

Rock Solid

3 Ways to Lead in Chaos

BLOG

February 2015 – We laugh about it now.

It was back-to-school night—our final one. Our youngest son was starting his senior year at Peninsula High School. Pattie and I had got this drill down pretty well. Grab the line-up of classes, make the rounds, shake some hands. All good. Right?

Not so fast. In commemoration of his last lap, Dusty decided to shake it up a bit. So he gave us a completely random listing of classes and times and room numbers (emphasis on COMPLETELY). Long story short, Pattie and I were in spin cycle, racing from one end of the campus to the other only to discover we were in the wrong class...again. We finally figured out the shenanigan at period four when we arrived in the gym for a girl's volleyball class! (Our only consolation in this fiasco is that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Which means that he'll get his campus runaround someday!)

As a leader, nobody needs to slap a Post-it on your office wall to remind you that your world regularly contains chaos. Often a sizeable portion.

What do you do when your head is spinning? How do you respond when things are out of control? How do you lead in the middle of chaos?

To chase down these questions, I want to review the game film of a story stashed away in the pages of the Old Testament.

The people of Israel have escaped the oppressive servitude of the Egyptians. They have miraculously crossed the Red Sea and find themselves backpacking across the sweltering wilderness. We meet them at a place called Kadesh-Barnea, tiptoed on the threshold of their new home—not just any home, but their promised home. A land flowing with milk and honey. A piece of real estate that danced daily in the dreams and imaginations of every descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You could cut the air of anticipation with a knife.

But this land is an occupied land. A land possessed by the enemy. And as such, it is a land that must be conquered. (And if you are going to conquer something, you better be prepared for chaos. And a lot of it!)

Twelve were commissioned to spy out the land. Of the twelve, only two—Joshua and Caleb—returned with a favorable report. From their two-thumbs-up assessment, we learn a handful of poignant lessons of leadership—lessons worthy of being stamped deeply into the heart of every leader.

Leaders speak calm and confidence in the face of chaos. Stacked against the majority report that the enemy was too formidable, these Old Testament leaders, in the middle of an angry town hall meeting, stepped up to the podium and delivered a firm voice of resolve. They changed the channel from confusion to stability. They changed the conversation from fear to faith.

Leaders live in the world of reality and the world of possibility. All twelve members of the recon team saw the enemy—their numbers, their size, their strength, their fortifications. Their 40-day stealth mission provided them with more than enough reality check. But only two of these leaders lived with one foot planted in reality and the other planted in possibility. While they didn't deny the truth of today, they chose to live in the hope of tomorrow. They saw a scenario that oozed with opportunity.

Leaders measure the opposition not against themselves, but against their God. The faithless ten chose to benchmark the enemy against the limitations of their resources. The faithful two made a different call. They chose to calibrate the foe against the strength of their God. They didn't bank on the vastness of their military might, but rather on the greatness of their Commander in Chief. They knew that they served a God who has yet to be out-matched.

The top takeaway from this storyline is this: When a crisis emerges, so does a leader. When life is out of control, a leader is in control. While sobered by the horizontal realities, leaders choose the vertical possibilities—looking up and locked on to a God who knows no limit.

And loves to come through.