

Rock Solid Avoiding the Penalty Box

BLOG

January 2015 – Jimmy couldn't wait until he turned six.

Jimmy's dad was a professional hockey player—a perennial star in the NHL—and the deal was that when he turned six, he could go to the arena to see his dad play for the first time. On the very day of his sixth birthday, he found himself seated in the stands, taking in the long-anticipated moment. As he watched his dad slice his way across the ice, he noticed that he kept leaving the game to sit in a room all by himself.

After the game, he and his mom drove home. Troubled and confused, he asked her, “Why did Daddy keep leaving the game? His mom replied, “Oh, that’s the penalty box—that’s where you go when don’t play by the rules.” Trying to sort it all out, Jimmy sat in silence the rest of the ride home.

Late that night, Jimmy's dad arrived home and went in to kiss his son good night. As he turned to leave the room, unable to feign sleep and keep quiet any longer, Jimmy called out, “Daddy, how can you score a goal for your team when you’re always sitting in the penalty box?”

Friends, as I write this first blog of 2015, my heart is heavy, weighted down by the sobering reality that far too many Christian leaders are sitting in the penalty box, letting down their team—their family, their organization, their church, themselves. People who have been disqualified from their leadership post because of choices to step outside the rules of the game.

You know it like I know it. The stats are staggering. Just moments ago, I received an email from a friend who shared the sobering news that the lead pastor of his church had just resigned due to moral compromise.

Sadly, the landscape of Christendom is littered with leaders who in their moment of temptation reached into the bank account of their lives and leadership only to find **INSUFFICIENT FUNDS**. To wit, after having conducted extensive research, Dr. J. Robert Clinton, professor of leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary, believes that more than 70% of leaders do not finish well. That is sobering. And unacceptable.

Paul—apostle and author—when he wrote his first tome to a group of Christ-followers who resided in a locale known for its indulgence and decadence, called out that one of the risks of life (and leadership) is disqualification. Using the metaphor of Olympic competition, he likens life to a race. And in preparation for the race of life, he makes a poignant observation: *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.*

So what's the take-home for a Kingdom leader?

Here it is: With an eye on the prize, spiritual leaders are relentless practitioners of self-discipline, strict training. They understand and order their lives under the banner of truth that the pain of discipline today far outweighs the pain of regret tomorrow. And while they know that there is the passing pleasure of sin, they also know that it often comes with an oversized and protracted price tag. Not to mention, a ton of collateral damage. My friend and pastor, Albert Tate, likes to put it this way: *Sin will take you farther than you want to go, make you stay longer than you want to stay, and make you pay more than you want to pay.*

So as you step into the starting block of 2015, don't just run to run, run to win.

Can I offer a challenge? Set aside a time of intentional solitude where you ask the Spirit of God to show you what area of your life is in need of "strict training?"

The stakes are high. You are needed—not sitting is a penalty box of disqualification, but competing in the game of life and leadership.

What is going to be your key area of "training" as you head into 2015?

Post your comments below.