



Leading in Crisis

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My old accomplished academician friend accepted an administrative assignment to lead one of our institutions on the verge of a crisis a few years ago. He and his family previously spent over a decade in the mission field, serving in the church in both Southern Asia and East Africa. His servant leadership reputation follows him wherever he goes, and he leaves an unprecedented legacy wherever he serves due to his transforming, inspiring, action-oriented leadership. His way of life is one of Christ-centered servant leadership.

In a speech to the institution, my friend said, “When God brings you to a mission field that is dry and rocky (crisis), He does not leave you bare feet; He provides you with strong boots to walk in that rock dry mission field.” In times of crisis, I believe he meant to say that God does not abandon those He calls to lead and gives them the zeal and grit they need to get through the crisis.

When I was in the Seminary as an undergraduate student nearly a year ago, Professor Manu commenced his presentation by addressing faculty and students, stating that trusting in God is the very essence while leading in crisis. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). And yet, for some reason, Jeremiah wanted to let everybody know, “God is in control.” From his writings and the historical background, we know that Jeremiah was a spiritual leader called to lead in a crisis.

Every person goes through a crisis at some point in their life. Every organization regularly experiences some form of crisis. The response to a crisis is as unique as each individual and organization. When faced with a crisis, some people react by diving headfirst into the situation and making every effort to resolve any problems; others, on

the other hand, steer clear of the obstacles altogether, owing to the gravity of the situation. While we have all been through crises, few leaders have worked to better prepare for them. This article will demonstrate to leaders how their faith in a God in control and an understanding of crisis leadership principles will assist them in dealing with current unavoidable crises and those that are yet to come.

The Bible makes it clear that God already knows about the crises our organization will face and that we should have faith that we will be able to overcome them. While this is very encouraging news, it does not mean we can sit back and hope everything will work out independently. Instead, we are to serve as leaders and icons for others during difficult times, as instructed in 1 Peter 2:9-11 and other parts of scripture.

On the one hand, Seventh-day Adventists have a vast theology that explains crisis leadership academically (as Petr Cincala demonstrated in his insightful articles *Leading Through Conflict* or *Thinking Small to Think Big: Leading For Change*) and practically. “Culture eats strategy for breakfast,” said Peter Drucker, an influential management guru.¹ Culture within an organization is necessary for leadership in times of crisis.² To put it another way, a leader should understand the relationship between culture and an organization’s response to a crisis to ensure that the organization is best prepared to deal with it.

On the other hand, many have yet to learn how to be led in a crisis. In a crisis, how we accept to be led shapes who we are as an organization and what we become. The common thread in Jeremiah 29:11 is God’s control. No matter how bad the situation, God is close by and ready to provide comfort and a bright future. As a result, leaders must recognize those personal crises such as deaths, disappointments, relationships, finances, and disasters that Spicerians face

reflects their response and willingness to be led. To better lead the organization through a crisis, leaders must understand how their people deal with personal crises.

I recently read in Ellen G. White’s *Spirit of Prophecy*, “In every period of this earth’s history, God has had His men (and women) of opportunity, to whom He has said, ‘yea are my witnesses.’ In every age, devout men (and women) gathered up the rays of light as they flashed upon their pathway, and spoke to the people the words of God. Enoch, Noah, Moses, Daniel, and the long roll of Patriarchs (and matriarchs) and prophets-these were ministers of righteousness. They were not infallible; they were weak erring men (and women), but the Lord wrought through them as they gave themselves to His service.”³

This quote applies to spiritual leadership as well as crisis leadership. According to research, leaders who emphasize genuine spirituality in the workplace gradually inspire their employees more. Furthermore, research shows that when employees’ spirituality is faithfully encouraged in the workplace, they perform better.⁴ Genuine spirituality among crisis-affected employees is critical to assisting the organization in navigating the crisis smoothly.

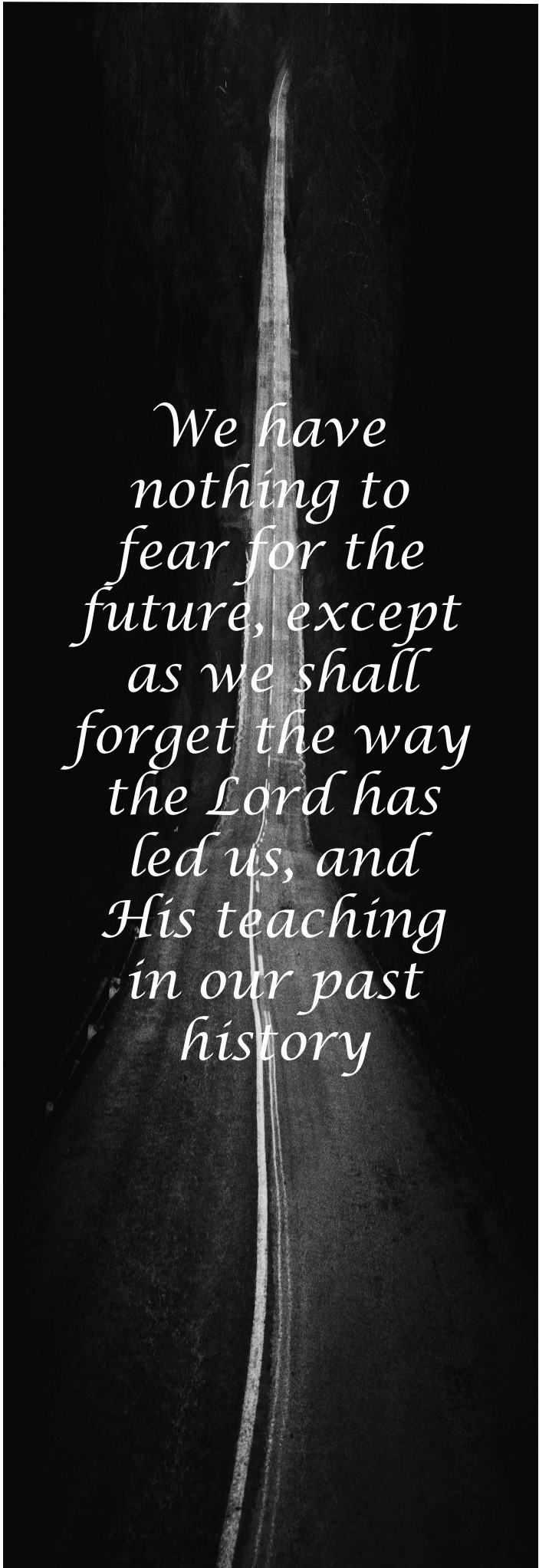
There are numerous examples in the Bible of people and leaders dealing with crises. For example, Hezekiah is an example of crisis leadership (2 Kings 18; Isaiah 37); David is an example of leadership growth and development (2 Samuel 15:2-6); Moses is an example of administrative leadership and people management (Exodus 6:6-7, Deuteronomy 20:10); and Jesus is an example of servant leadership and mentoring while crisis leading (Luke 24:32, John 21:15-17). These instances prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that crises are unavoidable. The most effective approach for leaders to lead during times of crisis is to look for examples to model their behavior after and direction from the Bible.

Overall, communication is essential to crisis leadership and should be simple, straightforward, and transparent. The Bible depicts leaders who communicated effectively during times of crisis. For example, consider Joseph's response to Egypt's food crisis (Genesis 41:46-57; 47:13-26) and Isaiah's message to Israel during a spiritual crisis (Isaiah 1:4-8; 31:1-4).

To recap, crisis leadership prompts a high level of resilience. "The bigger the position, the bigger the responsibility, and the more humble a person is to be," Elder Paul S. Maxwell said during the 2022 graduation ceremony. You can be resilient to the end through God, and serving God faithfully is the best way to do so." I strongly encourage all Spicerians to serve as a positive influence for their organization during times of crisis. May the pen of inspiration encourage our leaders and the Spicer family with the following words: "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."⁵

References

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