

## Redeeming a Rejection

I spoke recently with a church lay leader about an important matter in the church. This leader and others had been working for many months on a proposal for the church concerning the matter in question. Many hours of research, discussion, and policy writing had gone into the proposal. At the appointed time the proposal was submitted to the church for approval. However, the matter did not get final approval by the church because of some concerns expressed by a few church members. This was quite disappointing to those who had worked so hard to bring a thoughtful recommendation to the church.

If you have been involved in ministry leadership very long, then I am sure you can relate to the situation of this lay leader. It is hard not to take such an outcome personally. It is discouraging when something you have worked so hard to accomplish is met with rejection. However, this leader actually had a positive attitude about the rejection. After the initial disappointment, my friend was able to see a way forward that would *redeem the rejection*. This leader's spirit greatly encouraged me.

Every ministry leader experiences rejection at some point. Despite our best, most prayerful efforts, sometimes we get a result that stings. When that happens, we must turn our thoughts to redeeming the rejection. Consider these steps when you experience the sting of rejection.

1. *Temper your reactions.* A ministry leader cannot afford to have undisciplined emotions. When we react harshly or accusingly, we very quickly turn the focus from the issue to personalities. Undisciplined emotions will warp our purpose. Instead of honoring the Lord, we will be most concerned with winning or saving face. Undisciplined emotions will poison the atmosphere for any future discussions about the issue. They will also undermine our ability to lead in the future. Understand that it is okay to *feel* angry or disappointed. That is normal for a human being who experiences rejection. But it is not okay to *speak or act* in an undisciplined way. Speak to the issue appropriately, even strongly, but do not react emotionally. This will keep a momentary rejection from turning into a lasting embarrassment.

2. *Take time for reflection.* Step back and debrief the matter. Consider how the issue was handled and communicated. Pray for wisdom and let the Lord grow you for future leadership. Seek wise counsel, not just "echo chamber" counsel that will tell you what you want to hear. A period of reflection will help release the emotional pressure, renew you in the Lord, and help you regain perspective. It will foster your growth as a spiritual leader. Don't waste your setbacks!

3. *State the opposing view in the best possible way.* This is a critical step in redeeming the rejection. What we want to do, what our sinful flesh cries out for, is to turn those with an opposing view into a caricature. We instinctively want to state their position in the most ridiculous and denigrating way possible to soothe our pride and make them look stupid. This is not Christ-like behavior. The right thing to do is to sincerely understand the opposition's viewpoint and state it in the strongest possible way. Focus on their best argument, not their worst. In so doing, you are honoring the person, maintaining a relationship, and keeping the focus on the issue. You are also identifying the areas that must be addressed to move forward.

4. *Develop a plan for moving forward.* The plan might be to drop the issue for now due to greater concerns. It might be to tweak the proposal. It might mean having some meetings and working out a more broadly owned plan. It might mean further education and communication about the issue. It might mean going back to square one and approaching the matter from a completely different angle. Whatever it means, don't get stuck in the rejection. Prayerfully decide what the next step should be and take that step. Redeem the rejection by moving forward in a deliberate way.

5. *Maintain a "faithfulness" definition of success.* Of course, even with a great plan for moving forward, there is still no guarantee that you will achieve the desired result. Rejection is still a possibility. Therefore, a ministry leader must always define success as *doing what God has called me to do in a way that honors him all the way to the finish line.* This will keep your focus on the most important thing, honoring the Lord. It will also refute the prosperity theology that tells us everything should always work out "successfully" and if it does not, then we must have "missed God's will." Baloney. There are a thousand different reasons why some things do not work out, many of them having nothing to do with the ministry leader. Do not fall into the devil's trap of defining success as *getting the response you want out of people.* This will turn you into a self-serving, manipulative leader who is prone to discouragement. Remember Who you work for and focus on pleasing Him. Trust Him to bear the appropriate fruit at the appropriate time through your faithfulness.

6. *Pray all the way.* Remember, ministry leader: There is always a lot more going on than what you know about. One of the reasons we experience disappointments is so we will learn dependence on the Lord. Jesus told us, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Dealing with a rejection is a great time to relearn this basic principle of discipleship. Again, don't waste your setbacks. Let them fuel your spiritual growth.

Brothers and sisters, I do not like rejections any more than you do. They are going to happen though. Let's redeem them in the faith that our Father will work through them for our good and his purposes. Hang in there!