

Leading With a Limp

January 2012 – Some books entertain. Others educate. And then there are those books that mess with you.

I'm talking about the books that by design or default show up on your bookshelf (or get downloaded on your Kindle) that knock you off stride. Bust up your mental models. Remind you that you have some learning to do.

Or perhaps some unlearning.

Meet *Leading With a Limp* by Dan Allender—author, professor, therapist, and former president of Mars Hill Graduate School.

The book grabs its title from the episode in the Old Testament where Jacob finds himself in a no-holds-barred, all-through-the-night wrestling match with the Almighty—a wrestling match that forever alters his gait, and more importantly, his life. Here's a quick snapshot of Allender's take on this remarkable event:

The climax of the story is found in Genesis 32, where Jacob wrestles with God and gains a new name as well as a leader's limp. Prior to the limp, scheming and deceit marked his life. But after wrestling all night with God and gaining a limp that was obvious to all, Jacob in many ways became a different person. His story shows that God intends to wrestle with each of us in order to both bless us and cause us to walk and lead with a distinctive frailty.

Armed with this age-old account, Allender fires away. Meddling. Messing. Often painting you into the proverbial corner. No way out. Forcing one to think deeply.

Differently.

Here are a few excerpts from *Leading With a Limp* that may serve to whet your appetite for the full read. And if that is your choice, you won't be disappointed. But buckle up. You'll hit some bumps along the way—the kind of bumps that jar heart and mind.

Leadership is far from a walk in the park; it is a long march through a dark valley. In fact, leadership has been described as wearing a bull's-eye on your chest during hunting season.

—Dan Allender

- *Leading is very likely the most costly thing you will ever do. And the chances are very good that it will never bring you riches or fame or praise in exchange for your great*

sacrifices. But if you want to love God and others, and if you long to live your life now for the sake of eternity, then there is nothing better than being a leader.

- *Here is God's leadership model: He chooses fools to live foolishly in order to reveal the economy of heaven, which reverses and inverts the wisdom of this world. He calls us to brokenness, not performance; to relationships, not commotion; to grace, not success.*
- *This is the terrible secret about leadership and life: we achieve brokenness by falling off our throne. To be broken is not a choice; it is a gift. I don't know anyone who has made the decision to be broken and achieve it as an act of the will. But to experience brokenness and humiliation, all you have to do is lead.*
- *A limping leader understands this: I don't know if I am right, nor am I sure the path chosen is the best, but after reflection, feedback, debate, and prayer, I am choosing this path.*
- *A leader who limps subverts the expectations of those who define leadership as running an organization. It is not that a limping leader does not hire, fire, advance, reward, discipline, and delegate. These are inescapable duties of leadership. But the aim of a leader's activity is not the growth of the organization. It's not even meeting needs or doing good. The purpose of limping leadership is the maturing of character.*
- *Clearly the disillusioned and best leaders are those who have nothing left to prove because they have known both failure and success. Failure teaches us to not fear the contempt of others. Success teaches us to not trust the applause of others. When contempt and applause no longer move your heart to hide or to strive, then you are ready to ask the question "What will please you, God?"*

While I was reading *Leading With a Limp*, I was repeatedly taken back to perhaps my most significant wrestling match. With the clarity of an interstate billboard, I can give you the exact day and time and place, and more importantly, the message. It wasn't what I wanted. But it was what I needed.

On that day, I bulled my way into the wrestling arena armed to the teeth with an arsenal of complaint, wielding a veritable grocery list of well-documented, self-justified reasons for why I deserved something different...something better.

But what I left with wasn't what I came for.

I left with a limp. But I also got a new name. And a fresh start.

I know I'm a different person.

And I trust a better leader.

Lord, as I reflect on what it means to lead with a limp, I am once more reminded that Your ways are not my ways and how great is my need to pay attention to how You work out Your master plan in and through me.

