

Friction in Church Leads to Execution; We Need Friction!

A Reflection on Creative Tension in Church Leadership

Reflections Family, Discipleship and the Christian Life 21 November 2023

"We do not need friction, but harmony" — I can hear you loud and clear as you read the title of this piece. "He writes like a person out of his mind," others must be thinking. Let me ask: did you ever experience the harmony you always talk about? Read on.

I am unable to think of any instance where the right direction is found, and matters settle to a logical conclusion, without first crossing the bridge of friction. I therefore argue that we need friction in the church to find our way. If I said that I was not a person given to friction, I would be dishonest. I would rather think that my middle name should be Friction.

When I speak of friction, I include in it the feeling of being out of place, or of being unable to get into the groove. I am aware that most people would rather avoid friction. But I want you to know that the absence of friction is a clear indication of the absence of activity. We can put our lives on autopilot, and sail uneventfully through the years, months, weeks, and days of our lives, and may even feel satisfied in doing so. But what, then, of the thrill in our short lives? What of that little extra push to the next level of living? I want to live beyond the mundane today, in the church and elsewhere. I want to experience the thrill of being a contributing leader in the church. Do you not?

That would require thinking outside the box, applying creative notions, questioning the status quo, and being willing to gather, as we go along, both our failures and our successes. Such experience does not come from a routine life; it comes from the friction we must create, and then overcome.

How does one go about it? One creates friction. And how does one create friction? By working towards an outcome that calls for accountability. In the church, that may also involve some hard conversations. I often hear it said that it is time we created a second line of leadership, or a sound succession plan. It is all there in the management books, and the church can even hire specialists in human resources who may point the way. But they cannot themselves be present in the church to lead us to it. And at the end of it all, one still ends up signing a fat cheque.

Where do we go from there? I do not know — or do I? We need to talk about what would capture the imagination and interest of our

prospective leaders. Bring them into the midst of the friction; challenge them to navigate through it fearlessly; and place before them a goal that may seem impossible. If you find someone taking up that challenge, you have your successor. And as long as there are lost and broken people who are yet to know Jesus, your friction will lead you to your goal. The friction you have all along tried to avoid will, if you do not run from it, lead you to your goal as a leader in your church.