

Distant Management

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There has always been sort of a gap between management and the common worker. It's odd, too, because generally managers are promoted from the common workers themselves. But I've seen it many times, that as the common worker moves up into the ranks of higher management, he loses contact with his peers and forgets what working in the trenches is all about. Perhaps that is why the promotion process is rather slow, so that the managers-in-training can be transformed without incurring shock. Somehow I am reminded of the lowly caterpillar which through the cocooning process becomes a beautiful butterfly. Unfortunately, it is hard to see how the butterfly can have much sympathy for caterpillars.

I am not trying to trash "management," but I would like to draw some sort of lesson out of this situation. Let's look at a Biblical example of what I am talking about by studying the evolution of leadership in the life of David. Remember that David was once a simple shepherd who had an enormous faith in God. It gave him the strength he needed to do his job; caring for the sheep, staying out in the cold weather without the comforts of home, and fighting off ferocious animals such as lions and bears. Because he had a heart like God, he was anointed as king by Samuel. Soon after that he took on the great giant Goliath and cut off his head. To the people he was a great warrior, for they said, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7).

David also became a great leader, and the God gave him victory wherever he went (1 Samuel 8:6, 14). But Saul became so jealous that he had to run for his life. He then gathered about him a huge following of those who would risk their lives for him. I don't think that there is any greater sign of loyalty in the Bible than those who were led by David. These men endured many hardships, living in caves and being constantly on the move. But theirs was a fellowship forged in the heat of war.

But once David's kingdom became secure, the process began which distanced him from the warrior mentality that he had carried with him for so long. He had been away from the wars too long. Joab once even had to call to him to finish taking a city so that the king would not lose the glory. And in 1 Samuel 11:1ff, we see that David had delegated the whole war thing totally to Joab.

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba,, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

We know, of course, that had David not been managing from afar, he would not have gotten into this trouble. But it got worse because he forgot what the fellowship of war meant. David first brought Uriah back so that he could also sleep with Bathsheba and the baby could be claimed as his. But Uriah would not take the comforts of home while his fellow soldiers were roughing it out in the battle zone. David tried everything, but he could not break the man's integrity. So he went to his backup plan. As king he ordered Joab to withdraw from Uriah so that he would be killed in battle. Once again, though, David had forgotten the loyalty these soldiers had for each other. Joab did put Uriah in the thick of the battle, but it is obvious from the message that he sends to David that Uriah was not left alone. How could these men who had endured so much together commit that kind of crime?

The heavenly management that we long for is so much different. The German writer Thielicke has said that Christ is somewhat like the general who refuses to direct the battle from a safe distance, but comes directly to the front. This is what makes him so credible. We need this kind of leader, one who knows what it is like for us as we struggle to live for him. He has passed through the "common man" phase, living and dying for us, but he will never forget what it is like in the trenches.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
Hebrews 4:15-16

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