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Leadership Equipping Thoughts



The Ideal and the Real

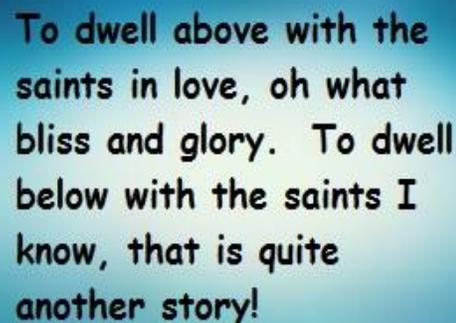
Leading God's people is a high honor and well as a difficult challenge. Burnout among leaders in ministry has one of the highest rates of any profession. Some leaders with high ideals start out full of zeal and enthusiasm only to be faced with the difficult realities and they simply crash and burn. Others with less than high ideals simply get jaded, learn how to play the game, and shift into maintenance mode hoping to make it through to retirement. I believe God wants us to avoid both extremes.

One helpful attitude that will help is expressed in the phrase, **“leaders need to learn how to embrace the ideal while living with the real.”** Consider the definitions of these two words.

Ideal – The perfect example of something, the standard or principle to which people aspire.

Real – The real and existing as fact, what really exist or occurs at the moment.

Paul speaks of God's work as a, "treasure in earthen vessels" (2Co 4:7). Because we are still bound in our human body and fleshly nature, there is an element of the “earthen” that is in everyone. While we are being perfected there is much imperfection in every person and every church.



To dwell above with the saints in love, oh what bliss and glory. To dwell below with the saints I know, that is quite another story!

Jesus speaks of the reality of this imperfection in His teaching on the Kingdom. He speaks of a treasure hidden in a field (Mat 13:44). There is nothing wrong with the treasure but the field can have a lot of junk in it. In order to get the treasure we have to buy the field. In our case the field speaks of the imperfections in people.

Two ditches to avoid in embracing the ideal while living with the real

Fatalistic Resignation: We cannot become jaded and think with resignation, “this is just the way churches and people are.” This leads to a fatalism with little faith that loses it’s edge in reaching for the ideal. There is a glorious church that Jesus is working to perfect. He has done this tirelessly for over 2000 years (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Leaders are to be co laborers with Him in this process. The Apostle Paul worked with all his might towards the same end that Jesus is working, maturity in Christ. He did so knowing that people and churches were imperfect but that didn’t detour Him from leading and reaching for the ideal. *Colossians 1:28-29 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. (29) For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.*

Unrealistic Idealism: We become so idealistic and focused on perfection that we cannot tolerate any imperfection. This can produce a legalistic drive towards perfection that minimizes the grace and mercy we need to have as we lead an imperfect people.

Leaders who swing towards this area often end up in a harsh driving mode of leadership. They are usually very principled people. Instead of leading the sheep they often drive them towards the principles and perfection. They have a hard time allowing for immaturity and fail to have a parental attitude. They fail to understand that the Kingdom expanding in imperfect people is a process (Mark 4:26-32).

The Bible shows us that the Kingdom works in the lives of people as well as the earth in a similar manner to agricultural processes. The planting process goes through several stages. The thing about agriculture is that you must be patient to work in it. What you plant today won’t be harvested in some cases for a long time. You have to trust the soil and the weather. No matter how hard you work there is an element of the intangible that is at work that is beyond your control. In the Kingdom the intangible is God, His Spirit, and His word all working beneath the soil and beyond the efforts of man.

Important reminders to reaching for the ideal while living with the real

- **We must have a tremendous patience when it comes to God’s people**

*1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 ... **be patient** with everyone.*

*Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **patience**, kindness, goodness,*

*Ephesians 4:1-3 walk in a manner worthy of the calling ... 2 with all humility and gentleness, **with patience**, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

- **We have to keep mercy and truth together**

Ps 85:10 "Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed" (Prov 10:6, Hab 3:2).

Mercy is the compassion and pity towards people who are in the condition of sin and a willingness to help them.

- **We must look to the Lord of the House not just the House** (Psa 127:1). We have to believe that God is at work even when we sometimes wonder if He is there.
- **We must keep a parental heart (motherly and fatherly) toward God's children**

1Co 4:15...yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father.

1Th 2:7-11 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children ...(11) we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,