



Session 3: Growing in courage and vulnerability

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or when the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again... who at best knows the triumph of high achievement, and who at worst if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."

- Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9

Leaders will experience setback, failure and discouragement, but they still show up and lead. That's why it takes courage and vulnerability to lead well.

Much of the ministry of leadership is simply persevering, through thick and thin, with loving others, praying, sharing vision, encouraging and serving, even when it feels like nothing is happening. This is the grit of a good leader. Now is the time for brave and courageous leaders, but also leaders who lead with empathy and wholeness.

- We won't change cultures for the better
- We won't have tough conversations that bring breakthrough
- We won't be able to empower and disciple many people
- We won't see our vision become reality...

... unless we learn to lead with courage and vulnerability.

Make no mistake. **This is not easy, but it is vital and wonderful.** If we are to see a change in our community and even our nation; someone, somewhere will have to take some courage and lead. It's time to get ready and train to lead with courage and vulnerability. This is really a call to lead with greater spiritual and emotional maturity.

Leading with courage

I love leading St Mary's, but I don't find it easy. Courage and patience are required every day. People have encouraged me to be more courageous and be bolder in my leadership. Sometimes, like Timothy, I have felt timid, and it has been very helpful to be reminded to that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7).

Brene Brown writes, *"We desperately need more leaders who are committed to courageous, wholehearted leadership and who are self-aware enough to lead from their hearts, rather than unevolved leaders who lead from hurt and fear."*¹ Leadership takes courage today. This is true whatever kind of leadership you are involved in:

1. It takes courage to take responsibility

- It is easier to follow than lead, but someone has to take ownership and responsibility to lead. This means we will make it a priority and show a real commitment to showing up and modelling servant-leadership.
- Leaders who take responsibility don't do everything themselves, but build a team to make their vision happen.
- I want to see us take responsibility as leaders and own our vision.

2. It takes courage to ask the right questions

- It can be easier to avoid tough conversations or asking honest questions. We need to find courage to have those conversations in a healthy way.
- This courage also helps us face the big fears and feelings in our teams.
- What big questions or issues need facing up to in your leadership?

3. It takes courage to cultivate deeper friendship in our teams

- Building friendship is at the heart of leadership and is harder than we think. Our time-poor culture means we struggle to build the friendships that are at the heart of great teams.

4. It takes courage to lead out of who you are

- God made us with personalities, gifts, talents and purpose. We are all different, which is great. God calls people to lead in diverse ways. It takes courage to grow in exploring that diversity and purpose.

¹ Brown, B., *Dare to Lead* (Vermilion, London, 2018) p4

5. It takes courage to try new things and sometimes fail

- Taking risks is part of leadership. We can't be sidetracked by perfectionism, but embrace learning and celebrate having a go.
- Failure is all part of learning and there is no shame in trying and failing.

6. It takes courage to obey the promptings of the Spirit

- Perhaps we can be afraid to obey because we would feel blame or shame if something didn't work out. It takes courage to obey God.

7. It takes courage to speak the truth in love

- We can easily avoid the truth because we are trying to be kind. However, we sometimes need to speak to truth to actually be kind.

8. It takes courage to empower people, even after being 'burnt'

- Even Jesus had one person in his team who didn't work out well! Sometimes when things go wrong in a team, it is easier to shut down and not empower again – leading to control. But, we need to keep going in giving ministry away to others.

9. It takes courage to simply keep going

- "Never give in, in nothing great or small, large or petty – never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense." Winston Churchill, 1941
- Keeping vision alive is about the daily, ordinary, keeping going, turning up, taking responsibility and staying encouraged

Leading from vulnerability

A. It takes a lot of courage to lead with vulnerability

- What is vulnerability? It is the emotional we experience when opening our lives to others when you can't control the outcome.
- For example, giving feedback, getting feedback, waiting for the GP to call, waving your child off to university, apologising to a colleague for how you spoke to him in a meeting, sharing something very personal with people you don't know well, putting an idea out there for people to consider. Vulnerability comes in all shapes and sizes. Vulnerability is about having the courage to be wholehearted in facing these

experiences and depending on God's grace and love.

- Vulnerability often comes with a sense self-protection or anxiety, which is why it takes a lot of courage to approach it with a whole heart.
- Leadership often puts us in a vulnerable place where we might be rejected, criticised, disagreed with, evaluated etc. The vulnerability can also be very positive such as experiencing deep connection, care and concern for the well-being of someone.
- Training ourselves to have open and loving hearts, empathy and secure self-awareness is important. It can be this vulnerability that either makes some want to run from taking on leadership or responsibility or that which fuels healthy leadership.
- *"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it round carefully with hobbies or little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the coffin of your own selfishness. But in that coffin – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable."*²

CS Lewis

B. It's about being human

- Leading with vulnerability is about leading with honesty about our brokenness, weakness and utter dependence on God's grace.
- Leaders are not always strong. We often feel very weak, but are strong in Christ alone. See Philippians 2 and 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 – "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."
- As well as being fully God, Jesus is fully human and we see his vulnerability in John 11:35, "Jesus wept". See also Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin." Jesus' ultimate vulnerable leadership was shown in his dying for us on the cross (see Isaiah 53).
- In our humanity we sometimes get ill, feel weak, struggle, fail, don't feel sorted, don't feel strong or feel low. We need to know that is okay not

² Ibid, p22

to be okay and it is okay to show emotion. God still uses us in our weakness. Throughout the Bible, there are countless stories of leaders who were weak: Moses stuttered, Timothy got ill, Jonah ran from God, Elijah was burned out, Peter was afraid of death, Jacob was a liar, David committed adultery and murder, Thomas doubted, Martha was a worrier and much more.

C. Really connecting with people

- To connect, we need to slow down and listen with empathy, which is about seeing the world as others see it.
- We don't just assume everyone is OK.
- Imagine the difference it would make to your leadership if you could slow down for people. What might happen?
- Many people find it hard to connect and build relationship. How can we train ourselves to grow in this grace to connect more deeply with a few others?

D. The importance of rest, reflection & replenishment

- The demands of leading with courage and vulnerability mean that we also need to know how to rest, reflect and replenish our souls and bodies.
 - **Rest**
“Life at warp speed will warp your soul.”³
Need a rhythm of rest such as sabbath of 24 hours with no work, resting and delighting in God and others.
 - **Reflect**
Learning to reflect on issues, problems and needs with others in a healthy way. Some people do this through peer mentoring or in smaller prayer groups. You can use the Leadership square to reflect any time you like.
 - **Replenish**
What is it that resources you? What fills you up after you have given out? We need to consider that we have limits, though God does not. We need input physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and relationally. Perhaps going for a walk or run? Perhaps reading a good book? Perhaps having a long bath or a lovely meal? Please be kind to yourself and love yourself as God loves you.

³ Scazzero, P., *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids)

Leadership Bible Character: Gideon – a leader who didn't think he was strong.

Each week, we will look briefly at the life and character of Bible leaders. This week it is Gideon from **Judges 6:11-7:25**. The reason for choosing him is that **he was weak, but God did amazing things through him**. The Midianites were bringing oppression, poverty and fear to Israel. God raised up Gideon as one of Israel's 17 Judges, who delivered Israel from their enemies.

Judges

- 6:11** God called Gideon from obscurity – Gideon was hiding!
- 6:12** God called him a “mighty warrior” while he was hiding. God sees things in us we cannot see.
- 6:13** Gideon struggled with his call. Have you ever felt like that?
- 6:14** Gideon was terrified, but God was calling him to lead. God took no excuses. “Go in the strength you have.”
- 6:15** Gideon complained that he is weak and his family is insignificant. He felt the weakest or the weakest. How could God use him?
- 6:16** God does not make mistakes and uses weak people for His glory.

In chapters 6-7 we also see:

- Gideon encountered God and made a sacrifice
- He tore down false gods at night because he was scared for the reaction. But at least he obeyed God.
- After that obedience, the Holy Spirit came upon Gideon and he called the people to arms.
- He still tested out God's will using the fleece, so was still nervous.
- To show His glory, God cut down the number of men from 22,000 to 300! God won the victory through his “weak” leader Gideon.

Questions for Group Discussion

- What do you find tough about leadership?
- Where have you had to have courage in your leadership?
- How do you feel about growing in vulnerability in your leadership?
- Share about your experience of weakness in leadership?
- What might happen if we slowed down more to connect with people?
- How do you rest, reflect and replenish?