

## Reliant Leadership

By Carrie Cavanaugh

Every leader knows that they are only as effective as they are trusted. Unfortunately trust is an elusive quality, which takes years to develop and can be lost in a moment. A lot of research has been done to help leaders identify what they can do to engender greater trust from their employees. Many of the suggestions are in line with biblical principles: live and lead with integrity, interact with your employees in a way that they can see that you genuinely care about them, listen to and act on their suggestions. But there is one other element that we see laid forth in the Bible that will never show up in secular research: reliance on God. The secular world just can't stomach the humility required nor the notion that God is sovereign and we can do nothing without Him.

The issue of trust becomes especially vital during times of duress. It is then that leaders step forward to direct the organization, often instituting change. For many employees change is scary. Learning new skills can be hard. And unless the employees trust the leader and the plan that they propose, there will be backlash. In situations like this, leaders can rely on the trust they have garnered from past success or openly communicating about their plan. But Christian leaders ought to also let their staff see how they are reliant upon Christ.

In John 15:4 Jesus teaches, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." Beyond the warning, there is a promise; in the

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next verse Jesus affirms that when we are reliant upon Him we "will bear much fruit." This should be an encouragement for the leaders of Christian organizations who long to see their ministries make an impact. But this passage depicts something more than just a means to success. Rather, the vivid imagery of a gardener pruning and burning the branches that aren't reliant upon the vine is a harsh truth that if we aren't relying upon God we are damned. That is, if our faith is sincere, it will inevitably evidence itself in reliance on God. Intellectually I know I can't do anything without God, but I so easily forget and therefore when I

find myself in those places where I have no idea how things will work out aside from God's grace, I'm thankful because He has brought me back to the paradigm that I ought always to have.

The story of the Israelite's conquest of Jericho makes for a wonderful children's song, but it also testifies to God's power and His people's dependence. The people of Israel were finally entering the promised land, but as exciting as that was, it was surely a daunting task as there were already people inhabiting the land. God had granted the Israelites some success, but then they came to the walled city of Jericho. At this point Joshua was met by a mysterious man armed with a sword and Joshua asked him if he was for them or for their enemy and he responded, "Neither, but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come" (Joshua 5:14). Joshua was then instructed in a most unusual method of conquering the city involving 6 days of silent marching followed by a 7th in which the priests would blow their trumpets at the end of the march. Why the bizarre plan? These instructions were prefaced by God's declaration, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands" (Joshua 6:2). The Israelites and the citizens of Jericho had a week-long lesson in reliance on God. It certainly wasn't their might that won the city, it was God's mysterious

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power. This power is both beyond their understanding and greater than anything they could ever muster up on their own. For the Israelites, success rested in reliance.

Like us, the Israelites found it hard not to take matters into their own hands, even after an experience like Jericho. The next battle was to win Ai, a small town, that seemed to be a simple matter. They reasoned, “Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there” (Joshua 7:3). But God surprised them with defeat in order to remind them that even in the things they thought they could handle, they needed to rely on Him. This is a profound revelation about God’s priorities and what it means for Him to advance His kingdom. Isn’t it a bit surprising that God allowed the Israelites to be defeated at Ai when it was His prerogative to give Israel the land? We find, however, that God cares more about refining their souls than giving them external victories. We need to remember this for our own lives. God may have us fail so that He can remind us that we can do nothing without Him. So, let us be wise and rely on Him from the start. Humbling ourselves before God is not only the best thing we can do for our organizations, but it is also the only fitting thing for us to do before Him in whom “all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17b).