



PART 1

PAUL IN CHAINS: LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Chapter Three

TAKING COURAGE

When Luke described the storm as “no small storm” in [Acts 27:20](#), he was not kidding.

[Acts 27:20 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁰“Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing *us*, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.”

Here is a fourth characteristic of all wise leadership: *A leader speaks with authority.*

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #4

A LEADER SPEAKS WITH AUTHORITY

“I URGE YOU TO TAKE HEART”

In fact, far from being self-exalting, Paul’s aim was to lift up others. The aim and the ultimate effect of Paul’s I-told-you-so speech was to cheer and to gladden those men who were discouraged, disheartened, and in despair of their very lives. He promised them, with God’s own authority, that there would be no loss of life among those on board.

Here is a fifth characteristic of every true leader: *A leader strengthens others.*

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #5

A LEADER STRENGTHENS OTHERS

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A real leader's aim is to make everyone around him better. He makes them **stronger**, more **effective**, and more **motivated**.

That is what Paul did here. He summed up his words of encouragement in **Acts 27:25**:

Acts 27:25 (NASB)

25 "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told."

His confidence fed the strength of others. He built them up. He encouraged them to believe there would be a future. He gave them a reason to hope when none of them had any hope whatsoever.

Then he gave them one more detail that at first glance does not appear so hopeful:

Acts 27:26 (NASB)

26 "But we must run aground on a certain island."

Notice, he did not shrink from telling them the whole truth. This was not completely good news, especially for the owner of the ship. But it was still a better scenario than what everyone had come to expect in these circumstances.

Paul's complete honesty laid the groundwork for further establishing his credibility when these things came to pass. The men who heard his prediction knew this would either come true or not. If it did come true, they would know it was God who brought it to pass. What was the likelihood of landing on an island in conditions like these—**losing the ship, losing the cargo—and yet not losing a single passenger?**

The sheer mathematical improbability was staggering. When it happened, they would know this was a purposeful display of God's power. Yet Paul was certain it *would* happen, because he had a clear and incontrovertible word from God. **That was the basis of his authority. It would soon be the proof of his credibility.**

Despite all appearances, God's hand of blessing was on this ship of disaster. Just as Paul's journey to the court of Nero was a blessing disguised as a trial, so this entire ordeal was a tremendous spiritual opportunity for these pagan soldiers and sailors. They were about to see the hand of divine Providence save them from certain disaster, and they would be given an opportunity and incentive to know and trust the one true Lord and Savior of heaven and earth. They would see His hand at work in a dramatic, vivid, and unforgettable way.

“I BELIEVE GOD”

Paul knew with absolute certainty what God was doing and what the outcome of their journey would be. He knew it because God's Word is infallible and His promises are sure:

2 Corinthians 1:20 (NASB)

20 "For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us."

Therefore, Paul could say with absolute **sincerity**, **confidence**, and **authority**:



Acts 27:25 (NASB)

25 “Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.”

In this we see a sixth principle of leadership: *A leader is optimistic and enthusiastic.*

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #6

A LEADER IS OPTIMISTIC AND ENTHUSIASTIC

Optimistic enthusiasm inspires followers. People will naturally follow a leader who arouses their hopes, and they will just as surely back away from someone who is perpetually pessimistic.

When I was playing football in high school, the coach once made a speech I will never forget. We were visitors in some other school’s stadium, and we were not playing well. The score was 0–0 at halftime. We went into the locker room and the coach began to give one of these Knute Rockne speeches. He got so enthusiastic, he put his fist through the blackboard. He began to remind us of our potential, punctuating his remarks by slamming locker doors and smashing boxes and laundry baskets. He made so much racket, I wondered what the people upstairs in the stadium thought was going on. His speech was a fierce, emotional, eloquent address about the superiority of our skills and the excellence of our team. He didn’t berate us; just the opposite. **His words were full of optimism and enthusiasm—and fiery passion.**

And his zeal was contagious. When the door opened, out we came, fired with new enthusiasm. I’ll never forget it. I think we scored 48 points in the second half. People in the stands must have been thinking a completely different team came out that door the second time. In a way, that was true. We had caught our coach’s enthusiasm, which in turn gave us a whole new enthusiasm. It was a great lesson to me about what optimism and enthusiasm can do.

Obviously, that is not my calling. I’m not a cheerleader. But it is true that I tend to be enthusiastic. I believe what [2 Corinthians 2:14](#) says: **“God...always leads us in triumph in Christ.”**

2 Corinthians 2:14 (NASB)

14 “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.”

You cannot be an effective leader and be pessimistic. People who are cynical and gloomy debilitate everyone they speak to. They’re like bloodsucking leeches. They make people **pale, weak, and passive.**

By the same token, you cannot be a good leader and bore people. I was at a Bible conference once with a preacher who seemed to think enthusiasm was unspiritual. Trouble was, his message was supposed to be about joy. I remember watching him go up to the platform with a sheaf of notes, which he carefully arranged on the lectern before him. He paused dramatically, looked up over his glasses at the audience, looked back down at his paper, and then read in a flat,

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emotionless, nasal monotone, “My dear friends, today I would like to speak to you on the joys of spiritual life.” Zzzzzzzzz.

I don’t think that’s quite what the apostle Paul had in mind when he said, “**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**” ([Philippians 4:4](#)).

On the other hand, optimistic enthusiasm creates **energy, excitement,** and **hope**. We who know the truth of God and have the promises of God should of all people be optimistic and enthusiastic.

My realm of leadership, of course, is the church. I was recently reading a book on church leadership in which the author began with a dramatic pronouncement that if the church doesn’t **reinvent itself, adapt to postmodern culture, rethink its whole mission, and retool its methodology**, the church will go out of existence in fifty years’ time.

Of course, that is ridiculous. Christ said He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it ([Matthew 16:18](#)).

[Matthew 16:18 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸ “**I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.**”

Are we supposed to take seriously this man’s warning that the church will go out of existence in fifty years if we don’t reinvent our techniques?

I’m not at all pessimistic about the true church. I’m optimistic about it, because I know God’s truth will triumph. I believe the church will be exactly what God intends it to be—glorious.

Christ Himself loved the church:

[Ephesians 5:25-27 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁵ “**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,**

²⁶ **so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,**

²⁷ **that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.**”

That is going to happen. Christ’s purpose for His church will not be thwarted.

If you look at the visible manifestation of the church in the world today, there might seem to be a lot of reasons to be discouraged. But if you look beyond that, understand God’s purpose for the church, and lay hold of the promises, you can say as Paul did to those disheartened sailors on that ship:

[Acts 27:25 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁵ “**Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.**”