



A Cautionary Tale

Once upon a time, in a kingdom not so far away...

Life wasn't perfect, but everyone was pretty comfortable with how things were.

The king was a good leader. He looked out for the interests of the kingdom and its people. There was also a governing council who helped with kingdom affairs and kept everything running smoothly. The people were safe and happy. Many of them had only known this one king.

These were good times.

But everything changed one day, after the king had a dream. This dream convinced him it was time for him to leave. It was time for someone else to lead the kingdom. He immediately summoned the council and shared this news.

All the councilors were in shock but soon realized that they could not convince the king to stay. The council set out to replace the king and told everyone in the kingdom about the search. As word spread throughout the kingdom, the citizens experienced different emotions about this situation: shock, anger, denial, fear, and even depression. But there was no opportunity to discuss these feelings. The citizens were never given a chance to celebrate all they had achieved under the king. They had to hold in their concerns for the kingdom, their feelings about the old king, and their hopes for the future. The council was too busy replacing the king to worry about such things. In fact, all normal kingdom business was interrupted, as all efforts were devoted to finding a new king.

In time, many neighboring princes were invited to visit the kingdom. Many citizens picked their favorite among the princes and argued about who they thought should become king. There wasn't any consensus, and the process caused greater confusion, disunity, and anxiety.

To make matters worse, while these prince visits were going on, some of the shopkeepers held a secret meeting to discuss the situation. They concluded that kings were too old-fashioned and decided the constitution should be changed to let the council run the kingdom. Besides, this would reduce taxes and make all the business owners happy!

Amidst all this emotion, excitement, and confusion, a wise stranger came to visit the kingdom.

Having seen this sort of turmoil in other kingdoms, he went to the palace steps, gathered everyone around, and boldly announced:

Everyone! You have missed the point. Replacing the king is the wrong place to begin. You should start with yourselves. You have an opportunity to rediscover who you are, what kind of kingdom you are, and what kind of kingdom you want to be. Only when you know what kind of kingdom you want to be can you ever hope to find the right king to lead you there.

The citizens and the council heeded this advice and asked the wise stranger for his help. As the stranger talked to the people, he found out about all the strengths and challenges within the kingdom. The stranger was able to challenge the way some things had been done up till then. He helped some people overcome their fear of change and kept everyone focused on what the future of the kingdom should be.

After months of working with the stranger, the citizens were able to get over their disappointment over the old king leaving and their fear about the future. In fact, they were all excited about the future and had developed a good understanding of what kind of kingdom they wanted to be. Eventually, they found a new king who was well suited to lead them into the future, not just a replacement for their old king.

Before the stranger left, he joined in the old king's farewell celebration, including the dedication of a giant statue in front of the palace, which would forever recall the king's glorious reign.

At the dedication, the king revealed the details of his dream: it was a vision of two possible futures facing the kingdom he so loved. The first possible future was a continuation of the current reality—more of the same—where the kingdom's potential was limited by his presence and everyone had grown tired and complacent. In the second possible future, relationships were revitalized, and a renewed vision for the kingdom was established. In this second future, everyone was spurred on to greater achievements under a new king.

Note: *A Cautionary Tale* was written by Andrew Hurrell, an Associate member of Outreach Canada. The story was originally written for a church needing some convincing that intentional interim ministry was a positive option for them. We ended up using the story to introduce our book *Between Pastors: Seizing the Opportunity*.

Feel free to use the story yourself with those congregations or individuals who might need a story to help get a picture of the benefits and value of intentional interim ministry. *Between Pastors* will be available in October, so stay tuned for how you can get a copy for yourself and others.