

LEADING THROUGH

7 TIPS TO WEATHER THE STORMS



CHALLENGING TIMES



by Gregg Hunter

We must free ourselves of the hope
that the sea will ever rest. We must learn
to sail in high winds.

—Aristotle Onassis

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.

—Albert Einstein

*Although the world is full of suffering,
it is full also of the overcoming of it.*

—Helen Keller

*In this world, you will have trouble. But
take heart; I have overcome the world.*

—Jesus of Nazareth (John 16:33)

So there you have it. A promise from the
mouth of Jesus: While you're living in this
world you're going to have trouble. You're
going to suffer. You'll experience pain. ►

IF YOU HAVE A MENTOR,
CALL THEM! IF YOU
DON'T, GET ONE!
YOU NEED SOMEONE TO
WALK THROUGH THIS
CHALLENGE WITH YOU.

Among the most difficult types of challenges we'll ever face are those involving people. Whether the conflict is with those closest to us — our spouse, children, parents or siblings, or those with whom we work — our board, staff, co-workers or boss — people challenges can bring short-term or long-lasting pain. In Christian camping, leaders often have to navigate additional relationships that may become difficult: denominational leaders, constituent churches, neighbors and local government officials.

But challenges don't only come in human form. Natural disasters, accidents, economic downturns and changes in laws can each bring devastating impact to our ministry.

When we're in the midst of the storm, how can we lead in such a way that we're able to maintain our faith and focus, and ensure that we (and our ministry) survive the challenge?

1. Cry out to God, "Lord, save me!"

I could have said "pray" but sometimes the crisis comes quickly and unexpectedly, and all we have time, focus and energy to do is cry out to Jesus like Peter did in Matthew 14. Just a minute before he cried out, Peter was living the miracle of walking on water. Cool, right? But when he started sinking in the waves, he yelled out and reached out to the only One who could save him.

In storms that are threatening and frightening, I literally reach my hands up and pray, "Lord, save me!" And I can imagine being in Peter's position — one minute fearing death, the next being grabbed and pulled up by Jesus. In the midst of storms, I can imagine

not letting go of His hand and only wanting to look in His eyes for the assurance that everything is going to be OK. Even as the waves crash around me, in that posture, I am safe.

In a crisis, cry out to Jesus and stay close to Him, trusting Him with your life and all its details. And if you forget and start to sink in worry and fear, cry out again and again and again.

2. Slow down.

I have made hasty decisions during challenging times. I've sent some emails and made some phone calls that I later wished I could take back. Not because the words themselves were wrong, but it was the sense of panic or desperation they conveyed.

Something I was told by a mentor early in my career at Boeing: "Never approach a conflict or a tough conversation when emotions are running high. *Always* wait overnight." Such good, reputation-saving advice.

Emotions are real and have to run their natural course, but I can promise that emotions, when they are running high, are likely to cloud your vision. When they subside, you can more clearly see solutions. Give emotions time to run their course; pray for wisdom and clarity and patience in moving forward.

Remember that as a leader, others are observing how you handle the crisis. What they need from you is not someone who ignites quickly and runs around in a panic. They may adopt that behavior as well. They need the example of one who believes God is in control and that it's going to be OK — that you all will get through this.

After you've prayed, take a deep breath. Decline the opportunity to

panic. Don't let adrenaline drive you to quick, and sometimes premature, action. Pause to consider your options for moving forward.

3. Find an ally.

Ask someone to pray with you — regularly, several times a day if necessary. (Not someone who will be “on your side” but someone who will be “for you.”) I'd suggest connecting with someone outside of the situation — not your closest co-worker or assistant, and not putting your spouse in that role unless they are the only one you have. If you have a mentor, call them! If you don't, get one! You need someone to walk through this challenge with you; someone who will care for you in the process — not just the person who always feels the need to “tell it like it is.”

Once, during a significant challenge, I called a mentor/friend more than once a day. He got to the point of answering the phone praying for me. He didn't even say, “Hello” first. When he picked up the call, he was already praying for me. It's what I needed, and was such a blessing to me. Find someone now you can lean on and trust to give you good support, and advice if necessary, when the storm rages.

4. Stay humble and teachable.

This is especially important if your challenge involves conflict with other people. Ask tough questions of yourself. Quickly acknowledge, to yourself and God first, what you could have done better, and then seek to make that right. Ask your mentor or your boss, board or others in authority what they think you could have done better. Just by ►

EXTRA INFO

A BLESSING DURING CHALLENGES

Encouraging words in the midst of crisis

When I share the content of this article in seminar form at sectional gatherings of CCCA members, I ask attendees to write on a small piece of paper the numbers that correspond with their situation:

- 1 = I'm currently going through a crisis.
- 2 = I've just come through a crisis and am still recovering.
- 3 = I'm not in a crisis now, but feel that one is coming soon.
- 4 = I have a good friend going through challenging circumstances.
- 5 = I'm doing well, just want to be prepared for the challenges I may face.
- 6 = I've never been better.

Every time I've done this, I've been amazed at the numbers of people in Christian camping who are currently walking through painful challenges, or those who fear a crisis is coming. The stress brought on by these situations is palpable, and many have shared some of their situation with me through tears. It is for them I wrote the following blessing to end my seminar:

May you reach out to God quickly when you face challenges; may He hold you close, comfort you and teach you through all your challenging times, that when you look back years later you might see how the scars helped shape you into the image of Jesus and taught you to lead more like Him.

—Gregg Hunter



IF OTHERS ARE WATCHING YOU AND YOUR LEADERSHIP DURING A DIFFICULT TIME AND YOU REMAIN SILENT, THEY ARE FORCED TO ASSUME WHAT YOU'RE THINKING OR FEELING.



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asking, you show a willingness to learn — a humility and teachability that is encouraging to those in your world.

As Rick Warren has said, “True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.”

5. Write it out.

Depending on your particular challenge, this may look like a “position paper,” or it could be an entry in a journal. If you are a leader, the document you write (if and when it is shared) may help to remove any doubt in the minds of others about where you stand in the situation, what you want for the future, for the ministry, perhaps even your motives.

Think carefully through this. Take time to pray and ask for God's wisdom. Then write out your thoughts so you can craft the statement appropriately. Keep it in front of you as a reminder while you walk through the challenge. Share your draft ideas with your mentor/adviser/prayer partner. Here's an example of this type of statement:

This is a challenging time for us all at Camp Pine Tree. But I am committed to seeing it through and facilitating a healing and recovery process. I want what's best for this ministry, and I'm going to seek advice from wise people who will help me develop a plan for getting where we all want to be. I'll also be taking a look at what I can do better — or what I could have done better — to make us a healthier organization. I love the ministry of Camp Pine Tree and want to see us at our best.

If you don't do something like this during a challenging time, you may cause others to assume your mental and emotional state: “Is he ready to cut and run? Has she grown tired of

Camp Pine Tree and less committed to our future? Does he acknowledge his part in this mess, or that he has some things to learn, or does he think he did everything right in this situation?”

6. Deliver your position statement to those who need to know.

Removing doubt about your position can be the strongest thing you do in a crisis. I've said for years, “In a communication vacuum, assumption and suspicion rule.” That is, if others are watching you and your leadership during a difficult time and you remain silent, they are forced to assume what you're thinking or feeling. If that goes on long enough, usually they begin to feel suspicious of you and your motives. “If he's not telling us what he's thinking, there must be a negative reason he's keeping this secret.” Share as much as you can, with grace, restraint and clarity so that you remove that mystery.

7. Do the next thing.

Sometimes, fear, pain and large challenges paralyze us and cause us to freeze in our path. One way to keep growing and moving in your situation is to break down your options into actionable steps, and then to rank them the best you can in priority order. Then, do the next thing. Sometimes even accomplishing small tasks helps us break loose when we're high-centered. Also, identify the ones you need help with — from a friend, mentor, boss, board or volunteer. Their action on your behalf can also give you the encouragement you need to take necessary steps. Then, mark the task off your list and re-evaluate your priorities. ●