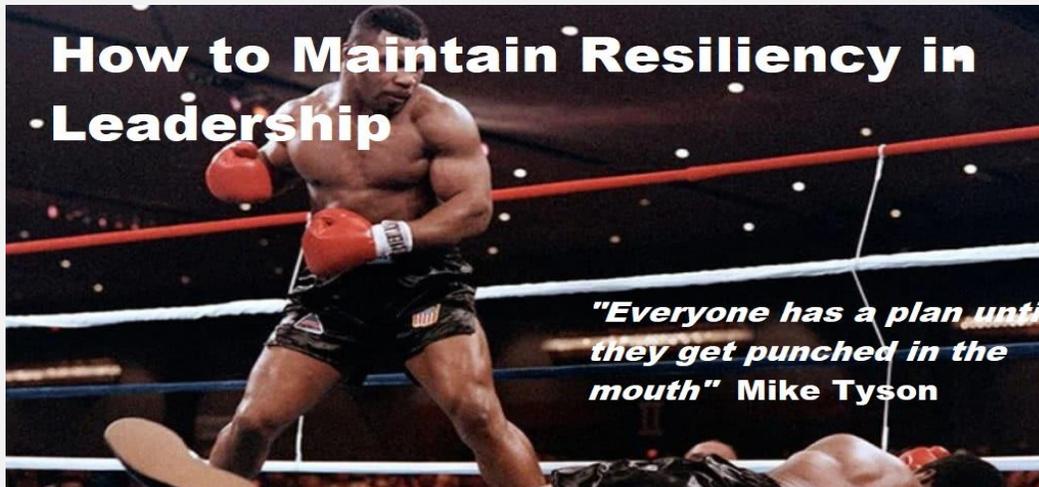


# Equipping Thoughts for Leaders



April 17, 2021

We have all faced and continue to face a very challenging season with COVID uncertainties, continued political hostilities, racial tensions, and conspiracy theories. For leaders, these things have brought a heightened sense of spiritual warfare.

There is an excellent quote from the famous evangelist Billy Sunday that helps us keep a right perspective towards the warfare we are always engaged in, "If you haven't been opposed by the devil lately you had better check because you might be going in the same direction."

Warfare is simply a part of leadership and expansion. The enemy knows the truth, "smite the shepherds and the sheep scatter" (Zechariah 13:7, Matthew 26:31), and he does everything he can to smite them.

We read the passage about Jesus building His church romantically, but we need to see it in reality, "On this rock, I will build My church." We often overlook the challenge of the next part as Jesus connects it to warfare, "and the gates of hell will not overpower it" (Mt 16:16-18). Matthew Henry comments on this very well,

"This implies that the church has enemies that fight against it, and endeavor its ruin overthrow, here represented by the gates of hell, that is, the city of hell...the devil's interest among the children of men. The gates of hell are the powers and policies of the devil's kingdom...These fight against the church by opposing gospel truths, corrupting gospel ordinances, persecuting good ministers and good Christians; drawing or driving, persuading by craft

or forcing by cruelty... this is the design of the gates of hell, to root out the name of Christianity...to raze this city to the ground."

As we are looking to walk with Jesus as He expands His Kingdom through missional ventures, planting, and restoring difficult church situations, we must realize there will always be opposition/warfare.

The book of Revelation records a scene where the devil stands by a woman who is about to expand by giving birth to destroy her offspring (Revelation 12:1-4). Matthew Henry comments about the context for this passage, church expansion.

*"Here we see that early prophecy eminently fulfilled in which God said he would put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, Gen 3:15. You will observe, the attempts of Satan and his agents to prevent the increase of the church, by devouring her offspring as soon as it was born."*

## **Warfare over Paul's most prominent church plant**

Paul spent the most significant amount of "onsite time" planting the church in Ephesus (3 years). About ten years later, that church had gotten into such bad shape that he had to send Timothy to help straighten out the mess. You get an idea of the warfare Timothy was under trying to restore that church by how Paul writes to him.

- *1 Timothy 1:18 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight,*
- *1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith.*
- *2 Timothy 2:1-4 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus...  
3 Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*

## **Success is Continuing to Fight**

There will always be opposition to Kingdom expansion, so leaders must be careful about how they view success. Leadership success isn't simply about having a great plan or avoiding trouble (Jesus guaranteed we would face it Jn 16:33). Success in God's sight is about faithfulness, staying faithful to what God has shown them amid opposition.

## **Consider the imperfect journey and warfare over prominent Biblical leaders.**

- **MOSES:** After a significant redirection of his life at the burning bush, Moses leads his people out of captivity so they could journey into the promised land. He then spends his entire life facing various challenges with God's people wandering around in the wilderness consistently grumbling, whining, and disobedient to God, then dies without getting to step foot into that promised land.
- **SAMSON:** After experiencing incredible feats of anointing and power over the enemy, along with correction for his cavalier disobedience, Samson repents at the end of his life and has one more victory in destroying many of his enemies/Philistines. Yet when the dust settles, he is dead, and the Philistines still rule over Israel.
- **DAVID:** The "man after God's own heart" was faithful to God in obscurity. He loyally helped another leader achieve greatness by defeating enemies. He came into his leadership over the entire nation and earned unprecedented success/victory. David had his failure with Bathsheba, then one of his sons, Amon, rapes his sister, and another son, Absalom, kills him. Absalom then leads a rebellion against his father, causing him to flee from his leadership position.
- **JEREMIAH:** He ends up in exile with the rest of the country after repeatedly getting beaten by his people for preaching what God commanded him.
- **JOHN THE BAPTIST:** The personal effect for his prophetic preaching was being beheaded by a perverted Roman ruler who then gives his head to a 15-year-old stripper.
- **PETER:** The Roman government killed Peter after He encourages God's people to honor and submit to it because it exists to "punish evil and praise those who do right" (2 Peter 2:13-25).
- **PAUL:** The Roman government killed Paul after he reminded people that government exists by God's hand to promote good (Romans 13:1-7). This was after he spends his life, with thorn intact (2 Corinthians 11), "being beaten, rejected, lost at sea, and consistently dealing with people coming in behind him and destroying what he built."

What pleased God in all these leaders' lives wasn't their perfect plan or the absence of trouble. It was their faith that caused them to keep getting up. They kept on fighting (Proverbs 24:16).

Former heavyweight champion, Mike Tyson, said something revealing about fighting and strategy (Tyson can represent demonic strategy). He was commenting on an interviewer's questions about his opponent's strategy for a fight.

***"Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth....Then, like a rat, they stop in fear and freeze." Mike Tyson***

This leads to their defeat no matter how great their plan.

Continuing the fight is the most important thing. More than having a great strategy is continuing to fight. Paul sums it up nicely by telling leaders to stay in the fight.

- *1 Timothy 4:7-9 On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; (8) for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things.*

**Things that will help us stay in the fight (“be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might” Ephesians 6:12).**

- **Maintain personal disciplines in walking with the Lord no matter how bad you feel (prayer, worship, His presence, and the word).**
- **Never make important decisions when in the valley of stress.** Decisions made in the fog of anxiety are rarely good/God ones.
- **Be open and ask close friends to pray for you and stay accountable.** It is essential to spend time with people who will encourage your soul in God.
- **Working from a “to do” list is good during foggy times.** Doing one thing at a time will help you not feel so overwhelmed.
- **Never respond to negative emails, posts, or exercise church discipline when under the gun of stress.** It will usually be a knee-jerk reaction rather than a leading of the Spirit that you will regret later. It is better to wait and sleep on it.
- **Seek perspective and counsel from a trusted mature believer or your pastor.** They may fix nothing, but just getting calm, trusted, other perspectives will help.
- **Repent of any anxious ways in which you try to help people.** You can’t do everything, fix everyone’s problems, and keep everyone happy. You are not Jesus, and even He couldn’t keep everyone happy, but your job is to point people to Him.
- **“Rejoice always, again I say rejoice” (Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:13).** Give thanks for the gospel of Jesus and the grace of God. It is always good news and will give you a God-filled perspective.
- **Keep sowing good things.** *Galatians 6:3 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we don’t give up.*
- **Remind yourself over and over that the most crucial thing is point #1, and make sure you pursue that above all the others.**

## **Additional nuggets of truth and wisdom**

- **Be careful not to make poor permanent decisions in response to temporary emotions.**
- **Don’t yield to an anxious scrambling to figure out your future.**

- **Acknowledge God in all your ways and trust Him to show you the steps to take (Proverbs 3:6).**
- **Small steps in the right direction are essential.** Don't always look to hit home runs, but keep your eye on the ball and connect with it. Don't ignore base hits or even walks because you will end up scoring runs if you are faithful to engage them.
- **Remember that the challenges we face today and our decisions in light of them determine the testimonies we tell tomorrow.**

Let's be faithful to God and stay in the fight.

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