

Courageous Leadership

by
Bill Hybels

Notes & Quotes per Pastor Jeff Pearson

Introduction:

In the early years of my ministry my boldness and decisiveness were not matched by equal measures of wisdom and sensitivity.

I've done my best to describe the function, instincts, and scope of what leaders must do. This is not a book on leadership theories, but rather on proven leadership practice.

I believe that the local church is the hope of the world!

Churches can become the redemptive centers that Jesus intended them to be. Dynamic teaching, creative worship, deep community, effective evangelism, and joyful service will combine to renew the hearts and minds of seekers and believers alike, strengthen families, transform communities, and *change the world*.

Chapter One: The Stakes of Leadership

The church has an utterly unique mission to fulfill on planet Earth... the future of our society depends, largely, on whether or not church leaders understand that mission and mobilize their congregations.

In Acts chapter 2 the community of believers offered unbelievers a vision of life that was so beautiful it took their breath away.

Why isn't this power evident in the contemporary church?

One major facet of the beauty of the local church is its power to transform the human heart.

Only the power of the love of Jesus Christ conquers sin and wipes out shame and heals wounds and reconciles enemies and patches broken dreams and changes the world... And the radical message of that transforming love has been given to the church.

That means the future of the world rests in the hands of local congregations.

Without churches filled with the power of God, depravity will win the day; evil will flood the world. But it doesn't have to be that way. Strong, growing communities of faith can turn the tide of history... The church is it.

There is nothing like the local church when it's working right. Its beauty is indescribable. Its power is breathtaking. It comforts the grieving and heals the broken in the context of community. It builds bridges to seekers and offers truth to the confused. It provides resources for those in need and opens its arms to the forgotten, the downtrodden, the disillusioned. It breaks the chains of addictions, frees the oppressed, and offers belonging to the marginalized. Whatever the capacity for human suffering, the church has a greater capacity for healing and wholeness.

No other organization on earth is like the church. Nothing even comes close.

What is the key to the vitality of thriving churches? Answer: thriving churches, those with the power and beauty of God running through them, ultimately flow from the blessing of God.

What do thriving churches have in common? Answer: Location? No, I have discovered thriving churches in the most unlikely places. Ideal facilities? No, in every imaginable kind of inadequate facility, I have discovered wonderfully thriving churches. Maybe the key to thriving churches is great preaching? Although many preaching-centered churches attract large crowds, their impact on the community is often negligible. Sermon junkies tend to stay in their comfortable pews, growing ever more knowledgeable while becoming ever less involved in the surrounding community. The body is being fed and satisfied in a corporate teaching setting, but that's about all that's happening. There are other assumed keys I could also debunk...

What flourishing churches have in common is that they are led by people who possess and deploy the spiritual gift of leadership. Whenever and wherever I have found high impact, Acts 2, prevailing church, I have also discovered a little band of brothers and sisters who are humbly and prayerfully providing vision, the strategy, and the inspiration.

It's not that I think the gift of leadership is more important than the other gifts. It's simply that people with the gift of leadership are uniquely equipped to come up with the strategies and structures that provide opportunities for other people to use their gifts most effectively. Leaders see the big picture and understand how to help others find their place of service with that picture.

The common thread connecting all these leaders is that they recognized and developed their leadership gifts, submitted them to God, and used them as effectively as they could. The result? Prevailing churches!

Behind the scenes of every prevailing ministry is/are a courageous, servant-oriented leader(s).

The local church is the hope of the world and its future rests primarily in the hands of its leaders.

The question is this: Will the men and women who have been entrusted with leadership gifts take their gifts seriously, develop them fully, and deploy them courageously, so that the willing and gifted believers in their churches can work together to make a difference in the world.

Romans 12:8 tells those who have the gift of leadership that we had better sit up and take notice.

Because the Church will flourish or falter largely on the basis of how we lead, my ultimate concern is not leadership. For me, the bottom line is the Acts 2 church. But the church will never reach her full redemptive potential until men and women with the leadership gift step up and lead.

People supernaturally gifted to lead must yield themselves fully to God. They must cast powerful, biblical, God-honoring visions (given by God). They must build effective, loving, clearly focused teams. They must insist with pit-bull determination that: the gospel be preached; the lost be found; the believers be equipped; the poor be served; the lonely be enfolded into community; and God gets the credit & glory for it all!

Scripture tells us that if leaders will do what God has called and gifted them to do, the forces of darkness will be pushed back!

Chapter Two: A Leader's Most Potent Weapon

When God fuels a dream, and a leader becomes inspired, who knows what might happen?

Don't bother questioning the possibility of change...

Vision is the most potent weapon for world change.

Vision is at the very core of leadership.

Vision is the fuel that leaders run on. It's the energy that creates action. It's the fire that ignites the passion of followers. It's the clear call that sustains focused effort year after year, decade after decade.

Proverbs 29:18 says: "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

When a church needs a God-honoring, kingdom-advancing, heart-thumping vision, it turns to its leaders. That's because God put in the leader's arsenal the potent weapon called vision.

If we will unleash the power of vision in our churches, we can change the world.

Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion.

What picture does that for you?

When God finally brings clarity of vision to a leader's life, everything changes... the dominoes start to fall.

Likely, one sees the vision through witnessing or experiencing a work of God that's already being done in someone else. Seeing this ignites an internal response that simply can't be ignored. Without hesitation the leader says: "I think I could give my life to this... I was born for this!"

Sometimes a vision comes like an epiphany, all at once – Bang! – it's there. Other times it comes into focus piece by piece over a long period of time. But, either way, at some point a leader sees clearly the vision God intends for him/her to see.

What makes a vision so powerful? Answer: it's the energy and passion it evokes deep in one's heart. This level of energy or passion must be experienced (and God given) to be fully understood.

Do something important with your one and only life. Lay it down for Christ & His Church.

God-given visions pack a powerful punch and make a lasting impact.

Vision and passion are inextricably bound together in the life of a leader. When God gives you a vision you'll know it. You'll see it clearly and feel it deeply.

Whenever I hear a leader communicating a passionate, heartfelt, God-honoring vision I am energized whether I want to be or not...

Leaders should never apologize for the strength of feeling that accompanies their God-given visions. God designed leaders to experience their longing, their desire, their drive deeply, and to express it fully. And when they do, they energize others.

The next step is for leaders to take responsibility for the vision... to own it!

Like Paul in Acts 20:24, the moment I received my vision from God, fulfilling that vision became the pressing priority of my life. Whatever personal agenda I had has given way to the marching orders I received from God.

When God asks leaders to subordinate their own personal agendas to fulfill the visions He has given them, He knows that if they do that they will never be sorry. However, some of the most exciting visions that God ever offered to humans have

languished, withered, and died. Why? Because some leader somewhere saw it and felt it but did not have the guts to own it or act on it... so the vision never became reality.

I can only imagine what this does to the heart of God. Visions are priceless! They are holy entrustments from God. To squander a vision is an unthinkable sin.

Don't miss this. If God has given you a kingdom vision, you had better take responsibility for it. You had better give your life to it. That's why God made you a leader. That's your unique calling. That's what you will be held accountable for someday.

I've discovered a number of "conditions of heart" that seem to maximize our ability to hear and receive vision from God:

- 1. Being fully yielded to God*
- 2. Ask God to unveil His vision for your life vs. blessing your plan*
- 3. Fast and pray*
- 4. Have quiet times with the Lord and wait on Him in solitude*
- 5. Remove the sin and sinful patterns in your life*
- 6. Rid your life of spiritual distractions and noise*
- 7. Expose yourself to a variety of ministries and visions for inspiration*
- 8. Spend quality and quantities of time in God's Word*

Receiving a vision from God involves the quiet, internal work of making your heart ready, and also the energetic, external work of exploring and experimenting. Leaders must devote themselves to both efforts.

How does a leader best communicate a vision? Answer: by embodying it. By personifying it. By living it out.

We all communicate our vision most powerfully when we can look our friends and other potential followers in the eye and say, "I am giving my life to the fulfillment of this vision. I'd love to have you help me. But even if you don't, I am going to do what God has called me to do."

I will not let the opinion of others affect my own commitment to God's call on my life. I am called to this vision. I must embody it. I must! It's a private thing between God and me.

Seasoned leaders carefully, passionately, and personally explain their vision, then they courageously ask individuals to join them.

Sometimes our "big ask" requires a person to trade a lucrative position for a lower paying ministry role or move from a city they love or accept a challenge that stretches their gifts further than they think they can go. Leaders need to acknowledge the sacrifice involved. "I know this is no small thing I'm asking. Would you just pray about it? I'll

pray too.” From that point on, the decision is in God’s hands and the leader must be willing to trust God for the outcome.

The last step in communicating the vision is to cast the vision publically. This is a daunting challenge because it forces leaders to put precise wording to their passions.

Some leaders choke and decide not to take that risk. They don’t give the vision talk. They intentionally stay out of harm’s way and acquiesce to the status quo – all to avoid possible pain. Then, everyone pays for the leader’s lack of courage.

When you do share the vision publically... keep it simple.

When a leader is casting vision publically the goal is to help people to know, understand, and remember the “main thing.” People better be able to walk away saying: “I know the main thing.”

Peter Drucker says the main thing should be able to fit on the front of a T-shirt. It better be crisp, repeatable, and the kind of statement the average layperson can recite back with minimal trouble. It needs to be succinct and memorable.

The power of vision moves people into action. It puts the match to the fuel that most people carry around in their hearts and yearn to have ignited.

Another benefit of vision casting is that it provides focus.

Nothing neutralizes the redemptive potential of a church faster than trying to be all things to all people. It is impossible for any one church to do it all.

Leaders will unapologetically say “NO” to all sorts of competing endeavors. Why? So that someday they can hear these words: “You stayed true to the vision I gave you. You did not get side tracked. You reached the unique destination I had in mind for your church. Well done, faithful servant.”

The payoffs of a clearly defined vision are increased energy, increased ownership, and increased focus.

One of the greatest gifts we leaders can give our churches is a clear, God-honoring vision that will outlast us.

But, what happens in most churches? Every 4-5 years, there’s a ninety-degree vision change when a new pastor comes in. I have seen entire congregations commit themselves to non-involvement because of their frustration with revolving-door pastors and ever-shifting visions.

Chapter Three: Getting-It-Done Leadership

There is one thing even more exciting than clarifying and casting a God-honoring vision: achieving the vision!

Sadly, an alarming number of leaders would rather cast vision than roll up their sleeves and attempt, with the Spirit's power, to achieve the vision!

It takes more than a pep talk... Some leaders believe that the key to getting results is simply to cast the vision again... and again... and again. They are convinced that if they just keep talking about the dream and keep focused on the dream and keep people thinking and praying and pumped up about the dream, it will automatically happen.

There's a huge difference between visionary leadership & get-it-done leadership.

A valuable lesson in leadership... at a certain point, people need more than vision. They need a plan, a step by step explanation of how to move from vision to reality

Set specific goals in conjunction with your refined vision.

Find and develop "Goal Champions" within your church, people who will passionately take ownership of your church's efforts to achieve a specific goal.

It is by God's power and our focused efforts that we reach our goals.

I recommend making 5 year goals and then breaking them down into 5 individual one year goals, which are subsequently broken down into successive 12 month goals...

We need to connect every level of leader directly to our strategic plan and we need to retrain everyone to feel responsible for the future of the church as a whole, not just their area of ministry.

I know Jesus' warnings about wielding power. I recognize the danger. But I believe that there are times when a leader has to draw a line in the sand. There comes a time when an issue has been processed into oblivion, and a leader must take action.

Many leaders stand before their congregations and say, "We are going to take the world!" Then, three years later, they haven't taken one city block. This is a kingdom tragedy.

Who is offering the message of hope to this community? Who is reaching out to neighbors, coworkers, and friends who are far from God?

Often times there are numbers of people who love to help a church make an impact. They just don't know what to do. They have been preached at and taught, but with on one to inspire them, to mobilize them, and to coordinate their efforts, their desire to make a difference for Christ has been completely frustrated and wasted.

One of the greatest tragedies of the church in our time has been its failure to recognize the importance of the spiritual gift of leadership. Only a fraction of pastors are exercising the spiritual gift of leadership... and the results are staggering.

Hebrews 13:7 reminds church leaders that we "must give an account" for what we do with our leadership gifts. When those of us with leadership gifts fail to lead effectively, the entire church is affected, not to mention the unchurched people in our communities.

Leadership is the catalytic gift that energizes, directs, and empowers all the other gifts. Without it, the other gifts languish, the church becomes inwardly focused and impotent, and unbelievers end up with a one-way, nonstop ticket to the abyss. That's why Paul so passionately said to leaders: "If you have the leadership gift... LEAD!"

All leaders need to strive continually to lift their leadership capacity to the next level, no matter how difficult that is. We need to be willing to move out of our comfort zones, to learn new skills and disciplines, and even to submit to a process of retraining.

I am asking leaders to be humble enough to learn. I am asking all of us leaders to be courageous enough to apply best practice in appropriate, Spirit-anointed ways in whatever leadership arena God assigns us.

Did God have goals and strategic planning in mind as useful tools to serve the church's mission? Or are we just superimposing worldly business practices into the spiritual world where they don't belong? Are we at risk of strategically planning the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit right out of the church?

Leaders must decide where to settle on these issues. Should we just dream and give pep talks and leave the rest to God? Or should we manage for results?

What you have to understand is that some of us church leaders believe to the core of our beings that the local church is the hope of the world. We believe that the church is the only God-anointed agency in society that stewards the transforming message of the love of Christ.

The eternal destinies of people in our communities hang in the balance. That's why we are so determined to get our visions right and live out our values and come up with effective strategies. It matters that we attain our goals! We believe that the success or failure of our churches directly affects people's lives here today and for eternity.

That's why we make no apology for learning and applying best practice principles as God leads us in our churches.

God says to each leader: "You lead as diligently as you possibly can. You maximize every ounce of leadership potential I put in you. Read. Study. Find a mentor. For the sake of the church and the world, develop this gift to the zenith of its potential in your life.

Look at how Jesus took his leadership challenge. When only 12 He told His parents, "I must be about My Father's business." I'm fascinated by the very fact that he called it business.

Years later, He launched His ministry. He had a clear vision, a 3 year strategic plan which included the selection and development of 12 disciples. He had a well planned evangelism strategy that moved from concentric circles outward. Jesus gave specific assignments and job descriptions. When His followers did their jobs well, He commended them, praised them, rewarded them. When they didn't, He confronted them and showed them how to do it right. Then he sent them out to do it again, but better.

Jesus took His Father's business all the way to the cross.

Jesus expects today's church leaders to put their best efforts into building prevailing churches. He promised to gift us, empower us, and walk beside us... We, like Jesus, need to be serious about "our Father's business." It will require prayer, spiritual discipline, dependence on the Holy Spirit – and best leadership practices. It's a "both/and" deal. We also need to accept that we will probably have to pay a price for devoting our lives to building the kingdom of God. Jesus did.

It's time for leaders to really lead! It's time for us to be about our Father's business with diligence, dependence, and get-it-done leadership.

Chapter Four: Building a Kingdom Dream Team

What a privilege it is to be part of a loving, unified, energized team. How many people go to their graves without ever having experienced such a blessing.

Team community is more than just working with other people, it's doing life deeply with one another as we serve together! The difference between the two is huge.

Jesus provides us a model of a leader who build a cohesive, loving team.

Being on a "dream team" is like enjoying a bit of heaven on earth.

This is as good as it gets – being powerfully used by God – together!

Such experiences make ministry work sweet even in stressful times. It's what it means to live out the dream of Jesus, who prayed, "Oh God, may my followers become one."

Define the purpose of the team... Thru the power of the Holy Spirit the ability to build a dream team is a standard component in a leader's gift package.

First step: define the purpose of the team... define it with ruthless specificity!

We are forced to define the purpose of the team very specifically so that the leader will know what kind of people to look for. Widely different tasks may require people with widely different gifts, skills, and experience.

Step two: The "3 C's" of team selection... Establish clear criterion for the selection of specific team members. What kind of person is needed to fill each position on the team? We need to look for certain characteristics and qualities in order of their importance: 1). Character 2). Competence 3). Chemistry

Character first. You must have confidence in a person's walk with Jesus. You need to know that they are committed to spiritual disciplines. You need to see evidence of honesty, teachability, humility, reliability, a healthy work ethic, and a willingness to be entreated.

Lapses in character create problems with far-reaching implications.

A break down in character tends to breed distrust and alienate team members.

Look for character that has already been positively formed.

Check references. Speak at length with people who know the person well. Look for any red flags of character.

If an existing team member begins to display lapses in character, act as soon as you become aware of the problem. Ask the person to face it, confess it, repent, and make changes with God's help. If their patterns and choices continue, ask the person to leave the team.

Competence is the second thing to look for... Don't apologize for shooting high.

The author recommends choosing the best qualified person for the position (assuming all spiritual, character, and chemistry issues are in line). He says: "Shoot for the moon when it comes to competence." I (Pastor Jeff Pearson) disagree here. I insist on letting the Lord lead in these matters... I recognize that the Lord may want to build His team with under-qualified, unlikely, servants – with the divine plan to "qualify the called" who have responded with faithful obedience to God's call on their lives. (I stand as a living example of such a plan.)

Peter Drucker warns: “If you find someone whose qualifications look good, but he or she is unhappy or unemployed, be very cautious.

Chemistry is the 3rd category of selection criteria...

Ken Blanchard warns leaders to never invite a person onto the team who does not have an immediate positive emotional effect on you.

Don't ever overlook your own people when building a team. Hire from within whenever possible.

To build performance, start with the Leader!

The most crucial factor in a team's performance is the effectiveness of its clearly defined leader. A top quality leader will:

Keep the team focused on the mission.

Make sure the right people are in the right positions.

Maximize every team member's contribution.

Evenly distribute the load so that morale stays high & burnout stays low.

Facilitate communication & keep all team members in the loop.

Assess and raise the level of community within the team.

One of the most important roles a leader plays is to guide team members into a deeper experience of community...

Build team performance by establishing clear goals...

Goals have to be more than big. They also have to be clear.

What gets measured, gets done. Without clear goals, most teams flounder, wasting time, losing energy, getting distracted, and eventually becoming demoralized.

Jesus gave us a big, clear goal... Matthew 28:19-20, “Okay team, here's the goal: Go into all the world and preach the gospel. Lead every man, woman, and child to faith. Then grow them up by teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. Ready. Set. Go!”

It takes extraordinary leadership energy to set appropriate goals, to align people to them, and to inspire team members to reach them.

Build team performance by rewarding achievement...

Leaders have to reward teams for work well done. Some leaders are squeamish about rewarding those who work effectively. But Jesus was not vague about the concept of rewards. He often promised devoted followers great reward “in this life and the next.”

Chapter Five: The Resource Challenge... the test of a Leader's mettle

At the start of Willow Creek Church, we had no facilities, no equipment, no ministry budgets, and no salaries. We had no people! My romance with the notion of building an Acts 2 church had blinded me to the harsh realities of funding one...

Most of my memories from the late 70's have to do with trying to deal with our church's lack of resources. The financial pressures became almost more than I could bear. (Note: page 96 illustrates a very bad example, one with which I – Pastor Jeff Pearson, am grieved – it shows what happens when money takes an unhealthy posture within a ministry.)

The point leader stands accountable for raising and allocating funds for the entire organization.

A fruitful ministry requires resources.

Resource truth #1: God is the ultimate resource Supplier...

Psalm 50:12 shows that God agrees... “the world is mine, and all that is in it.” God's resources, in other words, are unlimited. Many church leaders fall into the trap of believing that some person in their church is their ultimate resource supplier. Not so! People are the conduits of God's supply.

God alone controls the flow of the financial river we need. No one wants to see a (biblically healthy) church appropriately resourced than God does.

Resource truth #2: Under the right circumstances, people love to give...

Start by assuming that people are predisposed to give.

A leader who thinks his/her job is to wrench dollars from people who are adamantly opposed to parting with them cannot help but come up with a fundraising strategy that is manipulative (that typically works thru guilt).

If the right people are presented with the right kingdom opportunity in the right way at the right time, the result will be a joyful and generous outpouring of support.

Approach fundraising efforts from a positive perspective that treats people with dignity. A leader's goal should be to offer wonderful people fantastic opportunities to invest in the kingdom, if God so leads...

Resource truth #3: Funding ministry proves the character of a leader like no other challenge...

If Bill Gates were to offer to transfer a couple billion dollars into Willow Creek's coffers, I'd turn it down. The reason... I believe there are tremendous spiritual benefits associated with having to face financial challenges.

Pressure is the stuff that God wants to use to move you and your people into higher levels of commitment and trust.

Don't underestimate the value of the spiritual growth that develops as you address resource challenges... When I first experienced the Acts 2 idea of interdependence in the family of God it melted my pride. In those years of scarcity I found God to be the ultimate promise keeper. I don't think that conviction could have been forged in me in any other way... Scarcity can produce amazing spiritual fruit! Those years made God's faithfulness more than a theory to me. God made the impossible possible. By His supernatural power He had moved the resource mountain.

Nothing tests the mettle of ministry leaders and members more than the resource challenge. Leaders must willingly accept the resource challenge. We must allow the pressures of scarcity to teach us all we can learn about God, our people, & our selves.

Five principles for raising and allocating resources...

1. Education Principle = educate people on biblical stewardship
2. Information Principle = lay everything out in front of people
3. K.I.S.S. Principle = the archenemy of fundraising is complexity
4. Strategic Discipling Principle = help people with the gift of giving
5. Vision Principle = people give to "vision," nothing else

Chapter Six: Emerging Leaders... when leaders are at their best

Leaders are at their best when they are working in tandem with God, raising up leaders around them; in large part by creating "leadership cultures."

Leaders that mentor and multiply are displaying leadership at the highest level.

Leadership development requires a vision...

Leadership development never happens accidentally.

In high-speed, high-intensity organization, leadership development will always slip to the bottom of the agenda unless mature leaders force it to the top.

Three key steps to leadership development:

1. Someone spots a "leader's" potential
2. Someone invests in the emerging leader
3. Someone trusts the up-and-coming leader with responsibility(s)

Leaders don't become leaders until someone actually puts a baton of responsibility in their hands and says, "Go!"

Jesus' leadership development plan... Jesus moved through these 3 phases as He raised up His disciples and other potential leaders. He selected His disciples carefully. He took His time and prayed fervently before He chose them.

He very quickly moved into an intense time of investing into their lives. He spent time with them. He taught them. He nurtured them. He confronted them. He motivated them. He rebuked them. He inspired them. Then, months later, He entrusted them with real ministry responsibility and coached them into effectiveness.

Character qualities to look for in emerging leaders...

First necessary quality is influence – the ability to influence others. Leadership, at its core, is about influence. So I'm always looking for people who have the ability to influence their peers.

Second quality is character... Lots of people with influence lack the character to use that influence constructively or Christianly.

Try to discern whether he or she has the honesty, humility, stability, teachability, and the integrity to steward the influence God has given them. I want to see evidence of a sincere walk with God, a yieldedness to the Holy Spirit, and a commitment to the authority of God's Word.

When a person appears to have both influence and solid character I intensify my search for the remaining three qualities.

Third quality is "people skills" – the sensitivity to the thoughts & feelings of others, and the ability to listen (really listen) to the ideas of others. These are the people who genuinely care for other people, who view others as more than a means to an end.

Top leaders must have people skills. They must be able to relate winsomely to a wide range of people, to folks with personality quirks, power issues, and self-esteem deficiencies.

Fourth quality is "drive" – people with an action-orientation, those who are comfortable taking initiative.

Good leaders make things happen! They want to finish the job so they can move on to the next thing God has for them to do.

People with this kind of drive have so much energy that they energize others without even trying.

Fifth quality is intelligence – not necessarily SAT scores, IQ, or sheepskins...

What I look for in potential leaders is mental quickness... people with street smarts, with the kind of mental savvy required to process lots of information, sift thru it, consider all the options, and generally make the right decision. I also look for someone with an eager, curious mind – intellectual elasticity... those who can learn and grow over the long haul.

When you find people with these 5 leadership indicators, figure out ways to get them into your personal orbit so you can get to know them better and verify your initial observations. If they do in fact have the “right stuff,” do your best to get them on a developmental track as soon as possible.

Leaders learn best from other leaders.

True leaders want more than theory from teacher types. They want to be around other leaders who have actually been in the game, leaders with a few bloodstains on their uniforms.

For emerging leaders to become seasoned, they need proximity to and interaction with veteran leaders.

Those of us who are more seasoned in leadership must carve out time to invest in the next generation of leaders. It is our responsibility!

The best catalyst for a leader’s growth is to make him/her lead something. No one can grow as a leader without the real life challenges of actually leading.

Jesus didn’t seek to minimize the challenge He gave His followers (Matthew 10:16 = “I am sending you out like sheep amongst wolves...”) Jesus was telling them that this is the real-deal! The stakes are high. The possibility of failure is real. And I’m not going to protect you from all risk.

When we have identified emerging leaders, poured into them, trained them, and adequately prepared them, we must hand emerging leaders an important kingdom baton – not a little make-believe job or a low-stakes challenge – but something that will make their pulse quicken; something that will make them feel believed-in, valued, and held in high esteem; something that will make them fall to their knees and cry out for God’s help; something that will demand the best they have to offer.

Leaders live for high-stake challenges! We crave the kind of kingdom goals that make us gasp and gulp. That’s not true of non-leaders; they generally prefer to keep challenge (and stress) levels low; that’s how God made them. But leaders want the kind of kingdom responsibilities that demand everything they’ve got. Anything less than that is de-motivating.

I love seeing people in whom I've invested time and energy bearing fruit, having impact, glorifying God and loving it.

I remember clearly what it was like to have something that you planned turn out better than your wildest dreams, because God showed up in a mighty way... I remember how that can melt a young leader's heart.

Whatever we do, we must create leadership cultures. We must identify emerging leaders, invest in them, give them kingdom responsibilities, and coach them into effectiveness. Then we can each experience the thrill of watching them soar.

Chapter Seven: Discovering & Developing Your Own Leadership Style

Leadership has many faces. Different leadership styles vary... yet certain leaders have unusually high impact because their particular style of leadership meshes perfectly with a specific need.

Certain leadership styles fit better than others with specific kingdom needs.

Try to identify your leadership style & the leadership styles of those around you.

Leadership Styles...

1. *Visionary Leadership:* He or she has a crystal clear picture in mind of what the future could hold. He/she casts powerful visions and has indefatigable enthusiasm for turning those visions into reality. Visionary leaders shamelessly appeal to anybody and everybody to get on board with their vision. They burn white hot for their vision... They are idealistic, faith-filled leaders who wholeheartedly believe that if they cast their vision clearly enough and often enough it will become reality. They are not easily discouraged or deterred. People who tell them it can't be done just fuel the fire of their spirit. Visionary leaders may or may not have the ability to form teams, align talent, set goals, or manage progress. To be effective over the long haul they will either have to find other people who can help or they will have to work hard to develop these other skills. One thing is sure: these leaders carry the vision, cast the vision, draw people to the vision, and they'll die trying to fulfill the vision!
2. *Directional Leadership:* The strength of this leader is his/her uncanny, God given ability to choose the right path for an organization as it approaches a critical intersection. Directional issues are huge, so huge that they often immobilize a church or ministry. But a leader with directional style is able to sort through all the options. Directional leaders may or may not have a high profile in an organization. They may or may not be able to stand up in front of people and excel at public leadership... I have learned to defer to seasoned directional leaders.

3. *Strategic Leadership*: These leaders have the God-given ability to take an exciting vision and break it down into a series of sequential, achievable steps. This gift of leadership allows an organization to march intentionally toward the actualization of its mission. Unless people eventually see progress toward the fulfillment of the vision they will conclude that the vision caster is just a dreamer and their morale will plummet. Strategically oriented leaders form a game plan that everybody can understand and participate in. They challenge team members to “work the plan.” A strategic leader will also strive to bring the various sub-groups of an organization into alignment so that all the organization’s energy will be focused toward realizing the vision. Every church and organization needs someone who provides this critical strategic component to the leadership team.
4. *Managing Leadership*: This not a “manager,” but rather a true leader, one with the gift and ability to organize people, processes, and resources to achieve a mission. The managing leader salivates at the thought of bringing order out of chaos. He/she finds deep satisfaction in monitoring and fine-tuning a process. They are motivated by establishing appropriate mile-markers on the road to the destination. Managing leaders seldom captivate attention, but in the day-to-day operational world, someone has to manage people and progress to move the organization toward its goals.
5. *Motivational Leadership*: These are the modern day Vince Lombardis... Motivational leaders have the ability to keep their teams fired up. They move quickly to inject the right kind of inspiration into those who need it most. They have a keen sense about who needs public recognition and who needs just a private word of encouragement. It is a huge mistake to underestimate the value of this style. Most people would gladly make due with a lower voltage vision caster, an occasional bad call, and/or a periodic lapse of managerial effectiveness if their leader consistently fired them up, called out their best, cheered on their progress, celebrated their accomplishments, and told them they were important to the team’s cause. Jesus consistently motivated His disciples...
6. *Shepherding Leadership*: Shepherding leaders build teams slowly while loving the team members deeply – nurturing them gently, supporting them consistently, listening patiently, and praying for them diligently. These leaders draw others into a rich community experience. These leaders focus less on the specifics of vision and key in on the power and potential of community. There are plenty of community-starved people who need to be welcomed onto a team where they can be nurtured and loved. Only then will they be motivated to answer the call of a cause. Without tender care they will hold back, but if shepherded lovingly they will joyfully pursue almost any kingdom purpose with loyal dedication.

7. *Team-Building Leadership*: These folks realize it will take a team of leaders and workers to accomplish the goal. They are good team builders who know how to put people in the right positions for the right reasons. The difference between the shepherding leader and the team-building leader is that the team-builder is driven more by a clear understanding of the vision than by the desire to nurture and build community. The unique strength of team-building leaders is that they have a stranglehold on the strategy and an acute insight into people that allows them to make precise placements of personnel into critical leadership roles. Finding the right people to do the right things consistent with their best skills is the hallmark of the team-building leadership style. There is nothing like forming a kingdom dream team and watching it soar to higher and higher levels of impact.
8. *Entrepreneurial Leadership*: What distinguishes these leaders from the others is that they function optimally in start-up mode. Once a venture is up and operational, most entrepreneurial leaders lose enthusiasm, focus, and sometimes even confidence. At that point they start peeking over the fence and wondering if it might be time to start something new. If they can't give birth to something new every few years, something inside them starts to die. That's just their style and it's important in the kingdom. I believe the Apostle Paul was an entrepreneurial leader. The kingdom would be diminished if entrepreneurial leaders stopped dreaming new dreams & starting new stuff.
9. *Re-engineering Leadership*: Turn-around environments suit these leaders best. If a team has lost its vision, if a ministry has people in the wrong positions, if a ministry is trying to move forward without a strategy – these are all examples of situation in need of a re-engineering leader. These folks enthusiastically dig in to uncover the original mission and the cause of the mission-drift. They re-evaluate personnel, strategy, and values. When everything is back on track and operating smoothly, these leaders may or may not be motivated to stay engaged. Many prefer to find another organization that needs to be overhauled.
10. *Bridge building Leadership*: These leaders have the unique ability to bring together under a single leadership umbrella a wide range of constituent groups. This enables a complex organization (like parachurch ministries) to stay focused on a single mission. The unique gift that bridge-building leaders bring is enormous flexibility. Diplomats who possess a supernaturally inspired ability to compromise and negotiate... They are specially gifted to listen, understand, and think outside the box. Above everything else, bridge builders love the challenge of relating to diverse groups of people. After building relationships of trust, bridge builders try to refine the vision of each sub-leader, negotiating with them until their goals are working in harmony with the overall vision and mission of the larger organization. Bridge building leaders are champions of the “win/win” by helping all parties realize that they can achieve the goals of their sub-ministry, while simultaneously contributing to the realization of other worthwhile goals. Dealing with complexity is a bridge building leader's forte.

There are 4 steps to discovering & developing your leadership style:

1. *Review the list above... You may find one or several styles that fit you... Be sure to get outside perspectives from those who know you well.*
2. *Discern whether or not your leadership strengths actually fit the role you are being expected to fill.*
3. *Determine the leadership style of each person on your team. Do this together.*
 - a. *Make sure each member is matched with the leadership need that allows him/her to have the greatest impact.*
 - b. *This will create an opportunity to see if there is any glaring hole in your team's leadership inventory. If you notice an area of leadership that is needed by lacking, this exercise will point you in the direction of the next leader to add to the team...*
 - i. *NOTE: there are some leadership styles without which an organization cannot survive!*
 1. *Organizations that aren't sustained by a captivating vision eventually die.*
 2. *Every organization needs a workable strategy.*
 3. *Every team needs someone who is gifted in lifting the human spirit – shepherding leaders.*
4. *Final step is to commit yourself to developing both your strengths and your weaknesses because overlooking areas in which one is weak will eventually compromise their ability to lead.*

When leaders are optimally positioned so that their leadership strengths mesh perfectly with the specific needs of a ministry, they can have a huge impact. Under their leadership the troops can be mobilized, the mission can be achieved, and the kingdom can move forward like never before!

Chapter Eight: A Leader's Sixth Sense... the sources of decision making

Some leaders seem to be uniquely gifted to spot the one glittering diamond of opportunity buried in a coal mine of problems. Everyone else is overwhelmed and discouraged, but these leaders are undaunted; they see what no one else can see – potential in the midst of disaster.

I believe that spiritually gifted leaders construct, over time, a value system and experience base that wisely informs each subsequent decision they make. As they diligently add to this personal database year after year, they automatically increase their leadership batting averages.

Their ability to see what others miss is the fairly predictable result of embracing the right values and letting those values inform their perceptions of reality and the choices they make based on those perceptions.

Most of my (Bill Hybels) decisions are informed by 4 distinct data sources:

First Data Source: What I Believe – convictions that operate beneath the surface

- A. If I honor God in everything, He will honor me.*
- B. People matter – God treasures people and so should I*
- C. The local church is the hope of the world*

What are your bedrock beliefs? The list could be longer but most leaders will do well to identify their top 3 core beliefs. Be careful of faulty belief systems! Make sure your convictions are biblical. What you believe to be true in the core of your being will influence the decisions you make throughout your leadership life. Be honest... Maybe it's time to rebuild the core convictions of your life...

Second Data Source: What I Know Other Leaders Would Do

- A. Find a personal risk-assessment mentor*
- B. Find a performance-evaluations mentor*
- C. Find and/or consult with excellence mentors*
- D. Find and/or consult with a morale informers*
- E. Find theological mentors*
- F. Find finance mentors*
- G. Find psychology mentors*
- H. Find relationship experts/mentors...*

Third Data Source: Pain

Pain is a powerful teacher and a fantastic informer of our decision making process. Pain can be a great teacher, but only if we pay attention and learn the hard lessons. I recommend developing a Top Ten Pain-Lessons List, in which your top “hard lessons” are remembered, so that we’ll always remember those things we’ll never do again. This pain file will help veteran leaders to discern the level of potential pain inherent in any new idea. If the level is too high, their danger sirens start blaring, and they know they have to pull the plug.

Proverbs 13:20 says, “Whoever walks with wise people will be wise.” So, we can learn from other wise people’s pain lessons... This is another reason why it’s important to get together with other leaders and talk... sharing experiences and wisdom.

Fourth Data Source: the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is by far the most valuable data source we have. Ultimately, we walk by faith, not sight. There is a supernatural dimension to leadership that only comes our way when we listen carefully to the Holy Spirit.

Surely we must use wisdom and good judgment as we lead our ministries. But just as surely, we must at all times turn an ear to heaven. We must listen as the Holy Spirit, our supernatural data source, speaks into our decision-making process the wisdom we need the most.

Is there enough quietness in your life for you to hear the whispers of the Holy Spirit? Do you have the guts to carry out promptings, even though you might not understand them fully, and even though your team might question your wisdom? Are you willing to walk by faith? Will you commit yourself to allowing the Spirit to fully inform you decision-making?

Chapter Nine: Self-Leadership... the 360-degree leader

Many people don't realize that to lead well, a leader actually needs to be able to lead in all directions.

Through relationship and influence good leaders lead the people who supervise them.

Effective leaders must also learn how to lead in peer-group settings. If we don't learn how to lead laterally and create win-win situations with colleagues, a ministry's culture can deteriorate.

The most overlooked leadership challenge is the one in the middle.

Who is your toughest leadership challenge? Answer: YOU!

How can any of us lead others effectively if our spirits are sagging or our courage is wavering?

"It is management of self that should occupy 50% of our time and the best of our abilities." - Dee Hock

Daniel Goleman researched why a small percentage of leaders develop to their fullest potential while most leaders hit a plateau far beneath what one might expect from them... His conclusion? The difference has to do with self-leadership. He calls it "emotional-self-control." This form of self-control is exhibited by leaders when they persevere in leadership despite overwhelming opposition or discouragement; when they refuse to give up during times of crisis; when they stay focused on their mission rather than being distracted by other people's agendas.

Recall the first five chapters of Mark's Gospel. Jesus' pattern of intense ministry activity was quickly followed by time set aside for reflection, prayer, fasting, and solitude. Jesus repeated that pattern throughout His ministry. Jesus was practicing the art of self-leadership! He knew He needed to go to a quiet place and recalibrate. He knew He needed to remind Himself who He was and how much the Father loved Him.

This pattern of self-leadership helps the leader keep his calling clear, avoid mission-drift, while simultaneously keeping distractions, discouragement, and temptations at bay.

Every leader has to do this work alone... and it isn't easy! Dee Hock claims that because it is such tough work, most leader avoid it. We would rather try to inspire or control behavior of others than face the rigorous work of self reflection and inner growth.

The best gift you can give the people you lead is a (spiritually first and physically second) healthy, energized, fully surrendered, and focused you... And no one can make that happen in your life except (the Holy Spirit and) you. It's up to you to make the right choices so you can be your best.

Recognizing what is at stake (that which God is calling you to lead), get into the habit of regularly asking yourself the following questions:

1. *Is your calling sure?*
 - a. *We all must surrender ourselves fully and make ourselves completely available to God. We must all ask: "What's my mission God?"*
 - b. *Acts 20:24 reveals that for Paul, there was no higher priority than fulfilling the ministry God had given him.*
 - c. *It is a great privilege and blessing to receive a call from God. Our life becomes focused. We have increased energy and greater confidence. And knowing that we are on a mission that matters adds purpose and meaning to every day.*
 - d. *On a regular basis I ask, "God are you still calling me to be the pastor of this church?"*
 - e. *When I receive divine reaffirmation of that calling, I say, "Then let's go! Let's ignore all other distractions and temptations. Let's burn the bridges and get on with it!"*
 - f. *If you've been called to be a leader, it is your responsibility to keep your calling sure.*
 - g. *With an open heart, seek God's affirmation. Pull out all the stops to discern what God is trying to tell you. Stay focused on your calling. Keep it foremost in your mind.*

2. Is your vision clear?
 - a. *Every leader needs a regularly scheduled "Vision Night." On that night we say, "This is the picture of the future we believe God has given us; this is what we're going to do; this why we're going to do it; and this is how we're going to do it. And if we all pray like crazy and stay focused on our mission, we will be a different and better ministry one year from now.*
 - b. *As leader, you need to be absolutely clear about the vision.*
3. Is your passion hot?
 - a. *It is the leader's responsibility to keep him/her self fired up with passion... this truth is a self-leadership fundamental.*
 - b. *I have come to understand that my passion has to be white-hot before I can expect others to catch it. So, I have to keep it hot.*
 - c. *Do whatever you have to do, read whatever you have to read, go wherever you have to go to stay fired up.*
 - d. *Don't ever apologize for being white hot with passion!*
4. Are you developing your gifts?
 - a. *Do you know what your top 3 spiritual gifts are?*
 - b. *If you cannot articulate them as quickly as your name, address, and phone number... you need to have your cage rattled.*
 - c. *I have very little sympathy for leaders who are fuzzy about their spiritual gifts. Leaders must know which gifts they've been given and in what order.*
 - d. *The Bible teaches that all leaders are accountable before God for developing each of their gifts to the zenith of their potential. Don't ever forget that someday you are going to stand before God and be held accountable for how you (used and) developed what God entrusted to you.*
 - e. *Are you challenging yourself to develop your gifts to the best of your ability?*
5. Is your character submitted to Christ?
 - a. *Followers only trust leaders who exhibit the highest levels of integrity.*
 - b. *Every time you compromise character, you compromise leadership.*
 - c. *When you tell your teammates that you'll do something but don't do it, that's a character issue.*
 - d. *If and when character issues are compromised, it hurts the whole team and eventually undermines the mission.*
6. Is your pride subdued?
 - a. *"God opposed the proud but gives grace to the humble." – 1 Peter 5:5*
 - b. *The best way to find out if pride is affecting your leadership is to ask your teammates.*
 - c. *If you have a pride problem don't ignore it, pray for the Spirit's help.*

7. Are you over-coming your fears?
 - a. Fear immobilizes and neutralizes leaders.
 - b. When fear causes you to deceptively ask: “Why take this risk?”
 - i. 1 John 4:4 says, “The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”
 - ii. Ask yourself: “Has God spoken to me? Has He made His direction clear? Is He still going to love me even if I fail? Am I still going to heaven if this whole thing doesn’t turn out right?”
 - iii. Knowing the answer to those questions, step out in faith!
 - iv. It is the leader’s job to deal with fear so it doesn’t sabotage the mission.
8. Are interior issues undermining my leadership?
 - a. Leaders who ignore their interior reality often make unwise decisions.
 - b. Some pastors don’t realize that their own struggles with grandiosity cause them to make decisions that enslave their entire congregation to an agenda that’s not God’s.
 - c. Other leaders are incurable people-pleasers... they take a poll to see where they stand, then behave accordingly.
9. Is your pace sustainable?
 - a. “I came close to a total emotional meltdown in the early 1990’s. Suffice it to say, I was not practicing self-leadership. I didn’t understand the principle of sustainability. So I fried my emotions. I abused my spiritual gifts. I damaged my body. I neglected my family and friends. And I came within a whisker of becoming a ministry statistic... The pace at which I was doing the work of God was destroying God’s work in me.” - Bill Hybels
 - b. Deep down inside I kept wondering, “Why aren’t people rescuing me? Doesn’t someone, anyone... see that I am dying here?”
 - c. In addition, I expected my wife to understand and accept my extreme commitment to “God’s work.” That was a mistake, a self-leadership fumble. Our marriage suffered, as does any marriage caught up in the pressure of an insane pace.
 - d. My whole pace problem was my own making...
 - e. I was mad that I couldn’t point the finger at anybody else for my exhaustion and my emotional numbness... It is a terribly lonely feeling to have no one to blame...
 - f. *It is your responsibility to devise a sustainability plan and stick to it everyday.*
 - g. *We leaders are naïve if we think we can live at an unhealthy pace without causing pain to those closest to us.*
 - h. *Establishing a sustainability pace for your life is nobody’s job but yours. So do it!*

10. *Is your love for God and people increasing?*
- a. *People are God's greatest treasure... therefore, people ought to be our greatest treasure too.*
 - b. *Ministry comprises our loving of people like God loves people...*
 - c. *Don't let your heart shrivel.*
 - d. *Change what you have to change. Experiment with life-managing practices that will allow you to excel at leadership AND excel at loving!*
 - e. *It doesn't matter how many points you manage to hit around the compass if you aren't strong in the middle.*

Chapter Ten: A Leader's Prayer

“God, I want to be a better leader than I am. I don't want to stand before you someday and have to admit that I squandered the opportunities you gave me. I want to develop my leadership skills to the peak of my potential. But I need your help. Please direct my growth and instruct me in the way I should go.”

God, make me like David...

David had hall of fame optimism. I need David's capacity to perceive what might happen when you are in the mix. His faith-based optimism moved him to attempt feats for God that more cautious leaders would never have considered. With confidence David marched in whatever direction God pointed him, fully expecting grace and power to be revealed along the way.

Optimists expect to experience God's greatness and love, even when they're facing bleak circumstances. I need that kind of optimism in my leadership! People need to hear a leader with faith-based convictions say, “Wait a minute. Things can get better. Human lives can be transformed by the power of Christ. Suffering can be relieved by God's mercy. Oppression can be lifted. Sin can be defeated. The church can push back the gates of hell. Lord, make me like David, so I can be a leader who inspires hope. Help me lift others into a faith based optimism.

God, make me like Jonathan...

Jonathan had it all but his heart was even bigger... God, give me Jonathan's capacity to love. I don't want to use people. I don't want to see people as tools. I want to have a heart like Jonathan. Jesus taught that the acid test of our discipleship is the test of love. I'd rather be thought of as a man of love than a man of strategic intent. I'd rather be remembered as a man of love than someone who achieved a lot of goals.

God, make me like Joseph...

Joseph is a hero of mine because of his integrity. Joseph's rise to power was meteoric. Such an ascent often leads to pride but Joseph remained uncorrupted by power. He stayed unstained to the end. Moral authority comes from a completely surrendered heart, an unsoiled mind, and a clean conscience before God.

People who follow my leadership need to have confidence that I am not going to lead a double life; that I'm not going to play with the cash register; that I'm not going to sell out to the values of the world. People need confidence in my integrity.

The only way to keep from sliding into depravity is to lay yourself before God each and every day of your life and pray for His enabling power. We all have a wandering, rebellious streak that surfaces from time to time. We have to fight it with a whole array of spiritual practices. Sometimes these practices become burdensome but I have learned their value, so I hang onto them like a drowning man hangs on to a life preserver. Here are the disciplines I recommend:

1. Write out your prayers (a.k.a. "journal")
 2. Daily solitude/quiet time with the Lord
 3. Develop accountability relationships to ask the tough questions...
 4. Do secret acts of kindness & service on a regular basis
- *** Every leader must figure out what rigors, practices, and spiritual disciplines are necessary for overcoming his or her proneness to wandering. Every leader's routine should be custom fit.

God, make me like Joshua...

God, give me Joshua's decisiveness. "Choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." - Joshua 24:15

So much of leadership is about making right decisions and calling others to make them as well. Leaders must come to absolute certainty regarding major life issues, then call the people they lead to do the same.

If Joshua were leading your church he'd say, "Okay, you've heard the plan. Now it's decision time. You need to either get on board or stand clear because this train is leaving the station.

Joshua would ask our people to make bold decisions. Joshua believed that nobody ever drifts in a God honoring direction! People have to choose to follow God. People have to make tough, often costly, choices. And leaders are often the catalysts for those heroic decisions.

We must remind people that life is not a game nor is spiritual growth something to be taken lightly. The issues around which our lives and ministries revolve are eternal, and, therefore, worthy of some bold decisions.

God, make me like Esther...

Oh God, give me Esther's courage!

She could either risk her life by pleading her people's case before a dangerous king, or she could protect her position and walk away from the crisis at hand. After asking the entire local Jewish community to fast and pray, she said, "When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

- Esther 4:16

"I will do the right thing... and if I perish, I perish." Esther put it all on the line. She was willing to do what God had called her to do – no matter what!

Esther believed certain values were worth living... and dying for.

Sometimes I find myself thinking that for church renewal to occur, a whole generation of leaders is going to have to manifest the courage of Esther. We're going to have to do church a new way – a more biblical, relevant, thoughtful, and creative way. We've got to do what God has called us to do... and if we perish, we perish!

I ache when I see the enormous potential for church renewal that is unrealized for lack of leadership courage.

When are you going to start to lead courageously? Either act decisively or step aside so someone else can.

Too often I hesitate to take courageous action because I don't want to put decades of work on the line... When I feel this way, I try to remember Esther. I need Esther's courage.

God, make me like Solomon...

Oh God, please give me a small portion of Solomon's wisdom.

Too many, in fact most, leaders lay sleepless in their beds at night, tossing and turning with uncertainty.

When people ask how they can pray for me, my most common response is, "Please pray that my leadership will be characterized by a godly, sober mindedness. Please pray that I will discern God's mind on every matter.

God, make me like Jeremiah...

I have always been blown away by Jeremiah's emotional authenticity.

When the evil one seemed to be gaining the upper hand, Jeremiah didn't get cynical, nor did he slide into bitterness. With rare honesty, he expressed his true feelings to God. He admitted that he felt abandoned and fearful of the future. Then he let God restore his broken heart.

Jeremiah's ministry NEVER went well during his entire lifetime. But he stayed faithful to his calling. Despite the disappointments and thwarted expectations in his life and ministry, he never lost his confidence in God. See Lamentations 3:22-23.

The kind of hope and confidence in God that characterized Jeremiah has nothing to do with putting your game face on. It only comes to those who spill out the truth of their broken heart to God and let Him touch them with healing balm.

God, make me like Nehemiah...

Nehemiah is one of the greatest leaders of the Old Testament and what he teaches, amongst other things, is that we must commit to celebrate God's blessings. All work and no play makes for dull people and dull ministries. Leaders must not let that happen.

We need to be as intentional in planning the victory parties as we are at setting and achieving the organizational goals.

In the midst of esprit de corps the rigors of ministry suddenly seem light.

God, make me like Peter...

While there's much in Peter we leaders need to avoid, there's also a lot to be admired. I pray God will give me Peter's inclination to take initiative. Remember, Peter was the only disciple willing to get out of the boat and walk on water toward Jesus. Other times, Peter was the only one willing to speak out and up at all. He was the first to publically identify Jesus as the Messiah. Don't forget, Peter was also the one who whacked off the ear of the guy going for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane – that took initiative. Peter was the guy who always felt compelled to do something!

Like Peter, let us be leaders who are initiating kingdom action, trying something new, and launching out in ways that keep the enemy on his heels.

God, make me like Paul...

God... please... give me Paul's intensity.

Take some time and read the following passages so as to get a little bit of insight into Paul's gift of intensity: Acts 20:24; Philippians 3:13-14; 2 Corinthians 12:15; Philippians 1:21; 1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Fight! Keep the faith! Finish! When I hear those words from Paul I can barely contain my emotions. I want more of that intensity in my life. I think it's time we all ask God to give us greater intensity – a God honoring, Paul-like intensity.

Chapter Eleven: The Leader's Pathway... a vital walk with God

A close, humble walk with Christ never fails. It strengthens the heart, redirects the will, restrains the ego, and purifies the motives. It never fails!

A Leader's greatest gift: a fully yielded heart...

Jesus said, in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit." His promise reminds us that if we stay in close connection with Him, He will infuse our leadership with power, creativity, courage, and whatever else it takes for us to bear fruit for the glory of God.

A close, consistent walk with Jesus will include disciplines like solitude, fasting, prayer, Bible study, journaling, and Scripture memorization.

Different leaders have different particulars in their pathway. However, with that said, there are some great common denominators to consider. Reading "Sacred Pathways" by Gary Thomas is a great way to become exposed to those common tools.

A relational pathway...

For leaders who feel most at home on the "relational pathway," solitude feels like solitary confinement; but, inject a strong dose of relationship into their pursuit of God and watch them begin to thrive spiritually.

The intellectual pathway...

People who thrive on the intellectual pathway are those whose minds must be fully engaged before they can make significant spiritual progress. These people cannot

have their morning devotions without two or three opened commentaries flanking their Bibles. They gravitate toward classes, seminars, and special events that will challenge their thinking.

For people wired this way, once their minds are fully convinced, their hearts and will quickly follow and their convictions are rock solid.

The Apostle Paul had an intellectual pathway.

If these leaders do not keep their minds challenged, they will probably dry up spiritually. If you have an intellectual pathway, stop apologizing for it and start developing a spiritual formation plan that focuses on the development of your mind.

The serving pathway...

These people are the doers.

If you ask them when they feel closest to God, expect them to say: “When I am serving. When I am volunteering in ministry. When I know I’m helping to accomplish the work of God.” If this is your pathway, put together a spiritual formation plan that centers on serving.

The contemplative pathway...

Throughout church history there have been some Christians who feel like they’re marching to a different drummer. These people are easily drained by relationships and activities but they can spend almost unlimited time in solitude. For them, just being alone with God is enough. They spend hours reflecting on the goodness of God and have an enormous capacity for prayer and private worship. They operate with sensitive spiritual antennae and can discern the activity of God wherever they are.

The downside for these leaders is that they can sometimes feel out of step with the rest of the Christian community. Their sensitivity causes them to take very seriously things that other people don’t.

Contemplative leaders often serve as the conscience of the faith community, calling us to ministries of compassion and inclusiveness. They reflect on the numbers of (lost people and/or) people suffering in the world and wonder why so few people care. Often idealistic, they help us focus on what kingdom life is supposed to be like.

Contemplatives also have rich inner worlds. They can at times seem scattered, but often in reality they’re incubating creative ideas. While these people may seem a little out of step with the rest of us, they’re the ones who compose the songs that stir our hearts or write the books that make us think new thoughts about God.

Mature leaders understand that contemplatives need to spend a considerable amount of time outside the mainstream. They need to protect their thought life. Eventually, their reflections will lead to something wonderful that will bless the whole church.

Leaders whose primary pathway is contemplative need to give themselves an extra measure of grace. They need to give themselves permission to spend long hours in quiet reflection, even if others view it as inappropriate or strange. For contemplatives, that time alone is what opens the door to time with God.

The activist pathway...

Activists are at their best when working at light speed... They're happiest when white knuckled and gasping for breath. They need and revel in a highly challenging environment that pushes them to the edge of their potential. When they are on the edge, they feel closest to God.

Other people tend to fear for the activists. It seems as though these activists are consistently biting off more kingdom work than they can chew.

Christian "activist leaders" choose a fast pace... They're not victims.

Activist leaders love riding rockets!

Ask activists when they feel closest to God and they will respond: "When I'm way out on a limb of faith flapping in the breeze. When the battle against evil is the fiercest and the only hope for victory is divine intervention.

If you are one of **us**, accept that God has made you this way. Lean into your activist pathway. Come into God's presence – even if it's with your hair on fire. He knows our kind and enjoys us completely. Really!

The creation pathway...

People who tend to grow best and relate to God most closely when they're surrounded by nature. These people are the naturalists, the tree-huggers, and the "green" believers. Being in a natural environment dramatically increases their awareness of God. They often draw direct spiritual meaning from nature.

The worship pathway... David, author of many of the Psalms, was someone whose primary pathway to God was worship.

Application #1: Identify your pathway(s)...

Application #2: Lean into your pathway(s)...

Application #3: Appreciate all pathways...

Application #4: Help others identify their pathway(s)...

If all our leadership teams and volunteers were led by people who were in vital union with Jesus Christ. Imagine the fruit that could be born.

Chapter Twelve: Developing an Enduring Spirit... staying the course

If you could ask God any question, some might ask, “Am I going to survive my calling? Am I going to make it across the finish line?” I came very close to bailing out of ministry work many times because I knew, deep in my heart, that I could not continue to live the way I was living over the long haul.

Church leaders understand about conflicting realities. A pastor rolls up his sleeves and starts to build a church. Seekers start coming to Christ and soon they’re growing up. People start joining small groups, discovering their spiritual gifts, and beginning to serve. All the charts are going up, and that is good, exciting, and inspiring. But then the budgets and the buildings start going up, and the pace starts going up, and the pressures and responsibilities and stress levels start going up, up, up.

If the speed in your life has accelerated to the point that the thrill of serving Christ has been replaced by a sense of impending doom, they join the crowd. Almost every church leader I’ve known who was really serious about God, and who really believed that the local church is the hope of the world has wondered how long he or she could hold out before the inevitable “something awful” happened. If you answer your call correctly, if you do it right, you will endure & flourish!

The “Graduate School of Endurance”...

First Course: Make your calling sure and stay focused.

You must master the material in this class. Here, based on 2 Timothy 4:5, we will help you sort out exactly what God has asked you to do in this world.

Fulfill your ministry – nothing more, nothing less! Fulfill the exact ministry that God *gave* you vs. the ministry *you* dreamed up. Not the ministry that forces you out of the basic wiring pattern that God gave you. Fulfill YOUR ministry. The one that flows out of a sincere spirit of humility and submission. The “right” ministry will correspond with your true spiritual gifts, passions, and talents.

Ministry leaders who have lasted the test of time often say that their secret is not attached to anything they “did” – but rather, to the many things that they “did not do.” They understand that the key to leadership survival is staying focused.

These leaders have successfully said “No” to anything and everything that would take them or their ministries away from the specific ministry God has given them. They often say: “No, that’s not my calling. That’s not my assignment. I’m sure heaven has instructed someone to do that, but it’s not me.”

If we invest our limited time, energy, and resources into some of the endeavors we’re invited to join, we would have to take away some degree of our time, energy, and resources from what God is asking us to do. None of us should be willing to do that.

2 Chronicles 16:9 says, “The eyes of the Lord search all over the world (to do what?) to strongly support those whose hearts are fully His.” This means that if leaders are fully obedient to the calling God has put on their lives, then He will strongly support them in fulfilling that calling.

God knows what He’s doing and He’s not playing games with our lives. So, when our lives feel unsustainable, we need to turn our attention to what we might be doing wrong. There’s always room for improvement.

The words of Paul should haunt/inspire every leader... Fulfill your ministry. Don’t bail. Don’t quit. Figure out what you need to do to sustain your life in ministry, because quitting is not an option.

In the end, every Christian leader has to get his or her answers from the Holy Spirit. Lay your heart open before the Holy Spirit and say, “God lead my life. You are the Potter, I am the clay. Show me the way. You speak and I’ll listen.” Every leader must learn Holy Spirit dependence. If you do, God will make your calling sure.

Second Course: Enduring by developing the courage to change

Per 1 Timothy 4:16, examine yourself and examine your life. Then change whatever you can change that will lighten your load and help you prevail in your calling. Leaders who have disqualified themselves from ministry often say they didn’t have the guts to change and do what was necessary to stay engaged in the ministry. Those chose to bail before they would risk ruffling feathers.

Changing the pace of my life... I knew I needed a break. I remember going to the elders and explaining that the first seven years of Willow had taken a huge toll on me that had left me emotionally drained and physically exhausted. I was expecting instant support for my request for time off, but I didn’t get it. I’ll never forget the look of hesitation in the eyes of the elders. While they were genuinely concerned about me and my family, they also knew how crucial my leadership was in that era. But

the elders knew I was at my breaking point, so they had the vision and grace to grant me a three week break.

After I informed the church of my plans for a break, I got a scathing letter from a man in the church: “Who do you think you are? You stand up and challenge us to sacrifice, serve, and give – and then you run off to the nearest beach. Are you the exception to the commitment-rule? And on and on it went... I was devastated and felt nauseated. I began flirting with the idea of canceling my badly needed break. But hours later, healthier inclinations prevailed. Without being melodramatic, that three week vacation probably saved my family and my ministry. I can honestly say that I would not have lasted in pastoral ministry without those summer breaks. But summoning up the courage to go on that first break was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done.

It takes great courage to make the tough decision that increase ministerial sustainability. But we can – and we must – make those decisions.

Changing how you do ministry... I reached another breaking point ten years later... Almost every waking moment of my day was spent studying for messages, writing messages, praying for messages, delivering messages, and recuperating from giving messages. I began to think of myself as a message-machine. I began to dread the very thought of another teaching assignment. Sharing the load was the only way I felt I could stay in ministry. As we formed a teaching team and began sharing the load, the response was predictable – negative. Attendance even went down when I wasn’t preaching, but we kept with it, continuing to coach the new teachers and praying that God would mature our congregation.

The point is that sustainability requires intentional solution-side thinking and the courage to stick with a new approach even when you encounter resistance. Often the price seems high, but in the end it is worth it.

Making difficult personal changes... Every significant change I’ve made to ensure a sustainable life in ministry has been awkward, difficult, and painful. The risk of receiving people’s disapproval and of damaging the church were very real and very frightening.

How do you handle the things you can’t change... The Apostle Paul had a troublesome condition that he referred to as a “thorn.” Apparently it never went away. All of us have a thorn that forces us to turn to God daily and say, “Damn it, God, it hurts again today. For the life of me I don’t understand why you don’t remove this. But there’s a reason why you are God and I am me. I’ll trust you through another day.

How do you handle a thorn? You talk to God about it. You express your frustration. But eventually you claim God's words to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Another way to handle thorns is to pray... ask God, "Lord, help me endure this thorn until the sun goes down... we'll handle tomorrow, tomorrow."

This approach works! It builds faith, character, and it contributes to a radical reliance on God.

Third Course: Enduring by discovering "safe" people...

This class is based on Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Leaders who have led passionately for a long time have usually made the transition from being self-sufficient, independent types to becoming people who lean deeply into community. They usually describe a breaking point when their frustration came to an all-time high and their despair was as an all-time low... They said to someone they trusted: "Please help me." Read Jesus' words in Matthew 26:38...

Our hearts were not built to handle the hardships and heartbreaks of ministry alone. We need to link up with a few folks who can help us bear the heavy burdens of our lives. How many more leaders will we lose before we acknowledge our need to lean into "safe relationships?"

I have learned that I am not strong enough to face the rigors of church work alone. Leaders need to find safe people. Keep praying and looking and trusting God to provide...

Final Course: Enduring with an eternal perspective...

I guarantee that this class will not be easy...

Heroic Christian leaders throughout redemptive history have always looked at the difficulty of their short term struggles against the back drop of eternity. Paul said, in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "For the light, momentary afflictions that we bear are producing in us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." When the difficulties of life appear overwhelming, we need to think more like pilots than sailors. We need to look at the waves from above them rather than in them. That is what it means to look at life from an eternal perspective.

Like Paul, we can endure if we have the right perspective. Hence my life verse, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain if it is in the Lord" – 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Paul is saying, “Decide in advance that you are never going to quit. Decide in advance that you are going to keep abounding in the work of the Lord no matter how high the pain level rises. Decide in advance that you are going to keep showing up, trusting, serving, proclaiming the gospel, discipling, shepherding, leading, and casting the vision.” **That’s courageous leadership!**