

Christian Community at ExxonMobil
Houston Campus

Leading Through Crisis

A Study of Biblical Leaders and the Attributes
that Made Them Successful

Self-Study Workbook

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Leading Through Crisis

To Our CCEM Community:

Brothers and Sisters,

Our mission is, “To connect and encourage Christians to confidently live out their faith in the workplace.” Each of us spends a large portion of our life in the workplace and as such, it is important for us to bring our whole-self to work each and every day. Furthermore, as Christians we are called to **Love** all people, show **Grace** to others, and be a **Light** for the Gospel. If each of us did this every day we could have a major positive impact in our community and our company.

It is no secret that 2020 introduced many new challenges into our country and our company. Things have been tough, but Christians have an opportunity to shine bright through the darkness. We can impact the culture in our communities and create a grace-filled workplace in our company. It starts with each of us and it starts with us looking to live the Gospel every day. None of us are perfect and each of us will stumble multiple times a day (maybe multiple times a minute). But the redeeming love of Jesus, and His mercy, renews us repeatedly. Through Him, we can strive to grow, becoming more like Jesus.

We believe that strong leadership is one of the most important keys to making it through tough times. Leaders set the tone for their followers, and leaders can have a major impact on people’s lives. You may not know this, but our company has a group of Christian senior leaders who meet monthly to study scripture and pray for our company. Through these challenging times, this group set a goal to connect with Biblical men and women who led through a crisis. They studied the key attributes of these individuals which made them successful, and discussed how those attributes can be implemented into their leadership at ExxonMobil. What a blessing it is to have leaders who are striving to be more like Jesus, as they lead our company through tough times.

The truth is that we are all leaders in some way. We each have an influence on others, and we each have the ability to lead others (even without formal authority). Therefore, we wanted to make this study content available for everyone. We believe that if we all can learn to lead the way God calls us to lead, we will not just survive challenging times, but we will grow stronger as a company and a community. We hope you enjoy!

Love,
The CCEM Team

Leading Through Crisis

About this Study:

This goal of this study is to look at different attributes of Biblical Leaders and how those attributes helped them lead through a crisis. The attributes identified in this study were originally defined by J. Oswald Sanders in his book, *Spiritual Leadership: A Commitment to Excellence for Every Believer*. The scriptural examples of each attribute were identified by the CCEM Team as examples of how these attributes were utilized in crisis situations. Of course, this list and these examples are not exhaustive, and we encourage each of you to identify more attributes from each Bible story.

This self-study guide has been constructed for you to be able to walk through it on your own (although, you are more than welcome to do so with a group). Each section will have an introduction to provide some context and background of the attribute, as well as the scriptural passage to be studied. The scriptural passages will also be included in the workbook for ease of access in the NKJV translation, but you are free to use whatever version you like! The study questions are designed to help you think through the passage as well as how to apply that passage to your job at ExxonMobil. This important component is meant to help us grow from studying scripture. Take your time in this section to really reflect, pray about, and ask God how to apply the content to your world. Finally, there will be some commentary in each section. The purpose of this commentary is to be read *after* you finish thinking through the questions, providing an additional perspective and to try and simulate the “group-like” conversation you would typically have in a small group. We also have a version of this study available without the commentary, if you would prefer it that way.

Our hope and prayer is that this study would be a blessing to you, and a blessing to our company. We hope you enjoy it! Feel free to reach out to us with any questions or feedback at ccemlist@gmail.com.

This study guide was put together by CCEM members on their own personal time and does not necessarily reflect the views of ExxonMobil.

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Introduction: A Leader's Call to Study Scripture

When thinking about this study, and why we as leaders should look to the Bible for wisdom, Deuteronomy 17:18–20 first came to mind. In it, God provided a charge to the leader of His people. To summarize: “Study My Word.” God laid out a clear expectation for scriptural study, tying the study of His Word to their role as a leader, and the wisdom it provides.

Biblical Leader: The King of Israel

Biblical Passage: Deuteronomy 17: 18–20

Background and Context

After having been freed from slavery in Egypt and wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, the Israelites are preparing to take possession of the land that God had promised them. Prior to taking possession, God provides the Israelites with a series of principles for them to follow in the land. In one set of principles, God outlines the “Principles Governing Kings,” providing insight into His expectations for the leader of His people.

Deuteronomy 17: 18–20

¹⁸ “Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. ¹⁹ And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, ²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

Discussion Questions

1. What does God charge of the King of Israel?
2. Do you think God intended for the King to literally write out the law? Why or why not?
 - A. What are some of the benefits of the King literally writing out the law?
 - B. What could be some of the negatives of the King literally writing out the law?
3. Do you think God intended for the King to literally read the law every day of his life? Why or why not?
 - A. What are some of the benefits of the King literally reading the law daily?
 - B. What could be some of the challenges of the King literally reading the law daily?

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4. What does God say is the reason for this charge? What are His intentions for the King?
5. What are some of the dangers of a King that does not revere the Lord and follow His decrees?
6. In your own words, what is/are the timeless message(s) of this passage?
7. How can this passage apply to modern leaders (both in business and in government)?
 - A. Why is it important that we as leaders at ExxonMobil glean wisdom from this passage?
 - B. How can we as leaders at ExxonMobil put into practice some of the wisdom from this passage?

Commentary

The Israelites are about to enter into the Promised Land and God provides them with some final instructions on how to be successful. In one portion, He lays out “Principles Governing Kings.” It is interesting to note that God does not necessarily oppose Israel having a king. However, God desires for the individual who is to be king to be a man whom God chooses. A man who is after God’s heart, and who is a servant of the Lord. Since God is the true King of Israel, no human king should have absolute power. Therefore these principles would help the king recognize his own dependence on God, the true King.

In one of these principles, God commanded the king to be a man of scripture. The king was to write out a copy of the law with his own hand and read it every day. I think that this is a literal expectation of the king, the leader of God’s people. Through writing out the Law by his own hand, the king would undoubtedly have an intimate working knowledge of God’s Law. Studying the Law every day would keep it fresh in the king’s mind and always on his heart. Furthermore, he is to keep to a pure copy of the Law (*“from the one before the priests, the Levites”*) as God had intended it to be, not distorting it.

God gives His reasoning for this practice clearly in verse 20. He wants to make sure the king does not allow himself to see himself as being above the people. God does not wish for the king of His people to become like the monarchs of the world (i.e., self-serving). Rather, God desires that the king of His people remain a servant to God. Furthermore, God appears to set a conditional covenant with the king. *If* the king keeps these commands, he may “prolong his days

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in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.” In keeping himself in check, and remaining a servant of the Lord, God will bless the kingdom and His people will flourish. If you know your Old Testament history, you know that when Israel had good kings, they were a strong and prosperous nation. However as time wore on, the kings of Israel began to drift from God, forgetting His Law and His authority. This led to the eventual conquering of Israel by the Assyrians and Babylonians, and their return to exile.

For us today, I think that this passage is full of application. Although we are not kings, we all have the ability to lead others. Recognizing that all people are children of God, we should seek to lead others in the same ways that God desired for Israel to be led. We should seek to remember our place as servants of God first and foremost, and guard our hearts from becoming haughty or self-serving. The world is corrupted and each of us will be tempted daily to serve our own self-interests, departing from God's commands. However, the more time we spend in God's Word, the more we write His commands on our hearts, the more we can guard our hearts from those attacks.

When thinking about the commands that God gave the king, the first thing that comes to my mind is: “that must have been incredibly time consuming!” I am not suggesting that we each need to literally write out the Law by our own hands, but I do ask that each of us think about how much time we spend with God each day. If God expected the king of His people, the leader of a nation (i.e., someone who is very, very busy), to spend that much intentional time with His Word, shouldn't we strive to spend intentional daily time with God as well? Are we busier, with more important things to do, than the king of Israel?

In closing, this passage reminds me of a discussion the CCEM Leadership Team had with a prominent pastor in The Woodlands. We had invited the pastor to one of our strategic planning workshops to talk about spiritual leadership. During our talk, the pastor challenged each of us to spend intentional time with God daily, emphasizing how important that was for our daily walk. How much time we should spend was up to us, as long as we were intentional. He closed out his talk by letting us know that his routine is to spend at least 30 minutes of intentional, undistracted, uninterrupted time with God daily. With Easter coming up, the church was getting very busy with events, and he asked us to guess how much time he had carved out on his daily calendar to spend with God during the “busy season.” The answer: two hours! In his wisdom he recognized that the busier we get, the more likely we are to get distracted and drawn away from God. His advice to us: the busier you are, the more time you need with God to keep yourself grounded. His words have always stuck in my mind, helping me further understand this passage, and God's desires for His Leaders.

Leading Through Crisis - A Leader's Call to Study Scripture

Personal Reflection Questions

1. How much intentional time do you spend in God's Word?
2. What are some of the challenges to spending time in God's Word? What can you do to overcome these challenges?
3. How do you integrate wisdom from God into how you lead?

Attribute 1: Discipline

“Without this essential quality, all other gifts remain as dwarfs: they cannot grow...Before we can conquer the world, we must first conquer the self. A leader is a person who has learned to obey a discipline imposed from without, and has then taken on a more rigorous discipline from within.” - J. Oswald Sanders

Biblical Leader: David

Biblical Passage: 1 Samuel 24:1 - 7

Background and Context

Saul has lost favor with God through his own actions and God has led Samuel to anoint David as the next King of Israel (a King after God's own heart). Saul, trying to take matters into his own hands, seeks to kill David. He and his men get word that David is hiding in the wilderness of En Gedi and head that way in order to find and kill David.

1 Samuel 24: 1-7

Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, “Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi.” ² Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats. ³ So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.) ⁴ Then the men of David said to him, “This is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you.’” And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe. ⁵ Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe. ⁶ And he said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master; the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.” ⁷ So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) Why is Saul seeking David? What are Saul's intentions?
- 2) What is significant about where Saul and his men stop for a break?
- 3) How do you think David and his men might feel when they notice Saul and his 3000 men are right outside? (i.e., What is the Crisis?)

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 1: Discipline

- 4) How do David's men interpret their current situation? Do you think they are justified in their interpretation?
- 5) How does David respond to his men's prompts?
 - A) Why does David's heart trouble him after cutting off a piece of Saul's robe?
- 6) What is David's final action? (VS 7)
- 7) What timeless truth do you see in this passage?
 - A) How does the attribute of discipline play a role in how David leads through this situation?
- 8) How can this passage (and the attribute of discipline) be applied to our roles as leaders at ExxonMobil? Why is discipline important in leadership?
 - A) How does the attribute of Discipline tie into the We Are ExxonMobil Core Values?

Commentary

God rejects Saul as king of Israel because of his disobedience (1 Sam 15). The throne will depart from Saul's family and he will be replaced by a man whom God chooses. The favor of God leaves Saul and falls on David, a boy who does not have the physical attributes of a king, but has the right heart (1 Samuel 16:17). At God's leading, Samuel the prophet anoints David as the next king of Israel.

Saul begins to slip into madness and seeks to kill David, who has done nothing to deserve the threat. David has served Saul valiantly as both a warrior and as a close family friend. David and his men flee from Saul, taking refuge in the wilderness of En Gedi. As Saul and his army draw near, David and his men hide inside a cave. Saul unknowingly enters into the same cave in order to relieve himself. David's men believe that God is delivering Saul into their hands and it is David's time to take over as king by killing Saul. At the encouragement of his men, David first goes and cuts off a piece of Saul's robe (potentially as an act of defiance against the king). However, David is immediately convicted that his conduct is improper, refraining from further action and rebuking his men. He shows self-discipline, restraining himself against the pressures of others, holding to his convictions, and waiting on God's time.

Reading this passage, I am amazed at David's restraint. If I were in David's shoes, I likely would have interpreted the situation similar to his men. I honestly cannot blame them for feeling that it

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 1: Discipline

was time for David to kill Saul. I mean, what are the odds of him entering into *their* cave! They were outnumbered by a powerful army 10:1 and were likely afraid. They were cornered, with no way out; but now they had the element of surprise! The man who was seeking to kill them was alone and vulnerable, unaware of their presence. They likely knew David had already been anointed as the next king, now was his shot!

There must have been a lot of pressure on David to comply with their requests. After all, he was their leader and he was responsible for their well-being. Their lives were all in jeopardy due to their allegiance to him. They were on the run, living as fugitives in constant danger from the pursuit of Saul. I am sure they all wanted to stop running and go home. I am sure David himself wanted to stop running and go home. Now was the moment! They were encouraging David to end the threat to their lives and to take his rightful place as king. Maybe it was all that pressure that caused David to start down that road and cut off the corner of Saul's robe. Maybe he was considering it.

However, David then gets an overwhelming sense of conviction. Scripture says that his heart troubled him and he refrained from further action, telling his men to stand down. That takes an incredible amount of self-reflection and self-discipline to stand firm to his conviction. David could have easily killed Saul. He likely would have been heralded by his men and taken the throne to be king shortly thereafter. He would have been fulfilling "God's plan" for him in being king, and he would have given his stakeholders exactly what they wanted. But he didn't do that. He was convicted by God that this was not the right way to achieve His goal, and he refrained, he had self-discipline.

Have you ever felt the stress to deliver results? Have you ever had people encouraging you to take a certain action, maybe a short cut? Have you ever been in a situation where all of that pressure was pushing you in a direction that you felt was wrong? Maybe it was ok by the world's standards, and maybe you would be rewarded for doing it, but you still felt a deep down conviction that it was the wrong way. What did you do? How did you handle the situation?

Our first step towards being a Godly leader is to have self-discipline. To have the convictions of what is right and wrong and to not take the easy way out, but hold to those convictions in the face of pressure. Sure, we will fail at times, but we are all on a journey towards becoming more like Jesus, and we can continue to practice self-discipline every day. We do not need to do this alone; discussing our struggles with trusted, Godly men and women can help. We were meant for community, and our community can help hold us accountable.

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 1: Discipline

Lastly, I would encourage you to look at the We are ExxonMobil Core Values of Excellence and Resilience. I found that attribute of discipline fits well into these Core Values of doing the right thing. As Christians, we should seek to adhere to and elevate those standards to a measure that is right by God, and right by those we lead.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- 1) Think about a time when you may have given into pressure (from work, friend, etc.) and made a decision you later regretted. What about that situation caused you to act the way you did? What things could you do to guard yourself in the future?
- 2) How have you shown discipline in your role at ExxonMobil? What drove you to maintain that discipline?
- 3) What ways can you prepare yourself to exhibit discipline in the future when tough decisions need to be made?

“But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

- 1 Sam 16:17

(Before Samuel Anoints David to be King)

Attribute 2: Seeking Wisdom for Decisions

“If knowledge is the accumulation of facts and intelligence the development of reason, wisdom is heavenly discernment. It is insight into the heart of things. Wisdom involves knowing God and the subtleties of the human heart. More than knowledge, it is the right application of knowledge in moral and spiritual matters, in handling dilemmas, in negotiating complex relationships... Wisdom gives a leader balance and helps to avoid eccentricity and extravagance.” - J. Oswald Sanders

Biblical Leader: Josiah

Biblical Passage: 2 Kings 22:8 - 2 Kings 23:4

Background and Context

The northern kingdom of Israel has been destroyed by the Assyrians as judgment for their idolatry and turning away from God. The southern kingdom of Judah is in a similar state of idolatry and turning away from God. The previous kings of Judah, Manasseh and Amon, who were described as “evil kings” of Judah, have recently died leaving the kingdom to Josiah. Josiah takes over realizing that the Kingdom is in a bad spiritual state, potentially recognizing the prophecies about its imminent destruction.

2 Kings 22:8 - 2 Kings 23:4

Then Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.” And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. ⁹ So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word, saying, “Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of those who do the work, who oversee the house of the Lord.” ¹⁰ Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, “Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read it before the king.

¹¹ Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes. ¹² Then the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Michaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, ¹³ “Go, inquire of the Lord for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”

¹⁴ So Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her. ¹⁵ Then she said to them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to Me, ¹⁶ “Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read—¹⁷ because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 2: Seeking Wisdom

other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched.’ ” ’¹⁸ But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, in this manner you shall speak to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: “Concerning the words which you have heard—¹⁹ because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you,” says the Lord. ²⁰ Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.” ’ ” So they brought back word to the king.

Josiah Restores True Worship

23 *Now the king sent them to gather all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. ² The king went up to the house of the Lord with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord.*

³ Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant. ⁴ And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the Lord all the articles that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) Who are Hilkiah and Shaphan and what does their discovery tell you about the state of Judah? (Ch. 22 Vs. 8)
- 2) How does King Josiah react to the reading from the Book of the Law?
- 3) Why do you think King Josiah reacted this way? What thoughts or feelings would be going through your head if you were in this situation? (i.e., What is the crisis?)
- 4) What is King Josiah’s first step after recognizing the seriousness of Judah’s situation? (Ch. 22 Vs. 12-14)
- 5) Why do you think King Josiah sought wisdom before responding to the crisis?

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 2: Seeking Wisdom

- A) Why do you think King Josiah sent a series of individuals to the prophetess?
- 6) What does the prophetess tell them? What about King Josiah's actions does she highlight? (Ch. 22 Vs. 18-22)
- 7) How does King Josiah respond after hearing the wisdom of Huldah? (Ch. 23)
- 8) What timeless truth do you see in this passage?
- A) How does the attribute of wisdom play a role in how Josiah leads through this situation?
- 9) How can this passage (and the attribute of wisdom) be applied to our roles as leaders at ExxonMobil? Why is seeking wisdom important in leadership?
- A) How does attribute of wisdom tie into the We Are ExxonMobil Core Values?

Commentary

I can only imagine how King Josiah felt when hearing the words of the Law read to him. He is the king of Judah. He has taken over a kingdom that is spiritually void. The northern kingdom of Israel has recently been destroyed by the Assyrians (presumably as a judgement of God due to their disobedience), and there are prophecies swirling around about the same fate that awaits Judah. Upon taking over as king, Josiah began to implement reforms to try to correct course on the spiritual state of Judah, but upon hearing the Word of God, he tears his clothes in grief, humbling himself before God. Maybe he begun to realize just how far they had fallen.

Moreover, what does the fact that someone seemed to *accidentally* find the Book of the Law in the Temple (as if it were unknowingly lost) say about the situation in Judah? In my own mind, I imagine the Book being found covered in dust in some back room; it's finders, who happen to be priests, perplexed about what it is they just found. We are not given the complete details about how Shaphan the scribe told Josiah about the Law and its contents, but I picture it as a pretty sad scene:

“Um, hi king! Shaphan the scribe here, you know... one of the clerks of the sacred manuscripts... I recognize that you are trying to implement these spiritual reforms and all... trying to get us right with God and what not... well, me and the boys were cleaning up the Temple like you requested, and well.... we found this book. We passed it around and it's got some pretty interesting stuff in it. We brought it to Hilkiah, the high priest, and well... he didn't really know exactly what it all meant, but he thought we should bring it to you... would you like to see it?”

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 2: Seeking Wisdom

This interaction alone should have left Josiah in absolute anguish, full of anxiety, and thoughts racing about how to respond. However, before making any rash decisions, Josiah pauses. He decides that before he does anything... before he makes major, nation altering decisions, he needs to seek wisdom from someone who can be trusted. I find it interesting that he seeks wisdom, not from the High Priest, or the scribes, but rather from someone who does not have a formal, authoritative title. In fact, he sends the High Priest, and the scribes all together to Huldah the prophetess to seek wisdom. Upon confirming Josiah's concerns, and providing wisdom into the situation, Josiah begins implementing strong, nation altering reforms.

When you face a crisis at work, how do you respond? Do you react rashly or impulsively? Or do you seek good (both professional and Godly) *wisdom* before making a decision?

As a closing observation, I found it interesting that Josiah sent a congregation of individuals to Huldah the prophetess to seek wisdom. Scripture doesn't necessarily say why, but I tend to think that in sending a wide congregation of leaders, he was more easily able to obtain buy-in to some of the major decisions/reforms he was about to make. Obtaining buy-in is important in making decisions and leading, and I think Josiah showed wisdom of his own in the way he sought wisdom. We do not need to work through challenges or make decisions alone. We should lean on our community, and those with the gift of wisdom, to provide guidance.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- 1) Think about a time when you may have jumped the gun on making a decision and later regretted that decision. What about the situation caused you to respond too quickly?
- 2) How have you sought wisdom in your role at ExxonMobil? What drove you to seek that wisdom?
- 3) What ways can you prepare yourself to seek wisdom in the future when tough decisions need to be made?

Attribute 3: Vision Setting and Execution

“Vision involves foresight as well as insight. President McKinley’s reputation for greatness rested in part on his ability to put an ear to the ground and listen for things coming. He turned his listening into vision; he saw what lay ahead. A leader must be able to see the end results of the policies and methods he or she advocates. Responsible leadership always looks ahead to see how policies will affect future generations.” - J. Oswald Sanders

Biblical Leader: Nehemiah

Biblical Passage: Nehemiah 2:11–20, Nehemiah 4: 7–16, Nehemiah 6: 1–9

Background and Context

The northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah have been destroyed by the Assyrians and Babylonians and the Jews are in exile. During their exile, the Persian Empire rises to power (conquering Babylon in 539 BC) and is now the governing authority in the region. It is noted that:

The Assyrians and Babylonians had displaced conquered peoples far from their homes and then in turn took other peoples and settled them in areas which had been subdued, thereby controlling large groups of their subjects. The Persians did the opposite. In order to curry the favor of conquered peoples, they permitted refugees to return to their hometowns and to rebuild their temples, and also requested that all peoples worship and pray on behalf of the well-being of the empire.¹

Consistent with this policy, Cyrus issued a decree in 538 BC allowing displaced peoples to return to their homelands.

Nehemiah was a Jew who was placed in an important position in the Persian Kingdom, holding the role of cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah hears about the vulnerable state that Jerusalem is in and petitions the king to allow him to return to Jerusalem to help rebuild the city. Nehemiah receives the king’s favor, and travels to Jerusalem.

¹ Louis Goldberg, “Nehemiah,” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 310.

Nehemiah 2:11–20

Nehemiah Views the Wall of Jerusalem

11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. 13 And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass. 15 So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.

17 Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." 18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me.

So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work.

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"

20 So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) Who is Nehemiah and what does his position tell you about his character? What is the crisis that he is facing?
- 2) What does Nehemiah do when he first arrives in Jerusalem? (Vs 2:11–16)
- 3) Why do you think Nehemiah does this?
- 4) How does Nehemiah respond to the situation? (Vs 2: 17–18)
 - A) What is significant about where Nehemiah chooses to start rebuilding the city?
- 5) What timeless truth(s) do you see in this passage? (2:11-20)

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 3: Vision Setting and Execution

Nehemiah 4: 7–16

⁷ Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, ⁸ and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. ⁹ Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

¹⁰ Then Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.”

¹¹ And our adversaries said, “They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.”

¹² So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, “From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us.”

¹³ Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. ¹⁴ And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”

¹⁵ And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. ¹⁶ So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah.

Questions for Discussion:

- 6) What challenges arise during the execution phase of Nehemiah’s plan? (Nehemiah 4:7–16)
- 7) How does Nehemiah respond to these challenges?
 - A) Why do you think he responded this way? / What important principle/truth can we learn from Nehemiah’s response?

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 3: Vision Setting and Execution

Nehemiah 6: 1-9

Conspiracy Against Nehemiah

6 Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), ² that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono.” But they thought to do me harm.

³ So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”

⁴ But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.

⁵ Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. ⁶ In it was written:

It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. ⁷ And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, “There is a king in Judah!” Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together.

⁸ Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart.”

⁹ For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, “Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done.”

Questions for Discussion:

- 8) What second challenge rises against Nehemiah in Nehemiah 6: 1-9?
- 9) How does Nehemiah respond to this challenge?
 - A) Why do you think he responded this way? / What important principle/truth can we learn from Nehemiah’s response?
- 10) How can these passages (and the attribute of Vision Setting and Execution) be applied to our roles as leaders at ExxonMobil? Why is Vision Setting and Execution important in Leadership?
 - A) How does the Spiritual Attribute of Vision Setting and Execution tie into the We Are ExxonMobil Core Values?

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 3: Vision Setting and Execution

Commentary:

In order to be cupbearer for the king, Nehemiah was someone in whom the king had trust. I think Nehemiah's character, and the fact that he rose to such a position in the empire, was important. God used Nehemiah's personal audience with the king to set in motion His work.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah appears to take some time before addressing the situation. Scripture says that he spent three days before taking any actions. While it does not specify what Nehemiah did during those three days, I like to think he may have gotten to know the people who were living in Jerusalem. After three days, Nehemiah sets out with a small team to personally investigate the situation and begin developing his plan. Rebuilding the wall is a notable place to start. Without the wall, the city lay vulnerable and weak. Restoring the city walls would buy the people the defenses and security they needed to continue to restore the city on the inside. Nehemiah presents his plans to the people, obtaining buy-in, and construction starts on the wall.

Once in execution, a new challenge rises that threatens Nehemiah's plan. Sanballat, Tobijah, and others in the region become upset about the restoration of Jerusalem's walls. They begin to develop plans to attack. Their plans evidently become known to those working in Jerusalem and they understandably become concerned for their own safety. Recognizing his execution team's concerns, Nehemiah implements a mitigation to provide continual armed protection for the laborers. However, as any project manager can attest, the execution challenges do not stop there. Sanballat continues his attempts at disrupting the project, and continually sends messages to Nehemiah to try to intimidate and distract him. However, Nehemiah disregards the messages, maintaining focus on the project at hand, and ignoring unfruitful distractions.

This building project of Nehemiah's has loads of application for our work at ExxonMobil. We all manage projects in one way or another. Whether we are leading a small team of volunteers at a United Way event, or leading a multi-billion dollar development project, we can all appreciate the need for Vision Setting and Execution Management, and Nehemiah provides us with a great example. To start, while this project is important, it seems as though Nehemiah does not begin executing his work in haste. Jerusalem is in a crisis, the city lay in ruin with no protection. Arriving on the scene, Nehemiah appears to take some time before developing a plan. Maybe he was engaging with those in the city trying to learn about their concerns and challenges. Maybe he was learning about the personalities he would be working with. The Bible doesn't say, but I like to think he was doing something intentional during those three days. Nehemiah then personally investigates the situation himself before launching a vision. I find that sometimes when a project is assigned to me (especially a high priority/crisis management type of project), I want to jump right in and start laying out my plans based on my prior experiences. However, do I really understand what is needed?

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 3: Vision Setting and Execution

When I was in college I interned at a manufacturing facility. One day I met an operator who was more than happy to share his thoughts with a young and new engineer. He brought me over to a piece of machinery and pointed out a relief valve that was included in the system. The valve looked fine to me, but he proceeded to point out that it was located tightly between two hot pieces of pipe with boiling water inside. Its location threatened to burn anyone who attempts to operate the valve (likely trying to operate that valve in haste). I'll never forget what he told me: "This is what happens when engineers stay in the office and don't actually talk to the people who need to operate the equipment they design." This should be kept in mind when developing plans for our projects at ExxonMobil.

Once a vision is set and the project is in execution, it should be smooth sailing from there right? Of course not! There are always things that threaten to derail a project. Therefore a good leader needs to evaluate what things are worth responding to, and what things are not. In Nehemiah's case, he recognized that the direct threats to his team had them worried and distracted. Therefore, he addresses their concerns, protecting them. He recognizes that if his team is distracted, his project will likely be in danger. He not only addresses their concerns through his actions, but he also directly addresses and encourages them through his words. As leaders we rely on others to execute our vision. We need to protect them, breaking down barriers that distract them so that they can take care of our vision. Finally, Nehemiah himself received threats and distractions. However he did not let those items distract him from his sticking to his plans. He did not let personal concerns distract from the broader objective. He ignored the noise, and kept his eye on the ball.

Vision Setting and Execution is tied firmly into the ExxonMobil culture. In fact, our Expectations for Leaders is designed with that in mind. It is important for us to continue to learn and grow in this area (both professionally, and spiritually). Setting the right vision, and responding the right way to execution challenges (and taking care of our teams) can be the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful project.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- 1) Think about a time when you may have developed a vision/plan/execution strategy; what information did you base your decisions on when developing that plan? Why did you use that information?
- 2) How have you responded to challenges that have threatened your vision/execution plans? Have those responses been effective? Why or why not?
- 3) What ways can you prepare yourself to better plan projects/respond to execution challenges in the future?

Attribute 4: Courage

“Courageous leaders face unpleasant and even devastating situations with equanimity, then act firmly to bring good from trouble, even if their action is unpopular. Leadership always faces natural human inertia and opposition. But courage follows through with a task until it is done. People expect leaders to be calm and courageous during a crisis. While others lose their heads, leaders stay the course. Leaders strengthen followers in the middle of discouraging setbacks and shattering reverses.” - J. Oswald Sanders

Biblical Leader: Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego, Daniel

Biblical Passage: Daniel 3; Daniel 6: 1–23

Background and Context to Daniel Chapter 3

The northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah have been destroyed by the Assyrians and Babylonians and the Jews are in exile. God blessed Daniel, Meshach, Abed-Nego, and Shadrach with wisdom and skills (Dan 1:17). Through that wisdom and skills, Daniel, Meshach, Abed-Nego, and Shadrach were placed in positions of administrative authority for King Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 3

The Image of Gold

3 *Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ² And King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴ Then a herald cried aloud: “To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; ⁶ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”*

⁷ *So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, and lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.*

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 4: Courage

Daniel's Friends Disobey the King

⁸ Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. ⁹ They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image; ¹¹ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up."

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

Saved in Fiery Trial

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰ And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹ Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ²² Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?"

They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

²⁵ "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 4: Courage

Nebuchadnezzar Praises God

²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here.” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. ²⁷ And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king’s counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! ²⁹ Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this.”

³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What do the positions of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego tell you about their characters?
- 2) What do the positions of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego tell you about God?
- 3) What does King Nebuchadnezzar declare in Dan 3: 4–6?
- 4) What is reported to King Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 3: 8–12?

Background and Context to Daniel Chapter 6

The Babylonian Empire has been overtaken by the Medo-Persian Alliance. As part of that transition, Darius has taken over power of the region and proceeds to set up his government. He appoints 120 satraps (“protectors of the kingdom”), as well as 3 commissioners to oversee the satraps. Daniel’s reputation and skills are known to Darius, as he is one of the 3 commissioners appointed.

Daniel 6: 1–23

The Plot Against Daniel

6 *It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; ² and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. ³ Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. ⁴ So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. ⁵ Then these men said, “We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”*

⁶ So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: “King Darius, live forever! ⁷ All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. ⁸ Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.” ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.

Daniel in the Lions’ Den

¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

¹¹ Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. ¹² And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king’s decree: “Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?”

The king answered and said, “The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.”

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13 So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

14 And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

15 Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed."

16 So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." 17 Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

Daniel Saved from the Lions

18 Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. 19 Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. 20 And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

21 Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! 22 My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you."

23 Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.

Questions for Discussion:

- 5) What decree is issued by Darius in Dan 6: 6–9?
- 6) What is reported to Darius in Dan 6: 11–13?
 - A) What does Darius's response to these reports tell you about Daniel?
- 7) What crisis did Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego each face?
- 8) How did Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego each respond to their respective crisis?
 - A) Why do you think they responded this way? / What important principle/truth can we learn from their responses?

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- 9) What do you notice about each situation, and how others responded to the actions of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego? Why do you think others responded this way?
- A) What do you notice about how God responded to each of these situations? What can we learn about God from His response?
- 10) How can these passages (and the attribute of Courage) be applied to our roles as leaders at ExxonMobil? Why is Courage important in Leadership?
- A) How does the Spiritual Attribute of Courage tie into the We Are ExxonMobil Core Values?

Commentary:

In the book of Daniel we see two very similar accounts of courage. The first account is with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. These men have evidently rose to prominent positions within the Babylonian Empire, serving King Nebuchadnezzar. The king sets up a golden idol and commands that all people bow down and worship it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego are now faced with a difficult decision. They could either comply with the king's command (which is now the law of the land) bowing down before the idol, in turn violating God's law (Exodus 20:3–4), or they could disobey the governing authority and risk severe personal consequences.

Fast forward to Daniel chapter 6 and we see Daniel in a very similar predicament. In this case, the Persians have taken control of the empire and a decree is issued that bans all prayer and worship of any god or man other than the king for 30 days. Daniel is a prominent political figure in the empire now and would likely be expected to not only comply with the law, but also be an example for those under his authority. However, in doing so he would violate his own conscience and be separated from his God. Violating the law of the land would have disastrous personal consequences for him.

Of course, we know how both of these stories go. In both scenarios the men, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego, and Daniel all chose to stand with courage for God. We read the stories and cheer for them, encouraged by their faith and courage. We should ask ourselves: what would I do if I was the one facing personal consequences for obedience to God? We are blessed to work for a company that has a good moral compass. However, our company and our country are not perfect. It would be naive of us to think that we will never face a potential dilemma like this in our own lives (hopefully not *exactly* like this!). Do you have the courage to stand for truth, for the right thing, even if it has the potential to impact you personally?

There is one difference that I want to highlight from these two stories that I think is important to consider. In both scenarios, the men were faced with a difficult decision, where complying with the law would have been the easy choice. They could have done so without anyone *really*

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noticing, and they would have continued to live their lives in positions of comfort and authority. The difference is where the pressure to comply was coming from. In the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, they were being challenged by an aggressive strong-willed king with a temper. There was likely no doubt in their minds that Nebuchadnezzar would make good on his promise to kill them for their lack of compliance. I can only imagine the fear that they felt standing face to face with him, seeing his anger burning. However, Daniel's case may have been even more difficult. In Daniel's case, he was disobeying someone who appears to be a friend. You can see the respect between the two based on Darius's reaction to the threat on Daniel's life, and Daniel's reaction when Darius checks on him in the morning. Having courage in the face of personal consequence is difficult, regardless of where the pressure to comply is coming from.

Another aspect of these stories that I would like to highlight is that in both cases, there are a group of people who are conspiring against those who seek to stay true to God. In Daniel 3, there are a group of individuals who are quick to report on the non-compliance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. In Daniel 6, it appears that a group of people are more actively trying to trap Daniel through their petitioning of Darius to issue said decree. In either case the message is clear: the enemy does not like when men and women of God put God first. There will be challenges, and living for God will require courage.

Thinking about these stories, I am inclined to think that if it were me, I would have been tempted to say to myself:

“Well, this is just a one-time thing...if I just comply subtly right now, I will be unscathed, and remain in a position of authority and influence and can continue to use that authority and influence for God... God tells me to submit to authority, anyway, so as long as I do this one little thing, I can continue to try and use my position of influence for God later... after all, I can't work for God if I am out of this position right?”

Have you thought like that before? It certainly is tempting and sounds good right? Please don't get me wrong, we should be obedient to authority (Romans 13:1–7). We should be servants to those in authority, seeking to serve as a form of worship to God. However, I think that scripture also shows that in cases where earthly authority is clearly asking you to violate God's authority, we need to have courage to hold God's law to a higher degree.

One final thought about Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego and Daniel. In both situations, the courage of the men ends up having an impact on Nebuchadnezzar and Darius. While it would be easy to think complying is the “right way” to continue to have an impact for God, their courage resulted in having a positive impact on the authority figures above them. I think God had these men in these high positions of influence, with strong characters, for precisely this reason. Their courage of conviction, and their ability to hold firm to the truth *was* likely one of the most impactful actions for God in their political careers.

Furthermore, God delivers them from death. This does not mean that every time we act courageously God will swoop in and save us from the earthly personal consequences associated

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with that courageous act. In fact, I don't think we should expect that at all. However, I do think that when we act courageously, and hold to God's Word, He will have a reward for us in Heaven. The ultimate reward is to hear Jesus say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Leadership take courage, no doubt about it. ExxonMobil values courage as well. In fact, one of ExxonMobil's Core Values is Courage! To be a good and impactful leader, we all need to have the courage to do the right thing, even if it has the potential to negatively impact ourselves.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- 1) Think about a time when you may have needed courage in your career. What about that situation required courage? What drove you to be courageous?
- 2) Have you ever shied away from doing the right thing during a challenging time? What caused you to shy away?
- 3) What ways can you prepare yourself to exhibit courage during challenges in the future?

Attribute 5: Integrity and Sincerity

“Paul spoke of his failures and successes with an openness few of us are prepared to copy... These two qualities of leadership were part of God’s law for the Israelites (Deuteronomy 18:13). God wants His people to show a transparent character, open and innocent of guile.” - J. Oswald Sanders

Biblical Leader: Ruth, Boaz

Biblical Passage: Ruth 1:15–18, Ruth 2: 2–12, Ruth 3: 8–15, Ruth 4: 5–13

Background and Context of Ruth Chapters 1 & 2

The story in Ruth takes place during the period of the judges, after the conquest but before a king reigned over a united kingdom (sometime between 1350 BC and 1050 B.C). Naomi is married to Elimelech and live with their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, in Bethlehem. They leave and head to Moab due to the famine that has hit Judah. While in Moab, Elimelech dies. Mahlon and Chilion marry local Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. After 10 years, both sons die with neither conceiving children. Naomi learns at this time that the famine in Judah is over. Having lost her husband, both sons, and in the absence of further family, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem. She encourages Orpah and Ruth to remain in Moab where they would be more likely to find husbands. Orpah agrees and turns back.

Ruth 1: 15 - 18

And she said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.”¹⁶ But Ruth said: “Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die, And there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me.”¹⁸ When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

Ruth 2: 2 - 12

² *So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor.”*

And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.”

³ *Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.*

⁴ *Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, “The Lord be with you!” And they answered him, “The Lord bless you!”*

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 5: Integrity and Sincerity

⁵ Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?”

⁶ So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, “It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷ And she said, ‘Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.’ So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house.”

⁸ Then Boaz said to Ruth, “You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. ⁹ Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.”

¹⁰ So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”

¹¹ And Boaz answered and said to her, “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. ¹² The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.”

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What is the crisis facing Naomi’s family? How does Orpah respond? How does Ruth respond? (Ruth 1: 15–18)
- 2) Why do you think Ruth responded in this manner?
- 3) What does Ruth do once the pair arrives back in Judah? (Ruth 2: 2–12)
- 4) What do her actions say about her character?
- 5) Who is Boaz, and how does he treat Ruth? What does his treatment of Ruth in chapter 2 tell you about his character?

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 5: Integrity and Sincerity

Background and Context Ruth Chapters 3 & 4

During harvest time, Ruth is gleaning in a field that belongs to Boaz (who also happens to be a relative to Elimelech). Naomi knows that Boaz is an eligible kinsman-redeemer². Naomi launches a plan that results in Ruth and Boaz meeting late one night.

Ruth 3: 8 - 14

⁸ Now it happened at midnight that the man was startled, and turned himself; and there, a woman was lying at his feet. ⁹ And he said, "Who are you?"

So she answered, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative."

¹⁰ Then he said, "Blessed are you of the Lord, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman. ¹² Now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. ¹³ Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a close relative for you—good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, as the Lord lives! Lie down until morning."

¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose before one could recognize another. Then he said, "Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."

Ruth 4: 5 - 13

⁵ Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy it from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance."

⁶ And the close relative said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything: one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was a confirmation in Israel.

² A kinsman-redeemer is a relative who restores or preserves the full community rights of disadvantaged family members. Normally, this was the duty of the nearest living blood relative. The redeemer had several duties; first, to buy back alienated properties (this was to prevent any individual from growing their estate and to keep the land within the family). Second was to buy back a member of the family who had fallen into slavery. Third was to avenge the blood of a murdered relative. Furthermore, if a man of Israel died without leaving his wife a son, it was the duty of the nearest male relative to marry his dead brother's wife and raise a son by her in the dead brother's name. If the nearest brother refused (this was considered highly disgraceful), the duty passed to the next closest relative.

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⁸ Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself." So he took off his sandal.
⁹ And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, from the hand of Naomi.
¹⁰ Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day."

¹¹ And all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. ¹² May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the Lord will give you from this young woman."

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son.

Questions for Discussion:

- 6) What is notable about the actions of Ruth in Chapter 3: 8–14?
 - A) What is notable about the actions of Boaz in Chapter 3: 8–14?
- 7) Describe the contrast between Boaz and the Redeemer Nearer in Chapter 4: 5–13.
- 8) What attributes of Ruth and Boaz's character are highlighted in the Book of Ruth?
 - A) Why do you think these attributes are important? How does God respond to these attributes?
- 9) How can these passages (and the attributes of Integrity and Sincerity) be applied to our roles as leaders at ExxonMobil? Why is Integrity and Sincerity important in Leadership?
 - A) How does the attributes of Integrity and Sincerity tie into the We Are ExxonMobil Core Values?

Commentary:

The Book of Ruth is packed with lessons that we can take away, but I am always aware of the integrity and sincerity of both Ruth and Boaz. To start, Ruth makes a most unusual decision. Upon the death of her husband, there is no male remaining to care for the women of the family. This is a significant problem; without a male heir available to redeem the possessions of the family, the women are rendered essentially homeless, without a way to provide for themselves. Naomi is aged and living in the foreign land of Moab. It is very unlikely that she will find a husband, especially in a foreign land that was not necessarily on the best of terms with Israel.

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Naomi decides to head back to her homeland of Judah where she will be in a better position to live out her years.

As young women in their home country, Ruth and Orpah would be able to move back into their respective father's house and re-marry. Orpah says goodbye to Naomi and heads home. Rather than following Orpah's lead, Ruth decides to stay with her mother-in-law. Ruth pledges to Naomi to stay with her and care for her. This is a huge deal! Ruth has essentially promised to leave her home, her family, and any prospects of re-marrying in order to accompany her mother-in-law to a foreign land, where she would be seen as an outsider. What's more impressive is that Ruth's actions prove that her commitment was sincere. Upon arriving on Judah, Ruth looks for opportunities to glean.

The Law outlines principles for gleaning to help the poor and sojourners in Israel (Leviticus 19:9–10). Essentially, farmers were to harvest their fields (known as reaping), but leave the corners of the field untouched. Furthermore, if during the reaping the reapers dropped products, they were not to pick them up, but continue on. The corners of the field, and the dropped products would be left for the sojourners, and the poor to partake. This is not easy nor glamorous work, but Ruth makes good on her commitment to Naomi and takes on the job.

Ruth finds herself at the field of Boaz. Boaz has heard about Ruth and her pledge to Naomi and decides to intervene. He tells Ruth to only glean on his field so that she would be safe. Furthermore, he shows his sincerity by his further actions. He provides her with harvested products which she did not pick herself and offers her water from his reapers vessels. This is far above and beyond anything Boaz is required by the Law to do, and says a lot about his character.

As the story goes on, we learn that Boaz is actually a relative of Elimelech, and thus an eligible kinsman-redeemer. At Naomi's request, Ruth petitions Boaz one night to redeem her and Naomi. Boaz, being a man of integrity, informs Ruth that by Law he is not the closest relative; thus the offer for redeeming should go to someone else first. However, he promises that if that individual declines he will redeem Ruth and Naomi. Boaz quietly sends Ruth away (protecting her reputation), but promises to take care of the situation quickly.

The next day Boaz head into town to settle the redemption. He offers the redeemer-nearer the opportunity to redeem all of Elimelech's property and possessions. At first, the redeemer-nearer seems on board to purchase Elimelech's property and possessions, but once he learns about the redemption of Naomi and Ruth (a Moabite), he declines. The redeemer-nearer does not want to fulfill his duty out of fear about the implications to his own inheritance. However, Boaz is a man of his word. He redeems Ruth and Naomi and provides Ruth with a son, Obed, who is the grandfather of King David.

Ruth and Boaz show sincerity in their words and actions. When they make promises, they follow through. They do not appear to say things just to sound good, but they mean what they say. Furthermore, both Ruth and Boaz's commitment to following the Law properly, as well as the

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 5: Integrity and Sincerity

commitments they have made to others, highlights the integrity that they have. They are honest and do right by those to whom they have committed.

As leaders, we should strive to have such integrity and sincerity in our words and actions. In a world of politics, it sometimes feels as though *leadership* and *integrity/sincerity* are the antithesis of each-other. But that should never be the case! In the mid-2000's, Gallup conducted a research poll to try and discern why people follow leaders. They started by asking people to think about a leader who had a positive impact on their life. They then asked them to write free-form about how that leader made a difference, and what that leader contributed to the follower's life. Here is an expert of their conclusions:

As we continued to review the descriptors, distance patterns started to emerge. In some cases, more than 1,000 people had listed the exact same word, without any categories or options provided. Given that there are more than 170,000 words in the English Language, this was impressive. It seems that followers have a very clear picture of what they want and need from the most influential leaders in their lives: trust, compassion, stability, and hope.³

Trust, compassion, stability and hope. I am not sure about you, but I am not sure how a leader could build trust, show compassion, maintain stability, and provide hope *without* exhibiting high levels of integrity and sincerity.

Do you always follow through on your promises? Do you seek to be open and honest? Do you care for others? True leadership cannot go without integrity and sincerity. ExxonMobil has even identified *Integrity* as one of its core values. It is paramount to being a good and effective leader, and it is paramount to be a light for Jesus in a dark world.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- 1) Have you ever been insincere through your words or actions at work? What caused you to speak/act insincerely? How did it make you feel? What was the result of those actions/words?
- 2) Do you think others would describe your dealings with them as being full of integrity and sincerity? Why or why not?
- 3) What ways can you protect yourself to exhibit integrity and sincerity during challenges in the future?

³ Tom Rath, *Strengths Based Leadership* (New York: Gallup Press, 2008), 82.

Attribute 6: Humility

“Humility is also a hallmark of the spiritual leader. Christ told His disciples to turn away from the pompous attitudes of the [Gentile rulers], and instead to take on the lowly bearing of the servant (Matthew 20:25-27). As in ancient days, so today humility is least admired in political and business circles. But no bother! The spiritual leader will choose the hidden path of sacrificial service and approval of the Lord over the flamboyant self-advertising of the world.”
- J. Oswald Sanders

Biblical Leader: Jesus

Biblical Passage: Matthew 26: 36–46

Background and Context

There are countless passages in scripture that highlight the humility of Jesus. In fact, one of the most famous humbling acts (the washing of feet) occurs right before this passage. However, there is something about this passage that is quietly humbling. The last supper has just completed and Judas has left to betray Jesus. He takes His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Jesus goes off, alone, and expresses Himself to the Father.

Matthew 26: 36–46

Jesus' Three Prayers

³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.” ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. ³⁸ Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.”

³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”

⁴⁰ Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” ⁴³ And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then He came to His disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.”

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 6: Humility

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What is the crisis facing Jesus?
- 2) How does Jesus decide to respond to this crisis? (Vs 36)
- 3) Why do you think Jesus asked Peter, James and John to keep watch with Him? (Vs 37–38)
- 4) What does Jesus pray? What is His desire? (Vs 39)
- 5) What do you notice about Jesus's second and third prayers? (Vs 42–44)
- 6) What attribute of Jesus's character is displayed through His prayers?
 - A) What is notable about Jesus, who is God incarnate, displaying this/these attribute(s)?
 - B) Do you think this/these attribute(s) are widely celebrated in the world? Why or why not?
- 7) How can this passages (and the attribute of humility) be applied to our roles as leaders at ExxonMobil? Why is humility important in Leadership?
 - A) How does the attribute of humility tie into the We Are ExxonMobil Core Values?
 - B) What do you think humility looks like at ExxonMobil?

Commentary:

I think that there is very little that needs to be said about this passage. Out of all of the accounts of Jesus, all of the moments where He exhibited humility, all of His intentional teachings, this moment here seems to show Jesus as vulnerable and humble before His Father. Knowing that He is being betrayed, and knowing that He is hours from death, Jesus takes His closest friends to the Garden at Gethsemane to pray.

Once in the Garden, Jesus prays to the Father three times. In the first account we see the humanity of Jesus, pleading with the Father to spare Him of this plan. The account in Luke 22:4 says that Jesus's sweat became like blood falling off of His face. Jesus is being open and vulnerable with the Father, making known the desires of His heart. However, even with the intensity of His request, Jesus still humbles Himself to the Father's will. We see that the second and third prayers, while similar, seem to be slightly different. They appear to almost have an aspect of acceptance to them, with Jesus recognizing the Father's will, and humbly accepting it.

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 6: Humility

A few years ago I had the privilege of visiting the Garden of Gethsemane. Our church group had the opportunity to spend an hour of private, quiet time in the garden to reflect on the scriptures, pray, and just be. Reading through all of the Gospel accounts of this moment, I found myself feeling connected with Jesus. In the Garden, Jesus displayed His humanity. He was vulnerable, expressed His personal desires (which was for His own benefit), and His longing for connection with His friends and with God. These are all things I can identify with. I have personal desires (most of which are for personal benefit), I can feel stress, anxiety, and pain. I have a need for connection with others and with God. Jesus was a man, just like me.

But even more, Jesus was not *just* fully man, He is also fully God. He had the power to avoid the cross. He could have saved Himself. He didn't have to do any of what He did, but He still did. The almighty and powerful God of the Universe humbled Himself, both in becoming man, and agreeing to willfully die for us (even if that is not what His humanity wanted). Our God is not a God who is detached, sitting on a pedestal somewhere, seeing man as His minions. Rather our God is a God who humbled Himself, to save us. He can identify with our struggles, and we can trust that He understand us.

If God can humble Himself like that, why do we as man feel the need to exalt ourselves? I do it, I desire it, and I am sure you do too. That is how our world works, that is how our culture works. I need to get what I want, when I want it. But God didn't act that way. And if God can humble Himself, putting aside not just what He wanted in His humanity, but what He deserved, shouldn't those of us who seek to reflect Jesus also act that way? It will certainly look different, but isn't that the point?

What is your leadership philosophy? What is the purpose of your team? Is your team there at *your* disposal to fulfill *your* purpose and do what *you* want? Do you do what is best for *you*, and *your* personal situation? Or do you humble yourself? Do you see your team as people who you are responsible for lifting up (or *saving* in Jesus's case)? Do you exalt yourself to authority, or are you an advocate for your team to authority? If we want to be more like Jesus, I think we need to lead more like Jesus. And sure, we will fail at times, probably a lot of times, but how much better of a culture could we have if all of us lead with humility, and with others interests in mind.

Finally, while I am sure that Jesus would have loved to avoid the immense pain and suffering of the impending Roman scourging, or the humiliation and agony of the crucifixion, many scholars agree that perhaps the biggest concern on Jesus's mind was the fact that He was about to be separated from God spiritually. God the Father would turn away from His Son, leaving Him alone, disconnected from Him. To be a good leader, especially a good *Godly* leader who is a reflection of Jesus, we need to be connected with God. It is the only way that we will grow in relationship with Jesus, and grow to lead more like Him.

Leading Through Crisis - Attribute 6: Humility

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- 1) Do you find yourself struggling with humility at work? Why or why not?
- 2) Do you think others would describe you as a humble person? Why or why not?
- 3) What ways can you show humility as a leader at ExxonMobil?

A Final Word

Those called to lead can have a significant influence on the lives of those entrusted to them. When a crisis hits, strong leadership is essential to navigating through the storm. Simply making it through should not be the goal. *How* we lead in crisis can reveal what motivates us to lead and what is in our hearts. As men and women seeking to be more like Jesus, our leadership, especially through crisis situations, can be glorifying to God, and speak the Gospel.

This study is certainly not a perfect blueprint or an all-encompassing guide to how we should lead through crisis. Scripture is filled with countless wisdoms on leadership, and our intentional time in the Word and in prayer is important for our growth as spiritual leaders. Asking God for guidance on how to apply these wisdoms in our life can help to transform our leadership to be more like Jesus. Even the passages we studied here have more to teach, and each time I read one something new stands out to me. That is how the scriptures come alive and speak to us today. After all, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16–17)

So while not perfect, we hope that this study was able to stir some thoughts about how each of us lead, and how we can be more intentional in our leadership and in our time with God. We believe that each of us are in our respective positions for a purpose, and each of us can use our time to not only be highly effective in our jobs, but also shine the light of God. We know that if we all do this, we will have a better community, company, and country. We hope you were able to take one or two things away from this study, as we all work towards leading more like Jesus.

We love you,

The CCEM Team

Additional Leadership Resources:

Free Servant Leadership Course

Grace Center for Leadership Development: <https://www.gsot.edu/center/servant-of-the-lord-study/>

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Leading Through Crisis

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

(Philippians 2:3–8)



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