



Monthly Devotional – August 2007

“Isolated from the Truth”

Queen Victoria’s biographer once noted: “It has always needed courage to inform royalty that some of the people are starving.” Giving bad news to those in command has never been an enviable task. Too often leaders make it clear by their actions that they do not welcome negative news. Queen Elizabeth I was notorious for her vitriolic temper when an adviser displeased her. A French ambassador once confessed: “When I see her enraged against any person whatever, I wish myself in Calcutta, fearing her anger like death itself.”

Scripture warns that leaders are never more vulnerable than when they lack reliable advisers. Proverbs warns: “*A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment*” (Prov. 18:1). People who isolate themselves typically do not want their opinion challenged or their attitude critiqued. Better to turn a deaf ear, they think, than to hear something unpleasant. God understands that everyone has blind spots. No one is smart enough or alert enough to detect every danger or possibility. We must depend on others for a proper view of ourselves and our circumstances.

God will place people around us who see things we do not. Our spouse knows us well and can offer helpful feedback, if we will listen. Friends will see things in us we might overlook. Colleagues at work, those on our board or our staff, all have different perspectives from which we could benefit. Winston Churchill once observed: “Those who ride in carriages have their own point of view.” The outlook from the executive office is quite different than the one from the shop floor. Both are valid and need to be taken seriously.

Yet despite the availability of advisers around us, there are many ways we can retreat from the truth rather than engage it. We can pull back and become angry or irritated when people relate bad news. We can argue rather than listen. We may limit the feedback we receive by the way we ask questions (“No one has a problem with this, do they?”). We can avoid people who might tell us what we don’t want to hear. We can even resort to pouting so everyone knows our feelings have been hurt. While keeping people at arm’s length might save us from present annoyances, isolating ourselves inevitably leads to personal and professional disaster. Failure is avoidable if we humble ourselves and seek wise counsel. Our personal well-being and the success of our company are worth the humility required to obtain good advice. General Dwight Eisenhower’s motto was: “Make no mistakes in a hurry.” He was keenly aware of how much was at stake every time he made a mistake. Others would pay a stiff price for his pride.

Who in your life feels free to share their concerns with you? How well do you receive such counsel? Do you listen with an open mind or do you immediately prepare your rebuttal? While you may assume you are open to negative feedback, consider the last time someone gave you some, and how you received it. Ask the Lord to examine your heart. The success of your company and the well-being of your employees may hinge on your openness to God’s perspective on your leadership. Don’t isolate yourself from those who could tell you what you need to hear. If you have inadvertently done so, immediately invite various kinds of people into your life who will tell you the truth. Wise leaders don’t hide from the truth; they face it, learn from it and are better because of it.