

Leading Out of Love
The Christian Leader's Guide
to Genuine Ministry

By

Paul Heier

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accomplished while still “being” the people they were
intended to be,

You, the reader, for your willingness to be changed by
the amazing power of God’s love and grace as you
lead others.

Dedication

*To my family (actual and adopted) who
is helping me along on my journey to Christian
“being.” Thank you!*

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Prologue

“I love You, Lord Jesus!” I whispered after realizing how far God has already brought me in my journey with Him.

My pilgrimage in Christian leadership has been a difficult one. I have felt alone many times. There have been days—actually even weeks—when I felt like quitting. I have stopped a number of times, but I have never really quit.

My journey started at age 13. As we sat in our family room, my father led me to the Lord. He had undergone extensive surgeries, yet his health lingered in the balance. Somewhere between the intensive care unit and our suburban home, he had “gotten right” with Jesus. He felt a holy obligation to tell me about Christ. I responded immediately by turning to Jesus Christ in faith and asking Him to save me from my sins.

One year later we moved to Florida and I was “called to preach.” It is hard for me to describe the “call to preach.” A lot of folks don’t believe in it anymore. They have all kinds of theological reasons for their position. I really don’t! All I know is that Jeremiah described a “fire” deep down inside.

But if I say, “I will not remember
Him or speak anymore in His name,”
Then in my heart it becomes like a
burning fire shut up in my bones.
Jeremiah 20:9

That is what I felt. I felt a holy fire that seemed to draw me to the preaching ministry like a porch light draws a June bug. My pastor pushed me into the pulpit shortly thereafter. The entire congregation had to suffer through my eight-minute sermons about once a month. My pastor really believed in God, and apparently, he really believed in me, too.

I went off to college. I took as many Bible courses as I possibly could. I went off to the church as a youth pastor. What an eye-opening experience. My training hardly prepared me for my work in the church. What joy! What suffering! What immense pain! What a thrill!

Our church split and at the ripe old age of 22 or so, I ended up pastoring the splinter group. I was a man of great experience! That little church taught me the importance of prayer. I finished a seminary extension course only to find out that it had little to do with the work of the ministry.

After struggling and suffering, I finally moved and left for another seminary. My experience was helpful although troubling at times. I can remember sitting in a class learning how to put together a worthwhile sermon, but I had been preaching since I was fourteen. Did the professor honestly have something to teach me about effective sermons? Yes and no. His methods were helpful—his lack of experience was not. He did teach me something about grace. It was here that I first learned about the victorious Christian life and the

spiritual disciplines that could aid me in experiencing that same victory.

I worked in a strangely depressing business while in seminary. The Lord, however, used this experience to teach me sales, marketing, people skills, and just plain old common sense. I then returned to Florida.

Eventually I was invited to work as an administrator at a Bible college. Could it get any better than that!?! I would teach, counsel, and preach. Wow! I had finally arrived. So many pastors dream of moving on to “college work.” When I was a youth pastor I dreamed of being a pastor. When I was a pastor, I dreamed of being a Bible college professor or administrator. When I was a Bible college administrator, God replanted the original dream of being a pastor.

I left to start a church. What a walk in faith! I also work as a consultant to a Bible college and occasionally as a professor. I find myself experiencing a greater sense of fulfillment than ever before.

I have a passion. My passion is to see men and women become effective leaders for Christ. I believe in growth. I believe in love. I believe in caring. Of course, I believe in the Bible. I believe in having a lively, one-on-one relationship with Jesus, too.

While I certainly don't have all the answers, I do have some of them. And, they're not coming in the form of untested theory. I am living, learning and

developing these answers right now. I want to pass along the things I have learned in my brief but painful journey. I want to tell you the things from my heart that I wish someone had told me. Here goes!

One: Who is a Leader?

No, I am not actually going to name the leaders of this world. My point is that our focus is usually on what a leader does instead of “who” he or she is. We have forgotten “who” we are.

Our identities are completely bound up in what we do instead of “who” we are. I nearly came apart when I realized that my identity was not based on works, but on relationships. I thank God for two professors from my latest round of seminary studies, Drs. Wess Pinkham and Kevin Belsby, who helped me to understand ministerial identity and who God used to put me back together. My cataclysmic run in with my own lack of identity was the beginning of my undoing, but it was also the beginning of understanding genuine ministry, too. I desperately needed to bridge this gap between doing and being.

I had learned since childhood that a leader leads—and that a preacher preaches. It was a subtle trick of the Devil. It sounds so innocent. The problem is that a leader who merely leads may not lead down the right path. A preacher who merely preaches may be just another windbag.

Who are you as a leader?

Are you a lover of Christ? An ego-maniac? A fanatic? A warrior? What is going on in the inside? Where is your soul? How does God view you? After all, it is not as if you can really hide anything from

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Him. He even knows the thought that just passed through your mind. Oh the horror of an all-knowing, all-seeing God.

This all-knowing, all-seeing God is not looking at you as a Judge. He is looking as an all-compassionate lover of your soul. You *are* your soul. Jesus loves you. I know it is easier to picture Him as the divine lightning pitcher, winding up a billion watt curve ball intended for you and all the other sinners. The fact is, Jesus was gracious and merciful toward sinners. He wants the real you. And, He loves the real you.

Who are you?

If you are like the average pastor, deacon, lay-leader, or church-goer you've learned to conceal your true identity. You have learned to hide your messy side. You have built walls so tall that not even Spiderman could scale them! You have been taught to do this by your pastors, your parents, your co-workers, your neighbors, and virtually everyone else with whom you have come in contact. We are a generation of fakers.

We know the game. We play to win. Do we really win though? I think not. Look at the divorce rate. Examine the stats on married (or even single) men who view pornography. Think of the lonely wives and the abandoned children. Our game is not really a game—it is a nightmare.

I am done playing. I hope you are too.

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Here is the question again, who are you?

I know it is a little frightening because you are so used to hiding in the shadows. Your spouse may not even know the real you. God certainly does know you whether you like it or not. Now is the time to “fess up.”

Make peace with who you are and then make peace with who God has called you to be. Let’s not worry about the doing for now. Let’s just look at the “being” and the thinking.

I know “about” a lot of things. For instance, I know that George Washington was the first president and that he was a great man. I know that he crossed the Delaware River and that he cut down a cherry tree. He is merely a great historical figure in my mind. That is the way many people view Jesus—just a great historical figure. While Jesus was a man in history and we can locate Him in time and space, He is not merely historical. You believe in the resurrection, don’t you? We can know the living Jesus right now. Knowing about Washington has not significantly changed or molded my life. I am not supposed to merely know about Jesus. Don’t get me wrong, it is great to know about Him, but there is more to it than that. I must know Him.

I am supposed to be divinely connected to Him in a relationship. My connection is based on faith. I know Him (and about Him) through His divine

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Autobiography, the Bible. A Christian leader must be connected to Christ by more than mere knowledge about Him. There must be a living, breathing relationship based on the love of Christ and the leader's desire to truly know Him.

Too often Christian leaders talk about faith, but they don't really exhibit any. What is the basis for our faith? We have the testimonies of thousands of people in the Bible who say that Jesus is reliable. They have gone before us and their resounding message is that Jesus can be trusted. He is worthy of trust.

Where are you as a leader?

Are you a person of genuine faith? I am not talking about saving faith—I am assuming you are a Christian, a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ—that is, that you have initially trusted Jesus to forgive you of your sins and to change your life. I am talking about an ongoing faith in Jesus Christ. I am talking about a connection to Him, a daily dependency that says, “God, I am really trusting and loving You today.”

Jesus told his disciples that a little faith goes a long way in ministry. This is a book of faith. A book about really trusting Jesus. A book about how to see your love relationship with Christ worked out into various phases of your life as a leader. Read on!

Two: The Leader as a Theologian

Every person has a theology, but not every person is a theologian. There is a difference. A theologian is a person who realizes he has a theology and reflects on it. Our theologies inform the rest of our being. Even a non-believer has a theology! There is a certain danger in being a theologian. We tend to focus so much on learning about and knowing about theology that we tend to miss God altogether. Theology literally means the “study of God.” Unfortunately many try to study Him without ever experiencing an ever-growing love relationship with Him. What is the real point of theology—to study or to know?

I already mentioned that a host of people have helped me to see the danger in “doing” merely to “do.” They have rightly emphasized the importance of “being.” In other words, there is a certain level at which all of us must see who we really are. Who am I? Why am I here? Why do I exist? Why has God called me to do this? What are my faults? My failures? What are my successes? My strong points?

The Depression of Discovering What You Really Believe and Practice

There is a certain depression that goes along with realizing who you really are. I am probably not exactly the person that I want you to believe I am. I am not allowed to be the same in public and in private. This is one of the worst lessons I acquired in studying for the

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ministry: “Get really thick skin.” “Don’t become friends with members of your congregation.” “Keep your distance.” “People cannot handle seeing or knowing that their pastor has struggles, too.” Be fake.

Hide your faults. Never let them see you.
What a crock!

Where did Jesus teach that? When did He tell the apostles to “fake it”? When did He hide His own struggles or hurts?

Hiding our inadequacies, failures, and insecurities just does not work. It is only a matter of time before “they” see us for who we really are. Depression comes when we see that the “public us” is not really the same as the “private us.”

I am not advocating standing before your congregation and sharing your perverted thoughts or your sexual temptations, but I am advocating a Jesus-like vulnerability and transparency. You will be amazed at how the people under your care will respond when they realize that you actually understand what it is like to be human.

In my case, I am a conservative, Bible-believing Christian. However, many of my traditions and much of my training had not brought me to the place I wanted to be—or the place God wanted me to be. I learned how to defend the Bible. I am a staunch defender of the faith. I can do battle with someone on a

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number of theological subjects and leave him emotionally wounded.

What an important skill! Remind me, please, where did Jesus promote this idea? Oh, He did not. Of course, Jesus wants us to know the Bible. We must know what we believe and why we believe it. There are reasonable and logical theological arguments that are highly important. And, there is nothing more irritating than an uneducated, know-it-all-pastor who mocks theological education while single-handedly destroying verse after verse. I am not advocating ignorance—merely balance.

Balance is not what I had. I had all the answers, but no relationship. Maybe you can identify with “Pedaling.” It is something I wrote when I discovered my love for doing and my lack of zest for Christ:

I awoke to a nightmare.
I say “to” instead of “because of” because it
didn’t end when I awoke.

The night was dark and eerie. There were
shadows everywhere.

Light was hardly found and constantly
dampened. The day was equally gloomy.

A day of hopeful despair.

I looked to the right and saw a beautiful
stream. It wasn’t really moving except for a
light trickle of water at one spot. It was the kind
of stream or little pond that you see in Florida.
It’s really a swamp. Trees and plants grow up,

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but their roots are immersed in water much of the year.

There in the swamp—in the beautiful stream—I saw an image. A vision. A flash. Was it real or imagined?

It wasn't large. It wasn't easily identified. It was just below the surface. Sometimes you might see a baby alligator or a fish, but that's not what I saw. It wasn't a snake or a bug. Or, anything normal.

I focused harder on the water. I tried to see just below the surface as you do when you're looking for a fish or shark or whale or whatever! It disappeared. It always runs when you stare it down. You can feel it.

Then it flashed by again. There was a ripple, but still I couldn't see it. What is it? Where did it go? When will it return? The harder I looked the more mysterious it became. It was a monster. A creature.

A small one at that. It was quiet, as if it were strategizing my demise. It gave off a feeling of lethal power. The scent was stifling. The darkness swirled above. The shadows swirled below. I was alone. There was no fear on my part though, only wonder. A gentle amazement, sort of like the kind a young boy has when he catches his first lightning bug in a glass jar. More like the surprise he has the next day when he discovers his new pet is dead. The amazed disappointment. The profound sadness. The how-could-this-have-happened feeling.

This monster—part animal, part human, and part machine—was well-known to me. I

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had met him before. He comes in the lonely times. In the discouraging times. In the times of ability and even in the times of inability. This “doer” was the kind of lying snake that Hollywood models their worst villains after. I was not scared of him only because of my familiarity with him. I’d seen him before. I’d been left to clean up his messes before. I had met him in the laboratory of life many times.

He’s a villain’s villain—the real thing. No mercy—all demand. Action. More action and then destruction. Superman on steroids. He lurks in the shadows but is no stranger to the spotlight either. He’s a chameleon changing color and even shape when it’s in his best interest. He’s illusive but nearly ubiquitous.

He lies, rambles, and hypnotizes his victims. It’s as if he himself is running off of some Hollywood script spawned in the arena of the feel-better crowd. He destroys to dazzle. He learns merely to destroy. Sounds like grace, but feels like pain. As I focused deeply on the image in the water, I knew for sure that he was I. And, I was he. Oh, the pathetic life of a person who only does to do!

Where has love gone? Where is the meaning for all of this doing?

I felt so far away from home. I hadn’t been over that way in quite a while. It felt so far away. Then I realized just how close to home I was. It only felt so far away. You see knowledge and feelings are not always properly linked. “Doing” and “being” are not always properly connected. The monster owns wire-cutters and uses them at will.

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Realities that are merely explored and never integrated or felt are never my realities. The monster calls for isolation, protectionism, and knowledge—the real me longs to know and to be known.

The real me wants to be at home with the Father. The real me wants to hold and be held. The real me wants to be sent as a son on a divine errand. Always knowing that Christ's home is in my heart. And, my home is in Him. To feel the peaceful feeling of finally being at home.

Monsters don't live in my home—only in the swamp of busyness and religion. In the enclave of the self-made-man. And in the hearts of the hated—those poor souls trying to somehow merit the overwhelming grace of Christ. Those miserable, lonely monsters who only want to love and to be loved. For real.

Spreading the Misery

I have seen Bible college student after Bible college student learn more information about God while internally withering from a lack of relational nourishment. Anyone who has been in a Bible college or seminary setting can attest to the difficulty of maintaining their personal spirituality while being in this “theological” environment. I am an advocate for Bible college and seminary training. I think it is great. But, I believe we need to do a better job of teaching our students what it is to be spiritual.

*Do You Really Believe in the Necessity of a
Relationship with Jesus?*

We always tell people that they need to have a “personal relationship with Jesus,” but we do not always believe it. Dallas Willard, Brennan Manning, and a host of other authors have made this point so well. We really do not believe in having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We have an initial meeting—but no actual relationship. I’ve met some famous people, but I don’t have a relationship with any of them. Meeting someone and having a relationship with them are not necessarily the same thing. Introductions do not always lead to relationships.

A relationship takes time. A relationship takes energy. A relationship requires communication and sacrifice, and...well, relationships are difficult. How much time have you spent talking to Jesus this week?

Go ahead and quickly add up those pre-meal prayers that are fired off like a shot out of the starting gun at a local track meet. Really! How long have you spent talking to Jesus this week? Sure. Add up the minutes at church or at the prayer meeting. Go ahead. Let’s hear it.

If you are like so many Christians that I know (I am one myself), the answer is painful, even embarrassing. Maybe you talked to Him, but how much did you listen? A person who only talks in a relationship and never listens is a user. Do we treat

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God like that? No, of course not. Not us Bible-believers! My point isn't to make you feel bad, but to invite you to examine the quality of your relationship with Jesus.

Our souls have turned up missing. The human spirit is absent without leave. There is not just, as someone has said, a "God-sized hole" in me. There is a "me-sized hole" in me, too. I am missing. Out to lunch. I am so busy doing that I have never "been."

Maybe we shouldn't call ourselves "Bible-believers"—maybe we should use the term "Bible-be-ers." I say "be-ers" instead of "doers" because we are already way too focused on "doing." We "do" without "being."

Is my theology really a system of "doing"? Or, is it a system of "being"?

Love is the Key in a Relationship

"I love You, Lord Jesus!" I whispered.

I was praying the other day. I mean really praying.

I had been convicted by the Spirit. I am not one to start a debate about signs and wonders or strange happenings, but I had a bit of a strange experience. I hope that you won't shut me out at this point. I really think you will be able to identify with my experience.

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I was face-down on my living room floor. The Holy Spirit was convicting me about my lack of “being.” I am a “doer” from a long-line of “doers.” Anybody who is not a “doer” isn’t much in our book. We brag about doing more in a single day than many people do in a whole week.

The Lord brought to mind a very familiar passage—John 21:15-19:

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where

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you do not wish to *go*.” Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me!”

In that passage, Jesus asks Peter three times whether he (Peter) loves Jesus. Peter is heart-broken, amazed, awe-struck. Of course he loves Jesus. How dare God doubt his love? Jesus saw right through Peter’s impulsiveness! He wants a consistent love relationship with us—not an occasional visit.

It was as if Jesus asked me that same question. “Paul, do you love me?” I said, “of course.” He said, “No, really! Do you love Me?”

I was baffled. Of course I love Him.

Finally, in desperation I began to cry out to God. I mean really cry out. People with my sort of theological background and beliefs are not supposed to do that kind of thing!

Finally, God spoke to my heart. He said, “I know you love your ministry, but do you love Me?” Whew. “I know you love your ministry, but do you love me?” It gets worse. Then, He said the most amazing thing. It was one of the most painful sentences that has ever been spoken to me. It was also one of the truest.

“Paul, you are having an affair with your ministry.”

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“You are supposed to love me and do the ministry out of your love for Me.”

Wow! I was crushed. God was right. I was having an affair with my ministry. I am the bride of Christ and yet I was having an affair—an act of immorality—with my church. I was so focused on the church that I forgot about Jesus. I was so busy “doing” that I “wasn’t.” God was not impressed. Are you more in love with your day-to-day ministry than you are with Jesus?

I repented and spent several weeks in prayerful inactivity before Him. Here is what I mean by “prayerful inactivity:” I stopped “doing” and asked Him to help me learn “being.” Then, I asked Him to help me “do” out of my love for Him. I now “do” out of my “being.”

Do you have a theology of “doing” or “being”? Have you had an affair with your ministry? With your theology? With your studies? Have you made an idol out of something in your life?

Does your theological system have a place for a living, loving relationship with Jesus? Not just in theory, but in practice! My life changed drastically when a professor (Kevin Belsby whom I mentioned earlier) explained the simplicity with which Jesus summed up spirituality for us in Mark 12:29-31:

Jesus answered, “The foremost is,
‘HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR

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GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ The second is this, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

My personal attempts at spirituality had been anything but simple! In this passage, He stated that spirituality consists of “loving God” and “loving your neighbor.” That is “being.” Sure there is an element of “doing,” but it is “doing” out of “being.” We love God and therefore we love our neighbors.

That is what Peter learned in John 21, too. He learned that ministry comes out of love for Jesus. He had something real to give to those to whom he ministered. Out of his love for Jesus came the genuine attitude and heart of ministry. He did not just do ministry to do ministry. It was an overflow out of his love relationship with Jesus.

What does your love relationship with Jesus look like?

Do you really believe we are supposed to have a personal relationship with Jesus?

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What is the truth about your real, internal theology? What do you really believe? Careful, it might be showing. Do you live your theology or is it something you talk about to impress your friends or family?

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Three: The Leader's Mission

Okay. You managed to figure out who Jesus is. You have learned something about the Bible. Maybe you are in Bible college now or you've been to seminary. You have learned about theology, but what have you learned about yourself?

There is a huge disconnect between what we learn and study in the Scriptures and who we are. We forget that the purpose of the Bible is to inform and *conform* us into the people we were intended to be. God does not want us to stop being human. He created us. He wants us to live like the humans we are supposed to be. He created us for one reason: to have fellowship with Him. It is about a relationship. Specifically, it is about a relationship with Jesus Christ, the Creator-Redeemer God. He wants a relationship with you so badly that He died to make it possible. He went a step further and gave us the Holy Spirit. He went a step beyond and gave us the Bible. He is serious about His intention to have a relationship with us.

Many of us have a difficult time trusting people. We have tried and failed. Or been hurt. We then develop a policy of non-trust—even with God. He longs to be in a trusting, loving relationship with us. He longs to hold us close. He wept over Jerusalem and said in Matthew 23:37 that He wanted to embrace the people of Jerusalem: “How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.” What a picture. He wants to hold us in His arms. Can we trust Him enough to let

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Him do that? Can we stop “doing” long enough to let Him “love on” us?

Who doesn't like to know that he is loved?

Before you and I can understand our mission, we must understand who we are. Who are you? Are you a lover of Christ? Or, are you simply another busy minister or Christian leader? When is the last time you let Christ love you? When is the last time you really felt His love?

Do you think He will scream loudly enough to be heard over all of your “busyness” and all the noise that you constantly produce and invite? The Psalmist said in Psalm 46:10 (KJV) that we are to “be still.” One translation says, “Cease!” In other words, unplug. Unplug from the world. Unplug from the activity. Unplug from ministry. Unplug from everything until you sense the love of Jesus. This is not a novel idea—just read the New Testament. Why did Jesus withdraw to a solitary place over and over again to spend time with His Father? Why did John bother to quote Jesus as saying that we are “in Him” and that He is “in us” (John 14:18-21)? When was the last time that you really felt like God was with you—let alone in you?

Your Mission in Life

What is mission? Mission is simply my reason for existence or the purpose behind my life. I think it is wise for a person to have one general mission

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statement and then to have several smaller ones for key areas of his life.

You need a mission in life and in leadership, but you cannot have a mission until you really know who you are and who Jesus is. There are many reasons people have not established effective mission statements for their lives. Let's explore some of them.

Are you happy about your "place" in life right now? It might be better to say "content." There is a difference in the way we use the term "content" and the way the Apostle Paul used it in Philippians 4:12 where he said, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." We often simply mean "lazy." Or, we sometimes mean that we have settled for less than excellence. Paul certainly was not lazy. He did thank God for all that he had, but he worked very, very hard at accomplishing the Lord's will.

Are you content? Are you where you want to be or should be? For most of us, the answer is no. I don't think it is unspiritual to say, "no." We know that we have not given it our best shot. Sure we are content with the Lord and with many of our relationships, but the fact is that we haven't maintained our relationship with the Lord and with others like we really wanted to. Why not?

Some people really feel powerless. They do not feel like they can change. They do not really believe that they can have a consistent walk with the Lord. Do you feel powerless to change or have a different life?

Do you really believe that the Word and the Spirit can change you?

What makes people feel like they have to keep going down a road on which they do not want to be? Usually it revolves around one of three things: guilt, fear, and/or greed.

The Power and Pain of False Guilt

Perhaps you are living under the tremendous pressures of *false* guilt. I say false guilt because you really do not have a reason for feeling guilty. False guilt occurs when you feel guilty on behalf of, or because of, someone else's belief system. You feel guilty for things that are not your fault. Many people have a poor view of God, and this causes them to have an unbelievable amount of false guilt.

☞ An Example: You love your mother and want her to love you, too. Maybe your mother is overweight, and you can hear her saying on the tape playing in your mind, "eat your dinner—don't get too skinny." You hear the phrase over and over again—you feel guilty for not following her directions. Now you find yourself overweight and unhappy, partially because of something that was actually said twenty or thirty years ago. You may have subconsciously repeated it ever since.

Many, many Christians are plagued by false guilt. Some of it is encouraged through our theological traditions, our parents, our friends, or even our

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congregations. Make a list of everything you feel guilty about—you may have to make a list of the phrases that you repeat to yourself, too. Chances are that you catch yourself mentally repeating phrases that somebody said to you and that you have chosen to believe. You may have been living according to them even though they were not necessarily true! What are those phrases? Whose voice says them to you? Or, have you said them to yourself for so long that it is actually your voice which now says them?

I really believe that false guilt can stop a person in his or her tracks. So many people could be and do so much for the Lord, but they can never separate the false guilt from the real guilt. They live in bondage to someone else's convictions or neurotic hang-ups.

Evaluate your list. When you look at each item, prayerfully ask yourself, "Is it genuine guilt (in other words, did you do something wrong—do you need to talk with somebody to make it right?) OR is it false guilt (just *perceived* guilt)?" Are you trying to please somebody who is dead or who does not even remember making such a statement? Are you worrying about a problem you do not have? Are you living your life according to someone else's voice? Sounds like a form of idolatry to me.

Real guilt is a gift from God. It is the conscience at work. In this way, God places a mental block on us so that we will take time to reflect and repent. You might discover some real, genuine guilt by making a list. If so, ask the Lord to forgive you (Psalm 51) and then go

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and make things right if necessary. You will feel such a sense of relief and your joy will return. Of course, it is not always correct or safe to go make things right in person. You may have to seek the advice of a pastor or counselor. Just make sure to prayerfully distinguish between false and real guilt.

I cannot overestimate the importance of real guilt. It is absolutely a gift from God. He designed the conscience to alert us to problem areas. It is like a warning strobe light that goes off when the fire alarm begins to sound—it is designed to get our attention. Many people suffer tremendous anxiety because of refusing to heed the warnings of their consciences.

The Power and Pain of Strange Fears

We have some strange habits because we have some strange fears. We often do the opposite of what we really want to do just because we are afraid. What is your biggest fear in life? When do you find yourself getting scared or nervous? Is there a failure from your past that still “haunts” you to this day?

It seems as if we are filled with fear. We know that God “has not given us a spirit of timidity” (2 Timothy 1:7) and that “there is no fear in love” because “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). What does that mean for us? We are not supposed to be afraid. Most of our fears will never come to fruition anyway. Satan can really attack a person’s mind. We may think that the deacons are out to get us. Or, that our supervisor wants to fire us.

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Many people are worried about running out of money. I know a millionaire who constantly worries that she will run out of money. She buys her clothes from garage sales and refuses to eat out because of the unnecessary expense. She rarely spends any money. She will leave a fortune to someone when she dies. She lives in absolute fear. She was raised in poverty and does not want to have to face that again.

How do you normally overcome your fears? Do you pray? Take some time to evaluate your fears. Are they real fears? Do you really have something of which to be afraid? Many of us tend to make our true fears bigger than they are—do you ever catch yourself doing that? Why are you afraid of these things? What can be done about it? How will you distinguish between true fear and perceived fear?

Fear is the opposite of faith, and fear can control you. God built fear into our souls. We are to fear Him. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 12:13 that we are to “fear God and keep His commandments.” We are not to live our lives in fear of other people or events. Jesus explained in Luke 12:5 that we should fear God because He is the One who has the right to cast people into hell. Then He goes on to explain that this “One” whom we are to fear loves and cares about us so much that He even knows how much hair we have (Luke 12:7)! Ask God to help you to become aware of your fears and to help you overcome them. Satan uses false guilt and fear to keep you from living in the victory, security, and blessing that God offers His children.

The Power and Pain of Greed

Many people continue down a road of greed because they want more and more. Do you ever find yourself at the end of such a road and wonder how you got there? So many people are plagued by emotional, social, and/or financial greed. What is it you are really after? And, why? Do you live, work, and minister out of greed?

Emotional greed is when you find yourself eating or spending because you are not getting the attention or love you need or deserve. Social greed is best illustrated by the talkative young person who focuses only on himself. He will not be quiet. He will not listen. He is so self-absorbed that no one else can get a word in. He is not just insecure—he is socially greedy. Of course, we all understand financial greed.

☞ For Example: Many people have huge credit card bills because they want more. They are trying to fill a void in their lives with shopping. Many of them are experiencing emotional greed—something in their lives is out of whack (in my opinion, most of the time it is a relationship). They try to fix it by buying everything they possibly can or by eating as much as they possibly can. Some turn to drinking, gambling, or any number of other things. Sometimes they fail in their own lives just to get back at a parent or spouse. Sometimes they actually end up spiting themselves.

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I really believe that emotional, social, and financial greed are caused by poor or inadequate relationships. People are searching for love. They want to be known. They want to know. Everybody desires love, affection, friendship, and attention. In our isolated world, people sink to some pitiful depths to fill their emotional voids.

Here are some practical suggestions at this point:

Go and talk to the people you need to go to—if it is the right thing to do.

Forgive the people you need to forgive—anger and revenge have not produced the results in your own life that you had hoped for—and let it go. The Bible is full of advice on forgiveness and love for others. Check out Matthew 6:14, Matthew 18:21-22, 1 John 2:12 and 1 John 4:7, 11. The Bible places a high premium on being able to forgive and love others. Look up some of the verses and ask God to really help you. Be honest with Him. Remember that He has forgiven you.

Understand the context in which various statements were made. Sometimes we repeat statements to ourselves that were made in a totally different context. Someone might say, “You look ridiculous! Maybe you should have turned on the bedroom light before getting dressed.” We might feel insecure and start believing that we always “look ridiculous.” They probably did not mean it in that way. And, even if they did, that doesn’t mean it’s true. Always think of other people’s comments in the context in which they were stated.

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Also, remember to evaluate the qualifications of another person to pass judgment on you.

Replace the negative statements with God's positive statements. Ask God to show you verses that will reveal something about His love for you or His work in your life.

Cultivate the relationships with people who support you emotionally and verbally—the really positive people in your life. Notice that Abraham did not take his servants or family up on the mountain when he got ready to sacrifice Isaac:

Abraham said to his young men,
“Stay here with the donkey, and I and
the lad will go over there; and we will
worship and return to you.”
Genesis 22:5

They would not have understood. They would not have supported him. Remember that not everybody can understand what the Lord is doing in your life or even what He has called you to do.

Do not expect everybody to support you. Do not build your identity and worth around other people's opinions or comments. And, don't spend too much time with unsupportive people. Human beings are prone to be jealous and greedy people. Watch out! Not everybody will truly be celebrating the new you! Yes, Jesus ministered to all kinds of people, but He did not spend inordinate amounts of time with negative

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people. Neither should you. Jesus always promoted “faith.” Do you spend time with people of faith or of doubt and fear? Jesus got pretty harsh with His own disciples for their lack of faith when He said, “you unbelieving and perverted generation” (Matthew 17:17). Jesus wants us to be people with faith and a faith-based outlook on life.

Realize that you were created to be responsible for yourself. We are not supposed to blame the current condition of our lives on others. Ask God to take charge of your life today. God has given you a mind full of ideas and intellect, a body capable of tremendous things, and with faith, the sky is the limit. Didn’t Jesus say that faith can move mountains?

What Do You Really Want Out of Life?

Many of the success “gurus” talk about how we tend to focus on the things in life we do not enjoy. Sometimes we have to look at what we do not enjoy to figure out where we are and how to move beyond our frustrations.

List some of the things you do not enjoy about the following areas of your life:

Professional

Family/Social

Financial

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Spiritual

Emotional

Physical

Other areas (for example, academics)

List some of the things you do enjoy about your
life:

Professional

Family/Social

Financial

Spiritual

Emotional

Physical

Other areas (for example, academics)

Ask the Lord to reveal His will for your life. Sometimes He calls us to endure certain types of stress or pressure. Other times, we simply cause or allow these things to occur. Much of the pressure that people experience is from a lack of planning or discipline.

Now, list three or four things from each applicable area that you would like to see changed or improved.

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Professional

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Family/Social

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Financial

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Spiritual

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Emotional

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Physical

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

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Other areas (for example, academics)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

What is Your Overall Mission in Life?

Let's talk about your overall mission in life. What is it that you would like to see accomplished in your life? Is it based on "who" you are or merely on what you are "doing"?

What is your overall life's mission statement? (Focus on "being") Write it here:

Now, jot down some of the things that you believe are God's dreams and desires for your life. What type of ministry are you passionate about? What events cause you to have positive and good feelings of faith?

Now put your "likes," "hopes," and "dreams" from the above area into sentences in each category. Make sure to use the present tense and phrase everything positively in faith. Avoid phrases like "I hope to..." or

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“I’ll try to....” Instead use words like “I always...” or “I love to...” or “I am...” or “God will help me to....”

Write your mission statement for each applicable area:

Professional

Family/Social

Financial

Spiritual

Emotional

Physical

Other areas (for example, academics)

As you look at the sentences you just wrote, do they match up with your overall mission in life?

God’s Mission for Moses

God gave Moses a divine dream in Exodus 3 and 4. Read it!

The LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have

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come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” Exodus 3:7-10

God inspired Moses with thoughts of “milk and honey.” God did not emphasize all the negative things about the land of promise. He emphasized the positive things. It was a “spacious” land. Moses must have spent a lot of time dreaming about the ramifications of the land of “milk and honey.” There must have been days when that dream was the only thing that kept him going. What dreams has God given you? Paul said in Philippians 2:13 that God “is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” Do you have a divine mission? Do you have a divine dream?

Envisioning: Imagining What Living Your Mission Will Look Like

The idea of envisioning is simply thinking about what your mission will look like in practical terms.

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What does it look like to do those things and be that kind of person? For instance, if your spiritual mission is to “be a lover of God,” what does that look like? You might envision it by saying the following:

I arise early in the morning and greet the Lord as I awake. I roll out of bed and fall on my knees. I call upon God. I thank Him. I radically love Him with my whole being. I take time to open my Bible and read it. I pause to listen and to meditate. I listen to worship music and sing to Him.

You must keep your dreams alive and well. Why did God give Moses that picture of “milk and honey”? He wanted Moses to be able to envision it. He wanted Moses to keep dreaming. He knows that human beings need visual pictures in order to live and accomplish things for Him.

We will talk about goals later. Make sure that you have one overall mission statement for your life and one for each important category of your life. Remember that your mission is more about “being” than “doing.” Make sure to attach an envisioning statement to each mission statement so that you can get an idea of what your life will look like when you are living your mission. Can you think of other places in the Bible where God helped someone discover his or her God-given mission and then painted a beautiful picture to help them stay focused?

*A Force that Can Destroy God's Mission for
Your Life: Lack of Faith*

There is one more area that can hold us back: lack of faith. It can be a lack of faith in God or in God's enabling power in our lives. Sometimes we just lack faith. We find ourselves surrounded by negative, doubting people who do not really believe that God still does amazing things. They would never openly confess their doubts, but their lives tell the story. They are used to failure and mediocrity. They have become lulled into a nauseatingly peaceful slumber by inactivity. Then we come on the scene and announce that we are praying and believing that God is going to do something great.

They look at us like frogs in the middle of a hailstorm. They want us to doubt too. They do not want us to be so high and mighty that we actually believe all of the stuff in the Bible. Soon we find ourselves lacking faith in God's enabling abilities in our own lives.

Moses suffered from this too. Remember the story you read in Exodus 3 and 4. God called Moses to do the job, but Moses did not think he was capable. He complained and moaned and groaned, but God didn't let him off the hook. Finally, Moses confessed that he did not believe he was able to do the job.

God made him a promise in Exodus 4:12 that I have paraphrased like this: "Moses, I'll be with your

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mouth.” Moses had confessed a problem with speaking and yet God saw right past it. God knows our weaknesses. He is familiar with our inabilities and inadequacies. He made us. When He calls us, He calls us. He is fully aware of the items on our resume. Nothing is a surprise to Him.

The surprise is ours—we cannot understand why God would want to use broken and fallen people like us for ministry and leadership. He does. He wants to use you and me. He won't let our weaknesses stand in His way so why should we let them stand in our way?

Do a little faith check on yourself. You have your mission, but it will be useless to you unless you have faith. A little faith goes a long way!

Four: The Leader as a Worshipper and Lover of God

I know that some people get a little queasy with my use of “lover of God.” “It is a bit much,” they reason in their minds. It is a little mushy. Perhaps it hits a little too close to home. Do you just want to be a friend of God? There is nothing wrong with friendship, but I am a little more radical than that. I am a lover of God. I really seek to love Him. I want to know Him. I want to feel His pulse in my own veins. I am not interested in keeping Him at a distance so that I can keep myself from feeling uncomfortable, intimidated, or emotional.

Many do not want such a close relationship with Jesus because they do not want to deal with their own personal issues. They cannot imagine getting that close to God. He is around for Sundays, holidays, and general emergencies. They get particularly close to Him when something goes wrong that the doctor cannot seem to fix. That is not spirituality—it is a mockery.

If spirituality is to be equated with “loving God,” is there any evidence that you are spiritual? In *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Brennan Manning does a masterful job of pointing out that God already loves us totally and completely. He focuses on God’s grace reaching out to us in such a way that there is nothing we can actually “do” to merit more of His love or grace. What a blessed thought!

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People get so touchy when you begin to talk about worship. Of course, there is the age-old debate on what kind of music we should have in church. Then we have to debate what it truly means to worship. Next we find ourselves in an inter-generational war. I refuse to be a part of any of that. I simply worship God and then model worship for our folks at church. When the music gets in the way, I turn it off or change it. Music is a tool for worship—not the end product.

Spiritual Devotion and Practice

There is always a danger in talking about spirituality and spiritual practices (or disciplines). Legalism creeps in so stealthily. I do not want you to get the wrong idea about spirituality. I can remember counseling Bible college students who were struggling with their own spirituality. I always started by asking them about their devotional habits. I can remember a time with a specific young man who was doing really well with his devotions until another professor explained the meaning of legalism in a class.

This student immediately decided he had been legalistic about having devotions and promptly stopped having them at the same time every day. Then, he completely stopped having them. When I met up with him he was quite torn between being a legalist and being spiritual! The two are not mutually exclusive. The fact is that spirituality takes discipline. It is hard to make yourself pray every day—that does not necessarily mean it is legalistic. I brush my teeth

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everyday. Does that make me legalistic? Not necessarily.

We know when we are blowing smoke and making excuses. It will be difficult to blow enough smoke to dull the vision of an all-seeing Savior. We do what we do out of our own relationship, but even in relationships we must have discipline. We do not always feel like doing the right things in a relationship, but that does not change our need to do the right things.

Just because a husband does not feel like being faithful to his wife does not mean he should go have an affair. Is it merely legalistic if he stays faithful even when he does not feel like it? Of course not! Why do we try to use such flawed logic on Christ? He does not buy it any more than a hurt wife would!

Dallas Willard has written a tremendous work on spiritual disciplines entitled, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. The Lord used it to help me evaluate my own spiritual practices (or lack thereof!). Spiritual practices are things that you can do in a disciplined way in order to aid your relationship with Christ. They can be things like Bible reading, meditating on verses, prayer, fasting, singing and seeking times of solitude.

What do I believe about prayer? Meditation? Worship? Fasting?

What do I practice? I can believe that prayer is my lifeline to Christ, but if I never pray, do I really believe

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it? If I am in a relationship with Christ then I must pray. I cannot have a good relationship if there is not any communication. So often we ask God to guide us and then we immediately get up, turn on the music, and start the day. When do we expect Him to guide us?

Are You Just a User?

We sometimes appear as mere “users” before the throne of God. “Lord, I have another need. Here I am boldly approaching You again.” It is a wonder God just does not scream out, “You are a user. I only hear from you when you need something.”

And yet, our God loves to give—even to users like us. He longs to hold us close. He longs to give to us. Jesus said that God loves to freely give and that He knows how to give great gifts (Matthew 7:11). We serve a giving and loving God who deserves more than just a minute here or a minute there. He deserves our time. He deserves our worship. He deserves our ears. He deserves our undivided attention.

How long would your best friend be your best friend if you never communicated with him?

Yet, God is still here. He is still our best friend. He longs to communicate and He longs to hear us. It is more than just the dust on our Bibles. It is the lack of time spent. The utter lack of reliance on Him. He just wants to hold us—to know us. He wants us to “feel” His love.

Our Example in Faith and Practice

I can remember when I invited one of my former seminary professors, Brad Mullen, to speak in chapel. His message was entitled something along the lines of “Jesus is more than our Savior—He is also our example.” He preached a fantastic series of messages based on the divine example Christ gave us in the New Testament. That is what we find in 1 Peter 2:21: “...since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.” Jesus is our divine Example. If we want to be spiritual, we should do what He did.

First of all, He loved and still does. Love is the foundation of all spirituality.

Secondly, He prayed. He sought quietness. He withdrew to the mountains and to quiet places to seek His Father (Matthew 14:23, Mark 6:46, Luke 6:12, and 9:28). He found strength in quietness and in prayer. It was not five minutes here and five minutes there. He did not have to scramble to come up with an hour a week!

Thirdly, He fasted. He assumed we would fast, too. Matthew 6:16 captures Him saying, “And whenever you fast...” In other words, He simply assumes we will fast. Fasting is not to earn His love or to try to earn the wonderful, gracious attention of Christ. It is to “unplug.” Fasting helps us free ourselves from the

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noise, busyness, and false dependencies that we have. It is simply a way for us to rely on God.

Fourthly, He taught us that we should worship. Isaiah saw God, and he was mesmerized in His presence:

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Isaiah 6:1-5

What is worship? Worship is a radical recognition of who God is. It is also a radical internalization of who God is and who I am in Him. Then, it is a radical response of love toward Him. When was the last time you stood in awe of God?

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When will be the next time? Why not now?

Jesus loves the Scriptures. He encouraged us to spend time reading, meditating, and pondering the Word. He believed “all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25), so why don’t we? We need to approach the Word as worshippers instead of as academic theologians.

I used to tell my classes that the “greatest theologian is not the one who knows theology, but the one who does theology.” Now I say that the “greatest theologian is the one who lives theology.” Do you know or do you live? Do you have a relationship with your Bible like you do with an encyclopedia or like a love letter from your wife?

We should spend time singing to God, too. Can’t you see the Psalmists singing to God? He loves it. Look at the emphasis on singing and praising God in both the Old and New Testaments. God loves singing and He loves to be loved.

The Power of Community

If God really is relational then we learn something about Him whenever we enter into good relationships. In Mark 12:30-31 where Jesus explains that the greatest commandment is to love God, we also find the shema: “HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD.” We find this remarkable teaching about the unity of the Godhead. We find this teaching

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about the Trinity preceding Jesus' comments on loving God and our neighbors.

Why did He include the shema there? Why is it in this passage? Jesus taught that God is His own community. In Genesis 1:26 we hear the Trinity talking amongst Himself: "Let Us make man in Our image." You see when we enter into a relationship with Jesus, we are entering into a relationship with the Father and with the Spirit.

And, when we enter into a relationship with other "neighbors," we are learning something about the essence of God—He loves unity and community. There is a part of theology we cannot learn from books. We must learn what it is to be part of a loving, God-honoring community. That is why God instituted work, the family, the church, and the Kingdom—so that we could learn about community and unity. Ultimately, community teaches us about God and it teaches the world about the love of God:

...that they may all be one; even as
You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You,
that they also may be in Us, so that the
world may believe that You sent Me.
John 17:21

We will never succeed in our spirituality if we try to do it in a manner that is independent of God and independent of the rest of the spiritual community. They need us and we need them. Leaders who go out on their own are destined to fail. They will fall. And,

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they will be alone when it happens. Oftentimes, they are completely alone, having lost their families, their friends, their churches, and even their souls. This was never the plan of God!

And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” Mark 8:34-36

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Five: The Leader's Personal Identity and Integrity

We cannot go very far without getting back to this idea of identity. Who am I? What does God have to say about who I am?

Servant, minister, leader, disciple, worshipper, follower, preacher, prayer warrior.

Lover of Christ and man!

So many of us have been taught a false theory of integrity. We have this crazy idea that “integrity is not getting caught!” Nothing could be further from the truth. It is not difficult to think of a number of recent religious and political scandals involving a lack of integrity. You and I probably do not have enough fingers and toes to count the number of people we know who have a near zero quotient of integrity!

Being a “lover of God” can make all the difference in the world. Paul lists all of the horrible characteristics of people in the “last days” in 2 Timothy 3. He comes to the ultimate point at the end of verse 4 and the sum of verse 5 when he says that men will be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.” Lovers of Christ cannot have other competing loves in their lives—not even their ministries!

Honesty: The Key Ingredient for a Life of Integrity

God's desire for us is that we are honest before Him. He wants to have both an open line of communication and a healthy relationship with us. He is not looking for perfect people. Honesty is difficult for most of us. It is not that we lie. We just do not tell Him everything. I am not sure why we do that. He already knows everything. It is sort of like my little dog. She honestly believes that if she cannot see you, then you cannot see her. God is not like that. He is a lot brighter than my dog. And, so are you. You and I know better, but we still play the game. The only people we end up hurting is ourselves. We carry around pain for years. We were never intended to carry that pain by ourselves. Jesus encouraged us to "come unto" Him (Matthew 11:28). Why would we want to keep the pain to ourselves when help is readily available? It is not a second rate, oh-I-hope-this-guy-knows-what-he's-doing kind of help. It is real help from a real God.

Not one of us is sinless, and frankly, God understands that. We really need to take an inventory of ourselves. What are our weaknesses? What are our strengths? How do others perceive us? What is the image that we try to project?

Knowing our weaknesses and failures, we need to approach God and seek His help. We can and should set up relationships of accountability and care. They

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are not merely for the purpose of sharing our horror stories. We are not to make an accountability session a whipping post. Again, that would only promote dishonesty, compromise, and a stealthy rearrangement of the facts! We need honest, loving, God-honoring relationships. Why did Jesus send the disciples out two-by-two?

Many have tried to put the fear of God in us. They told us that our “sins will find us out” and that our sins will play on a giant movie screen when we get to Heaven. Ecclesiastes 12:14 does say that “God will bring every act to judgment.” I do not think these kinds of texts are meant to scare us—they are meant to motivate us. We are to remember that “sinning” is serious business before a holy God. He does know what is going on. He does know what we are doing. We should strive to live holy and honorable lives before Him. This striving should not be based on embarrassment or fear of being found out, but rather on our relationship with the holy God who loves and calls us.

I remember reading about a Bible college student who was killed in an automobile accident. The newsletter from this particular Christian university extolled the young man because of his character. They even indicated that no evil things were found in his car at the scene of the accident! What a shame. This poor fellow was evaluated according to what he did not do—even after he was dead.

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We should fear God. More than that, we should love God. We should run to Him and embrace Him. We should allow Him to embrace us. What a glorious moment. If we lived in this love relationship with Jesus, we would be more transparent and more concerned about holiness. It would be the kind of holiness that is bound in an eternal love/honor code. It would not be an obligation but a responsibility. It is a logical setting of boundaries within our love relationship with Christ. Wouldn't that be life changing?

Have you ever taken a personality test? Do you remember the initial shock and disgust at seeing what you were really like. I used to administer them to my staff at the Bible college where I worked. Usually, after taking this sort of test a person experiences a 48-hour period of depression. I know that I did.

It is like having a mirror held up to your soul—you cannot deny the facts. It hurts. It is an honest and needed pain. We must all find out who we are before the resurrected Christ. We must pray that the Spirit of God would be empowered in us. We must cling to Abba and enjoy the comforts of our relationship with Him.

I think we should ask ourselves, “Why will I be a leader of integrity?” Is it just a commitment? Is it merely another act of doing? Is it part of the overall facade of being in ministry? Or, is it based in and on our relationship with the God of the Bible? Jonah agreed to “pay that which he had vowed” (Jonah 2:9),

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but it did not last very long. His heart was not in it. Commitments made outside of a consistent relationship will not last.

The Implications of Integrity

Integrity means doing the right things and being the right person. It means that I act as a son or daughter of God. Out of respect and mutual love for my Father I choose to be and do right. Couldn't the world in general and the church in particular use a genuine dose of integrity?

I think it is interesting that God did not ask us to stop being human. He merely asked us to "love God" and "love our neighbors." So many times we get caught in the trap of trying to undo our humanity. Jesus never requested that. Jesus came to liberate us from sin. He came to break the bonds of sin (Romans 6:6). God wants us to be the kind of humans that we were created to be. We can finally live in the walking, talking, loving, sharing kind of relationship that Adam and Eve had with God before the fall. Don't fight your humanity—understand it. God wants to have fellowship with humans.

No human is perfect, but one of the two people in our relationship with Jesus *is* perfect. Isn't that amazing. He is perfect and He unites with us. He understands and forgives our imperfections. Doesn't that make you love Him even more?

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The God whom Isaiah saw as “exalted” seated on His throne in Isaiah 6 is the same God who cries out in the Person of Jesus to the hurting, the sinful, the ashamed, the bruised, and the weary and says, “Come to Me.” What a relief! We can run to God instead of away from Him. He invites us to come into His temple, and He does not even worry about the stains we leave on His robe (it fills the room) from our soiled shoes or our dirty souls. He loves us. He wants us to come. He does not ask us to stand in front of the throne. He leaps up. He throws His arms around us and welcomes us home. The father of the prodigal son was elated to see his soiled son. Jesus is even more elated to see you. In Matthew 23 Jesus wept over Jerusalem and lamented the fact that He could not hold them to His own chest.

We finally look down at our soiled clothes after spending time in the King’s embrace and we realize that our clothes are clean for the first time ever. The King has washed our clothes. He washed us. What a relief! The King allows us in His presence. He ushers us in. He embraces us. He washes our clothes. And, He fills us with love and grace. He gives us His dignity. Wow. Dignity—the first real dignity we have ever had. Purpose. A reason to live.

Jesus wants to embrace you. He will help you to be a leader of integrity after you are honest with Him. You need to figure out who He is—that is why you have the Bible. Then, you need to figure out who you are “in Him.” The King of kings wants you to stand in the holy place with Him. Be a leader of integrity. Be a

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leader who is honest with God and forthright in your
ministry.

The King is watching!

Six: The Leader as a Minister and Missionary

The term “minister” evokes thoughts of everything from a scholarly, white-haired, kindly cleric to that of a “Gen-X” youth pastor in shorts and a t-shirt. The fact is that all of us are called to be ministers. We are called to serve.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:1

Service is an ugly word in our culture. Nobody wants to be called a “servant.” Worse than that, nobody wants to be treated like one. We are told that Jesus was a servant (John 13:5-20). Think about the complexities of that for just a moment.

The eternal God of the ages was a servant. The One who spoke the world into existence, breathed breath into the first human beings, and has the armies of Heaven at His disposal was a servant. It is difficult to stomach. We have so many ways to get out of it. We

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can rationalize, deputize, nullify, and justify, but the fact is, we are called to be servants.

The True Meaning of Ministry

I just reviewed an old word study that I did on “minister.” Wow! There are six words in the New Testament that could be translated as “minister” or “to minister.” Let me get to the point. They all include work. Being a minister is not for the faint at heart. There is a lot involved.

Definitions range from any of the following: being a helper, helping with manual labor, taking care of sacred services, helping to row a boat, and generally supporting the rest of the work that goes on. Most of us who have been in ministry for any length of time would have to conclude that ministry involves all of the implicit definitions above. It is hard work. It can be very demanding.

We would do well in our thinking about leadership to remember the idea of servanthood. If being a servant was good enough for Jesus then it is good enough for us. You cannot ever graduate from servanthood either. Sometimes we have the idea that we have already served our time. Let the next person be a servant and I will move up a notch or two. Do not buy it! Time does not necessarily reward us with promotion in ministry. Think about it! Jesus is eternal and yet He became a servant in the First Century! No, we never graduate from having the mind and heart of a servant.

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What does a minister do? Wait! Don't get caught in the trap of doing yet! We must constantly ask ourselves, "Who am I as a minister?" What are the implications? In order to minister for and with Christ we must be vitally connected to Him. He is our lifeline. I think of Christ and ourselves as being connected through faith. The Spirit is like the umbilical cord and our relationship (the sum and substance of ourselves) is the nourishment that moves from one to the other. God's Word is the divine and holy anchor that helps us to understand the importance and characteristics of such a relationship. Experience must always be anchored in the Scriptures. Otherwise all we have is a Gnostic-like experience without boundaries and without benefit.

Ministerial Identity and Amnesia

It was not too long ago that I experienced a ministerial identity crisis! I suppose that I had been experiencing a personal identity crisis before and just did not know it. My crisis was heightened and extended to include a professional and ministerial identity crisis. As a Bible college and seminary graduate, a pastor, and a consultant and professor at Bible colleges, I discovered that I had never really taken the time to examine my personal or professional identity. Apparently, I simply adopted a professional (or ministerial) identity that I seemed to enjoy and lived with it.

The Lord had begun the process of humbling me by commanding me to start a new church in our area.

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He knew that I really was not looking for such an assignment. I had been wounded severely in ministry and was not looking for more wounds! I sensed an overwhelming sense of relief, release, and joy when I surrendered to God's desire regarding this new church. I took a genuine leap of faith and left my full-time administrative position at the Bible college.

I had a good grasp on my theological identity, but I soon discovered that it had not brought me to the place personally or professionally where I desired to be. In other words, I had the knowledge, the expertise, and the arguments for virtually every theological area, but I did not have a firm grasp of Christ Himself. I was saved but empty.

I tend to be a goal oriented, driven, demanding, and aggressive person. I began to build the church in my way. I began to use my techniques for success. After all, I have a video series on goal setting, mission, and vision—who could do a better job than me?

I finally realized that I had been living in my own power. I had exuded a great amount of faith, but I was still missing the day-to-day power to sustain that faith. I had very little joy and was simply building the ministry to make myself feel more spiritual. I viewed my own sacrifices and hardships as modes of becoming more spiritual.

I do not think my case was unique—that is part of the reason I wrote this book. I think that many Christian leaders feel exactly like I felt. They get

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caught in a cycle of doing that never stops. It is like being on the world's longest roller coaster and never being able to get off. You want out. You want off, but the machine simply will not stop long enough. Who are you as a minister?

I began to be broken by the Spirit of God. As I examined my life, my ministry, and my ministry strategies, I discovered that I had indeed been using God simply to build my ministry so that I could feel good about myself. I wanted to be and feel more spiritual—I had simply followed the formula that everybody had taught me. I repented and fell on my face before God.

I knew that I would get the answers I needed. God had reassured me that all was not lost and that I simply needed to be quiet, do nothing, and wait on Him to bring me a solution. The first part of the solution for me was to “shut-up,” stop planning, and to do nothing. What a difficult thing for somebody like me! I am a doer.

People regularly come to me to have their problems fixed and their questions answered. I had to finally admit that I am not the Savior. I am His servant. Ministry is about the Master. And, when we have understood that, then and only then, is ministry about service.

The second part of the solution was for me to enter deep times of prayer, worship, silence and to sit under the teaching of some men who understand these

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problems. I needed (and still need) to hear from God. I had not spent the necessary time with God. I would like to think that you are different, but I know better. How much time have you honestly spent with God today?

I soon found out that I had fallen prey to ministerial amnesia. I had forgotten who I was. Like the silly person on a typical sitcom who has amnesia, I was wandering around aimlessly. I was charging into the battle without any armor or any knowledge about why I was doing it.

I was busy trying to become more and more spiritual. I would occasionally allow people to see the “unspiritual” me, but I was terrified that they might somehow unwittingly see how unspiritual I really was. I wanted to be transformed by my works. I thought that doing more and more ministry would make me more and more spiritual. Know the feeling? Played that game?

I pushed harder and harder every week to grow our new church. It did not grow. I did not grow either. My once strong faith weakened and I felt hopeless many days. I refused to let anyone see and would pretend to be strong! I was perplexed by my feelings of guilt, fear, and dissatisfaction. “It must be God’s way of shaping me!” I foolishly thought. In reality, it was *my* way of shaping me.

I have always been able to easily connect with people, but a strange distance from them and from God

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seemed to plague me. My hoped-for ministry was slipping between my fingers and so was my ministerial identity. I had fear because I was afraid somebody might see the real me. I experienced guilt because I was not the perfect pastor (or person) that people wanted me to be. I felt dissatisfied because my identity was determined by my ministry or lack thereof.

God was right. I was having an affair with my ministry. I realized that I am part of the “bride of Christ.” He is not to be an occasional lover, but a constant companion. He is not the subject of ministry, but the ministry. My love for theology dissipated. My enjoyment of ministry was nearly extinguished. My desire to grow the church grew faint. God ordered me to stop everything.

I learned that my ministry is to seek, find, and enjoy the presence of Christ. My ministry is to flow out of my experiences with the presence of Christ as I respond to His Word in a life of faith. I must be transparent. I must be truly connected to others out of love. I need to forget about being more spiritual and start being more human. I had been painfully reminded in the last couple of months of just how human I was! Now it was time to focus on being a restored human—being all that God created me to be. I’m not advocating some sort of humanistic religion! I’m trying to push you to consider the ever-flowing spring of hope you have in Christ. You can be all that God wants you to be and still be real.

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It was no longer about ministry, ministry, ministry, but about Jesus and His presence in my life. What a relief! I needed to leave my adulterous relationship with my ministry and return to my true Bride. I needed to love Jesus. And, I needed to feel His love afresh.

Instantly, my soul rejoiced. My moment of discovery had come! I was still depressed because of the loss of my previous identity, but I was thankful. I was on the road to discovering what it means to truly be a minister of Christ. My prayer times have become frequent occasions to hear from God. I have a renewed interest in reading His Word. Christ now walks with me instead of behind me. I am unconcerned about the outward ministry. After all, there is no true ministry without the ministry of Christ. I want to have a daily encounter with Him. I want to truly know Him and love Him. I want to be loved by Him. The counterfeit simply will not do anymore. I want the real Him. Only after I have the real Him will I be able to have an authentic ministry. By the way, the folks from church have picked up on this change and they are being transformed by real spirituality right now. Our church is experiencing a dynamic conversion to authentic ministry. People are catching the vision for what their relationships with Jesus could be. Lives are being changed because we've finally put Jesus in the rightful center of His church.

Loneliness

It is true that one of the most difficult challenges today for pastors and people in general is the feeling of

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loneliness. It seems that we are a group of people who are alone. I became acutely aware of this over the summer after returning from Mexico. There I could easily meet people on the street or in a store by merely striking up a conversation. Here that is not always possible anymore. In the words of one of my Latin friends, “Americans are locked up behind their front doors watching TV and feeling lonely.”

Perhaps he has captured more of the essence of America than the average American has. People are lonely. Ministers are lonely, too. We must take steps to build healthy relationships so that solitude does not turn into loneliness and temptation does not become sin.

It is difficult to be balanced, but I am making an honest attempt now. I now encourage my people to grow in their humanity—to become all that a restored and renewed human being was created to be. What a relief not to have to worry about being “spiritual” all the time. We can focus on Christ and His love, and we can exercise that love by loving others. Focusing on love is much easier than focusing on spirituality. Spirituality can be an endless cycle of disappointment and hurt. What a drag! No, we do not promote a sinful life-style, but we do promote honesty.

What about you? Who are you as a minister?

My identity crisis and yours too will probably be an ongoing one. We will struggle, arrange, and rearrange our thoughts on this all-important subject

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many times. I am sure that we will fight to return to our ministerial amnesia of the past only to be brought to failure and shame again. We must purposefully struggle to avoid this return. We must continue the relationships that we have with close friends who also act as mentors, making sure to inform them of our need to have accountability and time to share in the area of our ministerial identity.

Just last week I was informed about the fall of one of my ministerial colleagues. It seems that sexual temptation got the best of him. Stories like these abound, but why? My guess is that the loneliness, frustration, and pressures of ministry unite to gnaw away at a minister's moral standards. We might feel a sense of entitlement—almost as if God owes us since we have been hurt while serving Him.

I have taken a number of precautions in this area. I never counsel women alone. I seldom counsel women anyway because I feel that they are better served by other women. I have become aware of my weaknesses and have two accountability partners with whom I share the details of my weaknesses. I thank God for these friends who allow me to share with them. I know that they hold my thoughts in the highest confidence and they are truly praying for me. Find friends like them!

So many ministers feel like they cannot be honest about their weaknesses or feelings. Again, the problem is probably one of frustration or loneliness. There is a lack of trust specifically between pastors. Some are in

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competition. Others lead secret double lives. We are afraid to trust one another because we never know how it will come back to hurt us later.

If you are a Christian leader, then you are a minister. What does that really mean to you? Who are you as a minister?

Are You a Missionary?

The old byline of so many churches was “every member a minister.” We have gone a step further in our thinking because we say “every attender a missionary.” We say “attender” because we are not so sure that church membership accomplishes much. We want every person—not just the few who have actually joined our organization—to be involved in the work of the ministry. Why do we say missionary instead of minister? We want them to be able to identify with someone they have never been able to identify with—a missionary.

Think about the typical view people have of a missionary. I can remember some who used to come to our church’s missions conference when I was a teenager. Our church gave several missionaries \$25 per month whether they needed it or not. What a misunderstanding of missions!

Many of them came in mismatched clothes. They did not all smell good. They did not fit in real well and their prayers (even for food) took a long time. They were seldom concerned with letting us out of church

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on time, but they did have cool slides and pictures of foreign lands and people.

We are trying to teach our people that a missionary is a person with the heart of a missionary. A missionary is a person who feels a call to special service to reach people on the international front or from a different culture. Can't we all do that? I know that we will not all be vocational missionaries, but we can all reach out to different kinds of people in our own surroundings.

Maybe the people around us are not internationals, but I highly doubt they are like us. In today's America you do not have to be foreign to have a different culture or different customs. We emphasize reaching out to other people. We want people to understand God's heart for missions and missionaries.

We want our people to be able to "connect" with missionaries when they talk to them or hear them preach or share their work. We want them to learn a deep respect and love for missionaries. We want to raise the image that missionaries have in the mind's eye of many Americans. It is one of the most honorable positions in heaven and earth, and we want our people to realize and respect that.

Are you a missionary? I know you are a leader, but have you really surrendered everything to reach the culture in which you have been called to work. Are you so concerned about your image and your own

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comforts that you have neglected the all-important task of witnessing to and winning others?

Why are so many pastors terrible at personal evangelism? One reason may be that they simply do not take the time to do it. The second reason may be that they do not have that missionary spirit. They are locked up in the church and in the affairs of Christians all the time.

Ministers and missionaries are also people who get used to being rejected. We often think that ministry is going to be like a whirlwind rock tour complete with fans, groupies, big money, and an easy road. Okay, you have probably been around long enough to give up on the “big money,” but you still may think that everybody is going to welcome you with open arms. Not so.

Unfortunately you will meet a whole host of folks out there who are not too happy to meet you. Yes, you will meet (or perhaps already have met) the holier-than-thou types, the I’ve-got-more-money-so-you-have-to-do-what-I-say types, the garden-variety users, the know-it-alls, and well, for lack of a better word, jerks! They will all be in your congregation or organization at one point or another. Notice I did not say they will be following you at all times. Many may fake it, but that does not mean they have much confidence in you.

Some of you will even face it amongst your own family and friends—a lack of confidence. Chalk it up

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to victory. Welcome to the world of the ultimate Leader who ever lived, Jesus Christ. Read a few words from the Gospels and you will discover that He was mocked, abused, maligned, hated, and used. Welcome aboard! You will have to make peace with it if you are going to last in leadership.

I said “peace” because I am not sure it ever gets easier or less depressing. It hurts the most from the folks who are not jerks or users—it hurts the most when it comes from the normal people. Some may even be friends. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, which was a sign of affection, loyalty, and love. It will happen to you too.

Here are some tips to keep you from dropping out along the way: 1.) Build your esteem and worth on Jesus Christ, not on the people you serve. 2.) Remember that people are people. You are one too. You have let others down. You have misjudged people before. Somebody out there probably thinks you are a jerk too! 3.) Treat people with respect, even the ones that drive you crazy. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking you are experiencing righteous anger. You may be, but the probability for misinterpreting your feelings runs pretty high. Let Jesus go before you. Pray before you think. Think before you speak. And, never say the things that come into your head in the heat of the moment. Treat others with dignity and respect even if they treat you like a complete moron. 4.) Don't get defensive with the rest of your team. Suspicion can cause you more trouble than it is worth. If you find that there has been a general rebellion, seek the counsel of

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godly mentors before acting. 5.) Don't use the Bible as a battering ram. Don't attack people's lack of spirituality or try to evaluate their motives. Simply deal with the issues. 6.) Paul says in Philippians 3:10 that there is a certain fellowship in suffering: "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Now you can understand and experience it. One day you will praise God for having to deal with suffering at least in some minimal way.

The joys of being a minister and missionary outweigh the negatives. Keep your perspective and focus. Learn as you go. Always keep yourself in spiritual "check" by remembering that you are ministering out of love for Jesus and people. If there is another compelling reason, perhaps you had better examine your motives.

Be a minister and missionary and teach your people to "be" ministers and missionaries, too.

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Seven: The Leader as a Pacesetter and Visionary

Leaders are dangerous. Leadership is dangerous, too. The idea of leading implies that someone is following. And, if they are, then we assume a certain level of responsibility. I was taught very early on by my parents that you never have a position of authority without also having the responsibility of authority. This is probably one of the greatest downfalls in our culture today. No one wants to be responsible. It is fascinating because not only do they not want to be responsible for the group, they do not even want to be responsible for themselves as individuals. It isn't just the teenagers either! This is not just a worldly problem. It has infected the church. The church has become diseased by this virus called "irresponsibility." We can see it clearly in the lack of commitment and follow-through that people have in church.

It is easy to get volunteers for a project, but it is difficult to get committed and authentic volunteers. We have learned how to think up an excuse, pre-plan illness, double-book on the calendar and simply pick up the phone (or send an e-mail) excusing ourselves from responsibility. Who among us hasn't done it?

If you are the kind of leader who wants authority and shirks responsibility, do us all a favor and quit. Or, repent. God will not bless leaders who are irresponsible. The "blame game" gets old real fast. It is not just the younger generation either. This problem is not new. A leader is always responsible for who,

where, and how he or she is leading. Not sometimes—always. Mark that down and remember it.

What Pace Are You Setting?

The leader is a pacesetter and a visionary. What pace are you setting? Being a pacesetter drives home the point of understanding the necessity of having a vibrant and dynamic relationship with God. How will you know what God is doing in your ministry? How will you know what pace to set? It is fine to understand what pace the people can handle, but what about God's pace. The leader simply mimics the pace that God Himself has set. Our agenda is His agenda. His leading is our command.

God can speed things up or He can bring them to a complete halt. Whatever you do, do not pit yourself against God. How many Christian organizations have been running quite smoothly without God for quite sometime? This is not the blessing of God—it is the work of man. Ultimately, it is a gigantic waste of time, manpower, and money. I want God to run our ministry. I lead as He leads.

What Vision Are You Casting?

What is the vision that you are casting? It is a frightful thing to think that you and I are charged with setting God's pace and casting God's divine vision! So many are careless and even flippant about it.

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All of us can recall walking into a different ministry or church and meeting some of the people. They act like the pastor, don't they? They have followed. They have picked up some of his traits and habits. Some will even imitate his idiosyncrasies without ever knowing it.

Stubborn dad—stubborn son! Whining mother—whining daughter. Whew! You get the point. Children watch and learn. So do our followers. They assume we have it all together. As if we do not put enough pressure on ourselves, we have to worry about the pressure that they exert on us too. That is why it is so important to know who you are. You must understand your identity in light of your relationship with God and not anything or anybody else.

Think long and hard about the vision you are casting. Are you constantly praying about understanding God's vision for your organization? We really need to know where we are going. We need to let our followers know.

We must also be people who will keep following God. Sometimes He moves forward with a new plan, a new dream, or a new vision. We are still stuck in the old one. We must be very careful to stay anchored in the Bible. Not every strange new thing that comes along is from God. John told us in 1 John 4:1 to "test the spirits" to see if they are from God. We must not buy into anything and everything, but we must keep dreaming, praying, and believing. We must not just cast the vision—we must be visionaries.

We need to cast a vision that is understandable, adoptable, and practical. We need to set a pace that they can keep up with. Setting the pace and casting the vision are no easy tasks. This is where your goals come in. You have already spent some time examining who you are, what your mission is, and what it looks like (envisioning). Now it is time to set some goals. Goals are simply mile markers along the way. Goals are just goals—people are always more important than goals.

Setting Goals

The danger in setting goals is that you might miss the leading of God. James talks about remembering that everything is contingent on whether the “Lord wills” (James 4:15). That is good advice. We must prayerfully construct our goals.

I think there is a greater danger in not setting goals. It is easy for us to become lazy and complacent. We just do what we have always done. There is never any point of comparison except last year’s poor statistics. The life is gone. The only time we hear of a new project is as a last ditch effort to save our failing ministry or reputation. How many Christian leaders wait until disaster is impending before they set any goals or try anything new? Let’s face it, not setting goals is a sign of a stagnated relationship with Christ.

It does not sound like the victorious life of a disciple, leader, and minister of Christ.

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Make sure that your goals are the Lord's goals. Do they fit in with your mission? Are they "envisioned"? Are they who you are and what the Lord wants you to be?

Make your goals simple. Keep them understandable and achievable. Everyone needs a challenge, but we do not need discouragement. Make sure to set reasonable goals. Explain the important details such as who, how, what, when, why, and where. Goals can and should be adjusted. People need to take ownership of goals in order to accomplish them. Plan on investing enough time and energy in explaining your goals and in inspiring your followers to take ownership of them.

You should emphasize mission and envisioning more than goals. Remember goals cannot be accomplished without people. Relationships are vital to accomplishing anything for the Lord. By the way, if you accomplish your goals but lose your people in the process, you really have not succeeded. Make sure you have not just been using your people to make you feel good. People will let you simply use them because of their own insecurities, but God is not honored by that.

Some Helpful Questions

Here is a list of questions that will help you as you begin to pray about your goals:

When are you going to get started?

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What immediate steps will you take in your life to begin living out your mission?

What type of accountability will you have?

Where will you get encouragement? Who is your biggest fan? How do you plan to keep on track?

What are you going to do when someone tries to discourage you? What will you say to them? What will you say to yourself? Who tries to discourage you?

What safeguards will you put in place so you do not become self-centered, selfish, or arrogant? What will you do about new guilt, fear, or greed?

What does the “new you” look like, sound like, dress like, talk like, act like?

How will you keep your mission before you? How will you keep envisioning?

When and how will you evaluate and adjust your goals?

It is much easier to be disciplined once you know where you are going. Where are you going? What do you want? What does God want? How will you get there?

How will you handle getting back on the road should you temporarily slip up?

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Thinking About the Obstacles Ahead of Time

I encourage my students to develop an “obstacle grid.” They list their plans, goals, and dreams on a sheet of paper. Then they explain why they believe God wants them to accomplish those things. They write appropriate verses next to each item to make sure that they are anchored in the Word. Then they think of the potential obstacles or objections they may encounter. They list a verse to fight off the obstacle. They write out a prayer to pray if and when the objection occurs, and they write out a simple plan for how to deal with the obstacle. They think through their entire dream before launching out into new territory. Allies are few when you launch out into the deep water of God’s work. Get ready!

Learn From Your Own Failures and From the Failures of Others

One of the people we really need to think about when it comes to understanding leadership is Moses. Moses knew what it was like to fail. He knew the power of pain and the ramifications of failure. You will fail as a leader. Make room for that thought in your mind. I know that the success gurus try not to mention it, but it will happen.

Moses and God had quite a relationship. They spoke honestly with each other. We are almost

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embarrassed by the level of honesty they exhibited while speaking. God explains that He is ready to kill the Israelites and Moses pleads on their behalf. Later, Moses has his fill of them and throws a bit of a temper tantrum and God judges him severely. It almost does not seem fair.

Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them; and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink." So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel,

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therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.” Those *were* the waters of Meribah, because the sons of Israel contended with the LORD, and He proved Himself holy among them.
Numbers 20:6-13

It is really amazing that it happened. Moses had just fallen on his face before God and sought His guidance and wisdom. He experienced the power, presence, and direction of God Himself, and then with all of the stealth of an enemy of God, he did something other than what he was told to do. Amazing. The audacity of this man!

He was no ordinary man, though. He was a leader’s leader. A man of unbelievable capabilities. He was loved by God. They had the kind of relationship that few people could even imagine, let alone experience. They had their struggles. At times, it was as if they were at war with one another. At other times, you would have thought they were brothers.

You see when Moses threw his temper tantrum he was mad at his followers, and he did something remarkable—it is the kind of thing that a leader can slip into without even noticing. He took out his anger on God. He was mad at the people, but He punished God. He stopped believing God.

He did not embrace the holiness of God any longer. He was mad and he wanted everybody to know it. The

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passage in Numbers 20 is clear: Moses stopped trusting God and did not regard His holiness. That is so easy in leadership. We get angry with the people. We get sick of the day-to-day bickering that takes place. They never move at the pace we want to move. They are off doing their own thing when they are supposed to be concerned about the power, promises, and presence of God.

We feel all alone. Isolated. Despondent. Frustrated. We get angry at them. Somehow in the midst of that, we get angry at God. We would never admit it—we are much too holy for that. Why verbalize something that we know is bad? We might as well because God already knows it! We are not truly hiding anything from Him.

You see, Moses took advantage of his special relationship with God. They were so close that Moses really had learned to trust God. God had directed Moses and supported him, especially when the people were less than cooperative. Moses wounded God by not loving Him. He hurt Him by not honoring Him. He was unfaithful when He neglected the presence and direction of God Himself. With relationship comes responsibility. Moses knew how it worked, but one day he simply had enough.

I wonder if time stopped when Moses had the rod in the air just before striking that horrible blow. I wonder if the angels lost their breath when Moses pulled the rod back to strike again. Hard to believe that the water still came out of the rock. God never blesses

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sin, but He always accomplishes His purposes. God is gracious even when people are rebellious and leaders are self-centered.

You had better secure your leadership philosophy in your relationship with your Leader because your followers will sometimes let you down. There will be disappointment. There will be anger. There will be pain. Instead of turning away from your faith and shutting off the life-giving flow that ebbs from your relationship with Jesus, you should turn to Him immediately, honestly, openly, and sincerely. He understands pain. He recognizes the frustration and pain involved in dealing with people.

God did not punish the people—the water still flowed from the rock even though Moses had sinned. God punished Moses because he trespassed the boundaries they had set in their love relationship. The leader became too big for his britches. And the real Leader demonstrated His justice and His faithfulness.

He was good to Moses because He let him see the land. Moses was not sick. He was the picture of health, but God took his life. He gave him a private burial.

And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day. Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated. So the sons of Israel wept for Moses in

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the plains of Moab thirty days; then the days of weeping *and* mourning for Moses came to an end. Deuteronomy 34:6-8

What a way to go down in history. Looking, but not experiencing. Tasting, but choosing not to eat. Leading one day and being buried in an unmarked grave the next. At least God in His mercy personally took care of the arrangements. He will take care of yours too if you forget His holiness and disregard the depth of your relationship with Him.

Moses experienced the worst nightmare a leader can have—anger at the people, but it did not have to end the way it did. How many leaders do you know who are sitting on the sidelines of ineffectiveness today because they stopped trusting God and started focusing on the problem-people or on their own egos? They let their anger get the best of them. God simply withdraws His power and direction from these runaway leaders. The former days of effective, powerful leadership are sitting somewhere in an unmarked grave. Do not become the victim of your own pity or your own anger.

Part of the beauty of God is that He still gets the job done. He is vitally interested in accomplishing His plan for the greater body of Israel, so He still takes them to the Promised Land. Why? I am not sure we will ever understand it totally. I guess because of His one-sided love quest for His people. God's provision for His people is beautiful. Moses understood and

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accepted this beauty. He knew his place in the greater body of Christ.

Just out of curiosity, what are you passing along to your followers? Are you passing along anger, frustration, a defeated attitude, or fear? They notice. People are always listening, always watching, always learning even when you wish they were not. What are you modeling?

Accidentally Infecting Your Followers with Your Internal Fears

Visionary leaders are often caught at the intersection of faith and failure. We are involved in projects and ministries that push the envelope. Our ministries require big faith. Sometimes we are only moments away from failure or disaster. We can easily and yet accidentally spread our fears to the people.

Sometimes we cause our own disasters to occur by teaching the people that disaster is going to occur. I remember watching one of the financial network news programs for a few seconds a couple of months ago. The reporter indicated that consumers had finally accepted the fact that the economy was down so they had cut back on their spending which hurt the economy even further. It is crazy. The economy had been bad for months, but people did not decide to buy into the fears about it until later. Then, they made the prophecies come true. The economy slipped even further.

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God commanded Joshua over and over again in the first chapter of Joshua to be a man of courage. God has no room for fear. He did not want Joshua to sit around quaking in his boots all of the time. He wanted Joshua to lead in faith, in courage, and while obeying His Word. That is exactly what He wants from us, too. Do yourself and your ministry a favor and pass along faith, courage, and obedience instead of fear and negativity. Pass on the relationship. Model it. God promised to be with Joshua—that is the wording of presence and relationship. God even promised Joshua that He would be just as accessible as He had been to Moses.

Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, have I given to you, just as I spoke to Moses...No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.

Joshua 1:3,5

Notice that Joshua still had to fight some battles. He did not just wake up in the morning and pray all day. He did his share of talking to God. He developed his relationship with the Lord, but he also worked and fought very, very hard. We need to strike a balance between our relationship with Christ and our ministry. We work *because of* the relationship.

Didn't Jesus promise us the kind of access, presence, direction, and love in the New Testament that is mentioned here?

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Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. John 14:12-18

Getting In Step with God

If ever a leader ended poorly, it was Jonah. A visionary he was not. He set a pace, but it was to a totally different tune. He refused to get in step with God. We paint a pretty bad picture of him in our sermons and teachings, but he is a lot like us in many respects. He simply was a man filled with fear and with pride for his own people. He wanted things his way. He wanted to do what he wanted to do. He was sincere, but wrong.

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Many leaders are sincere. They have more convictions than a hardened criminal on death row. Their convictions simply are not God's convictions. Their "God's will" is not God's will. Jonah floated. One minute he did the right thing. The next minute he did not. He could not stand to see his convictions go out the window. He really could not stand to see God be so merciful to bad people.

The leader who turns himself or herself into a judge will fail. God never called us to be judges. He has called us to be ministers of His grace and love. If you want to succeed, you must hold to the biblical standards; but you must also be a leader of love, compassion, grace, and mercy.

Only the leader who has God's convictions and has experienced His love and mercy can truly be a visionary pacesetter. People will not follow someone who does not truly love them or who does not really know Who he himself is following. Jonah got wrapped up in his own agenda. Do not become a victim of your own agenda. Set the pace that God is establishing. Keep the dream alive by passing along God's vision.

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Eight: The Leader as a Counselor and Problem Solver

Any leader worth his or her salt will learn to be a good listener. People seem to carry such tremendous burdens today. It is amazing that they can even be semi-functional with all of the hurt, pain, and misdirected feelings they experience. Yes, the leader today is a counselor and a problem solver.

I am very honest with people who have problems. I tell them right up front that I am not a trained counselor. “If you’re looking for professional counseling or secular theories of psychology,” I say, “you would be best served by seeing somebody else.” I then go on to explain that I am a minister of Jesus Christ. Any solution that I may offer will be biblical and will be dependent upon the anchor of the Bible and the power of the Holy Spirit.

People Need A Refuge

The idea of a refuge or hiding place is very important in the Psalms (Psalm 31). I am sitting in an old trailer on the far end of a remote Bible college campus in a rural part of Florida. Rain is pounding the roof. The wind is blowing. This old trailer is my refuge at the present moment! The Bible college lets me have use of the trailer while I’m helping them develop their program in leadership. It is a home away from home, especially when I am too tired to make the hour and a

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half trip to my own home. Who would have guessed that this old trailer could be such a refuge?

Yet, we have a greater refuge in Christ. We have a hiding place. We have a quiet place of comfort, warmth, and security. I just ran over here from the other side of the campus. I stopped underneath huge live oak trees to get a reprieve from the huge raindrops pouring from the sky. What a feeling of security to be standing underneath a huge tree in the midst of a downpour! That feeling would have changed rapidly had there been any lightning. People need a refuge. They need protection and security. Jesus offers that to people everywhere in any and every situation. He is the perfect refuge.

Jesus' Agenda and Yours

Jesus did not help everybody who needed help. It was not His agenda. His agenda was to save sinners (Luke 19:10). Sometimes leaders feel like they have to help every single person who has needs or problems. It just is not possible. And, it may not be the will of God. Sometimes a person must learn to solve his own problems. Sometimes people become lazy or overly dependent because someone always intervenes for them. They can quickly and easily become dependent upon you instead of upon Jesus. Be careful, because sometimes we help people so that we can feel needed or because we want to feel better about ourselves. Is that really a pure motive? Is it out of love or greed?

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Some problems require someone trained to deal specifically with those problems. I am knowledgeable in a few areas of theology and ministry, but I am far from being an expert on many issues. Leaders must remember God's agenda for their lives. It may not be to help every person that comes through the door. I work with a competent Christian counselor in the area who sees our people at a discount. I know that he does a better job than I could do because he knows so much more about Christian counseling than I do.

Of course, there are many people that you can and should help.

The Importance of Asking about Devotions and Allowing People to Repent

I normally start by asking people about their devotional habits. I inquire about their Bible reading and their times of prayer. If victory in the Christian life is based on our relationship with Christ, then I need to ask about it. Usually, I can diagnose the problem within a few minutes. Many people see me for a very simple reason: they want to confess some sin that is haunting them. Halloween is over, but the haunted house of guilt remains and they want to make it right.

I always give people an opportunity to repent. I seldom interrupt them while they are telling their stories. I ask questions but not unnecessary ones. I ask them why they came to me and what it is they hope to accomplish by talking to me. I give them counsel from God's Word. I never let people off the hook. That is

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God's place and not mine. I refer them to the great Counselor who longs to hold them close and love them.

What is the place of repentance? I would say it holds the central place in much of the counseling I do. People need to feel badly when they have sinned, and they should confess and change their thinking and actions. I invite people to do so. I never force people to feel badly. I work with them to help them enter a relationship of accountability with someone. People may be delivered, but they need ongoing assistance and accountability to stay on track with the Lord.

I cannot underestimate the importance of daily devotions, church attendance, and small-group family fellowship. People need family. On the cross, Jesus rearranged the Christian family. He explained (John 19:26-27) that Mary was now John's mother and John was now Mary's son. This is not literally true, but it is experientially true. In other words, Christians are family. We lean on each other. We help each other. We love each other. We encourage each other. And, on occasion, we practice "tough love" on each other, too.

Many times people come to me to explain how they have been abused, hurt, or abandoned in a relationship. Sometimes their parents did the damage—sometimes a cousin, so-called lover, or friend. They need a chance to tell their stories. They need an opportunity to express their pain. People really need to be pointed to Jesus. They do not need our trite

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phrases or our cutesy poems. They need the love, forgiveness, and hope that only Jesus can give.

Sometimes it is humbling to really turn them over to Jesus, but that is what we must do if we want to be biblical and honest. What do people really need? They need to enter a warm, loving, forgiving, secure relationship with Jesus. We know how to help them do that. I speak about faith and hope frequently. People need to hear it. Hey! I need to hear it.

The world is a lonely place. We get hurt easily. There is so much hostility and pain out there. It is like a war zone. If the church is a war zone too, people do not really see Jesus in action. They cannot really understand the Gospels. People need to see these things modeled. We need to be leaders of grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

You and I cannot do that unless we are honest with God, ourselves, and our followers. People must know that we are a long way from perfect. They do not want to hear about all of the gory details, but they do want to know we are real. We really know what they are talking about. We have felt their pain. We know what it is like to live and function in the real world. That is why the author of Hebrews went to great lengths to explain that Jesus experienced all of the things humans experience, except, of course, sin. He is human. The God-man understands pain, discouragement, frustration, abuse, and broken relationships. He has experienced more broken relationships than anyone else in the history of the world!

Our church is in the process of developing small groups for evangelism, fellowship and accountability. People need friends. It is difficult to meet people anymore. There is so much suspicion. People are not very trusting. We have found that small groups can deal with a lot of the ongoing problems of life better than our regular Sunday morning service can. People need help when they are hurting. They need to know that people really care. Small groups offer this kind of family atmosphere. So many people just need a family.

Improve Your Listening Skills for Effective Leadership

I love to talk, but I have learned the importance of listening. Listening is more than keeping your mouth shut! It is really tuning into the other person. It is shutting down your own mental processes long enough to concentrate on what someone else is saying. I learned this in the hospital.

As a young minister, I was often sent to make ministerial calls on the terminally ill in our small community. After receiving ministerial training, I discovered that I still did not know what to say. This was a gift, because there are times when we are not supposed to say anything.

Imagine that! It does not seem like an option in our self-given multiple choice test of communication skills. "E" is not supposed to read: "Keep your mouth shut!" But it does. God treasures silence. So do hurting

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people. Sometimes people just need a hug. Sometimes they simply need to see that their pain hurts you like it hurts them. Sometimes ministerial therapy is shedding a tear at the appropriate moment.

Pray and God may give you a thought to share. I have often stood there not knowing quite what to say. Sometimes God gives me a word and sometimes He does not. When He does not give me one, I try my hardest not to make one up! I take it that He wants me to be quiet. I always ask people in the hospital if they would like for me to pray with them. So often that is what they want. I also offer to read them a passage from the Bible. Sometimes they have a favorite one they want to hear.

You might be surprised at the response you will get. Sometimes they want to hear a verse that they have not heard since childhood. Many times they merely want you to hold their hands, look them in the eye, pray with them and treat them the way Jesus would treat them. I never overstay my welcome in the hospital. If they want you to stay, they will make it abundantly clear. They need time together with their families. They need to have those special parting moments, and you and I have no business interrupting that unless invited and persuaded to do so. Even so, I always give them time alone whether they want it or not. Know when it is time to leave.

Always leave them with the hope of Christ and the knowledge of His love. Gently smile. Look deeply into their eyes and let them see the love of Christ. Be sure

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to be sensitive to their requests and realize that it may very well be one of their final requests. Listening skills are important in every counseling situation—not just in the hospital. People want and need a leader who will listen. Don't think you have to speak in every situation just because you are a leader. Sometimes it's better to soak in what someone else is saying.

Dismissing Impulsive Judgments

Problems in the church and in Christian organizations abound. I have a pretty good sense of discernment, so I used to make rash decisions. I often believed the wrong person. I now wait to make a judgment until I have heard both sides, had sufficient time to pray about it and to think through the entire situation. I now let enough time elapse for the parties to fix the problems themselves. I love it when God steps in and helps people to fix their problems without my having to intervene.

I seldom follow my initial impulse when handling a problem or counseling someone. If I suddenly fix it, I may not have given God the latitude He wants to fix the problem. Prayer is amazingly important. We must take time to seek His face. So often we have a solution, follow through on that solution, and then ask God to “bless” and “guide” us. He would much rather have had the opportunity to “guide” us before we made the problem worse or attempted to solve it in our own way.

In Matthew 18 Jesus gives the ultimate method for dealing with personal problems in the church. Many

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churches do not follow it at all. Others add extra measures to it and use it as a sort of machete to root out all evil from the body. "All evil" is usually defined as those people of whom the pastor is tired!

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.
Matthew 18:15-20

When we follow God's prescription for dealing with problems in the church, we are also promised that He will be present with us. Look around to see if you can sense that Jesus is present in the way most churches deal with problems. Church discipline would

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solve so many of our problems if we would follow the teachings the Lord Jesus set forth.

Confidentiality, prayer, love, and forgiveness are all key ingredients in this divine recipe for restoration. By the way, restoration (not punishment) is the key. If you as a leader are merely looking for a biblical way to take out your frustrations and anger on a given person, perhaps you should examine your own motives. You need to repent.

Love, humility, and balance must rule the day. Jesus is a God of love and forgiveness, but He is also a God of holiness. We must see to it that we mediate the ministry of Christ in a way that exalts Him and lifts people up to their highest potential in their relationships with Him.

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Nine: The Leader as an Administrator and Business Officer

There are different views on how to run a church or ministry. I do not think that God wants us to operate like some sort of sloppily run social service agency. Some of you reading this book may be running social service agencies that God has led you to found or manage. Praise God! We need social service agencies, but some organizations really try to justify sloppy management by claiming they are a ministry or social service agency. The church and all other ministries should be run in a manner consistent with good stewardship. Here is what I mean:

Some ministries avoid dealing with legal issues. In other words, they skirt the law. Their view is that “we’re a ministry so we don’t need to follow the letter of the law.” I could not disagree more. The Bible is very clear about our obligation to respect and obey the government (Romans 13:1). We must honor the government and laws of the land even if we do not like or appreciate all of them. Find a solid Christian attorney to help you bring your ministry up to speed.

Many a church, minister, and leader have found themselves in trouble with the I.R.S. We must constantly review our tax obligations. It is complicated. It can be difficult to get reliable help, but somebody out there can help you. Your integrity is at stake. God understands honest mistakes, but He does not approve of self-seeking ignorance or disobedience. It is strange how we can be so concerned about doing

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the right things and being the right person until it comes to the law or our taxes!

A Christian Work Ethic?—"It's Ministry So We Don't Need to Work!"

Another area to ponder is that of a Christian work ethic. Ministries often underpay their employees. The top person is often compensated nicely, but the others are not. This is hardly fair. How can we expect underpaid employees to be productive? I have been in ministries where the employees do not have any respect for their employers. In many cases, they learned disrespect from one of the leaders. The leader taught them disrespect by modeling it or by treating them poorly. Find ways to compensate employees fairly and adequately. One has only to thumb through Isaiah 58 to see how much God hates injustice!

Christian employees should have a solid work ethic. We should not just think to ourselves, "Well, this is just ministry so I will do the best I can." No, we should actually *do* the best we can. We should focus on excellence for Jesus Christ. I have been in many ministry situations where excellence is missing. I hate to admit it, but there have been times when some of my ministry ventures were not too excellent. We are communicating all of the time. We are representing Jesus—so let us leave a good impression. The word "stewardship" is not just connected with tithing. It goes much further than that. Are you a good steward of the ministry God has given you? Being the right person definitely extends to your work ethic.

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Finding Help You Can Trust

I think it is terribly difficult to find people in the ministry you can trust. There are so many lies and so many liars! You must find friends and trustworthy partners in the ministry God gives you. Set up a system of accountability for the business and banking side of your ministry. We now use a treasurer and bookkeeper who are not part of our church. While some people would wince at this arrangement, we have found it quite workable.

Our main focus can be on ministry. These “outsiders” can focus without prejudice on the business side. We are careful to review their policies and we have several accountability procedures in place. We do not have to worry about an in-house treasurer wanting to lord over our pastoral staff or our people. The other benefit is that of privacy. People in the church do not know how much other people in the church give unless they tell them. God will give you creative solutions to your administrative problems if you seek to honor Him and the people who support your ministry.

Keeping Private Information Private

That brings me to my next point. Make sure that you keep private things private. Loose-lipped leaders are the cause of much pain and anxiety in the Body of Christ. There is really no excuse for it. Some have a “tell all” attitude because it makes them feel more

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important. They can spiritualize just about anything. Wow! Doesn't it sound spiritual to ruin someone's reputation or cast judgment before all the ballots are in? By the way, who made you a judge? I thought you were a leader. Leaders do not sit around talking about those they lead. Leaders help develop those around them. Leaders are concerned with building relationships and trust—not destroying them.

The Necessity of Balance

Do not get overwhelmed by the business end of the church or ministry. That is not what ministry is meant to be. Be balanced. Make sure that you are accountable not only for your financial propriety but also for your daily walk with the Lord. Getting caught up in the business end of things might make you sound or feel spiritual, but it does not really help your relationship with Christ. Take the time that is necessary to seek God's guidance, spend time with Him, and grow in your daily walk.

I hear story after story of pastors or other Christian leaders resorting to antibiblical tactics for fund raising or promotion. What a disgrace! We should not be afraid to talk about money or to ask people to step up to the plate and give, but we should be cautious about our worldly techniques. Some of the worst offenders are those people who claim to know the most about the Holy Spirit's power. If you really believe in the Spirit's power, then you will give Him the time and means to work within your fellowship.

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I just spoke to a young lady at a ministry with which I am quite familiar. I jokingly asked her if anything exciting was going on. Her reply was telling: “Nothing exciting ever happens here.” What a commentary on God’s power in that particular ministry. It is a managed ministry. They have administrators, board members, memos, reports, and a whole host of official documents and operating standards. Somewhere, somehow the presence of God has been overlooked.

I think sometimes as administrators we forget that God is still in control. He wants space and time in which to work. We are not ultimately in charge. Just because we happen to be good and talented administrators does not mean we are going to experience the blessing of God. Jesus would like to have our undivided attention.

There are many times in life and ministry when we have to stop all of our activity. The machine must come to a grinding halt, and we must seek the power, presence, and love of Jesus. Your organization cannot transform lives. Jesus can transform lives *through* your organization and ministry, but ultimately transformation is accomplished not through paperwork, forms, and great management but rather through relationships.

Of course, you realize that I am not an advocate for sloppy or ineffective management either. Some people use the Spirit’s supposed direction as an excuse for their laziness or lack of desire to do the hard work of

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managing a Christian organization. God expects us to work, but first and foremost He expects us to seek Him.

I am aware of some organizations that keep an empty seat at a board meeting or business meeting. They go to great lengths to emphasize that “that” seat is for Jesus. Ultimately, it is His meeting. It is His ministry. It is His decision and empowerment that makes a ministry effective. Maybe you do not want to physically keep an empty seat for Jesus, but perhaps it would not be a bad idea for all of us to mentally cordon off a seat for the Master.

Being accountable may prevent you from being falsely accused and from giving in to those subtle temptations that come in ministry. Being above reproach by finding people you can trust, setting up law abiding and Christ honoring financial systems, and seeking the advice of competent professionals will only increase your effectiveness as leaders.

Paying people appropriately and keeping the business end of the details in perspective will help you to really function as a biblically-wise steward. Do not be the financial bully of your organization or church. You are not there to say “no” or to control from some passive/aggressive behavior pattern. You are there to be a wise steward who seeks to honor God and His ministry. View yourself as one of God’s managers. He owns the franchise and He has hired you to do the job. You must communicate and depend on Him, but you

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must also work very hard! The Boss occasionally checks up on His employees, even the managers.

Ten: The Leader as a Communicator

This book is not intended to be a text on delivery or sermon preparation. I want to share some thoughts with you on how you communicate, what you communicate, and what would help you to improve your communication skills. Get good books on sermon preparation, delivery, and teaching techniques. Read them. Polish your skills.

How Do You Communicate?

Are you a preacher? Teacher? Coach? Deacon? That's the first part of the question, but there is also a second part. Do you preach? Nag? Teach? Yell? Motivate? Intimidate? What is your preferred method? You have probably picked up a method of communication that you might not even realize. We all tend to have idiosyncrasies that impact our style and effectiveness.

I recently watched a fairly well known pastor preach. He has a quirky habit of mumbling, then drastically changing his pitch and volume. These strange vocal techniques are accompanied by a periodic slight kicking of one foot. Immediately after the kick, he buttons his jacket and then makes a motion with his arm. After his next point, he unbuttons his jacket, and starts to kick his foot again. I saw this process take place over a dozen times during one sermon. His congregation has apparently adapted to

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this strange phenomenon, but for the non-inducted, it is frustrating and hard to pay attention.

We all have these quirky mannerisms from time to time. We become blind to them. The particular pastor I referenced above probably does not even notice what he does. This illustrates our need to find loving and friendly evaluators to help us become more effective communicators.

What do you communicate?

What Is Your Philosophy of Ministry?

Your philosophy of ministry will greatly affect your communication. For instance, I believe that the church is primarily for those who have already embraced Christ as Savior, so I seldom preach a salvation message on a Sunday morning. We practice evangelism in our small groups and through community outreaches. I do, however, make reference to salvation during my messages, and I frequently invite all attenders to make sure of their salvation status.

We set aside particular Sundays (normally around a holiday) for evangelistic thrusts. On those particular days, I preach a strong salvation message. I tend not to use projectors or hand out notes when I preach. I do ask for audience participation. Sometimes I have a dialog with a person in the congregation or ask for a specific response from the people.

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My philosophy of ministry determines much of the content of my message. It also helps me to set forth an explanation of why I preach the way I do or what kind of response I am seeking from the people. What is your philosophy of ministry? Do you communicate that to your people? Could they explain it after hearing you preach or teach?

Living What You Believe

You are teaching and preaching all of the time. People are watching and listening. Leaders really have to live out what they believe. My first year in college I got so excited about hearing some fairly famous men of God preach. After their chapel sermons, they would come to our budding pastor's class and talk to us. They would give us the nitty-gritty of ministry.

I came to hate that class. So many of them were phenomenal speakers but lousy people. They were mean spirited and bitter; and it seemed to me that a number of them not only held a grudge against their people, they also held a grudge against God. The core of our communication is to "be" before doing. Remember one little incident of gossip or arrogance can be heard around the world!

Jesus got so terribly irritated with the Pharisees because they said one thing and did a completely different thing. We communicate hypocrisy to people when we do not have a balanced lifestyle. It is easy to fall into that trap as a Christian leader. After all, people expect you to act a certain way. All you have to do is

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make sure they never get to meet the real you. You, therefore, develop a public you and a private you.

This works until the two of you catch up with each other. Then you are busted! You are always communicating so you might as well be honest. Honest people are not only interesting to listen to, but you also feel like you know them. We all respond best to a communicator who we feel we can trust and with whom we can identify. As for me, it is hard enough to be me, let alone two people!

Communicating Publicly as a Leader

Well, as a leader you will be expected to communicate publicly at times. Of course, if you are a pastor this is an expectation with which you have come to live. I cannot emphasize the importance of studying. I think it is so important that I have included a chapter on that subject alone. So many people want to lead on emotion. They do not want to lead out of devotion and commitment.

Purely emotional leaders and followers (no matter how sincere) never last long. As soon as the emotion is gone so are they. Don't get me wrong: I am very emotional. I think good leaders and great communicators are emotional people who know how to appreciate God's gift of emotions, but we do not rely on that alone. When you are asked to speak somewhere, please study.

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Always know your audience. Ask for information. What are they like? What kind of jobs do they hold? Is there an expectation for you to wear a tie or jacket? Is the service contemporary? Have there been any recent tragedies in the church? What has the regular pastor been preaching on? Is there a special subject they want you to speak on and why? Study your audience before you meet them. Put yourself in their shoes. Think through their minds. Find a way to identify with them naturally.

I try to preach exegetical sermons. Exegesis means to “draw out.” In other words, we dive into the Scriptures and let the Scriptures draw out their own meanings. We don’t have to make up our own meanings or interject our views of what we wished the text said. I work hard at not twisting Scripture to fit my particular sermon. I ask the Spirit to guide me in selecting just the right text. I often study my text in the original languages. You should do the same if you can.

I seldom look at a commentary until my sermon notes are almost complete. Obviously, if you can’t study your text in the original languages, you may have to be more dependent on the commentaries. Good commentaries are very helpful, but they have downgraded a lot of “great” sermons to only “good” status. You certainly do not need to embellish the biblical data, but be careful about turning your sermon into a dissertation. Be as cautious about over-analysis as you are about under-analysis. Double-check your conclusions with those of reliable scholarly commentaries.

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We believe in the literal, historical, grammatical meaning of the Scriptures. That means we believe the Bible is to be taken literally unless there is a compelling reason to take it figuratively. Just because we don't like the literal meaning of a text is not a compelling reason! It also means that Jesus and the Bible are anchored in history. We must understand the historical context in which specific texts were given. We should understand how they fit into the context of the biblical book where they are located as well as into the whole of the biblical and historical context. We also believe that grammar is important. We believe that God linked the words together in a meaningful way through the language, grammar, and word meanings of the original languages. Since the words of Scripture are "God-breathed" we must take our time and reflect on their meaning and context. God expects us to deal with the text carefully and accurately.

Take enough time to pray and prepare. A combination of sloppiness and sincerity will not get the job done. No one appreciates having his or her time wasted. Be confident when you speak—not overly so, but confident. You have something important to share. You have prayed, you have prepared, and hopefully you have practiced.

I say "hopefully" because for some reason people do not think practice is very spiritual. I practice all the time before I speak. It really works. It helps you work the kinks out of your message or teaching. It also helps you to memorize what you are talking about. You can

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better anticipate responses. You can also pray and edit the content. It is good to occasionally practice in front of other people so that you can get input.

This is a very humbling experience, but it is worth its weight in gold. Take a humble pill and practice! You will be glad you did. So will your listeners.

Delivery, Duration, and Response

There is nothing more comical or sad than seeing someone try to be someone else. Speakers should always be themselves. People are smart. We need to give them credit. They know when we are trying to be something we are not. Stand in front of the mirror when you practice—that is who you are. God wants you to be you. We see all kinds of styles of delivery in the Bible. Paul was long on content and apparently short on excitement, Peter was long on enthusiasm and short on careful planning and thinking before he spoke. The Lord wants to use you. You are good enough to speak. Quit waiting to sound like a famous television preacher and just be yourself.

I preached a “barn-burner” the other day. It was great! Wow! It doesn’t get much better than that. Just ask me. But don’t ask the person I asked! One of my best friends was there so I inquired as to the greatness of my sermon and its bountiful content. He looked at me. Then, he looked at the floor mumbling, “It was too long.”

“What?” I responded.

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“It was way too long. I got bored and then I got lost and well, it was just too long.”

I was crushed. So much for my “barn-burner.” My barn burned all right! After trying to rationalize my long-windedness for two days, I had to admit that he was right. It was just too long. People do not have long attention spans. I of all people should recognize and respect this because my attention span is about a nano-second long!

A good speaker leaves people feeling like they want more. You are not an all-you-can-eat buffet. You are a fine, gourmet restaurant—maybe not in style, but at least in amount. You want people to enjoy the food and desire more. You do not want them to leave feeling overstuffed and sick. Obviously, you want to make sure you feed them adequately. Learn to shut your trap. Some of Jesus’ teachings were very, very short, but people got the point. We do not have to drone on and on for people to understand.

Responses always vary. It depends on the Holy Spirit. It depends on the Word. It depends on the people. I think we should pray about a response when we are preparing the sermon or teaching time. I sometimes envision exactly what I want people to do: pray, sing, come forward or kneel at the altar. Ultimately, it is up to God.

Make sure to invite the people to respond. I have often seen very sincere preachers or teachers expect

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the people to know how to respond. Not necessarily. Confusion abounds particularly at the moment of invitation. Make sure to give simple, clear directions and leave a lot of room for the Holy Spirit to work. Some people will not respond until days later when they have had adequate time to think and pray about it.

Remember your identity is not found in the response—it is found in your relationship with Jesus. Connect them to Jesus like you are connected to Him and that will produce the most beautiful response imaginable.

*Odds and Ends that Can Make or Break
You*

There is nothing wrong with planning. Nehemiah was a person who earnestly prayed and then planned his work. I pray and then plan. I ask God to show me where He wants the people to be. How does He want them moved to that place or to that level of “being”? Probably through His Word. The Spirit can and will lead you in planning. Being too lazy or immature to plan or prepare does not make you or your message more spiritual nor does it honor God. Nothing could be further from the truth.

You can and should be persuasive and passionate about your message, but do not be manipulative. When God’s Spirit wants something accomplished, He will make sure it happens. You will not have to twist or manipulate people to get your way. Let the Spirit be empowered in your teaching and preaching. After all,

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He is much better at doing His job than you are. And, He is a lot more qualified!

Be aware of the needs of your audience. I worked in the cemetery business to put myself through seminary. Boy did I hear some lousy funeral messages! Be appropriate. It is hard for me to imagine that a minister can find room for his own arrogance at someone's funeral. Apparently many can. Be careful what you say. Think and pray through it carefully and never be too big to apologize, correct yourself, or to offer a gracious explanation. There is no greater way to build credibility with your followers than to say you are sorry and mean it. Beware of arrogance at all times.

Communicate more than the fact that you are a leader or preacher. Be seen as a worshipper, a pray-er, and a compassionate person who has experienced the teaching or preaching you have talked about. You are the leader, but you are also a model of your message.

What are you communicating?

Eleven: The Leader as a Student

There are two extremes at which people find themselves. Some people think that stupidity is a synonym for spirituality. They do not want to go to Bible college or seminary. They do not want to be troubled with reading. They will “just depend on the Spirit.” They are way too holy for planning, studying, reading, and well, almost everything.

The other group finds themselves surrounded by a cloud of greatness that they have created. They are the intellectually elite. They know all there is to know. They usually love systematic theology and can categorize every conceivable thought into an area of systematics. They might begin to shout out chapter and page number of some great theologian while you are trying to tell them about the great Italian dinner you had last night.

God is not really glorified by either one of these attitudes. He got angry with the two men on the road to Emmaus because they did not know and apply what the Prophets had said. They had not studied the Scriptures. Jesus used some pretty harsh language with them and said, “O foolish men” (Luke 24:25). He doesn’t appreciate the attitude of lazy disciples who linger in syrupy sweet ignorance and conjecture about Him.

Nor does He appreciate those who, like the Pharisees of old, think they have it all together. The Pharisees thought they knew it all. Jesus disagreed. It

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is easy to find yourself in one of those categories. People end up there all the time.

I am an occasional college professor, but I am still a student. I will always be a student. I am a pastor, but I am still a student. I am writing this book, but I still read dozens of others. The word “disciple” is sometimes simply translated “follower” or “learner.” There is a lot to learn as a disciple.

Knowing your Bible

Many people are simply biblically illiterate. I have a few friends who make me feel this way from time to time. They will recount some story from the Old Testament that I do not even remember exists. I love it because it causes me to study. God wants us to study, meditate, memorize, and reflect on His Word.

There is always something new to learn. We should find ourselves constantly in the Word. Isn't it exhilarating to discover a new verse or new word that you never saw before? God loves for us to learn His Word. If you ever get the chance, take a course on the original languages. There is nothing like reading the Bible in the language in which it was written.

Find someone who is a good teacher and let them teach you. Maybe that means going back to school to finish college, seminary, or an advanced degree. Maybe that simply means buying lunch for and holding a conversation with that elderly old saint in your church who has so much to teach you.

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Find a spiritual accountability partner and find an academic one, too. It is great if they are the same person, but many times they are not. People are good at various things. We need people in our lives who can be used of God to help us become all that we were intended to be. Make sure to find friends who are also students. People you can struggle with. People who will help you grow.

Learning to Pray

Spiritually we have a lot to learn. We need to learn to pray. To fast. To take time for communion with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We must learn to listen. Learn the spiritual disciplines. There are some great materials available. Get them. Read them. Study them and become a student of prayer.

Books

I do not know where I would be without books. I love to read. Most effective people love to read. There is so much to learn. One of my undergraduate professors used to joke that “my books are my friends.” They sure are. I have found hope and healing in many a volume. I have been reading a definition out of a Greek lexicon when I discovered something about the character of God. God uses books to help us grow. I have often taken comfort in realizing that I was not the first person to have this problem or experience that strange emotion. I can learn from the knowledge and

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experiences of others. Only a fool would choose not to benefit from that.

Books can even be used to initiate us into moments of praise or to usher us into the presence of the King. They help us to know ourselves, the world around us, and the God we serve.

A Student of Jesus

Ultimately, I am a life-long student of Jesus Christ. I will not ever be complete until I stand before Him in Heaven. I am obligated to “become.” That is, my life is growing. I am constantly learning what it is like to “be” what I was originally intended to be. Progressive sanctification means I learn to “be” more of what God wants me to be every day. How can I do that if I am not a life-long learner?

Twelve: The Leader as a Shepherd

I have a little scar on my right hand. I would say it's about an inch long. I used to live in a little duplex out in the country. My yard and the surrounding woods were a dumping ground for unwanted pets. One day a stray dog came up to the yard and started howling. She was cut up and obviously starving to death.

I gave her some food and tried to get her cleaned up a little bit. She had been in the woods a little too long. She was defensive and mean. She didn't like for me to get too close. She was pitiful—hurting, injured, starving, but too scared and reactive to allow anyone to get near her.

After letting her graze on a healthy portion of food in my yard for a day or two I went to pet her. That's when I got the cut that produced the little scar. She had been so traumatized that she could never be trusted around people. I had compassion on her, but it wasn't enough. I called animal control and you can guess her fate.

That is a sad but true story. There is a sadder story though. It involves people who have been so hurt—so wounded—that you cannot get close to them. You cannot lead them. You cannot even love them. They react violently. They are desperate though, because they, like this old dog, need love and attention. They are starving on the inside.

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The leader is caught in the middle of this strange and dangerous paradox. People need help but will so often fight it. Welcome to shepherding! It may take weeks, months, or even years before you get the opportunity to have an intimate relationship with your followers, but keep holding out hope. They need you. They do not need an egocentric, maniacal, look-how-great-I-am leader. They need a shepherd. They need someone who cares. They need to see the love in your eyes and feel it in your presence. They need to feel safe and secure. They need consistent love even when it does not appear to be working.

This is your opportunity to show them the love and protection that can be found in Christ. He is the great Shepherd. Isaiah explained how God's sheep went astray. We marched away from God, and in one giant act of insanity and hatred toward Him "each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53). We lashed out at God.

Shepherds must be prepared to see the ugly side of humanity. That is another good reason why a shepherd must know his or her Master intimately. The battle scars will come, but finding that lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7) is worth the temporary pain and momentary shame of any such laceration. You may somehow find those scars to be a reassuring reminder of your effectiveness one day.

When I saw him, I was riding on a bus from Amman, Jordan down to the famed archaeological site known as Petra. I saw another one just like him outside

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of Bethlehem, too. Little boys. I don't know how little, but little. They wore jeans, t-shirts, and carried walking sticks. Seemed pretty ordinary. They weren't old enough to drive a car in the U.S., yet they were charged with a tremendous responsibility in the Middle East. What could be so special about them? They were shepherds.

They often looked bored, tired, and simply out of steam. They had to trudge around all over the countryside with those smelly and inconsistent sheep. Occasionally, a sheep would get out of line. The small shepherd might strike him with his staff or simply call out to him by name. At one point, I saw the shepherd get behind the sheep to throw a stone or two. It was a simple and effective way to let that particular sheep know to speed up and join the group.

The people whom Jesus taught were very familiar with sheep and with shepherds. They understood the way in which a person is charged with the responsibility of caring for the family's livelihood—the sheep. The shepherds would risk their own lives for the sheep. They would endure terrible weather, awful conditions, dangerous predators, and the occasional bandit just to care for the ungrateful, but valuable sheep.

Jesus referred to Himself as a Shepherd (John 10:11, 14). He indicated that leadership is comparable to shepherding in many ways. Jesus was also referred to as a Lamb (John 1:29, 36). The people of New Testament times would have understood the symbolic

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beauty and purity of this description. We are called to oversee the flock of God but to imitate the Lamb while we do it. We are to be protective, nurturing, loving, and tough when we need to be.

It is another one of those paradoxes. Leading is tough, especially when you do not get to call all the shots. Especially when it is not about you or your authority. Especially when your ego realizes you are a farm hand in the back woods of God's kingdom. God sees you though. Wasn't Moses out for a little walk with the flock when God set the bush on fire? God knows right where you are.

A Kinship with the Sheep

A good shepherd builds a healthy kinship with the sheep. I would imagine that shepherds know and name most of their sheep. I would imagine that they take special care of them. In a way, they are almost family. In our situations, they are definitely family. The shepherd is an overseer and a sheep at the same time. He also answers to the ultimate Shepherd.

Time to Think and Pray

There is an automatic peace and quietness that comes with being a shepherd. There is a good deal of time spent alone. There is a surreal sense of God's presence and a recognition of the "bigness" of God's creation. Shepherds meet a lot of needs, but they also have a lot of time to spend meditating, praying, and

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thinking about God. At least that is the way it is supposed to be! A distracted shepherd is a lousy shepherd.

A shepherd who is not ultimately concerned about his Master's sheep is a disaster waiting to happen. Shepherds are not allowed to plan their own agendas. They must take care of the needs of the sheep, but ultimately they must hearken back to the direction of their Father.

Sent on a Divine Errand

I picture it this way. A father loves and teaches his young son about shepherding. He instills in him a sense of worth. He teaches him who he is. He explains and models to him his importance to the family. The young boy recognizes his father's love. He experiences this love and basks in it. He understands the gentle embrace that his father gives him, but he longs to be sent out to do his father's business. He longs to respond—to take responsibility. He wants the father to send him on important business. Thus, the shepherd boy leaves the house each day with a sense of love, a sense of purpose, and a resolve to “do” out of his relationship with his father.

If he runs into trouble, he can run home at the end of the day and fall into his father's arms. If he gets hurt, he can find a resting place—a healing place back at home. His father will be proud of him because he understands who he is and what he is to do.

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Don't you long to be sent on a divine errand? After being embraced by the Father don't you want to respond and "do" out of love and out of "being"? I do. I long to be a shepherd. I long to lead people—gently, patiently, lovingly, and graciously. I love that I can run home at any time and feel my Father's embrace.

I enjoy spending time with the sheep. At just the moment I get angry and impatient with the one who always seems to stray, I realize that he and I look and sound a lot alike! I enjoy finding that lost sheep. I love to see the hope in his eyes when he stares up at me from the ravine in which he has fallen. And, I love to return that look of hope. I love to calm him down with a gentle tone of voice that says, "With Jesus there is hope." After all, I've found myself looking up from a ravine a few times myself.

Our Shepherd gave His life for us. We are His flock. Leaders must give their lives too. It will not be easy. There will be inclement weather. The sheep will stink. They will have needs at times when you do not feel like helping them. There will be times of frustration, discouragement, and anger.

As I look down at that little scar on my hand, I have to admit that it was worth it. Leadership out of love is always worth it. You may not win back the sheep, but at least you can sleep at night knowing that you did all you could out of who you are.

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After all, you and I will not be the only ones walking around the streets of Heaven talking about our battle scars. Welcome to the way of the Shepherd.

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Thirteen: What Does It All Mean?

I explained earlier that I think the keys to worship are threefold: a radical recognition, a radical internalization, and a radical response. Here is what I mean by that. First of all we ask ourselves this question in regard to God: “Who is He?” That is, we recognize Him. There is a divine pause in time. The world stops on its axis and we realize who He is. A leader without this knowledge is not a Christian leader, he or she is merely a leader of Christians! This process is not a once-for-all-times type of experience. It must be an ongoing, daily recognition of God that inspires and renews our relationship with Him. The Bible teaches that Moses and God knew each other “face to face.” Do you know Him like that?

The second part of worship is to ask, “Who am I with this Person?” I liken this to the moment when a young man progresses in his thinking to the point that he realizes a certain young lady is beautiful, and arrives at the fact that he is “in love” with her. At that stage, we understand and internalize the thought and reality that we are standing before the King of kings. It is at His request. He called us. He loves us. We overflow with emotion and excitement. We wince at our sin and long to fall into His embrace. He jumps up from His throne and embraces us like a little girl embraces her father after he returns from a long business trip. The dad can barely breath!

Part three is this: my radical response. In other words, at this point, I “do” something. It is usually at

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this point that the Spirit actually calls you to do something. It is a “doing” based out of “being” in love with God. This is the heart and soul of Christian leadership. We do because we are somebody in Christ. We do because Christ is strengthened within us. We don’t merely do to do. We don’t do just because that’s what’s expected of a leader. We “do” out of a love relationship with Christ. The husband who just buys the anniversary gift (doing) because it is their anniversary, will not fare well over the years! How much better to buy out of love (doing out of love) than out of obligation! Many people lead Christians, but few are Christian leaders.

Teaching People about Who

People are not getting this kind of teaching. The emphasis in many churches and ministries is a mindless collage of doing. A person could get nauseated after realizing all that must be done. There is the list of “things to do” and then, of course there is the list of “things not to do.” It is an endless cycle. It is a cycle of oblivion. It does not provide meaning for life or ministry; it simply produces a tired spirit and a frustrated soul. People are tired of just doing to do. We need to teach them “who” they are in Jesus.

Teaching People How

Most people will respond with something like “Okay, now what do I need to ‘do’ about it?” Don’t hurt them! They need to be taught. Remember many of

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us have been raised in a culture that promotes activity as a form of godliness. There are always the lazy sloths that have to be pulled along to accomplish anything in life, but most of us are too good at doing. We need to teach people how to live and how to “be” who they were intended to be in Christ. Then, we need to teach them how to “do” out of love. Much of this is modeling.

Living the Mission and Seeing the Vision

People also need to be taught to live the mission. We determine what our mission is based on who we are in Christ and what He has called us to do. If we become defined by the mission, we will never have a true desire for ultimate effectiveness. Be defined by your relationship with Jesus. Ever seen how depressed retired people get? They loved to be busy. They were defined by their work. Much of the time it was a mission of doing instead of doing out of love.

We constantly encourage people to see the vision and dream the dream God has for them. It is easy to fall back into the trap of trudging along, but ultimately it is the dream that God gives us that will inspire us to greatness in the Kingdom of the loved. It was Paul who said that God was working in our hearts and minds to accomplish His will. Let Him work.

Accomplishing the Goals

Goals are measurable steps of accomplishment. They are the blueprint to building the house of successful leadership and ministry. They can also become the graveyard of your soul. I cannot emphasize enough the importance and danger of goals. Live your goals. Love your God. Remember that goals are only a means to accomplishing the work that God has called you to do. If you accomplish the goals and lose God, what have you truly gained?

Life-Changing, World-Changing Leaders Who Develop a Home for Their Followers

Is life about more than just making a name for yourself or making a lot of money? For me, it is. I want my life to be radically changed. I want to see God invade my soul in ways I never dreamed possible. I want to see His love, power, presence, and forgiveness manifested in me so much that they become a part of who I am.

Then, I want to be used of God to change the world in which I live, not as a politician or one motivated by self-serving motives, but as a true leader—a true minister. God will use His family to change the world. He is ready and waiting to use you and me to accomplish the change He desires in the hearts of men and women.

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I want my ministry base to be a place that not only “feels like” home to people, but is also a spiritual, moral, and family-like home where they can grow into all that God has for them. They can be nurtured and allowed to “be” all they were intended to be. I can love them, prod them, walk and work beside them and see God do great things in their lives. Then, together, we can take the Gospel to the ends of the world. We can do it victoriously, because having experienced His love, we will have the right motivation—love for Him.

*A Final Word about a Man Who Never
Forgot "Who" He Was*

Joseph. Abused, battered, tortured by his brothers and wrongly accused by his boss’s wife, he grew up to be one of the greatest political leaders Egypt had ever seen. He remembered those who abused him, yet somehow the love and compassion of God were so strengthened within him that Joseph found a way not only to provide for his brothers but also to save their lives.

Joseph had a request: to see his dad (Genesis 45:3). You probably know the story. After carefully arranging a meeting, Joseph, without revealing his identity, asked his brothers about his dad. He then set the plan in motion to see his younger brother and his father as well. He welcomed his family into his home and took care of them as if nothing had ever gone wrong. Dysfunction disappeared. Bitterness bit the dust. Love and a deep respect for the plan of God ordered the day.

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Years later Joshua's clan would carry the bones of Joseph back to Israel (Joshua 24:32). He would find his final resting place. The people of Israel remembered that Joseph was a Jew and that he desired and deserved to be buried in the Land of Promise. They remembered "who" he was.

After you and I are gone, and the briefcase is all packed up...After the last sermon has been preached, the final person coached, and the last prayer issued...What's left? Is it merely an odd assortment of things we did? Will it say on your tombstone, "He was a great doer"? Perhaps at my eulogy they will just read off a list of ten great things I did. I hope not.

I hope they remember "who" I was. And, in remembering that, I hope they learned "who" God is and "who" they are when they embrace His love.

Lead out of love and God will use you to change your world.

About the Author

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