

Possible closing meditation for the Leadership 'Source

Moses and the Wilderness

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One of the people in the Bible that has always fascinated and intrigued me is Moses. As I was preparing for this meditation it occurred to me that Moses may have been the very first minister to young people. Think about it for a moment. Moses and the people wandered for 40 years. Those who started the journey with Moses never saw the "Promised Land." A whole generation dies away, while it is the new generation that rises and goes into this promised land. Moses' task during these 40 years was to prepare a younger generation to be the people of God and to teach them how to live together as a community of faith.

In some ways our ministry with young people is like the experience of Moses. We are the leaders who are walking with young people through the stages of the teen and young adult years and just like the wilderness our ministry is filled with challenges and frustrations. And like Moses our task is to lead these young people to realizing who they truly are – a people of God, loved by God and called to live in community with God.

The wilderness story teaches two very important things. First, God is ever and always present and second, God gives Moses the resources he needs to be a leader. Think about it, who would have thought that a "staff" could be a primary tool of leadership.

Upon entering the wilderness the first crises Moses faces is what will they eat. This is a basic human need that must be addressed if they are to continue on the journey to the promised land. God responds to their need by giving them manna. Moses is

instructed to tell the people to take no more than they need for each day and on the 6th day they can gather twice as much as they need so they can rest on the Sabbath.

However, in due time, Moses is hit with murmurings. Sounds like ministry to young people to me. Youth and young adults are experiencing many changes and challenges in their lives just around the basic needs of security, acceptance, and safety, and during these years we hear much murmuring from them.

So maybe the first leadership principal that the wilderness story teaches us is this: when you are in the wilderness you should expect murmurings. Which leads us to a second leadership principal: being able to discern the difference between those murmurings that warrant our attention and those that don't need to be addressed.

In the wilderness story all the basic needs are met: water, food, and so forth. God knows these are legitimate complaints that have to be tended to for survival. Eventually in the wilderness however (Numbers) the people begin complaining about the food, manna day in and day out is just boring. They want Moses to give them "real" food. Yet God doesn't respond to this murmuring. God knows that is enough to sustain and nurture them daily. They are not going to die from eating manna.

As leaders of young people it is important for us to be able to discern between real issues/problems that need to be addressed and those that are distractions pulling us away from our "real work" of young people's ministry: leading young people to realizing who they truly are – a people of God, loved by God and called to live in community with God. With this as our focus, it helps us to know that such complaints as "this is boring," "do we have to go there again" and other such complaints don't need to draw our energies away from our real work.

Which also points to another leadership principal I have learned from the wilderness story: share the leadership. Living in the wilderness means that resources can become difficult to find and as a result, we may feel inadequate in being able to fulfill our ministry. In the wilderness story we find Moses calling out to God for help and God does respond allowing Moses to see that his own abilities are not sufficient to care for what the people need. In Exodus 18, we find Jethro has come to visit Moses and he watches Moses sitting all day listening to and settling complaints among the people. After the last person leaves, Jethro approaches Moses to help him understand that it's not Moses' place to address all the needs and complaints. Jethro encourages Moses to distribute his authority. "This is no way to go about it. You'll burn out, and the people right along with you. This is way too much for you – you can't do this alone....you need to keep a sharp eye out for competent men (and women)...who fear God, ...of integrity,...are incorruptible....and appoint them as leaders over groups....(Peterson's The Message)

We can't be the sole "go to" person or we will burn out and then, we will do more harm to the people than good. We can't do this ministry alone, we have to find others who will journey with us and participate in the leadership. We have to keep our eyes open for those who also have a maturity and faith to share with these young people we have been called into ministry with and invite them to join us.

Finally, the wilderness story has taught me the importance of Sabbath as a leadership principal. Sabbath is essential to leading God's people in the chaos and the challenges of the wilderness. It is very clear in the wilderness story that on the 7th day no one works, NOT EVEN MOSES. As leaders of young people, whether volunteer, part-time, full-time, or national staff, we are always stretched. There is always something to

do and something else that needs to be done. The Sabbath and the wilderness story remind us that God will provide for us sufficiently, but we must take time for our own rest. As leaders, we need to have time that is our own. We need time to be with God in worship and prayer, both private and public. And, we need to nurture our relationship with God both for our own good and for the good of the community. Our ministry is to keep moving forward – God is still here and there.