



Know Your Place, Occupy Your Space

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Church Extension Plan

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“...since you have never been this way before.” Joshua 3:4 (NIV)

It is safe to say that none of us have traveled this road before. Just scarcely a few weeks ago, before COVID-19, you and I were in a different place. Now, like Joshua, we are on a path we have never traveled. I believe the scope and scale of the opportunities for the Church on this new path are immeasurably *greater* than the crisis. The one thing this crisis will expose is just what kind of leadership we provide. This new path will require you as a leader to **know your place** and **occupy your space**.

Knowing your place means knowing your identity as a leader.

In trying and uncertain times, people look to and for leadership. They look to their national, state, and local governments for essential services, personal safety, justice, and clear communication; they look to their healthcare institutions for medical intervention, innovation, and preventive care. And make no mistake, they look to *their church* for hope, meaning, and guidance — not just for their spiritual day-to-day needs, but for the wisdom, strength, and practical application of their faith to new fears and dark moments.

I recall from my high school days, in my Physics class, learning the “Pauli Exclusion Principle,” which states that *two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time*. The practical and inverse implication is that whatever space you and I leave open, someone or something else will fill.

When the church and/or its leadership goes missing, especially during times of testing and uncertainty, someone or some other institution will endeavor to take its place. Case in point: a faithful church member of ours recently shared how a Jehovah’s Witness, in keeping with their door-to-door visitation practice, visited her home with a written letter in hand. She shared how the letter made her feel valued and was moved that someone would care enough to go to the trouble

of letting her know they were there for her.

In this COVID-19 crisis, it should not surprise us that even a faithful and involved church member would feel the void left by a church that unintentionally took its place for granted and failed to occupy a sacred space in their lives.

For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer — like in a marriage — leadership will either shine brightly or flicker dimly. Spiritual and Solomonic leadership is what our spouses, children, co-workers, and church members are hoping to find right now. The axiom that everything rises or falls on the shoulders of leadership has never been truer. If you’re reading this article, then you are that leader, and this is your moment of truth — just as it is mine.

Occupying your space means walking in your unique role.

Proverbs 25:11 (CEV) states, *“The right word at the right time is like precious gold set in silver.”* We are all experiencing information overload right now. Occupying your space means finding and using your voice. No one has your unique position — no one. Let me say it again, differently: For those you lead, *your heart expressed in your voice* matters far more than any newscast. So, how are you framing this crisis?

Interestingly, the word “crisis” has two definitions. The second definition is what I expected to be the first: catastrophe, calamity, cataclysm, disaster, plight, mess, dilemma, quandary, setback, etc. Surprisingly, the first definition includes critical point, decisive point, turning point, crossroads, climax, a moment of truth, point of no return, etc. I’ve decided that as a leader I must choose to see the current events not as apocalyptic, but as a critical, decisive, turning point.

It’s your *voice, opinion, and personal, caring touch* that communicates volumes in times of crisis. So, here are three tips to guide your leadership:

Inform: Provide your staff and members with the information they need to know, understand, and possibly act on, within your context. Ensure the information is clear, concise, and content-specific. Help them make sense of any pertinent compelling current events, organizational developments, and what to expect in the future. Some best practices to consider:

- Develop a communication plan and strategy.
- Communicate weekly or bi-weekly across different channels (email, text, newsletter, online platforms, etc.).
- Be intentional, consistent, and measured. Too much or too little information can have the opposite of your intended effects.

Instruct: Add to your information, instruction. What do you want people to do with the information you provide? What is the potential benefit and opportunity for growth? Help people know the one thing that matters and what to do about it. Some best practices to consider:

- Instruction should be easy to understand and follow.
- Instruction needs to be compelling.
- Instruction should include clear benefits and outcomes.

Inspire: Teams that win do so on inspiration as much as they rely on their gifts and talents.

Effective leaders tap into God's creative genius to inspire people to bring and do their best for God and others. Some best practices to consider:

- Take every opportunity to connect the information and instruction with your church's mission, vision, and core values.

- Tell stories often, highlighting and crediting the people who were instrumental.
- Look for opportunities to celebrate as a church.

Conclusion

Effective leaders know and take their place; they walk within their ordained calling, in the spirit of humility and excellence. The truth is no one can take your place, walk in your shoes, drive in your lane, unless you abdicate it. God has designed a unique niche and space for your life that truly no one else could ever co-occupy or fill. Just like no one else can be the parent to your children, no one else can be the leader, take your place, and occupy your space that God has ordained. Know your place and occupy your space with the confidence of knowing that the God of Joshua will help you too, "since you have never been this way before."

With these unprecedented times, unprecedented and untapped opportunity abound. But the opportunity is only optimal and powerful if we are able to **see** it, willing to **seize** it, and committed to **shaping** it! Let's continue to depend on God for His wisdom. Let's work in the spirit of harmony, excellence, and Kingdom-building. And, when we come through this time of testing better than ever, let's make sure we give God the glory! ■