



Israel was plateaued spiritually between the old and new Testaments. There were no prophets and not much really happening. Then John the Baptist emerged from the wilderness to stir things up. You couldn't stay where you were on the plateau – you either were challenged to repent and be baptised by John or reacted against the prophet and in effect went backwards and closed your spirit to the new movement.

Similarly at the time of Samuel, Israel was lacking a prophetic voice. No one was hearing God and nothing much was happening. In the vacuum, the young boy Samuel hears the Lord speaking to him one night. From that time on he brought the word of the Lord fearlessly to the nation for the rest of his life.

The disciples were out mending their nets, minding their own business, when Jesus came on the scene to move them out of their normal 9-5 existence. He called them to follow him and from that moment on, life would never be the same again. It was life to the full. Life abundant. Life with a capital L.

When you're on a "*plateau*", there's no up hills and down hills, it's just flat and kind of boring. There's no real learning or growth taking place. You look back and everything is pretty much the same. Same routine, same personal struggles, same issues you are having to deal with, same attitudes and behaviours. One year follows the next and you have to ask, "Do I know God better? Have I really changed?" Short plateaus are OK in the season of change, where there is time to regroup, adjust to the new situation or put the new knowledge into practice in some way. Generally however, plateaus are a work of the enemy. They stop you moving forward. They hinder any momentum and movement from taking place.

Then there's "*comfort zoning*." This is a little different. When you comfort zone, you choose to not take risks and intentionally stay in a safe place, a place you know, a place that's familiar, a place that you can control. The best place to be of course, is where God wants you to be. He wants us to be in a place of trusting him. We often find this scary because trust is often spelt R.I.S.K. Trust means we don't know the outcome or know what will be required of us. The agenda isn't ours! We put our lives in God's hands.

I love the film Madagascar. The animals are living in a zoo and the zebra has a birthday and is asked to make a wish. He wishes and the other animals ask him what he wished for. He doesn't want to tell them but finally is persuaded. His wish is to, "*Go to the wild*." The other animals choke and collapse and can't believe he wants to do such a ridiculous thing. They have comfort zoned!

Both plateaus and comfort zones are dangerous places. What do they look like?

- staying in a leadership role for too long, because even though you know you should pass it on, you don't know what you will do or what new role you will take on.
- Teaching the same material with the same examples from many years ago with no new up to date testimonies of what God is doing in your life.
- Not wanting to rock the boat with any new ways of doing things and sticking with the familiar way that you know works.
- Seeing no new depth in your relationship with God, your friendships or marriage and maintaining the status quo.
- Missing opportunities of ministry expansion because of the commitment, time and energy required.
- Become lazy in learning new things or developing your life, relationships and ministry.
- You don't want to take a leadership role on because of the stretch and challenge that it would bring into your life.
- You are more excited about the next episode of a TV show than you are about spending time with God – ooh!
- I don't think I will share any more but there are so many signs of plateauing and comfort zoning.

Perhaps you are thinking, *“This is not my problem. I am active, motivated, going for it and actually on the verge of burnout. My problem is more to do with being a workaholic.”* However, in all your working and going for it, all the hours of the day, how are you growing? How are your relationships developing? How fulfilled are you? We can be comfort zoning in our workplace, working every moment. We can feel more secure working and just doing stuff than relating, evaluating, enjoying Sabbath and spending time with God. That will sound strange to some but true.

So what is the answer? What do you think?

I believe the answer lies in a fresh encounter with God. We can't spend time with God and actually relate with him and hear what he is saying and come away bored – can we? There's another problem though. Many of us are not used to experiencing God's presence and receiving insight and revelation on a regular basis. We go through the motions but don't live in the supernatural and experience him breaking into our lives with miracles, direction and an awareness of his presence. If we did we wouldn't be plateauing and comfort zoning.

I remember hearing a story about a woman who died in her eighties. When her family went through her belongings they came across her journal where she had been writing her goals for the next 10 years! She wasn't plateauing. We all know the story of Caleb and how he held onto the vision of claiming Hebron as his inheritance for 45 years. Then at 85 with permission from Joshua, went on to see his dream become a reality. He was plateauing or comfort zoning either!

The happiest place on earth for each of us, is right in the centre of God's will. It's the safest, most fulfilling place to be – even if it is the scariest riskiest thing we ever do.

Where is your energy invested? Into the vision, the people, the ministry you are called to? Are you doing what you feel God has asked you to do? Great. Keep up that growth curve with new encounters with God.

If not – then make some time to seek God’s face for a fresh encounter. Not just a half hour here and there but TIME. Quality time to go deep. We need encounters regularly to stay in tune, and keep on track.

The bottom line is, “living according to what he says.” And that means listening intently without trying to reinterpret. Are we even able to hear something from God that is out of the box or challenging and risky? If my initial response to God is, “I can do that,” I’ve probably not heard clearly. On the other hand if my response is, “wow how is that going to be possible?” we’re probably a little closer to hearing right. We are to live our lives in radical obedience. Like the words of Mary to the servant at the wedding feast in Cana – “do whatever he tells you” (even if it sounds stupid!) Who in their right mind serves water to the head table when they’ve asked for wine? Have we grown soft in our years of service? Is it too much stress, too many extra miles, time to settle down... I remember Ken McGreavy, a wonderful teacher in the UK for many years, talking about the second phase launch for leaders who are called to pioneer once again. This time they don’t step out in ignorance. They know the cost and energy and time it will take. But these leaders will be blessed. I’ve discovered there’s a third, fourth and fifth launch too.

Just as leaders can plateau and get comfortable, so do bases. As leadership teams we need to be ready to hear the radical word of the Lord. We need to make room for the prophetic and apostolic in our midst. We get comfortable way too fast. May the Holy Spirit keep pushing us out of our comfort zones and encourage us to climb new mountains.

Until next month

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