as God had suggested. He told them that their eyes would be open and, finally, here is the big one - he told them that they would be like God.

As a consequence, our doctrine says:

We believe our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness, and that in consequence of their fall, all men have become sinners, totally depraved and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.

In the sad litany of temptations, there is still one more - sting in the tail - and it almost goes unnoticed. Twice the devil provoked him.

v 3&9 ‘If you are the Son of God.’

The provocation is this, if you are who you claim to be, then you can do whatever you want! If you are the Son of God, then act; use your power, use your authority and act. By doing so you become your own god and the world serves you. Do what you please, take what you please; behave as you please because, if you are who you claim to be, then it is all yours anyway.

Now think about it for a moment: the proposition is nothing less than an inversion of God's expressed way for the world. It inverts holiness, rightness and righteousness and it is the complete opposite of servant-hood and, of itself, becomes self-serving.

Henri Nouwen observes:

One of the greatest ironies of the history of Christianity is that its leaders constantly gave in to the temptation of power - political power, military power, economic power, or moral and spiritual power - even though they continued to speak in the name of Jesus, who did not cling to power, but emptied himself and became as we are.

Nouwen goes on to say: 'It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than love life.'

I want you to note the double inflection created by the challenge to identity.

On one hand it implied Jesus had power and authority, therefore He could do as He pleased, whilst on the other hand, it can be accusative and condemning.

If you are who you claim to be, then perhaps you can't do the things that you have power and authority to do?

How many of us are destroying, or have destroyed, our precious, and often fragile, inward confidence by critical self-doubt and condemnation over the things that we tell ourselves we should be doing.

Worse still perhaps, by others who tell us, because we are an Officer, what we should be and what we should be doing.

I want you to think about this because, at times, the battle is much more subtle than we might know.

The truth is, you might never succumb to the kinds of temptations to indulge yourself, gratify yourself or sell yourself, but what about this?

TO DOUBT YOURSELF

Is self-doubt not one of the most debilitating and crippling thoughts that haunt our thinking and minds?

Isn't it true that we look with admiration at colleagues and peers believing they have it all together? It all seems to come to them so easily, they are so good at everything they do and by comparison, we feel like a failure.

And what sits behind this self-punishment is the voice. The sarcastic, condemning, patronizing voice that says, 'if you are, who and what you claim to be, then act, do what you are supposed to have power and authority to do!'

The truth is that Officers are required to be all things to all people, but that will often mean we have to work outside of our gift-set, our skill-set, and, at times, even outside of our level of competence.

What it does not mean is that it will come easy, sit easy, feel easy or is easy. Sometimes it means we will work with what we do have and we will do our best, if that is what's required.

My own personal experience tells me that these are the times when the great grace of God does for us, what we are unable to do for ourselves.

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

You can have confidence in God, even if you have diminished confidence in yourself and as life and times goes on, so you will know the truth of what it means by the words – 'my power is made perfect in your weakness'.

Which is another way of saying, do your best and leave the results to God. It is after all, His business not yours.

The things of which I speak today are hindrances to Holiness that will rob the leader of Holy Leadership and Godliness of life.

I am saying that the journey of Holiness requires that we live in an experience of God that will easily reflect and reveal the falseness of temptation and evil invitation.

Thus, we might live victorious, God-honoring lives that lead others to Christ.

Notes

1 Henri J.M.Nouwen, In The Name Of Jesus, Darton, Longman & Todd Publishing 1998

2 Lawyers Weekly:

http://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/blogs/risk_management/archive/2009/03/11/face-of-corporate-fraud-unmasked.aspx

3 Ibid.

4 Psalm 91:11-12

5 Salvationist Doctrines, Schedule 1 of the Salvation Army Act 1980, Article 5

6 Henri J.M. Nouwen, In The Name Of Jesus, p. 58

7 Ibid. p. 59