

August 12, 2018

THE RED ZONE

Well, we are in the throws of football season! The High School kids have known this for awhile - they started practice at the end of July -- There's a scrimmage on Tuesday between the JV and the Freshman teams, and the Varsity Truckers will have their first game this coming Friday, the 17th, against Fox Valley Lutheran. (It is an away game). And then this past Wednesday was the first preseason game for the Packers and Football season is pretty much in full swing...

So, as I watched bits and pieces of the Packers game against Tennessee the other day, and I heard comments about the red zone, I remembered hearing a LOT about problems in the Red Zone last year, so I thought I'd take a look at that... Now, football players, coaches, retired coaches, and die hard fans probably know what that means, but I wasn't real sure. I knew it had something to do with when players get close to the end zone, and I knew a lot of people get pretty uptight when the play of the game lands in that area. I figure it's called the "red zone" because people can get pretty red hot mad when the ball is on that part of the field. I didn't know much more than that, so I googled it. I googled "Packers in the red zone 2017" and one of the first pieces of information that came up was "Packers defense was a punching bag in the red zone in 2017". And here are some of the statistics they shared:

- Opposing quarterbacks threw 20 touchdown passes and zero interceptions against the Packers in the red zone in 2017.

- On the road, Packers defense allowed touchdowns on 79.2 percent of red zone opportunities - by far the worst in the NFL.

- Teams scored 10 touchdowns on third or fourth down against the Packers in the red zone.

- The Packers gave up at least one red zone touchdown in 14 of 16 games.

And there were a few more statistics that didn't make them look any better at all. And I learned, in my research, that the Packers coaches and players were none too happy with those statistics...

Now, after looking at that, I thought, maybe, in football, the 20 yards closest to the goal are called the red zone, because that's the one spot on the field that makes the most people the most angry!

And so now, "red zone" and "angry" have a pretty synonymous relationship.

The other "red zone" I thought about has to do with education. Some of you may be familiar with this. In the last several years, our education system has been taxed with monitoring, counselling, and educating students and parents about emotional needs, behaviors, and challenges. One way that the system has been able to be effective is by use of a program called "The Zones of Regulation". In this program there are four zones that teachers try to help students discover for themselves. And one of these "Zones" is the "red zone". The main emotions that are identified in the red zone are upset, disgusted, or angry. So now, I have some knowledge of two things called "the red zone" and they are both about anger, or at the very least, negative emotions. And I came to realize that there really is this place - 20 yards to the goal - in football **or** as a metaphor to life, that we can find ourselves in and it is "the red zone".

I don't think we can avoid the red zone. I think we will find ourselves there periodically throughout our lives whether we want to be there or not, the thing is we have to figure out what that means for each of us and what we intend to do about it. Are we just going to stay there and be unhappy with people, the world, with life forever or are we going to figure out how to maneuver successfully in this zone, and get out of it?

We read about Jonah today. Jonah found himself in the red zone sitting outside the city. There he sat, just sat, and waited to see what would happen. He had some shelter that provided some shade, but that sun got pretty hot! While he was sitting there, God provided this nice big vine that grew up out of the ground and offered the shade Jonah needed to keep his head protected, and Jonah just sat there enjoying the added shade. Then, out of nowhere, the vine just died off and darn that sun was hot!!! And Jonah got mad! I imagine if Jonah had a conversation with God about this today he might have said something like, "Thanks a lot God! Here I am, doing nothing, and you let that vine get eaten up and die, and for what? Why are you punishing me? I didn't do anything!" And what would God say? Basically, the same thing He said to Jonah all those many years ago... God would say, "Exactly! You didn't do anything, you really don't have a right to be angry because you just sat there and you didn't do anything." Jonah didn't do anything to help that vine stay alive, he didn't water it, didn't prune it, didn't get rid of the worm that was eating it - he just sat there doing nothing expecting everything! Life just doesn't work like that.

What if the Packers defense took their positions in the red zone and then when the ball was snapped they just did nothing and then got mad because the other team

scored? Or if the offensive line got into position, snapped the ball and not a one of them tried to get open for a pass or a hand off? Some people would argue that that's why the statistics I shared earlier exist... What if the players found themselves somewhere in that last 20 yards and then didn't do anything...

Same thing in the education of our children. We can teach them that there is an emotion called anger, we can tell them that when they feel that emotion to one degree or another that they are in what we call the "red zone", but if we don't teach them that they are the ones that have to do something about it in order to get out of the red zone... Well, then nothing changes, nothing happens, nothing gets better.

Now, I'm not saying that when we find ourselves upset or angry, somewhere in the red zone, and we do everything in our power, everything we can think of to change the situation - I'm not saying that we will always like the changes that take place --- Just like the Packers don't always score their way out of the Red Zone or prevent the other team from scoring in the Red Zone, we might not always get the results we want... Everyday life is a little different than a football game, but in football or in life, when we're in the Red Zone, we either have to do something about it, or get burned like Jonah did. We might not always like how things work out, but isn't anything better than being stuck in that last 20 yards just mad and doing nothing? The Red Zone is not a good place to take up permanent residency. So if you are feeling stuck in the red zone, what are you supposed to do about it? We can look at our education system and we get some pretty good ideas...

When students find themselves in the red zone, they are supposed to stop. When you are in the red zone, you are out of control and have trouble making good decisions and you need to just stop. After you stop, take a deep breath, Jump on a trampoline, count to 20... there are a number of things that can be done to help you "re-group" when you find yourself in the red zone.

Some of the most beneficial materials and ideas are available to us through the schools. I believe that if we are honest with ourselves, we really must admit that we can all benefit from the lessons created for our children...

But there are other resources. In my google search of the "red zone", I found that there are all kinds of materials available to help us understand the red zone and what we can do when we find ourselves residing there.

We can find resources through google, in the newspaper, an encyclopedia, or wikipedia. Inspiration from great writers, poets, and philosophers: Buddha said, "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at

someone else; you are the one who gets burned.” Writer William Arthur Ward stated: “It is wise to direct your anger towards problems - not people; to focus your energies on answers - not excuses” and the sometimes surprisingly philosophical Elvis Presley who simply stated: “When things go wrong, don’t go with them.”

In addition to the wisdom shared by these three, there are countless inspirational quotes just waiting to give you a quick little “pick me up”. Quotes like: “Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass, it’s about learning to dance in the rain”; and “For every minute you are angry, you lose 60 seconds of happiness” (I like that one a lot!); or “Our days are happier when we give people a bit of our heart rather than a piece of our mind” I could go on and on and on, And these words of inspiration are great! but for the most part, these words are just that, just what they say they are, words of inspiration, they don’t claim to be inspirational and not necessarily directional - and we need clear direction. Direction to help us avoid the red zone, direction that will help us avoid the explosion that can occur if we hang on to anger. That direction is NOT going to be found in the Zones of Regulation used in our schools; that direction is NOT going to be found in the newspaper, an encyclopedia, or google.

For direction we need to look somewhere else, And I thought of a song again - probably not a big surprise to too many of you - - and here it is: “Oh the B-I-B-L-E, yes that’s the book for me, I stand alone on the word of God, the B-I-B-L-E”

The Bible is where we find direction. We heard much direction in Paul’s letters to the Ephesians today: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice”; I think perhaps one of the best verses giving direction to stay out of that red zone comes from Ecclesiastes 7: “Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools” and I’m telling you, the devil himself is waiting for the fools, I know because Psalm 37 tells us that very thing: “Don’t give in to worry or anger; it only leads to trouble.” But perhaps the most clear direction comes to us from James: “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” And in that, we not only have direction, we have a very clear reason for that direction... “Anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” Our job here on this earth is to live in the image of God Himself, display righteous behaviors, moral and ethical behaviors that God commands us to abide by. Anger does NOT generally produce moral and ethical

behavior... and what good can we accomplish if we are sitting in our red zones, not producing behaviors acceptable to our God?

Think about that as school starts, think of those zones of regulation and learn how to identify when you are in the red zone. Think about that as we are underway this football season. When your team is in the red zone - either end of the field - watch them try to do something about it - they don't want to be in the red zone during the game any more than you or I want to be in the red zone outside of the game - and in all of our humanity, we won't be able to prevent visits to that red zone - we will feel stuck, we will get angry - and when that happens, what will we do? That's up to each of us individually. That's up to you. Will you sit in your red zone and do nothing but raise your voice like Jonah did or will you take a deep breath, count to 20, and re-group. Will you do something and find your way out even if it is a slow process? Heed the words of Martin Luther King Jr.: "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step." AMEN.