Leading with a Limp

Title: ***Leading With A Limp: Turning Your Struggles Into Strengths***

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Book Summary:

Pick up most leadership books and you'll find strategies for leveraging your power and minimizing your areas of weakness. But think about the leaders whose names have gone down in history. Most of them are so messed up that, if they were looking for work today, no executive placement service would take their calls.

God's criteria for choosing leaders runs counter to the conventional wisdom. Our culture equates strength with effectiveness, but God favors leaders who know the value of brokenness.

In Leading with a Limp, you'll discover what makes flawed leaders so successful. They're not preoccupied with protecting their image, they are undaunted by chaos and complexity, they are ready to risk failure in moving an organization from what is to what should be. God chooses leaders who aren't deceived by the myths of power and control, but who realize that God's power is found in brokenness.

If you are a leader- - or if you have been making excuses to avoid leading- - find out how you can take full advantage of your weakness. A limping leader is the person God uses to accomplish amazing things. Dan B. Allender, PhD, is a founder of Mars Hill Graduate School near Seattle, where he serves as president. He also is a professor of counseling, a therapist in private practice, and a popular speaker. He is the author of a number of books, including To Be Told, How Children Raise Parents, The Healing Path, and The Wounded Heart. Dan and his wife, Rebecca, are the parents of three children.

Book Notes:

So here's the hard truth: if you're a leader, you're in the battle of your life. Nothing comes easily, enemies outnumber allies, and the terrain keeps shifting under your feet. If you've already tried the "easy" solutions you have found that they come up empty. I know unvarnished truth like this is never easy to hear, but it's the only truth that will help you lead with inner confidence…And you need confidence because nothing is more difficult than leading. (1)

The bottom line is simple: it is in extremity that you meet not only yourself but, more important, the God who has written your life. It is through leading that I've known the greatest need for a deep, personal, and abiding relationship with Jesus. I wouldn't trade that for all the money, frame, glory, and honor in this life. I suspect the same is true for you. (2)

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. (2)

Since we're talking straight, let's cut to the core assumption upon which everything else in this book is built: to

the degree you face and name and deal with your failures as a leader; to the same extent you will create an environment conductive to growing and retaining productive and committed colleagues. (2)

This is the strange paradox of leading: to the degree you attempt to hide or dissemble your weaknesses, the more you will need to control those you lead, the more insecure you will become, and the more rigidity you will impose—prompting the ultimate departure of your best people. (3)

What I am calling you to, however, is far more than the mere acknowledgment of your shortcomings. I'm suggesting an outright dismantling of them—in the open and in front of those you lead. (3)

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. (3)

Why is it so rare for leaders to name their failures? What keeps leaders trapped in a siege mentality, cut off from the data they need in order to make better decisions? Three primary reasons—fear, narcissism, and addiction—come immediately to mind. (4)

Why does God love the reluctant leader? Here is one reason: the reluctant leader is not easily seduced by power, pride, or ambition. (18)

A leader inevitably uses his own power, or limits the power of others, to make things happen. And there are as many different kinds of power in an organization as there are people, but two forms are the most common: instrumental and influential. Think of a family. The mother and father hold the instrumental power to control money and the family's schedule, so they plan the family vacation. But the volatile and moody middle child has the influential power to ruin the vacation. (18)

If anyone looks to you for wisdom, counsel, or direction, then you are a leader. (26)

Every leader must count the cost of leadership, and the cost includes six realities: crisis, complexity, betrayal, loneliness, weariness, and glory. No one escapes these twists and turns in the valley. (29)

Crisis is a context for opportunity and growth, but it also takes us to the edge where some don't survive. (29)

Crises serve to remind us that we are fundamentally not in control. (29)

Betrayal marks the past and mars the future. And once a betrayal occurs, it is nearly impossible to escape both self- doubt and self- recrimination: Why didn't I see it coming? What did I do to deserve it? What can I do to make everything right? Why are things getting worse? Why won't this person believe I meant no harm? Am I as bad as this person says? (32)

With all the suffering and struggle involved in leading others, why would we not bolt? For one reason: God pours out enough of his presence to keep us hooked. (36)

The more a leader hides, the more isolated he becomes, and the less information, feedback, wisdom, and true participation he will gain for the best possible decision- making. (44)

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. History 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. (45)

Prior to this season, I had been aware of some of my deficiencies, but I had never considered that the overwhelming majority of God's hand- picked leaders in the Bible were themselves riddled with faults and failure. I can hardly name a leader in the Bible who didn't fail radically enough to warrant being removed from leadership: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Mary, Paul, and Peter. It seems God loves to use troubled, odd unpredictable people to not only lead others but also to make the gospel known. (53)

Leaders are primarily storytellers and story makers; and troubled people are called to be leaders because they create and tell compelling stories. Sane, reasonable, play- it- safe people are not sufficiently engaged in life to generate great stories. Instead, they sit back and wait for a leader- storyteller to come along and get them caught up in a life worth living. (54)

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. (55)

Paul calls leaders not merely to be humble and self- effacing but to be desperate and honest. It is not enough to be self- revealing, authentic, and transparent. Our calling goes far beyond that. We are called to be reluctant, limping, chief- sinner leaders, and even more, to be stories. (56)

The leader will fail, so he needs to confess his anger, self- absorption, and cowardice and serve his people by being the first one who needs to be forgiven. (62)

Gossip is not merely passing on information; instead, it is the furthering of accusation and blame under the guise of relaying data. The dark underbelly of most crises is blame fueled by gossip. (67)

A controlling leader always gets what he deserves—the bare minimum and conformity without creativity. (68)

To effectively address a crisis, a leader must draw on creativity, intuition, wisdom, freedom, commitment, and passion. The leader who rules with intimidation squashes that kind of maneuverability and receives in its place rote, somewhat robotic, responses from his minions. (68)

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. (70)

Clearly there are only three possible responses to the absurdity of leadership: control, flight, or brokenness. Given the futility of control and the uselessness of flight, the only viable option for leaders who want to matureistoembracebeingbroken. (71)

What we fail to take into account is that every crisis—even one brought on by a natural disaster—still involves people. Keeping that truth in mind, a broken leader makes this radical assumption: The crisis is not just external; it is also internal, and it is an opportunity for me to address the failure of love in my life, whether that failure is directly or only indirectly related to the crisis. Every crisis has the effect if revealing something about the leader's character and inner life. And often we see other people's character more clearly than our own. (71)

To be broken embraces four realities: 1) I am never sufficiently good, wise, or gifted to make things work. 2) My failures will harm others, the process, and myself, no matter how hard I try to avoid failure. 3) The greatest harm I can do is to try to limit the damage I cause by not participating, by quitting, or by pushing for control. 4) Calling out for help from God and others is the deepest confession of humility. (72)

A broken leader is no longer driven by the need to impress people or to secure their approval. A broken leader has already known shame, so there is little fear of being found out or further exposed as a failure. (73)

If confidence is nothing more than the assurance that we are right, then confidence is nothing more than well-groomed arrogance. The confidence is courage that has been humbled. 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. (74)

A leader-fool is unafraid of chaos or confrontation. She does not rely on the false security of rigidity. After all, the greater the ambiguity of the situation, the more likely a leader will need to surrender the tried-and-true and be open to a new and deeper way of engaging a problem. (89)

The process of chaos-induced creativity invites us to surrender to the God who honors all creativity with new chaos and, with it, opportunities to re-create again and again. A leader-fool blesses complexity because she knows it will humble the team, expose their idols of control, and invite them both to listen with greater depth and to open their hearts to the inverted, odd, paradoxical ways of God. (93)

The more powerful the person's leadership position, the more likely it is that the leader has narcissistic characteristics. (97)

All leaders are lonely, but few are lonely for good reasons. The phrase "It is lonely at the top" is true, but it doesn't distinguish legitimate loneliness from self-inflicted isolation. There is a fine line between the two. (111)

Every organization has its zoo of unacknowledged elephants, and the unspoken rule is to not name what will make everyone uncomfortable. What results is a culture of hiding, game playing, and manipulation. (119)

Becoming more human involves confessing one's need for others. To confess that I need you—to help me think through a decision or to have compassion on my struggles—is to admit that I am not enough, period. I am not enough and neither are you enough for what I need, but together we are more that I can ever be alone. (122)

Every leader is desperately in need of hope, but two factors entangle us: unlimited need and expanding opportunity. And those factors do their best to extinguish hope. (126)

A lazy person does little to nothing while a busy person does almost everything, but the similarity is that both refuse to be intentional. (128)

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?" (135)

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. (143)

The purpose of all life is to present every person mature in Christ. Each human being is meant to become like Jesus—and to mark other lives with a beauty that draws them to Jesus. The scope of that calling is so enormous as to be beyond comprehension. It means subsuming every dimension of life from how I eat and

drink to how I vote under that one goal. (144)

Now, growth in character occurs to the degree that we accept being forgiven as a greater gift than life itself. If the greatest gift is not what I see but how I am seen by the living God, then my gratitude knows no limits. (146)

A leader is called to go further than anyone else. (151)

The more honestly I name what is true about myself, the less I need to hide and defend and posture and pretend. And the freer I am to accept help from any source, the greater will be my gratitude for any sacrament of kindness I receive and the more I will desire to give grace rather than to make others pay for their real or perceived failures. (152)

A leader is first a storyteller. She tells the story of her foolishness, redemption, reconciliation, and restoration to God and others. She is the canvas that God paints to reveal the beauty of his grace. (153)

Spin attempts to tell a flawless story with sizzle and panache, whereas truth is always more complex and gray. Spin puts padding over the jagged edges. (157)

To be like Jesus means that we must enter the complexity of both dignity and depravity. We are made in the image of God—glorious. We have taken on Adam and Eve's hiding and blaming—ruin. We are glorious ruins, bent glory. And it shows up in every moment of our existence until we one day see Jesus as he is and become pure as he is pure. (162)

Leaders must be able to see, name, and honor both dignity and depravity in all their endeavors. (165)

Good dialogue tends to create more chaos and confusion than clarity. It tends to expand the realm of possibilities, both good and ill, that needs to be taken into account. (167)

Individual discernment must submit itself to a community conversation with testing, refraction, and re-forming, and then the matter must be turned over to the designated decision makers for their responsible care. (168)

Being honest about your failures will also marginalize your influence—if influence is defined as always getting your way—because you will prove false the myth that you are imbued with super- human "stuff". (172)

If you are a leader, it is not possible to be at peace with all and friends with everyone. But when you name your own failures, even if others don't name theirs, you are free to wrestle with the number one sinner rather than being caught in the web of worrying about how others see you. (173)

How do you embrace honesty? The answer is threefold: give up what is already painfully obvious, tell the truth without telling all the truth. And embrace the gospel in your failure to live the gospel. (173)

It is an odd business: the more I live, the more I fail. The more I fail, fall forward, and am caught by the arms of grace, the more I reveal the message of the gospel. The more I pretend to have arrived and offer others advice on how they can do the same, the more I become like the prodigal's older brother, self- righteous and angry. (176)